

University of Nairobi  
School of Journalism and Mass Communication

MA Communication Studies

The Impact of Gatekeeping on Media Reporting in Kenya

Submitted By

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EAST AFRICANA COLLECTION

Ochola Alfred Oduor

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## **Abstract**

Gatekeeping is the process by which potential news goes through a series of decision points where certain items are passed along and others are halted with the end result being the transmission of certain items to society. (Shoemaker, P. 2001:233). From this perspective, this research paper distils the findings of a study on the impact of gatekeeping on Media reporting in Kenya with special reference to the effect of extra-professional factors.

The study was based on the premise that although individual Journalists and Editors may be committed to the values and ideals of Journalism, these alone cannot influence whether a story is published or broadcast. Therefore, the study set out to investigate factors, other than professional values, that influence publication of news items and how these factors manifest at the various levels of the news processing chain.

## **Methodology**

The study mainly employed the use of Desk Review, Survey and Key Informant Interviews to collect the required data. The data collected using the survey method was then analyzed electronically using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) to obtain simple frequencies and relational statistics. Qualitative data obtained using Key Informant Interviews was also analyzed thematically. Analysis of this data is presented using:

- Tables
- Percentage distributions
- Frequencies and
- Cross tabulations

## **Key Findings**

Almost half of the respondents surveyed for this study feel that the Media in Kenya is not independent enough to assert its authority on key issues especially those touching on personal, political and even ethnic interests of Media Owners and Advertisers and some News Sources. A similar number feel that professionalism among Media practitioners in Kenya is either fair or poor. This is illustrated by the fact that 79 per cent of the respondents who felt that Editors' decision on what to publish or reject was largely influenced by extra-professional factors emanating from news sources, Media Owners and Advertisers.

About 74 per cent of the respondents affirm that News Sources influence the manner in which the final news products ends up being presented in the paper mainly by offering bribes, freebies, lunch, dinner or some forms of gifts. In addition, some News Sources call Senior Editors and Managers of Media Houses with a view to influencing news content touching on their interests while some withhold specific information from Journalists with the intention of giving it to those Journalists who will cater for their interests.

Media Owners influence editorial content either by giving special attention to news items touching on matters they deem to be of social, economic or political interests to them. Conversely, they 'kill' stories that depict their business, political or social interests in bad light or those of their friends, families or business associates. In some extreme cases, they also fire Journalists whose reporting or orientation seems to go against their interests.

Advertisers threaten or actually withdraw adverts from those Media Houses who do not accede to their demands of ‘killing’ stories that depict them in unfavorable light. They also push for positive coverage of their organizations as a condition for advertising even though some of them may not meet the classic definition of newsworthiness.

## Recommendations

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The study recommends that the Media fraternity should urgently agree on a formula for funding the Media Council of Kenya (MCK) and therefore make it more effective in ensuring professionalism in the Media. In performing this role, the Council should liaise closely with Media houses in enforcing the Codes of Ethics. Media Houses should also be compelled to improve remuneration packages and working conditions specifically for Correspondents to make them less likely to fall into the temptation of being manipulated by News Sources who take advantage of their economic status.