

**INFLUENCE OF COMMERCIAL INTERESTS IN EDITORIAL
INDEPENDENCE: A STUDY OF THE KENYAN PRINT MEDIA**

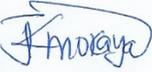
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**A RESEARCH PROJECT SUBMITTED TO THE SCHOOL OF JOURNALISM
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DECLARATION

This research project is my original work and no copies of this work have been submitted in part or whole to any other university or any other award.

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This research project has been submitted to the University of Nairobi for examination with my approval as University Supervisor.

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First and always, thanks to the Almighty God for enabling me to undertake this research project successfully in the face of many challenges and a host of other competing interests. It is also my privilege and honour to thank my Supervisor Prof. Hezron Mogambi for his guidance and strong encouragement through which he ensured I completed the project. Lastly, I am proud and grateful of my family for their love, understanding and tolerance and for creating an enabling atmosphere for my studies. Sincere thanks to my parents who instilled the values of education in me.

DEDICATION

This research project report is dedicated to my wonderful and beloved wife, Tabitha, and the children: Fadhili, Wangoi, Nyatichi and niece Sharon for their support, encouragement and understanding as I undertook the studies. You were truly the source of my inspiration.

May the Almighty God bless you richly.

ABSTRACT

Serving public interest is one of the key tenets of the media. However, over time, this principle is being eroded due to the influence of commercial considerations over editorial freedom and decisions in media organisations and their operations. This unfolding situation has forced the editorial fraternity to adopt a pro-business approach in the selection, packaging and dissemination of content without compromising the commercial interests of their respective organisations. This study, therefore, sought to establish the influence of commercial interests in editorial independence within the Kenyan print media. The objectives of the study were; (i) To establish the balance between commercial interests and editorial independence within the Kenyan print media, (ii) To investigate how editors cushion themselves against commercial interests in their selection and use of editorial content within the Kenyan media and (iii) To establish factors that influence the choice of news and editorial content within the Kenyan print media. The study was guided by the Descriptive and Manufacturing Consent theories. Descriptive research design was used with a qualitative approach. The target population for this study was senior editors who were purposively selected from Kenya's two leading print media outlets, Nation and the Standard Newspapers. The sample size for this study was 15 respondents specifically selected from the two leading newspapers by virtue of their experience and information including eight and seven senior editors from the Nation and the Standard Newspapers, respectively. The study used purposive sampling technique and an interview guide to collect data, which was later analysed thematically generating trends that informed generation of themes and narratives. The study found that editorial content and news is influenced by a number of factors including commercial interests from big advertisers, media ownership and control, timeliness, public interest, newsworthiness, politicians and journalists' personal gains. Also, there is a big link between commercial interest and editorial independence because the two have since become intertwined. Additionally, the study established that editorial independence will continue being compromised by commercial interests, but in order to cushion themselves against commercial interests, it is recommended that editors and media owners give priority to public interests in order to create a favorable image of the media house, which will ultimately lead to increased circulation and profitability. It is recommended that independence of the media to publish balanced, fair and credible content not only serves public interest, but also creates opportunities for the ownership to increase revenues.

ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

NMG	Nation Media Group
SMG	Standard Media Group
MCK	Media Council of Kenya
MCDA	Multi- Criteria Decision Making Analysis
PLC	Public Limited Company
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.0 Overview

Historically, the independence and separation between editorial and the commercial arm of media enterprises have been considered the fundamental norm of journalistic practice globally, in both developed and developing nations. Borrowing from the concept of the separation between Church and State, Friend & Singer (2007) says within the journalist context it refers to the separation of news copy from commercial influence or content.

Journalists, therefore, view the separation as both a necessary ethical norm or standard and a structural solution that guarantees the preservation of editorial autonomy from profit-driven pressures from advertising or commercial departments as explained by Drew & Thomas (2017). The authors note that the separation is a key tenet of journalistic identity. Delorme and Fedler (2005) concur that the separation not only preserves journalistic independence but it also ensures that their credibility and that of the content they publish is safeguarded from undue influence.

However, as a result of the acute economic pressures on the media enterprises induced by the emerging digital revolution on the newspaper industry, which has seen their profits fall significantly, media owners have literally sacrificed journalistic independence for financial gains leading to what Muller, Denis (2014) describe as conflict of interest that mocks the concept of editorial independence.

In response to the changing media environment, the owners or investors are increasingly integrating editorial and commercial operations, which has heightened the tension and conflict between editors and commercial managers in their decision making

processes Tanner et al (2005). The tension is characterized by the need by journalists, through their editors to seek autonomy while the proprietors are seeking business sustainability through profitability.

This section contains background of the study, Statement of the problem, study objectives and research questions, justification, significance and the scope and limitations of the study.

1.1 Background of the Study

Globally, the widening and increasing power of the of the advertising industry combined with falling revenues among many news media enterprises in both developed and industrialised nations have led to renewed and intense arguments on the influence of commercial interests on editorial content in newsrooms. Codington (2015) has argued that editorial decision-making and increased commercial interests has led to economic challenges thus breaking up the integrity of journalistic professionalism and news values.

Traditionally, although editors were expected to work independently by distancing themselves from any influences emanating from commercial or sometimes ownership interests, (Lewis, Williams & Franklin, 2008), points out that due to increasing economic pressures, advertising departments within media organisations are having a significant influence on editorial decisions.

Koch, Obermaier and Riesmeyer (2017) say the emergence and growing digital transformation of journalism, which has significantly transformed the traditional news gathering and processing processes, has resulted into redundancies and diminishing resources for newsroom operations. This has led to a growing demand for and dependency on pro-commercial service providers such as public relations firms for

editorial content, which is largely skewed to serve the interests of advertisers. This has led to increased concerns about editorial freedom in most news organisations, Picard (2005), forced to give in to the coercive demands of advertisers.

Codington (2015) states that although newsrooms are guided by a set of procedures and codes of conduct that seek to protect journalistic works against commercial influence to ensure their autonomy and integrity; they are often ignored due to economic demands on the editors to use commercial-friendly content. This scenario has often led to the widely debated tension and conflict in the media circles on the fact that nearly all media organisations, with exception of government owned or sponsored, depend on revenues from advertising as profit and for survival, thus escalating the tension between commercial and editorial objectives.

Hanusch, Baniac & Maares (2019) have argued that editorial credibility and integrity is under threat from the ever rising economic demands that have seen the wall that separates editorial and commercial become more porous.

To remain financially sustainable, newsrooms have been restructured, with fewer resources invested to cover the same spectrum of topics, Lee-Wright (2012); Ferrucci (2015), this scenario has further made editors more vulnerable to manipulations by commercial interests in their quest to either increase or protect their sources of revenues from being investigated or reported negatively by journalists. According to Cohen (2015) journalists are more vulnerable to economic influences since they lack time and finances for research and in-depth reporting.

In every democratic society the media is not only expected to protect, but also promote public interest especially against autocratic powers of the State, and other

oppressive forces within the capitalistic societies. However, considering the fact that the Kenyan media, both print and electronic, are concentrated in the hands of the private sector, they are supposed to operate profitably and purely as commercial entities which must return profit and dividends to the owners. Independent media occupies a unique position as it wields significant influence over the public agenda while still operating as business (Arsenault & Castells, 2014). Adopting a communitarian ethic based on the needs of society would probably make editors' decisions easier. Editors and sub-editors are key role-players since they make decisions on how resources are allocated and which stories get published.

The complete coverage of stories and investigative reports are certainly at risk with the rise of media as more of a business, rather than a service to the public Edward & Chomsky, (1988). Decisions made by editors on a daily basis can have a disproportionately large impact on society because of the influence of the media on society (Arsenault & Castells, 2014). Editors play a fundamental role in the media as they are entrusted with the freedom to decide what to publish. Editors are the top newsroom managers and the custodians of the professional values of the newsroom (Gade, 2014). There is, however, a lot of pressure on the editors to make good decisions as each day or week an editor's decision is scrutinised by the public. The concept of acting in the public interest dominates the profession of journalism. However, in the current Kenyan context this term is up for debate (Gade, 2014).

Decision makers in newsrooms are faced with a number of considerations when selecting stories to publish. Journalism is guided by professional values, including public service, allegiance to the truth, journalistic autonomy and social responsibility (Gade,

2014). Therefore, the link between commercial interests and editorial decision is clear in that you cannot have one without the other (Martin & Souder, 2012; Cottle & Rai, 2014).

Critics have argued about adverse effects of ties between editorial decisions and commercial interests (Bruns, 2005). For instance, editors may be forced to drop a negative story about a company that gives business to the media house (Soontae & Jin, 2015). Further, news production is monopolized by large organisations and molded to suit their interests (Golding & Murdock, 2010).

Kenya, just like most other nations in the world, the media and especially newspapers, historically are major instruments of social, economic and political development and promotion of public discourse. Edward & Chomsky (1988) explains that the mass media provide the platform and instruments by which to communicate symbols and messages to the public.

The Kenyan media environment is not only one of the most vibrant in Africa but also one that has embraced and undertaken several major transformations in the recent past. One of the key developments is the 2015 digital migration in which the previous analogue broadcasters were forced to convert to digital based technologies.

Another major transformation that has and continues to impact on the media industry is the increasing use of the internet, standing at about 39.6 million users, Communications Authority of Kenya (2019), which has grown exponentially and being accessed by a significant population of the country backed by a substantial improvement in bandwidth speeds and reduced cost of bundles, Kenya Media landscape report (2019).

According to the report, KML (2019), which is an outcome of a survey carried out by two research agencies in Kenya; these developments have not only significantly and

substantially altered patterns of media consumption in Kenya, but have led to the proliferation of digital media in the country such as the use of cell phones and data to access print and electronic media anytime, anywhere and has resulted in what is now referred to as information democratization (Kenya Media landscape report, 2019). This position is collaborated by Obura & Ong'odo (2019) that the use of social media in Kenya is vibrant, and widespread. Further, social media use in Kenya has been encouraged by the high concentration of mobile phones, where there are about 54.5 million active subscribers translating to cell phone penetration of about 14.8 percent, Communications of Authority of Kenya (2019).

The transformation has led to a cutthroat competition and falling advertising expenditure by a number of firms on the traditional media such as newspapers, which has forced media enterprises and the owners to adopt new business models such as pro-industry editorial strategies such as the use of native content, so as to diversify their revenue streams. The consequence of this being compromised editorial freedom. It is within this context, of a changing media environment, that the tension and conflict between editorial and commercial interests has been heightened as media owners advance their commercial interests.

However, despite the emerging challenges to the traditional media, especially print, whose editorial independence is under threat from commercial interests, the Kenyan media environment remains vibrant with a well-developed print media with a sizeable circulation Obuya & Ongo'ngo (2019). The scholars aver that Kenyan media are among the most respected and trusted institutions in the country.

Opinion polls usually indicate that Kenyans do trust media as since they are the custodians of truth, sincere advocates of positive change, and a credible sources of information. This view is reinforced by Abdi and Dean (2008), who assert that the Kenyan media are the most respected institutions. He further, explains that Kenyan citizens rely on the media for information than any other source of information.

The Kenyan Constitution 2010 expressly provides for freedom of the media under Article 34. As a consequence, the country has witnessed the growth of a vibrant and diverse media terrain serving the needs of the over 40 ethnic communities and the nation at large, Obuya & Ong'ondo (2019). The Media Council of Kenya (2012), reports that the sector is characterized by a considerable media concentration that whereas the industry regulator, the Communications Authority of Kenya has licensed over 110 media owners, the media landscape is dominated by less than ten active players, with a number of them being cross-media owners with interests in print, electronic and online. The country has also witnessed active, growing and very active online citizen journalism, (Media Council of Kenya 2012).

As a result of the increased internet technology Kenya's print media industry, specifically daily and weekly newspapers, have diversified into online and digital editions so as to meet the emerging and dynamic audience and consumer needs, besides widening their revenue streams, Lauf & Wulf (2005). Some of the leading digital publications include Standard ePaper, Nation ePaper, Star ePaper among others.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Media is critical in shaping public opinion, interpreting and understanding issues to any society and the agenda projected usually forms the foundation of people's thinking

on matters of social, political and economic interests (Bergen, Lafky & Weaver, 2000). Power to decide on news items to be presented to the public, the importance to be attached to particular news items and personalities should be done by media managers such as editors independent of any influence. On an annual basis, the Media Council of Kenya receives complaints on professional conduct of media institutions and journalists (Media Council of Kenya, 2018).

Nevertheless, the reality is that news media operates in a competitive market today; commercial interests including audience ratings, circulation and profitability index are some of the pressing factors that determine how the media operates (Knighton, 2014). In addition, commercial interests and editorial decisions must have a very delicate balance. Soontae & Jin, (2015) explains that media owners and commercial interests have forced editors to slant stories due to pressure from advertisers and the powerful. In their bid to balance the commercial interests of the media owners with the interests of the society, editors' professionalism is sometimes affected.

Further, various complaints against the media over professional standards have been raised (Media Council of Kenya, 2018; Gade, 2014). Thus, this study seeks to explain the influence of commercial interests on editorial independence in determining the nature of content to be published or disseminated to the public and outcomes within Kenya's print media.

