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The Kenya Journalism Review

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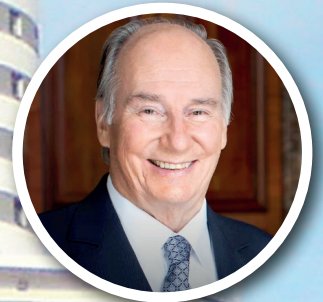
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The Aga Khan

“ **END OF AN ERA**

The bulldog of African
media has a new owner,
and a new bark

**Selling the Nation:
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**Kenya Journalism Review
is a publication of the
Kenya Editors' Guild whose
mission is to promote media
freedom, credibility and
professionalism.**

Preface

Journalism is more than the reporting of events; it is the preservation of truth, the defence of public interest, and the foundation upon which informed societies are built.

As the media landscape continues to evolve at an unprecedented pace, journalists are navigating a complex environment shaped by rapid technological change, the rise of artificial intelligence, shifting audience behaviour, economic pressure, misinformation, and growing threats to press freedom.

As we look ahead to a critical electoral period, these realities place an even greater responsibility on the media to safeguard information integrity, strengthen public trust, and deliver journalism that is accurate, ethical, and accountable. They also underscore the urgent need to build a more sustainable media ecosystem capable of serving the public interest for generations to come.

The Kenya Journalism Review (KJR) provides a timely platform for reflection, learning, and professional discourse. It captures the ideas, key developments, experiences, and emerging trends that are shaping journalism in Kenya and beyond while celebrating the work of practitioners who continue to uphold the highest standards of excellence in the profession despite the many challenges confronting the industry.

This publication is more than a collection of stories. It is a record of our collective journey, documenting the conversations, innovations, research, and best practices that will help strengthen journalism for generations to come. It is also an invitation to continually question, adapt, and reimagine the role of the media in an increasingly interconnected and digital world.

At the Kenya Editors Guild (KEG), we remain steadfast in our commitment to promoting editorial excellence, defending media freedom, strengthening newsroom leadership, and investing in the next generation of journalists. We believe that a vibrant democracy depends on a media that is independent, ethical, innovative, sustainable, and trusted by the public.

I extend my sincere appreciation to all the contributors, editors and partners whose dedication has made this edition possible. Your insights enrich our profession and reaffirm the critical role journalism plays in promoting accountability, transparency, inclusion, and informed public discourse.

As you turn these pages, I invite you to engage with the ideas presented, challenge conventional thinking, and draw inspiration from the diverse perspectives shared. Together, let us continue building a media ecosystem that is resilient, future-ready, and firmly anchored in truth, integrity, innovation, and the public interest.



**Zubeidah
Kananu**
President
Kenya Editors Guild

Africa must reform media regulation for digital age



By
Churchill Otieno
@OtienoC

I was a young reporter when Jaramogi Oginga Odinga died at Aga Khan Hospital in Kisumu. Only two journalists were on the ground that day. I was one of them. The other was my boss, Caleb Atemi.

What followed remains one of the defining lessons of my career. Verification under pressure. The essence of establishing facts. Every indication was there that the unthinkable had happened, but we had to wait for Dr. Odhiambo Olel, now late, to come and confirm it directly to us before we could commit it to a story. We filed the story through a reverse call from a red telephone booth just outside the hospital reception. The story was taken directly by Nation Media Group's topmost editor Wangethi Mwangi.

The Covid pandemic found me leading the team that built Nation Media Group's first digital paywall, one of the earliest serious attempts in Africa to persuade audiences that journalism has value and that value deserves compensation. More than 18-months of workshops and sprints on Zoom with teams distributed across globe made it clear the arena had changed, materially.

The responsibility of separating truth from speculation at a moment of national significance played again powerfully more than 31 years later when Jaramogi's son Raila Odinga died in October 2024. Joe Odindo reminded us recently how for hours almost the entire nation knew Raila had died in India yet the mainstream me-

dia stoically held back from reporting it because no one in the family, party, or government could go on record. Journalism at its finest is not merely about information. It is about public trust.

These experiences, separated by decades and technology, taught me the same lesson. Journalism creates immense value. The problem has never been creating value. The problem is that increasingly, those who create that value do not control enough of it to sustain themselves.

That challenge now sits at the heart of the crisis facing African media.

Julius Nyerere once observed that "without an informed public there can be no democracy." He was speaking before social media, before search engines, before artificial intelligence. Yet his insight remains profoundly relevant. Information is not simply another commodity. It is the oxygen of self-government.

Across Africa, journalists continue to expose corruption, investigate abuse of power, document injustice, scrutinise elections and provide reliable information during moments of crisis. Yet many of the institutions producing this journalism are financially weaker than they were a decade ago.

This is not simply a business problem. It is a market problem. And increasingly, it is a regulatory problem.

Economists use the term market

Without an informed public there can be no democracy
Julius Nyerere



A journalist covering an event / AI ILLUSTRATED

failure to describe situations where markets fail to produce outcomes that are socially optimal. Public-interest journalism is perhaps one of the clearest examples, as Daily Maverick's Styli Charambous has so persuasively argued.

The benefits of journalism extend far beyond those who directly pay for it. When corruption is exposed, everyone benefits. When public spending is scrutinised, everyone benefits. When misinformation is challenged, everyone benefits. Journalism creates what economists call positive externalities, benefits enjoyed by society as a whole.

The difficulty is that while society enjoys these benefits, the organisations producing them often struggle to capture sufficient economic value to remain sustainable. The social value of journalism is immense. Its commercial value is increasingly under pressure.

For decades, advertising helped bridge this gap. News organisations used advertising revenues to subsidise public-interest reporting. Then the internet arrived. Social media followed. Today, artificial intelligence is acceler-

ating the disruption.

Newsrooms pay reporters. Newsrooms invest in investigations. Newsrooms bear legal and editorial risks. Yet an increasing share of the economic value generated around journalism is captured elsewhere through search, aggregation, social distribution and AI systems trained on journalistic content.

The newsroom creates value. Others monetise it. This is not merely technological innovation. It is also a structural transfer of value.

Nelson Mandela underscored the importance of this ecosystem when he said that "a critical, independent and investigative press is the lifeblood of any democracy." The significance of that statement lies not only in its defence of media freedom. It recognises that journalism performs a public function that markets alone may not adequately support.

For too long, Africa has approached media regulation primarily through the lens of rights and freedoms. That focus was both necessary and justified. Our post-independence history required us to fight censorship, criminal defamation laws, arbitrary licens-

Today, some of the greatest threats to independent journalism are economic rather than political. A newsroom does not need to be censored if it can be starved.

Nelson Mandela

ing regimes and political interference. This duty remains critical.

But while we focused on protecting media freedom, the economics of journalism changed dramatically.

Today, some of the greatest threats to independent journalism are economic rather than political. A newsroom does not need to be censored if it can be starved. A publication does not need to be banned if it can no longer afford investigative reporting. A journalist does not need to be jailed

if the institution employing them becomes commercially unsustainable.

Freedom without sustainability is fragile.

This is why Africa needs a new generation of media regulatory reforms. Not reforms designed to protect media companies, but reforms designed to protect society's access to independent journalism.

Competition authorities should investigate imbalances in bargaining power between dominant digital platforms and news publishers. Parliaments should enact laws requiring greater transparency on how journalistic content is used in AI systems.

Publishers should be able to negotiate collectively where necessary. Compensation mechanisms should be explored where journalistic content generates commercial value elsewhere.

Most importantly, regulation must recognise that journalism is not merely another market commodity. It is democratic infrastructure.

African societies have long understood that some goods are too important to be left entirely to market forces. Ubuntu teaches us that our humanity is interconnected. Harambee reminds us that collective effort can achieve what individuals cannot.

Across our continent, communities have historically protected shared resources because their benefits extend beyond individual users. Messing the village well drew the wrath of the community. Journalism belongs in that category.

Kofi Annan captured this reality succinctly when he said that "knowledge is power, information is liberating."

But information does not appear by magic. It requires institutions. It requires investment. It requires journalists. And it requires business models capable of sustaining them.

This is where African media leaders must confront an uncomfortable truth. We continue to compete fiercely against one another while losing collectively to much larger actors. Publishers treat neighbouring publishers as primary competitors. Broadcasters view fellow broadcasters as threats. Digital outlets fight for shrinking



An illustration of a newsroom and use of technology / AI ILLUSTRATED

pools of audience attention. Meanwhile, global technology companies negotiate from positions of unprecedented scale and power.

This fragmentation weakens everyone.

The future demands a shift from competition to what economists increasingly call cooptation. Competing where necessary. Collaborating where essential.

The late Cameroonian publisher Pius Njawa often warned that Africa's media would struggle not because of a lack of talent, but because of a lack of solidarity. His observation is even more relevant today.

No single publisher possesses sufficient bargaining power against global technology platforms.

Collectively, however, publishers can document harm, commission research, engage regulators, pursue legal remedies and negotiate from positions of strength. The telecommunications sector learned this lesson. Banks learned it. Airlines learned it. Media must now learn it too.

The public-good nature of journalism also requires a more mature conversation about funding. Neither markets nor governments nor philanthropists alone can sustain public-interest journalism. We need structured contributions from both public and private sectors.

This does not mean political patron-

age. It means recognising journalism as a form of democratic infrastructure.

Independent public-interest journalism funds, tax incentives, innovation grants and support for local news ecosystems deserve serious consideration, accompanied by strong safeguards to protect editorial independence.

The private sector also has a role to play. Businesses benefit from accountable institutions, transparent markets and informed citizens. Supporting independent journalism should be viewed not as charity but as investment in the health of the societies and economies within which businesses operate. This is why brands that withhold advertising to avoid critical journalism must be called out.

Artificial intelligence makes these questions even more urgent. AI systems can summarise information. They can synthesise content. They can distribute knowledge at scale.

But they cannot replace original reporting. They do not attend court hearings. They do not cultivate sources. They do not investigate corruption. They do not stand in floodwaters documenting human suffering. Without journalism, AI has no credible news to learn from.

Babacar Touré, one of Africa's most respected editors, often described journalism as a public trust rather than merely a business. The AI era reminds us why that distinction matters.

African journalism now stands at an inflection point. The old economic compact has broken down. The institutions that create journalistic value no longer control enough of the value they generate. Yet this moment also presents an opportunity.

An African proverb teaches that when spider webs unite, they can tie up a lion. The lesson for media leaders is clear. Fragmented, we negotiate from weakness. United, we can reshape the terms of engagement with platforms, regulators and markets.

The task before us is therefore not merely commercial. It is democratic.

We must reimagine media regulation for the digital age. We must move from competition to cooptation. We must build evidence, organise collectively and recover bargaining power over journalistic value.

Above all, we must insist on a simple principle: those who create public value deserve a fair share of the economic value that flows from it.

Journalism remains one of democracy's most important institutions. Its future cannot be left to market accidents.

The future of African journalism will depend on whether we finally find the courage to act on this truth.

The writer is the President of The Africa Editors Forum (TAEF). Find him at cotieno@gmail.com

Owning the narrative: Media regulation and Africa's quest for voice and sovereignty

By
David Omwoyo



When I rose to the podium at the Annual Pan African Media Summit on May 13-15, 2026 in Nairobi, I carried some anxiety that I suspect many of my colleagues across the continent share. We are living through the most turbulent period in the history of journalism and media—and yet, here we were, gathering to talk, debate, and hopefully chart a strategy forward. Would it be just another talk-shop?

Here is a question I posed to delegates at the Summit: Who is a journalist in 2026?

It used to be easy. A journalist worked for a registered media house, carried a press card, and answered to an editor. Today, a teenager with a smartphone and ten thousand TikTok followers can break a story before

our accredited reporters have picked their notebooks. Bloggers, influencers, citizen reporters have democratised information in ways we celebrate and fear in equal measure.

The Regulatory Architecture -Confusion or collaboration.

If you want to understand media regulation in Africa, Kenya is not a bad place to start. We are, in many ways, a microcosm of the continent's contradictions.

Media regulation in Kenya sits at the intersection of competing legitimate interests: the public's right to information, journalists' freedom to report, and society's need for accountability and protection from harm. The challenge for policymakers, media practitioners, and other actors is to craft a framework that nurtures a vibrant, independent media while ensuring responsible journalism.

A fundamental debate persists about whether media should be largely self-regulating or subject to stronger statutory oversight. Media practitioners generally advocate for self-reg-

ulation, arguing that government involvement threatens editorial independence. Authorities, meanwhile, often cite the need to protect citizens from misinformation, hate speech and irresponsible reporting.

Kenya's 2010 Constitution represents a watershed moment for media freedom. It enshrines freedom of expression, media freedom, and access to information with a clarity that many democracies envy.

Articles 33 and 34 explicitly protect freedom of expression and freedom of the media, marking a deliberate departure from the more restrictive frameworks of earlier decades. Article 34(2) specifically prohibits the state from exercising control over or interfering with any person engaged in broadcasting, production, or circulation of any publication.

However, these freedoms are not absolute. The Constitution itself carves out limitations, particularly regarding propaganda for war, incitement to violence, hate speech, and advocacy of hatred.

When that document was promul-



gated, Kenyans collectively exhaled. Finally, we thought, the days of state-controlled broadcasting and intimidated newsrooms were behind us. But constitutions, as we have learned, are only as strong as the institutions that breathe life into them.

Cases of journalists facing threats while covering sensitive stories—particularly those involving corruption or political controversy—underscore the gap between constitutional guarantees and lived reality.

Strengthening self-regulatory mechanisms while ensuring they remain credible and effective is the only sure way of en-

suring regulatory independence so that bodies like the MCK remain insulated from political interference

At the Media Council of Kenya, we have spent years building a model rooted in self-regulation. Our philosophy is simple: journalism is best policed by journalists who understand its rhythms, its pressures, and its ethics—not by politicians with axes to grind. Our Complaints Commission has handled hundreds of disputes between aggrieved citizens and media houses, and it works. It is not perfect, but it works.

Beyond Borders: Why Africa Must Own Its Media Regulation Story

Within the East African Community, we are beginning to recognize that fragmented, country-by-country approaches to media regulation are no longer tenable. Our media markets are increasingly integrated. Kenyan broadcasters reach audiences in Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda, and beyond. Our journalists' cross borders to cover regional stories. Capital flows freely across our media industries.

So why should our regulatory frameworks remain stubbornly national? At the Summit, East African delegates engaged in some of the most productive conversations I have witnessed. There was genuine appetite for harmonising standards—for creating mutual recognition of journalist accreditation, for shared protocols on combating disinformation, and for collective protection of press freedom.

When a journalist is harassed in one capital, it should concern all capitals across Africa. Efforts by the East Africa Press Councils (EAPC) to harmonise the Code of Conduct for Media Practice and Accreditation Guidelines should be encouraged and supported.

But let me be candid about the elephant in the room. Not all our East African neighbours enjoy the constitutional protections Kenyan journalists do. In some quarters, the relationship between the state and the press remains slightly worse than complicated. Regional cooperation must therefore be a tide that lifts all boats—not a mechanism that exports the lowest common denominator of repression. We must be vigilant that “harmonisation” never becomes a polite word for coordinated control or lowering the standards in order not to “leave anyone behind”.

The Continental Vision: Telling Africa's Story

For too long, Africa has imported its frameworks for understanding media freedom from elsewhere. We have measured ourselves against Western indices, adopted Western models, and often felt perpetually found wanting. But the African Union has, encouragingly, begun to articulate a distinctly African vision.

The African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights—our continent's foundational human rights instrument—has long protected freedom of expression under Article 9. More importantly, the Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information in Africa, adopted by the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, provides a remarkably progressive blueprint. It champions self-regulation, condemns the criminalisation of journalism, demands the decriminalisation of defamation, and insists on the

safety of journalists.

As the IGAD Executive Secretary emphasised in the regional dialogue, “information integrity and responsible media ecosystems are foundational to peace, governance, and regional stability in the Horn of Africa.” This underscores a broader truth: media regulation is not merely a national concern—it is a pillar of continental cohesion.

What thrilled me at the Annual Pan African Media Summit was the renewed energy around making these instruments real. We spoke at length about Agenda 2063—the AU's aspirational blueprint for “The Africa We Want.” You cannot build the Africa we want without a free, robust, and credible media. A continent that aspires to good governance, accountability, and citizen empowerment cannot simultaneously muzzle the very institution that holds power to account.

For decades, the world has told Africa's story. Famine, war, corruption,

disease. It is time Africa told Africa's story, because this, ultimately, is what media regulation in Africa must protect—not just the freedom to report, but the freedom to narrate ourselves on our own terms. When our media is captured, intimidated, or impoverished, we surrender our narrative to others. A continent that does not control its storytelling cannot truly control its destiny.

Closer to home, Kenya's leadership has reinforced this imperative. The Cabinet Secretary for Tourism observed that, “media is a strategic partner in shaping how Kenya and Africa are experienced globally—through stories that reflect our culture, resilience, and opportunity.” She said during the Annual Media Excellence Awards Gala dinner at the conclusion of the Summit.

These perspectives converge on a simple but profound reality: narrative power is strategic power.

The fake news epidemic does not



It is time Africa told Africa's story, because this, ultimately, is what media regulation in Africa must protect—not just the freedom to report, but the freedom to narrate ourselves on our own terms.

respect borders. A piece of disinformation manufactured in one country can ignite ethnic tensions in another within hours. During our discussions, a colleague from West Africa shared how a single doctored video nearly triggered cross-border unrest. This is the new battlefield, and our old regulatory weapons are frankly outdated.

This is where regulation becomes a paradox we must navigate with wis-

dom. We need just enough regulation to ensure professionalism, ethics, and accountability—and not an ounce more that would strangle the very freedom we cherish. It is a tightrope, and we walk it daily.

In conclusion, I offer a few reflections as the debate moves forward. Firstly, self-regulation must remain our gold standard. Across Kenya, East Africa, and the continent, we must re-

sist the seductive but dangerous logic that governments should police the press except for as long as their representation in the regulatory bodies.

