THE REFERENDUM COVERAGE BY KENYAN MEDIA
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Media Council of Kenya
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# List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BBC</td>
<td>British Broadcasting Corporation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CA</td>
<td>Communications Authority of Kenya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CORD</td>
<td>Coalition for Reforms and Democracy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KBC</td>
<td>Kenya Broadcasting Corporation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MCK</td>
<td>Media Council of Kenya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPSS</td>
<td>Statistical Package for Social Sciences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Acknowledgements

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The media play a critical role in disseminating information thereby serving as a catalyst for dialogue between the State and its citizens. During referendum and elections period, the media act as a channel for political and civil society voices by providing space to articulate policy priorities of competing parties, whilst also generating debate.

It is generally argued that the media fail to serve the public well, because they do not provide diverse, well-balanced political information during referendum debates. This might be true for entertainment-oriented media such as most television and the tabloid press. Furthermore, the media has failed to place relevant information within a broader context and within diverse perspectives.

The media coverage of referendum issues is very important but can sometimes be thorny if not professionally done. Kenya can learn from examples witnessed in other countries like Britain during the Scottish secession referendum. Some of the complaints against some media in the UK included the media being accused of broadcasting “lies” and being “biased” in favour of retaining the Union. Some of the claims alleged that BBC was institutionally biased against Scottish independence and was spreading “propaganda” to keep the Union intact through its news reports.

Some of the unprofessional practices that have been witnessed in Kenya in the past include biased coverage of issues, inaccuracy, over-enthusiasm on coverage for perceived “contentious issues” and misinformation. Such coverage has the potential to influence negative reactions or perpetuate conflict during the referendum process. The use of improper language has also been witnessed in the past.

It is therefore important to learn from the past malpractices and focus on ensuring professionalism in the media during the referendum period.

HARON MWANGI
Chief Executive Officer & Secretary to the Council
1. Executive Summary

The Media Council of Kenya (MCK) is a statutory body established under the Media Act 2013 which regulates the media and advances professionalism of the media in Kenya. The Media Monitoring and Research Department monitors print and electronic media on a continuous basis.

As part of its mandate MCK monitored the coverage of the push for a Referendum by two groups, one led by governors and another by the Coalition for Reforms and Democracy (CORD). County governors who were pushing for the referendum under the banner Pesa Mashinani, a campaign that sought to increase national revenue allocations to the counties from the current 15 percent to more than 45 percent. The Coalition for Reforms and Democracy (CORD) through the Okoa Kenya Initiative proposed to strengthen the Senate, while pushing for a dramatic increase of revenues to the counties from 15 percent to 45 percent of the total audited and approved national revenue.

Other reasons for the referendum given by the opposition coalition included lack of ethnic inclusivity in public appointments, the need to disband the independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC), and insecurity in the country.

The aim of monitoring was to analyse the quality of reporting and the adherence of the media to the “Code of Conduct for the Practice of Journalism in Kenya.”
1.1 Key Findings

- Referendum as a topic was prominently covered, with a total articles published $n = 270$.
- The dominant Referendum topic covered from September 24 – October 7, 2014 included the rallies held by Pesa Mashinani, Okoa Kenya (championed by the former Prime Minister Raila Odinga) and rallies by Jubilee members to who sought to discredit the need for a Referendum.
- Referendum as a topic was not predominantly covered on TV. Only 18 stories were broadcast.
- Majority of the articles were personality based and not issue based with Raila Odinga, William Ruto among the most covered personalities.
- KTN broadcast the most stories at 33%
- There were neither Interviews, opinions nor feature broadcasts on TV. All stories broadcast were news reports.
- Majority of the articles monitored adhered to the Code of Conduct for the Practice at 95.2 percent. Only 4.8% of all articles contained violations of the Code of Conduct.
- The Referendum was not prominently covered on Television. Only 18 stories were broadcast from the four TV stations sampled.
- Of the articles monitored, more than half, 54.4 percent had only one viewpoint, indicating a low diversity of viewpoints covered in news items, 45.6 percent had two or more viewpoints.
- On TV, women were not covered as central news sources, whenever they were covered, they were covered together with men at 17 percent. Men were covered as central to news at 83 percent
- 89.3 percent of the news reports identified their sources. Only 2.2 percent of the news sources did not identify their sources.
- Majority of articles had men as the central news subjects and sources, with 81.9 percent; women were covered as central news subjects and sources at only 3.7%. This huge disparity in men and women as news subjects and sources clearly goes against article 15 of the code; Women and men should be treated equally as news subjects and news sources.
- Out of all stories broadcast on TV, 61 percent had an education role while 28 percent had a watchdog role. 11% of stories broadcast had an agenda setting role.
- Majority of articles were written by men, (70.7%), only 9.3% of the authors were female.
2. Project Description

2.1 Objectives, Data Collection and Analysis

MCK observed and analysed the coverage of the call for a Referendum by the Daily Nation, The Standard, The Star and The People Newspaper from September 24 – October 7, 2014. All major articles mentioning the Referendum, Pesa Mashinani or Okoa Kenya were analysed. Additionally, all 9 PM prime time news bulletins on Citizen TV, NTV, K24 and KTN were monitored during the sample period.