However, traditionally the media is considered as an organisation with the responsibility of informing and educating people without undue influence whereas organisational interests are key and the guiding principle for news organisations should be to inform without bias (DellaVigna & Kaplan, 2007).

However, vested interests by senior management, owners and external forces such as advertisers make editors' decisions even more difficult. Edward & Chomsky, (1988) have strongly argued that media promote propaganda on behalf of the powerful social interests that control and fund them. Further, Edward & Chomsky (1988) argue that media are largely accountable to the powerful forces that fund them and not their audiences thus influencing the content published or broadcasted to their audiences.

1.3 Research Objectives

1.3.1 General Objective

To investigate the influence of commercial interests on editorial independence on content in Kenya's print media.

1.3.2 Specific Objectives

This study was guided by the following specific objectives:

- i). To establish factors that influence the use of business-friendly news and editorial content within the Kenyan print media.
- ii). To investigate the balance between commercial and editorial independence within the Kenyan print media.
- iii). To analyse how editors cushion themselves against commercial interests in their selection and use of editorial content within the Kenyan print media.

1.4 Research Questions

- i). What factors influence the use of business-friendly news and editorial content within the Kenyan print media?
- ii). How is the balance between commercial interests and editorial independence maintained within the Kenyan print media?

iii). How do editors cushion themselves against commercial influences in their selection and use of editorial content within the Kenyan media?

1.5 Justification of the Study

According to Martin & Souder (2012) the interests of corporates are important, but the guiding principle for news organisations is to inform the public. Media companies are not always giving the complete story to the Kenyan public. Therefore, the public should not rely solely on the print media for information, but should look elsewhere for alternative sources of news for verification. The news media have considerable impact on what we know, and they need to realise the influence and impact they have on their audiences, and report news as accurately, completely, and objectively as they can, for the good of the society.

1.6 Significance of the Study

The findings of this study will, therefore, benefit the print media in Kenya in highlighting the balance that they need in order to meet their economic needs while retaining their important role of informing and educating the public without undue influence. Additionally, the findings will benefit the regulators and policy makers in the media industry including the Media Council of Kenya (MCK), the Ministry of Information and Communication Technology and the Ministry of Interior in coming up with appropriate regulations and policies guiding the conduct of the media in as far as informing the public is concerned.

Editors will also benefit from the study as they will be able to know the decisions to make when faced with the dilemma of handling conflicts relating to commercial interests of the media house and the editorial decision making process. Lastly, the study

will benefit future researchers since it will form part of the available literature. The report will be made available in academic libraries where they can access it for reference.

1.7 Scope and Limitations of the Study

The study focused on the influence of commercial interests on the editorial independence within the Kenyan print media. In order to come up with credible data, comparisons were made between theory, as enumerated by scholars, and practice through various interviews.

Data were collected from senior editors who have worked at the Nation and Standard newspapers for the last 10 years in Nairobi City. This is because the head offices for these two media companies are in Nairobi County. The present study was limited to the two newspapers because they had the highest circulation and readership in Kenya. The data were collected through in-depth interviews.

The respondents were, however, interviewed in their personal professional capacity for purposes of objective responses since the two media organisations were competitors and the researcher risked getting biased responses if those interviewed were approached in their official capacity. The findings of the study were generalised to the population of the print media industry in Kenya.

1.8 Operational Definition of Terms

- Public Opinion:** Collective thinking and view of the majority in society.
- Editorial:** The responsibility of identifying news sources and determining on how it will be collected and packaged for consumption by readers.
- Sub-editors:** The team which corrects and verifies for accuracy and integrity of editorial content by writers or news reporters before publication.
- Social Responsibility:** It is an obligation to the society by an organisation or individual to promote public good and welfare without expecting anything in return.
- Circulation:** This refers to the number of newspapers that reach the readers daily, weekly, monthly or periodically.
- Fourth Estate:** This refers to the media, journalism or the Press based on the assumption that the media practitioners have a professional duty to report fairly and accurately matters of public interests and where necessary question verify issues of governance.
- Commercial Interests:** This is the profit driven interests or goals by a media organisation which at times sacrifices or overlooks public interest.
- Senior Editors:** Refers to editorial staff with the responsibility of determining how editorial content is collected, processed, packaged and ultimately disseminated for public consumption as news stories, features, visuals and bulletins.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.0 Overview

This section discusses the relevant literature of the study, which includes; commercial interests and editorial decisions, factors that influence the selection of news and editorial content, effects of relationship between editorial decisions and commercial interests, challenges editors face balancing editorial with commercial interests, theoretical review and conceptual framework.

2.1 Commercial Interests and Editorial Decisions

Globally, the news media is facing an increasingly competitive environment and it is feared that economic pressures could finally undermine journalists' capacity to carry out the role that democracy requires of them (Beam et. al, 2015). Even though Indonesia is a less studied country in communication research, it has one of the most active media systems in Asia (Hanitzsch & Hidayat, 2012). Indonesia also has a swift changing media landscape and is one of the three countries in the Southeast Asia rated as 'partly free' by Freedom House (Kwok, 2014).

In addition, press freedom in Indonesia only came with the collapse of the regime of President Suharto in 1998 but before that, the autocratic government of Suharto maintained 30 years of full press control, which featured intimidation of the press (Sen & Hill, 2010). Therefore, the presence of democratic ideology, as well as growing diversification of the media after the downfall of the Suharto regime, marked the advent of press freedom (Hill, 2014). At the same time, commercial interests increased alongside a decrease in government control of the press.

The number of newspapers increased from approximately 300s to more than 1000 (Hanitzsch & Hidayat, 2012). However, the editorial desk was never given full freedom to make decisions since commercial interests controlled the media freedom which was early controlled by the Indonesian government. However, the general election in Indonesia in 2014 was among the apex moments of the conflict between the commercial interests of the media and independent editorial decisions (Dhyatmika, 2014).

Kenya has experienced a rapid development of the media since the 1990s, which has resulted in structural changes in media organisations which have influenced how editors make editorial decisions (Mwangi, 2010; Odhiambo, 2012; Ogola, 2011). Although liberalization has led to the growth of numerous media organisations in Kenya, the liberalised media environment has also facilitated the growth of media conglomerates such as the Standard Media Group and Nation Media Group (NMG), which has seen the latter grow steadily from two newspapers in the 1990s to the largest media house in East and Central Africa today.

2.2 Factors that influence the selection of news and editorial content

Several factors determine the editorial decision making process which include demographics, which is gender, race, age and education level (Coleman, 2013). Deadlines, too, also influence the selection of news. This observation was made by Sylvie and Huang (2012), who noted that in every newsroom, operations run with closing deadlines, hence reporters and editors lack sufficient time for making reliable decisions.

Experience, equally, influences a person's decision making style. For instance, one moves up in his/her career, there is a steady progression toward openness, diversity of opinion and participative decision making (Brousseau, et. al 2016). The implication on

this study is that the experience in journalism could be a key factor in making various decisions in content publication thus not favoring anyone or any organisation. Further, news values also determine how editors make decisions on the kind of content to be disseminated to the public or in the news selection process (Urbany et al, 2013; Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2011).

However, some key factors may override different normative considerations, for instance tough advertising revenue and audiences' competition. This forces the media to consider what kind of advertising and news segments the audience is much interested in. Hamilton (2014) proposes that the commercial media is interested in who cares about a certain information rather than the who, where, what, when and how of a story. From this perspective, whether the news is important matters less than whether they are profitable.

Further, research suggests that the news content favors content that involves the elite and popular, organisations and actors (Bennett, 2010). This is because of their incentives that usually have the authority to shape news (Gans, 2011). They may also have an impact extending beyond their normative newsworthiness. Ishengoma (2007) observed that advertisers, business, political and influential allies of the media owners interfere and adversely affect editorial independence when owners are forced by corporate organisations to coerce their editors not to publish unfavorable content so as to protect advertisement revenues.

Although editors, by the very nature of their obligations and responsibilities are expected to be fair and impartial and should remain steadfast, upright and just, this is never the case due to the external interference as a result of commercial interests.

Due to the powerful commercial interests exerted on them, some editors, as noted by (Ogongo-Ogong'a, 2008), are forced to practice self-censorship so as to placate advertisers at the expense of public interest. The scholar explains that there are often conflicts between editorial staff and the advertising department on making key decisions about influential advertisers. His findings, however, established that at the end of it all, it is the commercial interest that carries the day, with editors forced to protect advertisers by projecting their business positively in their coverage.

2.3 Effects of the conflicted relationship between editorial decisions and commercial interests

Editorial decisions are the manner in which editors determine whether or not to cover a news event and the format in which the content will be packaged and disseminated whereas commercial interests are forces that play the gatekeeping role of ensuring that any editorial content that is detrimental to the interests of the media owners, government, and advertisers is either neutralised or done away with by editors. Media especially, private owned face immense commercial and political pressure that could erode their editorial independence (Brousseau, 2016). Media owners often carry favours with advertisers and sponsors of media products and services to secure or retain advertising contracts. For most media owners, commercial interests are more important than media independence (Franklin, 2014). Commercial interests also come from shareholders and strategic business partners. Although media owners profess independence, what happens in practice is different. Big spenders on advertising wield immense influence in media houses which influences editorial outcomes such that in

most cases news coverage is geared towards protecting the interests of media owners (Urbany,2013).

There is a thin line between the interest of editors and owners. Media owners often delegate authority to senior editors to transact business and make industry decisions on their behalf (Brousseau, et al. 2016). Under this arrangement, it is difficult to know the interests the editors serve when making critical decisions that could, in the end, affect the independence of the media. Media managers and editors must have the business skills to be able to resist the attempts by governments and other non-media actors such as advertising agencies and businesses to influence or manipulate content through placement of advertisements.

For a newspaper to maintain its editorial independence, it needs to be well-managed, effective and financially self-sustaining (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2011). It should be able to collect revenue from a number of sources and not exclusively depend on advertising and circulation revenues. Further, private newspapers also run the danger of being condensed to providing artificial content or what (Hughes & Lawson, 2014) have described as the trivialisation and tabloidisation of the news in their attempt to get circulation or advertising numbers up.

2.4 Challenges Editors Face balancing editorial with commercial interests

One of the critical challenges facing the media is the juniorisation of the newsroom (Tsedu, 2012). The report found that there was serious lack of basic interviewing, lack of experience in newsrooms, writing and accuracy skills amongst junior reporters. There are a number of theories why the media industry is experiencing a

lack of skills, including experienced journalists finding more lucrative positions in government and business Manzella (2013).

The Kenyan government through the publicly funded Media Council has previously used examples of poor quality journalism to undertake reforms some which may not be favourable to the media. A story may serve the public interest but in order to tell it, an individual's right to privacy may be violated. Each story has its own unique set of circumstances and possible implications. It is up to the editor to assess the options and make the relevant trade-off.

This often has to take place in a short space of time and with no analytical process to reflect the implications of each trade-off. The difficulty lies in determining the relative value of each of the options and subsequent outcomes. Subjective judgment is required to make the trade-off (Hammond, 2012).

Due to the expanding number of new media, channels and networks there is heavy competition within and between media. Competition has been speeded up by the deregulation policies and to an increasing extent; the codes of entertainment took over from those of information (Guyot, 2016). This situation can lead to short-time thinking within media companies as well as bad editorial decisions. Besides, the editor's freedom is largely determined by media owners (Horgan, 2016). The arrival of free newspapers like the People Daily also tends to destabilise the independent press. The main concern for editors, publishers and media owners is to avoid losing advertisers or displeasing owners. Journalists feel that they are less free to choose their topics while more of them report attempts from economic players to influence their writings (Vasarhelyi, 2010).

Further, the orientations and attitudes of journalists have changed as they are aware of the commercial aspects of their work and integrate this dimension to their know-how. Another challenge is the decreasing of public broadcasting service or independent media facing competition with private-owned media (Wal, 2016). However, what is generally put forward is the lack of regulating bodies and policies, particularly in the broadcasting field, in order to ensure fair balance between editorial independence and commercial interests.

2.5 Theoretical Review

Traditionally editorial and commercial departments in any media organisation have co-existed independent of each other, but playing their complimentary roles of supporting the enterprise's business through their respective functions of news collection and processing and sourcing of revenues from advertising.

But a new custom, brought about by technical advances through the internet has narrowed the division between the two departments, which has in a way compromised editorial independence leading to sharp tension and conflict between editors and commercial managers. Aneez et al. (2016) explains that in some news organisations commercial managers have attempted to control editors.

However, a section of editors has supported what they term as the developing norm of amalgamation and collaboration between the two sections aimed at ensuring professional autonomy by working together to jointly enhance commercial sustainability (<https://doi.org/march> 2018). This study was guided by two theories; Manufacturing Consent by Edward & Chomsky (1988) and the Descriptive Decision Theory (2017). Manufacturing Consent sought to explain that mainstream media are profit oriented

enterprises that are primarily structured and patterned to protect the business interests of the profit seeking owners at the expense of public interest, which should be the primary calling of the media as the public watchdog. The scholars have argued that among other functions, the media concentrates on serving and promoting powerful societal interests that control and finance them. The descriptive decision theory on the hand sought to explain how people arrive at decisions in situations of uncertainty.

