

**The Media and Public Opinion in Kenya: The Impact of Print Media Coverage of the Grand Coalition Government.**

By

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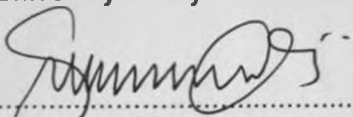
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DECLARATION

This Research Project is my original work and has not been presented for award of a degree in any other University or anywhere else for academic purposes.

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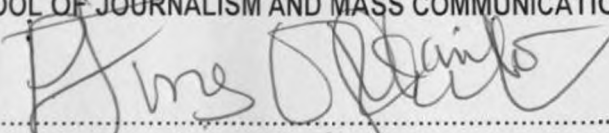
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## DEDICATION

This Research project is dedicated to my mentor Professor George A.O. Magoha whose advice, leadership and inspiration has shaped my dreams and academic pursuits.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Research is never the product of the efforts of one person. I take this chance to acknowledge everyone who has contributed to make this project a success. To God almighty for inspiring and guiding this work. To my supervisor, Polycarp Omolo Ochilo for his input, refinement of my ideas and guidance without which this project would not have been complete. My very helpful research assistants Samuel Ngure and Ozem Muriuki for helping to administer the questionnaires and my faithful and resourceful friend Confred Nzau for helping me locate important literature for this project. You all exceeded my expectation and may God bless you.

## ABSTRACT

This study sought to investigate the impact of media coverage of the coalition government and how it influences public opinion. The objectives of the study focused on the role played by the print media in determining how the public views the coalition government, the relationship between media coverage and public opinion was investigated and the impact of media framing on public perception. The study explored the possible impact of this coverage of grand coalition government covering the period starting from December 1<sup>st</sup> 2008 to August 31<sup>st</sup> 2009.

As part of the theoretical framework, the study applied the agenda setting theory, decision making theory and information processing theory of communication to underscore how the nature, quality and delivery of information influences public perception.

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The study was conducted through a survey. 200 questionnaires were administered through the help of qualified research assistants to respondents purposively drawn from the middle class people living in Nairobi to ensure they reach those who are exposed to the print media. Out of these, 140 questionnaires were filled and returned 140 respondents. The data gathered was both qualitative and quantitative data to establish the relationship between media coverage and public perception of the government. The data collected was analyzed using Statistical Packages for the Social Sciences (SPSS) technique. The research findings form part of this final research report.

The study found that the public rely a lot on the media for interpretation of political news and events. This is because the media is the most highly trusted information source. This is because majority of the people believe the news stories are accurate and balanced. Sustained negative coverage has a direct relationship impact public perception since the public base their decisions based on the negative content. Consistent exposure to negative content causes positive public opinion and rating of the government to diminish because there is no alternative information to balance this.

The study further established that there has been very little coverage of the achievements of the coalition government but too much focus on its failures and mistakes, this has led the public to believe the Coalition government has done little or nothing and rating of government performance in critical areas to be ranked very poorly. The language, labels and frames used by the media to describe the government and political

events tends to influence public perception because they provide the lenses through which the public looks at the government ultimately forming pictures in the mind.

However, media is not entirely and solely responsible for the current poor rating and negative public perception of the government. Other factors like the current global economic crisis including the harsh weather patterns has increased frustration among Kenyans and the perceived failure of the government to act decisively in mitigating these challenges has left many Kenyans disillusioned by the government.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### MEDIA, PUBLIC OPINION AND AGENDA SETTING

#### Introduction

Over the last few months from December 2008, the Grand Coalition Government of Kenya seems to be losing the support of the members of its public. There seems to be increasing public apathy towards the government and its officials with Kenyans getting disillusioned by the day.

Studies and analysis conducted by various groups and organizations have indicated a consistent trend of diminishing approval by the Kenyan public.. For example, according to a report dubbed SPEC Barometer Results by the Steadman Group (now called Synovate) conducted between 13<sup>th</sup> – 17<sup>th</sup> April 2009, the approval ratings of the government and its leaders have gone down significantly with each new report showing a further downward plunge in the approval ratings. In that report, the presidents approval rating stood at 48 per cent (%) , the Prime Minister 64 %, the Speaker of the National Assembly 68 % while the media got 73 % approval rating. (Synovate April 2009).

In a poll released on 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2009, 70 per cent of Kenyans felt the Government had achieved 'nothing' beyond ending the post-election violence. Indeed, only 31 per cent of Kenyans interviewed by the Steadman Group were optimistic that the Grand Coalition Government would survive until 2012. In an article published in The Standard Newspaper on 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2009 titled, *People's verdict: Coalition Has Let Us Down*, between 77 and 80 per cent had no confidence in the Government's commitment to deal with the post-election violence, the maize and oil scandals, extra-judicial killings and fire safety and disaster preparedness. The Government polled measly in its performance in education (8 per cent), addressing post-election violence (6per cent), delivery of services (5per cent), national reconciliation (3 per cent) and food security and relief services (3 per cent). Others were fight against corruption (2 per cent), poverty alleviation (2), and 1 per cent each for security, the economy, distribution of resources and health.

The Mars Group Kenya Ltd, in a publication dubbed *The Grand Failure* insist that the Grand Coalition Government has completely failed in its performance particularly in regard to the implementation of agenda four , in the National Accord and its reform package. The report indicates that majority of Kenyans rate the performance of the government as (F) Grand failure.

The latest poll by the Synovate group titled SPEC Barometer Results Quarter 3 conducted between 5th – 13<sup>th</sup> October 2009 showed consistence with earlier polls revealing a great disapproval of government efforts in dealing with key issues highest on the list being food prices ( 80% disapproval) ,corruption in the public sector (66%) , poverty (66%). (Synovate , October 2009).

After the controversial *Kenya Communications amendment Bill ( 2008)* was passed in parliament in December 2008, it was eventually signed into law by the president, the media responded by engaging in a serious war against the government leaders to pile pressure on them to denounce the bill and repeal or amend what were regarded as controversial sections of the bill .On 11<sup>th</sup> December 2009, the major news channels devoted the entire news broadcast time to a fiery criticism of the Bill and the government leaders. In an attempt to increase public pressure the media houses engaged in what can be seen as unethical reporting by digging into the private lives of the government leaders in matters totally unrelated to the bill, notably , the Minister for Information and Communication , Honourable Samuel Poghisio.

At the beginning of this confrontation, on Jamhuri Day, 12th December 2008, some journalists and media practitioners including civil society activists were arrested for wearing black T-shirts bearing protest messages and demanding the right to exercise freedom of expression. These events were given considerable coverage in the local media.

It is worth noting that these events occurred at a time when Kenyans were facing extreme problems of hunger, the effects of the global economic crunch were just beginning to be felt in the country and the Kenyan legislators had refused to pay taxes despite drawing huge salaries. Francis Mwege in paper titled '*The Effects of the Global Financial Crisis : A case Study of Kenya*' , notes that impact since Kenya is a rural based agro economy, these effects would have an impact especially in regard to high food prices and the resulting inflation. Mrs. Stella Kilonzo , the Chief Executive Officer of the Capital Markets Authority also highlights the impact of the global crisis on Kenya in Paper titled '*The Global Financial Crisis : Its impact on Kenya and Possible Strategies to Mitigate the Effects*'

The media rode on this frustration among Kenyans as they engaged the government. The result was increased frustration among the members of the Kenyan public.

Some of the Key issues that the media focused on during this period include the refusal by Members of Parliament to pay taxes despite overwhelming public condemnation. The emerging corruption scandals mainly the maize and fuel scandals that occurred at the same time with famine. According to the United Nations' World Food Programme estimates, about 4 million Kenyans are in urgent are facing starvation. The rising cost of living with basic services and amenities becoming unaffordable for the average Kenyan, these coupled with uncontrolled spending by the government on seemingly unimportant matters like the huge budget for tea and flowers for ministries became a source of frustration among the public.

The media also focused a lot on the wrangles in the coalition government with unending power struggles paralyzing government operations in key sectors like health, this gave the impression that the politicians were only concerned about power and to many Kenyans it seemed like the Coalition government may not survive its entire five year term. The failure by the government (including parliament) to make any significant progress towards trying the suspects of post election violence was given significant coverage by the media and it dominated public debate for a long time.

There were two fire disasters that killed over 150 people and the government's response was seen to be slow and uncoordinated which left an impression among Kenyans that the government was insensitive to their plight. Around the same period, there was increased coverage on the cases of extra judicial killings that culminated in the killing of two human rights activists working for the Oscar foundation. The inability and/or the unwillingness of the government to tackle urgent issues affecting Kenyans including dealing with corrupt ministers and other public servants implicated in the various corruption scandals was also given considerable coverage.

The decision to openly broadcast parliamentary proceedings has not made things easier for parliamentarians as the public can now watch as they engage in wrangles and incessant babblings. At the height of all these challenges, there was an unsuccessful censor motion in parliament against the minister for Agriculture who was associated with the Maize and fertilizer scandal. Other government officials and politicians implicated in various corruption scandals stood their ground insisting they would not resign. At this time, the media was only too willing to highlight these matters.

At some point, there was conflict between the Prime Minister, Raila Odinga and the Standard Group Media due to what the Prime Minister described as deliberate focus on negative issues with intent to tarnish the

government's reputation while ignoring to report on positive achievements of the government. In one meeting, he 'promised' to deal with the media house.

Recently, the prime minister scheduled a high profile press conference to defend the coalition government and highlight its achievements. In the briefing, while acknowledging the Grand Coalition had not entirely succeeded, he blamed the media for dwelling on the negative and eroding the confidence of Kenyans without highlighting the positive steps the government had taken and the progress that has been made so far.

### **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

The empirical evidence from studies done in Kenya by Synovate Group, Strategic PR and other organizations in Kenya has constantly shown that Kenyans believe the media as both trusted and one of the most critical sources of their information. Similarly, the media is seen as key in checking the activities of the grand coalition government since its inception. However, it is instructive that the grand coalition government has of late been criticized by the media constantly as not living to its mandate and the public expectations.

The question and therefore the problem is to interrogate the extent to which the media coverage may have influenced the public's apparent negative rating of the Grand coalition government. This study therefore sought to investigate the possible impact of media coverage of grand coalition government covering the period starting from December 1<sup>st</sup> 2008 to March 31<sup>st</sup> 2009.

### **OBJECTIVES**

1. To investigate the extent to which media coverage influences public opinion.
2. To explain the relationship between media coverage (media agenda) and public perception (public agenda).
3. To explain the impact of frames used by the media on public opinion

### **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The study sought to provide answers to the following questions.

1. To what extent does media coverage influence public opinion?
2. What is the relationship between media coverage (media agenda) and public perception (public agenda)?
3. What is the effect of media framing on public perception?

## **JUSTIFICATION OF THE STUDY**

This study is important in shedding further light on the subject of public opinion. Although there have been numerous studies done in this area, each subsequent study has continued to refine our knowledge about media and the construction of public opinion, yet, a lot more remains unclear. The study will make attempts to deal with such problems.

Furthermore, this study will also be useful to the political leadership of this country as it sheds important light on how the government in the future can avoid unnecessary conflict with media over its handling of critical issues.

This study is also useful to media owners and practitioners as it focuses on how the loss of objectivity by the media can also have an impact on their credibility.

The study is also important for purposes of furthering academic discourse in the area of media and agenda setting.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

Theoretical framework is a conceptual model of how one theorizes the relationships among the several factors /variables identified as important to the problem. A theoretical framework also explains the theories underlying these relations and also describes the nature and direction of the relationships. A theory suggests how to approach a problem in a way that is likely to yield the greatest meaning.

This study was informed by several theories their contribution to mass communication theory and research. These include agenda setting theory, decision making theory and the information processing theory

### **Agenda Setting Theory**

The consistent and sustained coverage by the media on specific issues has tended to focus public attention on these issues. The media in Kenya has tended to select news, issues and events and give them prominence and importance to the exclusion of the others. Consequently, the issues currently dominating public debate like the failure to implement reforms, corruption in public offices, high food prices among others are the same issues that the media has been giving significant coverage. The repeated coverage of these shortcomings of the coalition government has raised their prominence in the public mind thereby affecting public opinion. It has been hard for the public to think of the Coalition government as having succeeded in its mandate and performance. This is in line with the positions advanced by McCombs and Shaw that "...people tend to share the media's composite definition of what is important..." (McCombs and Shaw).



With the agenda setting function of the media being defined as the media's capability, through repeated news coverage, of raising the importance of an issue in the public's mind, it is possible to see the theory at work in relation to how the media has been covering the Coalition government.

The use of some frames such as 'Grand confusion', 'Grand corruption', 'Grand collision', 'Grand collusion' in reference to the Coalition government have all tended to create certain pictures in the public mind in their perception of the government. As Walter Lippman puts it, the 'pictures in their heads' have been formed from some of the frames and interpretations that the media has used .

For example, there has often a significant gap between the accounts of the press and what had actually taken place. The question therefore is are the 'pictures in our heads' ranked in our personal assessment of significance in a manner parallel to the way in which they were covered and emphasized by the press in the daily flow of news? Is what the press has ranked as important really so in reality?

### **Decision Making Theory**

Decision making is the process of making choices among competing courses of action. Human beings are regarded as rational beings who make their decisions after analyzing the available information. This information must be adequate and sufficient, accurate and factual, it must be relevant and appropriate to enable the recipient to make an informed choice. The media here acts as the source of the information through coverage of various news events and issues. The public receives this information which they engage in analyzing.

This study reveals that the information that the media has been releasing to the public particularly in regard to the government has not been adequate or complete to enable proper and sound decision making as envisioned by the proponents of the decision making theories . Similarly, some of the information has been seen to be skewed and at times inaccurate. It therefore becomes hard for the Kenyan media audience to make rational decisions in how they view the Coalition government since the information is not complete.

The focus in the media on issues that are not so relevant and appropriate has also hindered sound decision making. At times, there has been too much focus on interesting stories that are not necessarily of public interest.

The ideal situation in which a decision can be made or the decision making theory applied where all the relevant and factual information is provided has not been realized in Kenya . This then compromises the ability of Kenyans to make an rational, informed and accurate analysis thus affecting how he/she chooses to view the government. It therefore follows that the current negative perception of the Kenyan public is partly attributable to the failure by the media to provide information that is adequate, accurate, relevant and appropriate.

### **Information Processing Theories**

Persuasion is said to occur when an individual processes new information at his disposal. Due to the rampant growth of the media in Kenya, people have generally been exposed to more information which they are interacting with on a daily basis and actively processing. This information is received, processed, and stored in memory and is therefore available for retrieval. It is this exposure to information (external stimuli) that leads to persuasion.

According to the information processing theory, the audience is actively involved in processing the information at their disposal. People are sophisticated problem solvers, who evaluate available information carefully Kenyans have been actively involved in the political discourse due to the proliferation of the media in Kenya particularly radio which allows members of the audience to call in and contribute to the ongoing debate on socio-political issues. The public broadcasting of parliamentary proceedings has generated significant public interest which has further enriched political discourse.

