



THE AGA KHAN UNIVERSITY

eCommons@AKU

Theses & Dissertations

1-30-2020

Self-censorship and Journalism practice in mainstream media in Kenya

James Odhiambo Okong'o
Aga Khan University

Follow this and additional works at: https://ecommons.aku.edu/theses_dissertations



Part of the [Journalism Studies Commons](#), and the [Mass Communication Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Okong'o, J. O. (2020). *Self-censorship and Journalism practice in mainstream media in Kenya* (Unpublished master's dissertation). Aga Khan University, East Africa.

AGA KHAN UNIVERSITY

Graduate School of Media and Communications

**SELF-CENSORSHIP AND JOURNALISM PRACTICE IN MAINSTREAM
MEDIA IN KENYA**

By

JAMES ODHIAMBO OKONG'O

535172

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

Nairobi, Kenya

30/01/2020

© Copyright

COPYRIGHT

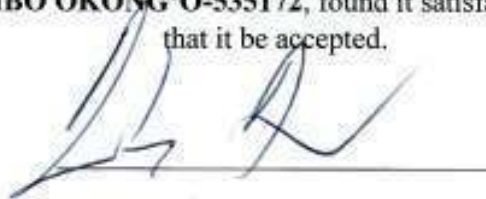
Copyright © 2020 James Odhiambo Okong'o

APPROVAL PAGE

The Aga Khan University
Graduate School of Media and Communication

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

Members of the Thesis Evaluation Committee appointed to examine the thesis of
JAMES ODHIAMBO OKONG'O-535172, found it satisfactory and recommended
that it be accepted.



Alex Awiti, PhD.,
Chair, Thesis Evaluation Committee

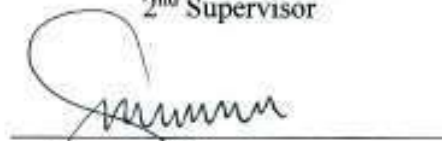


Nancy Booker, PhD.,
Director, Academic Affairs



Peter Kimani, PhD.,
1st Supervisor

James Oranga, PhD.,
2nd Supervisor



Sam Kamau, PhD.,
Member Thesis Evaluation Committee

30/01/2020

DECLARATION

I, **JAMES ODHIAMBO OKONG'O-535172**, declare that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgment 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 endeavors.

James O.

Signature

30/01/2020

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This work is a culmination of an intense period of study and research. It is a product of huge intellectual and professional support from several people for which I remain eternally grateful. Profound gratitude to the German Development Bank-KFW Scholarships and the Aga Khan University, without their support, this work would have not been possible. Special gratitude to my research supervisor's Dr. Peter Kimani and Dr. James Oranga for their invaluable scholarly advice, guidance, and encouragement towards the completion of my thesis. I also wish to thank my Thesis Committee members for their critical input. To all Aga Khan University Graduate School of Media and Communications management, staff, faculty members and my fellow students, I say a big thank you for your invaluable support and input during my study. Sincere gratitude to my journalist colleagues who generously gave vital input for this study and I hope that together we can build a much better media for Kenyans. Finally, special appreciation to my brother Ken for his unconditional support and to my fiancé Agatha for the constant encouragement throughout the process.

ABSTRACT

This study examines the relationship between self-censorship and the practice of journalism in Kenya's mainstream media by answering the following questions: What factors drive self-censorship in Kenya's media? What impact does self-censorship have on the practice of journalism? And are journalists willing to self-censor? The study also discusses the findings of different scholars on self-censorship in Africa and other continents. Kenya has one of the most robust and pluralistic media in Africa, however, it still faces challenges in achieving its full potential as a public watchdog. The findings of this study show that self-censorship is a serious threat to the practice of journalism, the practice is linked to the diminishing trust in the media as well as the declining consumption of news content. The study sheds light on the major factors that lead journalists to self-censor categorizing them into three broad components namely: Institutional (ownership and editorial policies), National (politics, economic and legal factors), and personal/cultural factors. Journalists are forced into self-censoring by power players who include media owners, advertisers, the government and politicians. The power players have made regulations meant to put journalists under control, those who dare not to obey are punished. Besides, media organizations need advertisement revenue for survival thus they accept whatever corporate organizations, the state, and politicians tell them to do in exchange for advertising money. This has led to media owners and managers forcing journalists to work under certain policies that influence them to censor themselves. As a result, journalists choose not to write against the interest of power players. They hide facts, leave out information they think will upset the power players and are not willing to work on sensitive stories which they cannot write truths about. The study adopted a mixed-methods research approach, the method provides a better chance to understand whether dishonorable journalistic practices, as well as the utilization of media organizations by several vested interests, are responsible for self-censorship among journalists. The study recommends that media organizations should focus on: production of quality news content, championing for the full implementation of Article 34 in Kenya's Constitution on press freedom and adhere to it, regulate media ownership, and align editorial policies to the journalistic principles.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

APPROVAL PAGE.....	iii
DECLARATION.....	iv
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	v
ABSTRACT.....	vi
LIST OF TABLES	x
LIST OF FIGURES	xi
ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS.....	xii
CHAPTER ONE.....	1
INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY	1
1.1 Introduction.....	1
1.2 Background of the Study	1
1.3 Problem Statement	7
1.4 Purpose of the Study.....	8
1.5 Objectives of the Study.....	8
1.6 Research Questions	8
1.7 The Rationale of the Study	9
1.8 Significance of the Study.....	9
1.9 Assumptions of the Study	10
1.10 Scope of the Study.....	10
1.11 Limitations of the Study	11
1.12 Definition of Terms	11
1.12.1 Self-censorship	11
1.12.2 Media.....	12
1.12.3 Journalist	12
1.12.4 Journalism	12
1.13 Summary.....	12
CHAPTER TWO.....	13
LITERATURE REVIEW	13
2.1 Introduction.....	13
2.2 Defining Media Self-Censorship.....	13
2.2.1 Philosophical Foundations of the Concept of Freedom of Expression.....	14
2.2.2 Historical Context of Media Censorship since the Pre-colonial Era	16
2.3 Theoretical Framework	25