2.5.1 Descriptive Decision Theory

Since the world is wide and decisions are often not a simple choice between several known options. Editorial desk is always faced with complex and unique decisions since there is no formulae for making an optimal decision. In response to the real world's limitations of normative theories of decision making. Therefore, theories dealing with how people actually make decisions in real world situations emerged (Roos & Nau, 2010).

There are several descriptive theories of decision making which examine the impact of different factors on the way people make decisions in real-life situations. Klein (2013) introduced the naturalistic decision making (NDM) research approach which is one of the more popular descriptive theories. Naturalistic Decision Making approach examined how people make decisions in real world settings. Further, a central feature for this approach is the NDM framework which emphasizes the role of experience in enabling people to rapidly categorise situations to make effective decisions (Klein, 2013).

In contrast to the rational decision making process, the NDM approach suggests that the process of decision making is complex and nonlinear (Galloway, 2007). Editors regularly have to make verdicts rapidly and without the luxury of following a systematic

process. In addition, Multi-Criteria Decision Making analysis (MCDA) is a structured approach to decision making which assists decision makers who are faced with choices with various alternatives for instance interval modelling method and swaps (Mustajoki & Hamalainen, 2015).

Research into decision making has also fixated on prejudices that can be introduced into decision making by the mental short-cuts (heuristics) people use to cope with the complexity and ambiguity of the real world (Knighton, 2014). The heuristics and prejudices paradigm showed that people did not observe to the values of ideal presentation; respondents relied on heuristic as opposed to algorithmic strategies even when these strategies generated systematic deviances from optimal judgments as defined by the laws of probability, the sayings of expected utility theory and Bayesian statistics (Klein, 2013).

The model is valuable for this study as it suggests that the process of decision making is intricate and nonlinear and emphasizes the role of experience in allowing people to rapidly categorise situations to make effective decisions. Therefore, editors need to make choices promptly. Their experience therefore comes in handy in balancing the value of their editorial decisions with the commercial interests of the media owners.

2.5.2 Manufacturing Consent Theory

The theory argues that media are powerful ideological establishments that are used to influence and proliferate interests of advertisers, the elite, their owners, government and other powerful forces in society at the expense of public interest (Edward & Chomsky, 1988). The theory states that the media serve and propagate

strategic interests of powerful and influential groups in society such as advertisers, the elite, the owners and their allies and those in power (Edward & Chomsky, 1988).

These groups have the financial power and influence to determine the level of funding the media owners will get in form of profits (Edward & Chomsky, 1988). They also have the power to influence media policy which ultimately determines the type of content that the media will publicise and in what manner.

Edward & Chomsky (1988) also argue that media owners create institutional policies that ensure that editors and other staff operate in conformity with their interests. Therefore, editors in making editorial decisions will largely be influenced by the level of interests from ownership and those in authority thus influencing the content.

According to Edward & Chomsky (1988) in countries where authority is in the hands of a state administration, media domination and censorship define that the media serve the governing elite. Edward & Chomsky, (1988) further, explain that money and power determines the content editors feed to the public and that power gears the government and dominant private interests to disseminate content to the audience in the manner they want.

Proponents of Manufacturing Consent, in analysing mass media, argue that the mainstream media's news content is basically decided and sanctioned by a minority, but very influential elite who make editorial decisions in collaboration with the editors.

This has left the media at the mercy of capitalistic interests seen through the political and economic influences exerted on the media in what they have called filters. Filters act as gatekeepers to ensure editorial content disseminated by the media serves the interests of powerful forces in society not the public interest.

The filters, which form the key tenets of the manufacturing consent theory include: government; the argument that the media's reliance on the state as the source of news and revenue compromises their independence and freedom on what to publish, advertisers; editors forced to be sensitive to the views and concerns of advertisers and sponsors, flak: the pressure exerted on the journalists, media owners which could include threats for legal actions.

Ownership; journalists forced to protect the business interest of the owners and use content that promotes owner interests, anti-communism postulate that the media is not a social enterprise and therefore ought to operate by promoting and protecting benefits of open market competition and the tenets of capitalism.

Through the filters, which are contained in what the authors have termed as the propaganda model, "describe forces that shape what the media does" Edward & Chomsky (1988), argue that the performance and structural behavior of the media, which does not encourage free flow of news. This view is also shared by Cottle (2006) that the media lack a sense of independence and objectivity in the processing and dissemination of news to its audience. This position is also a confirmation that news or editorial content is being treated as a commodity for sale with the audience as consumers of the media information (Mcqual, 2011).

However, the theory has been faulted for its assumption that journalists can only source information from the government and for assuming that editors do not have a mind of their own to make independent and rational decisions in the packaging and dissemination of content instead they reflect the ideologies of media owners and other powerful forces in society. This is because editors include adverts which generates

revenue for the media company, information from government, business people, ownership and elites who control what is being published, anticommunism and the size of the media and flak.

Flak is considered to be costly to the media house especially when it is geared by large scale, groups of people or individuals with substantial resources. Manufacturing consent theory further assumes that it can manipulate people easily in order for them to consume what they see or read in media platforms and making it into practice. The theory also fails to acknowledge that the advent of internet and proliferation of the digital media has opened new democratic space for journalists to air and write content which would not be accepted by the mainstream media due to the corporate and elite strongholds.

The relevance of the theory to the study it is that the news content the public consumes from newsrooms sometimes is influenced by funding sources such as advertisers, media ownership, different authorities, the size of the media and flak. Since the media houses depend on revenues for it to run or operate, they therefore depend on advertisers for revenues who also determine what is published. Manufacturing consent theory explains why commercial interest has taken over editorial independence when it comes to what is to be disseminated to the public.

Editors publish information that funding sources, anticommunism, flak and the media owners think should be consumed by the public thus controlling media content. The theory shows how these filters influence the functions of the media which include; amusing, entertaining, informing and inculcating people with morals, beliefs and values that are acceptable in society. For instance, money and power do influence media

companies to convey messages across the public that favor the elites, authorities and media owners.

2.6 Application of the theories

Descriptive decision theory was critical in the study as it guided the study on how decisions were made and the circumstances in which some decisions were made. Manufacturing consent theory was important as it guided the study on some of the factors that influence on what information is to be published by the editors and what interests drive the publication of that information and what purpose they are to serve. The two theories ere therefore helpful in this study and guided in answering the research questions and subsequent analysis and interpretation of data collected.

2.7 Conceptual Framework

Independent Variable

Dependent Variable

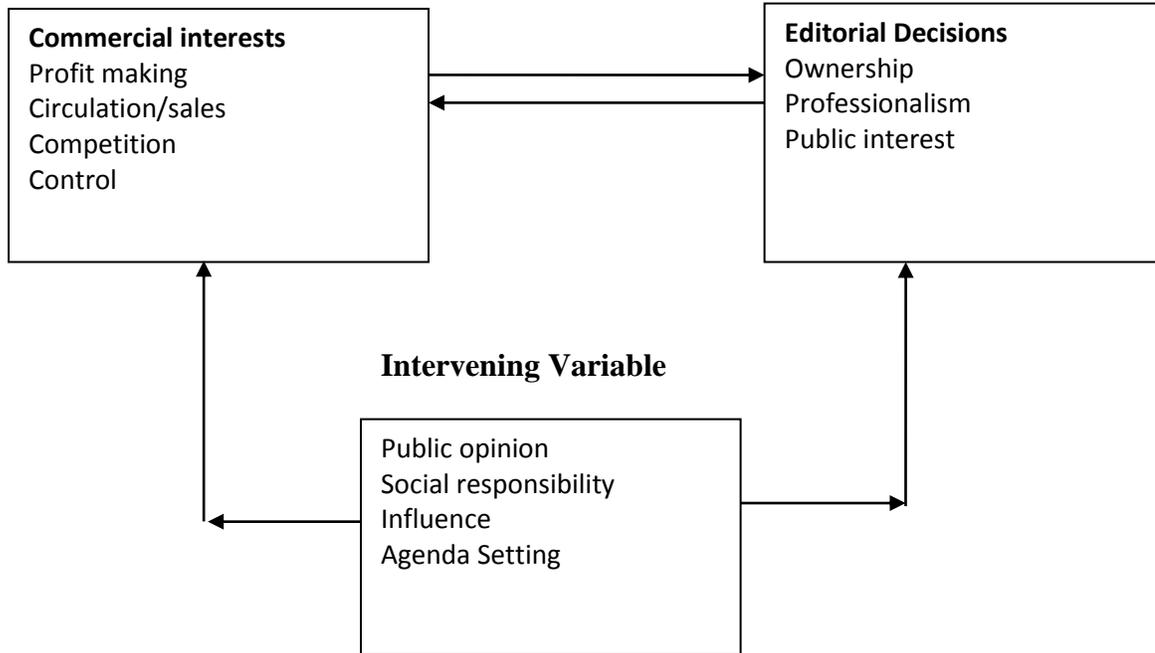


Figure 2.1 Conceptual Framework adopted from Goodwin (2003)

2.7.1 Commercial Interests

This is the desire by media owners and shareholders to maximise on profits and protect powerful forces in society especially big corporate and influential government officials. Media owners and managers depend on these powerful forces for revenues and hence they influence decisions editors make in content collection, packaging and dissemination.

2.7.2 Editorial Decisions

Although editors are expected to make independent and professional judgments in the choice and use of content, more often than not, most of their decisions serve commercial objectives of their respective media organizations and not public interest, which should be the main function of the media. The editorial decisions include; ownership professionalism and public interest.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0 Overview

The chapter comprises of the research approach, research design, research method, population, site of the study and the sampling procedure. It also contains data collection and analysis, data presentation, research credibility and ethical considerations. It describes the site where research was conducted, data sources, sample design and data analysis. Qualitative research method was used to obtain data from senior editors from the Standard Media and Nation Media Group Newspapers. The present study used purposive sampling technique to obtain respondents for the study whereas data were presented in narrative form.

3.1 Research Approach

Qualitative research approach was used in the study. It has been explained by Mugenda & Mugenda (2003) that by using qualitative research approach a researcher is able to collect data and explain phenomena more deeply and comprehensively. Qualitative research approach is relevant to this study since its well aligned with researcher's descriptive research design which sought to describe and evaluate the culture and behavior of the subject under study, Kombo & Tromp (2016). Lunenburg & Irby (2008) concurs that qualitative study builds a holistic picture of the subject being surveyed through a detailed reporting of a respondent's view by closely examining people's words, attitudes, actions as opposed to quantitative studies which investigate such words and actions.

The approach was also relevant to this study because it allowed for flexibility and instructiveness, Kombo & Tromp (2016), which was necessary in the present inquiry.

The research approach was also appropriate to this study as it enabled the researcher to adjust the research instrument depending on the respondents, for instance a respondent who might insist on a written question guide or a telephone discussion as opposed to a face to face to interview.

Further, this approach was ideal for this study because the researcher interviewed some of the respondents in their personal professional capacity and not in their capacity as employees of their respective media organisations due to possible conflict of interest and biased responses.

3.2 Research Design

Although there are different types of research designs, the researcher in this particular study used descriptive research design. This design involved gathering data that described events, trends and relationships which depict and described the current status of the subject under study. Cooper & Schindler (2016) posit that descriptive design is a process of collecting data in order to answer the questions of the current status of the subject under study. Descriptive studies portray the variables by answering who, what, and how questions.

Descriptive design was therefore appropriate in this study as it comprehensively describes behavior, attitude, characteristic and values of the area of study. For instance, the current study which was qualitative sought to understand the effect commercial interest has on editorial decisions and outcomes.

3.3 Data Collection Tool

In the present study, an interview guide was used to get relevant information from senior editors who had worked for at least ten years with The Standard Media Group and

Nation Media Group. The researcher used interview guides to conduct in-depth inquiry with the respondents. The tool involved subjecting of every informant to the same stimuli according to Kombo & Tromp (2016), that is by asking each respondent similar questions. Mugenda & Mugenda (2003), explains that an interview schedule enables a researcher obtain data required to meet specific objectives of the study.

In-depth interview schedules were also appropriate for this study because they were used to standardize the interview situation. The tool was suitable for this study due to the fact that it helped give the researcher deeper details about particular issues of interest because the researcher sought information on specific issues.

Secondly, it was ideal because it was comprehensive and systematic since questions were formulated before the interviews. Besides, it was also time saving since respondents' responses were limited to what they have been asked. It also lets the researcher to comprehensively investigate a specific issue before moving to the next one.

However, Kombo & Tromp (2016) have cautioned that the researcher may miss out on important information not captured in the questions formulated. To address this concern, attempts were made to ensure the interview guide adequately and comprehensively brought out the required data as per the purposes of the study. Where necessary the researcher requested a repeat interview to address any emerging issue important to the study.

3.4 Target population

Target population is the specific group about which information is desired. Bryman & Bell (2013) describes a population as a well-defined or set of people, services, elements, events, group of things that are being investigated. Cooper & Schindler (2013)

equally describes a population as the total collection of elements whereby references have been made in a given survey.

The target population of this study was 33 senior editors at the daily and weekend editions of both the Nation and Standard Newspapers who directly supervise news collection, packaging, processing and dissemination.

