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THE AGA KHAN UNIVERSITY
Graduate School of Media and Communications

**GATEKEEPING PROCESSES IN CONTENT PRODUCED BY KENYAN NEWS
CONTENT CREATORS ON YOUTUBE**

By

Judith Vereso Mwangi
553292

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

Nairobi, Kenya

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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
JUDITH VERESO MWANGA-553292, find it satisfactory and recommended that it be
accepted.

Prof. Nancy Booker,
Interim Dean
Chair, Thesis Evaluation Committee

Joseph Nyanoti, PhD., Supervisor

Member,
Thesis Evaluation Committee

20/02/2023

DECLARATION

GATEKEEPING PROCESSES IN CONTENT PRODUCED BY KENYAN NEWS CONTENT CREATORS ON YOUTUBE

I, **JUDITH VERESO MWANGA-553292**, 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 mother Sabina Nyakeya Mwanga.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This Graduate Degree is a dream come true. It culminates hours, days, months and years of hard work and dedication. I thank the almighty God for giving me the confidence to enrol for the programme and the grace to pursue it to the conclusion. It was not a solo effort, but a project owned by many who are pleased with the outcome. Heartfelt gratitude to the Aga Khan University-Graduate School of Media and Communications faculty. Special thanks to my supervisor Dr. Joseph Nyanoti, for taking a keen interest in my study and guiding me to execute it. Your counsel, patience and encouragement throughout the project even when I felt overwhelmed is highly valued. Sincere appreciation to Hesbon Hansen Owilla and Henry Kibira for the consistent academic guidance that helped me successfully undertake my study. Thank you, gentlemen, for walking with me in this journey and constantly keeping me on toes so that I beat the deadlines. I am grateful to my mum Sabina, for encouraging me to “*Maliza kitabu*” (Finish the book), it is done Mama. Heartfelt appreciation to my sister Valentine, and brothers Tom and Daniel for supporting my dreams and celebrating my achievements. To my friends and classmates who nudged me on, I say thank you for the inspiration. Lastly, this study is a tribute to the Kenyan news content creators who have dared to dive into the digital space and set the pace for the rest of us. May God richly reward you all.

ABSTRACT

Gatekeeping is a crucial process in journalistic content production and especially news. This is because the information collected from various sources must be subjected to journalistic practices such as verification to establish authenticity before dissemination to audiences. The growing popularity of online media content and the desire to attract more followers means news content creators on YouTube could be conflicted on the key reason they are producing content for the platform. The study aimed to establish the gatekeeping process employed by Kenyan news content creators producing content on YouTube and whether decisions are in the public's interest or lack thereof. This study was prompted by the emergence and proliferation of celebrity content producers, some of whom are associated with legacy media and the attendant brand association. They produce content for YouTube in an era of click baits to attract traction and advertisers. The study's objectives were to examine the sourcing strategies employed by news content creators on YouTube, establish the extent to which the gatekeeping processes by YouTube news content creators guarantee editorial independence and public interest journalism and find out gatekeeping challenges YouTube journalists face in their public interest undertaking. The gatekeeping and networked gatekeeping theories were used for this study to explain the process of selecting news content. A qualitative approach was adopted anchored on exploratory research design. Eight content creators based in Nairobi, who produce news content on YouTube, participated in the study and were selected using a purposive sampling technique. Data collected was analysed thematically. The study established just like in mainstream media, gatekeeping applies in YouTube news content creation and distribution. However, the study also established that even though YouTube news content producers produce public interest content, their gatekeeping processes are not as rigorous as in mainstream media. The study recommends more research into other journalistic practices by Kenyan news content creators on YouTube.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

COPYRIGHT	ii
APPROVAL PAGE.....	iii
DECLARATION.....	iv
DEDICATION.....	v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	vi
ABSTRACT	vii
TABLE OF CONTENTS	viii
ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS.....	x
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.....	6
1.4 Objectives of the Study.....	7
1.4.1 Specific Objectives	7
1.4.2 Research Questions.....	8
1.5 Justification of the Study	8
1.6 Significance of the Study.....	9
1.7 Scope of the Study	10
1.8 Limitations of the Study	10
1.9 Operational Definition of Terms	11
1.10 Summary.....	13
CHAPTER TWO.....	15
LITERATURE REVIEW	15
2.1 Introduction.....	15
2.2 Theoretical Framework.....	15
2.2.1 Gatekeeping Theory.....	15
2.2.2 Networked Gatekeeping Theory.....	16
2.2.3 Gatekeeping in the Digital Age	18
2.3 General and Empirical Literature Review	22
2.3.1 YouTube journalism and Public Interest.....	22
2.3.2 YouTube journalism and Media Ethics	24
2.4 Summary.....	27
CHAPTER THREE	28
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	28
3.1 Introduction.....	28
3.2 Research Approach and Research Design	28
3.2.1 Research Approach.....	28
3.2.2 Research Design	29
3.3 Population.....	30
3.4 Target Population.....	31
3.5 Study Site.....	31
3.6 Sample Size	31

3.7	Sampling Procedure.....	32
3.8	Research Method	33
3.9	Data Generation Tools.....	33
3.10	Data Collection Procedures	34
3.11	Pre-testing of Data Generation Tools	35
3.13	Validity and Reliability of Research Tools	35
3.13	Data Analysis and Presentation Plan	36
3.14	Ethical Considerations.....	36
3.15	Summary.....	37
	CHAPTER FOUR	38
	DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION	38
4.1	Introduction.....	38
4.2	Presentation, Analysis, and Interpretation	38
4.2.1	Findings	38
4.2.1.1	Sourcing strategies employed by news content creators on YouTube	38
4.2.1.2	Gatekeeping processes and editorial independence and public interest journalism	43
4.2.1.3	Gatekeeping challenges YouTube journalists face.....	47
4.3	Summary of Key Findings.....	52
4.4	Summary.....	53
	CHAPTER FIVE	55
	DISCUSSIONS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS	55
5.1	Introduction.....	55
5.2	Discussions of Key Findings	55
5.2.1	News content sourcing strategies.....	55
5.2.2	Gatekeeping processes.....	59
5.2.3	Gatekeeping challenges	61
5.3	Conclusion and Implications for Practice.....	63
5.4	Recommendations.....	65
5.4.1	All-inclusive decision making	65
5.4.2	Collaboration	66
5.4.3	Editorial policies.....	67
5.4.4	Recognition and flexibility	67
5.5	Areas for Further Research.....	68
	REFERENCES	70
	APPENDICES	77
	Appendix A: In-depth Interview Guide.....	77
	Appendix B: AKU Ethics Review Committee Approval Letter	78
	Appendix C: Introductory Letter From AKU.....	79
	Appendix D: NACOSTI Research Licence	80

ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

AKU-GSMC:	The Aga Khan University-Graduate School of Media and Communications
AIDS:	Acquired immunodeficiency syndrome
COVID-19:	The coronavirus disease 2019
HIV:	Human immunodeficiency virus and the resultant
KUJ:	Kenya Union of Journalists
MCK:	Media Council of Kenya
NACOSTI:	National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation
PWDS:	Persons with disability

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

YouTube is an online video-sharing platform which allows users to upload, view, rate, share, add to playlists, report, comment on videos, and subscribe to other users. It offers a wide variety of user-generated and corporate media videos. Individuals and organizations including the mass media upload most content on YouTube. YouTube, established in 2005, has become a leading platform for online video globally. The site has 2.24 billion users, is available in over 100 countries, and can be accessed in 80 languages (Ceci, 2022). In Kenya, 21.7 million people use the internet and 91.3% prefer YouTube (Kemp, 2021). A good number of these internet users are media professionals who share news content on YouTube. These include those employed in mainstream media houses and independent journalists who have made their name and brands in the legacy media. Notably, the number of Kenyan news content producers on the digital platform grew during the COVID-19 pandemic which caused disruptions in the media industry, including the loss of jobs. The Kenya Union of Journalists (KUJ) said at least 300 journalists were furloughed and thousands forced to take pay cuts, because of economic downturns occasioned by the global health crisis. Consequently, a number of top news personalities left the newsroom to establish their own online media entities (Mwita, 2021).

For instance, television news anchors Eric Njoka and Tony Kwalanda and Radio presenter turned politician Phelix Odiwuor alias Jalango, formerly employed by Media Max Limited are examples of Kenyan journalists who turned to YouTube to share

independently produced news content at the height of the pandemic. At that time, they joined industry colleagues creating news content on YouTube, including former television news anchors Betty Kyallo and Jacque Maribe, and Caroline Mutoko, a renowned radio personality in Kenyan media circles.

The shift from mainstream media to YouTube journalism by these journalists can be said to be spurred by the need for clout and relevance in the digital space by leveraging the opportunities available on social media. Ferreira (2018) illustrates, contrary to the pre-Internet age, journalists and ordinary individuals now have greater chances of interaction. For some of these journalists, losing jobs in mainstream media does not stop them from engaging with audiences online as they seek to remain relevant in the eyes of the public and their fans (and) or followers. This is courtesy of the variety of options which make social media particularly attractive to journalists (Pantic & Cvetkovic, 2020). However, for others, a mix of legacy and new media is the perfect recipe to grow their brand, and attract more attention and followers. This is because most are already household names locally anyway and there is no harm gaining fame beyond national borders.

A number of content producers claim to earn millions of shillings in revenue from YouTube advertisements. Research on their practice was to help establish if content is genuinely produced for the public's interest and if the public gets value or the creators are just out to woo more followers and advertisers to get more revenue.

1.2 Background to the Study

Gatekeeping in the context of news is a method of determining what is newsworthy and what is not. Shoemaker and Vos (2009) define gatekeeping as putting together lots of information into communication that is accessible to the public daily. Gatekeeping, they say, dictates how the media fits in with society and is a way to establish the quality of information and how it will be packaged as news before disseminating to audiences. Notably, this concept of controlling information flow to the public has ceased being a preserve of mainstream media and now also applies to digital media, including content produced by journalists independently.

Therefore, research on the process of gatekeeping in creating independent YouTube news content was premised on the growing population of content creators in Kenya. This included journalists who turned to social media platforms to share audio-visual content. Balakrishnan and Griffiths (2017) aver that the emergence of social media and its diversified functions has led to extensive exploration and content creation by users for personal and social gratification. They further argue that YouTube is more than a video-sharing and viewing channel. It has created careers for new talents in the field of education, arts, business, psychology, medicine, and entertainment. Holland (2016) also advances the claim that content creators in mainstream and new media are getting job opportunities in YouTube. The study also sought to establish if a number of journalists found a lifeline in the social media content-sharing platform after exiting mainstream media. This is because some were said to have returned to traditional media based on the success of their forays into the digital space.

Because of the need to make earnings from these ventures, advertisements are a common feature in productions, with the content producers sometimes putting disclaimers of sponsored content even as they verbalize the same. Often the line between objective content and advertising is blurred so much that some productions end up being endorsements rather than informative in the quest to monetize content. This contrasts the observations of Heinderyckx and Vos (2016), who opine that journalists should adopt an evaluative stance when gatekeeping. They should then sieve and categorize news to ensure the finished product appeals to the public and feeds their interests as opposed to being sensational or undertaking public relations. Their model perhaps speaks to how the control of information flow, that is, gatekeeping and determining what is presented to audiences as the final product has changed. It is also about experiencing a transformation with the advent of new media moving from a unidirectional flow through the stages of control and impact of information flow (Chin-Fook & Simmonds, 2011) to providing choices for media organizations to attract audiences with more variety of content as fast as possible. This new form of gatekeeping, also seeks to attract and maintain a constant interest in the content and create a buzz to inspire endorsement. When it comes to digital media, the popularity of content, especially news, is measured by impact in terms of the number of clicks, likes, re-tweets and other reactions (Tandoc Jr, 2014). Of note, is that the role of gatekeeping in digital media is dynamic and adapts to the changing nature of the media industry (Pantic & Cvetkovic, 2020).