Secondly, we must invest in the safety and welfare of journalists. A hungry journalist is a vulnerable journalist. A frightened journalist is a compromised journalist. Protecting the press means protecting the people who practise it—their livelihoods, their physical safety, and their independence.

Thirdly, we must urgently develop African-led solutions to the digital and disinformation crisis. We cannot outsource this. We understand our linguistic diversity, our ethnic sensitivities, and our political contexts better than any foreign technology giant or consultant ever will.

Fourthly, we must operationalise the AU instruments. Resolutions gather dust unless we hold our governments accountable to the commitments they have made. The Media Council of Kenya is ready to join peers and counterparts across the continent in championing this implementation.

Finally, we must build media literacy among our citizens. An informed, discerning public is the strongest defence against both disinformation and state propaganda.

Conclusion: The Stakes Are Existential

From Nairobi's newsrooms to continental policy forums, one truth is increasingly evident: a free, responsible, and distinctly African media is not a luxury—it is the oxygen of democracy. The question is no longer whether Africa should tell its own story. It is whether we will create the conditions necessary to do so—credibly, independently, and at scale. Because a continent that does not own its narrative cannot fully shape its future.

The author is the Chief Executive Officer of the Media Council of Kenya and President of the World Association of Press Councils

How video and platform ecosystems are reshaping Kenyan and global journalism

By **Carole Kimutai**

For decades, the standard-bearers of Kenyan journalism were defined by two distinct sensory anchors: the daily aroma of morning newsprint and the commanding, synchronised chimes of the 7:00 PM and 9:00 PM television broadcasts. For generations of citizens, these highly structured, linear releases of information were the definitive markers of the day's reality.

Today, those legacy anchors have completely dissolved. The modern news consumer does not wait for the evening bulletin, nor do they scan the columns of a physical paper. Instead, they have already witnessed the news unfold in real-time, in a vertical format, on a high-definition screen that fits snugly in the palm of their hand.

We are living through a historic, video-first transformation. The global media landscape has fundamentally transitioned into an ecosystem that is increasingly platform-based, video-led, and creator-shaped. For Kenyan editors, media executives, and journalists, this shift is no longer a distant Western phenomenon to be observed from afar. It is a present-day, mobile-first reality that has permanently rewritten the rules of audience engagement, trust, and distribution.

What the data says

To move this conversation beyond industry anecdotes, I reviewed consumer perception data from WPP BAV—the

world's largest brand equity database, spanning over 16 billion data points across 53 markets—alongside the latest global media usage patterns. Together, these data-driven frameworks paint a vivid picture of a structural realignment. The shift to video is not a superficial trend; it is a fundamental restructuring of the relationship between news brands and the audiences they serve.

1. From text to screen

The numbers are not subtle. Internet video now accounts for the majority of global consumer internet traffic, a share that has grown uninterrupted for more than a decade. Globally, data show that roughly 77 per cent of consumers now access online news video every week, with a majority watching it in every major market surveyed worldwide.

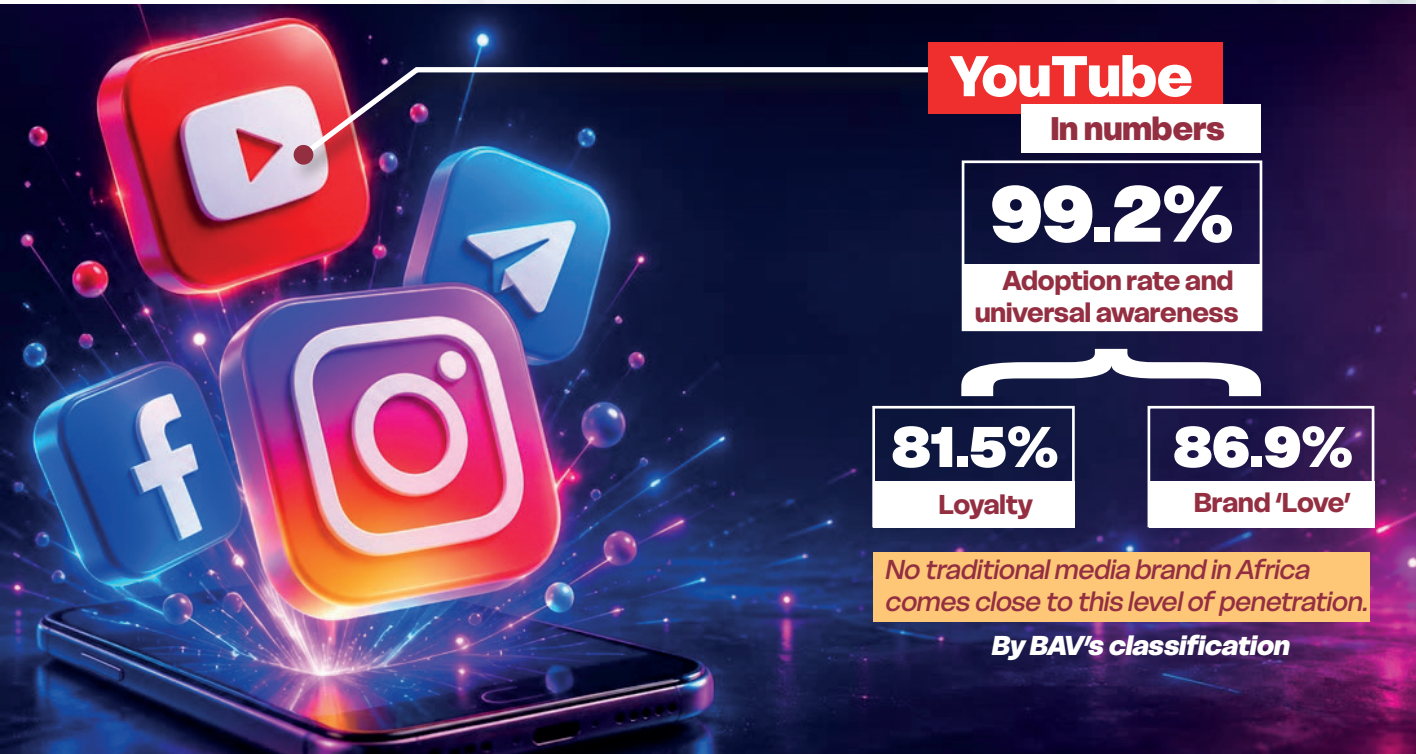
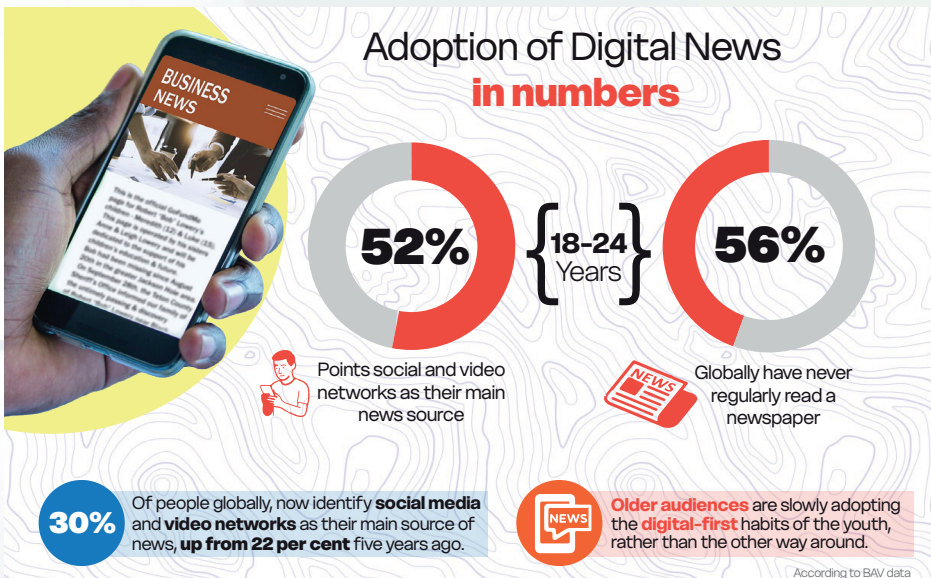
Crucially, as news audiences pivot to online video, they are not consuming it on publishers' proprietary platforms. On average, news organi-

sations globally have seen video consumption on their own sites and apps fall by 5 percentage points over the last year, and by a massive 10 percentage points over the last four years.

This transition represents what researchers identify as the platform takeover and the death of direct access. Social media and video networks have officially broken the monopoly of legacy publishers, surpassing news organisations' own websites, apps, and linear television as the primary ways to access news. Globally, 30 per cent of people now identify social media and video networks as their main source of news, up from 22 per cent five years ago.

While this migration is led by the young, with 52 per cent of 18–24-year-olds pointing to social and video networks as their main news source, the preference for traditional television and owned news sites has steadily declined across every single age group under 55 over the last five years.

Furthermore, 56 per cent of 18–24-year-olds globally have never regularly read a newspaper. Their daily news habits bear absolutely no resemblance to the production cycles and broadcast schedules that shaped previous generations. Older audiences are slowly adopting the digital-first habits of the youth, rather than the other way around. The architecture of the modern global internet is, at its core, a video architecture.



2. The African context

In sub-Saharan Africa, this transition is amplified by a unique technological trajectory. Unlike the West, where digital news consumption evolved gradually from desktop computers to laptops and then to smartphones, Africa's digital revolution has been almost entirely mobile-first.

In markets across the continent, smartphone penetration has outpaced fixed broadband by several multiples. Consequently, the mobile screen is not merely one of several options for accessing content. It is the primary, and often exclusive, gateway to the digital world.

This rapid mobile adoption has created a profound dependence on third-party platforms. In South Africa, the African market with the most longitudinal consumer brand data available, WPP BAV data illustrates just how extraordinary these platforms' brand positions have become.

Take YouTube as an example. The platform has quietly become the de facto television of the digital age. In South Africa, YouTube scored at the 99th percentile for both Relevance and Knowledge among all brands measured in the consumer economy.

Its Differentiation rank stood at 93 and its Esteem rank at 94.

By BAV's classification, YouTube is a Cultural Icon, a brand that dominates perception across every dimension simultaneously. In 2023, 83.9 per cent of South African adults reported regularly using YouTube. By 2025, that figure rose to 88.9 per cent, representing an almost complete saturation of the adult population.

Furthermore, YouTube's commitment funnel shows a 99.2 per cent adoption rate and near-universal awareness, backed by an incredibly deep loyalty funnel (81.5 per cent loyalty and 86.9 per cent brand "Love"). No traditional media brand in Africa comes close to this level of penetration.

Similarly, Netflix has achieved Cultural Icon status across Africa, achieving brand pillar scores above the 90th percentile. In South Africa, Netflix's regular adult usage climbed to 76.3 per cent in recent years.

For African journalism, this platform dominance has accelerated what media theorists describe as the Documentary turn, a mass public appetite for long-form, deeply reported, cinematically produced non-fiction con-

tent. Investigative series, docuseries covering political corruption, and historical reckonings have found massive audiences. Netflix has demonstrated that African stories, told with high production ambition, can command global audiences without requiring the direct patronage of legacy international broadcasters.

3. The Kenyan Reality of Creators, Bundles, and the Visual Imperative

The Communications Authority of Kenya has documented rapid growth in mobile internet subscriptions, with platforms like YouTube, TikTok, Facebook, and WhatsApp forming the primary digital environment for most Kenyans under 35.

Crucially, global reports explicitly highlight Kenya as one of the global markets where independent news creator usage is at its absolute highest. Globally, 27 per cent of respondents get their news from news-focused individual creators or influencers. In Kenya, this percentage is significantly higher, as a highly dynamic, younger, and English-speaking online demographic has actively bypassed legacy gatekeepers in favour of digital-native

personalities.

This popularity is driven by a profound perception gap. Globally, audiences view creators as more entertaining (+19 percentage points), easier to understand (+18 points), and more relatable (+6 points) than traditional news outlets.

Among those who regularly consume content from news creators, these numbers skyrocket: they find creators 45 points easier to understand and 41 points more entertaining. In Kenya, this shift is not just about entertainment; it is a structural critique of the perceived rigidity and detachment of legacy media.

However, this rapid transition to platform-hosted video is occurring within a challenging economic framework - the data bundle economy. Unlike Western consumers with cheap, unlimited fixed broadband, Kenyan news consumers face an ever-present tariff on consumption in the form of mobile data costs. Video is bandwidth-heavy and expensive to stream. This cost barrier makes building direct, paying digital relationships extraordinarily difficult for legacy publishers.

While the proportion of audiences paying for online news remains stubbornly flat at 17 per cent globally, in Kenya, the combination of data costs and expectations of free content makes paywalls a tough sell.

Furthermore, this platform transi-

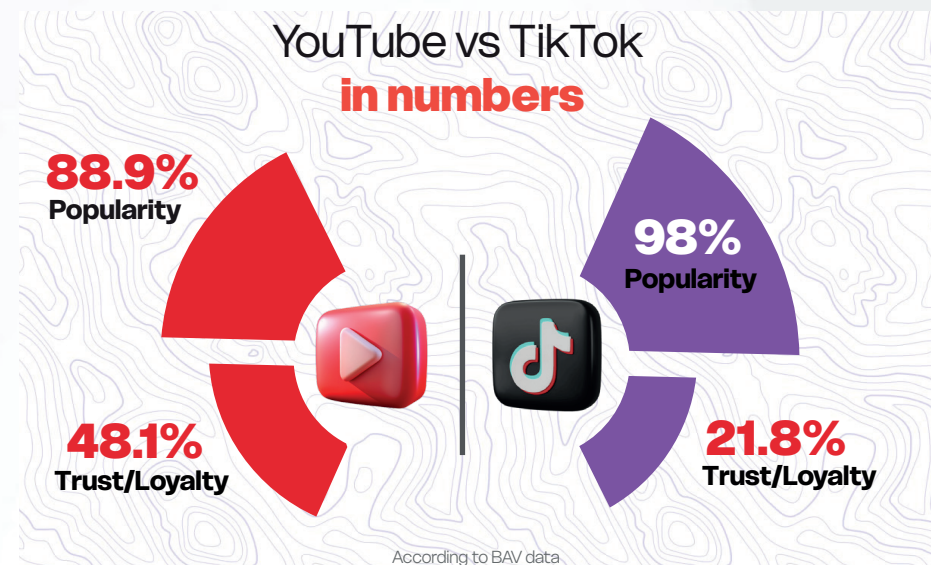
tion is happening alongside a severe crisis of trust. Global trust in news has dropped to 37 per cent, the lowest level since tracking began. This trust deficit is particularly evident on TikTok, a platform that has experienced rapid growth in Kenya.

According to BAV data, TikTok represents a striking paradox: it is highly differentiated and culturally magnetic (ranking in the 98th percentile for “gaining in popularity”), yet it is deeply untrusted. In South Africa, TikTok’s trustworthiness score stood at just 20.6 out of 100, while in other international markets like the UK, it was a dismal 11.7.

This presents a profound challenge for Kenyan newsrooms. TikTok is an incredibly potent vehicle for top-of-funnel discovery, but it possesses shallow commitment (a loyalty score of just 21.8 compared to YouTube’s 48.1). News brands that build their entire digital presence on TikTok without anchoring it in platforms with stronger trust architectures risk trading long-term credibility for fleeting, unmonetizable views.

4. A Manifesto for Newsrooms in Kenya

This data is a blueprint for evolution. To remain relevant in a video-led, creator-shaped, platform-dominated world, Kenyan newsrooms must urgently adapt both their editorial and business strategies.



Content creator engaging her audience on topical issues / AI ILLUSTRATED

Reporters should be empowered and trained to become personality-led guides on TikTok, YouTube, and Instagram—breaking down complex public policy, financial budgets, and investigative pieces into conversational, highly visual stories without compromising on factual rigour.

I. Humanise the Journalism

If audiences flock to creators because they are relatable, legacy media must allow their journalists to shed the rigid, detached, and overly formal persona of the past. Beat reporters should be empowered and trained to become personality-led guides on TikTok, YouTube, and Instagram—breaking down complex public policy, financial budgets, and investigative pieces into conversational, highly visual stories without compromising on factual rigour.

II. Treat Platforms as top-of-funnel discovery tools

Because audiences are increasingly hostile to leaving their favourite social apps to visit external websites, publishers must create native, self-contained video stories designed specifically for third-party platforms. The goal should be to capture attention on TikTok or YouTube, and then strategically funnel those highly engaged viewers toward owned newsletters, podcasts, or premium video offerings where deep engagement lives.

III. Lean into the role of the ultimate verifier

In an era of record-low trust, rising disinformation, and AI-synthesized

content, verified facts are a premium commodity. Kenyan newsrooms must position themselves as the definitive anchors of truth. While an independent creator can offer relatability and entertainment, only a dedicated, ethically bound newsroom can consistently deploy the resources required for deep investigative reporting, legal protection, and rigorous fact-checking.

IV. Invest in the visual skills revolution

Producing compelling video journalism requires a fundamentally different skill set than writing a traditional news article. It demands visual storytelling literacy, an understanding of pacing, graphics, and sound design, and the ability to distil complex information into clear, engaging frames. Journalism schools and newsroom training programmes in Kenya must make these multimedia skills central, not peripheral.

V. Prioritise commitment over raw reach

News organisations that are seduced purely by platform metrics like impressions, reach, and viral clips, with-

out asking whether those interactions are building genuine audience relationships, risk investing heavily in reach while systematically undermining depth and loyalty. A news organisation that counts TikTok views as equivalent in value to YouTube watch time, or equates social media scrolling with committed readership, is building its business strategy on a category error.

