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**THE AGA KHAN UNIVERSITY**  
**Graduate School of Media and Communications**

**HOW THE SOCIAL MEDIA PHENOMENA OF PUBLISHING PRIVATE AND  
PERSONAL INFORMATION ABOUT PROMINENT PUBLIC FIGURES IS  
INFLUENCING ETHICAL DECISION MAKING BY LEGACY MEDIA  
EDITORS**

By

Evelyne Nyakiega Kahungu  
553323

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

Nairobi, Kenya

11/02/2022

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APPROVAL PAGE

The Aga Khan University  
Graduate School of Media and Communications

A thesis is 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  
EVELYN NYAKIEGA KAHUNGU-553323, find it satisfactory and recommended that  
it be accepted.

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## DECLARATION

### **HOW THE SOCIAL MEDIA PHENOMENA OF PUBLISHING PRIVATE AND PERSONAL INFORMATION ABOUT PROMINENT PUBLIC FIGURES IS INFLUENCING ETHICAL DECISION MAKING BY LEGACY MEDIA EDITORS**

I, **EVELYN NYAKIEGA KAHUNGU-553323**, declare that this thesis is a product of my research endeavours. It does not incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university and 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.

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Signature

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Date

## DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my beloved husband George Kihara and our children Suki, Zane, and Emi.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The attainment of this degree would not have been possible without the assistance and dedication of many. First, all gratitude's to the Almighty God for giving me good health throughout the period of the research. Second, I am forever indebted to my supervisors Dr Erneo Nyakundi and Dr. Njoki Chege for their guidance and encouragement. Their insights have made the process much easier. Dr Nyakundi's own interest in Media Ethics and law inspired this effort. I appreciate the speed at which they both responded to all drafts that have shaped this study. Equally, I would like to express my gratitude to my research study instructor Hesbon Owilla for always being of assistance to me whenever I needed academic guidance and support during the whole exercise. Accept my gratitude for your dedication, tireless efforts, positive suggestions, and interest that made this study successful. Appreciation to my husband and children, mum and dad, sisters, and brother as well as friends for being so caring even when I could not spend quality family time with them. Finally, I would like to thank all my lecturers at the Graduate School of Media and Communication, Aga Khan University for shaping my thoughts. May God bless you all.

## ABSTRACT

The social media revolution continues to impact legacy media's ethical decision-making protocols, especially when dealing with private and personal information of public figures published on these platforms by non-legacy media actors. The objectives of this study were: to examine the ethical dilemmas that legacy media editors are confronted with when private and confidential information of public figures is reported by non-legacy media content producers; to determine what considerations legacy media journalists make before publishing that information on their platforms; to assess the ethical decision-making protocols that legacy media editors in Kenya follow when dealing with the private information of public figures published online; and to find out how the social media phenomena is impacting the decisions that legacy media editors make in the coverage of public figures' private and confidential information. The study was anchored on the gatekeeping theory, theory of networked gatekeeping and the theory of social responsibility. A qualitative research approach and the exploratory research design were employed to investigate social media phenomena and public interest journalism in the coverage of public figures in Kenya. The target population for this study were senior editors purposively selected from three news media organizations; Royal Media Services, Nation Media Group, Radio Africa Group that had a national audience reach, and broadcast or published across three platforms (radio, print, digital, Television). The researcher conducted in-depth interviews with senior editors and veteran news editors as key informants. Collected data was analysed thematically. The study established that social media plays a key role in influencing editorial decisions among legacy media editors, it is also a crucial source of information. The study established that legacy media editors often face ethical dilemmas, make ethical considerations, and follow editorial protocols before publishing private and confidential information touching on private officials that have already been published on social media. The research identified six factors that guide editors when making decisions to public such content as editorial guidelines, professional code of conduct, law, news verification and newsworthiness. The study concludes that social media will continue to influence editorial decisions made by legacy media editors. Legacy media houses need to have updated editorial inhouse policies and effective legal offices to help editors in making the decisions.



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