Since gatekeeping concerns information gathering and dissemination control, the question was whether this process was applicable for the content shared on digital

platforms by independent journalists who are reporters and editors of their own stories. Erzikova (2018) posits that researchers have been forced to relook at the place of gatekeeping in new technologies including the internet. She adds that some scholars believe that gatekeeping is out-dated as journalism no longer has control of news production and distribution as nearly everyone with access to online content is a gatekeeper. On the other hand, Fenton (2011) notes that the internet has birthed journalism afresh with qualities such as interactivity, new writing styles, wider audiences and great speed of delivery.

Like any news gathering situation, scrutiny of ethical standards in editorial judgement to ensure content credibility was not compromised, seeing that the journalists in question are operating independently. Black et al. (1999), contend that ethics, especially journalism ethics, is essentially a practical activity that justifies action. It is worth noting that online journalists face challenges that require them to decide if to abandon, fully adopt or gradually implement traditional norms and values that govern the profession (Deuze & Yeshua, 2001). In Kenya, journalists are obligated to comply with the Media Council of Kenya (MCK) journalistic code of conduct, which spells out guidelines for practice. How to adhere to and inculcate values such as objectivity, fairness, accuracy, integrity, confidentiality, privacy, copyright and plagiarism are well illustrated in the MCK code of conduct for the practice of journalism.

In digital journalism, content that is rich in information and well-produced attracts advertisements. It was, therefore worth establishing whether journalists operating in that space allowed sponsors to control the production process such that they influenced the

outcome that was eventually presented to the masses. Schwalbe et al. (2015) posit, external forces very much influence the selection and presentation of stories to the public. This is especially so for productions that rightly illustrate affiliation with advertisers by declaring sponsored content or for those with subtle nuances of external power.

For YouTube content producers, the relationship between content and advertising takes an interesting twist, especially when viewed against the backdrop of gatekeeping. Therefore, this study sought to examine the extent to which these content producers were rigorous in gatekeeping and how it affected the quality of the end product.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

News content generation on YouTube by journalists and media personalities is a growing trend in Kenya, and as Yang and Sun (2021) argue, the internet has renewed the communication space. Many of the big names in the Kenyan media industry have their own YouTube channels. Djerf-Pierre et al. (2019) contend that YouTube Journalism can evoke empathy by highlighting stories about the human experience, contending that journalism videos have a role to play in ensuring social and democratic accountability. However, while these journalists and independent news content creators can access a free platform to reach a mass audience like in legacy media and hold those in power accountable, it was unclear how rigorous their gatekeeping processes were regarding broadcasting journalistic content that is of public interest.

Moreover, with the growing popularity of online media content and the desire to attract more followers, journalists with YouTube channels could have been struggling with

the dilemma of choosing between the production of public interest content and (or) yielding to the demands of audiences to only generate income and gaining more followers. In the case of the latter, Sheldrake (2011) explains that the influential position held by journalists who have been part of the legacy media means that there is some level of credibility which might translate to access to their network. She says this because in essence, by getting a few key people who trace them back to legacy outlets, hundreds, thousands, and millions of other individuals are reached through that same network. Indeed, the emergence of Kenyan YouTube news content creators with a journalistic background and the attendant household names they come with, producing and disseminating news content, also highlights the need to interrogate the gatekeeping process to establish whether these journalists operate within the domain of public interest.

1.4 Objectives of the Study

There are many YouTube content creators in Kenya, but this study focused on news content producers and their gatekeeping processes. It sought to establish how news content creators decide on personalities and topics to be featured in their channels.

1.4.1 Specific Objectives

1. To examine the sourcing strategies employed by news content creators on YouTube.
2. To establish the extent to which the gatekeeping processes by YouTube news content creators guarantee editorial independence and public interest journalism.

3. To find out gatekeeping challenges, YouTube journalists face in their public interest undertaking.

1.4.2 Research Questions

1. What are the sourcing strategies employed by news content creators on YouTube?
2. How do the gatekeeping processes by YouTube news content creators guarantee editorially independent public-interest journalism?
3. What are the challenges YouTube journalists face as they seek to satisfy public Interest?

1.5 Justification of the Study

A growing number of Kenyan Journalists and content creators were turning to the video-sharing platform YouTube to share news content and attract advertisers and followers. They included journalists who previously built their brand and credibility as professionals in mainstream media but are now using the platform to disseminate content they have produced to the masses who are oblivious of the gatekeeping processes (if any) involved.

Cognizant of the changing journalistic field marked by a declining audience for conventional news and increased alternative information sources, journalists are also transforming to cater for the perceived demands of modern journalism (Tandoc Jr & Vos, 2016). This starkly contrast to the past when journalists had the monopoly of selecting the news for their audience.

However, it is difficult to determine if their efforts are for the benefit of the mass audience or to attract more subscribers and followers. This is because YouTube is also used to push advertising content and as a tool to measure the popularity and loyalty of their legion of fans. Also, not much is known about the challenges these journalists face as they generate content that they feel is appealing to the public. Therefore, this study sought to establish if indeed there exists a form of gatekeeping in the work produced and shared on YouTube by Kenyan news content creators and the rigorous extent to which it is.

1.6 Significance of the Study

Examining the news content creation process on YouTube was to be useful to journalists who exclusively use the platform as it would be a point of reference on how to decide on content that is in the best interest of audiences even as they sought click baits and advertisements.

It was expected that the study would shed light on how the gatekeeping processes by YouTube news content creators guarantee editorial independence, and public interest journalism and therefore benefit journalists and media organizations keen on using the video-sharing venue as a channel of mass communication online. It was also expected to reveal challenges, gaps and opportunities in the gatekeeping processes on the platform which will create the need for more scholarly research on the subject. Institutions that train journalists and those regulating media practice in Kenya, the East African region and beyond would also find this research useful in developing curriculums and guidelines for best industry practice.

1.7 Scope of the Study

The study focused on eight Kenyan YouTube news content creators based in Nairobi, Kenya, who produce programmes that discuss issues of public interest. The gatekeeping and networked gatekeeping theories were used for this study to explain the process of journalistic content generation by YouTubers. The researcher used an exploratory research design to probe how news content creators on YouTube find their news sources. This is because exploratory research is done to understand a subject better (Akhtar, 2016), especially one where there has been no prior research or available information is little. The researcher used the qualitative research methodology to achieve the research objectives. In-depth, interviews were conducted with the YouTube news content creators to understand how they went about their gatekeeping processes and, upheld editorial independence even as they sought to satisfy public interest.

1.8 Limitations of the Study

Assuring participants of confidentiality was paramount for the researcher especially because of the concern that information shared for the study could land in the wrong hands. The researcher briefed participants about the study and shared with them a consent form which clearly illustrated the terms and conditions of participating. While all YouTube news content creators agreed to be involved in the research and answer questions, a few complained that the questions were too many or too intrusive and only consented to answer those they felt comfortable with. The researcher obliged since the questions they agreed to answer would at least reveal whether there was any form of gatekeeping in news content generation and dissemination on YouTube. This is because few scholarly works

are available specifically discussing the gatekeeping process in creating journalistic content uploaded on YouTube by Kenyan news content creators. Participants were interviewed separately before concluding.

1.9 Operational Definition of Terms

COVID-19: A global pandemic which began in China in 2019 and resulted in a total movement lockdown in countries including Kenya. In this study, it is used to contextualize the Kenyan media landscape where job cuts and losses were experienced, and a rise in independent digital news content producers was witnessed.

Digital journalism: The distribution of journalistic content using the internet. This study it explains the production of news content by independent journalists in Kenya.

Digital media: YouTube journalists and other content creators use online platforms to disseminate news-related information using electronic devices.

Gatekeeping: The process of determining the flow of information for publication and broadcasting using legacy media or internet platforms. This study examines its viability in the internet age, specifically its use by Kenyan news content creators on YouTube.

Gatekeepers: Individuals or systems in media that guide what news stories are given prominence. This study shows editors, journalists, independent news content creators and audiences as gatekeepers.

Journalism: The collection of news and its distribution by a journalist in electronic or print media.

Journalist: An individual who gathers information, whether written, video, audio or photos and presents them as news.

Kenya Union of Journalists: An organisation that defends the rights of journalists and journalism in Kenya. In this study, it is cited to explain the impact of Covid-19 on the media industry in Kenya regarding job security.

Legacy media: Newspapers, radio and television, also known as traditional media. These are channels of distributing information either through print or broadcast media. This study uses this term to explain alternative media available in Kenya other than digital media.

Media Council of Kenya: An organisation mandated by the law to regulate the practise of journalism in Kenya. It has a code of conduct to which journalists practising in the country should adhere to.

News: Information not previously known about recent events in a given area. This information is presented in written, audio, video or pictorial form.

News content: News reports are often produced and disseminated by journalists but also produced by other individuals for distribution on their social media accounts.

News content creators: Individuals who produce news for distribution on various platforms. They could be journalists or persons who are independent producers. In this study news content creators disseminate their work on YouTube.

Social influencer: Someone who is an expert in a subject or area of their interest and can change people's opinion on the same. Social influencers cited in this study use YouTube to distribute news and communicate about niche topics.

Social media: Platforms that enable creating and sharing of content as well as social networking using the internet. Journalists referred to in this study use social media to connect with followers and audiences.

YouTube: An online video-sharing platform that is popular worldwide. In this study it is cited as used extensively by a section of news content creators in Kenya.

YouTuber: An individual who produces videos for sharing on YouTube. Journalists and news content creators using YouTube to share videos also fall into this category.

1.10 Summary

In this chapter, the origin of YouTube and how journalists in Kenya, like their peers globally, have embraced the use of this digital platform as a channel of mass media communication has been discussed at length. This chapter provides insights into the world of YouTube news content creation. The next chapter reviewed of literature by a number of scholars speaking to gatekeeping and news content creation on YouTube. Chapter three explains the research methodology including the population, sample size and sampling

procedure while chapter four analyses the findings and objectives. Finally, chapter five discusses the findings and gives recommendations and a conclusion.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses and evaluates available literature by other scholars and researchers on gatekeeping in YouTube content creation by journalists worldwide and in Kenya. The literature review shows what studies exist and acknowledge the gaps therein. This chapter discusses the gatekeeping and networked gatekeeping theories as applied in mainstream and digital media.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

A theoretical framework is a structure that supports the theory (or theories) on which a study is anchored and seeks to situate the topic under investigation by highlighting areas of focus and how to go about the research (Adom et al., 2018). Kivunja (2018) further says it discusses relevant theories and concepts derived from previous studies, which the researcher then works with to conduct the study. For this study, the gatekeeping and networked gatekeeping theories and their place in YouTube news content creation were analysed.

2.2.1 Gatekeeping Theory

Gatekeeping is the process of controlling information flow using human or technological processes. In journalism, this is done by reporters and editors who decide what is news (Erzikova, 2018). The gatekeeping theory examines flow of information from the media to the public and can be explained as the process of digesting information and

reporting the news. It is a concept that German-American Psychologist Kurt Lewin first introduced in 1947. Lewin, at that time, sought to explain why families had different food habits and activities, presuming from his observation that wives and mothers were in control of households (Laidlaw, 2010). The theory has since evolved and is used differently in different fields although the core principle of sieving and (or) selection of information remains.

In communication and especially media, Tandoc Jr (2014) opines that gatekeeping does not classify gates through which information is processed and only provides an all-inclusive approach to news selection. He further goes on to explain that because of this lack of clarity the media is viewed as vulnerable to influences which journalists resist. Some scholars define gatekeepers as editors occupying strategic positions within news media outfits, decide what is vital to be shared with consumers as content. Furthermore, Laidlaw (2010) elaborates that gatekeepers have two roles, regulating opinions and behaviours internally and externally, which are applicable in the internet age. Today, audiences have a variety of media sources for information, education and entertainment. This is through networked communication that offers access to personalized information, tailored to individual preferences (Mukerjee et al., 2018).

