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

**SHARING THE NEWS: THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN NEWS  
DIFFUSION AND AUDIENCE BUILDING IN MEDIA HOUSES IN KENYA**

By

Isaac Swila  
553312

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  
ISAAC  
SWILA-553312 find it satisfactory and recommended that it be accepted.

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Nancy Booker, PhD.,  
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11/02/2022

## DECLARATION

### **SHARING THE NEWS: THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN NEWS DIFFUSION AND AUDIENCE BUILDING IN MEDIA HOUSES IN KENYA**

I, **ISAAC SWILA-553312**, 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.

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Signature

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Date

## DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my Family; dear mother Mary, dear spouse Anne, sons Alphonse and Djibril and late father Alphonse.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to first and foremost thank God the Almighty, whose providence has enabled me navigate through the tough academic terrain in the last two years. Secondly, an immeasurable appreciation goes to the Aga Khan University and the German Development Bank (KfW) whose scholarships enabled me to be part of this programme. I must also thank my supervisor, Dr. Sam Kamau whose patience and endless scholarly guidance made this possible. Special mention goes to Hesbon Owilla whose doors were always open for consultations. To Henry Kibira for close coordination, to Kimweli Wambua for taking time to edit the document, and to Augustine Gitonga for being readily available to help with research materials. Lastly, to my family, my dear mama, my dear spouse Wendy and sons Djibril and Alphonse, I say thank you. Your patience and encouragement throughout the rigorous academic journey and writing of this thesis made me beat the tight timelines. Had it not been for your love and patience I would have faltered along the way. Finally, this work would not have been made possible without the support of the Aga Khan University Library. I also appreciate my employer, Royal Media Services, for allowing me to take time off my tight schedule to attend to my academic work. My colleagues at RMS, I thank you for the support. I also take this chance to thank all the respondents who accepted to participate in this study. I shall for ever be indebted to all of you for making this study a success. For those who contributed in one way or the other to the successful completion of this work, may you receive God's blessing.

## ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study is to assess how media houses in Kenya are using social media to diffuse their news content and build loyal audiences in a competitive media environment. It uses two media houses, the Nation Media Group and Royal Media Services as case studies. The study aimed at attaining four specific objectives: to examine how social media platforms, facilitate diffusion of news content in media houses in Kenya; to examine whether sharing of news on social media lead to growth of digital audiences; to examine the strategies legacy media stations in Kenya, use to disseminate news content and grow audiences on social media and to explore the challenges associated with relying on social media for news diffusion and audience building. The study adopted qualitative research approach. Multi-case study was used as a data collection method. In-depth interviews aided by interview guide were used to generate data from a purposively sampled respondents. The study was anchored on the media news theory and audience theory. The two theories complemented each other and were useful in bringing on board the comparative advantage of each. The study found out that the two media houses have embraced social media platforms to facilitate diffusion of news. The study established that the primary use of social media is anchored on the broader process of information sourcing and getting feedback from the audience. Further, the study found that social media plays a key role in news diffusion and audience building. The researcher concluded that there is need for the social media account managers in the media stations to have a continuous training to acquire relevant and practical skills to improve the editorial. In addition, there is need to conduct a study on the role of audience on selection of content from social networking sites used by the media stations for news diffusion and audience building as well as a study on the impact of paywall on news consumption on social media.



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

COPYRIGHT.....	II
APPROVAL PAGE.....	III
DECLARATION.....	IV
DEDICATION.....	IV
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	VI
ABSTRACT.....	VII
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 to the Study.....	3
1.3 Statement of the Problem.....	7
1.4 Objectives of the Study.....	8
1.4.1 Specific Objectives.....	8
1.4.2 Research Questions.....	9
1.5 Justification of the Study.....	9
1.6 Significance of the Study.....	11
1.7 Scope of the Study.....	11
1.8 Limitations of the Study.....	13
1.9 Operational Definition of Terms.....	14
1.10 Summary.....	14
CHAPTER TWO.....	16
LITERATURE REVIEW.....	16
2.1 Introduction.....	16
2.2 Theoretical Framework.....	16
2.2.1 New Media Theory.....	16
2.2.2 Audience Theory.....	18
2.3 General and Empirical Literature Review.....	20
2.3.1 The Media Landscape in Kenya.....	20
2.3.2 Social Media/Digital Landscape in Kenya.....	23
2.3.3 Social Media and News Sharing.....	26
2.3.4 Media Stations and Audience Building Strategies.....	27
2.3.5 News Consumption on Social Media.....	29
2.3.6 Digital Audiences.....	31
2.3.7 Challenges of News Diffusion through Social Media and Opportunities.....	33
2.3.8 Concept of News Sharing and Social Media.....	36
2.3.9 News Sharing Social Media Tools.....	38
2.4 Summary.....	42
CHAPTER THREE.....	44
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY.....	44
3.1 Introduction.....	44
3.2 Research Approach and Research Design.....	44
3.2.1 Research Approach.....	44
3.2.2 Research Design.....	44