Looking into the future

The accelerating video revolution represents a permanent, structural reconfiguration of how humanity processes information, challenging Kenyan and African journalists to adapt to platforms that actively shape audience expectations and trust. To thrive in this vertical, mobile-first era, newsrooms must invest in visual storytelling capabilities and navigate a fragmented platform ecosystem without sacrificing the editorial rigor, independence, and ethical accountability that underpin trusted journalism.

Ultimately, the future of African media will not be won by those mourning the decline of legacy print and broadcast formats, but by forward-think-

ing editors who successfully carry the timeless values of truth onto the modern digital canvas.

The audience is watching. The question is whether journalism is ready to be seen.

Data Sources & Methodology:

The insights and statistical data presented in this article are drawn from two primary research frameworks:

1. WPP BAV (BrandAsset®

Valuator): The world’s largest and sharpest brand equity database and diagnostic tool. BAV tracks consumer brand perceptions, imagery, and usage patterns across 53 countries, managing over 16 billion data points. The platform brand metrics utilised in this article (Relevance, Knowledge, Esteem, Differentiation, and Commitment Funnel parameters) are based on BAV’s longitudinal consumer tracking studies in South Africa and the United Kingdom (covering the 2023–2025 period). South African BAV data serves as the primary continental benchmark for longitudinal African platform brand equity.

2. The Reuters Institute Digital News Report:

The global media consumption data and audience trends are sourced from the annual surveys published by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism at the University of Oxford. This includes specific data points regarding global video news usage, the rise of independent news creators, trust deficits, and local audience metrics in the Kenyan and African media markets.

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Podcasting is changing story-telling and giving journalists a chance to reclaim narrative authority



By James Smart

In late 2020 and early 2021, I revisited one of the stories I thought had received little attention. Somewhere in 2013, journalist Bogonko Bosire disappeared without a trace. Initially, his disappearance was not treated with much urgency by close friends and family, but after weeks turned into months, and eventually years, something was clearly wrong. Filmmaker and friend Vincho Ncho-gu embarked on an interview with those who were last with Bogonko. After five years of recording, she had hit a brick wall, and as a service to her lost friend, she posted about the frustration of not breaking the case. A few weeks later, Vincho needed a new tactic to tell a story that had gone cold for years. The solution to our problem was to create an audio documentary that used a serialised, episode-by-episode structure to unpack chronology, personal background, competing theories, and the wider context of blogging and press freedom in Kenya. This pacing kept listeners engaged while allowing deep contextual reporting across episodes, unlocking a problem for a story that felt unstacked and seemingly without a new angle to breathe. Podcasting has matured from a niche hobby into a powerful medium for journalism across the globe. In Kenya and much of Africa, podcasts offer journalists a chance to reclaim narrative authority and experiment with formats that traditional broadcast and print outlets may not support. When deployed strategically, podcasting can

amplify African storytelling, diversify revenue streams, and expand civic engagement. The idea of a podcast also supports the development of skills widely available in the industry. Audio journalism is considered low entry and accessible to many listeners. Indeed, research after research from the Media Council of Kenya shows that the lion's share of Kenya's audiences is found on radio. Therefore, podcasts, as a medium, find entry into the Kenyan market with ease, given that our audience is familiar with radio. **Why podcasting matters for Kenyan journalism** Audio creates a direct, human connection. Long-form interviews, serialised investigations, and personal narratives allow journalists to explore context, emotion, and nuance that short print pieces or TV segments often omit. In my experience producing Case Number Zero, audiences familiar with Bogonko's story and those newly introduced to it found both intimacy and depth, helping the story travel across borders. Unlike mainstream media, podcasts are designed to be consumed via



streaming or download and are often listened to during commutes, while doing chores, or offline. The question of accessibility and portability gives us keys to access our listeners in ways we previously couldn't. This also offers us data that is extremely crucial for newsrooms nowadays, who is consuming what and for how long? Data that helps in the next creation and sharpening our journalism to meet audience needs. Podcasts also let Kenyan journalists centre and position Kenyan voices. There's always the question of narrative control in storytelling, the idea that talking to people with lived experiences enhances community perspectives and foregrounds the truth as much as possible. I haven't seen a better medium that allows us to do exactly that while shifting our dependence on foreign gatekeepers and stereotypes. Partnering with regional hosting services, such as Afripods, and content aggregators can reduce dependence on international platforms, whose algorithms may not favour our audience's interests. This reduced gatekeeping enables storytellers to bypass restric-

“In Kenya and much of Africa, podcasts offer journalists a chance to reclaim narrative authority and experiment with formats that traditional broadcast and print outlets may not support.”

tive environments and publish independently, while maintaining ethical rigour and conducting risk assessment. It allows for format flexibility, as podcasts can take different forms, such as investigative series, explainers, roundtables, and narrative documentaries, enabling experimentation with form and pacing that can attract niche audiences. Long-form, serialised investigative podcasts can unpack complex corruption cases, environmental issues, or public-health crises over multiple episodes, sustaining public attention and prompting accountability. We have seen how podcasts can uplift African storytelling and platforms by allowing us to celebrate oral traditions. The numerous talk podcasts featuring famous artists, musicians, and comedians fit perfectly into a style of storytelling we know too well. African cultures have long valued oral storytelling, and podcasts can be utilised to modernise these traditions, featuring storytellers, griots and community elders in participatory formats, thus preserving heritage while making it accessible to younger, digitally connected audiences. They can be localised to reflect diverse languages and regions. Producing shows in Swahili, Kikuyu, Luo, Kalenjin, Sheng, and other languages affirms linguistic diversity and reaches audiences that are often insufficiently served by national media. The enhanced community engagement, characterised by call-ins, listener submissions, and local correspondents, turns audiences into sources and co-producers, thereby democratizing reporting. The subsequent ripple effect is that it enhances platform empowerment, realised through building and promoting African-hosted networks and distribution platforms, which in turn keeps revenue and editorial control local. This independence creates an enabling environment for cross-border collaboration, producing instances that encourage crossover of Pan-African podcasts that bring together journalists from different countries,

fostering comparative reporting on migration, trade, climate, and culture, and strengthening continental narratives. Leveraging multimodal storytelling, these episodes can then pair well with social media, short-form video, and immersive audio to create cross-platform campaigns that reach diverse demographics. **Monetisation models for sustainability** Several pathways have been explored in examining the financial sustainability of podcasts. We must admit that Kenya has slightly lagged behind in aggressively organising around audio journalism to realise the dividends of podcasting. Low-hanging fruit has been exploring various forms of partnership. This includes sponsorships and branded content from local businesses, NGOs, and social-impact funders to sponsor episodes or series that align with their missions; exploring various grant and fellowship initiatives; and collaborating with mobile operators for zero-rated content or bundled data to greatly expand reach while enabling revenue-sharing models. All these approaches must be undertaken with clear disclosure and editorial independence protocols in place to preserve trust. Membership and subscription models that offer bonus episodes, ad-free listening, early access, or community Q&A sessions to paying members via platforms such as Patreon, Supercast, or locally hosted paywalls have been explored in the West with varied success. Recording live tapings, workshops, or storytelling events with ticket sales, connecting audiences in person, building loyalty, and subsequently creating ancillary products that act as an additional income stream are strategies that have been explored locally. Feedback on these strategies has been positive, and scaling up is the next big thing. **Practical guidance for Kenyan and African journalists** • Focus on story first: Invest time in

reporting and narrative structure, strong scripts and sound design matter as much as topical relevance. • Prioritise audio quality: A modest investment in a USB condenser mic, headphones, quiet recording space, and basic editing software (Audacity, Reaper, GarageBand) lifts perception and retention. • Build audience intentionally: Use social media, newsletters, community partnerships, and cross-promotion with other podcasters. Translate episode titles and descriptions into local languages to reach a broader audience. • Maintain ethical standards: Verify sources, protect vulnerable informants, obtain consent for recordings, and clearly label sponsored content. • Use analytics wisely: Track downloads, geographic data, and listener retention to refine format, length, and release cadence. • Network and collaborate: Join or form local podcast networks to share training and resources. Collaborate with universities, NGOs, and cultural institutions for research and funding support. • Consider low-bandwidth strategies: Offer compressed audio and downloadable bundles, provide transcripts, and distribute via WhatsApp and Telegram.

Conclusion Podcasting offers Kenyan journalism a medium uniquely suited to African storytelling, one that honours oral traditions, enables deep reporting, and creates new paths to financial sustainability. With intentional production, ethical rigour, and creative monetisation, podcasts can lift local voices, strengthen public discourse, and build resilient media ecosystems across the continent. The new storyteller must be armed like a griot, think about data, and collaborate. *The writer is a Kenyan journalist and news anchor at Nation Media Group.*

Disruption of journalism in an African context

By
Nancy Agutu



Artificial Intelligence may prove to be the most significant disruption to African journalism since the arrival of the internet. While news organisations are turning to AI to cut costs, increase productivity and reach wider audiences, the technology is also challenging long-held principles of journalism, from accuracy and accountability to originality and trust. The question is no longer whether AI will transform journalism in Africa, but whether African journalism is prepared for that transformation.

Across the continent, newsrooms are racing to develop AI policies aimed at guiding the responsible use of the technology. These frameworks seek to streamline newsroom operations while ensuring that journalists use AI ethically and in accordance with professional codes of conduct. Yet an important question remains: will these policies be enough to prevent overreliance on AI by the very journalists responsible for gathering, verifying and telling the stories that matter most?

Several leading media houses, including Radio Africa Group, Nation Media Group, Zimpapers in Zimbabwe and Mwananchi Communications in Tanzania, have already introduced AI policies to guide newsroom practice. These efforts signal a growing recognition that AI is no longer

a distant innovation but an everyday newsroom reality.

However, policy development alone is not enough. The real challenge lies in balancing innovation with editorial integrity. Journalists must view AI as an assistant rather than a replacement for human judgment, verification and critical thinking. A newsroom can have the most comprehensive AI policy on paper, but if reporters become overly dependent on AI-generated content, journalism risks losing the very qualities that distinguish it: curiosity, scepticism, context and accountability.

This concern came into sharp focus during an AI conference I attended recently. One of the most engaging sessions centred on a provocative question: Is AI making journalists lazy? The discussion became so intense that organisers extended the session by 30 minutes to accommodate the debate.

Many participants argued that, rather than enhancing creativity, AI is in some cases making journalists less innovative and less willing to engage in the rigorous work that quality jour-

nalism demands. During the discussion, journalists from one media house admitted that some reporters simply feed a few lines of information into platforms such as Gemini, ChatGPT, Claude or Copilot and ask the tools to generate a complete article. The result is often a polished, well-written story that can easily pass editorial scrutiny at first glance. In some instances, the journalist merely submits the AI-generated story to an editor under their own byline.

Another example involved the reporting of opinion polls. When polling firms such as Ipsos release survey results, some journalists reportedly take screenshots of graphs, upload them to AI tools and ask the platforms to generate an entire news story based on the data. While this may save time, it raises serious questions about verification, context, interpretation and editorial responsibility.

If such practices are becoming commonplace, one must ask: do these journalists work in newsrooms with AI policies? If they do, how are those policies structured, and why are they



failing to prevent such overreliance on generative AI? More importantly, at what point did journalism begin to surrender its core responsibility of critical thinking and independent analysis to machines?

This concern has also attracted the attention of regulators. Earlier this year, the Media Council of Kenya (MCK) called for a deliberate focus on ethical, inclusive and locally grounded Artificial Intelligence development to safeguard African media ecosystems and promote responsible digital transformation.

Speaking at the African Women in Media (AWiM) Conference in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, MCK Chief Executive Officer David Omwoyo urged Africa to play an active role in shaping AI tools and governance frameworks. He warned that the continent risks deepening existing inequalities if it relies solely on technologies developed elsewhere.

“AI is not just a technical trend. It is a governance, cultural and ethical issue. Africa must define the tools that will shape its future; otherwise, we will inherit systems that do not under-

stand our realities,” he noted.

His remarks highlight a critical issue that is often overlooked in discussions about AI adoption. Beyond concerns about representation, AI introduces risks related to algorithmic bias, misinformation, weak data governance and the erosion of public trust. These challenges underscore the need for continuous investment in digital literacy, newsroom capacity-building and ethical safeguards.

As African media organisations embrace AI, they must ensure that technological advancement strengthens rather than weakens the core values of journalism. Policies should not merely regulate the use of AI tools; they should reinforce the importance of verification, originality, transparency and accountability. Otherwise, newsrooms risk producing journalists who know how to prompt machines but have forgotten how to report.

Yet focusing solely on the dangers of AI risks missing a larger story. The same technology that can encourage shortcuts in journalism can also help newsrooms solve some of their most pressing editorial and business chal-



The use of AI in a newsroom / AI ILLUSTRATED



allenges. The question is not whether AI is good or bad. It is whether journalists choose to use it passively or creatively.

TECH SAVVY?

Beyond developing AI policies, African newsrooms must also begin to view AI disruption as an opportunity rather than solely a threat. While much of the current conversation focuses on the risks of AI, there is an equally important discussion to be had about its potential to strengthen journalism and make newsrooms more sustainable.

A month ago, Africa Uncensored invited journalists and editors to apply for an AI fellowship designed to help media professionals develop AI-powered prototypes tailored to editorial workflows. The overwhelming response to the call demonstrated that many journalists are eager to move beyond the basic use of AI tools for writing, transcription or content generation.

What made the fellowship particularly significant was its focus on innovation. Participants were encouraged to think beyond everyday newsroom tasks and explore how AI could be

“AI is not just a technical trend. It is a governance, cultural and ethical issue. Africa must define the tools that will shape its future; otherwise, we will inherit systems that do not understand our realities”

David Omwoyo

used to solve real business and editorial challenges. The questions being asked were not simply how AI can write stories faster, but how it can help newsrooms generate revenue, reduce operational costs, improve efficiency and build smarter, more scalable editorial workflows.

This shift in thinking is encouraging. For too long, discussions about AI in journalism have centred on fears of job losses, misinformation and ethical concerns. While these risks are real and must be addressed, they should not overshadow the opportunities that

AI presents. African media organisations operate in an increasingly challenging environment characterised by shrinking revenues, growing audience demands and limited resources. In such circumstances, AI can become a powerful tool for innovation.

Imagine a newsroom developing an AI-powered system that automatically transcribes interviews, translates stories into multiple local languages, flags potential factual inconsistencies before publication or helps journalists analyse large volumes of public data in minutes rather than days. Such applications would not replace journalists; they would empower them to focus on higher-value tasks such as investigation, analysis and storytelling.

Take, for example, an online outlet known as the Gender Desk. It has developed an AI-powered tool that automatically curates a real-time tracker of gender equality indicators across Kenya’s online media landscape using data drawn from KNBS, UN Women and parliamentary records. Such innovations demonstrate how AI can be used to generate insights, monitor trends and strengthen public-interest journalism. Similar approaches could be adopted by media organisations across Africa, using AI not merely to generate content but to solve editorial and business challenges unique to their audiences.

The future of AI in African journalism should therefore not be confined to drafting articles or generating headlines. Instead, it should be about building solutions that improve newsroom efficiency, enhance audience engagement and create sustainable business models. The enthusiasm shown by applicants to the Africa Uncensored fellowship suggests that many journalists are already thinking in this direction.

That is the kind of disruption African journalism should embrace: one that uses technology not to replace journalists, but to strengthen their work, expand their capabilities and help newsrooms thrive in a rapidly changing digital landscape.

The writer is the Deputy Digital Editor at Radio Africa Group

Devil in the detail Quiet return of criminal defamation

By
Dr Julius Bosire



The celebrated Shakespearean quote in Romeo and Juliet, “a rose by any other name would smell as sweet” encapsulates intrinsic quality of character as opposed to a mere label.

Conversely, one would argue that a skunk by any other name will emit stuff that stinks to the heavens. This aptly describes the moral corruption of sneaking back the law of criminal defamation in Kenya’s statutes the Computer Misuse and Cybercrimes Act (2018, revised 2025).

In the modern world, the law of defamation is a mechanism designed

to balance the protection of personal reputation against the fundamental right to freedom of expression. Its origin can be traced to ancient legal traditions that sought to protect individual honour and social order.

Defamation law, at its core, addresses the harm caused by false or unjustified statements communicated to third parties that damage an individual’s standing in society. Beyond providing redress for reputational injury the law aims at balancing two major societal values of dignity and communication.

Criminal defamation, by its nature, gives way to the application of draconian laws with sentences such as jail terms, consequently creating a powerful weapon for public officials, wealthy individuals, and corporations to silence critics through the threat of criminal prosecution rather than engaging with substantive criticism.

Criminal defamation makes speech a punishable offense carrying potential imprisonment, fines, or other penal sanctions. Such punitive approaches create chilling effects on public discourse, investigative journalism, and political criticism. This fundamentally undermines democratic accountability mechanisms.

The threat of harsh criminal sanctions, especially imprisonment, exerts a profound chilling effect on freedom of expression. A mere initiation of criminal proceedings can exhaust defendants’ resources, damage their professional standing, no matter the outcome of the case, and deter others

“The law of defamation is a mechanism designed to balance the protection of personal reputation against the fundamental right to freedom of expression.”



from speaking out on matters of public concern.

In civil defamation, remedies comprise compensating successful petitioners through monetary damages. However, current debate worldwide is to look for alternative ways of compensation besides pecuniary measures for purposes of free flow of information.

Such measures are enshrined in the Media Council Act (2013), which establishes a tribunal to arbitrate media to media and media to public disputes.

The criminalisation of defamation is testimony of State interest in controlling discourse and imparts a social stigma to it. Where they exist, criminal defamation laws are abused by the powerful to limit criticism and to stifle public debate.

The law of defamation is not static. The balance between protecting individuals' reputation and upholding the fundamental right to freedom of expression is achieved through evolving interplay of doctrinal elements, statutory reforms, judicial interpretations, and contextual defenses that reflect shifting societal values and democratic imperatives.

There has been a prolonged debate about criminal defamation worldwide and there is consensus that it should be abolished in democratic societies.