3.5 Site of the Study

The study was carried out in Nairobi, with focus on the two major media print houses, Nation Media and Standard Media, where the two newspapers are headquartered. The choice was informed by the fact that these print media organisations were the leading in newspaper circulation and readership in the country. The two have a national coverage and outlook which collects and disseminates at least 60 per cent of the editorial print content that is consumed by the Kenyan audiences among other print media (Geopoll, 2015). The two also attract nearly 80 per cent of commercial content which comes in the form of advertising (Geopoll, 2015). To minimize biasness and boost objectivity as the respondents were interviewed outside their work places which helped them freely share the requested information.

3.6 Sampling Procedure

The study adopted purposive sampling technique to identify the senior editors from both Nation Media Group and the Standard Group who were the respondents in the study. Purposive sampling is the deliberate choice of an informant due to the relevancy and quality of information they possess in line with a given study. Simply, the researcher decides what needs to be known and sets out to find people who can and are willing to

provide the information by virtue of their knowledge, experience and the positions they hold within a particular set up (Bernard 2002, Lewis & Sheppard 2006).

The study therefore used purposive sampling for the reason that the researcher sought data from senior editors within the Nation and Standard newspapers since they were the ones involved in the top editorial decision making processes within the two newspapers and as such they had the relevant data for the study. They were therefore rich sources for the data that the researcher was seeking.

Therefore, participants in this study were specifically selected due to the in-depth knowledge and experience they held on the subject under inquiry. Mason (2007) describes such respondents as knowledgeable people. They were selected by virtue of their positions of authority and power, level of influence and expertise in their respective organisations.

3.7 Sample Size

The sample size for the present study was 15 respondents who were senior editors from Nation Newspaper and the Standard Newspaper. The researcher obtained eight and seven senior editors from Daily Nation newspaper and the Standard Newspaper, respectively.

Table 3. 1 Sample Size

Media Company	Population	Sample Size
Daily Nation Newspaper	17	8
Standard Newspaper	14	7
Total	33	15

Field survey, (2020).

3.8 Data Collection Procedure

The researcher obtained primary information directly from the 15 sampled respondents. The respondents were senior editors who have worked for at least 10 years in the Nation and the Standard Newspapers. In this case, the researcher used an interview guide (appendix I) that was a set of questions the researcher asked the respondents. In each case the researcher identified respondents and requested them for their concurrence to participate in the exercise purely for academic purposes.

Once in concurrence, the researcher then scheduled a meeting time and venue for the interviews. The participants were initially contacted and briefed about the study through their emails and telephone contacts and upon acceptance they were invited to a convenient venue for the interview. The interview was conducted to senior editors outside their work stations in order to achieve objectivity.

The responses were further written down in a notebook and recorded using a tape recorder and later transcribed for analysis. The researcher took notes as the interview progressed and recording of the proceedings to ensure all important information was captured by the researcher for analysis.

3.9 Data analysis

Data were analysed by identifying key concepts and themes relevant to the research questions and objectives using a qualitative data analysis computer program that located and merged codes making it easier for the researcher to identify categories, themes and specific patterns of the responses. The data were then analysed by identifying and connecting themes which were grouped together into coherent categories or narratives for analysis.

3.10 Data presentation

The data were presented in narrative form since this was a qualitative study. It was presented by explaining statements and themes in line with the objectives from the interview guides thus creating meaningful information of the findings.

3.11 Research credibility

Prior to actual collection of data, a pilot testing was conducted to assess the interview guides' credibility of the data that was collected. The study pretest was done to determine whether the instrument used by the researcher obtained the relevant data (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2009). The information collected during the pilot study was used to undertake a preliminary analysis to enable the researcher establish if the tool was suitable in answering the research questions in line with the study objectives. In order to minimize the possible instrumentation error and hence increase the credibility of the data collected, the researcher conducted a pre-test among other senior editors, who were not part of the participants of this study. This was to ensure the data collection instrument attracted the responses that the researcher was looking for.

Further, the pre-test helped the researcher remove misunderstandings that were unclear. After pilot testing, the necessary corrections and adjustments were made. The researcher then personally conducted the interviews with the respondents guided by the interview guide after briefing and convincing the respondents to be participants in the study.

3.12 Ethical considerations

Before the researcher proceeded to the field, an introductory letter, certificate of field work from the University and a research permit from other regulatory bodies to

facilitate the process were obtained. The letter was presented to the senior editors to avoid any suspicions regarding the information sought for the study.

The respondents were assured of utmost confidentiality and confirmation that the study was strictly for academic purposes. According to Driscoll & Brizee (2012) a researcher must seek consent from the relevant authorities and supervisors to conduct any research. Therefore, the whole process of data observed high standards of integrity and confidentiality.

3.13 Reflexivity

The researcher conceded and acknowledged the fact that he was an editor in one of the media houses whose senior editors were the subject of this study. He, however, moderated the research process with minimal bias and subjectivity that could arise during interviews with the respondents. Reflexivity is important as it accords the researcher the opportunity to interview the respondents outside their newsrooms to enhance objectivity.

Since the researcher works in one of the media houses involved in the study, he conducted the survey in his personal capacity as a professional and student so as to avoid any biases and conflict of interest which could compromise the integrity of the findings.

CHAPTER FOUR: DATA ANALYSIS, PRESENTATION AND INTERPRETATION

4.0 Overview

This chapter presents findings and results of the study in line with the research objectives and questions. The section provides data analysis, data presentation and subsequent interpretation of the study findings. Data analysis was based on study objectives. Data from interview guides were analysed by use of a qualitative data analysis computer programme that located and merged codes, making it easier for the researcher to identify categories, themes and specific patterns of the responses. Data from interviews was transcribed and presented in form of narratives. The overall objective of the study was to analyse the influence of commercial interests on editorial independence on content in Kenya's print media.

4.1 Presentation of the Findings

4.1.1 Interview Response Rate

This refers to the percentage of the sample that was involved in the interviews and data collected for analysis. The study sample size consisted of 15 senior editors from the Nation Media Group and the Standard Media Group. Out of 15 senior editors that were considered as a sample size for the study, six and seven senior editors from the Standard Media Group and the Nation Media Group, respectively, accepted and participated in the study. This means that 86.67% of the senior editors were, therefore, accessed and interviewed (Table 2).

According to Mugenda and Mugenda (2003), 50% of the response rate is adequate, 60% response rate is good while above 70% response rate is well for the study.

The response rate was therefore determined as sufficient for the study.

Table 4. 1 Response Rate

Media Company	Sample Size	Percentage (%)
Daily Nation Newspaper	7	53.85
Standard Newspaper	6	46.15
Total	13	100

4.2 Factors that Influence use of Business- Friendly News and Editorial Content within the Kenyan Print Media

News media is facing an increasingly competitive environment and it is feared that economic pressures could finally undermine journalists capacity to carry out the role that democracy requires of them (Beam et. al, 2015). This is happening despite the fact that media managers and editors have the business skills to enable them resist attempts by governments and other non-media actors such as advertising agencies and businesses to influence or manipulate content through placement of advertisements.

The study, therefore, sought to find out the factors that do influence the use of business-friendly news and editorial content within the Kenyan print media. The influence of commercial interests is, however, not new in the media industry in Kenya (Erjavec, 2004). Critics have long argued about the possible adverse effects of ties between editorial decisions and commercial interests (Bruns, 2005). The researcher, therefore, focused on factors that influence the selection of news and editorial content, the profitability of the media house and editorial decision making processes, sources of media funding and competition within and between the Kenyan print media.

4.2.1 Factors Influencing the Selection of News and Editorial Content

Codington (2015) states that although newsrooms are guided by set procedures and codes of conduct that seek to protect journalistic works against commercial influence to ensure their autonomy and integrity; they are often ignored due to economic demands on the editors to use commercial-friendly content. During the study, it was established that editorial content is much influenced by the organisations' commercial interests, media owners, editorial policies, editors' interests and journalists' personal gains as explained by some of the respondents:

Editorial content selection is much influenced by commercial interests to the organisation. Organisations use their advertising financial muscle to influence editorial decisions by threatening to withdraw business with media companies either to muzzle them to remain silent on sensitive matters that can hurt the organisations or carry only positive content. Personal biases also play a role in content generation, publication space allocation, article size and placement. In general, media is for those who can buy it! (Respondent one and two, August, 2020)

“Commercial interests of our publication can influence on how we treat the story, though this rule is informal and there is no standard guideline that must be followed.” (Respondent eleven, August, 2020).

From a commercial perspective, therefore, the finding imply that the commercial value of the content to be published ought to be interesting enough and capable of influencing sales in a competitive marketplace where circulation and ratings are key commercial factors.

In addition, findings revealed that government and advertiser decisions are some of the factors that influence the selection of news and editorial content within the Kenyan print media. Below is the response :

Kenya's newsroom news selection process is influenced by a number of factors that include; the government influencing what is aired, published or broadcast since they want to control what the citizens should consume in terms of news. Most of the private media houses including The Standard Media and the Nation rely heavily on government advertisement to run their daily operations and this has greatly impacted the quality of our news. (Respondent five, August, 2020)

The print media as a business entity must sell more copies of newspapers or have a large audience so as to attract and retain more advertisers for survival. This has seen media package editorial content and news in a way that is appealing to masses. Poor content will see numbers drop including advertisers. From the findings above, this implies that commercial interests sometimes override the need for objectivity since most media houses require capital to sustain operations. Therefore, this implies that advertisers sometimes threaten to withhold advertising revenue from some of the media houses if they fail to publish information that favours them or if they defiantly publish negative information touching on such advertisers.

The study revealed that media ownership and control do influence what to be published in newspapers. The findings indicated that top managers have been forced to practice self- censorship when dealing with media owners or with businesses that are close to the media owners. The study also established that if an editor or journalist tries to be fair and objective, he or she may be reprimanded or fired;

“Ownership and control have huge influence in the determination of news and editorial content. Media owners are likely to fire editors or journalists who seem to be too objective” (Respondent twelve, August, 2020)

The study further, found that at times news selection and editorial content decision making is equally influenced by groups of people pushing a particular agenda which will

benefit them as opposed to the entire audience. This is because these groups, in most cases, have got connections with media owners and other powerful forces within government and beyond.

Some interest groups, for instance, politicians that are linked to certain media owners can also influence what to be published and what should not. A good example is during political campaigns and election period, in a number of situations, editorial would be cautioned by the owners or certain influential groups not to cover or offer positive coverage to rivals who vying against their choice of candidates. (Respondent three, August, 2020)

One respondent in the study said that editors also select editorial content or news based on the nature and magnitude of events taking place and in whose interest they have been organised, especially if they are persons of influence in society and would be speaking on controversial socio-political issues and other matters of public concern:

Before selecting news, he or she should examine factors that inform news gathering. For instance an editor cannot select editorial content that he or she does not have! It must be based on an event or topical issues. Further, news selection is guided by regional balancing whereby strong reports from different counties are reserved to be used as splash in Editions. Other considerations are based on, personalities, controversial political issues and finally thematic concerns. (Respondent eight, August, 2020)

The study further established that editors seek to follow the traditional news values in their selection and use of content such as; timeliness, newsworthiness, conflict, humor and public interest as among the factors that influence the selection of news and editorial content to be published. The findings from the study indicated that when the information is new and has value to various consumers, it is in most cases given priority for publication as captured by the below respondent:

Sometimes we carry human interest stories that have humor or inspire people. Further, newsworthiness of the story also influences editors to publish a story. Lastly, we carry some content because of public interest, for example,

grabbing of public land, dumping of hazardous waste and many others. (Respondent nine, August, 2020)

The study established that the daily docket, which is a record of past, present and future news events that is permanently placed in the newsroom and managed by senior editors, offers guidance on when and where to source some of the editorial content for publication. According to respondent seven

Daily docket-driven and largely current affairs-based is a factor that influences the selection of news. Secondly, purpose-based especially investigative pieces which are specific assignments to reporters. Third is product-driven which applies to various branded sections of a newspaper. Fourth, are client-driven such as press releases and supplements and finally, opinion pieces that are informed by the prevailing company policy, media ownership, and political situation, religious and socio-economic situation in the country. (Respondent seven, August, 2020).

The study further, established that how topical an issue is and the number of people the information will impact or affects makes it qualify for coverage and publication.

Other factors will include news values, company priorities and interests, relevance of the subject matter to the audience, currency of the subject, public interest and space availability are among the factors that influence selection of news and editorial content by editors. If the information is new and relevant then it qualifies to be given coverage as a matter of public interest.

Relevance to audience interests, freshness of the details of the story, news values, company's strategic interests and priorities, public interest, and the available space determine the selection of news to be published in newspapers. (Respondent eleven and twelve, August, 2020)

The above results are supported by Urbany, Reynolds & Phillips, (2013) who noted that news values are key determinants in editorial and news selection decision making.

This is a confirmation that news values among other factors also influence the editorial decision making processes within the Kenyan print media.

