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THE AGA KHAN UNIVERSITY

Graduate School of Media and Communications

**DIGITAL NATIVE MEDIA: GROWING ONLINE AUDIENCES AND
CHALLENGES OF MONETIZATION**

By

Martin Wachira Njoroge
553310

A thesis 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 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
MARTIN WACHIRA NJOROGI-553310, find it satisfactory and recommended that it
be accepted.

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11/02/2022

DECLARATION

DIGITAL NATIVE MEDIA: GROWING ONLINE AUDIENCES AND CHALLENGES OF MONETIZATION

I, **MARTIN WACHIRA NJOROGE-553310**, 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 research endeavours.

Signature

Date

DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my parents my Mum Agnes, friends, and colleagues.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Prof. Nancy Booker, Hesbon Owilla, Mary Ndulili, and Charles Mwaniki. They have played a key role in helping me complete my thesis project. I would like to thank Kimweli Wambua who assisted in the proofreading and editing of my paper. I am grateful to my mother Agnes Ngina for the immeasurable support and prayers during this journey.

ABSTRACT

Digital native media platforms have grown and amassed massive audiences and readership online. Despite the audience growth, they have been experiencing challenges in monetizing and generating revenues. The objectives of the study were: (a) to establish monetization opportunities for digital native media houses, given their growing online audience numbers, (b) to determine strategies deployed by digital native media to help them monetize online content given the high numbers on the digital platforms, and (c) to establish challenges digital native media are facing in leveraging the online audiences and monetizing the content. The study adopted a qualitative research approach and employed multiple case study design. The study was anchored on two theories: disruptive innovation theory and media economic. The target population of this study was three digital native media houses: *Kenyans.co.ke*, *Tuko.co.ke*, and *Pulselive.co.ke*. The data generation of the study was in-depth interviews. Thematic analysis was used to code and present data. This study identified programmatic revenues from Facebook and Google, sponsored content from direct clients, videos and livestreaming on social media platforms as key opportunities. At the same time, the study established content development, segmentation, maximizing on sales team and livestreaming as the main strategies. Despite these opportunities and strategies, the study discerned a couple of challenges that impede the platform's bid to optimally monetize their audiences. The key challenges included lack of diverse revenues sources, imbalanced relationship with Google and Facebook and the pricing of rate cards. The study recommends the following for digital native publisher for future sustainability: installing metered paywall for premium content, revising rate cards to offer packages for small businesses, maximizing on social media knowledge to offer support for clients and more livestreaming of events on Facebook which attracts better packages and coming together as stakeholders and policy makers to engage Google and Facebook for better pay rates.

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