



THE AGA KHAN UNIVERSITY

eCommons@AKU

---

Theses & Dissertations

---

1-30-2020

## Coverage of the Big Four Agenda in the Daily Nation and The Standard newspapers in Kenya

John Kuru Ngirachu  
*Aga Khan University*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://ecommons.aku.edu/theses\\_dissertations](https://ecommons.aku.edu/theses_dissertations)



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

---

### Recommended Citation

Ngirachu, J. K. (2020). *Coverage of the Big Four Agenda in the Daily Nation and The Standard newspapers in Kenya* (Unpublished master's dissertation). Aga Khan University, East Africa.

**THE AGA KHAN UNIVERSITY**

Graduate School of Media and Communications

**COVERAGE OF *THE BIG FOUR AGENDA* IN THE DAILY NATION AND  
THE STANDARD NEWSPAPERS IN KENYA**

By

**JOHN KURU NGIRACHU  
535179**

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

Nairobi, Kenya

30/01/2020

© Copyright

COPYRIGHT

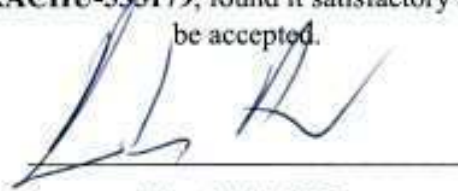
Copyright © 2020 John Kuru Ngirachu

APPROVAL PAGE

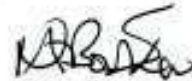
The Aga Khan University  
Graduate School of Media and Communications

A 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 **JOHN KURU NGIRACHU-535179**, found it satisfactory and recommended that it be accepted.



Alex Awiti, PhD.,  
Chair, Thesis Evaluation Committee



Nancy Booker, PhD.,  
Director, Academic Affairs

James Oranga, PhD.,  
1st Supervisor

Erneo Nyakundi Nyamboga, PhD.,  
2nd Supervisor



Peter Kimani, PhD.,  
Member, Thesis Evaluation Committee

30/01/2020

## DECLARATION

I, **JOHN KURU NGIRACHU-535179**, 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

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis is the culmination of more than one year of intense intellectual work that would not have been possible without the academic, moral and material support of a bunch of people. I owe a huge debt of gratitude to the Graduate School of Media and Communications at the Aga Khan University for taking me among the first cohort of the Master of Arts in Digital Journalism, and especially for the material support in the form of a scholarship. I must thank Prof. Rhonda Breit, Dr. Sam Kamau and Dr. Nancy Booker. I appreciate especially the colleagues who lent me great support in the course of negotiating the course and as we guided each other, sometimes with very little light, through the maze that has ended here. Mary Kulundu, Kenfrey Kiberenge, Joan Njaro and James Okong'o were especially useful, as sounding boards, as sympathetic ears and as strong shoulders to lean on. I must also thank Maryann Wanja and Alphonse Shiundu for their support throughout the journey. Special appreciation to my wife Murugi and our boys for the moral support, and space, peace and quiet, as I labored through the stages in the making of this thesis. Additional gratitude to my supervisors, Dr. James Oranga and Dr. Erneo Nyakundi Nyamboga, for their guidance, patience and encouragement throughout the journey, and for pushing me to do better always. My colleagues at Oxygène MCL were also helpful and supportive and deserve a special mention for their support and encouragement, and for understanding and filling in for me whenever I needed more than a few hours to work on this task.

## ABSTRACT

This thesis set out to study the coverage of the Kenyan government's Big Four Agenda by Kenyan newspapers between December 1, 2017 and December 31, 2018. The Big Four Agenda was introduced to Kenyans on December 12, 2017, Independence Day, by President Uhuru Kenyatta. He framed the Big Four Agenda as the most important policy of his second term and had specific objectives to be met by 2022: to construct 500,000 affordable houses, to increase the contribution of manufacturing to the Gross Domestic Product, food security for all, and Universal Health Coverage. This thesis was provoked by a study by Infotrak Research, published by The Star on December 18, 2018, which established that 53 per cent of Kenyans did not know about the Big Four Agenda. This lack of awareness was considered worthy of research considering the central role of the media in informing society about the government's policies. The media also provides spaces for interrogating the policy, and this has been the case with the Kenyan media. Newspaper coverage was selected for research because newspapers are ubiquitous in Kenya and also play an intermedia agenda-setting role. The research set out to establish the frequency of newspaper coverage, the dominant sources, the placement of articles on the Big Four Agenda, the dominant issues as well as the factors that influenced coverage. A mixed method was used to approach the research and content analysis used as the research method. Data was generated using document review of the Daily Nation and The Standard and interviews with journalists from the two newspapers. The research established that while journalists were eager to provide coverage of the Big Four Agenda, there was inadequate comprehensive information on the policy, government officials often avoided going into details on it, and the topics were considered complicated and therefore were denied publication in the prime pages. The thesis therefore concluded that the media was enthusiastic to cover the Big Four Agenda but was frustrated by a lack of information. All these factors resulted in a majority of Kenyans lacking awareness about the government's key objectives. The thesis recommended that media houses develop policies and templates for reporting on development policies, that the government develop communication plans for disseminating information about its development policies. This study should benefit the media in Kenya as well as the government and policymakers.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