Finally, it was also clear that the current punitive media laws in Kenya have tended to protect the powerful and those in authority since they can use their influence to hide behind such laws and even threaten the media not to write anything negative about them due to the applicability of defamation laws, which have now extended to individual editors and reporters and no longer exclusive to the publishers as expounded the respondent below:

In our county and in situations where the media tend to be objective and independent, powerful people are still being protected by media law. Negative information about these people cannot be published. For instance the new Computer and Cyber Crime Act has always scared investigative journalists since the law criminalizes access to documents and information with hefty fines of up to ksh. 20 million or longer jail terms. So at times editors make editorial decisions with such a background in mind, which ultimately influences the content outcomes. (Respondent twelve, August, 2020)

4.2.2 How profitability of media house influence editorial decision making

On the issue of profitability, the study sought to establish whether profitability has an influence on editorial decisions and how. It was revealed by respondents that profitability is not only the central, but the key determinant in editorial decisions since most media houses are profit making organisations. The end game for the media owners and shareholders is profit, reasonable dividends and good salaries for the staff, which is generated by revenue brought by advertisers. Any decision that has to be made concerning what to be published or not, therefore, will depend on the impact it will have on profitability, shareholder value and brand equity.

Media companies have got bills that they need to settle, they also wish to pay their workers so as to sustain their operations. This implies that profitability is crucial and has a significant influence on the nature of news and other editorial content and how it will be collected, packaged and finally disseminated. According to respondent A, G and H;

It is the guiding factor since the media is not an activism vessel, but a place to also earn a living. Any editorial decision must lean towards paying bills of the organization, including my salaries and allowances. It's the fuel through which the media operates, just like any other business! Further, Media houses are first and foremost businesses, without revenues job cuts are inevitable. As an editor I have a target for circulation and brand value, which means that I must push stories that will have impact so that people advertise or buy the paper. Declining revenues mean job losses, and also no investment in staff and other resources for work and the investors expects profits and dividends at the end of the day. (Respondent one, seven and eight, August, 2020)

Further, the findings shows that profitability is significant for any media house for survival and sustainability. Therefore, this means that any editorial decision has to put commercial interest (profit) and performance into consideration. Below is what respondent nine and ten had to say:

Profitability is important for media survival and sustainability and even viability. So any decision must often consider the commercial interests and performances. If, for example, a story is going to hurt the relationship between the media house and an advertiser, careful consideration must be taken into account. Of course at the end of the day public interest is key and there are those whose interests must also be carefully considered and accounted for. (Respondent nine and ten, August, 2020)

Respondent two and four also indicate that as an editor, he has to balance both commercial interest and editorial values when making editorial decisions. This is because the objective of any business is to make profits. While the basic role of a media house is to inform, educate and entertain, the respondents explained that they cannot overlook the fact that as a listed business enterprise shareholders expect it to make profits and eventually declare dividends.

Against this background, decisions made in the choice of stories or content must reflect circulation figures, attract advertisers, avoid libel suits that may make the business end up paying huge amounts of money in form of compensations and also avoid hurting the major advertisers in the corporate world with huge advertising budgets. Therefore, this implies that editorial content decision making sometimes depends on the mercies of the amount of money advertisers invest in the media house thus influencing what to be published.

Every business is started with an aim of making profit and in this has impacted my decision making, in that I have to align my decisions on content to be used by ensuring that I balance both commercial interest and editorial values. (Respondent two and four, August, 2020)

This is a confirmation that a good deal of the decisions is founded on how it will impact on the company's profitability. With advertisement revenue reducing owing to a combination of factors including the crowded market, the many alternative platforms for advertisements and the limited allocations of the advertising budget by firms has made the print media more sensitive to decisions that can negatively impact on our overall profitability thus becoming top priority in the daily or weekly editorial meetings and conferences in line with a media's house's strategic goals.

The respondents confirmed that although within the Kenyan print media, editorial content is supposed to cover 60 percent whereas commercial content is allocated 40 percent of the space, in most cases commercial eats into editorial space in bid to accommodate more advertisements. Profitability of a media house may affect performance of journalists since they will not be comfortable writing stories in a manner that is in agreement with advertisers. This, however, may dilute the editorial content since

commercial interests can always control editorial decisions. This therefore, implies that journalists will be hindered from reporting freely on public interest content, which by virtue of their calling undermines public good. This is supported by Hanusch, Baniac & Maares (2019), who argues that editorial credibility and integrity is under threat from the ever rising economic demands and changes in the media environment that have seen the wall that separates editorial and commercial become more porous, and the economic influences being felt both on the organizational level and in individual journalists' daily routines and practices thus making editors to compromise in favour of commercial interests.

In most media houses, editorial should cover 60 percent of the space in the case of the print media but in most instances commercial takes more than its share of the space at expense of editorials. This discourages journalists who may want to write public interest stories that may not be liked by advertisers. (Respondent twelve, August, 2020)

Study findings indicate that profit from advertisers create a good relationship between the company and the advertisers. However, further, findings of this study indicate that profitability of the media affects the independence of the editorial desk thus should not be given priority as it may ultimately undermine total independence of the editors. However, it is important that both commercial and editorial staff should agree on the importance of giving editorial the independence they deserve without necessarily undermining commercial objectives.

The need for the media house to make money will influence my decisions to a large extent. It might be seen to promote a good relationship with advertisers, which could help to sustain the news company financially. But it largely shackles the editorial desk on independence of its content and core calling, and thus should be given low priority since a popular media will naturally

attract increase circulation and hence lure more advertisers to its platform.
(Respondent ten and eleven, August, 2020)

4.2.3 How sources of media funding affect editorial decisions

On the question of how sources of media funding affect editorial decision making processes, the study findings established that editorial standards will continue to be compromised unless the media get some other sources of funding apart from advertisers and those in authority. The study findings further indicated that editors are supposed to keep the editorial independence, but commercial interest override this mandate.

“Whoever pays the piper calls the tune and unless media houses source for new funding models then their editorial standards will continue being compromised.” (Respondent two, August, 2020)

Further, the study findings established that media funding denies the readers or audiences detailed information concerning particular news aspects. This happens by hiding information of some politicians, especially, those in authority thus denying audience a true and accurate picture of a news event. For instance, one of the respondents indicated that if the media funding happens to come from the principal shareholder, then certain decisions will have to be taken to favor them or their interests, which editors must protect so as to keep their jobs.

Editors may want to retain independence but it is never absolute; the owner of the purse ultimately has some influence in the content. Sometimes, this is extended to the principal shareholder’s cronies and business or political associates. This is in line with Ishengoma (2007), who affirmed that advertisers, business, political and influential allies of the media owners interfere and adversely affect editorial independence when owners

are forced by corporate organisations to coerce their editors not to publish unfavorable content so as to protect advertisement revenues.

This affects the editorial decisions for instance when reporting stories about principal stakeholders' cronies, business and political associates. It affects editorial decision and judgement by denying the readers or our audience sufficient information or details of certain news stories or events. (Respondent three and four, August, 2020)

Further findings indicate that:

“To a large extent big spenders can almost virtually dictate how they are covered” (Respondent ten, August, 2020)

According to Respondent five, majority of those funding the media are the biggest sources of information but in most cases they make huge demands on editors in the manner their content is to be packaged and disseminated. Unfortunately media houses that tend to ignore them are severely punished through denial of revenues in form of advertising. If any media house avoids publishing a given story in the manner it is required by the funders and instead stick to editorial policies, house style or prevailing socio-economic and political realities, the revenue will be given to the competitor. Below is the reaction from respondent five:

They are the biggest source of information, but also, increasingly the weakest link especially when they pursue vested interests in direct opposition to editorial policy, house style or prevailing political/economic or societal realities offer bribes or issue threats to patronize a competitor if a particular angle is not published. Their interests take priority. Independence cannot be achieved if you have to pledge allegiance to your funders. (Respondent five, August, 2020)

From the study's findings, media houses depend on the advertisers for revenues to pay bills, salaries and profits since it is a business entity. Therefore, editors will have to

work hard in order to publish news and stories that have impact in order to attract advertisers thus targeting large circulation and brand value. In addition, media funding in most cases has influence on the content since it tends to favor the contributing institutions lest they withdraw the funds. Funding also has certain objectives which could mean certain sections of the news or content more than others.

This leaves editors with fewer options to choose from. Below is what respondent seven indicated:

Media houses are first and foremost businesses, without revenues job cuts are inevitable. As an editor, I have a target for circulation and brand value, which means that I must push stories that will have impact so that people advertise or buy the paper. Declining revenues mean job losses, and also no investment in staff and other resources for work. (Respondent seven, August, 2020)

Advertising, for example, is the lifeblood of commercial media and for their sustainability. Media funding is critical and, unfortunately, most of these advertiser want a value as a return, either favorable or positive press, or killing of ‘bad’ stories that will also affect their survival. It’s a quid pro-quo and this is acknowledged in many media circles.

“We cannot often bite the fingers that feed you. If you do, you soon discover that you don’t have any food, and the result is starvation.” (Respondent twelve, August, 2020)

4.2.4 Heavy competition between and within media effect on editorial decisions

The study further investigated how competition between and within media influenced editorial decisions. From the findings of the study it was established that the media fraternity has been influenced to an extent of compromising their editorial content

by sometimes copy pasting from each other in order to attract advertisers thus affecting their editorial decision making decisions. This is perhaps due to audience demands since some of the advertisers go for the circulation numbers with little care of the content published by the specific newspaper. This is what respondent two and eight had to say:

“This has made media fraternity to compromise on their content by copy pasting content from each other so as to attract advertisers and this eventually affects editorial decisions by the editors” (Respondent two, August, 2020)

At times you are forced to play ball because your competitor has. A good case in point is MyGov which the mainstream media tried to resist, but after The People Daily started carrying the pullout, Nation and Standard followed suit because continued resistance would lock out them out of the lucrative government advertising running into billions of shillings. (Respondent eight, August, 2020)

However, respondent three and nine indicated that there is so much competition in the media industry. The editors have to ensure that they use a different approach of stories from what competitors used in the same stories in order to remain relevant. Further, the competition in the media industry has forced the media houses to think harder and ensure they beat the competition by ensuring that they do not share the same headlines whenever they have a similar but major news event. It also expands the realm of debate and in cases where you have a restless government that punishes media houses for negative stories, it’s always good when media houses aggressively push the limits because it reduces opportunities for one newspaper being blacklisted and journalists selectively harassed.

Respondent three and nine affirmed that:

There is much competition between media houses, but on the newspaper, I recall we had to anticipate which angle the competitors were likely to go, and choose a different angling to create as much distance as we could. The marketing team's feedback was that the Standard did poorly if it had a headline close or similar to the Nation's. (Respondent three and nine, August, 2020)

We have been forced also to print editions for certain regions to ensure that we give content that is relevant to the specific people reading our newspaper in certain regions. There are days we have done five editions (Coast, Western, Rift Valley, Central and Final (city edition) so as to increase our sales and circulation numbers. (Respondent four, August, 2020).

Further, findings from the study indicate that competition is always welcomed since it helps improve on quality, investing more on research and bring to the market a product that is worth purchasing. But it also compromises on quality due to the inadequate time taken to verify news sources which leads to the publishing of half-baked stories. Another critical consideration in staying ahead of the competition is going to the market early.

This sometimes means that editorial teams do not get adequate time to cover all angles of a story, therefore going with a 'half-cooked' story. According to respondent six, seven and twelve:

Competition is a double edged sword. It is good because it makes one work hard, to get the best stories, to hire the best journalists, to be out in the market first, to address issues that genuinely interest the public. But it can also make some cut corners, disrespect the journalistic values and ethics. (Respondent, six and twelve, August, 2020)

Competition within and among the media industry leads to better editorial content which in return favours the public. However, in some instances, it kills key skills among small entities if some well-established and financially sound media houses poach staff from smaller media houses with the promise of better pay which sometimes is short-lived. (Respondent seven, August, 2020)

What this means is that decisions must be based on what audiences need, and at the same time stick to the values and ethics that underpin the relationship between an editor

as the gatekeeper and the buyer of the product, the audience or consumer. However, without solid, verifiable circulation figures and revenue statements, it is hard to take claims of rivalry seriously. The biggest rivalry should be with New Media, changing demographics, political and religious inclinations. In short competition means making the 'best' decisions based on the various factors informing journalism.

4. 3 Balance between commercial and editorial independence within the Kenyan print media

The study further sought to investigate on the balance between commercial and editorial independence within the Kenyan print media.

4.3.1 Tough decisions of balancing between commercial interests and editorial decisions

The researcher further established that editors are forced to make tough decisions as they sought to establish balance between commercial interests and editorial decisions. Since Kenyan media houses are first and foremost businesses with financial targets, therefore an editor makes editorial and financial decisions simultaneously. It's not enough to understand the market, you must also pay attention to revenue, meaning that many a times you have to drop stories to keep an advertiser, or you have to carry a weak story to cheer an advertiser. Indeed, stories are increasingly becoming collaterals for commercial department to warm their way into the monies.

Commercial staff are getting desperate in their pitches, often going for short term fixes that literally hawk the paper for prompt and immediate revenues, without regard to the long term impact such actions have on editorial freedom and sustainable survival of the media house. They not only weaken the brand but also slowly make the publication

unattractive readers, especially when forced to use sponsored or paid for content but disguised as news or breaking stories. Such information is referred to as Native Content, but in essence it is an advertorial packaged as a news story.