In Kenya, Section 194 of the Penal Code, regarding 'Criminal Defamation,' has been used in several occasions by state officials to target those criticising injustice and impunity in both offline.

However, in a landmark ruling, High Court Judge John Mativo, in 2017 verred that criminal defamation had no place in Kenya under the Constitution of Kenya 2010.

Justice Mativo made the ruling in a case of Jacqueline Okuta and Jackson Njeru, who sought the court's declaration that section 194 of the Penal Code is unconstitutional and invalid; and that any continued enforcement of Section 194 by the Director of Public Prosecution against the petitioners would be unconstitutional.

Section 194 of the Penal Code provides that any person who, by print,

Section 22 of the Act under the heading "False Publications" stipulates that a person who intentionally publishes false, misleading or fictitious data or misinforms with intent that the data shall be considered or acted upon as authentic, with or without any financial gain, commits an offence and shall, on conviction, be liable to a fine not exceeding five million shillings or to imprisonment for a term not exceeding two years, or to both.

writing, painting or effigy, or by any means otherwise than solely by gestures, spoken words or other sounds, unlawfully publishes any defamatory matter concerning another person, with intent to defame that other person, is guilty of the misdemeanour termed libel.

In his ruling, Justice Mativo urged the Kenyan government to immediately seek and review similar laws that unjustifiably limit the right of Kenyans to seek, receive and impart information as enshrined in Article 34 of the Constitution of Kenya 2010.

Justice Mativo declared Section 194 of the Penal Code unconstitutional, striking down criminal defamation. He ruled that treating defamation as a crime that carried up to two-year jail term was disproportionate, excessive, and a violation of the constitutional right to freedom of expression.

The implication of the ruling is that that citizens, bloggers, and journalists could no longer be arrested or jailed over defamatory claims, effectively decriminalizing defamation in Kenya.

This ruling is important because as earlier indicated above, defamation laws are informed by various declara-

tions including court rulings.

Barely had the country celebrated the ruling when Parliament passed yet another law that criminalises defamation in Kenya in the Computer Misuse and Cybercrimes Act (2018).

Section 22 of the Act under the heading "False Publications" stipulates that a person who intentionally publishes false, misleading or fictitious data or misinforms with intent that the data shall be considered or acted upon as authentic, with or without

any financial gain, commits an offence and shall, on conviction, be liable to a fine not exceeding five million shillings or to imprisonment for a term not exceeding two years, or to both.

Part 2 of the section limits the freedom of expression in the Constitution in respect of the intentional publication of false, misleading or fictitious data or misinformation that (a) is likely to — (i) propagate war; or (ii) incite persons to violence; (b) constitutes hate speech; (c) advocates hatred that (i) constitutes ethnic incitement, vilification of others or incitement to cause harm; or (ii) is based on any ground of discrimination specified or contemplated in Article 27(4) of the Constitution; or (d) negatively affects the rights or reputations of others.

It is worth noting that there is no absolute freedom. Freedom has to be tempered with responsibility. The problematic position is criminalizing such actions in a democracy which

guarantees freedom of expression.

Section 23 of the Act under the heading of Publication of false information says that a person who knowingly publishes information that is false in print, broadcast, data or over a computer system, that is calculated or results in panic, chaos, or violence among citizens of the Republic, or which is likely to discredit the reputation of a person commits an offence and shall on conviction, be liable to a fine not exceeding five million shillings or to imprisonment for a term not exceeding ten years, or to both.

These sentences are so punitive that they instill fear and therefore impeding free speech as enshrined in the Constitution and as is common practice worldwide.

The introduction of criminal defamation through the Computer Misuse and Cybercrimes Act 2018, immediately after the Mativo ruling shows either impunity, ignorance, arrogance or disregard of the law by Kenyan law makers. This law privileges the foundational democratic principle which states that the remedy for false speech is more speech (deliberations) not censorship through criminal prosecution.

Contemporary legal scholarship supports the abolition of criminal defamation in favour of exclusively civil remedies. Experts argue that criminal sanctions for speech offenses are inherently disproportionate and incompatible with democratic values. Civil defamation law, when properly

calibrated with appropriate defenses provides sufficient recourse for individuals suffering genuine reputational injury while preserving essential space for public debate.

Kenya should embrace the best practices in communication, freedom of speech and protection of reputation of persons. Media and freedom of expression. Kenya is a signatory to international statutes, which anticipate the country to enact laws that support democracy, free speech and justice.

The repeal of Section 22 and 23 of the Computer Misuse and Cybercrimes Act (2018, revised 2025) will set the country free for a more sophisticated understanding of how to balance individual dignity with collective democratic needs in the modern era.

The repealing of these sections represents a fundamental rethinking of how Kenya, as a democracy, should balance individual dignity against collective rights to open debate, transparency, and accountability. The rationale for this dual approach of abolishing criminal sanctions while maintaining civil liability is anchored in both theoretical principles and practical considerations regarding proportionality, chilling effects, and the proper role of state power in regulating speech.

Criminal defamation is a bad law because it weaponises the state's punitive power against individual expression, creates disproportionate barriers to democratic discourse, lacks adequate procedural safeguards, and contradicts evolving international human rights standards.

The begging question is why would someone institute criminal proceedings which lead to fines and jail terms – with nothing trickling down as compensation for the harm instead of civil proceedings in which. --at least-- the petitioner stands to be compensated. Could such a decision be based on malice or sadistic emotions?

Dr Bosire is a Senior Lecturer of Media and Communication Studies at the Technical University of Kenya and a member of the Executive Council of the Kenya Editors Guild representing the academia

Civil defamation law, when properly calibrated with appropriate defenses provides sufficient recourse for individuals suffering genuine reputational injury while preserving essential space for public debate.



Beyond austerity, anxiety and costly cutbacks, there is glimmer of hope for media industry

By
Dinnah Ondari



Behind the polished television bulletins, breaking news alerts, radio talk shows and newspaper stories that define Kenya's media landscape, a hushed narrative has been persistent inside newsrooms: fear, exhaustion and uncertainty.

Over the past five years, Kenya's media industry has experienced an unprecedented wave of layoffs, salary delays and newsroom restructuring as traditional media houses struggle to survive in an increasingly digital and revenue strained environment. What was once considered a stable profession has become, a career marked by job insecurity and psychological strain.

The Media Council of Kenya (MCK) revealed in 2024 that more than 2,000 journalists had lost their jobs in five years, with less than half of those employed five years ago still working in mainstream media today. Major media houses including Standard Media Group, Mediamax Network, Nation Media Group, Capital Group and Royal Media Services have all effected rounds of retrenchment in recent years.

The number is definitely higher given to continued layoffs witnessed in 2025 in a pattern that saw community stations close shop. The Coast region has been one of the most hit for instance. What was once a region with 32 FM stations has, within a year, narrowed to 25.

Radio Rahma, a leading Muslim station in Mombasa, limited its programming due to financial strain, with inconsistent presenter attendance disrupting schedules. Sauti ya Pwani and Baraka FM significantly scaled down operations. Lulu FM closed after its acquisition by MBCI Nakuru, while Praise Radio quietly ceased broadcasting. Radio Salaam was acquired by Radio Generations, introducing new

“In 2024, more than 2,000 journalists had lost their jobs in five years, with less than half of those employed five years ago still working in mainstream media today.”

Media Council of Kenya”



A journalist worried of restructuring / AI ILLUSTRATED

management dynamics. This trend runs across the country where several community media houses have closed shop and sent their staff home.

Television and print bureaus have also been shrinking. The Voice of America (VOA) bureau in Mombasa closed, affecting five staff members. Nation Media Group officially closed its Mombasa and Eldoret bureaus, with several staff affected across editorial, commercial and other departments, marking a significant shift for a media house long anchored in a physical newsroom. During the same period, KTN News officially ceased broadcasting as a standalone 24-hour channel and merged with its parent station, KTN Home.

While executives describe the cuts as necessary restructuring, employees describe a climate of constant anxiety.

For many journalists, every internal memo triggers panic. Conversations in newsroom corridors increasingly revolve around unpaid salaries, expiring contracts and fears of being “next on the list.” Freelancers and correspondents, once relied upon to extend coverage across Kenya's counties, have become especially vulnerable as media houses slash operational costs.

The crisis reflects a broader shift in global media environment. Audiences are migrating from television and print



“Newsrooms that once had specialised desks now expect a single journalist to shoot video, write stories, edit content and manage social media simultaneously.”

A journalist covering a scene / AI ILLUSTRATED

to social media and digital platforms, while advertising revenue — once the financial backbone of journalism — is increasingly controlled by technology companies such as Google, Meta and TikTok. Traditional media outlets are now competing with against algorithms and influencers.

In Kenya, the situation is compounded by harsh economic conditions, reduced government advertising, delayed state payments and rising operational costs. Several media companies have cited restrictive govern-

ment regulations and declining client bases as contributing factors behind staff reductions.

Journalists who once covered national crises are now confronting personal crises of their own. Some have been forced to abandon careers they spent decades building. Others juggle multiple side hustles to survive. Younger reporters entering the profession increasingly encounter burnout before stability.

Mental health concerns within the profession are also growing. The pres-

sure to produce more content with fewer resources has intensified the workload. Newsrooms that once had specialised desks now expect a single journalist to shoot video, write stories, edit content and manage social media simultaneously.

The emotional toll is often invisible.

Undeniably, the layoffs risk weakening investigative journalism, reducing editorial diversity and undermining public trust in the media. County reporting, essential for local accountability and democratic participation, has particularly suffered as correspondents are quietly phased out.

Yet beyond the grim statistics lies a glimmer of hope, for those willing to do what it takes to chart a new path.

Some journalists are adapting by moving into digital entrepreneurship, podcasting, public relations and independent media production. Others are building personal brands online or turning to audience-funded journalism models.

The media industry crisis sparked by Covid 19 not only exposed the media's soft underbelly but also, and perhaps more importantly, sent researchers to the drawing board. Beyond the threats of extinction, media research is slowly but steadily building a case for optimism.

Media research findings locally and globally converge around the need for media to remodel their business strategies, content formats and distribution. Though there is no magic bullet yet, those that have heeded the call and remained consistent are still afloat with a number reporting enhanced revenue and audiences.

From research, the following factors offer hope of a turnaround for media:

1. Stable trust in Media -The Media Council of Kenya's State of the Media report has in the last three years shown an over 70 percent level of media trust. This contrasts with the Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2026 which indicates trust in news is at its lowest (37 pc). According to MCK's report, the top three reasons for accessing media platforms remain news, entertainment and sports. This

means that with the right strategies, audiences are still within reach. Despite digital platforms being the first source of news for the audience, they still turn to the media to verify information, which shows a level of trust in industry. Only the platforms has changed content is still king.

2. Willingness to pay for content-A 2025-2026 survey by the Media Council of Kenya on Monetisation Challenges and Opportunities for Kenyan Media in the Digital Economy showed that 50 percent of consumers are likely to pay for digital content. However, there is a catch; the content has to be exclusive, high-quality, or niche and ad-free. Does this ring a bell?

3. Print income still matters-The WAN-IFRA World Press Trends Report 2025-. 2026 shows that circulation or reader revenue is still a more reliable prospect for publishers in terms of sustainable, predictable revenue, compared to the more volatile nature of advertising. The same report still finds that although digital income streams are significant, monies from print advertising and circulation still account for 43.6 % of revenues.

4. New sources of revenue-Apart from advertising, the WAN-INFRA 2025-2024 report found that events, grant funding and business services were the top three important sources of income for media enterprises and independent journalists. This speaks to the need for the Kenyan media to diversify its products beyond editorial content. Enterprises like Royal Media Services, Radio Africa, Capital Group, Nation Media Group have ventured into events businesses and other digital products to shore up their revenue. Africa Uncensored, Willow Health and Defrontera are examples of new platforms that are leveraging on institutional partnerships to conduct reporting, build journalistic capacity, and extend their audience.

5. Shift to digital consumption-Audiences are turning to social media for media content. The findings form



the the State of the Media Report (MCK), and the survey on monetisation, Challenges and Opportunities for Kenyan Media in the Digital Economy(MCK), Digital News Report 2026(The Reuter Institute) agree on this as mobile phones become critical in accessing to these platforms. This means that content generators who will format their content to suit mobile/ smartphone users and young audiences might have leverage over those who remain on other traditional platforms. In Kenya, many stations are investing in live streaming, social media engagement, and podcasts. Digital-first platforms such as Radio Generation and Blue Radio illustrate how online broadcasting models can operate with lower overheads while reaching audiences beyond traditional FM coverage. These platforms connect with younger listeners and diaspora communities, highlighting the growing importance of innovative digital strategies.

From the foregoing, it is clear that access to information is mediated by platforms and AI-driven interfaces

that sit between publishers and their audiences. While this does not negate the value of journalism, it does change how and where value is created. Again, no single model is adequate; business models must invest in understanding their audience, appreciate how they access information, diversify products, to facilitate engagement from multiple touch points. Product innovations must fit into audiences' daily lives not just to monetisation, but to remain relevant.

The Wan-IFRA and FIPP Innovation in Media Report 2026 sums it up aptly: "There is no universal blueprint. The mix will vary by market, brand, and audience. But the direction is clear: away from reliance on any single model, and toward more integrated, relationship-driven approaches to revenue — where long-term value is defined less by individual transactions and more by the strength of the ongoing relationship with the user.

The author is the manager Media Monitoring and Research at Media Council of Kenya

Calling out impunity

Years of systematic mismanagement at Standard Group should trigger lifting of the corporate veil



By
Kizito Namulanda

The Standard Group, Kenya's second-largest media house, is home to the country's oldest newspaper and the first private television station. For years, it has faced a troubling pattern: employees—both current and former—owe months of salary arrears, retrenchment severance dues remain unpaid, and statutory deductions go unremitted. This has left staff in the midst of a deep-sea financial crisis.

The fact that Standard Group has endured this crisis for more than three years without signs of improvement raises urgent questions about staff remedies and the reach of the corporate shield. Can directors be held personally re-

sponsible, and could the corporate veil be pierced to address systemic mismanagement? This has gone on for far too long, and without any clear commitment from management to turn things around, then definitely steps to lift the corporate veil will kick in at some point. If leadership remains silent, the case for piercing the veil will grow stronger, not weaker, and the risk of personal accountability for those at the helm will escalate.

So far, management seems focused more on investing in the business and hiring more staff. The argument that quietly sits under the table is that channeling funds into sorting out the staff mess—which was created by someone else—sinks cost into things that will not show shareholders value for money. Which is really a defeatist argument, because these monies are accruing interest and

piling up evidence of continued violations. Should authorities decide to pursue the route of lifting the corporate veil, those funds in arrears will become part of the evidentiary tapestry that points to ongoing mismanagement.

Should the situation escalate to lifting the corporate veil, then we expect exposure to happen at two levels. First at director level – the people who manage the company's daily operations and strategic direction. They are appointed by the shareholders to run the company, oversee management, administration, and legal compliance, and they bear a legal fiduciary duty to act in the best interests of the company. Second is at the beneficial owner level – this is the person who ultimately owns or controls the company and receives its economic benefits. They are the ultimate recipients of the financial profits or losses generated by the business.

Looking at the situation at the Standard Group, should authorities decide to lift the corporate veil, it will most likely be directors who will be exposed rather than the beneficial owner. Directors are the ones who steward policy, approve budgets, and set priorities. Where those choices consistently sideline lawful obligations for employees and the state, the accountability equation rests on their shoulders.

Turning to staff, the recommended remedy is to pursue their unpaid salaries and final dues in the Employment and Labour Relations Court (ELRC). Wage disputes, including salary arrears and retrenchment final dues, fall squarely within the ELRC's purview. Staff can seek recovery of owed salaries and interest, and retrenchment packages as set out in the Employment Act 2007, which provides for final dues of at least



KTN News desk / COURTESY

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Money deducted
from an employee's
salary is not
supposed to be
used as company's
operational cash
flow.”

15 days' salary for each year of service when an employee is terminated on account of redundancy. Several staff members have already filed cases in the ELRC, while many who cannot afford the court process have been left with no option but to hope for better days ahead. Given the scale, courts may be urged to consider special or exemplary damages to deter ongoing violations and demonstrate that the law will bite where gross non-compliance is proven.

When it comes to statutory deductions, a different enforcement route is adopted. PAYE, NHIF/SHIF, NSSF, pension contributions, and SACCO deductions are not merely contractual obligations; they are statutory or trust-like duties requiring timely remittance to the relevant authorities or funds. Regulators such as the Kenya Revenue Authority (KRA), NHIF, NSSF, and the pension regulators (and SACCO regulators such as SASRA) have enforcement powers, including notices, penalties, and orders to recover funds. In persistent non-compliance, regulators can pursue director liability or disciplinary action. KRA has already acted, leading to the freezing of Standard Group accounts for weeks in past to recover unre-

mitted deductions, while SHIF and NSSF are understood to be taking initial enforcement steps.

It is against this backdrop, that the question of piercing the corporate veil—lifting it—enters the frame. Kenyan law treats the corporate form as a shield designed to protect directors and shareholders from personal liability. Yet the shield is not impenetrable. The Companies Act 2015 contemplates disqualification of directors for “unfitness” (Section 225), and the court, the Attorney General, or the Official Receiver may act if a director's conduct shows persistent unfitness or other misconduct. The Insolvency Act provides a parallel route through wrongful trading (Section 506), allowing directors to be held personally liable for contributions to the company's assets when the company trades while insolvent or continues to incur unpayable debts.

In the realm of taxes and payroll, deliberate non-remittance of

deductions can expose directors to personal liability under the Tax Procedures Act when applied together with the Income Tax Act. Related SHIF/NSSF provisions and provisions in the Penal Code contemplate criminal liability for fraud or theft where employee deductions are misappropriated. Money deducted from an employee's salary is not supposed to be used as operational cash flow.