2.2.2 Networked Gatekeeping Theory

Over the years, studies on gatekeeping have focused on three aspects, what the gates are, how they are kept and the number of people who depend on them, as illustrated by Nielsen (2014). Furthermore, with the growing digital media space, journalism scholarship has expanded to include investigating how the gatekeeping process has

transitioned from the traditional newsroom to the internet. Network gatekeeping as defined by Barzilai-Naho (2009), is the transition of the gatekeeping process from a direct approach to a more dynamic one. She says that because of this shift, gatekeeping and gated roles by stakeholders change as frequently as their interests and goals. These stakeholders include influential blogs and individuals on social media who follow existing gates for the benefit of their audience and rarely keep separate gates of their own (Welbers & Opgenhaffen, 2018). Sentiments are also expressed by Bro and Wallberg (2015), who deduce that the increased diversity of principles and practices in journalism has changed the concept of gatekeeping. They further acknowledge that open communication structures afforded by the internet make it possible for gatekeepers outside the newsrooms to decide what news to publish and distribute. This means the decision on what news to disseminate on the internet is now in the hands of many gatekeepers, both individuals and organizations alike who can publish anything in the way they see fit. (Ghulam & Safdar, 2015)

Networked gatekeeping is perhaps best exhibited by legacy media actors like newspaper publishers who have embraced the digital space and are using social media to push news content. In this regard it was important to appreciate the role of a network gatekeeper, which calls for not only a hands-on approach to deciding newsworthy content but being alive to the place of information technologies and how they impact the overall goals of a media organization (Odigie & Gbaje, 2017). Additionally, there was the need to understand how the dissemination of news items and (or) links to the same on social media is affected by the gatekeeping influence of social media editors (Welbers & Opgenhaffen, 2018).

Nielsen (2014), in his study *Varieties of online gatekeeping*, termed the digital and networked media environment as varied and, to an extent, divided because of the diverse online gatekeeping and gates most people depend on. He pointed to the need for studies in journalism to probe the increasingly crucial space occupied by digital gatekeeping. Nielsen advocates studying the interconnection between the traditional editorial gatekeeping that is constantly changing and new forms of audience gatekeeping facilitated by digital technologies.

2.2.3 Gatekeeping in the Digital Age

Traditionally, a journalist or employee in mainstream media was responsible for deciding news content (Al Nashmi et al., 2017). In *Mapping Digital Media: Gatekeeping in Digital Media* Peter Olaf Looms, a senior consultant at Danish Broadcasting Corporation, agreed with this notion. However, he observed a section of authors understand gatekeeping to be a preserve of journalists and managers while the organization they work for is the gate.

Extensive internet connectivity and the affordability of hand-held digital communication devices such as mobile phones have made information flow almost hassle-free. This departure from traditional media platforms has caused the evolution of the gatekeepers and gated roles, as observed by Laidlaw (2010), who adds that from the perspective of Web 2.0, the gated are hardly stagnant but active in the internet environment. This, he avers, leads to fluidity of roles, countless possible gatekeepers and gated. Indeed, scholars have observed that digital communication has ended the monopoly of information

delivery as it now includes independent and citizen journalists (Heinrich, 2011) who also source the news and share it with the masses.

While at the beginning, it was focused on the mass media, gatekeeping has since developed to focus on face-to-face communication and the many-to-many concept characteristic of the Internet. Scholars, Ferreira, (2018), Heinderyckx and Vos (2016), and Ekman and Widholm (2015), are of the opinion that gatekeeping is no longer a preserve of journalists since they have no control over information flow as far as production and distribution is concerned. This is because audiences are now gatekeepers and can share content liberally thanks to alternative forms of communication that are readily available.

Schwalbe et al. (2015) propose a new model called the twenty-first-century visual news stream and which argues gatekeepers and gatewatchers in legacy newsrooms no longer exclusively control content distribution even though they pick, substantiate and preserve visuals. They further observe that external influences hugely impact the flow of stories through gates to the audience. This role though critical, is now multifaceted as audiences have the power to distribute content easily via various platforms such as YouTube without external influence.

As Pantic and Cvetkovic (2020) also concur, anyone with access to the Internet can publish information which is a challenge to gatekeeping simply because digital media platforms have reduced gates. Also, the increase of digital media networks has seen the emergence of a dynamic audience who manipulate media content to suit their needs and gates online have been reduced, giving everyone leeway.

Another set of scholars who have studied gatekeeping in new technologies, Bro and Wallberg (2015) suggests three approaches to the process. The first is based on a process of information, the second on a process of communication, and the third on a process of elimination, where people outside the newsrooms takeover the function of gatekeeping. Pearson and Kosicki (2017) argue that rather than being constrained by what gates to put into controlling information, the uptake of news and its production can be perceived as a process used by journalists to attract audiences online. Additionally, Chin-Fook and Simmonds (2011) say the interactive nature of digital media increasingly transforms the flow of news and arrive at the conclusion that with a multi-directional flow of information where all actors have the potential to influence one another, gatekeeping occurs online and continues to change with the times.

Interestingly, though journalists appear as the sole gatekeepers, it is evident, digital media platforms do not function as technological gatekeepers. In digital gatekeeping, platforms serve as network spaces where journalists and many other actors can communicate according to the rules set up by the platform owner (Wallace, 2018). Conversely, the choices made by users are heavily influenced by the platform's operating systems (Van Dijck, 2013). Therefore, journalists require a high degree of independence from their audiences' influence in order to best exercise their gatekeeping role. Even as journalists and media critics sometimes appraise gatekeeping as overly authoritarian (Bruns, 2005).

Nevertheless, because audiences are increasingly embracing alternative avenues of information other than traditional media, they are taking advantage of the convenience

offered by the internet to access to share content they would otherwise not have. Moreover, with YouTube, Van Dijck (2013) notes its unique feature as a broadcasting platform means messages are shared online even by a cross-section of groups, be it families, political activists, and even musical bands. Arguably while the shift from legacy to digital media is partly due to the independence of the audiences in accessing information it is also motivated by the search for more depth of information, normally aired on television, radio, or even published in newspapers and other hard copy publications.

Gatekeeping on YouTube also enables consumers to enjoy the freedom of watching and making decisions. Gross (2015), in his review of the book *The Impact of YouTube on U.S Politics* by LaChrystal Ricke, notes that all users enjoy democracy and accessibility of political space because there are no visible boundaries on YouTube. Furthermore, he posits that reduced gatekeeping and agenda-setting on the platform has occasioned a power shift in civic participation in American politics. This is largely because consumers actively debate and create news content (Wilding et al., 2018). Additionally, collaboration between users such as eyewitnesses, journalists and the audience has created a symbiotic relationship where citizens and news organizations share each other's video content (www.journalism.org).

Overall, according to Siapera and Veglis (2012), technological advances notwithstanding gatekeeping is still an important part of journalism as sources' credibility must be verified. However, other scholars would argue creation and dissemination of content is no longer exclusive to journalists (Ferreira, 2018).

2.3 General and Empirical Literature Review

2.3.1 *YouTube journalism and Public Interest*

Journalism and digital platforms are reshaping the public sphere (Wilding et al., 2018). The growing number of subscribers who consume content by practising journalists or former journalists who have ventured into independent editorial content production on YouTube indicates the increasing digital audience in Kenya and beyond, who are looking for content that is of public interest. Currently, in the world there are 37 million active YouTube channels (Aslam, 2022). In Kenya, journalistic content creators on YouTube have, over time gained a huge following because audiences hold them in high esteem and therefore trust what they are producing, often in the assumption that content is for the public interest. And it is as should be, as Ferreira (2018, p.499) acknowledges, ‘public journalism urges journalists to put citizens first.’

Generally, when a journalist disseminates information beneficial to the public they are deemed to be doing so in the interest of the said public. When journalists use their private accounts on social media platforms like YouTube to share news content, the same applies, although one might argue context is key. Whether viewed as personal or professional appreciating the relationship between the journalist and their media organization is important (Mellado & Hermida, 2021). Their social media accounts are not confined to professional institutional structures allowing them to display other personalities (van Dijck & Poell, 2013). An example of how this space is utilized is a study by Mellado and Hermida, (2021) on how journalists on social media perform the roles of promoter, celebrity, and joker to establish how they manifest beyond legacy media and

impact journalism practice and perception. They found that the three are the new roles for journalists using the space to express individual beliefs and innovation outside of their employers or institutions. Additionally, they argue that journalists can claim ownership of their social media platforms where they may advance individual over public interest even as those same accounts may be perceived to represent their employer interest.

Therefore, it goes without a doubt, that at some point, many a YouTuber will prioritize profits while seeking more followers and audience growth through click baits. For instance, Bonga Na Jalas is a talk show hosted by Kenyan journalist turned politician Phelix “Jalango” Odiwuor on his YouTube Channel Jalango TV. The programme was sometimes recorded in restaurants where condiments were displayed on the table in addition to mentions and squeeze backs of promotional content during programmes. An almost similar approach was used by Kenyan radio personality Caroline Mutoko through one-on-one interviews or product and service reviews on her YouTube channel, for example branded rice or airline packages. The two considered media celebrities in Kenya often gave disclaimers of sponsored content and demonstrate how to influence masses. (Sheldrake, 2011) avers by reaching a few key people, you reach hundreds, thousands, and millions of other individuals through their network’s reach. This, however, does not validate the use of misleading news information to gain traction (Gutiérrez-Martín et al., 2019). Moreover, Shoemaker and Vos (2009) warn that news content can be compromised if advertisers flex their financial muscle and “gatekeepers have been socialized to accept advertisers’ interests as the media’s best interest or even as the public interest.” Nevertheless, Wellman et al. (2020) opine, that influencer marketing is not inherently

unethical and that prioritizing brands and relationships with audiences while anticipating profits is expected. While return on investment is a great motivator for news content creators, it can be argued that audiences also have some indirect influence in that what they prefer is what is broadcast for their consumption. This battle of interest means journalists are constantly at a crossroads, and decisions on what content to share may not be entirely well meaning for the audiences, subscribers and followers. Moreover, Haridakis and Hanson (2009) emphasize the reality that the audience is now a key component of content distribution online, whereby millions of users view the most popular clips. Increasing access to news, which is abundant online, means consumption can be personalized and customized such that only content that is of interest remains (Wilding et al., 2018).

To understand the gatekeeping process in YouTube content creation and the place of public interest, one needs to understand who YouTubers are and who controls them. According to Scolari and Fraticelli (2019), YouTubers are unconventional video bloggers who operate channels and access many viewers by creating YouTube content. Regarding journalistic YouTubers, Belair-Gagnon and Holton (2018) say they are among a growing community of digital players upholding journalistic practices in and outside mass media organizations. Based on these insights, it would be worth finding out how YouTube news content creators in Kenya are navigating their way in this space and the influence of news sources and audiences on their choices.

2.3.2 YouTube journalism and Media Ethics

Journalism and media ethics refer to practices and conduct that is expected of journalists and other media practitioners (Pavlik, 2008). Certain ethical challenges have

been worsened, and new ones have been created by technology hence the need for journalists and media professionals to be alert (Pavlik, 2008). Concerning ethics in practice, it is worth interrogating the extent to which YouTube news content providers subscribe to journalistic gatekeeping processes that speak to the public interest. It is also prudent to question whether they do so with fidelity to journalism principles which include accuracy, independence, objectivity, fairness and accountability. Scholars such as Rosenberry and Burton (2009) agree that even in YouTube content generation, journalists should continue upholding values such as democracy which allows audiences to exercise freedom of speech by participating in the news making process. Furthermore, a system guides fact-checking, verification and presentation of content professionally (Andén-Papadopoulos & Pantti, 2014). According to Rosenberry and Burton (2009), it also behoves content creators to strive for solutions journalism that benefits the masses to balance news shared by citizens.