The toughest decision I have taken is to convince my commercial colleagues to reject advertorials that I believe would weaken our brand at a times when I know very well the company needs each and every cent to keep running and also keep staff on payroll. Since Covid-19 my headache has been to convince commercial department not to auction the paper at throw-away prices for adverts in the name of native advertising because it's a lose-lose position. (Respondent seven, August, 2020)

This is a confirmation that at times editors are forced into a corner, finding themselves between a rock and hard place and therefore as professional journalists it becomes very difficult to strike a balance in their editorial decisions against commercial interests.

In extreme circumstances, an editor or journalist may be forced to do away with the content if the commercial interests are at stake.

The study further established that it is very challenging for editors to balance between commercial and editorial standards especially from business partners, advertisers or those from powerful personalities or organisations that have a significant influence in news processing and dissemination.

This is because the media, especially private owned, face immense commercial and political pressure that could erode their editorial independence (Brousseau, 2016). Further, media owners often curry favours with advertisers and sponsors of media products and services to secure or retain advertising contracts. This further confirms that

for most private owned media houses or firms, commercial interests are more important than editorial independence which makes it very difficult to balance the two.

There was a time I had to run a sponsored story yet it was a one sided story from one of our commercial partners. This is always a very hard decision and most of the times we are expected to strive and seek balance between commercial interests and editorial standards. (Respondent two, August, 2020)

Further, this point was buttressed that:

I recall a time I was handling a certain column in the Standard Newspaper. The column was basically supposed to highlight shortcomings or poor services offered by private and government organisations. The then CEO summoned me and asked me “to go slow” on a certain organization as it was a heavy advertiser. (Respondent four, August, 2020)

This is a demonstration that when there is a negative story touching on commercial partners, big advertisers and even those in authority, the editors or journalists are forced to kill the story or are challenged to tone it down to by leaving out key facts. This scenario makes it difficult for the editors to be fair and give balanced reporting. In addition, it is hard to maintain professional integrity over the public relations pitches from offending news sources. This is largely evident in advertisers with deep pockets such as banks, airlines, big hospitals, mainstream or extremist religious outfits, multinationals, senior politicians, and political parties that have clout.

It is always a thin line whether to report a murder, domestic abuse or even rape by a senior politician or leave it to the braver, reckless social media. It is dicey to report abuse in a bank, airline or multinational that carries a huge percentage of advertising in your media. (Respondent five, August, 2020)

Another respondent also noted that:

A large enterprise had announced results that showed they made a marginal loss, though their revenues had grown substantially. To strike a balance, we went with the revenue headline but also included the loss in the body. But the organisation demanded that we repeat the story the next day but leave out any

details to do with the loss. To attain that they withheld advertising revenue worth Ksh 1.5 million. Respondent eleven, August, 2020)

Further findings of the study established that in most cases, editors are faced with difficult decisions in balancing editorial content or news between commercial interest and editorial as they are forced to slant or kill stories that may be unfavorable to the media house's business partners.

For instance, respondent nine indicated in a quote that:

There are many times we have had stories relating to our partners, but I can say I try telling the story in many different ways while not annoying out partners by getting their views and also telling their story. It sometimes lands me in trouble but my security is that I had a balanced story that gives their side of the story. (Respondent nine, August, 2020)

However, respondent eight mentioned that he had to kill such a story that was to paint the advertiser in a negative manner. *"The solution is killing a story painting a big advertiser in negative light."*

From the findings of the study also, it was established that largely, public interest smacks of universalism. The issue might be attractive and even sensational, but not many discerning audiences like it or want it. It's balancing between what sells and what interests and impacts the public.

Sometimes the choice of stories to be published was based on circulation and not necessarily on 'genuine' public interest. There are also internal dynamics, including ownership, editorial policies and decisions, advertising. All these must be taken into consideration when selecting content for publication. (Respondent ten, August, 2020)

From the study findings, it was established that any adverse news affecting the ownership of the media house and its associates is unlikely to be published even when the

news came from privileged sources like parliamentary committees and courts that are insulated against legal actions.

During my tenure on the News Desk, Kiptagich Tea Factory, which is owned by the Moi family, was highlighted in parliamentary proceedings among public lands that had been hived off the Mau Forest. The reporter briefed me about what had been presented in Parliament. I decided to run the story. The Managing Editor expunged Kiptagich from the list but the story ran. Of course, the Moi link was splashed by the competition. (Respondent seven, August, 2020)

However, the best tradeoff is one that allows for win-win situations. The independence of the media to publish balance, fair and credible content should not be compromised by commercial interests while the advertiser has to respect the media's role in society as public watchdog that promotes public interest. A media house that is reputable for promoting public interest earns trust from its audience and thus any content published by the same media house will also gain public trust and hence attract more advertising.

4.3.2 The media owners' balance between commercial interests and editorial independence

The question of whether media owners are able and willing to strike a balance commercial interests and editorial independence has been answered by different respondents. For instance respondent one mentioned that even though the balance is not ideal, media owners try to balance by engaging in various Corporate Social responsibilities and partnerships to endear with their audiences with the aim of cultivate a favorable image. In addition, they try to provide adequate space for commercially driven

editorial content to run alongside the hard news with aim of trying to create a balance between commercial and editorial interests.

This balance is never ideal. However, media houses also play the public relations game to appeal favorable response from audience. In such, there is the corporate affairs department keen on engaging corporates, individuals and many others through corporate social responsibility activities. Moreover media houses also dedicate some space through special columns for commercially driven editorial content, separate from hard news pages. (Respondent one, August, 2020).

This means that most media houses are finding it difficult to fully create a clear and sustainable demarcation between editorial and commercial interests, which has left them at the mercy of advertisers and other powerful and influential players in society. Most of them are forced to give in to the demands of advertisers. They need to differentiate between sponsored content and editorial content.

However, from the findings, and in order to retain credibility, some of the media owners have allowed editors to manage the editorial desk fairly independently by encouraging them to publish less controversial content. Therefore, they do publish human interest stories so that the media house can gain and keep its credibility among customers. This is in line with Brousseau, et al. (2016) who affirms that media owners often delegate authority to senior editors to transact business and make industry decisions on their behalf.

However, the findings also indicate that in case of a sensitive story from the advertisers, powerful people or interest groups, the commercial department must be informed before the story is published. This is a confirmation that most media owners are in business and they value commercial interest as much as they want to practice journalistic values hence end up losing potential customers.

Media owners have largely given the editors a leeway to run the editorial department. Sometimes stories that have a huge public interest must be published because the media house must gain and keep credibility among its customers. When handling sensitive stories touching on big advertisers, sometimes the commercial department is informed in advance so as to find a way of mitigating the consequences before the content is published. (Respondent four, August, 2020)

They hire managers and give them some independence to make certain decisions of the organisation including editorial staff while they oversight the management as directors or appoint someone to present them on boards and in crucial editorial meetings where key decision are made on what content to use and how. (Respondent twelve, August, 2020)

But respondent three and five tersely declared that there is no longer a balance between commercial interest and editorial decisions within media houses. In most cases editorial has almost always lost the battle for the shillings and cents argument. Forget about shillings and sense. This is what they said:

Most editors practice self-censorship and keep away from issues that are likely to land them in trouble. For instance, the Kenyattas' business interests will never feature in Mediamax outlets, unless it's positive. Neither will the Nation cover any adverse reports on His Highness the Aga Khan and Aga Khan Network Enterprises in Kenya. The Moi's and their cronies are out of reach at Standard Group. (Respondent three and five, August, 2020)

In addition to the above finding, the respondents said some of the media owners intimidate editors to ensure they succumb to their demands.

Many media owners instill fear and warn their editorial staff against any negative publicity as a way of securing their political and business interests and therefore renders us not good public watchdogs as expected. Further, there focus is more on commercial interest rather than editorial independence. (Respondent, six and seven, August, 2020)

Further, data indicates the same:

It's a tough balance. In Kenya, advertising pays the bills so you cannot afford to rub a major advertiser the wrong way. The unwritten rule is to treat advertisers with kid gloves. Sometimes some editors refuse to play ball. This has cost some their jobs while some have had to run a clarification or apologies. (Respondent eight, August, 2020)

A careful look or examination of the print media landscape clearly indicates that editorial independence is often a fallacy bandied about by those who have no clear understanding of the internal media dynamics. Although media owners know that public interest is important and deserves attention, it no longer matters to them because it does not translate to revenues. Profits come from advertising and not circulation. Those are the ones who determine the rate card and ultimately profitability, especially government as the biggest consumer of media products and services.

Unfortunately, there is a lot more interest in commercial interests than editorial performance. It's the 'end-justifies-the-means' sort of thing. As long as the story is able to generate revenues, then it's good to go. Therefore, editorial independence is shelved from time to time to take care of certain interests and agendas and especially sources of revenue such as government as the biggest spender and user of media services. (Respondent nine, August, 2020)

4.3.3 The link between editorial decisions and commercial interests

There is a very delicate link between editorial and commercial as well-endowed commercial enterprises or individuals will most definitely influence the editorial content in favour of commercial, but at the detriment of editorial. This definitely affects the quality of editorial content as it will be slanted in favour of commercial interests. Negative news will be shelved while only the positive elements of a news item as determined by commercial will be published. If a media house publishes negative information, they will be punished through withdrawal of advertising revenues which will

ultimately, for the sake of business survival, force editorial to compromise and give in to the demands of commercial.

Findings revealed that although editorial and commercial are supposed to work together to create better and complementary content, there is always an inherent conflict between the two; Editorial striving to uphold high quality editorial standards while commercial on the hand is striving to bring in more revenue at whatever cost by giving in to demands from the powerful advertising corporates as explained by some of the respondents below:

Editorial and commercial managers clearly understand that the business must make money. Therefore, decisions made by editorial must be favorable to the commercial department to enable them approach clients for advertising space. Although stories must also be balanced and credible, in most cases they are packaged in a way that they would not offend the advertisers. (Respondent two and four, August, 2020)

This however confirms findings of the study that there is a big link between commercial interest and editorial independence since one cannot exist without another.

Below is evidence from some of the respondents:

“None can exist without the other. That is why many media houses strike a balance in percentage each can take up daily/weekly/annually. Therefore, cash is the link. You scratch my back and I'll scratch yours.” (Respondent nine and six, August, 2020)

Commercial interests to a large extent dictate editorial decisions. It's an open secret that certain stories about big advertisers will not see the light of day. Without funding most media houses would die, they would be unable to fund activities, story collection, publication, dissemination, human capital (remuneration, insurance, training, professional, and personal growth and retention). Therefore, commercial interest is key to media sustainability, existence and performance. (Respondent eight and eleven, August, 2020)

This shows that this is not a simple binary of editorial versus commercial interest. Today's editor worries about the company's financial position and priorities. It's a question of privileging both commercial and editorial interests to secure the newsroom without undermining news values. So any editorial decision has to weigh carefully between editorial content and commercial interests, including, for example, not jeopardizing the relationship between advertisers and media houses.

The study findings indicate that commercial interests and editorial decisions are like conjoined twins. They only require editorial managers to have managerial skills to be able to balance between editorial and commercial interests as noted by the respondent below:

The two go hand in hand since commercial deals usually fund the operations of the media. This leaves media houses with no options but to sometimes play the tune of commercial interests or advertisers. (Respondent twelve, August, 2020)

This is confirmation that media houses cannot sustain operations without reliance on advertising revenues from big corporate and government. This link, therefore, leaves them at the mercy of advertisers as they are obligated to process, package and disseminate most of their content in a manner that they will not offend the advertisers. Editors, therefore, are forced to ensure that stories with significant commercial implications are told in a particular way so as to protect current and future sources of revenues.

This means that the two are directly intertwined with editors seeking to protect editorial independence, credibility and reputation by packaging and disseminating factual

information to the public, they are expected to ensure their content does not compromise on revenue generation. While advertisers seek to advertise in a reputable media enterprise that is credible for facts and the truth, the same advertisers may tend to induce non critical coverage through the promise of continued advertising which is a revenue earner to the media house. However, clear cuts boundaries are necessary to maintain media freedom while at the same promoting advertiser content.

4.3.4 The effects of linking editorial decisions to commercial interests

On the balance between commercial interests and editorial independence within the Kenyan media, the researcher again sought to find out the effects of linking editorial decisions to commercial interests. The researcher therefore, established that linking editorial decisions with commercial interests dilutes journalism and its noble agenda.

It is the creation of many ills in the world as errant organizations use the media drift to commercial guided auctioning to cement their agendas in the society of media consumers. Further, it undermines quality of stories, distorts gate-keeping by introducing non-news variables in copy tasting and allied decision making. (Respondent one, August, 2020)

Commercial interests leaves the media at the mercy of advertisers, which is not for public interest reporting since most media houses by the virtue of their licenses are meant to serve public interest and promote public good. (Respondent twelve, August, 2020)

Further, findings indicated that linking the two may have both negative and positive effects whereby the negative effects is that the content or news may not be objective and factual whereas the positive effect is that when the two work together, they set aside specific sections of the newspaper where to carry clearly flagged advertiser information in the form of advertorials of paid for native content.

