



THE AGA KHAN UNIVERSITY

eCommons@AKU

---

Theses & Dissertations

---

1-30-2020

## A changing profession: examining newsroom roles and skills in the digital age

Kenfrey Mwenda Kiberenge  
*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

Kiberenge, K. M. (2020). *A changing profession: examining newsroom roles and skills in the digital age* (Unpublished master's dissertation). Aga Khan University, East Africa.

**THE AGA KHAN UNIVERSITY**

Graduate School of Media and Communications

**A CHANGING PROFESSION: EXAMINING NEWSROOM ROLES AND SKILLS IN  
THE DIGITAL AGE**

By

**KENFREY MWENDA KIBERENGE  
535175**

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

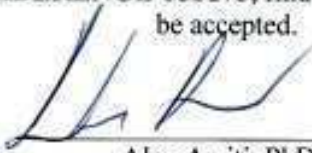
Copyright © 2020 Kenfrey Mwenda Kiberenge

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  
**KENFREY MWENDA KIBERENGE-535175**, find it satisfactory and recommended that it  
be accepted.




---

Alex Awiti, PhD.,  
Chair, Thesis Evaluation Committee



---

Nancy Booker, PhD.,  
Director, Academic Affairs




---

Nancy Booker, PhD.,  
1<sup>st</sup> supervisor

---

Joy Mueni, PhD.,  
2<sup>nd</sup> supervisor



---

Peter Kimani, PhD.,  
Member, Thesis Evaluation Committee

30/01/2020

## DECLARATION

I, **KENFREY MWENDA KIBERENGE-535175**, 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

30/01/2020

---

Date

## DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my wife Catherine, my son Leo, my dad John and mum Nicera for their support and encouragement.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First of all, I am grateful to my supervisors Dr. Nancy Booker and Dr. Joy Mueni, whose scholarly advice, help and constant encouragement have contributed significantly to the completion of this study. Dr. Sam Kamau also helped immensely with the conception and firming up of the research topic; for that I'm grateful. I am grateful for the cooperation of all the participants who offered their insights on the topic without which the study would not have been a success. I also wish to thank the Thesis Committee members for their critical input for my study. I also wish to thank the management led by the interim dean of students Dr. Alex Awiti, staff, faculty members, and my fellow students at the Aga Khan University Graduate School of Media and Communications (AKU-GSMC) for their invaluable input and for being a great source of support to me during my study. I am appreciative of the services of Hesbon Owila, Kimweli Wambua and Henry Kibira who went out of their way to ensure that this project was a success. My gratitude to the library staff and the entire GSMC faculty and staff as well as for their support. I thank Augustine Gitonga, the campus librarian at GSMC for his unwavering support and quick responses during the entire research process.

## ABSTRACT

This study examined how journalists can survive in the newsrooms in Kenya in the digital age. The study was guided by four research questions: (1) What are the emergent newsroom roles in the digital age? (2) What retooling and reskilling do media workers need to survive in the digital age? (3) How do journalists acquire the new skills? (4) What role has digital disruption played in the reorganisation of newsrooms? The study used two theoretical frameworks: The theory of disruptive innovations and de-professionalisation lens. The researcher conducted face to face in-depth interviews with eight journalists from four media houses namely: British Broadcasting Corporation (Nairobi office), Nation Media Group, Standard Group Ltd and Royal Media Services as well as two key informants. All the respondents were purposively selected. The study found out that digital disruption has created new roles in the Kenyan newsrooms which have been taken up by both journalists and non-journalists and that the disruption has necessitated reskilling and retooling of journalists and those who fail to adapt are eventually forced out of the newsrooms. The study also found out that most journalists are learning new skills on their own with media houses and media schools playing a peripheral role. This despite the fact that, as the study found out, the roles of ensuring journalists acquire new skills rest with individual journalists, media houses and Journalism Schools. Finally, the study found out that disruption has happened before in Kenyan media but digital disruption is different. While media houses have adapted well to past disruptions, this time around, digital disruption has not only forced some media houses to close down due to dwindling fortunes but has ended newsroom careers of many journalists. The study concluded that while most journalists are playing their part in responding to digital disruption, media houses and journalism schools are lagging behind. If this trend continues, it will keep hurting journalism more. The study recommends that media houses organise regular formal training for their journalists. Journalism schools should also update their training manuals to ensure their graduate transition seamlessly into the newsrooms. Media executives and administrators of journalism schools should also communicate regularly to ensure each side understands the needs of the other.