The need for meaning drives the audience to the digital space even as they enjoy the convenience of accessibility afforded by technology. However, a number of communication researchers have pointed out the fact that there is a gap as far as studies on gatekeeping on YouTube. In her study on gatekeeping, Erzikova (2018) acknowledges the role of the gated, affected by decisions of the gatekeepers, is undergoing changes prompted by the new gatekeeping methods afforded by the digital environment. Consequently, Shoemaker and Vos (2009) say there is a need for more research on how specific content is impacted by gatekeeping, especially on content analysis. The two further argue that traditional journalistic practices face new challenges from the consumers of content across

the economic divide. They also agree that assessing the internet to establish gatekeeping and how communication practices and messages vary is crucial.

This same idea is advanced by Thorson and Wells (2015), who aver that more research is also needed on the current vital changes in communication to understand better gatekeeping given the increases in the number of content creators who are using other platforms competing with traditional media for public attention. Dennis, Herbers, and Henn (2021) weigh in on the need for analysis of journalistic content by arguing it will benefit younger audiences who are interested in more information because they have formed opinions and learnt about politics thanks to generation-specific entertaining content, which helps them get immersed in the work of Youtubers.

Additionally, Salaudeen and Onyechi (2020) feel there is a need for more study on how media credibility and audience awareness is influenced by information preference. Their argument is anchored on the notion that media's credibility depends on reliability and honesty. Pearson and Kosicki (2017) further present a model to facilitate the understanding of gatekeeping in producing and consuming news in the digital age. 'Usefulness of gatekeeping theory in the 21st century depends largely on scholars' creativity and willingness to learn procedures that analyse dynamic systems' (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009).

Available research is on the negative impact of social media on journalism, curating of social media and gatewatching journalism. Kameel Butt, in his study on *Journalism without Gatekeepers/Editors: Negative Impact of Social Media on Journalism in Pakistan* argued that misguiding news is shared on social media because there are no gatekeepers or

editors to control information flow. The findings of the research, which adopted a qualitative approach showed there were no journalistic standards on social media hence everything is put out there as news. Stanoevska-Slabeva et al. (2012), using the explorative analysis method, established that content on social media was usually not original, but a mix of what is available on social media and information gathered on legacy media. She termed this blend as social media curation and noted that it could be used to control the flow of information on the platform.

2.4 Summary

This chapter sampled literature by a number of scholars in a bid to understand YouTube and how it supports news content creators. Justification for the study was provided through the theoretical framework which discussed the gatekeeping theory and how it fits in digital journalism. Through empirical literature review, previous studies were analysed and gaps in research which could be studied in future were also identified.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the methodology and research design used to conduct the study and answer research questions. It further explains the source of data, target population, sampling design and data collection instruments used to collect information. This chapter also discusses the qualitative research approach adopted by the researcher to comprehensively analyse the gatekeeping process on YouTube by Kenyan news content creators. Exploratory research design and in-depth interviews, which were used to collect data, are also discussed in this chapter.

3.2 Research Approach and Research Design

3.2.1 Research Approach

This study used the qualitative research approach. Populations under study are more deeply understood using this approach (Vanderstoep & Johnston, 2009) which also sought an all-inclusive opinion based on natural settings without manipulating variables (Creswell, 2014). Being inclusive, qualitative research also facilitated collection of rich data from various sources to understand individual participants better (Nassaji, 2015). Therefore, this approach was appropriate for the study because the researcher sought to conduct an in-depth analysis of the gatekeeping processes adopted by journalists, former journalists and non-journalists producing content on YouTube. Through in-depth interviews, the researcher sought to get “pragmatic, interpretive, and grounded lived experiences” of these YouTube news content producers (Marshall & Rossman, 2016, p.3).

The choice of qualitative research was also suitable as it supported an understanding of the experiences of the individuals in their environments (Daba-Buzoianu & Bira, 2017). The researcher fully engaged with these news content creators to collect rich data on their sourcing of content and newsmakers, and editorial processes, assess the extent to which they guaranteed independence and establish challenges these journalists encountered in serving the public interest.

3.2.2 Research Design

Research design is a plan one uses to answer research questions (Kumar, 2014) and provides direction in research (Creswell & Poth, 2017). The researcher used an exploratory research design to probe how news content creators on YouTube found their news sources. This is because exploratory research is done to gain more insight into a subject (Akhtar, 2016) especially where there has been little prior research or available information is little. Through this design, the study sought to understand gatekeeping processes adopted by the Kenyan news content creators on YouTube and further analyse the editorial independence of the journalists and former journalists who are now producing content for their private YouTube channels. Because exploratory research helps comprehensively explain a phenomenon, the researcher interacted with journalists through interviews to better understand the editorial processes involved before the end product was uploaded on YouTube. Also, this study has not been done before in Kenya and therefore did not interfere with variables.

3.3 Population

Currently, YouTube is awash with channels of Kenyan journalists and non-journalists such as Grace Msalame, Sheillah Mwanyigha, Terryanne Chebet, Mungai Eve, Susan Wanjiku, Jaymo Ule Msee, Rina Hicks sharing news content. Noting that the number of journalists and content creators currently using YouTube as a channel for sharing news content is unknown, this study mainly focused on a section of YouTube news content creators based in Kenya. These are media personalities either currently in mainstream media, previously worked for legacy media or familiar faces in media and who are now producing news content and broadcasting on YouTube, where they have dedicated channels. Five specific Kenyan YouTube news content creators were identified for the study because they had private YouTube channels which were fast growing with over 100,000 subscribers each. This subscriber base is what the researcher used as a threshold to identify these participants. They included journalists who were in mainstream media and therefore enjoyed the level of trust associated with the media. To some extent their audiences viewed them as custodians of public good through public interest journalism. Two did not respond to the communication sent by the researcher appealing for them to be part of the study. The researcher was in communication with two, but they pulled out. One participant outrightly refused to be involved in the study. Consequently, the researcher decided to identify other news content creators with YouTube channels, albeit with a smaller but growing number of subscribers. This is because the study aimed to interrogate gatekeeping processes in the news content produced and was not necessarily pegged on the number of subscribers or viewers.

3.4 Target Population

The target was those with legacy media backgrounds, whether working in mainstream media or not and other independent YouTubers producing news content and broadcasting on their YouTube channels. Eight YouTube news content creators were identified because the researcher felt they had diverse experiences and each produced niche news content. Their content addressed politics, health, disability, governance, development and sports. It was packaged in different formats ranging from talk shows to documentaries. Six actively ran YouTube channels where they shared news content, while two took a break from YouTube but agreed to share their experiences. Two of the news content creators sampled were also identified as social influencers. Some news content creators were journalists who were in the mainstream media and enjoyed the level of trust associated with the media. To some extent their audiences viewed them as custodians of public good through public interest journalism.

3.5 Study Site

The researcher conducted the study in Nairobi, Kenya and interviewed participants at their convenience in their chosen environments. Three interviews were conducted at a neutral physical location in Nairobi while five were conducted via phone.

3.6 Sample Size

Sampling is the selection of a subcategory of units and elements to form a determined population to induce results from the whole population (Tille' & Matei, 2016). The study involved a sampling of eight Kenyan news content creators, all based in

Kenya. This sample size was arrived at because it was supported by the qualitative research method. Dworkin (2012) avers that in such studies, the sample size is often lesser than what would apply in quantitative research methods because of the in-depth nature of the research.

3.7 Sampling Procedure

All eight YouTube news content creators were purposively sampled given that majority met the inclusion criteria of having worked with or working with the mainstream media houses. Therefore, the public associates their content with some level of rigour in the editorial approach.

The study being qualitative, purposive sampling was also ideal because it allowed the researcher to identify participants who have information that responds to the study's objectives. All eight, given their status as news content creators with their YouTube channels, had the relevant information for the study. Etikan et al. (2016) note that purposive sampling methods are anchored on sampling information until saturation. The researcher had hoped also to interview the editorial staff (if any) working for these journalists' YouTube channels to help shed more light on the research problem being investigated (Creswell & Poth, 2018) either until all had participated or until the saturation point was attained for each individual on their editorial team. However, this was impossible because of circumstances beyond the researchers' control.

3.8 Research Method

In-depth interviews and observation were to be used as this study's primary data collection method. According to Silverman (2016), in-depth interviewing was done via phone and face-to-face and helped the researcher access information through the participant, interrogate evidence relevant to the study and gather knowledge of how people view social experiences. This method helped identify sourcing strategies employed by journalistic content creators on YouTube, establish the extent to which the gatekeeping processes by YouTube content creators guarantee editorial independence and public interest journalism and find out gatekeeping challenges YouTube journalists face in their public interest undertaking. Answers to these questions helped achieve the study's objectives which will contribute to the communication research field. Berger 2016) avers with interviews, the researcher accesses data that cannot be generated from observation-only, and this information can be obtained if participants are asked the right questions. Additionally, the use of in-depth interviews was meant to allow the researcher room to gather more information and analyse any new phenomenon that may emerge from responses instead of relying on assumptions and theories (Dworkin, 2012). Observation of the news content creators in their environment did not occur as three of the interviews were conducted physically at a neutral location and five were conducted on the phone.

3.9 Data Generation Tools

An interview guide was used as the primary data collection tool. Interview guides are more personal, and help the researcher gather needed information from the participants. Information was transcribed as part of the records. Interviews offered detailed information

about the experiences and opinions of the participants. Questions were structured such that the researcher could leverage on knowledge and experiences of participants to get more information (Turner, 2010).

3.10 Data Collection Procedures

Data was collected during one-on-one interviews with eight Kenyan YouTube news content creators who identify as journalists and social influencers, using questions structured to fit the research objectives. Interviews were conducted between October and December 2022. Three interviews were face-to-face and five were conducted over the phone. The conversations between the researcher and the interviewees were recorded electronically on an audio recorder and transcribed for data presentation analysis and interpretation. For clarification purposes, the researcher also phoned the participants and reminded them they could add more information or withdraw if needed. The observation was also utilized where the participants' body language, that is, nonverbal communication, where physical behaviour, as opposed to words, were observed by the researcher. Such behaviour included facial expressions, body posture, gestures, eye movement, touch and the use of space. The participants were generally friendly. However, the researcher could not interview the teams that work with YouTube news content creators or sit through production meetings and (or) recordings. Common themes identified, were clustered according to the research objectives. The themes were then analysed, and the findings were presented in narrative form.

3.11 Pre-testing of Data Generation Tools

The researcher did a mock face-to-face interview with participants using a sample interview guide to gauge its effectiveness in generating data. The researcher used a sample population of two journalists who previously had YouTube channels. During this pre-test, the journalists were given the same questions planned for the full-scale survey and responded independently to ensure all questions were valid and reliable. The equipment to be used in audio recording was also tested for functionality and clarity. Frequent consultations with supervisors to agree on the best data generation tools and methods was also done.

3.13 Validity and Reliability of Research Tools

The in-depth interview guide gave the researcher and participants a formula to execute data collection. However, a section of some participants were selective in the questions they responded to. Some claimed the questions were man, while others cited busy schedules that did not allow them time to tackle all. This is despite the same guide being successfully used during the pre-testing of the tools. However, the researcher obliged and asked questions they were comfortable with since that right was granted by the consent letter. On the other hand, the observation guide was not used as some of the interviews were conducted at a neutral location and the majority on phone. Perhaps it would have worked had the participants agreed to be interviewed during the pre-production or post-production stage.

3.13 Data Analysis and Presentation Plan

The researcher analysed data by reviewing information gathered through written notes, interview transcription and audio recordings. This data was analysed by identifying main themes, patterns and categories based on in-depth interviews and observation. To maintain the participants' anonymity, their responses were recorded in numerical order as participant one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight and participant 1, 2, 3,4, 5,6, 7, 8.