I believe this has both negative and positive; in the negative aspect the quality of content since it will not be objective and factual in the name of native content partnership. In the positive way commercial can work with editorial team to create a special project in certain areas and this will offer objective, accurate and balanced reporting whereby both sections will gain fully. (Respondent one, August, 2020)

At times commercial interests constrain an editor from making independent decisions as they have to approve usage of content which should not upset major advertisers. While one might argue that in the first instance there is an editorial policy that can guide such interventions, while the latter is a breach of laid-down principles of editorial independence, they both have the adverse effect of promoting self-censorship. Therefore, this undermines editorial independence and compromises selection of stories for eventual publication. This curtails what information get to the public thus burying important details. Corporations that have huge advertising budgets usually get positive publicity and the negative aspects of their operations and services are deliberately overlooked.

Safaricom and KCB, for instance, are in a way insulated against bad press because of their large advertising budgets in local media. At the same time some of the business entities associated with those wielding power levers at both NMG and TSG cannot be covered negatively by the two leading newspapers in the country. (Respondent three and four, August, 2020)

Commercial interests and Editorial independence are largely inseparable. This is because no media outfit is set up solely for news propagation purposes. The outfit might employ professional writers and journalists to do the daily grind, but ultimately, media is formed for varied vested interests including financial, propaganda, agenda-setting (such as human rights, environment/conservation, political campaigns, case law, hospitality, tourism, religion many others). All these interests must pay their way through

advertising, subscription or straight up sponsorship of editorial content. This is a fight no editor or owner can win against revenue streams that keep the publication in circulation.

The bottom line is important to media survival and performance. Profits help in news collection, hiring of 'good' journalists, payment for services and products, including, for example, licenses, salaries, newsprint, office space. So having 'good, interesting, relevant' editorial products/content is key to the bottom line. And the bottom line is critical to media sustainability and performance. (Respondent six and nine, August, 2020)

It might be seen to promote a good relationship with advertisers, which could help to sustain the news company financially. But it largely shackles the editorial desk on independence of its content, and thus should be kept at a minimum. (Respondent eleven, August, 2020)

But some of the respondents hold a very strong position that editorial independence should be protected from commercial considerations so as to promote good governance and accountability even among huge big advertisers who use their power and influence to avoid public scrutiny through negative publicity.

News stories should be told and published to the public or readers as they are to enable audiences access to the content as long as they are credible and factual.

Personally, I do not generally agree with many of the commercial induced decisions as long as the stories are factual, credible and our readers deserve to know about them. I believe the independence of the newspaper or media must be maintained at all costs so as to hold those in government and leaders of private corporations and other public entities accountable. (Respondent twelve, August, 2020)

4.4 Cushioning editors against commercial interests in their selection and use of editorial content within the Kenyan media

Finally, the researcher sought to investigate how editors cushion themselves against commercial interests in the use of editorial content within the Kenyan media.

4.4.1 The influence of experience in editorial decision making process

On the question of whether experience is key in editorial decision making in the face of commercial interests, the study established that it is critical factor in helping editors make informed choices and decisions in their bid to balance between commercial and editorial influences.

Some of the respondents say experience helped them arrive at fairly transparent, credible and detailed conclusions in line with objectivity and journalistic values. In addition, past experiences enables editors make key decisions. Experience makes one to understand the consequences of certain decisions and how to mitigate or deal with the possible outcomes, be they commercially or editorially influenced. Therefore, editors often have to make decisions instantaneously and without the luxury of following a systematic process. Their experience, therefore, comes in handy in balancing the value of their editorial decisions with the commercial interests of the media owners.

Experience helps in proactive editing thus sets out to make certain editorial decisions more transparent by providing explanations and other information. At least I'm aware of the editorial policies and also what's expected of me. (Respondent one, August, 2020)

Experience is key as it enables you to detect news items influenced by commercial interests. Experience helps one to balance between commercial and editorial interest. If the news item is of great public interest, then the editorial interest will override the commercial interest as the public have a right to credible information. Experience is also key as it enables editors to seek relevant facts from the concerned commercial enterprises to corroborate editorial decisions so that you strike a balance in the packaging and

dissemination of the editorial content while at the same time supporting commercial concerns.

Experience, they say, is the best teacher. It helps an editor make better decisions, for they can smell planted reports from a mile away. The institutional knowledge guides me to make important decisions and handle difficult situations by drawing from my past experiences. Less experienced, less perceptive editors are more gullible and are likely to print unchecked facts or one-sided reports, which even if they are not influenced by commercial could be more injurious to the media house and audiences. (Respondent three, August, 2020)

Further, findings indicate that experience helps editors offer options in the manner they will execute commercially influenced content such as native advertising without undermining news values. Decision-making must consider the numerous factors and this requires some good experience based on lived and learnt experiences and knowledge.

Experience is key because it's the best teacher. Experience determines understanding of the media landscape, the stakeholders, the supporters, the political and economic environments and processes, ownership, advertising and how all of them interact and influence each other and media and journalistic activities and performances. Further, it helps editors to propose ways of securing the adverts without undermining our brand. In essence, it turns the editor into a counselor, worried about the brand, top line and bottom line at the same time. (Respondent seven and nine, August, 2020)

The study established that experience helps editors make fair and quick decisions amid the conflicted relationship with commercial interests.

The more experience one has the better the institutional memory he possesses, which makes it easier to make certain decisions in the newsroom. This gives one the confidence to make certain decisions based on the history of the staff or organisation they are dealing with and the issue at hand. (Respondent five and eleven, August, 2020)

4.4.2 Challenges editors face in their bid to retain editorial independence in the face of commercial interests

In addition, the study sought to investigate about the challenges editors face in their bid to retain editorial independence in the face of commercial interests. The study, therefore, established that in most cases, editors do struggle to follow the editorial independence more especially when they have a story that touches on major advertisers, media owners or government. As explained below they are forced to get clearance from commercial or the owners which will determine the fate of the story.

We struggle to adhere to the editorial independence since we have a story that touches on one of our advertisers we cannot run unless we seek approval despite our reporters having all the facts right. This makes it very difficult to operate independently. (Respondent two, August, 2020)

Another challenge faced by the editors is safeguarding and maintaining high quality editorial standards so as to retain and increase readership, but at the same time face the dilemma of making decisions which should not in any way compromise on revenue earnings by the commercial department.

The long-term impact is that it forces the editors into self-censorship which ultimately denies readers access to full and accurate information from the media house. In essence it means that most editors are forced to prioritize commercial interests at the expense of serving public interest by the media. This is in line with a study conducted in Hungary, which indicates that journalists feel that they are less free to choose their topics while more of them report attempts from economic players to influence their writings (Vasarhelyi, 2010). A respondent vividly captures such moments:

I would like to expand the sphere of commercial interests and say the desire to maintain high profits have minimized high-quality reporting. For instance, in 2005, as a Nation reporter, I was assigned to travel to Marsabit to report the Turbi massacre. The police chopper that was to be availed for journalists did not materialize. The Nation's Editorial Director declined to approve the hire of a private chopper. I wrote my story based on the pictures from the photographer on the scene. My readers' understanding of the topic was restricted to the pictures that I could access. The readers were denied the opportunity to read about and see the true picture through fair coverage. (Respondent three, August, 2020)

Although editors, by the very nature of their obligations and responsibilities are expected to be fair and impartial and should remain steadfast, upright and just, this is never the case due to the external interference as a result of commercial interests (Ishengoma 2007). Further findings from the study indicate that editors sometimes receive directives from internal but powerful forces or principal shareholders on how to handle certain editorial content. Sometimes editors have been forced to withdraw stories so that they do not hurt the commercial interests of the business, but instead publish pro-business articles although with less editorial value.

Editors have been forced to give less information or ignore negative stories of advertisers in order to appease them since they have deep advertising pockets. It gets worse when editors are forced to accompany the CEO to pay courtesy calls to some existing and potential advertisers. It becomes very difficult to run negative stories when this is done. (Respondent four and five, August, 2020)

Finally, the study established that the big challenge is walking the fine line between owners posturing publicly about editorial independence and the harsh reality of the very same people seeking to use the papers to advance their personal interests. They are aware that it is the advertisers' way or no way and this often leads to self-censorship.

Pressure from employers to favor some clients, inadequate space for editorial content, interference to skew content to attract advertisers is a challenge.

Therefore, balancing the interest of both editorial and commercial interests requires a delicate act as none can survive without the other. (Respondent seven and eleven, August, 2020)

The issue of ownership and the pressures they bring to bear on editors signifies that media houses are profit-oriented businesses like any other and editorial is therefore expected to make decisions that do not compromise commercial interests. Therefore, editors are expected to know, understand and ultimately balance different interests, and know how to deal with formal, legal, political and economic and informal challenges so protect commercial interests of the media house.

4.4.3 Arriving at the best tradeoff when faced with complex editorial decisions

The study, finally, sought to find out how editors arrive at the best tradeoff when faced with complex editorial decisions in such a complex situation where there are competing interests. The research findings established that senior editors look at the future impact of the information to be published, the facts of information and explore the legal and commercial implications before sanctioning or denying publication. This is evident from the statement below:

“I look at the future impact and explore legal options. This helps me arrive at a conclusive decision” (Respondent two, August, 2020)

Every case is unique, and the best decision is arrived at by looking at the facts of each story. The key thing is to be fair and accurate. We hold meetings and discuss the way forward with the team. Such decisions will be binding the editorial team. (Respondent eleven, August, 2020)

The study established that commercial interests and editorial independence reflect the complexities of navigating a newsroom in which editorial independence is not

guaranteed, or the guidelines are likely to be ignored to accommodate what's contingent politically and commercially. Therefore, sometimes the best trade-off is to respectfully remind media owners that the information gathering, processing and dissemination landscape has changed and the news in circulation is no longer controlled by those who buy ink by the barrel; Owners, advertisers, government and other powerful and influential forces in society.

For instance, in October 2019, the Standard recalled the day's edition on the reported instructions of Gideon Moi based on a solid court report on Idah Odinga's feud with the widow of her deceased's son, Fidel. It is understood that Raila Odinga reached out to Gideon to request the suppression of the report. What followed was more devastating. A PDF of the botched edition circulated online to millions of readers, while other national papers, including The Star and the Nation, used the report widely by far surpassing the modest circulation that The Standard would have managed. (Respondent ten, August, 2020)

From the findings, therefore, in the digital dispensation, it's best for editors to publish the truth rather than suppress it at the behest of the powerful and influential. However, due to increasing economic pressures and the need to increase profitability, the editors are forced to cover certain influential organisations and powerful individuals favourably because they are significant advertisers. Sometimes if the public interest will not be significantly impacted, then the commercial interests carry the day.

Sometimes we cover some firms favourably with the understanding that we will get business in return. Also, we have run investigative stories where some clients have been mentioned adversely. In such a situation, we allow a Right of Reply. (Respondent, four and eleven, August, 2020)

Ultimately, there is need for editors to have a deep understanding of the various socio-economic factors and the dynamics that define the media landscape so as to be able

to strike a balance between editorial boundaries and commercial interests in line with public interest, ownership, government interests, advertisers, strategic interests and other powerful forces in society.

According to manufacturing consent theory that guided this study, the media serve and propagate strategic interests of powerful and influential groups in society such as advertisers, the elite, the owners and their allies and those in authority (Edward & Chomsky, 1988). So editorial decisions must consider various scenarios, analysing them carefully as they strategically disseminate content that addresses public interest, the needs of owners, advertisers, political and other economic actors. The implication is that editorial content should not jeopardize the strategic relationships and trust between the media owners and all the other stakeholders.

Finally, the study found that despite the challenges, priority is given to issues of public interest in line with journalistic values and professional training while at same time accommodating the interest of other stakeholders. To achieve that, in most cases, editors employ dialogue with the commercial department so as to arrive at mutually beneficial decisions. Through this, journalism is not completely undermined.

I often ask myself, what's the impact of the decision on our journalism and public perception? If it undermines our journalism, I say NO. If the impact can be mitigated, say, by changing approach to commercial project I guide the manager how to navigate the fault lines. In essence, I find myself in a constant dialogue with my colleagues from commercial for a mutually beneficial decision. (Respondent twelve, August, 2020).

CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

Provided under this section is the summary of the findings, conclusions and recommendations of the study. Effective recommendations are made in this section, aimed at enlightening and enabling readers, going through this study, gain an in-depth understanding in regards to statement of the problem and objectives as per the study findings. The section also provides suggestions for further research based on the conclusion of the study findings.

5.2 Summary of the Findings

This study sought to analyse the influence of commercial interests on editorial independence and decisions within Kenya's print media, focusing on the largest two media houses, the Nation and Standard Newspapers. The study was guided by Manufacturing Consent and Descriptive Decision theories. Descriptive survey design and qualitative research approach were employed to obtain data.

Key informants were senior editors some drawn from the Standard Media Group and the Nation Media or those who have previously served at senior editorial positions in either of the two media houses. The senior editors, therefore, provided information for analysis on the influence of commercial interests on editorial decisions and independence within the Kenyan print media. The objectives of the study were; to establish factors that influence the increasing use of business-friendly news and editorial content within the Kenyan print media and less content that serves public interest.

The study also sought to investigate the balance between commercial and editorial independence within the Kenyan print media and lastly, the study analysed how editors cushion themselves against commercial interests in their selection and use of editorial content within the Kenyan print media so as to protect and retain editorial independence. From the findings, it was evident that the packaging and dissemination of editorial content is largely influenced by an organisations' commercial interests since they are profit making enterprises that are required by the owners to generate profits and dividends to shareholders. In addition, the researcher further established that there is a great challenge for editors in their quest of balancing between commercial and editorial standards especially from business partners, advertisers or those from powerful forces especially within government or influential corporates.