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Since consistent and repeated exposure to messages enhances the transfer to the long term memory and retrieval leading to persuasion, this theory sheds important light on how the sustained coverage of negative issues in the Kenyan media has led to significant impact in opinion among the public which is the subject of investigation in this study.

According to Norman Anderson's Information Integration theory, individuals adapt new opinion, attitude or behavioral intention by forming a general impression, which in turn is based on many pieces of information. Some of this information may support a change in attitude, opinion or behavioral intention, while other information may argue against a change.

Since most of the information coming from the media as the findings of this study indicate, has tended to focus on the short comings of the government, the repeated exposure to this kind of information has over time had an effect on how the public perceive the Coalition Government by forming a general impression

that the government has failed to a large extent. Persuasion occurs depending on whether the general impression supports a change in opinions, attitudes, or behavioral intentions.

In the local Kenyan media, significant time and space has been devoted to the coverage of issues relating to the Coalition government. Research into the information processing theory of communication suggests that there are limits to the amount of information individuals can attend to and effectively process at a given time. This, therefore, makes it necessary for the media to regulate the amount of information to the audience at one given time. For example, based on this, we have seen how the media has distributed the length and of time and space allocated for news, or the number of news items in the media, to ensure that the audience effectively follows the whole news and processes it for understanding.

According to Tan, Alexis (1979), 'Most persuasion research today is guided by information processing and functional theories.' The information processing theories help media practitioners to not only choose carefully external stimuli (messages), but also to frame or package these messages in the most appropriate way to aid their audience's understanding and eventual retention of the same.

This theory guides this study in understanding the different appropriate persuasive messages and strategies adopted by the media in influencing public opinion.

## **HYPOTHESIS**

Sustained negative coverage by the media leads to a decrease in a favourable opinion of the government by the public.

## **LIMITATION OF THE STUDY**

The study focused on a limited period namely December 2008 to August 2009 and does not therefore cover the entire period that the grand coalition government has been in existence. This period was chosen because there were significant political developments key among them, the passing and signing of the Kenya Communications amendment bill, the corruption scandals including the maize, oil and Grand Regency cases took place during this period. There was also significant strain in the relationship between the government and the media within this period. This limitation is of concern since there are other dynamics that were in play before this period or have come into play after this period meaning that the events in this period considered in isolation may not tell the whole story. However, this does not affect the

findings of the study since in respondents' answers to the questionnaires were based on their view of the Coalition government for the entire period of its existence.

This study used purposive sampling techniques in data collection. This maybe a limitation in the sense that since the media considered here is the newspaper, people who don't read the newspapers but listen to the radio and watch the television were left out yet they are key to understanding public opinion. However, these newspaper readers also listen to the radio and watch television and their responses regarding the media were also shaped and influenced by the broadcast media.

The sample population chosen for this study is limited to Nairobi province only and does not cover the other 7 provinces of the entire country. Besides, it focused mainly on the working middle class leaving out the other categories in the population. However, this class was chosen because they have the desirable characteristics necessary for the study that is, literacy, media exposure, political consciousness and an active conscious engagement in the political discourse. Leaving out the other provinces does not necessarily affect the study in terms of what it seeks to investigate since all the desirable characteristics are present in the targeted population.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

This section focuses on literature related to the topic under investigation. The media has been seen to play an important role in influencing public opinion. There is a heavy reliance on the media for information regarding almost everything (Page, Shapiro and Dempsey, 1987). The rampant growth of the media industry and the emergence of new media has given the media a critical role in shaping societal views. Since the focus of the study is to investigate the impact of print media coverage on public opinion, the literature examined will focus mainly on four parts namely; the media and public opinion, agenda setting and public opinion, information processing and public opinion and how information influences decision making thereby affecting public opinion.

#### **The media and public opinion**

Opinion is defined as judgment resting on grounds insufficient for complete demonstration. It is also said to be belief of something as probable or as seeming to one's own mind to be true. It has also been defined as what is generally thought about something. Opinions are cognitive, affective and behavioral responses that reveal the underlying attitudes (Greg 2004). Susan Herbst sorts the definitions of public opinion into four categories

- a) Aggregative: the collection of individual anonymous opinions each treated as equal in value.
- b) Majoritarian: the association of the 'opinion' with the view held most respondents.
- c) Discursive/consensual: including conceptions of the public will and taken-for-granted agreement.
- d) Reification: The projection of an opinion by the media or the elite onto an imagined or constructed public.

For this study, the major focus is on the majoritarian opinion held by most people and the reification opinion which has been very prevalent in the local media. An example is when Kenyans were shouting for flour during Jamhuri day celebrations, the media reported it as public anger towards the government because of the passage of the Kenya Communication amendment bill.

#### **Shaping Public Opinion**

According to Mutz (1998), Media play a particularly important role in shaping impersonal perceptions, and impersonal perceptions, in turn, play a particularly important role in shaping political judgments. Nonetheless, citizens are not necessarily doomed to excessive conformity or to puppet-like manipulation at the hands of those who control media content. The normative social influence conveyed by interpersonal

political discussion is obviously important, but the public also demonstrate a great deal of independence, even in face to face settings. (p. 270)

Public opinion and media coverage of events and opinions may help to facilitate or diminish opportunities for collective action. Research has shown that conceptions of public opinion are embedded in the news coverage (McLeod & Hertog, 1992).

Page, Shapiro and Dempsey (1987) argue that for information to modify existing beliefs, five conditions must be met. The information must be (1) actually received, (2) understood, (3) clearly relevant to evaluating policies, (4) discrepant with past beliefs, and (5) credible.

When these conditions are met to a sufficient extent, new information should alter an individual's preferences and choice. Further, if the conditions are met in the same way for many individuals, there may be a change in collective public opinion that shows up in opinion polls. (Page 1987)

Page and Shapiro (1982) contend that collective public opinion is usually stable and it does not change instantly. However, for whatever they do learn about politics, most people must rely heavily upon the cheapest and most accessible sources: news- papers, radio, and television, especially network TV news. When news in the media reaches large audiences and meets our five conditions for many individuals, we would expect public opinion to change. (Page, Shapiro and Dempsey, 1987).

For this study, majority of Kenyans rely heavily upon the news media for information on political issues including an interpretation of the political occurrences. It is this continued exposure to the same information that eventually has a bearing on public opinion.

### **The Media and Agenda Setting**

Support for the hypothesis of media agenda-setting effects has been found in hundreds of studies over the past few decades.

The agenda setting function of the media refers to the media's capability, through repeated news coverage, of raising the importance of an issue in the public's mind. It is a process in which the media selects news, issues and events and gives them prominence and importance to the exclusion of the others. This means that a media house may come up with an issue and give so much attention that all other stories get very minimal coverage. A characteristic of agenda setting is that the media determines issues that are regarded as important by the masses or audience and the agenda set through the media tend to be believed.

Media power to influence public agendas may be conditioned by a number of factors. One is the extent to which real-world indicators reinforce or diminish the media message. Another is the type of issue—“unobtrusive” issues may be more susceptible to agenda setting. Media influence may also vary with the type of public agenda. An individual’s civic agenda (his or her perception of the most important issues or problems facing the community) may be quite different from an individual’s personal agenda (his or her opinion about the most important problems he or she is facing). When an individual’s personal agenda is the focus of research, then there is considerably less support for the agenda-setting hypothesis (McLeod, Becker, & Byrnes, 1974).

Other scholars like sociologists Kurt and Gladys Lang (1959) observed that while there was considerable doubt that the press had great power to change people’s attitudes, the media did provide an immense quantity of information from which people learned about the important issues of the day.

The Langs noted that people seemed to learn about such matters as campaign issues ‘in direct proportion to the emphasis placed on them by their manner of presentation in the media. The mass media force attention to certain issues. They build up public images of public figures. They are constantly presenting objects suggesting what individuals in the mass should think about, know about, and have feelings about.’

One fact about the media in Kenya is that there is constant flow of news, large numbers of people read their newspapers and listen to news on radio. While some audiences rely more on television for their news, others have little interest in daily events. The news industry seems more interested in some events than others - material presented by the press is selective. This selectivity stems from the constraints the media faces; limited capacity to provide total surveillance, financial constraints, time, space and factors imposed on gate-keepers. Such variables determine the manner in which press decides which stories to select, follow-up, emphasize, interpret and present in particular ways

### ***The Agenda Building Process***

Researchers Gladys and Kurt Lang (1983) studied the relationship between the press and public opinion during the Watergate crisis and suggested that the concept of agenda setting be expanded to the concept of agenda building which is a collective process in which media, government and the public influence one another in determining what issues are considered to be important. The process was broken down into 6 steps;

1. The press highlights some events or activities and makes them stand out. This has been clear in the way the media in Kenya has chosen to focus on specific issues and given them repeated coverage.
2. Different kinds of issues require different kinds and amounts of news coverage to gain attention.
3. The events and activities in the focus of attention must be "*framed*" or given a field of meanings within which they can be understood. To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communication text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, casual interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment recommendation for the item described.
4. The language used by the media can affect perception of the importance of an issue. The media has continued to use words such as, 'Grand Corruption' in reference to the Coalition government.
5. The media link the activities or events that have become the focus of attention to secondary symbols whose location on the political landscape is easily recognized. People need to have a basis for taking sides on an issue. E.g the raid on the Standard Newspapers offices, confiscation of computers and property and the Margaryan brothers are connected and the Minister's justification of the acts by saying that "*if you rattle a snake, you should be ready to be bitten by it*", put the government in bad light.
6. Agenda building is accelerated when well-known and credible individuals begin to speak out on an issue. For instance, the visit to Kenya by United Nations Special Rapporteur on Extra Judicial killings focused the attention of Kenyans on the gravity of the issue.

Two basic assumptions underlie most research on agenda-setting: The press and the media do not reflect reality, they filter and shape it and; Media concentration on a few issues and subjects leads the public to perceive those issues as more important than other issues. (Gladys and Kurt Lang (1983

### ***Framing and public Opinion***

Framing is a process of selective control over media content or public communication. Framing defines how a certain piece of media content is packaged so it will influence particular interpretations. This is accomplished through the use of selection, emphasis, exclusion, and elaboration. This is central to second-level agenda setting.

Tankard et al. (1991) defined a frame as "a central organizing idea for news content that supplies a context and suggesting what the issue is through the use of selection, emphasis, exclusion and elaboration"



Framing has been defined as "the way events and issues are organized and made sense of, especially by media, media professionals, and their audiences" (Reese, 2001, p. 7).

To frame is "to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation" (Entman, 1993, p.57).

### **Information Processing and Public Opinion**

According to West and Turner (2000), information-processing theory of communication refers to the way individuals handle information at their disposal. From the theory's point of view, people are active learners who can control and manipulate information, and even devise strategies to deal with certain situations, for example, thinking aloud when completing a difficult task. Information-processing theories of communication consider new information (an external variable), as the most important influence on persuasion.

According to Norman Anderson's Information Integration theory, individuals adapt new opinion, attitude or behavioral intention by forming a general impression, which in turn is based on many pieces of information. Some of this information may support a change in attitude, opinion or behavioral intention, while other information may argue against a change. In addition, the theory argues that information sources vary in expertise and objectivity. We assign weights to each piece of information based on expertise and objectivity of the source, and other communication factors; we then average the weights of all the information and use this average to form a general impression (Tan, 1981.p.109).

Persuasion occurs depending on whether the general impression supports a change in opinions, attitudes, or behavioral intentions. Similarly, research into the information processing theory of communication suggests that: There are limits to the amount of information individuals can attend to and effectively process at a given time. Secondly, Individuals/the audience need to be actively involved in processing the information received to transfer it to the long-term memory, from the short-term memory and finally, recall of information is facilitated when the material is encoded in some way.

Miller's (1956) concept follows that, 'like the computer, the human mind takes in information, performs operations on it to change its form and content, stores and locates it and generates responses to it. Thus, processing involves gathering and representing information, or **encoding**; holding information or **retention**;

and getting at the information when needed, or **retrieval**. Information processing theorists approach learning primarily through a study of memory.

Information Processing is largely considered in the context of Persuasion. This is due to the fact, that when measuring the effects of communication using the individual's response, a change of attitude is considered. That change comes about after the individual has received persuasive stimuli (information) from the external environment.

The information processing theories help media practitioners to not only choose carefully external stimuli (messages), but also to frame or package these messages in the most appropriate way to aid their audience's understanding and eventual retention of the same.

### **Information, Decision Making and Public Opinion**

Decision making is the process of making choices among competing courses of action. "Classical theories of choice in organizations emphasize decision making as the making of rational choices on the basis of expectations about the consequences of action for prior objectives, and organizational forms as instruments for making those choices"( March and Olsen, 1986, pp. 11-35.)

The way people can and do make decisions varies considerably. Much early research has focused on the way we are observed to make decisions and the way in which we should theoretically make decisions, and as a result, the range and diverseness of theory is vast.

There are several criteria used by people in the decision making process.

*Rational Decision Making* "Rational" people make decisions in this theory based on the optimal choice of greatest benefit to them. People are generally able to consider the options available from the available information and they make a rational choice. *Tradeoffs*: Tradeoffs are often involved in decision making. To obtain one thing we want, we may have to sacrifice one or more things we want. *Biases*: The basic idea here is that we choose people and actions that please us. *Behavior Decision Making Psychology*: We all have different personal attributes, characteristics, and ways of thinking that affect our decision making.

*Normative and Descriptive Questions*: Normative decision making analysis involves the nature of rationality and logic of decision making. The descriptive analysis, unlike the normative, covers peoples' beliefs and preferences as they are rather than as they should be.

Simon [1960] proposed a three phase trichotomy of decision processes. These three phases he termed Intelligence, Design and choice.

Intelligence involves identifying the need for a decision or as Simon put it, "searching the environment." Once the environment has been searched, that is the need for a decision identified, the design phase commences. This comprises investigating and developing the problem domain and alternatives. Simon's final phase is that of choice, which describes the activity of selecting the most appropriate course of action from the alternatives previously generated. Each phase in making a particular decision is itself a complex decision making process (Simon, 1977)

Rational behaviour is typified by a decision maker who has a "*well-organized and stable system of preferences and a skill in computation that enables him to calculate, for the alternative courses of action that are available to him, which of these will permit him to reach the highest attainable point on his preference scale*"

Certain types of decision problem require particular approaches to decision making. For example, structured problems are typically well suited to the application of structured decision processes. In a similar vein, analytical decisions are best approached by way of an analytical decision strategy.

According to this theory then, the current perception of the public towards the government is as a result of the information that the public has been receiving from the media, in turn, they have analyzed it, synthesized it and reached a decision regarding the Coalition government.

### **The Mass Media and Democratization**

The media has been seen to play a critical role in enlightening the public about political processes, enhancing their political consciousness and subsequently their participation. Ullrich (1974) argues that the media is key in ensuring freedom of expression, continuous debate, national criticism and self-criticism aimed at achieving effective, practical, superior and humane forms of organization, better methods of work, mass mobilization and social progress

He further argues that, given Africa's colonial experience and its history of struggle for human dignity and liberation, the appropriate role for the mass media must be to sustain this struggle. Accordingly, their relevance must be seen in relation to the extent to which they promote the developmental and democratic aspirations of the majority of the people, ensuring mass participation in decision making and in the development process through constant consultations between the people and administrators and officials.