Findings from the study were presented in a simple layout of descriptive narrative using text that flows in thematic writing integrating findings with relevant references. Manual coding was used to analyse information to identify common themes and topics. Coding entails grouping bits of data in categories Flick (2014), a process which seeks to make sense of the information gathered using various tools (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

3.14 Ethical Considerations

One of the ethical issues and considerations in this research included the consent of participants. Because the study used interviews, participants were made aware of the reason for the research and why their feedback was important. Additionally, they were informed that participation is voluntary and that there is no compensation. All read the consent letter and agreed to participate in the study, well aware that they could retract part or all of the information afterwards if they felt uncomfortable being included in the research. The privacy of respondents and confidentiality of information was respected such that anonymity was upheld in reporting findings. It was paramount that the researcher remained focused throughout the study and avoid bias and presenting incorrect information in the findings. The study was conducted professionally and without manipulation of any

form. Any questions or clarifications desired by the participants were addressed. An ethics clearance letter from the Aga Khan University Graduate School of Media and Communications (AKU-GSMC) and a research permit from the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI) were also obtained.

3.15 Summary

This chapter discussed the methodology and research design used to carry out the study, which sought to interrogate the gatekeeping process in YouTube news content creation in Kenya. Target population, sample size, data generation and collection were illustrated, and data analysis and presentation. The researcher also explained the ethical considerations which guided the study.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the study's key findings and analyses the emerging themes from the data collected. The participants extensively stated their views and opinions on and off the record concerning the research questions. These were recorded electronically using an audio recorder and later transferred to the computer for storage. The identity of participants in this study were anonymous.

4.2 Presentation, Analysis, and Interpretation

The study was on gatekeeping processes in content produced by Kenyan news content creators on YouTube. Data collected was analysed thematically, namely: news sourcing strategies, gatekeeping processes satisfying public interest, and challenges in content creation. These were interpreted according to the objectives of the study.

4.2.1 Findings

4.2.1.1 Sourcing strategies employed by news content creators on YouTube

News sourcing strategies

All participants except one interviewed said they work with a team and acknowledged that is the only way to produce quality news content. They said they held production meetings and brainstormed ideas. At this same meeting decisions on who

makes the cut as a news source were made and arrangements put in place to execute the production(s).

Participant one submitted that sources of content for their YouTube channel are varied. The participant reported that the content is sometimes obtained through observing certain events. These could be political or development-based events such as infrastructure or general human-interest stories.

My YouTube Channel is focused on features and documentaries, meaning my productions are long-form. I follow up on stories that the media has done and elaborate on them, I also read books, newspapers and social media to see if I can get exciting content to film. I source my content from the things I observe and read (Participant 1).

Participant two's channel broadcasts news that is mostly about Kenya's political landscape said the content source was mainly from political events such as campaign rallies or meetings. The news content creator has correspondents stationed across the country covering various events touching on politics. These reporters by virtue of being on the ground as it were, also interview members of the public, seeking their opinion and reactions to various political discourses in the country. This information not only restricted to politics, is then edited and disseminated as a news package.

For example, if it's a story on Genetically-Modified Foods, where we want to see how Kenyans are reacting, we send our correspondents to every region to give us their reactions and later on we compile the views into one program that is then uploaded to our platform (Participant 2).

Participant two added that their YouTube channel also seeks to inform and educate Kenyans about politics, especially the electoral process. This, he says, is in the hope they will be more empowered to make the right choices at the ballot.

Sourcing for content that appeals to specific target audiences is what the Youtubers reported they aimed for. Participant three said a rapport with various personalities and professionals makes it easier to get material packaged into relevant content. Their channel engaged in the dissemination of information on various topical issues ranging from climate change, human rights, corruption, politics, and good governance, which affect ordinary people in the society.

I have been in the media industry for quite a while and we have developed a network of sources based on different contexts, whistle-blowers, environmental stories and human rights issues among others. I do meetings, we sit with reporters and producers and develop ideas where we get a list of stories to pursue (Participant 3).

Participant three added that some news-makers, individuals and organizations send requests on their other digital media platforms for news coverage. This has occasionally led to partnerships with a section of mainstream media. The result has been the production of news programming that reaches many people and is available on multiple platforms.

We have partnerships with media houses both local and international like NTV, KTN, MNET and BBC, this also enables us to get content very easily because people know that the content will not only be uploaded on YouTube but also on the legacy media (Participant 3).

Participant four, whose YouTube channel broadcasts stories and content on People with Disabilities (PWDs) said events, especially those organized by PWDs provide ideas

for some of the content of his channel. Being a person with a disability, stigma and discrimination are some factors that led to starting the channel.

My platform reduces ableism to include everyone in society, making the voice of persons with disability to be heard. The content is driven by passion for telling disability stories. I work with volunteers who help me in times of taking videos (Participant 4).

Participant four also said highlighting issues that are not commonly spoken about in society is also a key feature of the channel.

Trying to give people a different thought about something, or aspects or to view things in a more different way, what is not being brought forward by the mainstream media. Sometimes, I may talk about technology, going deep to smart devices or artificial intelligence, which is not much spoken about (Participant 4).

Participant five has a channel to highlight matters relating to the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and the resultant acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS). In addition, content is generated scientific research and shared on various global platforms.

Interviews are conducted with people who have expert information about HIV and AIDS. Sometimes I share my own experiences and other people's life experiences (Participant 5).

Participant seven, like most of the Youtubers, also reported looking for what is untold in legacy media, and got overwhelming requests on email and other digital platforms where the majority of followers shared their ideas and topics, they would want talked about on the YouTube channel.

For us, which story is amazing and not told by the mainstream media? We would sit, analyse, ask around, and research and through that you get so many ideas. Also, there were stories I wanted to tell while in

mainstream media but couldn't but now I can. I personally don't do controversial stories. I only focused on human interest whether grass to grace or grace to grass or in between (Participant 7).

For Participant eight, their YouTube channel is a spinoff of a Podcast dedicated to gender and digital security. All guests on the show are women. Topics of discussion were decided depending on seasons and (or) events.

October was cyber security month. So, I decided I will feature women in cyber security, cyber law, policies, mostly we look at the season and also, we look at what is happening currently. For example, during the elections there was a lot of online violence so we were featuring women who have actually gone through online violence, what has been their experience, how do they manage to get over it, and also take advantage of the digital platform to be able to reap what we call the digital dividends (Participant 8).

The study found that leveraging audience feedback also helped the content creators get material for subsequent episodes. For example, one of the YouTube news content creators said story ideas were sometimes shared by policy makers and generally people from the community who approach them directly, emails sent by fans and subscribers, as well as comments on the YouTube channel as the following quotation shows.

When someone drops a comment, we will see it as a team and react. If someone says the sound was bad, we work on shots, camera angles and boring questions and rectify the next episode. Those comments come in handy because they let you know if you are doing something good or bad. Because Kenyans never hide *kama ni mbaya ni mbaya kama ni nzuri ni nzuri* (If it's bad it's bad if it's good its' good) (Participant 7).

Another participant supported this view observing that feedback can be an eye-opening experience in terms of analysing and appreciating the trajectory of one's content creation journey:

Getting reviews is not easy, it's like pulling teeth. It's painful. But you have to keep at it. When you get reviews is when you realize what exactly you are doing. It's always a learning process you can never be 100 percent and also you are not for everyone (Participant 8).

4.2.1.2 Gatekeeping processes and editorial independence and public interest journalism

Gatekeeping processes

The researcher also engaged the news content creators on gatekeeping and the process they use to determine what went into their channel and what was not permissible. All said verification of information was an important step in gatekeeping. They emphasized research before and after recording a big role in the decision of what content to upload eventually.

Participant two said that one had to be very careful unscrupulous individuals out there preyed on unsuspecting digital content creators to spread misinformation. This is an experience they have had where people come with sob stories and attempt to con the audience or try to use the opportunity for coverage by the YouTube channel to spread propaganda. To guard against being taken advantage of, the team sift through information to leave out content that appears as propaganda.

I have a team of people spread across Kenya. We hold meetings in Nairobi and brief our colleagues in the counties on our target and deliberations on whatever content we cover. Our correspondents are thorough, they get only the information needed to be uploaded on our YouTube channel (Participant 2).

Participant two went on to further explain that, during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic some individuals approached members of the production team claiming that they had a cure for the virus. A background check confirmed otherwise. This

was cited as an example of the challenges they face daily while trying to convey credible information to the public. The experience while not unique, shows the importance of news content creators being aware of individuals who may want to take advantage of prevailing situations to spread misinformation and disinformation on social media platforms where the trend is expected.

Participant four underscored the importance of verification and said to make sure that the information conveyed to the public is factual and of interest to people with disabilities, it is imperative to read extensively as part of research to make sure that the messages are not hearsay or based on conjecture and innuendo. Being specific in message broadcasting is also part of the gatekeeping process that should be the spotlight of the Youtubers.

Participant five concurred by saying being knowledgeable on matters to do with HIV and AIDS has helped to only concentrate on the subject matter when generating content. The participant said, they mostly disseminate information that has been researched by scientists and content that draws from personal life experiences as shared by trusted news sources as a way of gatekeeping. The messaging is also based on data that is respected medical health institutions provide. Here is the response is captured verbatim below alongside views of other participants.

A lot of scientific research is coming out. But how can we communicate it to ordinary people? We have to end stigma, without this information we will end up with an ignorant population. HIV is now a normal health condition and so we have to counter myths with narratives that are scientifically researched so that's where I come in (Participant 5).

Another participant had this to say about the gatekeeping processes they adopt:

I decide based on the kind of story they have whether it is a fun or a sad story. If its human interest it really drives people to your page. It takes a lot of preparations, scrutinising all your ideas and knowing which one to run with. Nevertheless, you have to balance the episodes depending on the stories (Participant 7).

Participant eight reported making the final decision even though wide consultations with production team members are part of the process:

My team plays a very big role because we exchange ideas. When we note a particular guest, whoever can be able to reach the guest they invite them and we have a conversation. Of course, there are those moments when somebody suggests someone and then I look at the guest and ask myself what are they bringing. We analyse and if I feel otherwise the buck stops with me. (Participant 8)

As a way of gatekeeping, most of the participants who worked with teams said they hold meetings to brainstorm what ideas to pursue and decide what to upload and when. Participants two and eight said that they have a Social Media manager who schedules stories to be uploaded weekly and monthly. Only one said meetings are held daily with the team to deliberate on stories they think are of public interest and drop the ones that they deem unfit.

Satisfying public interest

When it came to the public interest, the Youtubers concurred that it motivated them to produce news content. One of the content creators said their channel covered current affairs issues which are already in the public domain courtesy of mainstream and social media. These are the stories they build on by giving in-depth analysis for emphasis. With this approach they are able to provide more information and sometimes a different angle to stories to the public through their YouTube Channel.

I pulled it off from what I was doing in mainstream media back then. It is the entertainment side of sports which people were really yearning for and thirsting for. For example, they needed the gossip, stories that ladies share in the salon. Those are the things the audience in the sports circles were missing, they needed something juicy, something they can laugh about, something entertaining about a particular sport (Participant 6).

This view was supported by another participant who said the intention to produce content that satisfies public interest calls for selection of news sources whose content is extraordinary and exciting enough to attract viewership and even subscribers.

For YouTube you have to go for guests who have amazing stories so that when you put out a teaser it attracts. People with amazing stories that will make someone click on your video, you must have a catchy title to your video. YouTube you have to be very selective especially when doing serious content, human interest stories. You always have to develop something new so subscribers get something extra. For news stories you have to do stories that are not being told (Participant 7).

