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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

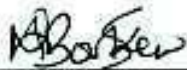
The Aga Khan University
Graduate School of Media and Communications

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
be accepted.



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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

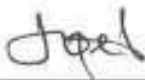
CA:	Communications Authority of Kenya
MCK:	Media Council of Kenya
NMG:	Nation Media Group
SPSS:	Statistical Package for Social Sciences
TV:	Television
U&G:	Uses and Gratification Theory

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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.



(Signature of candidate)

30/01/2020

Date

TABLE OF CONTENTS

COPYRIGHT.....	ii
APPROVAL PAGE.....	iii
DEDICATION.....	iv
ABSTRACT.....	v
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACROYNMS	vi
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	vii
DECLARATION	viii
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	ix
LIST OF FIGURES	xii
CHAPTER ONE	1
INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY	1
1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 Background to the Study.....	1
1.3 Problem Statement	5
1.4 Research Objectives	7
1.4.1 General research objective.....	7
1.4.2 Specific research objectives.....	7
1.4.3 Research questions.....	7
1.5 Scope of the Study.....	7
1.6 Limitations of the Study	8
1.7 Delimitation of the Study	8
1.8 Justification of your Study	8
1.9 Significance of your Study.....	9
1.10 Operational Definition of Terms	9
1.11 Summary	10
CHAPTER TWO	11
LITERATURE REVIEW	11
2.1 Introduction	11
2.2 History of Analytics	11
2.3 Gatekeeping.....	14
2.4 Adoption of Web Metrics in Online Newsrooms.....	16
2.5 The Role of Audience Preferences in News Selection.....	20
2.6 Theoretical Framework	22
2.6.1 Uses and Gratification Theory.....	22

2.6.2 Technological determinism theory.	24
2.6.3 Relevance of technological determinism in the study.	25
2.7 Summary	26
CHAPTER THREE	27
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	27
3.1 Introduction	27
3.2 Research Approach	27
3.3 Research Design	28
3.4 Target Population	29
3.5 Sample Size	29
3.5.1 Sampling techniques and procedures.....	29
3.6 Data Collection Instruments and Procedures	30
3.7 Data analysis and presentation	31
3.7.1 Quantitative and qualitative data analysis.	31
3.8 Ethical Considerations.....	32
3.9 Summary	33
CHAPTER FOUR.....	34
DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION	34
4.1 Introduction	34
4.2 Response Rate	34
4.3 Profile of the Respondents	34
4.4 Further Evaluation of Findings	37
4.4.1 Analysis of Objective 1	37
4.4.2 Analysis of Objective 2	40
4.4.3 Analysis of Objective 3	44
4.4.4 Analysis of Objective 4	47
4.5 Summary	49
CHAPTER FIVE	50
DISCUSSIONS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	50
5.1 Introduction	50
5.2 Discussion of Key Findings	50
5.2.1 Extent of web monitoring done by editorial teams.....	50
5.2.2 Factors driving utilisation of web analytics and tools used.....	52
5.2.3 How web analytics contribute to editorial decisions in Kenya’s top five websites.....	54

5.2.4 Relationship between web analytics and business decisions.....	57
5.3 Conclusion.....	58
5.4 Recommendations	60
5.5 Suggestions for Further Research	61
REFERENCES	62
APPENDICES	66
APPENDIX A: Data Collection Tools.....	66
APPENDIX B: Interview Schedule	72
APPENDIX C: AKU Ethics Review Committee Approval Letter	73
APPENDIX D: Nacosti Research License.....	74

LIST OF FIGURES

<i>Figure 1: Gender of the Respondents</i>	35
<i>Figure 2: Age of Respondents</i>	36
<i>Figure 3: Education Level of the Respondents</i>	36
<i>Figure 4: Years Worked as an Online News Editor/Sub-Editor</i>	37
<i>Figure 5: How Often Respondents Monitor Analytics of their Websites?</i>	38
<i>Figure 6: If you Monitor Web Analytics Daily, How Many Times a Day?</i>	39
<i>Figure 7: Why do you Monitor Web Traffic?</i>	41
<i>Figure 8: What Tools do you use to Monitor Web Traffic?</i>	42
<i>Figure 9: Do you monitor more than one form of web analytics?</i>	42
<i>Figure 10: What is your Likelihood of Publishing a News Article if:</i>	44
<i>Figure 11: What Editorial Adjustments are you likely to make on an Online News Article based on Data from Web Analytics?</i>	45
<i>Figure 12: Getting high page views and /or engagement is important because more readers mean high revenues</i>	47