3.3 Population .....	45
3.4 Target Population.....	46
3.5 Study Site.....	46
3.6 Sample Size.....	46
3.7 Sampling Procedures .....	47
3.8 Research Method .....	48
3.9 Data Generation/Collection Tools .....	48
3.10 Data Collection Procedures.....	48
3.11 Pre-testing of Data Generation/Collection Tools.....	49
3.12 Validity and Reliability of Research Tools.....	49
3.13 Data Analysis and Presentation Plan .....	50
3.14 Ethical Considerations .....	51
3.15 Summary .....	52
CHAPTER FOUR.....	53
DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION .....	53
4.1 Introduction.....	53
4.2 Presentation, Analysis, and Interpretation .....	53
4.2.1 Response Rate .....	54
4.2.2 Findings.....	54
4.2.2.1 Research Objective One. ....	54
4.2.2.2 Research Objective Two.....	64
4.2.2.3 Research Objective Three.....	75
4.2.2.4 Research Objective Four. ....	83
4.3 Summary of Key Findings .....	91
4.4 Summary .....	93
CHAPTER FIVE .....	94
DISCUSSIONS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS .....	94
5.1 Introduction.....	94
5.2 Discussion of Key findings.....	94
5.2.1 How Social Media Platforms, Facilitate Diffusion of News Content in Media Stations in Kenya?.....	94
5.2.2 Does Sharing of News on Social Media Lead to Growth of Digital Audience?s .....	97
5.2.3 What Strategies do Legacy Media Stations in Kenya, use to Disseminate News Content and Grow Audiences on Social Media? .....	99
5.2.4 Challenges associated with relying on social media for news diffusion and audience building .....	101
5.3 Conclusion and Implications for Practice .....	103
5.4 Recommendations.....	106
5.5 Areas for Further Research .....	108
5.6 Summary of Chapter Five .....	108
REFERENCES .....	109
APPENDICES .....	113
Appendix A: Interview Guide.....	113
Appendix B: AKU Ethics Review Committee Approval Letter.....	115
Appendix C: Introductory Letter from AKU .....	116
Appendix D: NACOSTI Research Licence .....	117

## LIST OF TABLES

<i>Table 1: Sample size distribution</i> .....	47
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## LIST OF FIGURES

<i>Figure 1: Social Media Followers at RMS Source (Author, 2021)</i> .....	55
<i>Figure 2: Social Media Followers at NMG</i> .....	56
<i>Figure 3: Media houses are also sharing news content on YouTube</i> .....	58
<i>Figure 4: The availability of a large pool of users on social media</i> .....	61
<i>Figure 5: Media Stations constantly share what goes on in their</i> .....	64
<i>Figure 6: Media Houses Leveraging Social Media to Grow Their Digital</i> .....	67
<i>Figure 7: Users interactivity on social media and direct correlation</i> .....	69
<i>Figure 8: RMS Audience interactivity strategy through the App</i> .....	70
<i>Figure 9: The introduction of Paywall has had impact on Digital</i> .....	71
<i>Figure 10: Sharing of news alerts/updates on social media and link to digital subscribers</i> .....	75
<i>Figure 11: Journalists sharing the media house content on their</i> .....	76
<i>Figure 12: Media Stations have made their content shareable</i> .....	78
<i>Figure 13: Media houses Use of hashtags and tags to drive audience</i> .....	80
<i>Figure 14: Use of Anchors/Hosts to encourage audience engagement</i> .....	81
<i>Figure 15: Use of Cards by Media Stations is common</i> .....	82

## ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

<b>IPS:</b>	Internet Protocol Suite
<b>KTN:</b>	Kenya Television Network
<b>MCK:</b>	Media Council of Kenya
<b>NACOSTI:</b>	National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation
<b>NMG:</b>	Nation Media Group
<b>RMS:</b>	Royal Media Services
<b>SMG:</b>	Standard Media Group
<b>SNSs:</b>	Social Networking Sites
<b>TV:</b>	Television
<b>WWW:</b>	World Wide Web
<b>3G:</b>	Third Generation