2.3.1	Spiral of Silence.....	26
2.3.2	Propaganda Model	27
2.3.3	The Gatekeeping Theory	30
2.4	Emerging Gaps in the Review of Literature Based on the Study’s Objectives	32
2.5	Empirical Literature Review	35
2.6	Summary	36
CHAPTER THREE		38
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY		38
3.1	Introduction.....	38
3.2	Research Approach.....	38
3.3	Research Design.....	39
3.4	Study Site.....	39
3.5	Population	39
3.5.1	Target Population.....	40
3.5.2	Sample Size	40
3.5.3	Sampling Techniques and Procedures	42
3.6	Types of Data	42
3.7	Data Collection Instruments	42
3.8	Data Collection Procedures.....	43
3.9	Data Analysis	44
3.10	Data Presentation Methods	44
3.11	Ethical Considerations	45
3.12	Summary	46
CHAPTER FOUR		47
DATA ANALYSIS, PRESENTATION AND INTERPRETATION.....		47
4.1	Introduction.....	47
4.2	Response Rate.....	47
4.3	Data Analysis	47
4.4	Questionnaire (Survey) Findings	48
4.4.1	Demographics of Respondents	48
4.4.2	Perceptions of Journalism Roles.....	52
4.4.3	Willingness to Self-censor among Kenyan Journalists.....	57
4.4.4	Respondents Perception of Ethical and Unethical Journalistic Practices ..	59
4.4.5	Perceptions of Factors that Influence Self-censorship.....	60
4.5	Key Informant Interview Findings.....	65
4.5.1	Views on Self-censorship from the Key Informant Interviews.....	65
4.5.2	Factors that Contribute to Self-censorship in Kenyan Newsrooms.....	69

4.6 Summary.....	83
CHAPTER FIVE.....	84
DISCUSSIONS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	84
5.1 Introduction.....	84
5.2 Discussions of the Key Findings.....	84
5.3 Conclusion.....	87
5.4 Recommendations.....	89
5.5 Suggestions for Future Research.....	91
5.6 How does this Study Contribute to Knowledge.....	92
REFERENCES.....	93
APPENDICES.....	97
Appendix A Online Questionnaire.....	97
Appendix B Interview Guide.....	102
Appendix C AKU Ethics Review Committee Approval Letter.....	103
Appendix D Introductory Letter from AKU.....	104
Appendix E NACOSTI Research Licence.....	105

LIST OF TABLES

<i>Table 1: Showing the number of accredited journalists in six mainstream newsrooms in Kenya</i>	40
<i>Table 2: Shows the sample number of journalists for the survey from the six selected newsrooms</i>	41
<i>Table 3: Shows the stratification of respondents by category</i>	41
<i>Table 4: Shows the distribution of stratified respondents per newsroom</i>	42
<i>Table 5: Shows Educational Qualification of Respondents</i>	51
<i>Table 6: Responses to the Question on Monitoring and Scrutinizing of Corporate organizations</i>	54
<i>Table 7: Shows responses to the question on the use of media for monitoring and scrutinizing government and state officials</i>	55
<i>Table 8: Shows responses to the use of media for setting the political agenda</i>	55
<i>Table 9: Shows response on media as a channel for advocating social change</i>	56
<i>Table 10: Shows response on the use of media to champion government policies</i>	56
<i>Table 11: Use of media to provide information that influences people to make the right political choices</i>	57
<i>Table 12: Shows responses to question 25 above</i>	59

LIST OF FIGURES

<i>Figure 1: Shows respondents job designations.....</i>	<i>48</i>
<i>Figure 2: Shows the gender of survey respondents.....</i>	<i>49</i>
<i>Figure 3: Shows the age bracket in (Years) of the survey respondents</i>	<i>50</i>
<i>Figure 4: Shows newsroom affiliation of the respondents</i>	<i>51</i>
<i>Figure 5: Shows respondents years of newsroom experience</i>	<i>52</i>
<i>Figure 6: Responses on the question of journalists “reporting things as they are”</i>	<i>53</i>
<i>Figure 7: Shows responses to the question of monitoring and scrutinizing of politicians.....</i>	<i>54</i>
<i>Figure 8: Shows responses to question 24 above.....</i>	<i>58</i>
<i>Figure 9: Summarized responses to the question on audience feedback</i>	<i>61</i>

ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

CA:	Communications Authority
CPJ:	Committee to Protect Journalists
CJR:	Columbia Journalism Review
GAA:	Government Advertising Agency
HRW:	Human Rights Watch
ICC:	International Criminal Court
KADU:	Kenya African Democratic Union
KANU:	Kenya African National Union
KCA:	Kenya Central Association
KICA:	Kenya Information and Communications Act
KII:	Key Informant Interview
KNA:	Kenya News Agency
KTN:	Kenya Television Network
MCK:	Media Council of Kenya
MRC:	Mombasa Republican Council
NARC:	National Alliance Rainbow Coalition
NMG:	Nation Media Group
ODM:	Orange Democratic Movement
PEV:	Post Elections Violence
PNU:	Party of National Unity
PPU:	Presidential Press Unit
RMS:	Royal Media Services
RWB:	Reporters Without Borders
RQ1:	Research Question One
RQ2:	Research Question Two
RQ3:	Research Question Three
SG:	Standard Group
UDHR:	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UN:	United Nations
VPPU:	Vice President Press Unit