The study findings were consistent and in agreement with Noam Chomsky's theory of Manufacturing Consent, which guided this study which stipulates that Media largely serves the interests of the ownership and other powerful forces in society at the expense of promoting public interest. However, the study further established that past experience and deep knowledge of the dynamics and workings within the media industry, enables editors arrive at key decisions as they seek a middle ground that satisfies both their professional calling and commercial interests in line with ownership interests.

5.2.1 Factors that influence the use of business-friendly editorial content within the Kenyan print media

Research suggests that the news media tend to focus and favor events and content that involves elites and those in power, big advertisers, large organisations and other famous actors (Bennett, 2010). The study established that editorial content is influenced

more by the organisations' commercial interests, ownership, internal editorial policies, government policies, and at times editors' interests and journalists' personal gains. Although media owners profess independence, the case is different in the real sense as big spenders on advertising wield immense influence in media houses which, ultimately, impacts the quality and nature of content disseminated to the audiences in form of news and other editorial content. This is well captured by Urban (2013), that news coverage is geared towards protecting the interests of media owners. The study further established that timeliness, newsworthiness, conflict, humor and public interest are among the factors that influence the selection of news and editorial content to be published, although commercial interests would, in most cases, take priority.

Further findings established that profitability is key for survival and sustainability of any media house and therefore most editorial decisions must take into consideration commercial interests before any news or content is published, especially that which is likely to depict a valued advertiser or business partner in bad light. It was also established that the quest for profitability undermined journalistic performance and output, especially when forced to write content that is pro-business. This scenario ends up weakening editorial content since commercial interests end up controlling and influencing editorial decisions. This also hinders journalists and editors from objective reporting of public interest stories.

Hanusch, Baniac & Maares (2019) supports this statement arguing that editorial credibility and integrity is under threat from the ever rising economic demands and changes in the media environment that have seen the wall that separates editorial and

commercial become more porous, and the economic influences being felt both on the organizational level and in individual journalists' daily routines and practices.

It was established that although editorial content covers 60 percent whereas commercial interests take 40 percent of the space, editorial standards will continue to be compromised unless the media owners establish additional sources of funding apart from advertising. The findings further indicated that although editors are supposed to be independent most of their decisions are heavily influenced and determined by commercial concerns. This state of affairs, therefore ends up compromising editorial freedom.

Traditionally, although editors were expected to work independently by distancing themselves from any influences emanating from commercial or sometimes ownership interests as explained by Lewis, Williams & Franklin (2008), the study established that due to increasing economic pressures, advertising or big commercial organisations have a significant influence on editorial decisions. Findings of the study also established that influential corporates, advertisers and government are the biggest sources of information and therefore, most media houses depend on them for revenue, which ends up holding editors captive since most of their decisions must serve the interests of those groups directly or indirectly.

However, due to heavy competition in the media industry, the editors have the challenge of ensuring that the content they disseminate is differentiated from their rivals so as to attract more readership and hence higher circulation figures. This also ensures they remain relevant in the market through publication of compelling content. Increasing competition has, further, forced media houses to be more innovative so as to beat the

competition, especially when they have sourced content from the same source or event such as a press conference or press statement.

But the respondents welcomed the competition saying it was healthy as it pushed the editors and the owners to protect editorial independence so as to remain more credible and competitive in the market, which ultimately contributed to higher sales in circulation.

The findings from the study revealed that the heavy competition was also good as since it forced media houses focus on improving the quality of editorial content by investing more in research and bringing to the market a product that is worth purchasing. But the downside of competition, at times, is compromise in the quality of stories because not adequate time is taken to verify news sources and hence the occasional publishing of half-baked stories.

5.2.2 Balance between commercial and editorial independence within the Kenyan print media

Since the Kenyan media houses are first and foremost businesses with financial targets, an editor therefore, needs to make editorial and financial decisions simultaneously. The study established that there is a major link between commercial interest and editorial independence since one cannot exist without the other. Although editorial and commercial are supposed to complement each other, there exists an inherent conflict between the two sides, which from the findings tends to end up or being resolved, largely in favour of commercial. The conflict is characterized by the continuous push and pull between the two departments as editorial strives to uphold editorial independence and standards, commercial on the other hand seeks to bring in more revenue by demanding concessions from editorial through use of pro-business content. In

addition, editors or journalists must ensure that the editorial content is not only objective but facts are verified with the concerned parties as well before publication. Unfortunately, and in extreme circumstances, an editor or journalist could be forced to discard authentic content if publication of such information will put commercial interests at risk.

However, the researcher established that it is very hard to balance between commercial and editorial standards especially from business partners, advertisers or those from powerful forces. For instance, when there is a negative story touching an influential commercial partners such as big advertisers or those in authority, the editors or journalists are forced to kill the story or slant it in favour of them.

Findings from the study revealed that any adverse news touching on the ownership, influential shareholders or their close associates of the two media houses, whose editors participated in the study, is unlikely to be published even when the news came from privileged sources such as parliament or courts that are insulated against legal actions. The study findings revealed that commercial interests eroded editorial independence by allowing paid for information and news in the form of native content, which is processed and packaged similar to authentic and independent content yet it is a form of advertising mimicking genuine news stories being given priority against independent news.

This leaves the audiences confused or deceived as they may not differentiate between sponsored and native content from independent stories or genuine news.

The study also established that although media owners gave editors the authority to make editorial decisions they were forced to consult and agree with commercial teams on how to handle sensitive stories that may have a positive or negative impact on advertisers,

powerful groups, commercial interests, government, and the ownership of the media house. This scenario, ultimately, denies editors the opportunity to make independent and rational decision on the usage and dissemination of such content.

In most cases large commercial firms or advertisers receive prominent media coverage frequently as opposed to smaller establishments. This is offered as an incentive to attract advertising from those large firms. This is in agreement with Golding & Murdock, (2010) that owing to market pressures to maximise profits, media production is increasingly being monopolized by large corporations and being molded to suit their interests and strategies at the expense of editorial independence.

The study found out that linking editorial decisions with commercial interests dilutes journalism and the agenda of serving public interest. So any decision by editors has to weigh carefully between promoting editorial freedom or commercial interests, but the overriding objective is to ensure that whatever decision taken does not endanger the relationship between advertisers and the media house. The study findings indicated that the despite challenges faced by editors as a result of commercial influence, they strive to retain some degree of independence so as not to lose public trust and be accountable to their audiences. They sought to achieve that by ensuring that the content they publish is factual and accurate even as they give attention to the needs of the media house to make profits from advertising.

5.2.3 Editors' cushioning themselves against commercial interests in their selection and use of editorial content

On the question of how editors cushion themselves against commercial interests and use of editorial content, the study established that editorial experience helps editorial teams make informed decisions, especially when faced with conflicting situations in their assignments thus achieving objectivity and journalistic values while understanding the consequences of certain decisions that one has to make. This scenario is in line with the descriptive decision theory which guided the study in helping explain how editors arrive critical decisions in situations of uncertainty. At times they root for native advertising as one of the most viable options for executing commercial projects without necessarily undermining news values and editorial independence.

In some cases they cushion themselves from undue commercial influences by holding joint content brainstorming sessions in which a more balanced common stand will be adopted by both editorial and commercial although it must be in the interest of the organization's long-term objectives.

But the study also revealed that at times editors are helpless as they are forced to abide by the decisions and whims of the owners who may demand that certain stories be dropped all together or altered to avoid creating any dissatisfaction among advertisers or certain powerful forces in society within government.

In such cases their focus will be directed more at protecting revenues and seeking to maintain high profits, but at the expense of quality editorial content. However, this

denies readers access to detailed and accurate information in a given subject and could be costly to the organisation in terms of low circulation numbers.

This was confirmed by findings in which an editor said that at times they received directives from senior management for instance a CEO or some principal shareholder dictating on how to handle certain stories so as to protect the business from any possible loss of revenue as a result of editors seeking to exercise editorial independence.

On the question on how editors arrive at the best tradeoff when faced with complex editorial decisions, the study established that editors take into consideration the possible short and long term impact of the content at hand before publishing or discarding it all together. Although their decisions are guided by journalistic values they are ultimately determined by a combination of other factors such as ownership, profitability, public interest and government position in relation to the subject at hand.

In addition, the study affirmed that the best trade-off by editors is to remind media owners that the media landscape has changed and the news in circulation is no longer controlled by a single platform but by multiple media outlets and hence the need to package and disseminate editorial content objectively.

Finally, some respondents explained that they strive to consider public interest before making key editorial decisions as per journalistic is con values. In most cases, therefore, they engage in a dialogue with commercial department so as to arrive at a mutually beneficial decision.

5.3 Conclusions

The main aim of the study was to investigate the influence of commercial interests on editorial independence within the Kenyan print media. As such, the following conclusions were drawn based on the study results:

On the factors that influence the selection of news-friendly news and editorial independence within the Kenyan print media, the study concludes that editorial content and news is influenced by a number of factors which include; commercial interests from advertisers, media ownership, journalistic value, government and other powerful societal forces such as politicians. In addition, the study concludes that other factors that influence content selection and usage include, timeliness, newsworthiness, conflict, humor and public interest.

The study concludes that the profitability of any media house is significant for its survival and sustainability thus it, largely, influences the editorial decisions and determines the independence of editorial decisions. Since those who fund the media by way of advertising are also some of the biggest sources of information, they are increasingly having influence on when and how editorial content is used.

The study further, concludes that unhealthy competition compromises the quality of stories published and denies the public opportunity to read well researched and quality editorial content. This is because in a bid to be ahead of each other editorial team from the respective media houses may not have adequate time to gather all the facts about a certain story, yet it must be published within very tight deadlines which could result into 'half-baked' stories.

The study also concludes that in order to maintain a mutually beneficial relationship that gives balance between commercial interests and editorial independence both sections should work together and agree on content usage in manner that does not jeopardize the business, but rewarding to both sides.

On how editors cushion themselves against commercial influences in their selection and use of editorial, the study concludes that allowing for win-win situations is the best tradeoff editors can adopt in order to cushion themselves from commercial interests and influence. In addition, the study concludes that the independence of the media is steadily being compromised by commercial interests which makes it difficult for the media to serve public interest without undue influence from owners, advertisers, government and other powerful and influential forces who interfere with editorial credibility.

The study also concludes that the primary role of the media, be it public or private is being undermined by other forces such the powerful advertisers and government and hence the need to protect it. The study further notes that most editors have been forced to give priority to commercial interests instead of public interest which goes against the traditional calling of the media's role of being the public watchdog. But there is greater value for advertisers and media owns to appreciate the value of nurturing and protecting editorial standards. A media house that is reputable for promoting public interest earns trust from its audience and thus an advertorial content published by the same media house will also gain public trust and wider readership and circulation.

5.4 Recommendations

Based on the above results, this study recommends the following:

- i). Editors and media owners should first put the interests of the public first when publishing news and editorial content in newspapers before commercial interests, individual gains, media ownership and control thus creating a favorable image of the company to the audience.
- ii). The editorial and commercial team should work together to create credible news and editorial content.
- iii). There is need for media houses to structure their content collection, processing and dissemination in a way that protects their independence but accommodates commercial interests by making advertisers appreciate the value of placing their content in an editorially independent publication. There is need, therefore, for editors to ensure balanced and objective reporting as the hallmark of good journalism which, ultimately translates to increased circulation and higher revenue to the owners.
- iv). There is need for the independence of the media to publish balanced, fair and credible content that is not compromised by commercial interests while respecting the primary role of the media in society.
- v). Clients and media owners should be advised by senior editors and media managers to understand the value of meeting editorial standards by informing and educating the citizens thus shaping their judgmental ability. Media owners should also allow the editors to make decisions on the editorial content and news to be published since they are professionals.

- vi). Senior editors should look at the future impact of the information to be published, the facts of information and explore the legal options before allowing it for publication.

5.5 Suggestions for further studies

The present study focused on analysing the influence of commercial interests on editorial independence within the Kenyan print media. The study therefore, recommends that a replica of the same study should be undertaken focusing on other Kenyan media such as electronic and online and also using different approaches and research methods so as to compare the findings. Further, more research should be conducted to investigate the readers' perceptions on editorial content and public interest within the Kenyan media.

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APPENDICES

Appendix I: Interview Guide for Senior Editors

1. Briefly explain factors influencing the selection of news and editorial content?
2. How does the profitability of your media house influence your decision making process?
3. How do sources of media funding affect your editorial decisions?
4. How has the heavy competition between and within media affected your editorial decisions?
5. Briefly explain any tough decisions of balancing between commercial interests and your editorial decisions?
6. How do media owners balance commercial interests and editorial independence?
7. Briefly explain the link between editorial decisions and commercial interests.
8. In your own view, what are the effects of linking editorial decisions to commercial interests?
9. How does experience influence your decision making process?
10. Describe any challenges editors face in their bid to retain editorial independence in the face of commercial interests?
11. When faced with complex decisions how do you arrive at the best tradeoff?

Appendix II: Certificate of Field Work