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

COPYRIGHT.....	ii
APPROVAL PAGE.....	iii
DECLARATION.....	iv
DEDICATION.....	v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	vi
ABSTRACT.....	vii
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	viii
LIST OF TABLES.....	xi
LIST OF FIGURES.....	xii
ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS.....	xiii
CHAPTER ONE.....	1
INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY.....	1
1.1 Introduction.....	1
1.2 Background of the Study.....	1
1.2.1 Changing Professional Identities.....	6
1.3 Problem Statement.....	8
1.4 Research Objectives.....	9
1.4.1 General Objective.....	9
1.4.2 Research Questions.....	9
1.5 Rationale of the Study.....	9
1.6 Scope of the Study.....	10
1.7 Limitations of the Study.....	11
1.8 Operational Definition of Key Terms.....	11
1.9. Summary.....	12
CHAPTER TWO.....	13
LITERATURE REVIEW.....	13
2.1 Introduction.....	13
2.2 Digitisation and Journalism.....	13
2.3 Empirical Literature Review.....	14
2.3.1 Roles in the Newsroom Today.....	14
2.4 Kenyan Newsrooms.....	18
2.5 Existing Research on Kenya.....	20

2.6 Theoretical Framework .....	21
2.6.1 Disruptive Innovation Theory.....	21
2.6.2 How Other Scholars Have Applied Disruptive Innovation Theory .....	22
2.6.3 Application of Disruptive Innovation Theory in this Study .....	23
2.6.4 Critique of Disruptive Innovation Theory .....	25
2.6.5 De-professionalisation Lens .....	26
2.6.6 Journalism: A Craft or Profession? .....	28
2.6.7 How other scholars have used de-professionalisation lens .....	29
2.6.8 Application of De-Professionalisation in this Study .....	30
2.7 Summary.....	31
CHAPTER THREE .....	32
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY .....	32
3.1 Introduction.....	32
3.2 Research Approach and Research Design .....	32
3.2.1 Research Approach .....	32
3.2.2 Research Design.....	33
3.3 Site Selection and Description.....	34
3.4 Techniques of Data Collection .....	34
3.4.1 Target Population.....	34
3.4.2 Procedure for Respondent Selection .....	35
3.4.3 Data Collection/Generation Techniques.....	37
3.5 Techniques of Data Processing and Analysis .....	38
3.5.1 Data Processing Procedures.....	38
3.6 Ethical Considerations.....	39
3.7 Summary.....	40
CHAPTER FOUR .....	41
DATA ANALYSIS, PRESENTATION AND INTERPRETATION.....	41
4.1 Introduction.....	41
4.2 Respondents Overview.....	41
4.3 Data Analysis .....	42
4.4 Findings .....	42
4.4.1 New Roles .....	42

4.4.2 Retooling and Reskilling.....	47
4.4.3 How Newsroom Staff Acquire New Skills .....	52
4.4.4 Newsroom Reorganisation.....	54
4.5 Summary.....	57
CHAPTER FIVE.....	59
DISCUSSIONS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	59
5.1 Introduction.....	59
5.2 Discussion of Key Findings.....	59
5.2.1 Emergent Newsroom Roles in the Digital Age .....	59
5.2.2 Retooling and Reskilling Needed for Survival in the Digital Age .....	64
5.2.3 Training.....	67
5.2.4 Newsroom Shake-Up.....	70
5.3 Conclusions.....	73
5.4 Recommendations .....	74
5.5 Areas of Further Research .....	75
REFERENCES.....	77
APPENDICES.....	82
Appendix A Screening Questionnaire for Journalists .....	82
Appendix B Interview Guide for Journalists .....	83
Appendix C Screening Questionnaire for Staff Performing Non-Traditional Roles .....	85
Appendix D Interview Guide for Workers Performing Non-Traditional Roles .....	86
Appendix E Interview Guide for KIIs.....	87
Appendix F Observation Tool for NMG Case .....	89
Appendix G Document Review Guide for Job Advertisements .....	91
Appendix H Profile of a Modern Journalist.....	92
Appendix I Informed Consent Form (ICF) .....	93
Appendix J Introductory Letter from AKU .....	95
Appendix K AKU Ethics Review Committee Approval Letter.....	96
Appendix L NACOSTI Research Licence .....	97

## LIST OF TABLES

<i>Table 1: Number of accredited journalists in four newsrooms in Kenya in 2019 .....</i>	<i>35</i>
<i>Table 2: Number of respondents from the four newsrooms.....</i>	<i>37</i>
<i>Table 3: Number of key informants.....</i>	<i>37</i>

## LIST OF FIGURES

<i>Figure 1: Screens with analytics at the media house under observation.</i> .....	49
<i>Figure 2: An editor checks web analytics at the media house under observation.</i> .....	50
<i>Figure 3: Sitting arrangement at the media house under observation.</i> .....	55
<i>Figure 4: NMG turnover and profit before tax between 2014 - 2018.</i> .....	71
<i>Figure 5: SG turnover and profit before tax between 2014 - 2018.</i> .....	73

## ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

**AKU-GSMC:** Aga Khan University Graduate School of Media and Communications

**BBC:** British Broadcasting Corporation

**CMS:** Content Management System

**ISP:** Internet Service Provider

**KII:** Key Informant Interview

**MCK:** Media Council of Kenya

**MML:** Mediamax Limited

**NMG:** Nation Media Group

**NYT:** New York Times

**RAL:** Radio Africa Limited

**RMS:** Royal Media Services

**SG:** Standard Group