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THE AGA KHAN UNIVERSITY

Graduate School of Media and Communications

**ONLINE AUDIENCE FEEDBACK AND MEDIA ACCOUNTABILITY
IN KENYA'S MAINSTREAM MEDIA**

By

ANNE ADHIAMBO OKUMU

535167

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of
Arts in Digital Journalism

Nairobi, Kenya

30/01/2020

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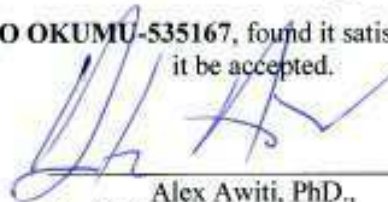
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APPROVAL PAGE


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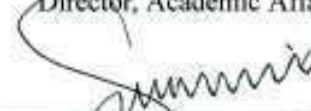
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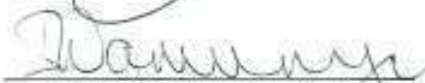
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DECLARATION

I, **ANNE ADHIAMBO OKUMU-535167**, declare that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university and that to the best of my knowledge it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference has been made in the text. The editorial assistance provided to me has in no way added to the substance of my thesis, which is the product of my own research endeavours.



Signature

30/01/2020

Date

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my loving mother Caroline Adhiambo Okech.

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I would like to express my sincerest gratitude to the Aga Khan University - GSMC faculty for the continuous support and motivation throughout this study and research. I would like to especially thank my supervisors Dr. Sam Kamau and Dr. Wambui Wamunyu whose guidance helped me in the time of research and writing of this thesis. The AKU Vice Provost East Africa and the Interim Dean of The Graduate School of Media and Communications Dr. Alex Awiti provided tremendous support in the completion of this study. My gratitude also goes out to Aga Khan University – GSMC’s Director of Academic Affairs, Dr. Nancy Booker for her support in the entire process of this course. I thank Mr. Hesbon Owilla, Mr. Augustine Gitonga and Mr. Henry Kibira for their help in making this thesis a success. I would also like to thank my colleagues at GSMC for being great fellows throughout this study, for all encouragement and support in the completion of this study. Thank you for being great motivators. A special thanks to my family, my mother Caroline Okech, and my siblings Ian Okumu and Josephine Grace and my niece Reign Cary for being my biggest support system throughout this study. Thank you for being there for me through to the finish line and always encouraging me. I could not have imagined having a better support system for my study.

ABSTRACT

This study sought to find out if online audience feedback in terms of engagement, correction and criticism of news stories produced by the media, leads to certain decisions by the media that amounts to accountability. The objectives of this study were; (a) to examine the nature of audience feedback to news stories in Kenya, (b) to determine how media responds to audience feedback on news stories, (c) to examine how the engagement, correction and criticism of news stories by online audiences leads to more accountability in the media, (d) to establish whether prompt reaction by online audience has led to a responsive media. Online audience behaviour was gauged through the active audience theory. The researcher conducted interviews with 15 respondents from five media houses, namely BBC Africa, Nation Media Group, Standard Group, Royal Media Services and Radio Africa. Content analysis was also done using stories extracted from online platforms of the media houses on the coverage of the NYS II Scandal for NMG, SG, Radio Africa Group and Royal Media Services and the night runners for BBC Africa. This study found out that online audience feedback has led to more accountability on the part of the media. Also, that the media takes issue with the nature of audience feedback. Media noted that feedback is mostly harmful to their characters personally and professionally. It is at times subjective, based on feelings and emotions rather than facts that could be used to improve on the profession. This study recommended the need for media literacy skills for the public which in turn will help improve how feedback is given to improve on calls for accountability. The study recommended further inquiry on the mental health of journalists in the wake of constant criticism, trolls and backlash on their personal and professional lives.

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ASNE:	American Society of News Editors
BBC:	British Broadcasting Corporation
CAJ:	Canadian Association of Journalists
CNN:	Cable News Network
IFJ:	International Federation of Journalists
KoT:	Kenyans on Twitter
KII:	Key Informant Interviews
MCK:	Media Council of Kenya
NMG:	Nation Media Group
RMS:	Royal Media Services
SG:	Standard Group