Another participant who agreed with the sentiments said public interest requirement came in handy during the COVID-19 time:

It is very much in public interest especially after the pandemic. If there is anything Covid -19 has underscored is the importance of the internet. Right now, we are trying to close the digital gender divide, and one way of closing the digital gender divide is bringing more women into the space. It is such a timely conversation (Participant 8).

The majority of the study's participants acknowledged that sometimes the news sources may influence the type of content being shared on the YouTube platforms for their own interest. However, one participant had this to say.

Influence must be there. A YouTube channel owner may not have not reached a status where we are being paid for work. Sometimes a guest will give you money. Sometimes it will interfere with your thinking, programming, how you run a show. Once they do that, you have been compromised and you may adjust your content (Participant 6).

This view was supported by Participant seven:

For us it was easy because we didn't have sponsors, because with sponsors involved, they influence how you tell the story. What we had was so easy because no one was setting the rule for us, ours was putting out quality content out there (Participant 7).

Participant eight had an almost similar reason:

I have questions which are my guiding principle. As a host you need to take charge of your stage, you are the one who is in charge. When I feel they are going a different way I just make sure I pull them back in a way though the conversation, through the question that I am asking (Participant 8).

4.2.1.3 Gatekeeping challenges YouTube journalists face

Challenges in news content creation

Like other platforms used as conveyor belts when it comes to disseminating information, Kenyan news content creators who use YouTube said they faced certain challenges while trying to balance satisfying their own and public interests. Participant one said, sometimes a news source will pull out or refuse to be featured on the channel once they discover it's not owned by mainstream media.

Mostly the challenges that I encounter as a Youtuber is that some people will ask about my channel and whether it is a TV station, well some are not interested in being interviewed once they find out that it's a YouTube channel (Participant 1).

According to participant one, this unfair judgement or thinking that YouTube is not an effective or credible communication channel has led some very crucial news-makers to turn down an interview request yet the information to be conveyed to the public needs their opinion and (or) input. This has seen content producers experience difficulties in trying to package comprehensive content for their target audiences.

Another challenge highlighted was that they received overwhelming feedback from the public and sometimes selecting the content that should be created for their YouTube channels became a problem.

I think because of the trust that we have had, we usually have lots of stories. I think what I can highlight as a challenge is not being able to respond to all the needs of our target audiences. Sometimes it's discouraging to some audiences because we will have so many people putting in their requests (Participant 1).

Participant four said that getting subscribers and viewers of their content can also be difficult. This is because viewers do not necessarily translate to subscribers. Also, the participant's channel targets a specific segment of the community while at the same time seeking to educate others. They, however feel somewhat frustrated.

Being a Person with a disability, and having experienced different situations like stigmatization and discrimination, one of the most challenging things is selling the disability agenda. It is not an easy thing (Participant 4).

Another content creator interviewed said some of the information regarding HIV/AIDS is very scientific and breaking it down to explain to an ordinary person can be challenging. They further emphasized the need for one to be knowledgeable on the topic to adequately inform the public.

Sometimes I interact with ignorant people who are clueless about HIV but are debating on it. I have to create content that can help them understand issues surrounding HIV and AIDS (Participant 5).

News content creators interviewed in the study said sometimes a guest may fail to show up and one has to have ways to cover up so that there is no gap and no one notices

anything is amiss. The majority confirm editing out the unwanted segments and filling the gaps with other relevant content.

“Guests have failed to come so many times even after they have confirmed. The good thing is that I normally prepared a backup of stories, analysis, and features. So, if they don’t come you have three or four stories that would fill the time and I never had a problem in terms of plan B because I was so much prepared (Participant 6).

Participant seven also agreed with Participant six that one must have a backup plan if the recording did not turn out as planned. They reported relying on video editors’ expertise to help make underwhelming interviews more impactful and tone down the overwhelming ones. While it may be viewed as manipulation, it is not as it is considered a process of the post production phase where the content is enriched before being uploaded on the YouTube channel. Editing also allows for segmenting of overly long but interesting content into reasonable episodes within the stipulated duration so that audiences are not bombarded with too much information.

Another challenge is handling feedback from audiences especially when they are negative and threatening news sources and other stakeholders’ safety. Participant eight acknowledged once making a drastic decision to protect a news source even though the individual in question felt otherwise.

I have had one incident whereby I had two guests, unfortunately when we put up the episode, they were really attacked online because of what they said and I had to pull down the episode because I needed to protect them. I made that decision because sometimes you outweigh the pros and cons, and I realised this thing might do more harm or good (Participant 8).

This action to prevent what they said was fast becoming online trolling was perhaps motivated by the common saying in journalism that no story is worth your life. However, because this content is available online and can be accessed by anyone, it is difficult to control the reaction in terms of negative, derogatory and personal safety threatening comments made by audiences in the guise of feedback.

Most content creators cited the cost of production as a major challenge. They said they use their resources to finance productions and admit equipment is expensive but the effort and traction are worth it. Only one participant revealed they have consistent funding for episodes. However, these financiers only came on board after they became acquainted with their content which is considered niche. The participant also said, the funding is allocated explicitly for certain topics the sponsor wants addressed. On other occasions, the money has been in the form of grants awarded after a competitive application process. One of their verbatim responses were as follows;

One show, one seating, wages, equipment, venue hire, catering would take us a minimum of 70,000 shillings for every episode. We had a show every week so when you record you do several shows. So, you hire a good venue so that you can have several locations for different episodes (Participant 6).

Participant seven concurred the cost of producing content is heaviest on the Youtubers who also have to hire equipment, transportation, make-up artist, consider catering and a stipend for the production crew. This high production cost, they said, impacts the gatekeeping process since sometimes you may be forced to reconsider the choice of news sources for specific episodes based on proximity of the source.

Participant two said that a challenge they have faced as a Youtuber is being accused by some quarters as biased, and unfair coverage to certain politicians. They cited instances they have been accused of defamation and threatened with legal action.

Sometimes you do a story then someone threatens to sue for defamation. They think we do stories to favour them and when they perceive it to be negative, they claim you are out to portray them in bad light or are supporting a particular political candidate (Participant 2).

This experience as explained by the participant shows the length at which influential individuals in society who are deemed as news-makers will go to so as to protect their image and reputation. Incidentally, in the Kenyan context it is mostly politicians, especially during campaign season who are most likely to threaten journalists and other persons engaged in news content production and dissemination. In this instance, the politician may have thought the content creator is not aware of their rights or is not familiar with the Media Council of Kenya Journalistic Code of Conduct which many journalists in the country subscribe to.

For participant seven, one challenge they faced is when a guest changed the narrative during recording. This is despite them having a prior conversation during which the participant interrogated the information and certified it as newsworthy to warrant an episode. However, when they got to the recording set the interviewee began changing the narrative as the content creator explains.

A source will tell you a gripping story but when they get on set its different, so sometimes you have to control, if the language is not proper, you have to censor and caution because if anything goes out there that is not factual or some cases are in court it will still come back to me (Participant 7).

The above statement proves that the news content creators on YouTube uphold journalistic practices that speak to verifying information for accuracy in reporting, establishing facts from fiction and using decent language. This has helped many avoid situations where they would be taken to court for defamation.

The Kenyan news content creators interviewed further said, despite the challenges, they are driven by passion for telling untold stories, inspiring and entertaining their audience. Based on this it can be said they work in public interest.

4.3 Summary of Key Findings

The study found that Kenyan news content creators who use YouTube to distribute information actively adopted some form of gatekeeping processes even though it is not as rigorous as in mainstream media. Findings on the first objective which sought to examine the sourcing strategies employed by news content creators on YouTube, showed that they intentionally seek out sources depending on the content they want to disseminate. Research on topics of interest and background checks on news sources also form part of the sourcing strategies employed by the YouTubers. The majority also worked with teams to produce content for their respective channels. These individuals made a significant contribution to the generation of ideas from concept to uploading on YouTube. Feedback from the audience either through comments on the channel or emails is another way they get ideas on topics and news sources to feature on their channels.

The second objective sought to establish the extent to which the gatekeeping processes by YouTube news content creators guarantees editorial independence and public

interest journalism. All YouTubers interviewed for the study said they verify information shared on their platforms independently to ensure what goes out is beneficial to the public. They professed to producing content that was in public interest, and opined that the public which is their audience dictated information they wanted to consume. This could be through direct feedback or the content creators tracking trending topics to provide in-depth analysis. Some of them acknowledged the influence of news sources on content produced. This influence could be in receiving resources as funding for production of content. However, they emphasised the influence does not in any way compromise editorial independence or public interest undertaking and the ultimate decision lies with the content creator.

To find out gatekeeping challenges YouTube journalists face in their public interest undertaking was the third objective. Here, it was established that the content creators face a myriad of challenges because they operate private YouTube channels. The majority catered for the cost of production while a number had sponsorships. Most of the Youtubers had put in place mechanisms of making up for shortfalls in production such as a guest not showing up or an interview not going as planned. Another challenge presented itself in the form of negative criticism from the audience and or subscribers. The YouTube news content creators nevertheless acknowledged feedback was important as it confirmed they had viewership and sort of validated their efforts.

4.4 Summary

The main aim of this study was to investigate sourcing strategies, editorial independence and challenges that are associated with news content generation for

YouTube. There are numerous YouTubers in Kenya and this research sought to find out how news content producers undertake gatekeeping processes specifically. In addition, the study delved into sourcing strategies and how they make decisions regarding how they select their interviewees and how they come up with topics featured on their channels. A number of themes emerged from the interviews namely; news sourcing strategies gatekeeping processes, satisfying public interest, and challenges in content creation which the researcher analysed to present the findings. Analysis showed that just like in mainstream media, gatekeeping applies for news content created for distribution on YouTube. These Youtubers most of whom have talk shows also faced challenges that would be encountered by their counterparts in traditional media for example insufficient financial muscle to fund productions and influence of news sources on overall output.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSIONS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

There are many YouTube content creators in Kenya but this study focused on Kenyan news content producers and their gatekeeping processes. This chapter discusses overall findings, conclusion and implications of the study. The researcher puts into context findings against the presented literature in response to the study's objectives. Also included are recommendations on what scholars on the subject can interrogate in future studies.

5.2 Discussions of Key Findings

5.2.1 News content sourcing strategies

The first objective was to examine the sourcing strategies employed by news content creators on YouTube. The research established that Kenyan news content creators who use YouTube as their only or primary platform of disseminating information have no one-size-fits-all approach of sourcing news content. However, most of those interviewed agreed that brainstorming ideas with members of their teams was one way they decided who to interview for their shows. These findings conform to observations by Bro and Wallberg (2015), who aver that the improved variety of principles and practices in journalism has changed the concept of gatekeeping. This is because of the open communication structures afforded by the internet that allow gatekeepers outside the newsrooms to decide what news to publish and distribute. The majority of participants interviewed for the study are enjoying this freedom of decision-making outside the newsroom and the fact that they have their own channels in this case YouTube through

which to disseminate information is a major boost and motivator. For those who have never been in media but produce content, their gatekeeping processes are supported by scholars such as Ghulam and Safdar (2015) who posit that the decision on what news to disseminate on the internet is now in the hands of many gatekeepers both individuals and organizations alike who can publish anything in the way they see acceptable.

Another strategy is settling on topics covered by the mainstream media and expounding on them by providing more information and analysis. In some cases, this analysis for deeper understanding extends to allocating more airtime to the news sources so they can explain their opinion further, which is sometimes not possible on legacy media. Unlike in traditional television broadcasting organizations where news and related programmes are allocated certain time slots, on YouTube, content creators have all the time to utilize as they wish. The videos can be as long or as short the Youtubers want them to be and the advantage is they can be watched at the convenience of the viewer and (or) subscriber. Participants interviewed who are journalists were unanimous in noting that the change from traditional to digital media consumption is due to independence of the content creators in producing content and the freedom of audiences in accessing information. From the study it is clear this independence greatly motivates the search for more depth of information beyond what was available in programming offered by television and radio broadcasts or published in newspapers and other similar hard-copy publications. The need to further analyse journalistic content for audiences who prefer YouTube and other platforms on the internet as a source of news is also inspired by the possibility of telling stories that appeal to a diverse audience including younger viewers. Dennis, Herbers and

Henn (2021), underscore this deeper scrutiny of news arguing it will also benefit younger audiences who because of their interest in more information, have formed opinions and learnt about issues such as politics from generation specific and entertaining content which makes them interested in the work of Youtubers.