Fanon contends that the mass media are an important means of socialization and of the social process. The dominant media are agents of social control. Their ideological and socialization functions are continually being defined in developing countries as indispensable factors.

He further argues that the media can be effective in campaigns aimed at improving health, education, agricultural techniques; encouraging the growth of participant political institutions, industrial production and expansion; enforcing social norms; raising aspirations; focusing attention; widening horizons; giving legitimacy to values and institutions; conferring status and validity; feeding interpersonal channels; encouraging informed debate; forming tastes; exposing corruption; attacking retrogressive and deviationist tendencies; and they can serve as an important national integrative agency (Quoted in Ullrich 1974).

Chimutengwende (1988) claims that 'the mass media do not as yet directly reach the majority of the people in Africa. But they nevertheless reach the key groups and opinion makers at the centre of modern development; these are the people whose political wishes and views are decisive at the present time in developing countries. The media have short-term and long-term influence on the ruling and 'modernizing elites'. But it is also part of development to continuously increase the mass media audience and directly reach the majority of the people. Without reaching the majority through the use of mass media, quick mass mobilization for development becomes an almost impossible task. The media can effectively feed and complement traditional and interpersonal channels of communication in the mass mobilization of the populace.'

Chimutengwende further argues that under the present local and global socio-economic conditions and environment, the role of the mass media of communication in Africa would be to perform the following tasks: (1) Promote literacy, health, agricultural and educational campaigns; (2) Act as channels for general and informal education; (3) Support agitational and mass mobilization campaigns for national development; (4) Defend human rights and promote mass participation and control in decision-making; (5) Continuously provoke and promote national, sectoral and occupational debates; (6) Encourage ordinary people to freely and publicly express themselves through media contributions like letters to the editor and random street interviews on given topical events and developments; (7) Promote economic policies based on principles of self-reliance and self sufficiency; (8) Promote the prioritization of people-oriented national development projects and expose the counter-productive nature of elitist and prestige-motivated national projects; (9)

Expose corruption, exploitation, racism, ethnic chauvinism and anti-people national policies and to give solidarity to victims of such policies locally and internationally; (10) Support national independence in the economic, political, social and cultural spheres; (11) Promote national, regional and pan-African unity, solidarity and justice; and (12) Support world peace, disarmament and the democratization of international relations.

### **Media and Democracy in Kenya**

The unique circumstances of a country determine the extent to which the media can/will influence the public. The current challenges facing Kenya have given the media an increased role in reporting and interpreting information to the public. As some studies (Schmitt-Beck and Voltmer 2007) have shown that the media are more influential in new democracies, because a high number of citizens have not formed yet their political orientation and are more dependent on the media's interpretation of events. Voltmer explains that 'people experiencing times of extra ordinary change and extreme insecurity are more vulnerable to media influences than people living in more settled circumstances ( Voltmer 2007).

The conditions in which news media operate to influence the political process include ; the degree of political openness, freedom of information, relationship between journalists and politicians , the socio-economic and cultural context, degree and form of state control, the degree of the civil society control and media ownership . All these factors play an important role in shaping the role of the news media in the democratization process.(Salagado 2009)

The media is a critical ingredient in the transition of society from authoritarianism to democracy. In Kenya, the media has played a critical role in the push for democracy. Generally, the media reflects the nature and level of maturity of democracy in a country as no other social indicator can.

The role of the media the media as the public watchdog is highlighted by Rosemary Okello, the Executive Director of African Woman and Child Feature Service (AWC). She says, 'Whereas the media is important and powerful, unless it can empower the local person, then we can question the very notion of why it exists by asking; Information for what and for whom, why are we collecting this information and what difference is it making in the lives of ordinary people on the ground, what do we do with the information once it is collected'.

Salgado (2009) argues that 'Although the assumption that the media shape the process of political change in Africa, playing an important role in the construction of democracy is being more and more accepted, there is still a lot to investigate on how the media can influence the political process'

The media can be considered a critical element to the process of democracy construction not only because they reflect the interaction between all the actors involved, functioning as a kind of a stage where things happen, but also because of their coverage of facts, events and personalities, they can influence the decisions that are made and they can have an effect on the process of political transition (Salgado 2009)

Journalists have had to pay the price for democratization of Kenya as many suffered under the cruel hands of the supporters of the former president of Kenya as they joined in the push for democracy.

## **CHAPTER THREE.**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **Introduction**

Methodology refers to the system of explicit rules and procedures upon which research is based. This chapter discusses methodological positions we have adopted in this study. It includes the research design, description of the area of study, target population, sampling design, data collection instruments, procedures for data collection and data analysis.

This study has relied on both primary data obtained directly from the field through the administration of questionnaires and secondary data which will be derived from books and journals.

#### **Research Design**

Research design refers to the total plan of an investigation or a study. It constitutes the blueprint for the collection, measurement and analysis of data. This research is by design a survey. The survey method was chosen because it is an excellent vehicle for measuring attitudes and orientations in a large population. It is generally the most appropriate for collecting original data for describing a population too large to observe directly.

The survey was conducted through the administration of carefully prepared questionnaires to the respondents. The individual was used as the unit of analysis. A total of 200 questionnaires were administered with the help of carefully selected and well trained research assistants from the undergraduate class in the Faculty of Arts, University of Nairobi. Out of the 200 questionnaires, 140 were filled and returned.

#### **Description of the area of study**

The study was conducted in Nairobi province. Nairobi was chosen because of its cosmopolitan nature it is possible to find people from all parts of the country. Secondly, people living in Nairobi are exposed more to variety of media than other regions since most media outlets are based in Nairobi. This is relevant to this study since it focuses on the impact of coverage of the print media on public perception. It is also possible to identify where people in different social economic classes can be found within Nairobi.

#### **Target Population and sampling design**

Target population refers to the group of people or objects to be studied in a survey and they will have at least one common observable characteristic.

Purposive sampling was adopted for this study. A purposive sample is a sample selected in a deliberative and non-random fashion to achieve a certain goal. The researcher chooses the sample based on who they think would have the desired characteristics relevant for the study. Newspaper readership was the basic criteria used to select the sample for the study. The four mainstream local dailies namely, the Daily Nation, including its weekend publications, the East African Standard, the People Daily and the Kenya Times were used for this study.

The Daily Nation and The East African Standard, they have been there since independence and they have a nationwide circulation and good readership across the country making them suitable for this study. The People Daily and Kenya Times are also included since they also have a significant circulation of about 50,000 copies daily. These four can be deemed to adequately represent the local print media.

According to Joseph Victor Otieno Ikawa in Geographic Information Systems (GIS) Development, a Geospatial Resource Portal, the population in Nairobi can be classified into three socio-economic classes.

The first category is the upper or the ruling class that mostly comprises of wealthy businessmen, senior managers, politicians and politically connected or individuals. These are the people who make and influence political decisions. They live in up market areas of Nairobi like Kitisuru, Runda, Karen and Muthaiga

The second category is the middle class or the working classes that comprises of middle managers, people working in government offices and other private corporations, qualified technicians and business persons. They are generally educated and are politically conscious and they engage in political debate. They live in areas like Buru Buru, Imara Daima, Outering, Lang'ata among others.

The last category is the lower class that comprises those who provide unskilled labour, apprentices of skilled traders, skilled manual work, casual workers and owners of small businesses. They are generally the poor in society. They live in the slum areas of Kibera and Mathare valley and Mukuru slums in Nairobi.

This study mainly focused on the middle working class. They were chosen because they possess the information that was needed for this study. They are active readers of newspapers and they also interact with other media. They are also generally active in the political discourse. This group has also been chosen because they are the ones most likely to make informed decisions because they are exposed to the media



than the lower class. They are good at probing and interpreting political occurrences and decisions and they also like doing a follow up of issues.

The lower class was left out for purposes of this study because they are generally prone to make uninformed decisions that are based on emotions or the manipulations of the ruling class. They also tend to see themselves as helpless victims of political decisions. Again, African culture is deeply rooted in the oral tradition meaning these people are exposed more to radio than newspaper which is the desirable media for this study.

### ***Sample Size Determination***

The sample must represent the salient characteristics of the accessible population (Mugenda 1999). In estimating the sample size for this survey, a purposive sample of 200 respondents was selected. This was done by targeting the middle class people by going to their offices. Reading of the local newspapers was to be considered as the key indicator for measuring precisely the purposive sample; this was determined by the research assistants inquiring whether the respondents read the local daily newspapers. This means they are exposed and knowledgeable in political discourse, and therefore were considered sufficient for the study. The margin of error is considered as 5% and the confidence level as 95%. Out of the purposive sample of 200 respondents, using the 'Easy Sample' sample size determination software, 140 respondents were considered adequate to be representative of the purposive sample.

### **Data collection procedures and instruments**

#### *Self administered Questionnaires:*

This is a method where the respondents are asked to fill the questionnaires themselves. For this study, the questionnaires were administered to the respondents through the research assistants and were collected after they were filled. This method was selected because the respondents are literate and are capable of filling the answers. A total of 200 questionnaires were administered. 140 questionnaires were returned representing a 70 % return rate.

#### *Questionnaire.*

A questionnaire is a pre-formulated set of questions to which subjects record their answers independently or with the help of the researcher. (Mbwesa J.2006). This study used a questionnaire to gather data. The questionnaires mainly consisted of close-ended questions with a few open ended questions.

The questions were designed in such a way that the desired information necessary to answer the research questions would be elicited. The questions were arranged in an orderly logical sequence with basic information appearing first then the more complex one appearing later to facilitate ease in answering.

The questionnaire was pretested among a few subjects drawn from the target population before it was administered to ensure its suitability and that it would be understood by the respondents. It was then revised and administered.

#### **Data Analysis procedures.**

The data collected in the survey was analyzed using the Statistical Packages for Social Scientists (SPSS) to code in and analyze the data. Frequencies and percentages were calculated and presented in the form of graphs and pie charts

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

#### Introduction

Presented in this chapter are the findings of the data analyzed together with their interpretations and discussion. The data presented in this chapter were processed thematically. Demographic and other general information about respondents who participated in the study are presented first, followed by findings on the research objectives as given by the different respondents. The results from these findings were very many and it will not be possible to present every result. Accordingly, only the main results with regard to the research objectives and research questions are presented and a summary of key findings given.

In the study, 140 respondents participated. A total of 200 questionnaires were administered, 140 were returned. The response rate was 70 per cent which is over and above 50 per cent regarded as desirable by Babbie (1990).

The survey was carried out in Nairobi in mainly government offices and major corporations namely , Kenya Commercial Bank, Barclays Bank, Kenol Kobil Oil Company, National Social Security Fund, Kenyatta University , Multiple Hauliers Limited, Kenya Institute of Management, Teachers Service Commission among others. These organizations were chosen because they had the population targeted by this survey (Working Class).

The survey was carried out within a period covering one week during which the questionnaires were hand delivered and collected.

**Table 1: Distribution by Age**

		Age			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	18-24	22	15.7	15.7	15.7
	25-34	72	51.4	51.4	67.1
	35-44	37	26.4	26.4	93.6
	45-54	6	4.3	4.3	97.9
	Above 55	3	2.1	2.1	100.0
	Total	140	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field Survey 2009.

Out of a total of 140 respondents, the highest percentage of the respondents were those aged between 25-34. They are followed by those aged between 35-44. 15.7 % of the respondents are aged between 18-34. Generally, 77.8% of the respondents who participated in the study are aged between 25-44 years. Adding

those aged between 18 – 24 the total percentage of the youthful respondents is 93.6 %. This is significant in that the Kenyan population is generally a youthful population falling below 45 years and it was critical to capture this in the survey since majority of Kenyan voters are in this bracket and their views are important. This group is very active politically and is therefore key in understanding public opinion especially in regard to political issues. However, the study was also able to successfully capture the views of those falling above 45 years to ensure a fair representation across age.

**Table 2: Gender Distribution of Respondents**

		Gender			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	76	54.3	54.3	54.3
	Female	64	45.7	45.7	100.0
	Total	140	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field Survey 2009.

Out of the 140 respondents, 76 were men representing 54.3 % while 64 or 45.7 % were women. The study was targeting to get a fair representation of opinion across gender. This was achieved though the men who participated were slightly more than the women. However, the ideal situation would have been to get a slightly higher percentage of women to reflect the national population by gender where women are said to be 52 % and men 48% (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics).

**Table 3 : Respondent's distribution according to the highest level of Education**

		Educationlevel			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	KCSE	7	5.0	5.0	5.0
	Diploma	30	21.4	21.4	26.4
	Degree	88	62.9	62.9	89.3
	Masters Degree	14	10.0	10.0	99.3
	PHD	1	.7	.7	100.0
	Total	140	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field Survey 2009.

The level of education is an indication of the literacy levels. The findings indicate that most of the respondents were graduates. 88 of the respondents representing 62.9 % had a first degree, while 10% had a master's degree and 21.4 % had a diploma. This is significant because the study was targeting people who are literate and who can critically evaluate the government operations and performance.

In the study, the educated people generally responded better to the open ended questions compared to the less educated ones. This shows a conscious engagement in the issues. They had facts to support their responses. This implies that education is a key factor in enabling people to critically evaluate the government.

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**Table 4: Newspaper read most by the respondents**

		MostreadNewspaper			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Nation	98	70.0	70.0	70.0
	The East African Standard	39	27.9	27.9	97.9
	The People Daily	2	1.4	1.4	99.3
	Kenya Times	1	.7	.7	100.0
	Total	140	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field Survey 2009.

70 % of the respondents mostly read the Nation newspaper which has the highest circulation among the local dailies. This could be attributed to historical aspects since the East African Standard is the oldest paper in Kenya and was traditionally a paper for the colonial masters before it changed ownership. The Nation on the other hand started around independence and gained momentum which it has sustained. About 27.9 % said they prefer the East African Newspaper. However, it is worth noting that most people who read the standard also read the Nation Newspaper and the percentage indicated here refers to those who read the Standard as their first preference. The People Daily and Kenya times are not widely read; between them they have less than 2% in readership among the respondents. For purposes of this study, the Nation and the Standard are the main papers that were considered.

The implication here is that since the Nation newspaper is so dominant, it can have a significant impact on public opinion. The fact that it is so widely read and its editorial content could end up setting the agenda for other local dailies in the country.

**Table 5 : Frequency of reading Newspapers**

**Frequency**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Daily	64	45.7	45.7	45.7
	At least thrice a week	52	37.1	37.1	82.9
	At least once a week	16	11.4	11.4	94.3
	Occasionally	8	5.7	5.7	100.0
	Total	140	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field Survey 2009.

