

**ETHICS IN BROADCAST JOURNALISM: A CRITICAL
ANALYSIS OF FM RADIO STATIONS IN KENYA**

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ABSTRACT

This study set out to examine the ethical conduct in broadcast media in Kenya in regard to FM radio stations. It was an attempt to determine the reasons for the increasing discontent among listeners. The study was prompted by the fact that courts of law continue to give hefty awards in defamation cases brought against FM stations. An extensive study was conducted to determine the universal ethical principles that broadcast media ought to adhere to in order to maintain a good relationship between the media house, practitioners and the audience.

The main objective of the study was to examine ethical standards in broadcast media in Kenya with a specific reference to FM stations in Kenya. Specifically, the study set out to examine the perception of listeners and media practitioners in regard to conduct of FM radio stations. It also sought to identify ethical challenges faced by FM radio stations following liberalization of broadcast media in Kenya. Based on the findings, the study aimed at making recommendations on how ethical practice in broadcast media in Kenya and FM radio stations in particular can be improved.

The study was an exploratory survey that targeted 160 respondents. The sample was derived from the city's 2.6 million residents and 26 FM stations broadcasting from Nairobi. A questionnaire was administered on a random sample of 132 listeners (80 men and 52 women) and 28 practitioners in FM radio stations. The survey was conducted between October and November 2005. Nairobi was selected since more than 90 percent of FM radio stations in Kenya broadcast from the city and the area has a cosmopolitan population, which is representative enough to allow for generalization of the findings to the rest of the population. The information was analyzed by statistical methods. Findings

from the questionnaire were augmented by face-to-face interviews with key informants in the media and secondary data obtained through library and research on the Internet.

The findings indicate that Kiss FM is the most popular FM station in Kenya with 24% of the respondents having selected it as their preferred station. Music (45%) is the most popular programme on FM stations closely followed by talk shows (44%). Talk shows were singled out as the most prone to abuse with 59% of the listeners terming them offensive. The principle of fairness is the most neglected, followed by balance then decency. Though majority of the practitioners (85%) are aware that broadcasting is guided by professional codes of ethics, only 28% are aware of the existence of the *Code of Conduct and Practice of Journalism in Kenya* which is enforced by the Media Council of Kenya. The biggest challenge facing the FM stations is the need to institutionalize professionalism in the broadcast media by enacting policies that are recognized in the country's statutes.

The study recommends that FM stations should take bold steps to improve programming especially the talk shows by encouraging reverence of the prescribed ethical tenets. This will be achieved through involving listeners in selection of issues to be discussed, diversifying the voices/range of opinion on shows, and promoting debate on themes that are relevant to the prevailing circumstances in society. A National Media Policy should be enacted to guide operations of the broadcast media in this country. The policy will entrench the *Code of Conduct and Practice of Journalism in Kenya* into the statutes and also streamline licensing procedures for FM radio stations. It will also give the Media Council of Kenya legal empowerment through an Act of Parliament making it more effective in overseeing the operations of the media.