Yet piercing the veil is not a routine remedy. It is usually invoked as a last resort, only when evidence demonstrates deliberate mismanagement, concealment, or a façade of corporate form masking wrongdoing. The central question, therefore, is whether the pattern of violations at Standard Group—years of salary arrears and unremitted deductions, if proven, forms a composite picture of governance failure and potential unfitness. Regulators might use such a record to argue for disqualification of officers under Section 225, while tax and social-security regulators could pursue personal liability where willful non-remittance is established.

The stakes are clear: hundreds of employees await redress; regulators watch for compliance; and the corporate form—long praised for enabling enterprise—will be adjudicated by the actions of those who held the keys to its governance. But should things not change soon at the Standard Group, the question will no longer be whether the veil can be pierced, but when and by whom, and whether the leadership can demonstrate they deserve to keep it in place.

The writer is the Editor of KOLLEA HUB and the Lead Consultant & Founder of LANDA STORYTELLING HUB for setting and shaping narratives.

Media as the bulwark for constitutionalism, democracy and public interest



A journalist in the street covering demonstrations / AI ILLUSTRATED

By
Gitobu Imanyara

When Kenya returns to 25 June 2024, it will remember not only Parliament, teargas and gunfire, but also the official fear of being seen. Protesters had moved from online anger to the streets. Police answered them with force. Journalists ran with cameras and phones, recording the smoke, the wounded, the panic and the disorder. Then came the threat to shut down media houses. The Kenya Media Sector Working Group said journalists had been attacked and that the government had threatened to shut down KTN for its coverage of the Finance Bill protests. That threat told the country something. Power did not merely want to control the crowd. It wanted to control the memory of the crowd.

The strongest evidence of a constitutional crisis is often not the loudest speech by a president, but the quiet instruction that cameras should stop

recording. A constitution lives in public view. It requires citizens to know who ordered force, who used it, who defended it and who later denied it. Courts may speak months later. Parliament may summon officials after funerals have already taken place. The journalist arrives at the first hour, when the State still hopes to describe the dead as criminals, the wounded as troublemakers and the frightened as enemies of order.

That is why the quarrel between the State and the media during the Gen Z protests was not a private quarrel about broadcasters, editors and licences. It was a fight over whether Kenyans would see their own country. The Committee to Protect Journalists asked Kenyan authorities to investigate attacks on reporters, stop intimidating the press and ensure secure internet access. IPI later described the blackout, journalist attacks and contempt of court during the anniversary protests as a direct affront to Kenya's protections for media freedom. These were not technical failures. They were methods of narrowing public sight.

It is notable that a government which constantly speaks the language of democracy can become most impa-

tient when democracy appears with a phone camera, a live feed and a stubborn reporter. The point of public participation is not that citizens clap after decisions have already been made. The point is that citizens see, question, object and organise before power settles the record. That is why Article 34 matters even without being quoted like a decoration. It keeps open the route through which ordinary people follow government, contest government and correct government.

The pressure has also moved away from Nairobi and spread into counties, police stations, online platforms and private offices where threats are made without cameras present. The Media Council of Kenya's State of Media Freedom in Kenya 2026 records intimidation, violence, arrests, doxing, denial of access and political aggression against journalists. It also records county officials among leading perpetrators of physical assault, threats and denial of access. That is the new shape of censorship. It no longer needs one censor in Nairobi. It can operate through many small acts of fear.

The Kenya Editors Guild therefore occupies a public role far larger than the defence of editors and the daily complaints of newsrooms. Its mandate speaks of professional standards, media independence and laws that affect news media directly or indirectly. That mandate is not ceremonial. Editors decide what the country sees first, what it sees later, and what some powerful people hope it never sees at all. They must resist government pressure, owner pressure, advertiser pressure, partisan pressure and the pressure of speed. They must also resist the temptation to turn anger into news before facts have been assembled.

Several Kenyan scholars have warned against treating media freedom as a side issue in public life. George Ogola has shown how Kenya's media has long been entangled in political and economic power even while trying to perform its democratic role. Levi Obonyo has argued that media freedom is part of social development rather than a privilege of media hous-

es. Yash Pal Ghai has warned that Kenya's transformative Constitution was built with the knowledge that politicians and officials could quickly disregard its promises.

The public interest is therefore not whatever the government announces at a press briefing, nor whatever the loudest crowd demands on a given afternoon. It is the citizen's claim to know how power is used. Who ordered the deployment? Who authorised the shooting? Who signed the contract? Who paid the influencer? Who called the newsroom? Who benefited from the silence? Good journalism asks these questions without first seeking permission from those who may be embarrassed by the answers.

Yet the press cannot ask the public to defend it while it behaves as if freedom excuses every newsroom failure. Paid propaganda sold as news weakens the profession. Ethnic dog-whistling dressed up as analysis damages the country. Studio shouting cannot replace reporting. A correction hidden at the bottom of a website does not repair a false headline that travelled across the country. The Code of Conduct for Media Practice ties freedom to accuracy, fairness, accountability, privacy and responsibility. Those duties are not chains. They are what make freedom defensible.

The digital age has made this struggle harder because lies now travel with the confidence of breaking news and the polish of professional production. Deepfakes can manufacture evidence.

Anonymous accounts can smear reporters. State-friendly bloggers can turn a falsehood into a national conversation before breakfast. ARTICLE 19 Eastern Africa has warned that attacks and harassment against journalists and human rights defenders have risen under security narratives that justify crackdowns on civil society, media freedom and dissent. In that environment, fact-checking is not clerical work. It is democratic self-defence.

There is also the quieter danger of capture, which does not require police outside a newsroom because the newsroom has already learnt which stories to avoid. A captured press edits itself before the State asks. It knows which advertiser must not be irritated, which minister must be flattered and which public suffering can safely be ignored. The Friedrich Naumann Foundation's report on media under pressure in Kenya makes the point sharply: captured media serves government, officials, advertisers and owners instead of the public interest.



The Code of Conduct for Media Practice ties freedom to accuracy, fairness, accountability, privacy and responsibility

There are alternatives to this slide, but they require both the State and the media to abandon convenient habits that have weakened public trust. The State must stop treating journalists as intruders at public events. Police commanders must protect reporters during protests. Regulators must never become instruments of political anger. Media owners must build newsrooms that can survive commercial pressure without selling editorial judgment. Editors must make corrections visible, conflicts transparent and public interest unmistakable. Citizens must defend press freedom even when the story wounds their side. When journalists marched against police violence, they were defending the citizen's right to know.

In short, Kenya does not need a quieter press at the very moment when public power has become more secretive, more irritated and more willing to punish scrutiny. It needs a press that records before official memory is written. It needs editors who understand that courage without accuracy is reckless, and accuracy without courage is useless. It needs citizens who know that a camera pointed at power is not an enemy of the State. It is one of the ways a republic remembers that sovereignty belongs to the people.

The writer is a lawyer, veteran of the Second Liberation, founder of the Nairobi Law Monthly, and publisher of The Platform, a legal education publication, and KEG member



Police arrest a journalist while carrying out his civil duty to inform the public / AIILLUSTRATED

End of an Era

The bulldog of African media has a new owner, and a new bark

By
Bernard Mwinzi



After 66 years, the Aga Khan Fund for Economic Development (AKFED) in March sold all its Nation Media Group shareholding to Taarifa Ltd, a company owned by Tanzanian businessman Rostam Aziz. While, three months later, it is not clear whether the deal has received all regulatory approvals in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda, the biggest question surrounding it is not that it happened, but why it happened and how it could change the media landscape in Kenya and across Africa.

In official communication of the transaction, AKFED said it had conducted "a strategic review of its investment portfolio" and decided to focus on its core sectors, including financial services, infrastructure, industrials, and hospitality. But while this was the formal explanation, it did little to fully answer the deeper question of why an organisation of such financial heft would exit a flagship media institution after almost seven decades.

For more than 60 years, the Nation Media Group was an unusual institution. It was not owned by a political dynasty or a profit-driven conglomerate, but instead belonged to a development agency within the wider network of the late Aga Khan IV. That ownership model created a rare buffer between journalism and power, and while the organisation was never immune to political or commercial pres-

sure, the Aga Khan structure gave it a level of insulation uncommon in African media markets, allowing NMG to invest in journalism not just as a business, but as a public good.

Under that framework, the company built some of the region's most influential publications, including the *Daily Nation*, *Business Daily*, *The EastAfrican*, and *Taifa Leo* in Nairobi; the *Daily Monitor* in Kampala; and *The Citizen* and *Mwananchi* in Dar es Salaam. It also expanded into television through NTV and radio stations in Kenya and Uganda, and built several news websites and content platforms. Three months on, AKFED's exit has effectively closed that colourful chapter of enterprise.

For many, it was the suddenness of the exit, the calm nature of the announcement on a warm Tuesday

Selling the Nation: Scoop of the Century for Aziz

Aga Khan IV had an admirable emotional attachment to NMG and ran it more as a public-good enterprise than a profit venture, but now, with the founding figure gone, the heirs are approaching the inherited assets more pragmatically, focusing on portfolio optimisation rather than legacy preservation. The bulldog of African media now has a new godfather and a bruised nose, but do not write it off yet, writes **BERNARD MWINZI**

afternoon despite its repercussions across the region, that was unnerving. Coming barely a year after the death of Aga Khan IV in February 2025, the announcement was immediately interpreted by business analysts as having been accelerated by the uncertainties



Nation Media Group twin towers in Nairobi / COURTESY



A reader getting the latest news from the newspaper/ COURTESY

of portfolio management during the transition as, often, when founders of businesses disappear, their emotional and historical attachment often weakens within the next generation.

This transition is important in this story as research on family and founder-led enterprises shows that emotional attachment to a company declines across generations, making strategic exits more likely. Scholars describe this attachment as “socio-emotional wealth”, or the non-financial value founders place on legacy, identity and reputation tied to the business.

There is not doubt that Aga Khan IV had an admirable emotional attachment to NMG. He ran it more as a public-good enterprise than a profit venture, often making decisions that baffled financial managers. He, for instance, defended *Taifa Leo*, the Kiswahili newspaper he launched in 1960 and the father of the entire media enterprise, when its fortunes started shifting in the mid-2010s and a clever fellow in the finance department suggested it needed to fold.

In 1994 he rolled out The EastAfrican, which he fashioned as a prestigious regional newspaper aimed at strengthening East African integration through rigorous journalism and informed policy analysis. To realise this vision, he recruited some of the continent’s finest journalists and editors,

often investing heavily despite uncertain commercial returns. Key figures included founding managing editor Joseph Odindo and veteran journalist Gerry Loughran, who helped shape the paper’s editorial direction, alongside prominent contributors such as Charles Onyango-Obbo and John Githongo. The Aga Khan urged the team to make the publication the “Sunday best” of the Nation Media Group by positioning it as a newspaper defined by excellence, credibility, and regional influence.

For the flagship dailies in Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania, he poured substantial resources into their editorial and visual development, transforming them, and especially the *Daily Nation* in Nairobi, into some of Africa’s most respected newspapers. He invested in strong editorial leadership, resourced his newsrooms with the finest journalists on the continent, and encouraged independent, public-interest journalism.

Given this colourful history, it is, understandably, hard to say what exactly happened in the months leading to March, but it appears that, with the founding figure gone, portfolio priorities shifted and the heirs started approaching the inherited assets more pragmatically than him, focusing on business optimisation rather than legacy preservation. And now the global

development institution that founded some of East Africa’s most influential media brands wants no involvement at all in the company, which means the Nation Media Group has moved from philanthropic stewardship to private ownership by a regional business magnate.

That shift raises profound questions, and the first and most obvious one is, why Rostam Aziz?

To answer that, one has to consider the fact that the Tanzanian billionaire is not new to media. In the early 2000s he helped build one of Tanzania’s most successful media groups through *Mwananchi* Communications, which publishes *The Citizen*, *Mwananchi* and *Mwanaspoti*. The company, headquartered in the Tabata Relini sector of Mandela Road in Dar es Salaam, was eventually acquired by Nation Media Group as part of its expansion into Tanzania in 2002.

At a press briefing in the Tanzanian capital on December 13 of that year, the then Group Financial Manager, Dennis Aluanga, beamed “we started existing in Tanzania yesterday” but declined to disclose the Group’s stakes in *Mwananchi*. However, Wilfred Kiboro, then the NMG executive officer, told reporters that *Mwananchi* was “an attractive investment”.

Aziz later reinvested in media through New Habari Limited in 2006 and ventured into broadcasting through Channel Ten and DTV. However, media represents only a small portion of his wider business empire as his conglomerate spans mining, telecommunications, logistics, agriculture, construction, real estate and energy. Indeed, one of his most prominent ventures today is Taifa Gas, a rapidly expanding LPG distribution company whose Kenyan branch was launched by President William Ruto in Mombasa in February 2023. In other words, he is exactly the kind of cross-border business elite increasingly shaping the region’s economic landscape.

And that leads us to another fundamental question: why would anyone acquire a financially struggling media company?

From a purely financial perspective, the acquisition is not an obvious one. Across Africa, traditional media companies are under intense pressure from declining advertising revenue, rising digital competition, and shifting audience habits. But from a strategic influence perspective, the move makes perfect sense as ownership of a major media organisation provides something few other industries can, and that’s agenda-setting power.

The Nation Media Group operates across Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania and Rwanda, reaching tens of millions of people through print, television, radio and digital platforms. Control of such an institution offers proximity to political elites, influence over public narratives, and substantial reputational capital. For a businessman with interests in heavily regulated sectors, those advantages matter as media ownership has historically served as a form of soft power across many countries.

In Kenya, for example, Daniel arap Moi maintained close relationships with friendly media outlets such as

his own The Standard Group and the ruling party mouthpiece Kenya Times Service during his presidency, while in South Africa companies linked to Iqbal Survé, the tycoon who is also chairman of Sekunjalo Investment Holdings, acquired major newspaper groups through Independent Media. Outside Africa, powerful business figures also invest in media, not primarily for profit, but for influence, and the acquisition of The Washington Post by Jeff Bezos in 2013 for \$250 million is perhaps the most famous example in recent years.

None of this, of course, automatically implies editorial interference, even though it illustrates why media companies attract investors whose motivations extend beyond the balance sheet. As news of NMG’s acquisition made the rounds in March, Aziz, the charming new owner, made the effort to affirm his support for strong, independent and trusted journalism, noting at a press briefing in Nairobi that “NMG has for decades played a central role in shaping public discourse across

East Africa and strengthening the ties between the peoples of our region”, and that “through this investment I’ll join the company as a shareholder and long-term strategic partner supporting its continued growth, innovation and transformation in the digital age”.

The reactions were to his statement and that of AKFED were fast and furious, with media analysts and industry observers questioning the future of editorial independence at East Africa’s largest independent media house. Among the most prominent voices

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NMG has for decades played a central role in shaping public discourse across East Africa and strengthening the ties between the peoples of our region.

Rostam Aziz ”



Tanzanian businessman Rostam Aziz/ COURTESY

was CNN International correspondent and former Nation journalist Larry Madowo, who expressed concern about the implications of the ownership change.

“I’m a former employee of the media conglomerate Rostam Azizi just acquired,” Madowo wrote on X “It was mostly independent, until it wasn’t, partly because of the Aga Khan’s distance and/or benign neglect. NMG being owned by a Tanzanian businessman with active political interests is concerning.”

Madowo added that Tanzania’s record on media freedom raised legitimate questions, saying he hoped Aziz would honour his commitment to editorial independence despite his close relationships with regional political leaders.

Former Nation editor Mutuma Mathiu also posed difficult questions about the deal. “What does the Aga Khan’s decision mean for press freedom in Kenya, East Africa and Africa in general?” he asked, while wondering whether the values that had defined Nation for decades, including democratic governance, human rights and East African integration, would be protected under the new ownership.

Meanwhile, the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism described the acquisition as a “structural shift”, noting that concerns persist over how the new ownership could reshape the incentives and boundaries within which editorial decisions are made. Inside Nation’s newsroom, a senior journalist, speaking anonymously to the Financial Times, dismissed Aziz’s assurances of editorial independence, saying “nobody believes him” before adding “the feeling here is that we have been abandoned”.

However, even with the questions, Aziz’s promise of “transformation in the digital age” is a fitting segue to the structural crisis facing media companies across Africa. Digital transformation has disrupted traditional revenue models worldwide, but the challenge is particularly acute on the continent. While in Europe and North America newspapers have gradually shift-



ed toward digital subscriptions, and while publications such as The New York Times and The Financial Times of London now generate billions of dollars annually from readers paying directly for online content, that model has proven far harder to replicate in Africa.

The reasons, I think, are structural. First, disposable incomes remain low across much of the continent, so paying for digital news often competes with more immediate priorities such as mobile data costs, or even food. Second, audiences have grown accustomed to free information through social media platforms like Facebook and X. And, third, payment infrastructure remains uneven, making subscription systems harder to scale. For companies like NMG, this creates the difficult equation of declining print revenue without a reliable digital replacement.

This crisis is now forcing media companies to rethink what journalism actually means as a business. For decades, newspapers relied on a simple formula: advertising paid for journalism while readers bought the paper at a subsidised price. That model, unfortunately, has collapsed globally. Digital advertising is now dominated by technology giants like Google and Meta, leaving traditional media organisations fighting over a shrinking

share of the market.

In East Africa, the problem is compounded by government advertising practices. State agencies are often the largest advertisers in local media markets, and that tends to create a structural vulnerability as editorial independence can come into conflict with financial survival. In 2019, for instance, the Kenyan government temporarily moved state advertising away from independent media houses to the state-owned Kenya Broadcasting Corporation. For Aziz and any media investor seeking to turn a profit, therefore, the question might not simply be whether, as Aga Khan IV believed, journalism is important, but whether it is commercially sustainable. And that presents murky waters for NMG to navigate in the coming days.