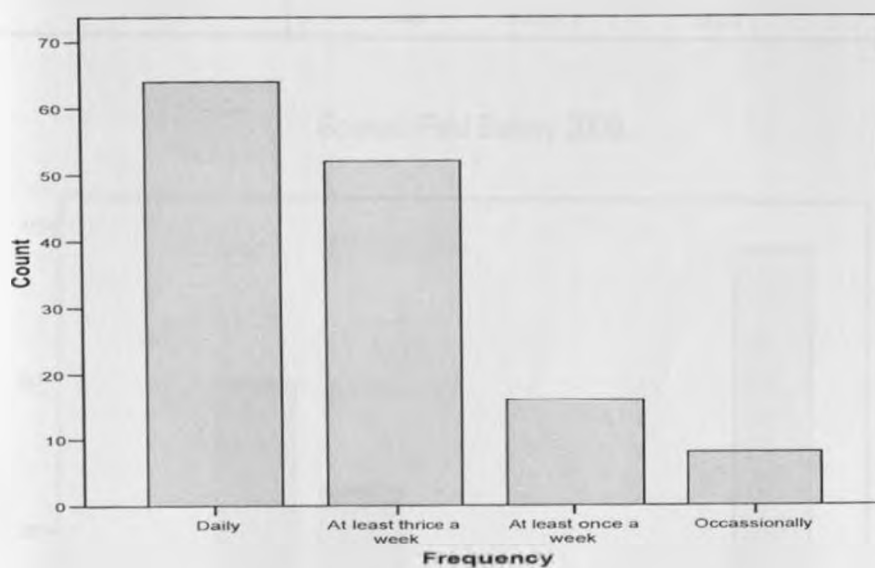


Figure 1-Source: Field Survey 2009.

The findings indicate that 45.7% of the respondents read the newspapers daily with another 37.1 % reading at least three times in a week. This is a combined percentage of 82.9. This shows that newspaper readership among the working middle class is very high. Daily reading indicates frequent exposure to information which is key to the decision making process and information processing which in turn has a bearing on public opinion. This shows that the print media plays a critical role in informing the public thus having an effect on public opinion.

Table 6: Type of News the respondents are interested in.

Typeofnewsinterestedin

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Entertainment	9	6.4	6.4	6.4
	Political News and analysis	30	21.4	21.4	27.9
	Trade and Business	23	16.4	16.4	44.3
	Social Issues	17	12.1	12.1	56.4
	Development Issues	15	10.7	10.7	67.1
	Sports	7	5.0	5.0	72.1
	All	39	27.9	27.9	100.0
	Total	140	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field Survey 2009.

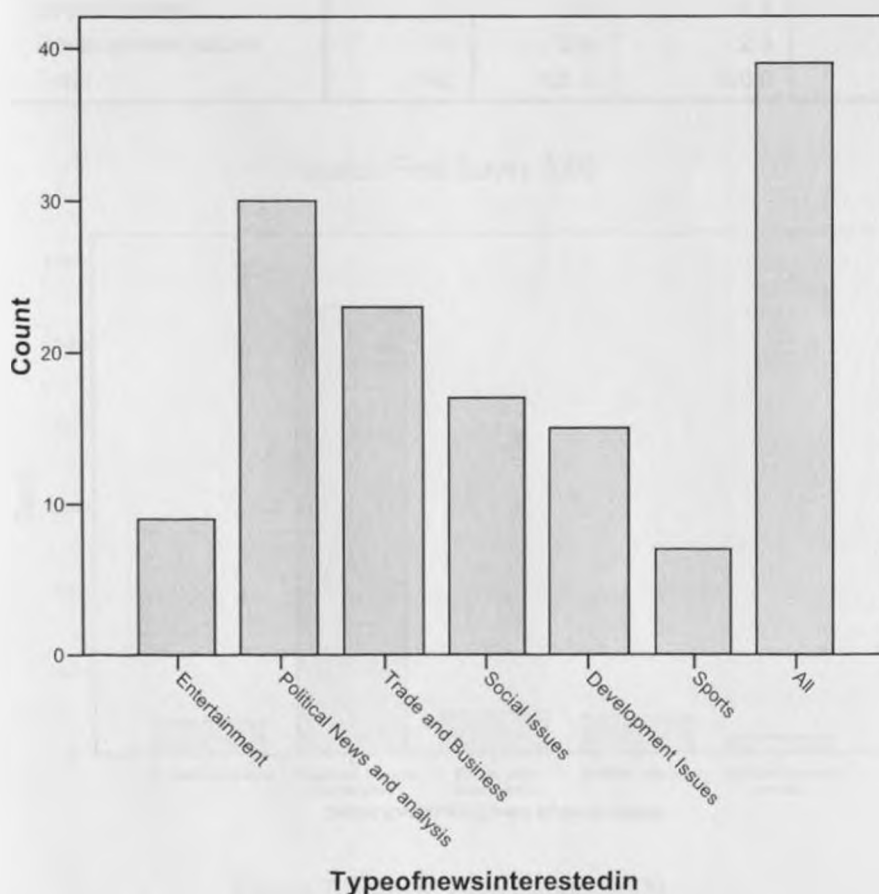


Figure 2-Source: Field Survey 2009.

About 28 % of the respondents are interested in the general content of the newspapers but majority ( 21.4%) have a specific interest in political news and analysis followed by Trade and Business at 16 % and Social issues at 12 %.

People generally rely on the media for information regarding politics. They read Newspapers to get analysis and interpretation of political events and news. This again shows the critical role of the media in influencing what the public knows and believes in political matters

**Table 7: Type of news given the most coverage**

		Storywithhighestcoverage			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Entertainment	8	5.7	5.7	5.7
	Political News &analysis	109	77.9	77.9	83.6
	Trade and Business	10	7.1	7.1	90.7
	Social Issues	9	6.4	6.4	97.1
	Development Issues	4	2.9	2.9	100.0
	Total	140	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field Survey 2009.

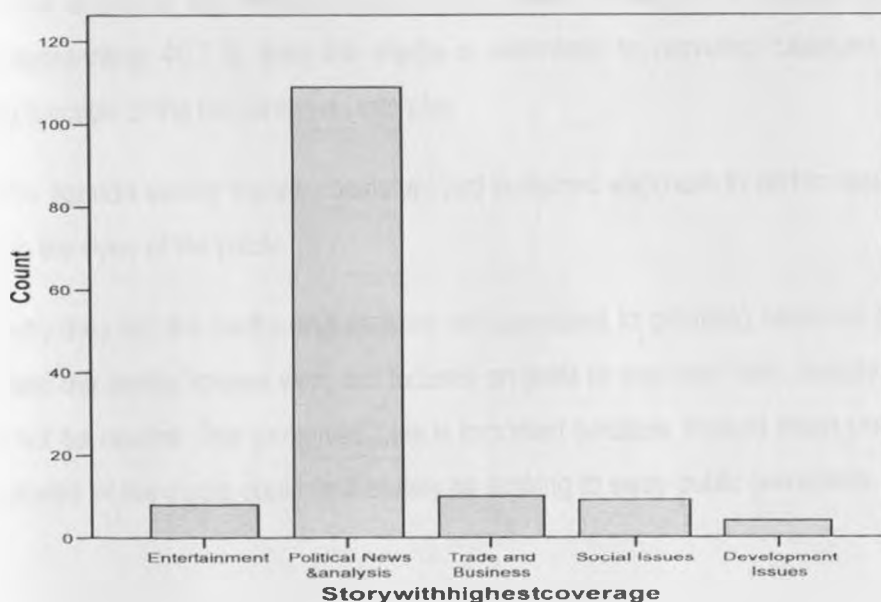


Figure 2-Source: Field Survey 2009.



78 % of the participants felt that political news were been given too much coverage and prominence at the expense of other important category of news like trade and business 7.1% , social issues 6.1 % , entertainment 5.7 % and development issues 3%.

This is definitely likely to have an effect on how they look at and interpret political issues. The media's obsession with political issues is likely to promote the prominence of politics over other issues so that people generally are concerned about political matters thus raising their political consciousness.

**Table 8: Respondents view of the media's commitment to provide balanced information**

Balanced info and coverage					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	57	40.7	40.7	40.7
	No	64	45.7	45.7	86.4
	Dont Know	19	13.6	13.6	100.0
	Total	140	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field Survey 2009.

45.7 % of the respondents felt that the print media is not committed to providing balance information and coverage of the various issues with many indicating that political news were being given too much coverage or that some of the media houses were biased. However, a notable percentage of the respondents representing 40.7 % think the media is committed to providing balanced information. The agenda setting function of the media comes into play.

According to the agenda setting theory, consistent and sustained exposure to certain issues tends to raise their salience in the eyes of the public

When asked why they felt the media houses were not committed to providing balanced information, many respondents said the media houses were too focused on profit or that they were already politically aligned and so could not be neutral. This perceived bias is important because it could mean people are skeptical about media stories or the media could deliberately be working to sway public perception.

Table 9: Respondents' view on whether the print media tends to focus more on negative issues when covering the Coalition Government

		Negativefocus			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	68	48.6	48.6	48.6
	No	47	33.6	33.6	82.1
	Not sure	25	17.9	17.9	100.0
Total		140	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field Survey 2009.

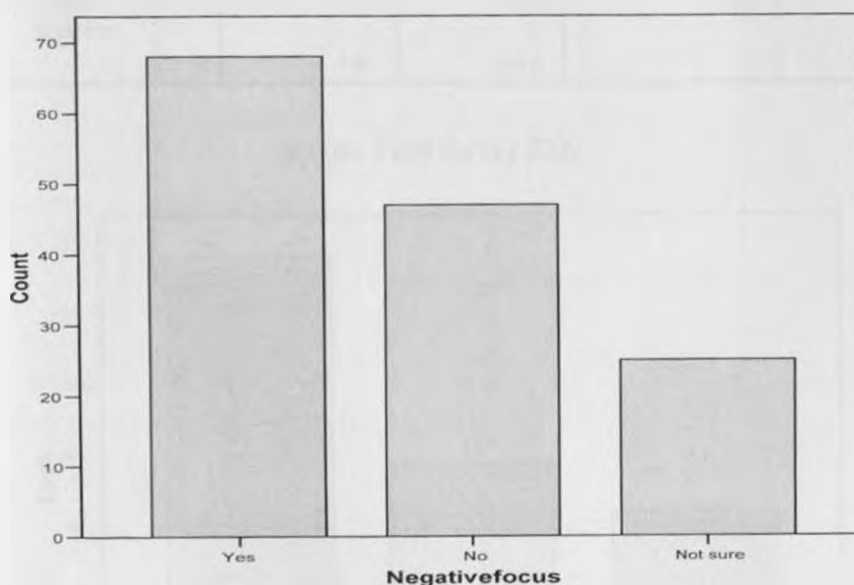


Figure 4-Source: Field Survey 2009

Almost half of the respondents (48.6 %) felt that print media tends to focus more on the negative issues when covering the Coalition Government. However, on the same, 33.6 % believe the media does not focus on negative issues but rather just reflects the picture of what is happening. 17.9 % said they were not sure.

The media in Kenya has to a large extent focused so much on the shortcomings and failures of the Coalition Government that it is hard for people to appreciate and celebrate its successes and achievements.

The media has been quick to highlight all the major corruption deals that the ordinary person is aware of all of them. In all the questionnaires, the respondents listed the various scandals associated with the government without highlighting any positive achievement of the government. Among the key scandals

cited are : the Maize scandal, the Oil scandal involving the Triton company, the sale of Grand Regency Hotel, the reappointment of Justice Aaron Ringera to head the Anti Corruption Commission, the Mau forest controversy among others.

**Table 10. Respondents' view on the effects of coverage on their government perception**

		Affectingpublicview			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	68	48.6	48.9	48.9
	No	39	27.9	28.1	77.0
	To an extent	32	22.9	23.0	100.0
	Total	139	99.3	100.0	
Missing	System	1	.7		
Total		140	100.0		

Source: Field Survey 2009.

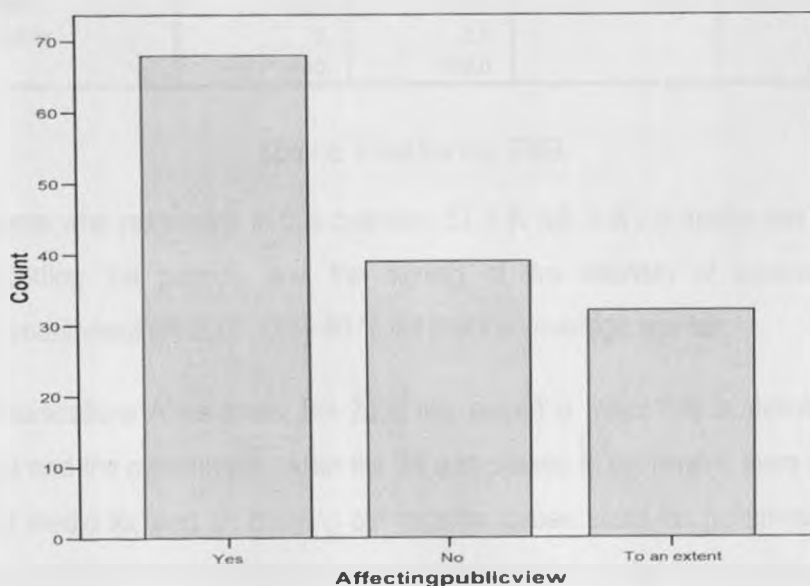


Figure 5- Source: Field Survey 2009.

68 out of the 140 respondents representing 48.6 % believe that coverage influences their perception towards the government. Another 23% believe that coverage influences their view of the government to an extent. This gives a combined percentage of 63.5 %. Only 28% believe that coverage does not affect their view of the government.

The study reveals that about half of the respondents' view of the government is influenced by the coverage given by the media. With negative coverage, there comes a negative perception.

Looking at this in the light of information processing theories, the information that an individual is consistently exposed will eventually stick in the long term memory after repeated exposure. If this information is negative and it is stored in the mind, it will influence how the individual views the government. This can explain the public anger that has been directed at the government and the waning public support of the Coalition government.

**Table 11. Coverage of the stories regarding the Kenya Communications Amendment Bill**

**MediaBillCoverage**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Fair	56	40.0	40.9	40.9
	Unfair/Biased	81	57.9	59.1	100.0
	Total	137	97.9	100.0	
Missing	System	3	2.1		
Total		140	100.0		

Source: Field Survey 2009.

Of those respondents who responded to this question, 57.9 % felt that the media was biased in covering the issues surrounding the passing and the signing of the Intensity of coverage of the Kenya Communications Amendment Bill 2008. Only 40 % felt that the coverage was fair.

The Kenya Communications Amendment Bill 2008 has played a major role in defining the relationship between the media and the government. After the Bill was passed in parliament, there was a big uproar in the media and the media focused on bringing out negative issues about the government and its leaders. The leading news stations focused their coverage on matters relating to the bill in an attempt to enlist public support.

This is a key aspect of this study because it captures a defining moment in the relationship between the media and the government.