Feedback from audiences who respond directly on the YouTube channel's comment section or who send emails and direct messages is another approach YouTubers use to generate news content. This confirms that audiences are now also gatekeepers and can freely share feedback on what they have viewed, listened to or read on digital platforms. For YouTube they feel comfortable doing this because they are invested in the productions by virtue of viewership or subscription. Furthermore, most of these content creators always refer to audiences as 'community' and encourage them to 'like, subscribe and share' including giving views on what content they would like to see next, which is more of a greenlight for the audiences to engage with the news whichever way they like. Additionally, researchers Pearson and Kosicki (2017) contend that journalists attract audiences online through the production and uptake of news because there is no barrier on what gates to put to control information. That notwithstanding, YouTube news content creators require a high degree of independence from their audiences' influence to best exercise their gatekeeping role. And even as they welcome suggestions from their respective audiences, participants interviewed for this study concur that verification of information especially on suggested topics, or proposals on suitable news sources is key to guard against being purveyors of misinformation or propaganda. This is in accord with Rosenberry and Burton (2009), who say content creators have the responsibility to balance

news provided by citizens for reportage that is solutions based. Additionally, they agree that upholding values such as democracy which give audiences a chance to exercise freedom of speech by participating in the news should be the norm in YouTube content generation.

The study established that another way of getting news sources is intentionally creating niche content to target specific audience segments. Content creation for audiences with similar interests rather than targeting larger groups with diverse interests is supported by Litchenstein, Harber and Baus (2021) who say outliers on social media prefer creating content for small and homogeneous groups of people compared to huge audiences. One of the participants said they intentionally target women news sources and sometimes tailor the show to align with themes or national and global events such as the International Women's Day. Another Youtuber has a channel dedicated to producing news that resonates with those interested in politics. This thinking is grounded in the studies by scholars like Evans (2016), who posits that the public have YouTube, an important new influence on their understanding of news, events and political behaviour. However, as they produce the niche content, they also need to be aware that theirs is not the only source of information on the subject and there are many other content creators out there doing the same on the same platform. On the other hand, audiences too have a variety of media sources for information, education and entertainment provided by networked communication that offers access to custom-made information, tailored to specific preferences (Mukerjee et al., 2018).

5.2.2 Gatekeeping processes

The second objective was to establish the extent to which YouTube news content creators' gatekeeping processes guarantee editorial independence and public interest journalism. The study established that verification of information to ensure what is conveyed to the public is factual is the norm for all participants interviewed. Because most of the media personalities interviewed produce content targeting specific audience segments, it is important for them to communicate information that is truthful and beneficial to the stakeholders involved. According to Siapera and Veglis (2012) gatekeeping, technological advances notwithstanding, is still a vital part of journalism as sources credibility must be verified. This coupled with extensive research ensures the content is not hearsay, speculation or ambiguous even as it seeks to appeal to specific viewers.

While the ultimate decision on what constitutes news content and qualifies to be uploaded is on the YouTubers themselves, majority work with teams to produce content for their respective channels. The majority concurred that their production teams made a significant contribution to success of the YouTube Channels. They said meetings held before productions are common practise whereby, they brainstorm ideas before settling on a given topic of discussion and relevant news source. Frequent consultations, can therefore be said to be a part of the gatekeeping process that guarantees editorial independence and where deliberate effort is made to ensure the end product uploaded is ideal and conforms to the overall vision of the channel. This collaboration ensures continuity and uniformity in standards which then promotes consistency and ultimately facilitates sustainability of

the YouTube channels. These findings are anchored in the networked gatekeeping theory which Barzilai-Naho (2009) explains as the evolution of gatekeeping from a direct approach to a more dynamic one. According to Barzilai-Naho, this shift in gatekeeping and gated roles by stakeholders changes as regularly as their interests and goals. The Kenyan YouTube news content creators count among these stakeholders, who Welbers and Opgenhaffen (2018) say include influential blogs and individuals on social media who follow existing gates for the benefit of their audience and rarely keep separate gates of their own. Furthermore, dissemination of news is gradually transformed by the collaborative nature of digital media. And courtesy of the multi-directional flow of information, gatekeeping can therefore be said to exist online. Of note, is that, it continues to change with the times because all participants have the potential to influence one another (Chin-Fook & Simmonds, 2011).

All Youtubers interviewed for the study professed to produce content that was in the public interest. They argued that the public which is their audience dictates information. One said their channel seeks to inform and educate Kenyans about politics, especially the electoral process. Another dedicates time to enlighten society about persons with disability and their lifestyle including sharing information on technology and other areas of interest. Ferreira (2018) supports this notion by acknowledging public journalism encourages journalists to prioritize citizens. This is because as Wilding et al. (2018) posit, journalism and digital platforms are reshaping the public domain. Some news content creators admit news sources sometimes influence content produced. If someone or something is trending on mainstream and social media, the news will be picked up and shared on YouTube where

a different audience will interact with it. Creating content that is in public interest also means being intentional about news sourcing, sources and the broadcast. The thought process should be such that information is viewed as a public good and the content creator is cognizant that once shared on the internet and in the case of this study YouTube then consumption will not be exclusive but inclusive.

Regarding audience feedback, the YouTube news content creators interviewed for this study said they appreciated that it was significant in many aspects. They said it makes them aware of who is interested in their channels in terms of viewership, preferences, and what they find important. Observations supported by Evans (2016) who opines that presentation of content on YouTube is guided by the perception of individual viewers regarding popularity and relevance. Likewise, Haridakis and Hanson (2009) underscore the reality that nowadays the audience is a crucial factor of content distribution online whereby millions of users view the most popular videos. For the YouTubers, feedback confirms they have viewership and command a certain share of the digital audience but also sort of validates their efforts and gives them direction. All study participants said they have gotten story ideas from feedback but admitted not all reviews are favourable. These ideas are sometimes a different approach to existing content or a new revelation which content producers cannot follow through with.

5.2.3 Gatekeeping challenges

The third objective was to find out gatekeeping challenges YouTube journalists face in their public interest undertaking. The study found that they encounter a myriad of challenges by virtue of the fact that they operate private YouTube channels. A majority,

said the main challenge was in the production of the content which has a direct bearing on gatekeeping. The research found out that majority of the content creators use their own resources to cater for the cost of production and this has led a section to seek sponsorship and (or) advertising. Admittedly, this advertising and sponsorship may dictate content and on occasion choice of the relevant news source. This is especially so if a tailored message that needs to be communicated to a specific audience. According to the news content creators interviewed specific messaging applies particularly if the advertiser is keen on leveraging on the popularity of the Youtuber, YouTube channel and subscriber base to push a certain message. Scholars like Sheldrake (2011) say reaching a few key people means you ultimately benefit from their networks. However, YouTubers must be cautious when engaging in such partnerships to avoid spreading information even as they seek more viewership and subscribers. In fact, scholars like Gutiérrez-Martín et al. (2019) warn against using misleading news information to gain traction.

Furthermore, Shoemaker and Vos (2009) also caution that news content can be compromised if finances are involved observing that advertisers' interests can sometimes be interpreted to mean the media's own best interest or the public's interest. However, some content creators said they had no problem using their platforms to advertise products or services if the messaging aligns with their channel's vision as they are also looking to generate income to stay afloat. This finding is backed by Wellman et al. (2020) who argue influencer promotion is not fundamentally unethical and that prioritizing brands and relationship with audiences while anticipating profits is expected.

Most of the Youtubers also acknowledged scenarios where recordings did not go as planned. A news source may fail to show up as expected or change the narrative during the interview. In such situations they have to be innovative to fill up the slot in case of a no show, repeatedly ask questions to get clarity of answers or even stop midway through the interview to inquire why the guest is giving a different account of events. Seeking accuracy of information and accountability for the same are some journalism principles that the YouTubers uphold in the digital space. Indeed Pavlik (2008) agrees that certain ethical challenges have been worsened and new ones created by technology hence and journalists, and media professionals need to be alert.

Another challenge is controlling feedback from audiences both subscribed and unsubscribed. This is especially if the responses are negative in nature and targeted. Many YouTubers interviewed conceded to muting the comment sections and sometimes pulling down videos to protect themselves and their platform. One content creator said they once interviewed a news source and thereafter the feedback which was leaning towards cyber bullying made them remove an entire episode from all digital platforms. This YouTuber, a journalist described getting feedback as a sometimes-painful process likening it to “pulling teeth” saying reviews help one realize what exactly they are doing and “It’s always a learning process you can never be 100 percent and also you are not for everyone.”

5.3 Conclusion and Implications for Practice

Generally, participants in the study agree that, gatekeeping exists in YouTube news content creation but it may not be as rigorous in terms of decision-makers as in mainstream media. They are unanimous that to be able to disseminate information to the public and

maintain credibility and loyalty one needs to be consistent with messaging. To make up for less rigour in gatekeeping the content producers are devoting more airtime and giving more voices to issues compared to legacy media. The result is that more information is accessible to the public which in turn leads to continued conversation and engagement on the topic at hand. Consistency in creating content around issues of public interest also contributes to their remaining relevant and creating a niche in specific subjects. Additionally, for YouTube content created with support from sponsors and advertisers, audiences should be alive to the commercial elements of the information. Discernment of the message being communicated should be with the full knowledge that there is influence from the funders which may or may not compromise the gatekeeping process depending on individual content creators.

At the same time, content creators whose YouTube channels have grown exponentially may need to expand the scope of production as needs arise. This may call for more investments in terms of human capital and finances which could increase the burden already being felt by the youtubers especially those whose productions are self-sponsored. However, these growing needs may be overwhelming to some Youtubers who may be forced to scale down or discontinue content production to pursue other more lucrative ventures in the hope they will get enough funds to revive their channels in future.

The implication for practice is that these news content creators are here to stay and should be acknowledged as credible sources of information just like mainstream media. They mostly follow the same news sourcing procedures as their counterparts in legacy media with the only major difference being, their content production is self-sponsored.

YouTube news content creators also to some extent perceive themselves as champions of the issues they articulate through their channels. This perhaps why those sampled for the study said they are passionate about what they do and are in the YouTube and digital space for the long haul, challenges notwithstanding. Therefore, there is needs to encourage them to continue producing news content for their respective audience segments.

5.4 Recommendations

Based on the findings presented, the researcher has identified a number of areas that could be improved to ensure the news content creators continue producing news content on YouTube. These are all-inclusive decision-making, collaboration, editorial policies and, recognition and flexibility.

5.4.1 All-inclusive decision making

Opening up decision-making on key issues such as the guest to interview to include the whole team rather than an individual. This is especially crucial when there is conflict of opinion on the ideal news source or content. The majority of YouTubers interviewed have the final word when it comes to making decisions on news sources and content uploaded. This is probably because they view their channels as personal property and therefore feel the need to protect their territory. Majority also regard themselves as authorities in their line of work and feel that privilege means their decision is final. A section admits to being guided by the vision for their respective channels and feels having the final say in matters makes it possible to remain within that realm. All- inclusive decision-making will give all involved in the production a sense of responsibility and ownership of content being shared.