In the immediate term, the acquisition is unlikely to produce dramatic structural changes inside NMG. It does not affect employment arrangements, no redundancies have been announced, and management decisions will remain with the NMG board, though the new majority shareholder will likely nominate directors once the deal is completed. Meanwhile, two long-standing AKFED-linked directors are said to have stepped down in June.

However, more subtle changes may eventually emerge across NMG’s re-



Nation Media studio / COURTESY

gional operations. The group runs major editorial centres in Nairobi, Kampala, Kigali, and Dar es Salaam. Aziz’s new regime could influence editorial priorities, level of investment in investigative reporting, regional coordination across bureaus, the entire digital strategy, and newsroom restructuring. Still, media transitions rarely transform newsrooms overnight as cultural change tends to occur gradually, but journalists are always the first to sniff trouble and will inevitably watch for signs of shifting editorial boundaries. And NMG still has some of the finest, sharpest newshounds on the parts of the world.

Another unknown factor in the deal is the structure of the acquiring entity. Taarifa Limited, the vehicle on which Aziz roared into Kimathi Street, is not widely known in regional media circles. Unlike established media conglomerates, it does not have a long history of managing large cross-border newsrooms, which raises questions about how the company intends to integrate or manage NMG’s existing operations. Will it, for instance, act primarily as a financial holding company, or will it take a more active role in editorial and operational strategy?

The success or failure of the acquisition will ultimately depend on how Taarifa balances commercial discipline with NMG’s institutional culture of high-level newsrooms that have op-

erated for decades under a very different ownership philosophy.

Aziz has indicated that he does not currently intend to buy out minority shareholders or delist the company, which remains listed on the Nairobi Securities Exchange and cross-listed on the Uganda Securities Exchange, Dar es Salaam Stock Exchange and Rwanda Stock Exchange. However, the possibility of delisting cannot be entirely dismissed. Should the new majority shareholder eventually desire greater strategic flexibility, taking the company private could become attractive. Such flexibility is important for faster decision making and has been credited with, for example, the relative success of Royal Media Services in Nairobi under Samuel Kamau Macharia, and Azam Media under the Bakhresa Group in Dar es Salaam.

It is important to note, however, that while delisting would remove some regulatory transparency requirements and allow for faster restructuring decisions, it would also reduce public scrutiny, which matters enormously for a media organisation whose core business is holding others accountable.

Given all these variables, for journalists and media watchers across East Africa, the sale represents both risk and opportunity. Media ownership concentration often narrows the range of voices in public debate, and

when powerful business figures control major media platforms, conflicts of interest inevitably arise. In this instance, therefore, an editor investigating corruption in the energy sector might find herself reporting on companies linked to her employer.

On the other hand, this transfer of controlling stake could bring fresh capital for digital innovation, regional expansion and multimedia storytelling. Nation Media Group has already invested heavily in digital platforms, but the pace of technological change demands constant reinvention. If Aziz prioritises long-term sustainability rather than short-term influence, NMG could emerge stronger.

This, however, sounds more like the end of an era than the beginning of a new epoch. For many journalists who passed through its newsrooms, NMG represented something unusual in African media. It was not perfect, but it was widely regarded as one of the few institutions in the region that attempted to balance commercial viability with editorial independence. That experiment was made possible by a unique ownership structure rooted in the development philosophy of the Aga Khan network. Now that structure is gone. The heirs of the Aga Khan empire have placed one of East Africa’s most influential media houses firmly within the orbit of a rising class of cross-border business elites, and whether that shift strengthens or weakens the institution will become clear only over time.

But one thing is certain. After more than six decades, the story of Nation Media Group is entering an entirely new chapter, one that will shape not only the future of the company, but the broader landscape of journalism in East Africa and beyond.

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Is journalism education still fit for purpose in the age of digital disruption?

By
Prof George
Nyabuga



Questions about the quality, relevance, and purpose of journalism education have become increasingly prominent in recent years. These concerns are neither new nor unique to journalism. Across disciplines, educators, policymakers, employers, and students continually debate whether university education adequately prepares graduates for the realities of the modern world. However, the rapid transformation of the media landscape, driven by digital technologies, social media, changing audience behaviour, and more recently artificial intelligence (AI), has intensified scrutiny of journalism education and training. At the centre of these debates lies a fundamental question: is journalism education fit for purpose?

One of the key issues in evaluating the quality of journalism education is determining whether it adequately addresses both student and industry needs while keeping pace with technological, economic, and social developments. For many observers, the value of journalism programmes is often measured by their ability to produce graduates who can seamlessly integrate into the media industry and contribute effectively from the outset. This perspective places considerable emphasis on practical skills, technical competencies, and professional readiness. Consequently, journalism schools are frequently assessed based on their capacity to equip students with contemporary skills such as multimedia storytelling, data journalism, mobile reporting, audience engagement, digital content production, and



Journalism students during a practical lesson / AI ILLUSTRATED

The value of journalism programmes is often measured by their ability to produce graduates who can seamlessly integrate into the media industry and contribute effectively from the outset.

increasingly, the responsible use of artificial intelligence tools. The rise of AI has introduced a new layer of complexity to this discussion. Artificial intelligence is fundamentally reshaping how news is gathered,

produced, distributed, and consumed. Newsrooms are increasingly experimenting with AI-assisted content creation, automated fact-checking, audience analytics, and content personalization. These developments have raised legitimate questions about whether journalism schools are sufficiently prepared to educate future journalists for an environment in which human and machine capabilities increasingly intersect. Critics argue that many journalism curricula remain rooted in traditional approaches that do not adequately reflect contemporary industry realities. Others contend that journalism schools are moving too slowly to adapt to technological changes, leaving graduates underprepared for the evolving demands of the profession. Yet reducing journalism education solely to the question of industry preparedness risks overlooking the broader purpose of higher education. The relationship between journalism schools and the media industry has long been contested. Some view jour-

nalism education primarily as a pipeline for producing skilled professionals who can meet the workforce needs of media organisations. From this perspective, journalism schools should focus on practical training and ensure that graduates possess competencies directly applicable to newsroom environments. While this argument has merit, it often narrows the purpose of education to vocational outcomes alone. The academy has traditionally served a broader societal function. Higher education is not merely about preparing individuals for employment; it is also about cultivating critical thinkers, informed citizens, and reflective practitioners. Journalism education occupies a unique position in this regard because journalism itself is both a profession and a public good. Journalists do not merely perform technical tasks; they interpret events, scrutinise power, facilitate public debate, and contribute to democratic governance. To fulfil these responsibilities effectively, journalists require more than technical proficiency. They need intellectual depth, ethical awareness, analytical skills, historical understanding, and the capacity to engage with complex social, political, economic, and cultural issues.

This raises important questions about the nature of knowledge and its role in society. Many people ask whether knowledge is valuable if it is not directly applied to practical or economic activities. Such questions often emerge from concerns about employability and economic returns on educational investment. However, the value of knowledge extends beyond immediate practical application. Knowledge enables individuals to understand the world, challenge assumptions, engage in informed debate, and contribute meaningfully to societal development. In journalism, these capacities are particularly important because the profession relies on the ability to investigate, interpret, contextualise, and explain events and issues that affect society.

Viewing journalism education exclusively through a professional development lens may therefore distort its

broader purpose. Such a perspective risks reducing universities to training centres whose sole function is to produce workers for the labour market. While employability remains an important objective, higher education also has a responsibility to foster intellectual curiosity, critical inquiry, creativity, and ethical reasoning. Journalism programmes should not merely teach students how to report stories; they should also help them understand why stories matter, how knowledge is produced, and how media influence

society. This broader debate is not confined to journalism alone. Similar questions have been raised about disciplines such as philosophy, theology, sociology, literature, history, and gender studies. Critics often question the practical utility of these fields, arguing that they do not directly lead to employment opportunities or measurable economic outcomes. Yet these disciplines play an essential role in developing analytical thinking, ethical reflection, cultural understanding, and social awareness. They provide frame-



Journalism graduate / AI ILLUSTRATED



A lecturer engaging students in class / AI ILLUSTRATED

“Developments in society today are ever emerging, the curriculum takes a while to review and go through the regulatory processes before being implemented, and you are dealing with new challenges

Prof. Levi Obonyo”

works through which individuals can make sense of human experience and societal change. Journalism, which frequently draws upon insights from these disciplines, benefits immensely from such intellectual foundations.

In the Kenyan context, these debates are particularly relevant. The country has experienced significant growth in journalism and media education over the past three decades. Tens of universities and colleges across the country now offer a wide range of journalism, communication, media studies, public relations, and digital media programmes. This expansion has increased access to media education and contributed to the professionalisation of the sector. However, it has also raised concerns about quality, curriculum relevance, staffing, infrastructure, and alignment with industry needs. Musakali Juma of Moi University argues that even though Kenya’s is quite developed in terms of journalism training, it is still faces myriad challenges including little or no budget allocation for training programmes,

uncertainties in the media landscape, and lack of AI guidelines in instruction in journalism schools. “Local journalism institutions are also not at par in curriculum development and facilities. Some are well organised and equipped whereas others are lagging behind in curriculum development, delivery and equipment. We have institutions that lack basic required training facilities. We still have a long way to go as we still play catch-up to developed economies,” Juma says. “At the same time, a number of institutions are also playing catch-up in digital journalism training with media and information literacy, digital media literacy and AI adoption not being given the attention they deserve in the fast paced journalism training space. These are gaping holes in most curricula.”

Prof. Levi Obonyo of Daystar University also posits that a combination of factors including the strictures and rigidity of the African academic programmes and curriculum development pose a challenge to the advancement of journalism education.

“Developments in society today are ever emerging, the curriculum takes a while to review and go through the regulatory processes before being implemented, and you are dealing with new challenges,” Prof. Obonyo contends. He adds that lack of adequate and qualified human and financial resources also restrict developments in journalism schools. “Given the cost of acquiring quality training equipment for journalism schools, charging corresponding fees would place the programme beyond the means of many,” Prof. Obonyo adds. Nancy Amaye of Maasai Mara University supports the argument that quality curriculum also demands quality developers, particularly those who have good grounding in media and journalism. To Amaye, curriculum development and teaching are “contextual” and contends that to improve the quality of journalism development demands the removal of “quacks from curriculum development and teaching by doing a thorough talent recruitment of qualified trainers”.

The Kenyan media landscape itself has undergone profound transformation. Traditional media organisations face increasing competition from digital platforms, social media influencers, citizen journalists, and global technology companies. Revenue models that once sustained newspapers, radio stations, and television broadcasters are under pressure. News consumption patterns have shifted dramatically, particularly among younger audiences who increasingly rely on mobile devices and social media platforms for information. These developments require journalism schools to continuously review and update their curricula to ensure that graduates possess the skills and knowledge needed to operate in a rapidly changing environment.

At the same time, journalism education in Kenya must resist the temptation to become excessively reactive to short-term industry trends. Technologies and platforms evolve rapidly, often rendering specific technical skills obsolete within a few years. If jour-

nalism programmes focus exclusively on current technologies, they risk producing graduates whose expertise may quickly become outdated. Instead, journalism education should strive to balance practical competencies with enduring intellectual foundations. Students need technical skills, but they also need critical thinking, ethical reasoning, research capabilities, adaptability, and a deep understanding of society. These are the attributes that enable journalists to navigate change throughout their careers.

Artificial intelligence provides a useful example of this balance. Journalism schools should certainly teach students how AI tools function and how they can be used responsibly in journalistic practice. However, equally important is helping students understand the ethical, legal, social, and political implications of AI. Questions about algorithmic bias, misinformation, accountability, transparency, privacy, and the future of human labour require critical analysis that extends beyond technical training. Addressing these issues demands the kind of intellectual engagement that universities are uniquely positioned to provide.

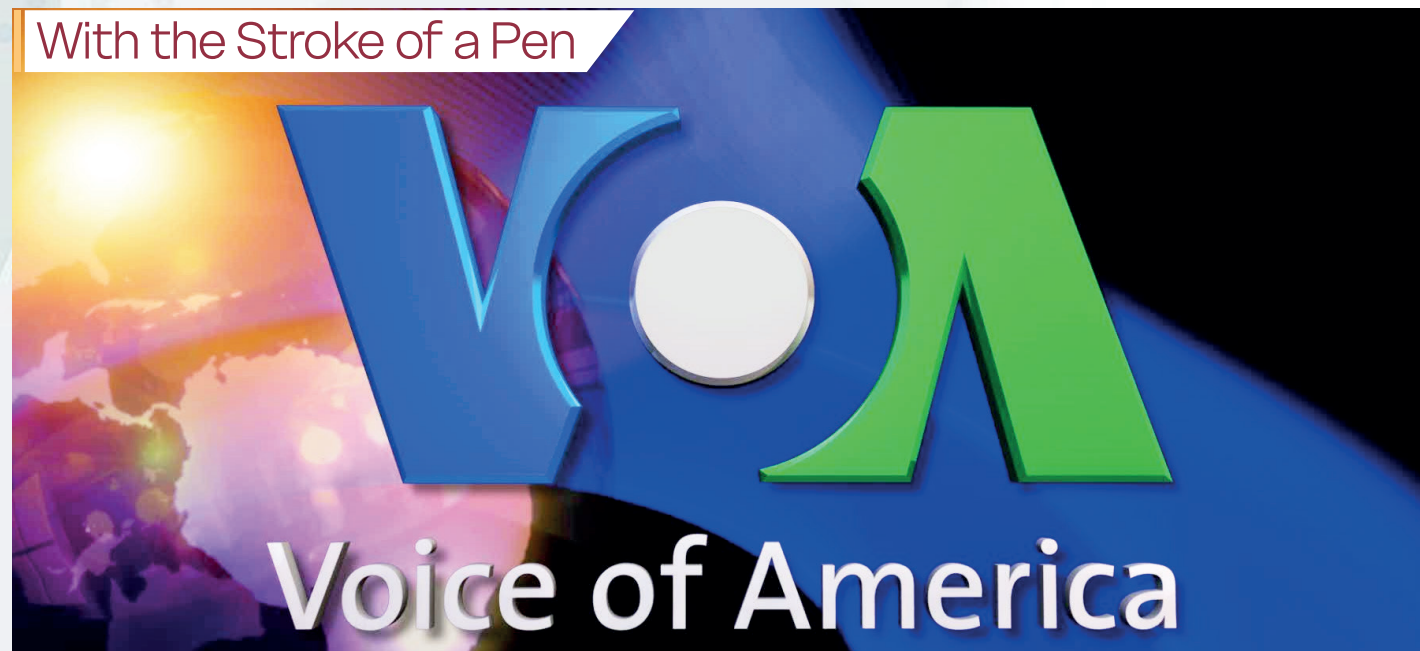
Ultimately, the question of whether journalism education is fit for purpose cannot be answered solely by examining employment statistics or industry satisfaction surveys. The answer depends on how one defines the purpose of journalism education itself. If its purpose is merely to supply labour to the media industry, then success can be measured primarily through professional outcomes. However, if journalism education is understood as a broader intellectual and societal endeavour, then its success must also be evaluated in terms of its contribution to democratic citizenship, public discourse, ethical leadership, and knowledge production.

The challenge for journalism schools, therefore, is not to choose between vocational training and intellectual development but to integrate the two. Effective journalism education should prepare students for professional practice while simultaneously equipping them with the intellectual

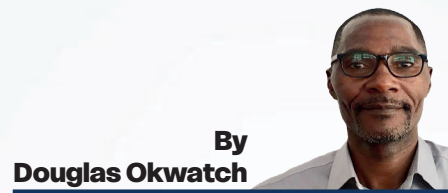
tools needed to understand and engage with a complex and rapidly changing world. It should develop graduates who are technically competent, ethically grounded, socially aware, and intellectually curious. Mwenda Njoka, the chief executive officer of Cape Media, argues that journalism training programmes may not always adequately prepare journalists for the changing and demanding newsroom. He locates his argument in newsroom operations and cultures like story sourcing and development. “The biggest challenge in newsroom today is making young journalists appreciate the value of proper sourcing of stories. I have seen cases of graduate journalists from reputable universities quoting bloggers and anonymous online content as sources for their stories,” he says. “This often creates legal problems especially on controversial issues more so if it is a matter touching on integrity of a person or an institution.”

As Kenya and other countries continue to navigate the disruptions brought about by digital technologies and artificial intelligence, journalism education must evolve accordingly. Yet in doing so, it must remain faithful to its broader educational mission. The future of journalism depends not only on the ability of journalists to use new technologies but also on their capacity to think critically, act ethically, and serve the public interest. In this sense, the enduring purpose of journalism education remains as important today as it has ever been. Yet, as Prof Obonyo says: “is journalism training fit for purpose. Who currently exactly knows the purpose?” That is the enduring question.

Prof Nyabuga is the Associate Dean and an Associate Professor of media and journalism at The Aga Khan University Graduate School of Media and Communications, and worked as a journalist, and Managing Editor in charge of weekend editions (Saturday and Sunday) as well as Media Convergence at the Standard Group.



Silence of the airwaves: A reflection on VoA shutdown and future of media in Africa



By
Douglas Okwatch

For as long as I can remember, the dawn in my corner of Africa had a distinct soundtrack. Shortly before the circadian rhythm of the village roosters triggered the cock-a-doodle-does, and long before the heat of the sun baked the black cotton soil of the Lake Victoria basin there was the familiar, metallic click of a battery-powered radio. My father's precious transistor radio. Growing up, that sound was immediately followed by a low, rhythmic hum—the distinctive signature of shortwave frequencies cutting through thousands of miles of vast lands and

oceans. Then came the words that stitched our village into the fabric of the global consciousness: “Hii ni Sauti ya Amerika, Washington, D.C.” (This is the Voice of America, Washington, D.C.) Whether it was delivered in the rich cadence of Hausa, the familiar warmth of Swahili, or the urgent tones of Amharic, depending on which part of Africa you were, VOA was more than just a media house. It was a reliable morning ritual, consumed alongside local tea, as farmers, teachers, and elders gathered to understand a world that often felt impossibly distant.