**Table 12: Intensity of coverage of the Kenya Communications Amendment Bill 2008**

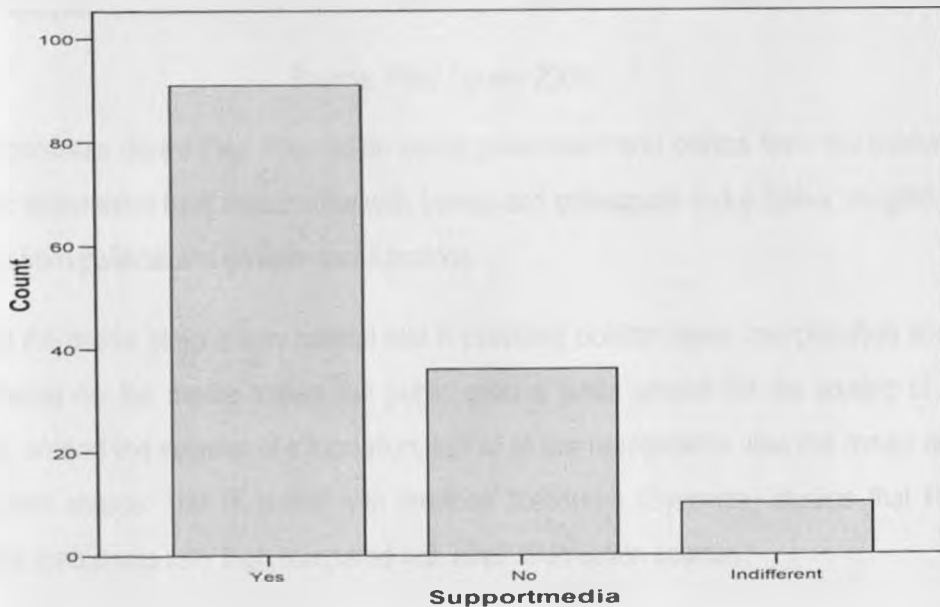
		Intensity of Coverage			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Too much	60	42.9	43.8	43.8
	Normal	58	41.4	42.3	86.1
	Not enough	19	13.6	13.9	100.0
	Total	137	97.9	100.0	
Missing	System	3	2.1		
Total		140	100.0		

Source: Field Survey 2009.

About 43 % of the respondents felt that the coverage of the stories surrounding the passing of the Kenya Communications Amendment Bill 2008 was too much with an almost similar number 42.3 % saying they found the coverage to be normal while still 13.6 % felt the coverage was not enough.

Too much coverage of issues related to this bill raised its status in the public debate making the public think it was very important according the agenda setting theory.

**Table 13: Respondents support of the media in protesting the passing of the Kenya Communications Amendment Bill**



2008.

Figure 6-Source: Field Survey 2009

From the findings, majority of the respondents found coverage surrounding this issue to be biased, skewed and not objective. They also felt the coverage was unusually too much beyond the accepted normal. In the

end, the objectives of the media were achieved because majority of the respondents sided with the media as they protested this move by the government. 66% of the respondents said they supported the media on this issue.

The information provided by the media at this time was not sufficient to enable people to make an informed decision and opinion as envisioned in the decision making theory. The media was able to successfully convince the public that the government was attempting to gag the media so that they could not expose the evils of the government. Although the media finally won the battle over this bill, the impact on public opinion could not be reversed since public opinion takes long to form and also to change.

**Table 14: Respondents' source of information on issues of governance and politics**

		Information source			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	The Media	114	81.4	81.4	81.4
	Freinds and Colleagues	23	16.4	16.4	97.9
	Political & Government Functions	2	1.4	1.4	99.3
	5.00	1	.7	.7	100.0
	Total	140	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field Survey 2009.

81% of the respondents derive their information about government and politics from the media. A further 16.4 % get their information from discussions with friends and colleagues and a further insignificant 1.4 % gets information from political and government functions.

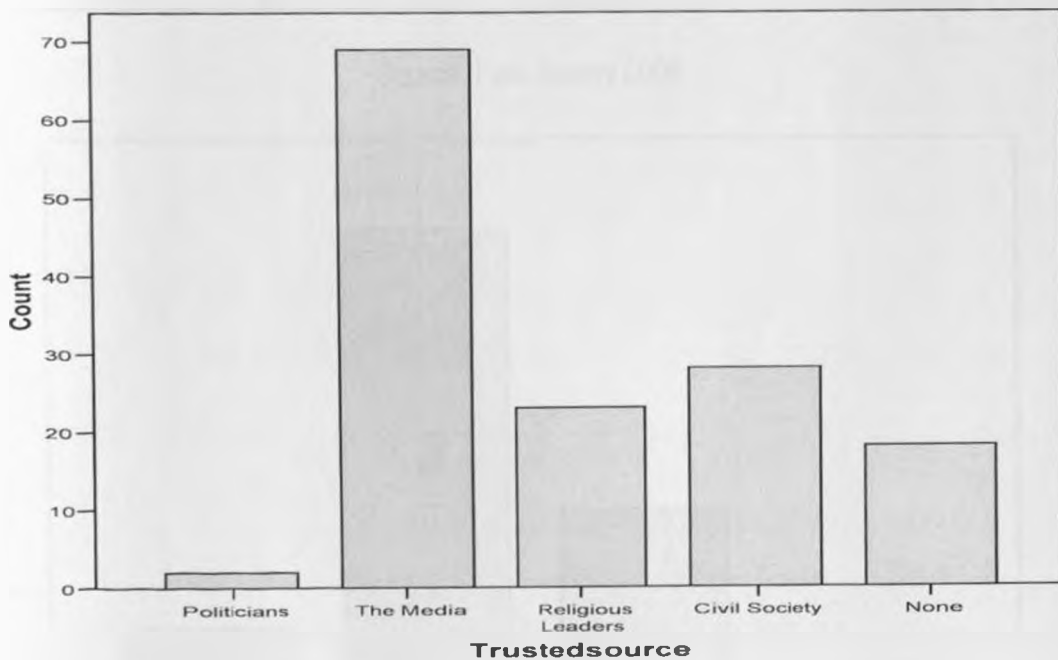
This shows that the media plays a very central role in providing political news, interpretation and analysis. This heavy reliance on the media makes the public mind a fertile ground for the sowing of ideas and opinions. Again, among the sources of information, half of all the respondents view the media as the most trusted information source. This is in line with previous Steadman (Synovate) studies that showed the public faith in the media was very high compared with other information sources.

With this heavy reliance and trust in the media as a critical information source, and having already established that the media focuses a lot on negative issues when covering the coalition government, it is possible to understand why the public is so dissatisfied with the government since many of them indicated that the Coalition government has not fulfilled or achieved most of their promises.

**Table 15: Respondents most trusted information source**

		Trustedsource			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Politicians	2	1.4	1.4	1.4
	The Media	69	49.3	49.3	50.7
	Religious Leaders	23	16.4	16.4	67.1
	Civil Society	28	20.0	20.0	87.1
	None	18	12.9	12.9	100.0
	Total	140	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field Survey 2009.



**Figure 7-Source: Field Survey 2009.**

Half of the respondents 49.3% regard the media as the most trusted source of information. The civil society comes in second with 20 % while 16.4 % regard religious leaders as trusted. It is worth noting that politicians rank the lowest with only 2 respondents representing 1.4% saying they consider them trustworthy sources of information.

Persuasion occurs when the source of information is regarded as credible and trustworthy by the receiver. It is therefore easier for the receiver to accept most of the information coming from the trusted source. This

indicates the media is strategically positioned to have the greatest role in informing the public, consequently they would have the greatest bearing on how the public perceives the government.

**Table 16: Respondents view of whether the print media covers the achievements of the coalition government**

		Coverageofachievements			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	13	9.3	9.5	9.5
	No	88	62.9	64.2	73.7
	To an extent	35	25.0	25.5	99.3
	4.00	1	.7	.7	100.0
Total		137	97.9	100.0	
Missing	System	3	2.1		
Total		140	100.0		

Source: Field Survey 2009.

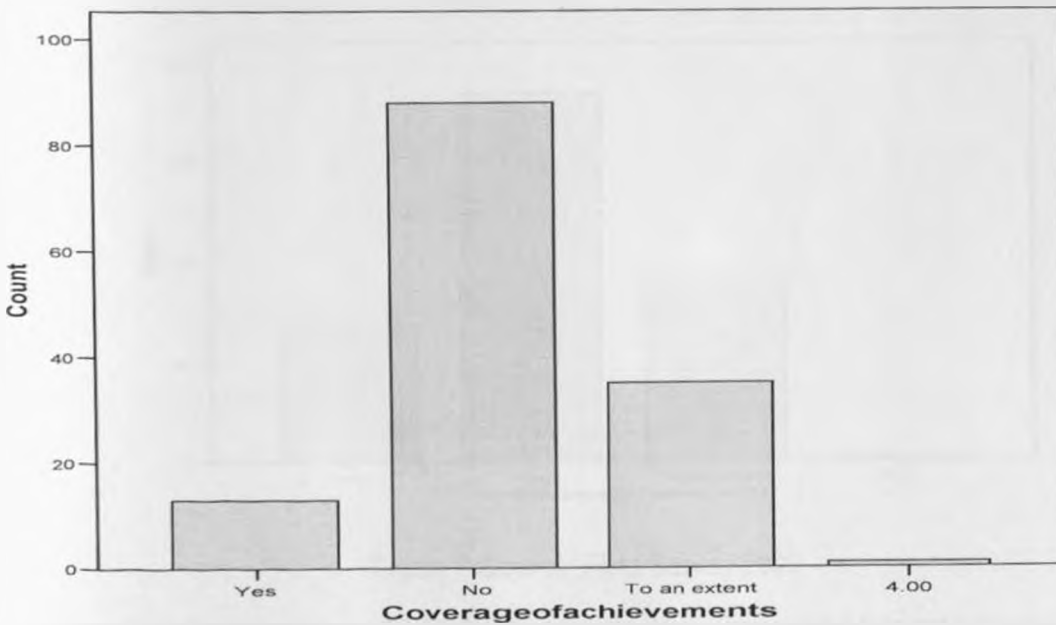


Figure 8-Source: Field Survey 2009.

62.9 % of the respondents felt that the print media does not adequately cover the positive achievements of the coalition government.25.5 % believe the media tries to an extent to cover these achievements while a small 9.5 % believe these achievements are covered adequately.

Majority of the respondents are of the opinion that the print media does not report on the positive achievements of the government but is quick to highlight its mistakes. It is therefore hard for the public to



appreciate the government if the media does not inform them of the positive achievements or progress that have been made by the Coalition government. The prime Minister once decried this situation when he accused the media of always hunting and speculating about the next scandal without taking time to tell the public the positive developments and the efforts that the government was making.

**Table 17: Respondents' view of the coalition government's achievements of its promises**

		Coalition achievements			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	28	20.0	20.0	20.0
	No	74	52.9	52.9	72.9
	To an extent	37	26.4	26.4	99.3
	5.00	1	.7	.7	100.0
Total		140	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field Survey 2009.

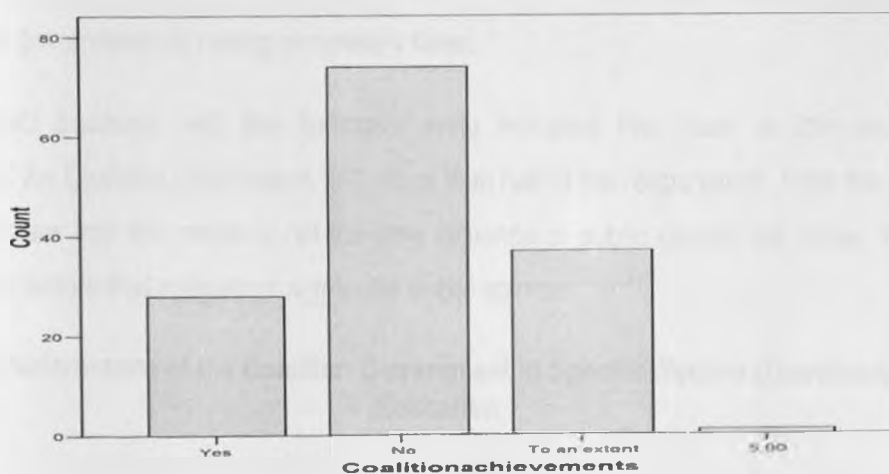


Figure 9 Source: Field Survey 2009

More than half of the respondents 52.9% felt that the Coalition government has not achieved many of its promises. However, 20% of the respondents believe the government has achieved many of their promises. A further 26.4 % felt the government had achieved to an extent.

This can be linked to the fact that since most of the achievements of the coalition government are not highlighted by the media, it would be hard for the public to conclude the government has achieved anything. This explains why most respondents feel the government has not achieved its promises. This

dissatisfaction with the government performance has led to disillusionment among the public with many feeling that the Coalition has failed in its effort and mandate.

**Table 18: Respondents Perception of the Coalition Government**

**Perception of Government**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Has done well	2	1.4	1.4	1.4
	Has let Kenyans Down	45	32.1	32.1	33.6
	It is Trying	74	52.9	52.9	86.4
	It is doing nothing	7	5.0	5.0	91.4
	Its a total failure	12	8.6	8.6	100.0
	Total	140	100.0	100.0	

Figure 10-Source: Field Survey 2009

53% (Slightly more than half) of the respondents think that the Coalition government is trying. However, a significant 32.1% believe that the Coalition government has let Kenyans down. 8.6 % of the respondents see the coalition government as having completely failed.

This is significant because, with the findings having indicated that there is little coverage of the achievements of the Coalition government, still, more than half of the respondents think the government is trying. This indicates that the media is not the only influence of public opinion but rather, there could be other intervening factors that mitigate or aggravate public opinion.