The goal of monitoring was to analyse the quality of reporting and adherence to the Code of Conduct of the Practice of Journalism in Kenya.

Print Data was entered into MCK digital media portal using “Enhance Evaluation” software. Statistical analysis was carried out with SPSS Version 19.0.

Broadcast data was entered into the “Volicon observer” software. Statistical analysis was executed through the SPSS Version 19.0.
3. General Observations

Referendum as a topic was prominently covered, with a total articles published n = 270. The Daily Nation covered 22.6%, the Standard 26.7%, the Star with the majority 37.4% and the People with the least coverage at 13.3%.

Figure 1:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Valid</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DN</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>22.6</td>
<td>22.6</td>
<td>22.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STAR</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>26.7</td>
<td>26.7</td>
<td>49.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STD</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>37.4</td>
<td>37.4</td>
<td>86.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TPN</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>270</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The dominant Referendum topics covered from September 24 – October 7, 2014 included the rallies held by Pesa Mashinani (spearheaded by Governors), Okoa Kenya (championed by the former Prime Minister Raila Odinga) and rallies by Jubilee members who sought to discredit the need for a Referendum. Majority of the articles were personality based and not issue based with Raila Odinga and William Ruto among the most covered personalities.

Majority of the articles covered by the papers did not give substantive background information on the call for a Referendum. Most times the paper seemed to have assumed that the public were aware of the issues around the Referendum. Instead, ping pong journalism strongly came into play.

3.1 Adherence to the Code

4.8% of all articles were classified as containing violations of the Code of Conduct, whereas 95.2% adhered to the Code.

1 Where only one side of adverse comments made is published and the rejoinder is published in another article.
Figure 2:
Cross tabulation, Breaches of the Code

3.2 Accuracy and Balance

Figure 3:
**Viewpoints**

Of the articles monitored, more than half, 54.4% had only one viewpoint, indicating a low diversity of viewpoints covered in news items, 45.6% had two or more viewpoints. The Daily Nation and the Standard scored the highest regarding the diversity of viewpoints in the news: 78.7% of the news reports analysed in the Daily Nation and 57.5% of the reports in the Standard presented two or more viewpoints. In stark contrast, the Star and the People Newspaper only provided 19.4% and 9% reports with two or more viewpoints. One reason for this was the extensive coverage of rallies, only reporting one viewpoint.

**Figure 4:**

![Viewpoints Chart](image)

**Sources**

In addition to this trend, 89.3% of the news reports identified their sources. Only 2.2% of the news sources did not identify their sources.

**Chance to Comment**

For example, The People Newspaper, 26.09.2014, “Raila now links Ruto to Sh15b loss at Treasury” Raila claims funds lost at treasury is being used by the Deputy President to conduct fund-drives over the weekend. The Daily Nation, 27. 09.14, “Why Governors have ganged up on Ruto” A group of Governors from the Rift Valley have accused the Deputy President of sabotaging their push for a referendum. The side of the story of the DP is not presented in the story. However 4.8% of the articles gave those mentioned in an unfavorable light a chance to comment and a majority 87.8% of the articles were well done.
Figure 5:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Valid (n.a.)</td>
<td>237</td>
<td>87.8</td>
<td>87.8</td>
<td>87.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chance given</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>92.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No chance given</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>270</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5W and IH

43.7% of all news reports provided answers to all six questions (Who? What? Where? When? Why? and How?), whereas 8.5%, 3.3% and 1.1% of the news reports only answered three, two and one of the questions respectively.

Figure 6:

3.3 Hate Speech

99.3% of all articles observed did not contain hate speech content.

3.4 Obscenity

None of the articles observed contained obscene language or images.
3.5 Gender Balance

Gender Author

Most of articles were written by men, (70.7%), only 9.3% of the authors were female. This could be due to the male dominated political scene where men cover the ‘hard news’ and women are given ‘soft news’ stories to cover. There were more female journalists in The Daily Nation and The Standard. The People Daily had the least number of female journalists as authors of news articles on the referendum.

Figure 7:

![Gender of Author](image)

Gender Presence

Whereas in article 15 of the Code of Conduct (Sex Discrimination) women and men should be treated equally as news subjects and news sources. The vast majority of articles had men as the central news subjects and sources, with 81.9%; women were covered as central news subjects and sources at only 3.7%. This huge disparity in men and women as news subjects and sources clearly goes against the Code. However, this could be credited to the small number of female politicians’ role in the call for or against a referendum.
4. Findings TV

4.1 Scope of coverage

The total number of articles monitored was 18 with KTN airing 6 items, K24 5 and NTV 4 and Citizen TV airing 3.