Then silence followed. Eternal silence. The Trump administration abruptly pulled the plug on the Voice of America's African division. It did not just shutter an office building in Washington, D.C. It cast a vast, unforgiving blanket

of static over millions of African households. To the bureaucrats of the “America First” doctrine, this sudden shutdown was likely viewed as a swift, domestic cost-cutting measure—a surgical strike against what they deemed an unnecessary taxpayer burden.

What began in 1960 as a modest French-language broadcast to 22 newly-independent nations evolved over six decades into a vibrant, multi-lingual lifeline speaking 16 different languages. Its commitment to reaching the most isolated corners of the continent was proven as recently as 2024, when the network launched its Fulani service to bridge the information gap for nomadic populations across West and Central Africa.

Today, sitting here, on the continent, adjusting a plastic dial that now yields nothing but a hollow, rushing hiss, the reality feels entirely different. The abrupt silence on our airwaves represents a profound geopolitical abandonment. By treating a sixty-year journalistic lifeline as disposable political theater, Washington has exposed the fragile underbelly of our lo-

cal information ecosystems. As I listen to the empty crackle of the frequency, it is impossible not to realise that a vital window has been slammed shut, leaving an information void that threatens to fundamentally alter the landscape of African journalism

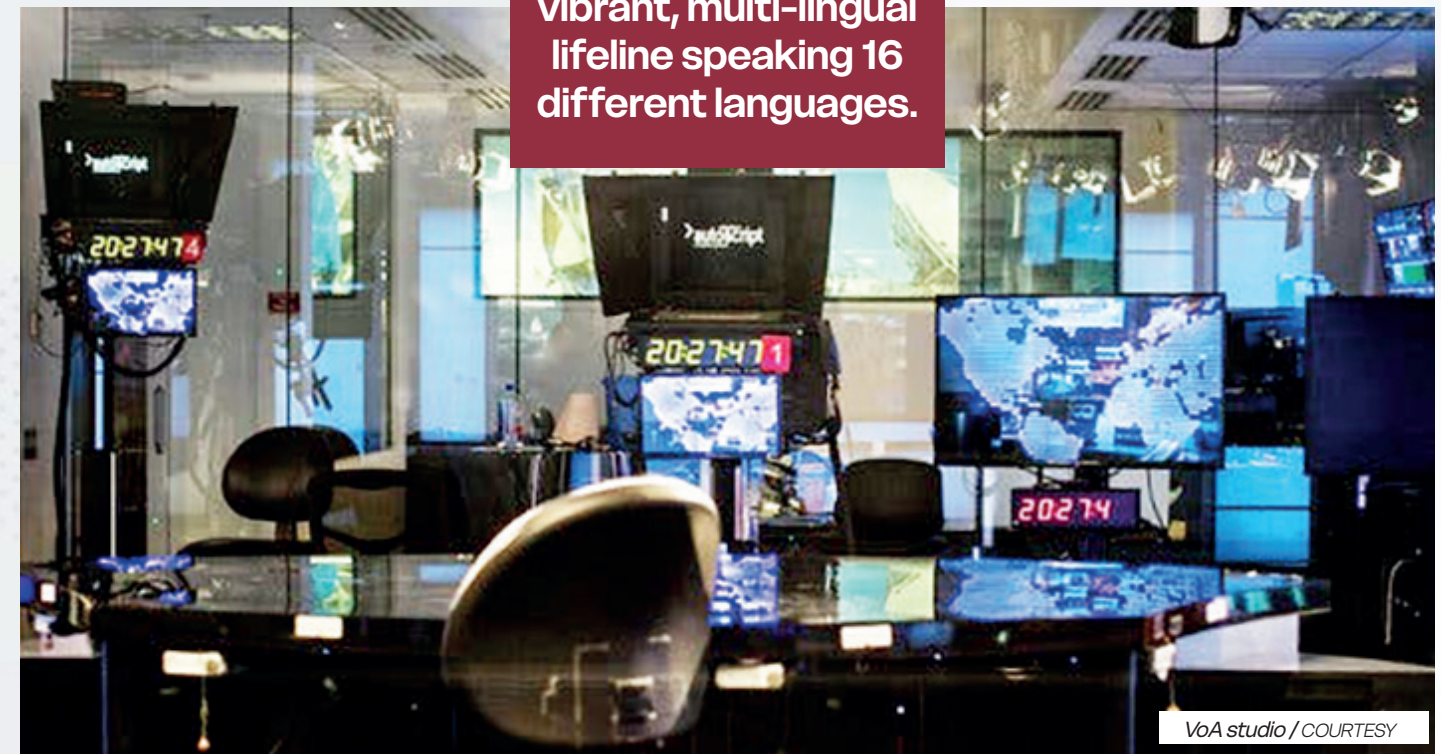
To understand why this sudden silence feels so jarring, one must appreciate how a broadcaster funded by a foreign superpower managed to earn the deep, generational trust of the African public. Growing up, we were well aware that VOA was an instrument of Washington. We knew it was born in the fires of 1942 to counter Nazi propaganda, and we knew it was later weaponised during the Cold War to project American soft power into a decolonising Africa. Yet, despite its origins as an ideological tool designed to win African hearts and minds away from Soviet influence, VOA managed to accomplish something rare for a state-backed medium: it achieved a reputation for reliability.

This paradox was not acciden-

tal; it was forged by law. In 1976, U.S. President Gerald Ford signed Public Law 94-350, cementing the VOA Public Charter into statutory law. This charter legally mandated that VOA's news must be accurate, objective, and comprehensive. Crucially, it established an “editorial firewall”—a legal shield that protected the network's journalists from the political interference of whatever administration happened to sit in the White House. For African listeners, this firewall transformed VOA from a mere megaphone for Washington's foreign policy into a trusted, profes-

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sional repository of global and regional facts. During the turbulent decades following independence, this legal distinction bore immense practical fruit on our continent. As military regimes, single-party dictatorships, and local censorship boards clamped down on domestic media across Africa, our state-run broadcasters became parody machines of government propaganda. In those dark eras, looking for unvarnished truths about our own countries required looking outward. Tuning into the VOA shortwave was often the only safe way to discover that a coup had occurred, that an opposition leader had been jailed, or that a famine was being covered up by local authorities. In a sense, therefore, Africa's press freedom was hit hard by the VOA shutdown. For over half a century, the network provided more than 625 hours of audio and video weekly across 16 local languages, serving as an irreplaceable baseline for truth. We trusted it because, even when America itself stumbled through its own civil rights strug-



VoA studio / COURTESY

gles or foreign policy disasters, VOA's journalists reported those flaws with the same rigor they applied to the rest of the world. It was this hard-earned legacy of institutional integrity—not just a craving for Western media—that made the station a life-line, and it is precisely this legacy that the current administration's shutdown has dismantled with the stroke of a pen.

The true tragedy of this shutdown is its fundamental misunderstanding of how media operates on our continent. In the air-conditioned corridors of Washington, bureaucrats likely assumed that shutting down VOA merely meant turning off a few digital feeds or letting go of disposable overseas staff. But on the ground in Africa, this decision has inflicted immediate, structural damage on an already fragile information ecosystem. While wealthy urban elites in Nairobi, Johannesburg, or Lagos can easily switch to high-speed internet, satellite television, or subscription-based Western media, the vast majority of our population lives in rural and peri-urban spaces. Their primary window to the world remains the

local community radio station. These small, poorly funded local stations relied heavily on VOA's syndication packages—rebroadcasting its well-researched world news, health bulletins, and agricultural advice in indigenous languages. By severing these supply lines, the White House has effectively starved rural African publics of verified, life-saving information.

This manufactured information vacuum is particularly dangerous in conflict-prone zones like the Sahel, northern Mozambique, or the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo. In these volatile regions, reporting the truth is an act of extreme bravery that often carries a death sentence from predatory rebel factions or authoritarian regimes. Local journalists frequently relied on the global footprint of VOA to broadcast sensitive local investigations without fear of immediate assassination. Furthermore, we must confront the immense human cost borne by our own people. When 1,300 VOA staff members were abruptly put on leave, it meant hundreds of talented African journalists, local stringers, field producers, and



A family watching news on TV / AI ILLUSTRATED

master translators were instantly stripped of their livelihoods. These were not distant American actors; they were our brothers and sisters, our aunts and uncles, serving as the essential narrative bridge between Washington and the continent. Their sudden silencing is a direct assault on the professionalization of African journalism.

In the theater of international

relations, nature abhors a vacuum, and information ecosystems are no exception. The “America First” doctrine was marketed to domestic U.S. voters as a masterful stroke of isolationist prudence—a withdrawal from global commitments that allegedly yielded no return. Yet, looking at this decision through a strategic African lens, the closure of VOA looks less like American prudence and more like a profound act of geopolitical surrender. Washington has voluntarily handed over the keys to the continent's airwaves, and its fiercest global rivals have wasted no time stepping into the void. As painful as it is to listen to the static on our airwaves, this moment of abandonment carries a profound, revolutionary lesson for our continent. For over half a century, African civil societies have trapped themselves in a dependency loop, relying on Western public broadcasters like VOA to deliver “objective truth” and protect us from our own domestic censors. The abrupt closure of VOA by the Trump ad-

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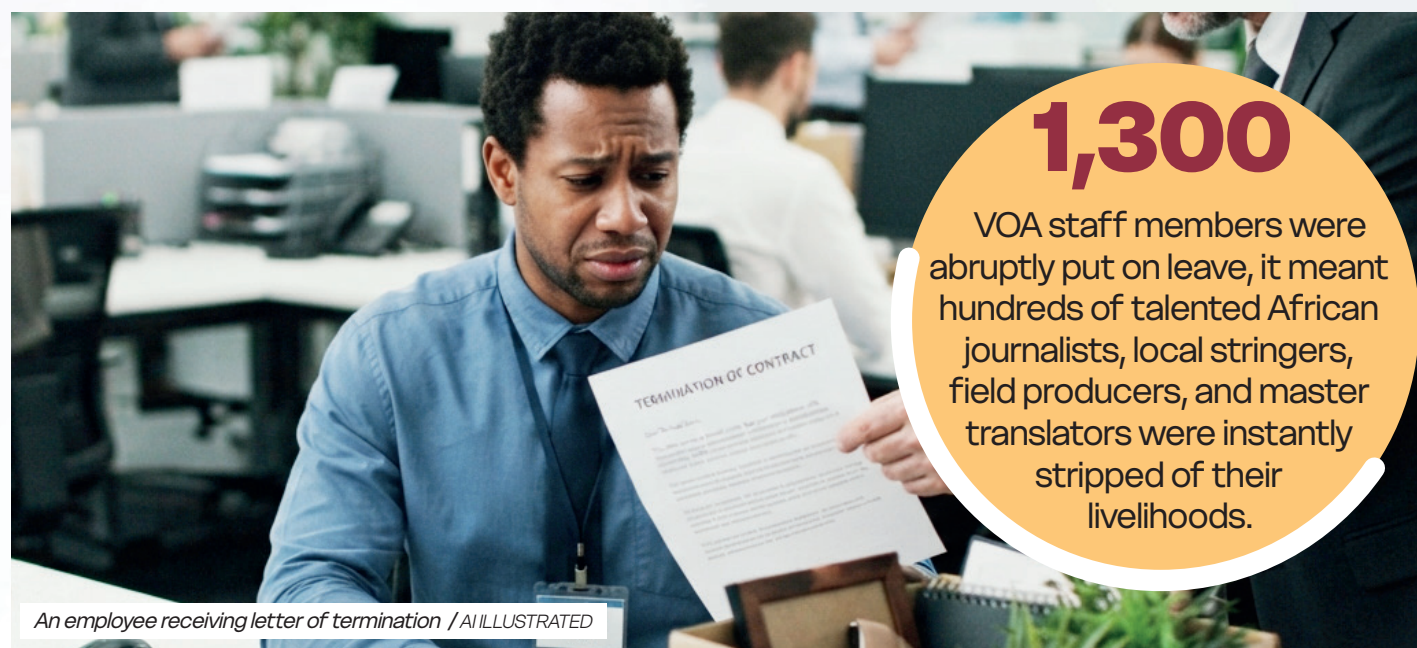
ministration strips away that naive illusion. It forces us to confront a harsh, undeniable reality: the information ecosystem of a democratic Africa can no longer remain a hostage to the volatile political whims of Washington or any other foreign capital.

This crisis must be embraced as our catalyst for epistemic agency. Instead of mourning the loss of a Washington-funded lifeline, African nations, philanthropists, and media collectives must step into the breach to invest heavily in our own independent, cross-border press houses. We possess the intellectual

talent, the journalists, and the stories; what we lack is the collective will to fund media structures that are fiercely independent of both local state control and foreign geopolitical strings. Ultimately, true press freedom cannot be imported on shortwave frequencies from the Global North. The antidote to the current information void is not a prayer for Washington to turn the transmitters back on, but a commitment to building a self-sustained African media landscape. By telling our own stories, in our own languages, and on our own terms, we can turn the silence of this shutdown into the birth of a truly decolonised, sovereign African press.

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An employee receiving letter of termination / AI ILLUSTRATED

1,300
VOA staff members were abruptly put on leave, it meant hundreds of talented African journalists, local stringers, field producers, and master translators were instantly stripped of their livelihoods.

The insider without and the dark arts of public comms

By
Julius Sigei



For more than a decade, my job was to hammer government bureaucrats and political leaders with questions. By scrutinising government agencies, corporations and influential figures, I was part of the Fourth Estate, the fraternity that holds the authorities accountable for their actions and exposes unethical practices and abuses of power.

Today, my job is different, with the shoe on the other foot. As a government public relations professional, I manage communication between a government ministry and the public. My team and I translate public policies, laws and official information into clear, understandable information for citizens. During emergencies like natural disasters, for example, we are the central source of safety guidelines and official updates. I also handle inquiries from journalists and coordinate interviews with the Cabinet Secretary.

The psychological shift from watchdog to messenger is interesting. In the newsroom, objectivity was the overriding goal as the journalist's aim is to uncover the true story. In my current role of official communicator, my goal is to advance the government ministry's mission. In this role, there is always at first the internal conflict

of defending an institution rather than critiquing it, as I would have done in my previous job.

Yet at the elementary level, both roles value clarity and public service. Shifting from newsroom journalism to public information is not a betrayal of storytelling, but a reinvention of it to serve the public from the inside out.

The instincts of a watchdog translate directly into the work of a messenger. The first is discipline under deadlines. Newsroom pressure trains you to think clearly and move fast when situations shift by the minute, whether it is a political story breaking or a crisis unfolding. The second is investigative instinct, the habit of scanning internal policy for the flaw a reporter would find before they find it. The third is translation. I take dense, bureaucratic language, such as a parliamentary bill or a policy memo, and turn it into something an ordinary citizen can read and care about. This is not unlike what a journalist would do.

But my new role also demanded new skills I had to build from scratch. The first was a change of attitude from reactive reporting, chasing what already happened, to proactive planning, shaping what should happen next. The second is balancing competing audiences at once, including the need for political correctness and diplomatic niceties and a public that needs clarity, not jargon or spin.

If journalism is the first rough draft of history as former Wash-



A journalist taking notes / COURTESY

ington Post publisher Philip Graham said, then public communications is one of the building blocks of that history. It is a good feeling that my work has impact from within. I have a seat at the table to shape policy communications before they launch, rather than just critiquing the aftermath as I would have done as a journalist.

Even then, there road hasn't been all smooth. Though I was trained in both journalism and public communication, I was not fully prepared for the operating environment in government. The media landscape is nothing like what it was when I earned my postgraduate diploma in journalism and public relations two decades ago or even my media studies MA a decade later. So, I have had to quickly adapt, about which shortly.

I had practised journalism for a whole 12 years, two as a field correspondent, during which period I also taught high school, and a decade at Nation Centre, where I rose to become an associate editor. All through, I was expected to do things by the old-school journalism book – speak truth to power, side with the underdogs, be a watchdog, and not be a lapdog, et cetera.

Besides teaching, I had known only journalism in my working life. It did not make things easier that, after leaving Nation Media Group in Covid-inspired restructuring and joined the Media Council of Kenya, I did not go in as a communications guy, but as a trainer.

So, it was into an altogether new world, then, that I stepped when I joined National Oil Corporation of Kenya as a communication

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If journalism is the first rough draft of history as former Washington Post publisher Philip Graham said, then public communications is one of the building blocks of that history

manager. Government communication runs on a different logic from journalism, because it is less about uncovering truth and more about managing perception. I was no longer the one asking hard questions on behalf of the public, but one building the image the public would see, working for the institution rather than against it.

What to do? One of my daily tasks was to talk with journalists, my old colleagues, about some of the story ideas we had. What I learned is that if you gave reporters information they needed to practise their trade, they would not harm you unnecessarily. I would therefore give tips to journalists about breaking stories.

As I moved on into my current role, I have had to adjust to the increasingly important role of social

media, which has changed how news is disseminated and consumed, shifting power from traditional editors to the algorithms of social media platforms and ordinary users. Anyone with a smartphone can instantly receive or share news about events anywhere in the world in milliseconds.

This has vastly accelerated news cycles and changed the way government communicators operate. Whereas in the olden days one had to watch legacy media, which has a rather predictable schedule, and try to set the agenda there, today we must contend with a myriad of outlets that can publish anything at any time of the day or night.

The work of a communication professional therefore has got harder with the fight for control of narratives shifting to social media.

In the final analysis, the relationship between journalism and public relations is by nature adversarial. Yet it doesn't have to be antagonistic. Indeed, both need each other. The PR professional needs a credible outlet to pass his message. On the other hand, the journalist needs credible information.

Although the objective of the journalist working for a daily newspaper, website, or TV or radio station is slightly different from that of a communication professional, the two share a common goal – disseminating information to mass audiences.

This bridge can be enhanced through strong storytelling. At the centre of strong storytelling is integrity in journalism, and that can also help increase transparency in public governance.