**Ranking Performance of the Coalition Government in Specific Sectors (Questions 6 :A-H)  
Education**

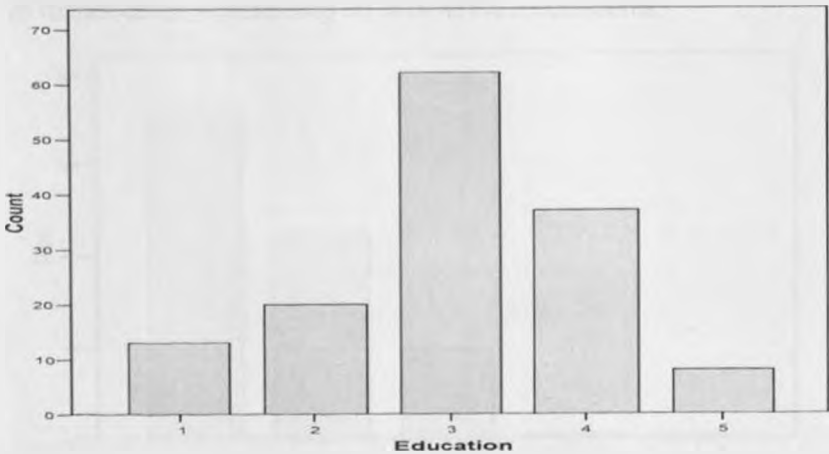


Figure 10-Source: Field Survey 2009

44.3% of the respondents are not decided in regard to the government's performance as far as the education sector is concerned. However, 24 % of the respondents have graded the government as having performed well in this sector. 14.3 % felt that the government had done poorly in the area of education

**Addressing Post Election Violence Issues**

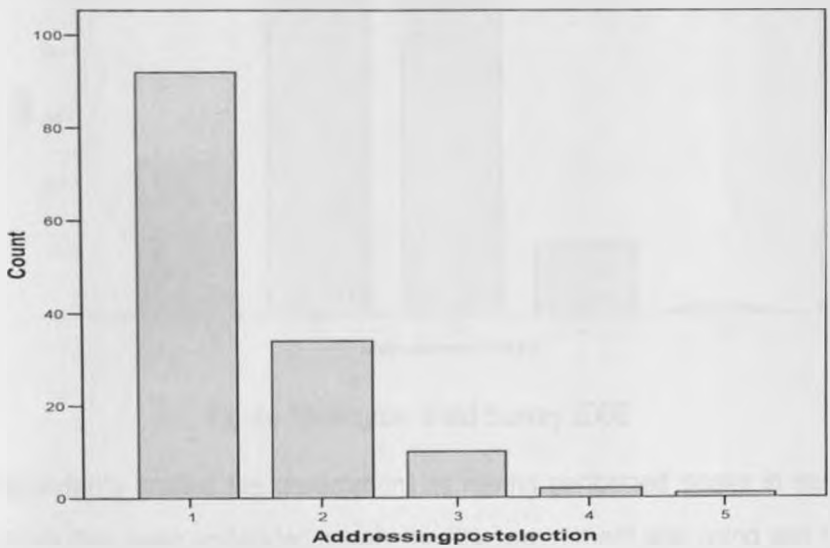


Figure 11-Source: Field Survey 2009

Majority of the respondents (65.2 %) are of the view that the Coalition Government has done very poorly as far as addressing issues related to post election violence are concerned. These include, resettling the internally Displaced Persons (IDPS) , dealing with the masterminds and perpetrators of post election violence. Another 24.5 % also feel the government has done poorly in dealing with this issue. This is a combined number of 126 respondents representing 90 % of all the respondents.

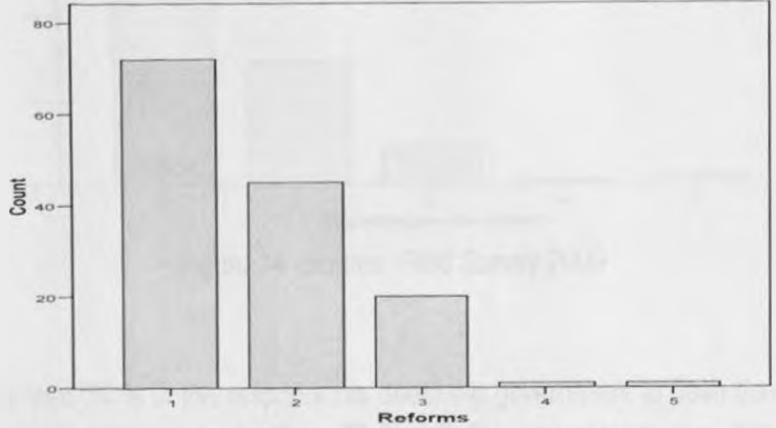


Figure 12 -Source: Field Survey 2009

As far as the implementation of reforms are concerned, 84.2 % of the respondents ranked the government as performing very poorly ( 51.8%) and poorly (32.4%). A negligible section of the respondents (1.4%) felt the government has done well in this area.

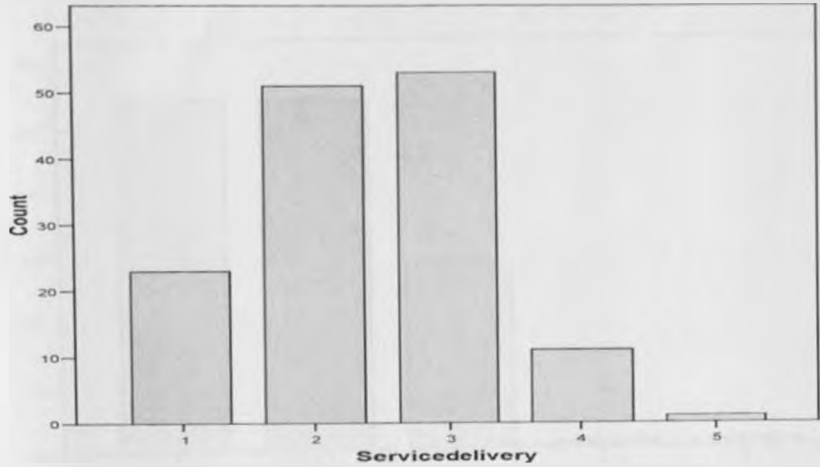


Figure 13-Source: Field Survey 2009

53.2 % of the respondents graded the government as having performed poorly in service delivery with another 37.9 % saying they were undecided on whether the government was doing well in service delivery. Only 8.6 % feel that the government has done well in delivering services to the citizens.

**Fighting Corruption**

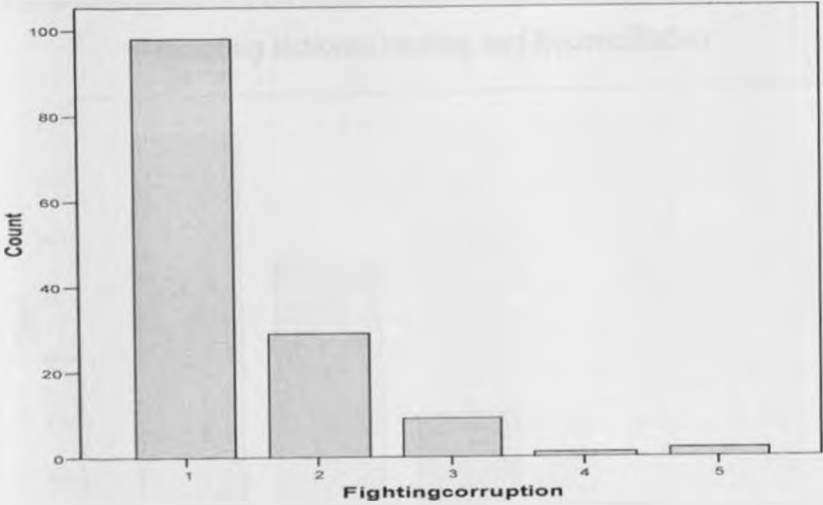


Figure 14 -Source: Field Survey 2009

The findings indicate that 70 % of the respondents deem the government to have done very poorly as far as fighting corruption is concerned. Another 22 % felt the government has done poorly in fighting

corruption. This can be looked at in the light of the refusal by senior government officials implicated in corruption to resign and the reappointment to office of those previously accused of corruption and the continuous emergence of new cases of corruption under the watch of the Coalition government. A negligible percentage of 2.1 % feel the government has made effort to fight corruption.

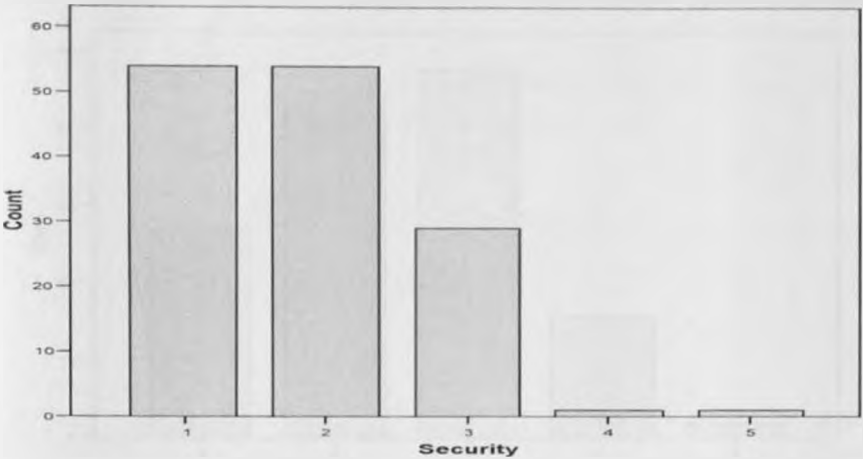


Figure 15-Source: Field Survey 2009

The findings also indicate that 77.7 % of the respondents rank the government as having performed very poorly (38.8 %) and poorly (38.8 %) as far as security matters are concerned. Only 2 respondents ( 1.4%) out of the 140 feel the government has done well in improving the security of Kenyans. This in the light of the row over Migingo Island , the increased operation of terrorist groups and the frequent cases of killings in several parts of the country.

**Promoting National Healing and Reconciliation**

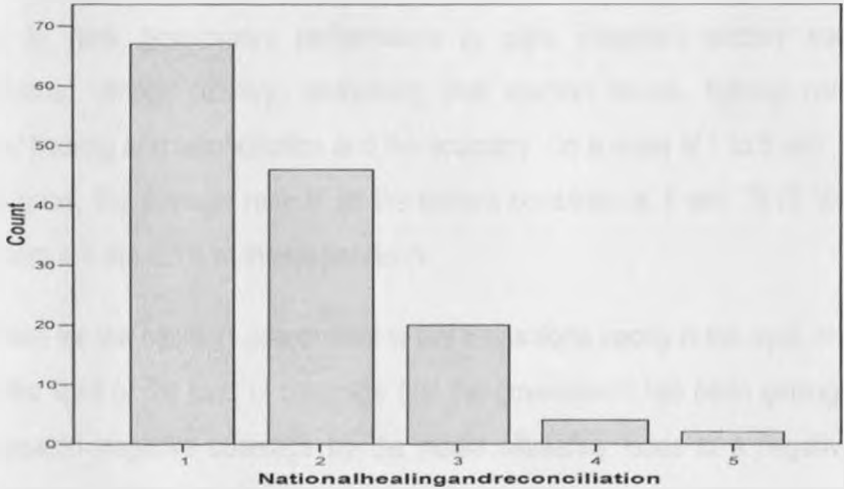


Figure 16-Source: Field Survey 2009

The findings also show that out of the 140 respondents, 113 respondents representing 81.3 % of the respondents feel the Coalition Government has done very poorly and poorly in bringing about National healing and reconciliation. This overwhelming majority feel very little progress has been made in addressing this matter. Only 6 out of the 140 respondents believe the government has not done enough

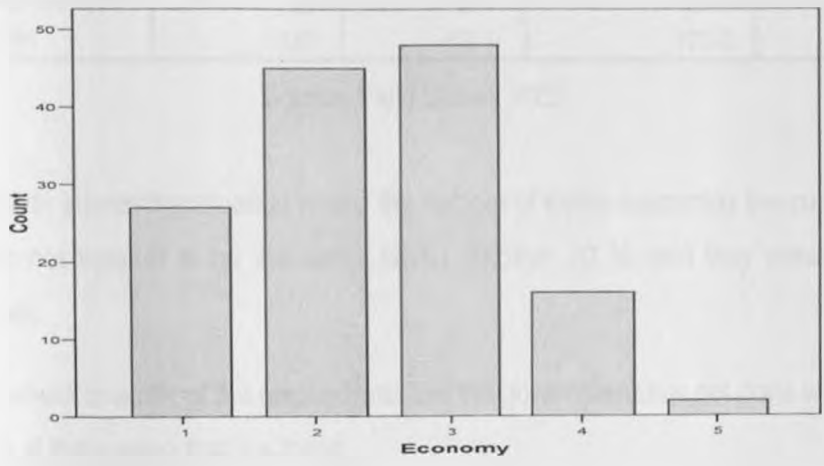


Figure 17- Source: Field Survey 2009

On the economy ,most respondents (34.8%) are not decided whether the government is handling the issue well. A However, 51 % believe that the government is not doing enough to improve the economy and only 13 % are convinced the Coalition government is doing well in this sector.

The findings indicated that, in the eyes of the public, the government has not done well. The study asked the respondents to rank government performance in eight important sectors namely, education, implementing reforms, service delivery, addressing post election issues, fighting corruption, security, promoting national healing and reconciliation and the economy. On a scale of 1 to 5 with 1 being very poor and 5 being very good, the average rank of all the sectors combined is 1 with 78.75 % while those who gave the government a 5 are 6.5% of the respondents.

The verdict therefore for the coalition government is that it has done poorly in the eyes of the public. When this is looked in the light of the kind of coverage that the government has been getting, it is possible to conclude that repeated negative coverage by the media ultimately leads to a negative opinion of the government. When the media consistently tells the public that the government has failed in its mandate, repeated and sustained exposure to that kind of information will cause the public to perceive the government as having failed.

**DoyouSupportthecoalition**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	55	39.3	39.3	39.3
	No	56	40.0	40.0	79.3
	Indifferent	29	20.7	20.7	100.0
	Total	140	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field Survey 2009

The findings reveal an interesting situation where the number of those supporting the coalition government and those who do not support to be the same (40%). Another 20 % said they were indifferent to the coalition government.

From the findings where majority of the respondents feel the government has not done well in critical areas although many are of the opinion that it is trying.

**Describingcoalition**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Grand Corruption	11	7.9	7.9	7.9
	Grand Coalition	23	16.4	16.4	24.3
	Grand Collision	25	17.9	17.9	42.1
	Grand Change	1	.7	.7	42.9
	Grand Confusion	55	39.3	39.3	82.1
	Grand Impunity	22	15.7	15.7	97.9
	All	2	1.4	1.4	99.3
	None	1	.7	.7	100.0
	Total	140	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field Survey 2009

**DoyouSupportthecoalition**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	55	39.3	39.3	39.3
	No	56	40.0	40.0	79.3
	Indifferent	29	20.7	20.7	100.0
	Total	140	100.0	100.0	

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	Grand Impunity	22	15.7	15.7	97.9
	All	2	1.4	1.4	99.3
	None	1	.7	.7	100.0
	Total	140	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field Survey 2009



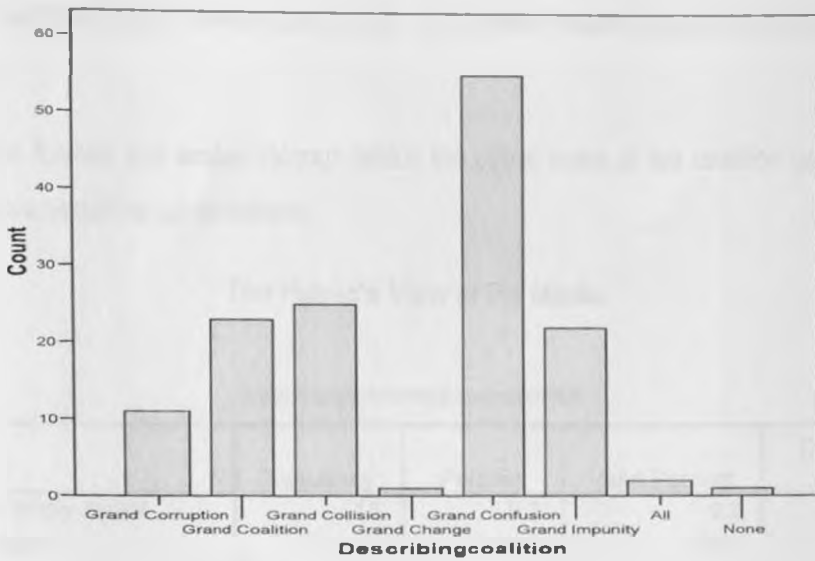


Figure 18-Source: Field Survey 2009

When asked how they would describe the coalition government, 39.3 % said they would describe it as Grand Confusion without order or centre of command. 16 % felt the phrase Grand Impunity was the best while still another 17.9 % said they would describe it as a Grand Collision. Only 16.4 % had a positive description of the government calling it the Grand Coalition. These negative phrases represent a combined percentage of 83 % and they reveal how the public views the government.