APPROVAL PAGE .....	iii
DECLARATION .....	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	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 Print Media in Kenya .....	3
1.4 The Media and the Big Four Agenda .....	5
1.5 Statement of the Problem .....	7
1.6 Research Objectives .....	9
1.6.1 General Objective .....	9
1.6.2 Specific Objectives .....	9
1.7 Research Questions .....	10
1.8 Scope and Limitations of the Study .....	10
1.9 Significance of the Study .....	11
1.10 Definition of Terms and Concepts .....	12
1.11 Summary .....	13
CHAPTER TWO .....	14
LITERATURE REVIEW .....	14
2.1 Introduction .....	14
2.2 A Brief History of Development Policy in Kenya .....	14
2.3 Media and Government Policy.....	17
2.4 Coverage of Government Policy by the Kenyan Media.....	19
2.5 Theoretical Framework .....	24
2.5.1 The Agenda-Setting Theory .....	24
2.5.2 The Agenda Building Theory .....	26
2.5.3 Priming Theory.....	27



2.5.4 The Hierarchy of Influences Model.....	28
2.6 Summary .....	30
CHAPTER THREE .....	31
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY.....	31
3.1 Introduction .....	31
3.2 Research Approach and Research Design.....	31
3.3 Site Selection and Description .....	32
3.4 Techniques of Data Collection.....	33
3.4.1 Target Population.....	33
3.4.2 Unit of Analysis.....	34
3.4.3 Sampling Procedure or Sampling Design.....	34
3.4.4 Data Collection Techniques.....	35
3.5 Techniques of Data Processing and Analysis .....	36
3.5.1 Types of Data.....	36
3.5.2 Data Processing Procedures.....	37
3.5.3 Data Presentation Methods .....	38
3.5.4 Data Analysis.....	39
3.6 Ethical Considerations.....	40
3.7 Summary .....	41
CHAPTER FOUR.....	42
DATA ANALYSIS, PRESENTATION AND INTERPRETATION .....	42
4.1 Introduction .....	42
4.2 Analysis, Presentation and Interpretation.....	42
4.3 Summary of Findings .....	56
4.4 Summary .....	59
CHAPTER FIVE .....	60
DISCUSSIONS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	60
5.1 Introduction .....	60
5.2 Discussions of Key Findings.....	60
5.2.1 Objective one .....	60
5.2.2 Objective Two .....	61
5.2.3 Objective Three .....	62
5.2.4 Objective Four .....	63
5.2.5 Objective Five.....	64
5.3 Conclusion.....	65

5.4 Recommendations .....	66
5.5 Areas for further research.....	67
REFERENCES .....	69
APPENDICES .....	73
Appendix A Document Review Guide .....	73
Appendix B Interview Guides .....	75
Appendix C Analysis Of Responses To Interview Questions .....	76
Appendix D AKU Ethics Review Committee Approval Letter.....	77
Appendix E Introductory Letter from AKU .....	78
Appendix F NACOSTI Research License .....	79

## LIST OF TABLES

<i>Table 1: Prime placement, page leads and the use of photos.....</i>	<i>47</i>
<i>Table 2: Dominant issues in the coverage of the Big Four Agenda .....</i>	<i>49</i>
<i>Table 3: Sources of information on the Big Four Agenda.....</i>	<i>51</i>

## LIST OF FIGURES

<i>Figure 1: A comparison of the number of Big Four Agenda stories in The Standard and The Nation between December 2017 and December 2018</i> .....	43
<i>Figure 2: Frequency in Daily Nation by objective</i> .....	45
<i>Figure 3: Frequency in The Standard by objective</i> .....	46
<i>Figure 4: Issues covered in Big Four Agenda articles</i> .....	50

## ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

<b>BBC:</b>	British Broadcasting Corporation
<b>ICT:</b>	Information Communication Technology
<b>IMF:</b>	International Monetary Fund
<b>KARF:</b>	Kenya Audience Research Foundation
<b>MCK:</b>	Media Council of Kenya
<b>NHIF:</b>	National Health Insurance Fund