5.4.2 Collaboration

It is clear news content creators on YouTube are determined to continue tapping into the online audience segment space even as majority grapple with challenges such as high costs of production. Collaboration with each other to produce content is one way to solve the issue. For example, when working on stories with similar angles they can pool resources to maximize ground covered in terms of transportation to various location and use of equipment and facilities. One of the content creators interviewed say they explore broadcast partnerships with local mainstream media and continental subscriber television channels. These kinds of collaborations can easily translate to more viewership and subscribers especially if the subject being tackled is interlinked. For example, the news content producers who focus on disability issues and the one who addresses HIV/AIDs can partner to generate programming that appeals to both audience segments. Partnership can also be extended to include producers in other jurisdictions who produce similar content. For instance, those with political channels can broadcast news from other regions or countries with YouTubers running channels with similar content. An example is the Nigerian elections slated for February 25, 2023 and Youtubers in Kenya can highlight that in their channels to get traction in the west African country and also attract audiences from that part of the world.

Content creators can also collaborate with mainstream media organizations to jointly produce content to be broadcast simultaneously on Television and YouTube. This will help drive audience numbers to both platforms and perhaps generate more revenue for

the content producers. Partnership will also lend credibility to the content aired on both YouTube and Television because some audiences see one as more valid than the other.

5.4.3 Editorial policies

The research shows that the line between personal and public interest is very thin. A cross-section of participants interviewed acknowledged benefiting in one way or the other from news sources and other stakeholders. Strict editorial policies should be incorporated to spell out terms of engagement with fellow content creators, their production teams, sponsors and even audiences. This will guard against news sources dictating content creation to the extent that it comes out as a straight forward advertisement rather than news content. Teams involved in the production will also less likely find themselves in situations that compromise the quality of content. Sound editorial policies will also help build trust between the news content creators and individuals and entities they view as key stakeholders. It will also help them expand the network of news sources without the burden of conflict of interest if any existed before.

5.4.4 Recognition and flexibility

All interviewed for this research said they are driven by passion for telling untold stories and for satisfying the hunger for different, niche content. There is a need for mainstream media in Kenya and other media stakeholders to recognize YouTube News content creators as key players in the media and communication ecosystem. For example, one of the YouTubers interviewed for this research was recently acknowledged by the President of the republic of Kenya for his contribution to nation building through news content production and employment creation courtesy of his YouTube channel which

broadcasts political content. Another one whose YouTube channel is a spinoff of a podcast is currently a much sought-after speaker on digital security and is considered an authority in the area, attracting continuous funding for projects. While this was not the crux of the study, it was evident that the Youtubers started their private channels not only to fill an existing news gap online but also out of frustration of not having the flexibility to do so while still in legacy media. Majority feel there is a sort of rigidity and routine in traditional media news sourcing and packaging that is limiting creativity of many journalists and locking out a significant portion of the audience. The YouTubers news content creators interviewed said there is a feeling of freedom in that they can produce whatever content they like and feel the audience needs without relying on the approval of editors as would be the case in mainstream media.

5.5 Areas for Further Research

From the findings it is clear there is some gatekeeping in news content produced by Kenyan news content creators on YouTube. However, there are areas of further research in YouTube Content creation. While this study contributes to research into gatekeeping in news content produced on YouTube by Kenyan news content creators, it is not exhaustive and creates an opportunity for further interrogation on the same and other journalistic practices on the platform. This is because YouTube unlike other new media can reach diverse audiences due to its perceptive nature (Evans, 2016). Journalistic practices such as gatekeeping are no longer a preserve of those in mainstream media and therefore methods used in this investigation can be used to interrogate the issue in other

jurisdictions and perhaps expose more areas of study such as the impact of these channels on television viewership.

Other studies could focus on the economic impact of YouTube news content creation on the jurisdictions they operate in because majority of participants interviewed work with teams and pay some stipend. Also obvious from the study is that some YouTube news content creators were celebrities and social influencers before venturing into the platform while some gained that status afterwards. Therefore, studies can be done to shed more light on the power of social media in creating societal influencers and celebrities. At the same time, while the new digital actors on YouTube and other social media compete with newsroom journalism in terms of audience and advertising market (Lichtenstein, Herbers, & Baus 2021) there exists a gap in unpacking the influence and impact of advertisers and funders on the news content produced by Kenyan news content creators on YouTube. This study sampled eight participants, a small percentage of YouTubers who produce news content in Kenya. However, but their insights have helped put into perspective the journalistic practices such as gatekeeping in that space.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: In-depth Interview Guide

1. How do you decide who to interview as a news source in your shows?
 - a. What guidelines/policies do you have for sourcing news/news makers? If none why?
 - b. Do you have a team/production/editorial that you work with?
 - c. What influence does your team/production/editorial have over choice of source?
 - d. What would you say is the relationship between the choice of guests in your channel and the topic of discussion?
 - e. Please explain how you go about the sourcing of guests and the strategies you have in place to ensure that the right guests for the topic of discussion is part of your production.
2. Briefly explain the editorial processes used in production of content for your audience?
 - a. What mechanism do you have in place to guarantee that the content you produce is independent from any interest?
 - b. What would you describe as the input/contribution of your editorial team in content production?
 - c. How do you decide what to broadcast, who to seek more information from, who to invite for the discussion on your channel and what to edit out?
 - d. How do you decide what is of public interest or otherwise?
 - e. How do you ensure your content serves public interest?
3. What challenges do you encounter when sourcing for content and producing content that is good and serves the interest for your audience?
 - a. Do you have a platform for audience/public feedback? What are some of the issues raised by the audience/public?

Appendix B: AKU Ethics Review Committee Approval Letter



THE AGA KHAN UNIVERSITY
Graduate School of Media and Communications

REF: AKU-GSMC/ERC/2022/005

Date: September 05, 2022.

Dear Vereso Mwanga (Student No. 553292)

**RE: GATEKEEPING PROCESSES IN CONTENT PRODUCED BY KENYAN NEWS
CONTENT CREATORS ON YOUTUBE**

This is to inform you that Aga Khan University – Graduate School of Media and Communications Ethics Review Committee has reviewed and approved your above research proposal. Your approval period is September 05, 2022, to September 04, 2023, and your application's approval number is AKU-GSMC/ERC/2022/005.

This approval is subject to compliance with the following, under the supervision of your two supervisors:

1. Only the approved documents including the informed consent form and the data collection instruments will be used.
2. Any changes, made on the approved documents that may increase the risks or affect the welfare or safety of the participants or compromise the integrity of the study must be reported to GSMC within the shortest time possible. The amended documents will be taken through a fresh review and the due process of approval.
3. In the event that the research cannot be completed within the one-year approved period, the researcher will request for renewal of approval 30 days prior to the end of the approved period.
4. The researcher will be required to submit a comprehensive progress report when applying for renewal of approval.
5. Submission of an executive summary report to the GSMC's Ethics Review Committee within 90 days of completion of the study.
6. Produce all the data collected using the approved tools as and when required by the Ethics Review Committee within the 90 days of completion of your study.

Prior to commencing your study, you will be required to obtain a research permit from National Commission for Science, Technology, and Innovation (NACOSTI). You can access the application portal from the website on <https://www.nacosti.go.ke/>.

Please feel free to contact me should you require any further information.

Yours sincerely

Dr Nancy Booker
Interim Dean

University Centre, 4th Floor, 3rd Parklands Avenue
P.O. Box 30270 – 00100 G.P.O. Nairobi, Kenya
Tel: +254 20 3740062/63, +254 (0) 731 888 055; +254 (0) 719 231 530
Email Address: info.gsmc@aku.edu ; Website: www.aku.edu

Appendix C: Introductory Letter From AKU



THE AGA KHAN UNIVERSITY
Graduate School of Media and Communications

National Commission for Science, Technology, and Innovation
P. O. Box 30623 – 00100
Nairobi

September 05, 2022

Dear Sir/Madam.

VERESO MWANGA (STUDENT NO. 553292)

Vereso Mwanga is a registered student at the Aga Khan University, Graduate School of Media and Communications. She is enrolled in the Master of Arts in Digital Journalism Programme and has completed her course work. She is now working on her Master's thesis. Ms. Mwanga's topic is "Gatekeeping Processes in Content Produced by Kenyan News Content Creators on YouTube."

The purpose of my writing is to request you to assist Ms. Mwanga complete this important academic exercise. Any information collected will be used solely for academic purposes. Upon completion of the research, Ms. Mwanga's thesis will be available at our library. She will also submit two hard copies and one soft copy in pdf of her completed work to your department.

We appreciate your support to our student towards her successful completion of her thesis research.


Please feel free to contact me should you require any further information.

Yours sincerely,

Prof. Nancy Booker
Interim Dean


Appendix D: NACOSTI Research Licence


REPUBLIC OF KENYA


**NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR
SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY & INNOVATION**

Ref No: **427382** Date of Issue: **07/October/2022**


RESEARCH LICENSE



This is to Certify that Ms. Judith Vereso Mwanga of Aga Khan University, has been licensed to conduct research as per the provision of the Science, Technology and Innovation Act, 2013 (Rev.2014) in Nairobi on the topic: GATEKEEPING PROCESSES IN CONTENT PRODUCED BY KENYAN NEWS CONTENT CREATORS ON YOUTUBE for the period ending : 07/October/2023.

License No: **NACOSTI/P/22/20831**

427382
Applicant Identification Number


Director General
**NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR
SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY &
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See overleaf for conditions

THE SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION ACT, 2013 (Rev. 2014)
Legal Notice No. 108: The Science, Technology and Innovation (Research Licensing) Regulations, 2014

The National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation, hereafter referred to as the Commission, was established under the Science, Technology and Innovation Act 2013 (Revised 2014) herein after referred to as the Act. The objective of the Commission shall be to regulate and assure quality in the science, technology and innovation sector and advise the Government in matters related thereto.

CONDITIONS OF THE RESEARCH LICENSE

1. The License is granted subject to provisions of the Constitution of Kenya, the Science, Technology and Innovation Act, and other relevant laws, policies and regulations. Accordingly, the licensee shall adhere to such procedures, standards, code of ethics and guidelines as may be prescribed by regulations made under the Act, or prescribed by provisions of International treaties of which Kenya is a signatory to
2. The research and its related activities as well as outcomes shall be beneficial to the country and shall not in any way:
 - i. Endanger national security
 - ii. Adversely affect the lives of Kenyans
 - iii. Be in contravention of Kenya's international obligations including Biological Weapons Convention (BWC), Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization (CTBTO), Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear (CBRN).
 - iv. Result in exploitation of intellectual property rights of communities in Kenya
 - v. Adversely affect the environment
 - vi. Adversely affect the rights of communities
 - vii. Endanger public safety and national cohesion
 - viii. Plagiarize someone else's work
3. The License is valid for the proposed research, location and specified period.
4. The license any rights thereunder are non-transferable
5. The Commission reserves the right to cancel the research at any time during the research period if in the opinion of the Commission the research is not implemented in conformity with the provisions of the Act or any other written law.
6. The Licensee shall inform the relevant County Director of Education, County Commissioner and County Governor before commencement of the research.
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11. The Commission reserves the right to modify the conditions of the License including cancellation without prior notice.
12. Research, findings and information regarding research systems shall be stored or disseminated, utilized or applied in such a manner as may be prescribed by the Commission from time to time.
13. The Licensee shall disclose to the Commission, the relevant Institutional Scientific and Ethical Review Committee, and the relevant national agencies any inventions and discoveries that are of National strategic importance.
14. The Commission shall have powers to acquire from any person the right in, or to, any scientific innovation, invention or patent of strategic importance to the country.
15. Relevant Institutional Scientific and Ethical Review Committee shall monitor and evaluate the research periodically, and make a report of its findings to the Commission for necessary action.

National Commission for Science, Technology and
Innovation(NACOSTI),
Off Waiyaki Way, Upper Kabete,
P. O. Box 30623 - 00100 Nairobi, KENYA
Telephone: 020 4007000, 071 3788787, 0735404245
E-mail: dg@nacosti.go.ke
Website: www.nacosti.go.ke