Framing defines how a certain piece of media content is packaged so it will influence particular interpretations. This is accomplished through the use of selection, emphasis, exclusion, and elaboration.

In describing the Coalition government, majority of the respondents used phrases that are a slight variation of the phrase 'Coalition Government'. The most popular phrase was 'Grand Confusion' followed by 'Grand Collision'; these are attributable to the recurrent squabbles and infightings within the Coalition government. Other terms used to describe the coalition government include 'Grand Corruption', 'Grand Collusion', 'Grand Impunity', 'Grand Conspiracy'.

When asked where they first heard the phrases, majority of the people said they heard it or read in the media and a few said they heard from friends and colleagues.

These phrases though seemingly harmless are loaded with meaning and they plant ideas and paint pictures in our heads as Lipmann in *Public Opinion* (1922) argued that 'people depend upon the press to

provide them with information on events and views of the world outside from which they form pictures in their heads.'

These phrases have formed the lenses through which the public looks at the coalition government. Most of these labels are have negative connotations.

### The Public's View of the Media

#### Accuracy of newspaper stories

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	13	9.3	9.3	9.3
	Agree	71	50.7	50.7	60.0
	Neutral	43	30.7	30.7	90.7
	Disagree	10	7.1	7.1	97.9
	Strongly Disagree	3	2.1	2.1	100.0
	Total	140	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field Survey 2009

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Half (50.7 %) of the respondents agree that the stories carried in the local dailies are accurate with another 9.3 % saying they strongly agree. 30 % do not have an opinion on the same. It's a very small percentage 9.2 that feels the stories are not accurate.

#### The stories are Fair

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	13	9.3	9.3	9.3
	Agree	40	28.6	28.6	37.9
	Neutral	51	36.4	36.4	74.3
	Disagree	32	22.9	22.9	97.1
	Strongly Disagree	4	2.9	2.9	100.0
	Total	140	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field Survey 2009

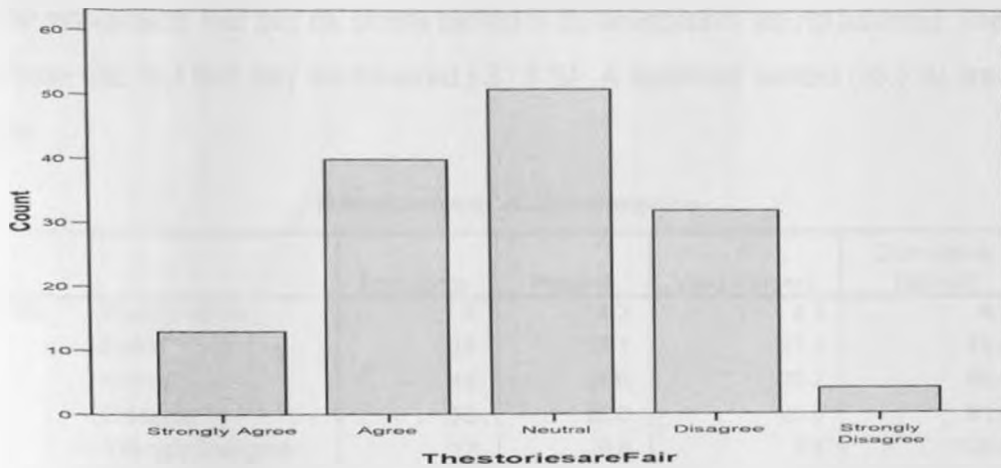


Figure 19-Source: Field Survey 2009

While most respondents (36.4%) are undecided whether the stories are fair, those who agree that they are fair (28.6%) are slightly more than those who say the stories are not fair (22.9%). However, in general all those who agree and strongly agree form 37.9% compared to those who disagree (23.8%).

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	7	5.0	5.0	5.0
	Agree	37	26.4	26.4	31.4
	Neutral	49	35.0	35.0	66.4
	Disagree	40	28.6	28.6	95.0
	Strongly Disagree	7	5.0	5.0	100.0
	Total	140	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field Survey 2009

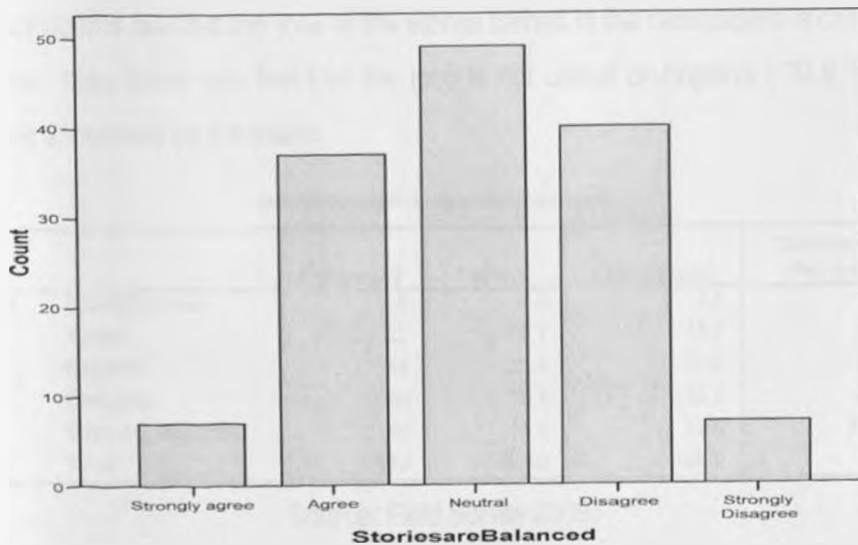
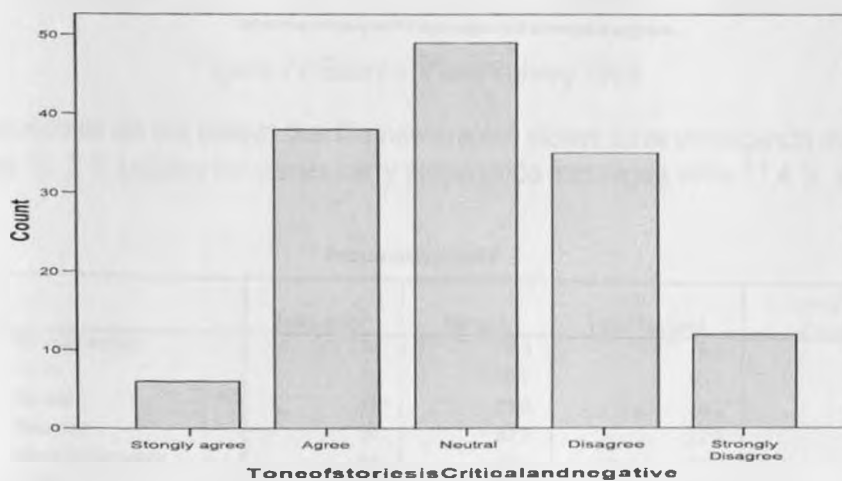


Figure 20-Source: Field Survey 2009

33.6 % of the respondents feel that the stories carried in the newspapers are not balanced. This is slightly more than those who feel that they are balanced ( 31.4 % ) . A significant number (35.5 %) are undecided on the matter.

**ToneofstoriesisCriticalandnegative**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Stongly agree	6	4.3	4.3	4.3
	Agree	38	27.1	27.1	31.4
	Neutral	49	35.0	35.0	66.4
	Disagree	35	25.0	25.0	91.4
	Strongly Disagree	12	8.6	8.6	100.0
	Total	140	100.0	100.0	



**Figure 21-Source: Field Survey 2009**

31.4 % of the respondents feel that the tone of the stories carried in the newspapers is critical and negative this is slightly less than those who feel that the tone is not critical or negative ( 33.6 % ) . A significant number (35 %) are undecided on the matter.

**StorieshavePropagandamessages**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	5	3.6	3.6	3.6
	Agree	22	15.7	15.7	19.3
	Neutral	44	31.4	31.4	50.7
	Disagree	50	35.7	35.7	86.4
	Strongly Disagree	19	13.6	13.6	100.0
	Total	140	100.0	100.0	

**Source: Field Survey 2009**

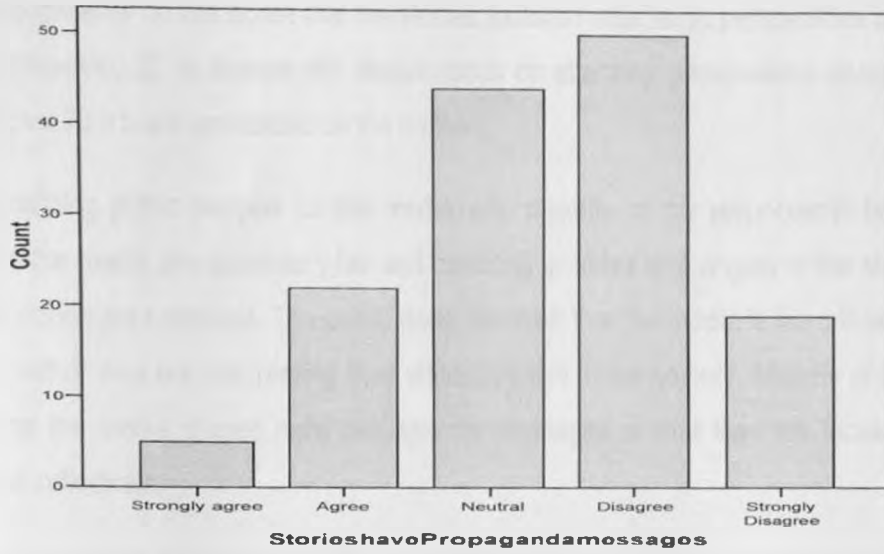


Figure 22-Source: Field Survey 2009

49.3 % of the respondents do not believe that the newspapers stories have propaganda messages. A smaller percentage 19.3 % believe the stories carry propaganda messages while 31.4 % are undecided.

Personalityattacks

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	13	9.3	9.3	9.3
	Agree	22	15.7	15.7	25.0
	Neutral	41	29.3	29.3	54.3
	Disagree	46	32.9	32.9	87.1
	Strongly Disagree	18	12.9	12.9	100.0
Total		140	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field Survey 2009

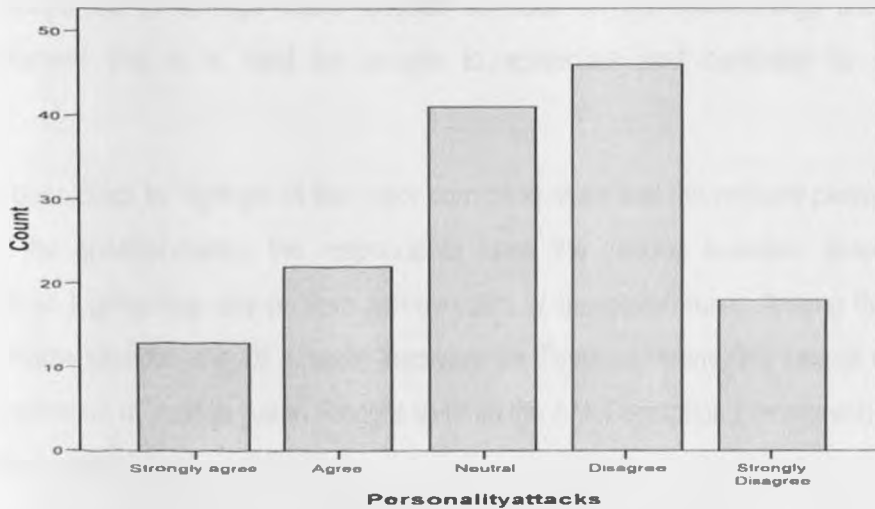


Figure 23-Source: Field Survey 2009

45.8 % of the respondents do not agree that the stories focus on attacks on personalities instead of issues of governance. However, 25 % believe the stories focus on attacking personalities instead of the actual issues. A significant 29.35 are undecided on the matter.

There is overwhelming public support for the media with majority of the respondents believing that the stories carried in the media are accurate, fair and covering all sides and angles of the stories. They also believe that the stories are balanced. The public does not think that the media is too critical of the coalition government but rather they are just playing their watchdog role in the society. Majority of the respondents do not agree that the media stories have propaganda messages or that they are focused on attacking personalities and individuals.

It is only a small percentage that seems to think the media is out to tarnish the reputation of the government and its leaders by giving inaccurate information and propagation of unsubstantiated rumours.

This public support and confidence in the media has made the fourth estate a key player in the Kenyan society and whatever agenda the media advances is likely to find a highly receptive mind. The media was able to successfully ride on this in resisting the efforts of the government to pass into law and operationalize the Kenya Communications Amendment Bill 2008.

Negative relations with the media seem to ultimately hurt the government's image and that of its leaders.

## **DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS**

The media in Kenya has to a large extent focused so much on the shortcomings and failures of the Coalition Government that it is hard for people to appreciate and celebrate its successes and achievements.

The media has been quick to highlight all the major corruption deals that the ordinary person is aware of all of them. In all the questionnaires, the respondents listed the various scandals associated with the government without highlighting any positive achievement of the government. Among the key scandals cited are ; the Maize scandal, the Oil scandal involving the Triton company, the sale of Grand Regency Hotel, the reappointment of Justice Aaron Ringera to head the Anti Corruption Commission, the Mau forest controversy among others.

sustained exposure to that kind of information will cause the public to perceive the government as having failed.

When the respondents were asked to list the various scandals associated with the coalition government, they listed very many but when asked to list the achievements of the coalition government, many respondents struggled to list anything.

This can again be explained by the fact that, the shortcomings of the government have been highlighted and emphasized clearly and consistently by the media and they are now common public knowledge, but the achievements are not so known to the public.

There is overwhelming public support for the media with majority of the respondents believing that the stories carried in the media are accurate, fair and covering all sides and angles of the stories. They also believe that the stories are balanced. The public does not think that the media is too critical of the coalition government but rather they are just playing their watchdog role in the society. Majority of the respondents do not agree that the media stories have propaganda messages or that they are focused on attacking personalities and individuals.