Figure 1
4.2 Format

All news items at 100% were news reports.

4.3 Adherence to the Code of Conduct

Ping Pong Journalism

The most common breach of the Code of Conduct for the practice of Journalism was lack of balance in news items. In Most cases only one side of the story was told. For Instance K24 on 28.9.2014 aired two stories in a sequence that were related to each other and could have been merged to form a balanced story but instead they were separate. The first story that carried the headline ‘CORD referendum campaign’ focused on the CORD coalition campaigning for the referendum. The second story with the headline ‘Anti referendum campaign’ detailed a group of Jubilee coalition legislators speaking against the call for the referendum. These two stories could have been merged to present a balanced story.

On 28.9.14, NTV broadcast a story in which CORD leaders were campaigning for the Referendum in Kilifi in an Okoa Kenya rally in which CORD Principal Raila Odinga accused the Jubilee Government of graft/ethnic discrimination in state appointments. The government’s side of the story was not presented.
### 4.4 Gender representation

Article 16 of the Code of Conduct for the practice of Journalism calls on journalists to treat Women and men as equal news subjects and sources. The majority of published articles had men as central news subjects at 83%. Women were only covered as central news subjects together with men at 17%.

![Gender presence](chart.png)
4.5 Role of the media

The power of the news media to set a nation’s agenda to focus public attention on key public issues is an immense and well-documented influence. Not only do people acquire factual information about public affairs from the news media, readers and viewers also learn how much importance to attach to a topic on the basis of the emphasis placed on it in the news.

We all know that the media is assigned a special watchdog role in a democracy. This means that the independence of the media, freedom of speech and freedom of information is sacrosanct.

On the other hand, the media must provide education on important issues in the world. During the monitoring period, the agenda setting, watchdog and education role of the media were assessed.

61% of all stories broadcast had an education role, while 28% of stories had a watchdog role. 11% of the stories had an agenda setting role.

4.6 5 W’s and H

44% of all stories broadcast provided six answers to the 5W’s and H (Who, What, Why, When, where and How) where as 28%, 11% and 17% of the news reports only answered five, four and one of the questions respectively.
4.7 Number of sources

28% of all stories broadcast had three, four and five sources, while 11% of all stories had two sources. 6% of all stories had six sources.
4.8  Station, 5W’s and 1 H questions

All stories (100%) broadcast at Citizen TV had only one W question answered while 40% of stories aired on K24 had four W questions answered. 60% of stories on K24 had 5 of the W questions answered. 17% of all stories on KTN provided answers to only five of the questions while 83% provided answers to all six questions (Who?, What?, When?, where?, why?). On Ntv, 75% of stories broadcast provide answers to only three questions while 25% provided answers for 5 questions only.

Figure 8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source * Number w answers Cross tabulation</th>
<th>Number w answers</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CTV Count</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within Source</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K24 Count</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within Source</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>40.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KTN Count</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within Source</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NTV Count</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within Source</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Count</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within Source</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.9  Appendices

Figure 9
Figure 10

Bar Chart

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CTV</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K24</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KTN</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NTV</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Legend:
1. Red
2. Purple
3. Pink
Conclusions

• The referendum coverage was predominantly personality based and not issue driven.

• The most frequently covered sides were the Okoa Kenya campaigns – spearheaded by CORD leader Raila Odinga and the Jubilee Alliance comments/ campaigns against the referendum.

• Journalists practiced ping pong Journalism both on TV and in the print media. Reporting comments that were deemed unfavorable or portraying the opponent in bad light without giving them an opportunity to reply was characteristic of some of the coverage.

• A substantive number of articles, 55.5% were accompanied with pictures, especially of major rallies of (Okoa Kenya, and Pesa Mashinani initiative) this indicated prominence in the coverage of the Referendum.

• Political coverage is still male dominated.

• Most articles by the People Newspaper and The Daily Nation were angled on the agenda of ‘why we should not go to a referendum’. The paper was not providing reasons why it was not in support of the referendum calls. For example, an article in the Daily Nation on 1.10.2014, “I accuse the Church and the Press for ignoring one side of the audience.” The media is accused of bias coverage of the call for a referendum. The People Daily on 14.09.2014, Referendum is a waste of time, says Cardinal Njue. “

• Hate speech was not encountered as a significant breach of the code of conduct, only a few articles 0.7% contained ridicule or sarcasm.

Recommendations

• In compliance with the Code of Conduct, the press must provide a balanced and impartial coverage, which include a comprehensive coverage of the issues, well sourced reports based on sound and credible sources. This is to help educate and inform the public to make informed decisions on critical national matters.