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**THE AGA KHAN UNIVERSITY**

Graduate School of Media and Communications

**ONLINE AUDIENCE AS GATEKEEPERS: THE INFLUENCE OF WEB  
ANALYTICS ON CONTENT SELECTION IN KENYA'S TOP FIVE NEWS  
WEBSITES**

By

**JOEL MULONZI MUINDE**

**535160**

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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APPROVAL PAGE

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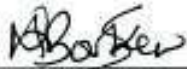
A research thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts in Digital Journalism

Members of the Thesis Evaluation Committee appointed to examine the thesis of,  
**JOEL MULONZI MUINDE-535160**, found it satisfactory and recommended that it  
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30/01/2020

## DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my dear wife, Martha Kivindu, and our two sons Scott Muinde Mulonzi and Jamie Kivindu Mulonzi.

## ABSTRACT

This study examined the adoption of web analytics by Kenya's top five news websites as ranked by Alexa.com on how online audiences impact news selection by online editors. The study was guided by four research objectives: (i) to determine to what extent web analytics monitoring are done by editorial teams, (ii) to establish factors driving the use of web analytics and what tools used, (iii) to establish how use of web analytics contributes to editorial decisions, and (iv) to identify the relationship between the use of web analytics and business decisions in newsrooms. The study was guided by two theories: Uses and Gratification and technological determinism. The study adopted concurrent research design and a mixed-methods research approach. Questionnaires and interview guides were used as data generation tools. The researcher adopted census survey and Key Informant Interviews as research methods. The sample size of the study was 43 respondents. This was achieved through stratified and purposive sampling techniques. The quantitative data was analyzed using SPSS (Version 25) and presented in form of pie charts and graphs while qualitative data was analyzed thematically. The study found that all top five websites in Kenya have appropriated several web analytics. They use them for content planning, newsgathering, gauging popularity of content, news placement, re-tweaking headlines, altering content placement, re-tweaking content and appeasing advertisers for commercial gain. Further, the study found that online newsrooms are nearly obsessed with monitoring web analytics but are consciously careful of letting that addiction and over-reliance change their functionalist role of informing, educating, persuading and entertaining audiences by turning them into online audience pleasers. The study concluded that online editors have wielded part of their gatekeeping role to audiences through the use of web analytics signaling a cultural change in newsroom practice. The researcher recommends that online newsrooms set clear editorial policies to ensure that the use of web analytics does not lead to the abandonment of the cardinal role of journalism, to be a watchdog that works for public interest and common good.

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACROYNMS

<b>CA:</b>	Communications Authority of Kenya
<b>MCK:</b>	Media Council of Kenya
<b>NMG:</b>	Nation Media Group
<b>SPSS:</b>	Statistical Package for Social Sciences
<b>TV:</b>	Television
<b>U&amp;G:</b>	Uses and Gratification Theory

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## DECLARATION

I, **JOEL MULONZI MUINDE-535160**, declare 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.

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(Signature of candidate)

30/01/2020

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Date

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