### **Is The Media Solely Responsible For The Current Dissatisfaction With The Government?**

Even after the study established that there has been significant negative coverage in the media in regard to the coalition government, not all the public disaffection is attributable to the media. As some studies (Schmitt-Beck and Voltmer 2007) have shown, the media are more influential in new democracies, because a high number of citizens have not formed yet their political orientation and are more dependent on the media's interpretation of events

There are also other variables at work that have affected the public perception towards the government. The effects of the global economic crunch have largely been felt in Kenya over the last one year and they have come with unique challenges some of which were beyond the control of the government like inflation, high energy costs, food shortage among others. There has also been a prolonged draught in the country which culminated in both water and power sharing with great consequences for majority of Kenyans. Whenever citizens face severe or harsh challenges, there is always a tendency to see the government as having failed or in some cases unresponsive to the plight of the poor person.

The government has also been guilty of mismanaging some of these problems, in some cases, the government leaders have aggravated these problems and on many occasions failed to cushion the public from these effects. In other cases, some politicians and government leaders have taken advantage of these crises to advance themselves at the expense of Kenyans, the maize scandal is one such example. In this situation, the government has been blamed by the public for not doing enough to assist its people or act to mitigate against these harsh conditions facing Kenyans and other African people.

The current low rating of the government by the public must be looked at in the context of the larger picture of these global conditions and not limit them to the media coverage.

The media is supposed to report objectively on the events that have been happening in society. It is merely a reflection of the image and not the creator of the image. Where the government has failed, the media should not attempt to cover up or twist the truth but must diligently inform the public. This is one of the critical roles of the media. However, this study revealed that the media might have aggravated the already poor perception of the government by dwelling too much on its failures and not devoting equal time and space to its achievements.

This study focused on the literate public with over 73% of the respondents having at least one degree. This section of the public is an active public that is capable of analyzing issues and making decisions on their own without much influence from the media. They are not a passive lot who are waiting for the media to come and tell them what to think of the government. These are citizens who are able to critically analyze what the media is telling them and make informed decisions on what to believe. Therefore, their view is not all attributable to the media coverage although this does not absolve the media from responsible journalism.

In the light of the agenda setting theory, the media has only served to elevate the importance of certain issues in the eyes of this public by focusing on them but the public has the final decision after evaluating the information. In 1996, when the American media attempted to sway public opinion by focusing too much on the Monica Lewinsky saga, the ratings of President Bill Clinton were not affected, rather, he ended up clinching the presidency the second time.



## CHAPTER FIVE

### SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

This chapter provides a summary of the key findings coming out of this study, it provides key recommendations and conclusions of the study.

The study found that there is a heavy reliance on the media for political news and analysis. Majority of the respondents in the study look up to the media for interpretation of political events and developments. This is in comparison to other sources of information like religious leaders, politicians and government leaders, discussions among friends and the civil society. This positions the media to have the greatest impact on public perception.

Further, the study also found that the most people view the media as the most trusted source of information when compared with other sources. Credibility of an information source is dependent on its trustworthiness in the eyes of the receiver. This trust in the media makes them receptive to the information coming from the media which will in turn have a bearing on public opinion. Most of the respondents believe the stories carried in the media are accurate and factual and hence they believe them .

Another key finding of the study is that there has been a significant focus on negative content in the media in regard to the Coalition government. The shortcomings and mistakes of the Coalition Government have been consistently highlighted and emphasized. On the other hand, the media has not been equally committed to highlight the positive achievements of the coalition government. Ultimately, these have had a recognizable effect on how the public views the government which this study found to be unfavourable towards the government.

The study also found the Kenya Communications Amendment Bill 2008 to have played a significant role in affecting the media coverage of the coalition government. In putting up a fight against the bill, the media ended up criticizing the government too much at times engaging in unethical reporting especially when covering key government leaders like the Minister for Information and Communications and his Permanent Secretary in an attempt to gain public support. The study also found that majority of the people supported the media in its struggle with the government over the Bill.

Another key finding of the study is that that majority of the people perceive the government as having failed to live up to its mandate and promises. The government was given the lowest possible ranking as designed in the study. Majority of the respondents indicated that they did not support the Coalition government and they believed it had failed. This is linked to the fact that the media has not focused on providing a balanced coverage of both the shortcomings and achievements of the coalition government.

The labels and frames used by the media to describe the Coalition government have an impact on the public's perception of the government. Labels like 'the Grand Confusion' and 'Grand Collision' have affected how the people view the government. They have formed the lenses through which the public evaluate the government.

Finally, the study found that most people believe the stories carried in the media have a significant influence on how they perceive the government. Many said they believed the stories affected how they perceive the government. This indicates the media plays a critical role in influencing public opinion.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Introduction:**

From the findings of the study, there are some key recommendations that can be made that would improve future relations between government and the media and how to resolve differences between the two.

- A. The media should always aim to provide balanced, objective and fair information to the public. There should be a strict adherence and enforcement of the provisions of the media act 2007 and the journalist's code of ethics to ensure journalistic standards are maintained. This will help regulate their operations and prevent them from going to extremes in carrying out their mandate.
- B. The media in playing its watchdog role in society in exposing the questionable dealings of the government should also ensure they also cover the positive achievements to ensure the public has the full information and will therefore be able to make informed choices based on the information provided.
- C. The government should be careful in dealing with the media and should avoid unnecessarily antagonizing the media since a tussle between the two hurts the public image of the government and its leaders as this study found out.

- D. There should be appropriate mechanisms for dealing with all manner of conflicts between the government and the media to avoid an antagonistic relationship between the two. There should be open and continuous dialogue between the two to prevent matters from deteriorating and getting to the levels witnessed in the early months of the year 2009.
- E. The government should work closely with the media to inform the public of its progress on critical issues and also highlight its achievements. The government should also look for other means of supplementing the media's efforts in getting out information to the public and educate the masses on its achievements.

## CONCLUSION

Though the media plays a critical role in the formation and shaping of public opinion, they do so in the light of other important intervening factors.

Repeated and sustained coverage and exposure to negative content tends to have a negative effect on public opinion. There is a direct relationship between negative coverage and a low rating of the government or a diminishing favorable opinion of the government. While 48% of the respondents believe there is too much focus on negative issues in the media, it is interesting to note that 40 % said they did not support the government. When the media deliberately focuses on the shortcomings, failures and scandals in the government without highlighting the achievements, there is a tendency among members of the public to see that government as having achieved nothing. 52.9% of those interviewed did not believe the Coalition government had achieved many of its promises.

The verdict for the coalition government is that it has done poorly in the eyes of the public. The average rating of the government in this study found 78.75 % of the respondents believe the coalition government has failed in critical areas like dealing with the economy, education, service delivery, implementing reforms among others. When this is looked in the light of the kind of coverage that the government has been getting, it is possible to conclude that repeated negative coverage by the media ultimately leads to a negative opinion of the government. When the media consistently tells the public that the government has failed in its mandate, repeated and sustained exposure to that kind of information has caused the public to perceive the government as having failed.

From the findings of the study, we can see the agenda setting function of the media at work. Coverage is able to raise the salience of an issue and make it prominent even if it may not be so significant. Politically knowledgeable citizens who trust the media to be accurate and informative infer that news coverage of an issue means it is an important matter for the nation, leading these people to place greater emphasis on that issue. The coverage of an issue like the Kenya Communications Amendment Bill raises its importance in the public mind. 43 % of those sampled in this study felt the focus on the bill was too much which led 65% to support the media and even though 57.9 % believed the coverage was one sided and biased

The media is supposed to report objectively on the events that have been happening in society. It is merely a reflection of the image and not the creator of the image. Where the government has failed, the media should not attempt to cover up or twist the truth but must diligently inform the public. This is one of the

critical roles of the media. As this study revealed, the media can aggravate the already poor perception of the government by dwelling too much on its failures and not devoting equal time and space to its achievements.

The frames the media uses in coverage of issues normally have an influence on public opinion. When the media used phrases like 'the worst corruption ever' or 'Grand Corruption', these have a considerable effect on how the public perceive issues. 83% of the phrases the respondents gave as best describing the coalition government were negative and the respondents said they got these phrases from the media. These phrases from the frames through which the public view the media.

The media can reinforce and strengthen public opinion if they focus on issues that are of great concern to the public. If the media is able to demonstrate to the public that the government is either unwilling or incapable of dealing with these problems, then public opinion will be significantly affected.

Information is critical and the media must continue to play the important role of informing the public. However, the media practitioners should ensure the information provided is accurate, fair, balanced, adequate, relevant and appropriate and then leave the public to make judgments based on that information.

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## SELF-ADMINISTERED QUESTIONNAIRE

## APPENDIX 1.

### INTRODUCTION

I am a Masters Student at the University Of Nairobi, School Of Journalism pursuing a course in communication Studies.

This questionnaire has been designed to enable us gather useful information on our study that seeks to find out whether media coverage affects general public opinion.

You are kindly requested to fill this confidential self-administered questionnaire. You may want to be honest with your responses to the questions but avoid writing your name anywhere in this questionnaire. The responses will not be made public and are for purposes of academic research leading to the Award of a Master's degree only.

**Note:** There are no wrong answers, just your honest opinions.

### INFORMED CONSENT

Participation in filling this questionnaire is voluntary. Filling the questionnaire is an indication of your informed and voluntary consent and will be treated as such.

### INSTRUCTIONS

- For close-ended questions, circle / tick your response where necessary.
- For open-ended questions, fill the responses in the space provided.

### SECTION A: RESPONDENT MEDIA PREFERENCE

(Please do not fill this questionnaire if your answer to Question 1, below, is No)

- 1) Do you read any of the local Daily Newspapers?
  - a) Yes ( )
  - b) No ( )
- 2) If yes, which ones?
  - a) Nation ( )
  - b) The Standard ( )
  - c) The People Daily ( )
  - d) Kenya Times ( )
- 3) How frequently do you read the Newspapers?
  - a) Daily ( )
  - b) At least thrice a week ( )
  - c) At least once a week ( )
  - d) Occasionally ( )

### SECTION B: MEDIA AGENDA AND INFLUENCE

- 1) What type of news do you feel you majorly need to know about?
  - a) Entertainment ( )
  - b) Political News and Analysis ( )
  - c) Trade and Business ( )
  - d) Social Issues ( )
  - e) Development Issues ( )
  - f) Sports ( )
  - g) All ( )

- 2) In terms of coverage, do you think your need is met? a) Yes ( ) b) No ( ) c) To an extent ( )
- 3) What type of news is given the most coverage?
- a. Entertainment ( )
  - b. Political News and Analysis ( )
  - c. Trade and Business ( )
  - d. Social issues ( )
  - e. Development issues ( )
  - f. Other (name).....
- 4) Do you think the media is committed to providing balanced information and coverage to meet the needs of their audience? Yes ( ) b) No ( ) c) Don't know ( )
- 5) If No above, why do you think so?  
.....
- 6) In your opinion, do you think the media deliberately focuses on negative issues when covering the government? a) Yes ( ) b) No ( ) c) Not sure ( )
- 7) Does this affect how you view the government?  
a) Yes ( ) b) No ( ) c) To an extent ( )
- 8) Have you ever heard of the Kenya communications Amendment bill (media bill)?  
a) Yes ( ) b) No ( )
- 9) At some point there was heightened criticism on the government on the passing of the Kenya Communication Amendment Bill 2008.  
How would you classify the coverage given by the media to this matter?  
a) Fair ( ) b) Unfair/ Biased ( )
- 10) How did you find the coverage of the media bill.  
a) Too much ( ) b) Normal ( ) c) Not enough ( )
- 11) Did you support the media in objecting the move by parliament to pass the said bill?  
a) Yes ( ) b) No ( ) c) Indifferent ( )

**SECTION C: PUBLIC OPINION**

- 1) Where do you get most of your information on politics, politicians and government?
- 1. Media ( )
  - 2. Friends and Coleagues in discussions ( )
  - 3. Political and Government functions ( )
  - 4. Religious Gatherings ( )
- 2) From the following categories of public informants whom do you consider as the most trusted and reliable?
- 1. The Politicians ( )
  - 2. The Media ( )
  - 3. Religious Leaders ( )
  - 4. Civil society ( )
  - 5. None ( )

- 3) In your own opinion do you think the Coalition government has had major achievements out of its promises?  
 a) Yes ( )                      b) No ( )                      c) To an extent ( )
- 4) Do you think the media gives enough coverage to the achievements of the Coalition government?  
 a) Yes ( )                      b) No ( )                      c) To an extent
- 5) What do you think of the Coalition government?  
 a. It has done a wonderful job ( )  
 b. It has let Kenyans down ( )  
 c. It is trying ( )  
 d. It is doing nothing ( )  
 e. It is a total failure ( )

6) How do you rate government performance in the following areas

(5 for very good 1 for very poor)

	Area	5	4	3	2	1
A.	Education					
B.	Addressing the post-elections violence issues					
C.	Implementing Reforms					
D.	Service delivery					
E.	Fighting corruption					
F.	Security					
G.	National healing and reconciliation					
H.	Economy					

7) Do you support the Coalition Government?  
 a) Yes ( )                      b) No ( )                      c) Indifferent ( )

8) Name any three scandals that have been associated with the Coalition Government?

- a) .....
- b) .....
- c) .....

9) List any three major achievements of the coalition government

- a. ....
- b. ....
- c. ....

10) Which of the following words do you think best describes the current government?

1. Grand Corruption ( )
2. Grand Coalition ( )
3. Grand Collision ( )
4. Grand Change ( )
5. Grand Confusion ( )
6. Grand Impunity ( )
7. None ( )

11) Where did you first come across these phrases .....

#### SECTION D: PUBLIC OPINION OF THE MEDIA

Tick the answer that most accurately represents your opinion

Key : (SA) – Strongly Agree; (A) – Agree; (N) – Neutral; (D) – Disagree and (SD) - Strongly Disagree

In your opinion, what do you think of the articles/ stories that are normally carried in the Newspapers?

1. The stories are accurate / factual (Stories attributed to source)

SA ( )      A ( )      N ( )      D ( )      SD ( )

2. The stories are fair (All sides of the story are covered)

SA ( )      A ( )      N ( )      D ( )      SD ( )

3. The article is balanced (Equal space and emphasis is given on opposing views)

SA ( )      A ( )      N ( )      D ( )      SD ( )

4. The tone or attitude of the writer is critical/negative towards the government?

SA ( )      A ( )      N ( )      D ( )      SD ( )

5. The stories contains propaganda messages

SA ( )      A ( )      N ( )      D ( )      SD ( )

6. The stories focuses on /attacks personalities instead of governance

SA ( )      A ( )      N ( )      D ( )      SD ( )

#### SECTION E: DEMOGRAPHIC DETAILS

1) Gender      a) Male ( )      b) Female ( )

2) Age bracket (Years)

a) 18-24 ( )    b) 25-34 ( )    c) 35-44 ( )    d) 45-54 ( )    e) Above 55 ( )

3) Highest Level of Education

a) KCSE ( )    b) Diploma ( )    c) Degree ( )    d) Masters    e) PhD ( )

4) Profession.....