Mr Sigei, a former Daily Nation associate editor, is the Director of Communication in the Office of the Cabinet Secretary, Ministry of Interior and National Administration.

Life after the newsroom



Former EACC chairman Philip Kinisu, one of my clients, signs a copy of his book, *The Interrupted Accountant*, for former Auditor General Edward Ouko during its launch at Serena Hotel

By
Tim Wanyonyi



Retiring early from a high pressure, fast-paced job can be a huge challenge if one is not fully prepared beforehand.

In February 2018, I left the newsroom after 26 years in journalism.

As the head of content, I had just delivered one of my biggest assignments -- coordinating coverage of the 2017 General Election for the Nation Media Group.

What does one do with all the time on one's hands? In my case, the only thing I was sure I did not want to do was look for another full-time job.

With the benefit of hindsight,

employees should start planning what they will do on retirement right from the first day of employment.

Looking back in my case, I started preparing myself in the last 15 years of my full-time work life. Not all my plans succeeded but the key was to keep trying.

Three unrelated developments in my professional and personal lives turned out to be part of the preparation.

In 2005, I acquired a piece of land in Soy, Uasin Gishu county, with a loan from the Nation Sacco which I intended to turn into my rural home.

In 2009, I registered a communication consulting company.

And in 2010, I teamed up with four other media colleagues to start a regional newspaper based in Kajiado county.

Ken Opala and I had been incubating the idea of a county paper from the day the 2010 Constitution was promulgated in August of that year.

But it was after we brought the other partners on board in December that preparations started in earnest. These involved strategy meetings on matters such as the title of our publication, its target market, head office, registration, raising operational funds, hiring correspondents and distributors.

By this time, I had been at NMG for 16 years. I dreamed of retiring early from employment and seamlessly moving into managing a regional paper in which I had shareholding. We called it The County Update.

We thought that devolution under the 2010 Constitution would give room for startups to share space with big boys like The Nation and The Standard at the county level.

Our target market was the counties of Kajiado, Machakos, Makueni, Kitui and Narok.

After nearly a year of preparation, the maiden issue hit the newsstands on the morning of 9 September 2011.

Star Publications Ltd printed our launch edition. We printed subsequent editions at Nation Media Group which gave us slightly more favourable rates.

The paper was warmly received by the market.

In a story on the launch edition published in the second issue, Adelaide Mtoro, a student at Nonkopir Secondary school said: "I never knew a lot of things about Kajiado, but I am so delighted and happy that through The County Update I will learn about my county."

David Kimani, a businessman in Kitengela, said he hoped the paper would help business in the county

to grow. "Through the paper we shall market our products, hence all the information about our goods will reach our clients and business partners."

Noreen Mbula of Machakos said: "We have been waiting for a long time for this and now our dream has come true. In Machakos, it wasn't easy for us to know all things that are happening around this place, but the coming of County Update has made it easier for all of us."

On the advertising front, our launch issue was a success, or so we thought with a good mix of adverts.

But the euphoria did not last. We realised quite quickly that we may have bitten off more than we could chew.

For example, it was one thing to publish adverts but quite another to be paid.

Our advertising manager would spend a lot of time, energy and her own money chasing payments. On

28 January 2012, she resigned in frustration.

This threw us into a spin. She was the only director with commercial knowledge and experience in media business.

But we took it on the chin and resolved to keep moving. From then on, it meant that the other directors, all journalists, had to combine editorial and commercial responsibilities. The going was tough.

A year later, we decided to cut our losses and ceased publication. The failure to collect advertising and circulation revenue was a major factor in the publication's collapse.

With nearly Sh2 million in potential revenue, the first issue had the highest number of adverts. But out of this, we collected just about Sh600,000.

The only county that gave us business owed us Sh1.2 million but paid Sh400,000 only. We were still chasing the balance at the time

we halted operations.

We had also hoped that the other four counties would give us business, but this did not happen.

Of course this was coupled by high operational costs, the biggest being printing. We then had to pay our correspondents, rent, water and electricity charges.

In February 2013, one year and five months after we published our first edition, we closed shop.

What lessons did I learn from this experience? I think we did not listen to the ground sufficiently. As part of the research ahead of starting the business, I travelled to Machakos where I met Keg member Martin Masai who ran a regional paper, The Anchor.

Martin gave me useful insights into the business. I could sense his skepticism on our model, which we should have taken seriously but we did not.

We were excited by the new devolved dispensation. We thought if we had money, from our own sav-



Samples of the publications I have edited



A delegation of farmers, members of Trans Nzoia Beekeepers Cooperative, during a benchmarking tour of our Soy bee farm.

ings, to operate for a year, revenue from advertising would start supporting the publication.

We resisted approaches by one political heavyweight to invest in the business fearing we would lose our independence.

We thought devolution would bring a deluge of financial resources to the counties and that we would be positioned to benefit from this. In the end, this did not happen.

With the collapse of the paper, my focus turned to Afrique Consult, the communication consultancy and developing my land in Soy, planting trees and watching them grow.

And these two are what I transitioned into on my retirement five years later.

Communication was the easier one because it was familiar territory given my journalism work. Additionally, I specialized in Book

Publishing and Media studies at university.

I offer research, writing, editing, design and publishing services. Through this company, I have worked with a wide range of clients in the public and private sector and individuals.

These include the ministries of Defence, Education, Labour and Social Protection, Information, Communications and Technology, Agriculture, United Nations, Free Press Publishers and Rhino Ark Charitable Trust.

I have edited and helped publish autobiographical books, Government policy documents and Strategic Plans.

But consulting has its highs and lows. There are periods when you can be swamped by work. And then others when you go through a dry spell.

My agribusiness venture, anchored by my farm in Soy, has

been constantly occupying my time daily.

I tried many projects – dairy, maize, and fruit farming all of which failed as commercial ventures. But it was a combination of the fruit farming project and my passion of growing trees that led me into bee keeping which has turned out to be my most successful active income stream.

Growing trees has been a lifelong passion, and it was only a matter of time before it intertwined with beekeeping.

In 1971, when I was three years old, my father moved from a suburb of Webuye town, then slowly urbanizing after establishment of Pan Paper Mills, to rural Kabuchai.

In Kabuchai, I grew up in a natural forest, ringed by nature's abundance. This gave me an intimate connection with nature, the singing of birds, the buzzing of bees,

the beauty of the forest and its treasures.

My father was a beekeeper as well. I grew up watching him weave traditional bee hives using material from the forest and harvesting honey. He never commercialized his honey though. We consumed it at home, and the surplus was gifted to friends and relatives.

When I acquired my land in Soy, my dream was to turn it into a forest environment like the one I grew up in Kabuchai. And it is this forest that provides the habitat for bees that support my honey business today.

So, what does it take to run a bee enterprise? My biggest investment has been in the bee forage trees and other plants that I have painstakingly grown or conserved on my farms over the last 21 years.

Adequate forage means bees will be more productive because they do not have to travel far for pollen and nectar.

One development in 2013 played a key role in my beekeeping journey. Until then, my main source of income on the farm was commercial maize.

To diversify, I planted an acre of assorted fruit trees. In my research for this project, I learned that fruits that are pollinated by bees are bigger, sweeter, juicier, and more nutritious and therefore fetch more money on the market.

In 2016, as the fruit trees started flowering, I acquired two hives from the National Beekeeping Institute in Nairobi and installed them.

The bees did their magic, and the fruits did not disappoint. But as an income generating project, it failed because of challenges of telephone farming.

I forgot about the hives and bees until January 2019 when I decided to check if they had any honey. I

harvested nine kilogrammes out of which I sold six. At the same time, I sold three 90-kg bags of maize.

My eureka moment was when I realised that I earned the same amount of money from selling six kilos of honey and 270 kilos of maize. How much would I have earned if I had sold 270kgs of honey?

The answer to this question drove me to stop commercial maize growing and go full-time into beekeeping.

I increased my forest cover from 30 percent to 80 percent, making sure that every tree I planted was beneficial to bees.

From the two hives, today I have more than 100 spread across four farms in different ecological zones operating under Pollinator Farms Kenya business name.

The bulk of our honey is consumed in Kenya although we also sell outside the country mainly to Kenyans in the diaspora.

Our branding approach highlights our honey's diverse origins. Honey from each ecological zone

is distinct, thus allowing our customers to taste the unique flavours, colours and texture shaped by the local flora and environment.

Each ecological zone brings its own challenges and rewards. I harvest more times in a year in the drier Kajiado than in western Kenya. I have a bigger challenge with insect pests (wax moths, ants) in western Kenya than in Kajiado where the biggest threat is honey badgers attacking the bees and feeding on their young.

Over the years, demand for my honey has outgrown my production. To bridge the deficit and ensure consistency, I contract other bee farmers. This not only grows my business but also supports beekeepers who might otherwise struggle to find a market for their honey.

When you are selling a product, marketing is crucial. I attend shows to connect with fellow beekeepers, industry experts, and potential customers. I also use social media to highlight my products to a wider audience.



School children interact with our honey products at a World Bee Day celebration at Ildamat stadium, Kajiado town

I am a member and leader in local and national beekeeping associations.

I serve on the marketing committee of Likuyani Forest Beekeepers Association (LIFBA) management board. I am also a member of Apiculture Platform of Kenya (APK), a national umbrella organisation that brings together all industry stakeholders including farmers, government, research institutions, and universities.

Through these groups I help to shape the future of apiculture in Kenya through contributions to policy formulation, legislation and training. My farms have become benchmarking hubs for beekeepers.

The knowledge acquired in training opens your eyes to the endless opportunities in beekeeping beyond just honey. It has led me to diversify into other hive products like candles, cosmetics and propolis.

My passion and dedication have inspired many people, including members of KEG, to grow trees

and keep bees.

Some people in journalism listen to my story and incorrectly conclude that the profession has lost me. I have kept touch with the profession. In my apiculture organisations, I am the media liaison person. Reporters seeking information always call me and I link them up to the experts.

Additionally, I have served journalism as a board member of the regulator Media Council of Kenya (MCK).

I first joined the board in 2019 with the support of the Kenya Editors Guild. In my first term, I chaired the Regulatory Affairs Committee through which I was able to help develop policies, regulations and guidelines for the good of the organization and the media sector.

For my second term, on top of the agenda is the long overdue amendment of the MCK Act (2013). More than a decade since its enactment, the Act no longer adequately reflects the complexity, scale, and technological transfor-

mation of Kenya's media ecosystem.

It has exposed functional overlaps with the Communication Authority on content regulation. Indeed, industry players have obtained court judgement stating that MCK is the independent institution envisioned in the Constitution to regulate content and not CA which wants in on the action.

Reviewing the Act presents an opportunity to enhance accountability, uphold professional standards, and reinforce public confidence in media oversight, while safeguarding constitutional freedoms.

These reforms require the buy in of stakeholders and the Kenyan public as stipulated by the Constitution. To help successfully deliver this will be one of my biggest contributions to the media sector.

Lessons

1. Start early. Leverage on your skills and networks to have multiple income streams.
2. Register a company. Some clients may hire you as an individual. Others insist on dealing with a company. It should have an active bank account and be tax compliant.
3. Be consistent at whatever you do.
4. Brand your product and market it. Brand recognition is crucial.
5. Invest in the business. Not just equipment but knowledge as well.
6. Diversify products and services.
7. Financial discipline. Keep records.

The writer has served as Kenya Editors Guild trustee and was the founding editor of the Kenya Journalism Review (KJR) and he is a Board Member of the Media Council of Kenya



Hives attacked by honey badgers at our farm in Olooserian, Kajiado

Golden Unbowed



A radio studio setting / COURTESY

Evolution, innovation, and the changing fortunes of radio

By
Toepista Nabusoba



The radio of today is a very different medium from what it was generations of yore. Radio in the years before the 90s was a controlled household item the father who decided when it was switched on or off. It did not matter that perhaps everyone else the children and their mother were being entertained, he switched it off to save the batteries so they could last longer and when the radio was portable, he even decided to carry it with him on his rounds in the village.

Being the first mass communi-

cation technology was also controlled by the state, the leadership that took over from the colonial leaders inherited the control over radio. The state owned the radio and controlled content and being the only mass medium channel used it to inform citizens on government developments and to educate them on matters such as health, agriculture, and what government deemed necessary.

The radio was an essential factor and for control of political power, in the years of dissent it was used to spread propaganda against perceived opposition using the news peak time to scold the opposition.

It was used to sack and hire government officials as the head of state desired making the one o'clock news the most listened to

content of radio. The Kenyan experience of radio reflects its transformation around the world especially where it originated. Said to be one of most transformative inventions of human history- a medium that begun as a scientific curiosity, became a military necessity, grew into a mass entertainer, and has now re-invented itself in the digital age.

The radio journey that begun with the first crackle of Morse code through the air to the crystal-clear audio streams we now listen to on our phones today spans 150 years of relentless innovation. Understanding this journey matters because radio did not just change how people communicated – it changed what it meant to be a free and informed society.

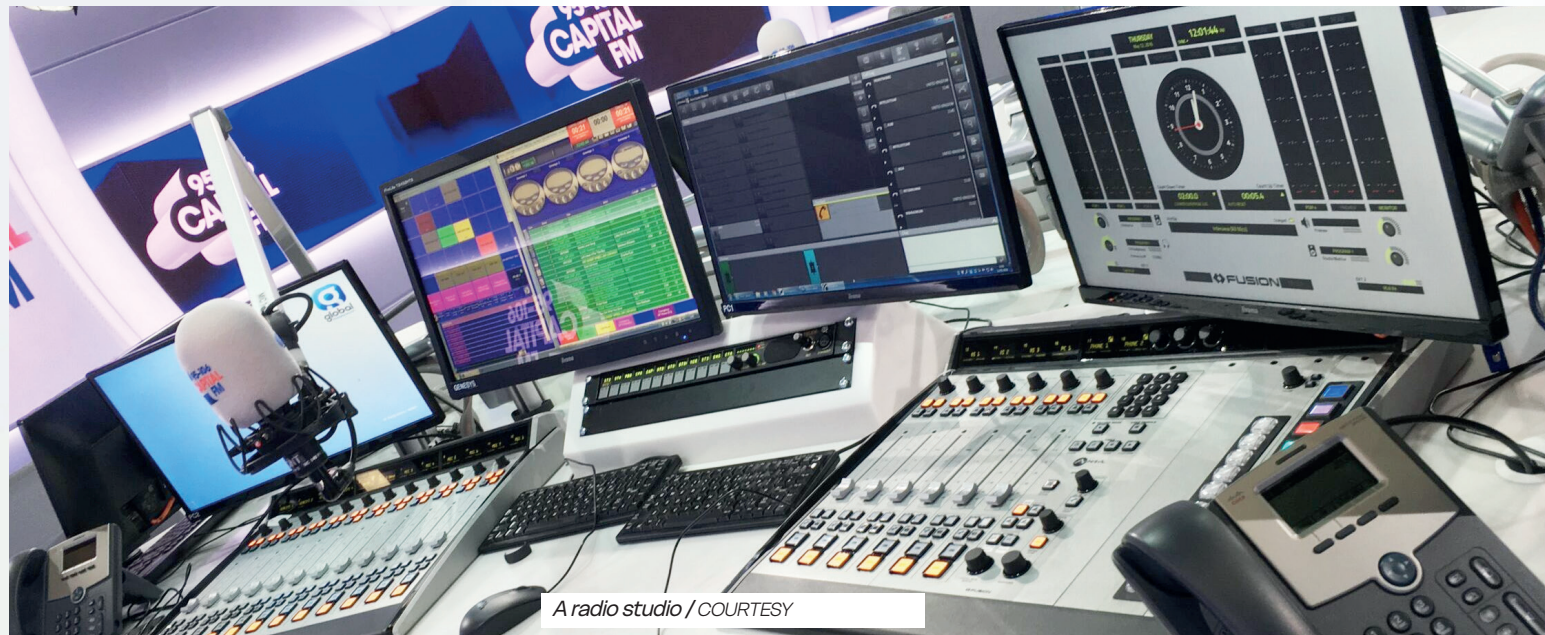
From the onset the vision for radio was clear that it was a medium for entertainment, education, and information. It also reflected the ideals of the very first BBC managing director John Reith that radio would be a medium for impartiality, cultural moral uplift and what he called the 'high moral tone'.

Radio technology has evolved

from the analogue that was AM, to FM and now digital. AM (Amplitude Modulation) broadcasting which was Fessenden's pioneering work, was prone to static and interference.

FM (Frequency Modulation) radio was developed in 1930s and expanded commercially, instead of varying the wave's strength, it varied the frequency. FM offered better audio quality and less noise compared to AM, and music on FM sounded as good as a home stereo.

Radio in the 50s was analogue, the devices occupied space in the living room like a piece of furniture; a table top for those considered to be well off. Most homes did not own the radio but as technology improved it became affordable for those who could buy the batteries to power the radio. Not a wonder then that it was controlled by the bread winner in the family. The production of transistor circuits replaced valves and made radio cheap and portable, a device that required a good space like a piece of furniture in the living room now fit in a shirt pocket. Ra-



A radio studio / COURTESY

dio truly became personal which one can take anywhere with them.

Analogue radio was characterised by size and the operations, audio sound was recorded and stored on vinyl records and magnetic tape to be replayed in the studio on big size Studer machines for broadcast. Broadcast journalists carried around recorder that weighed over between 10 to 15 kgs with big microphones and cables for interviews. The recorded material was

the taken back to the studio for editing, another physical exercise of cutting and joining the ends of the magnetic tape with splicing tape. A media house worth its name had to have a good library for research which today all is done at the click of a button. Even type writers came to broadcasters rather late, scripts were hand written in carbon copy for final the production. The production of a single programme was a time-consuming physical process. Heavy broadcast machinery that took much of studio space heated up the studio and in the event the air condition was faulty became uncomfortable and a health hazard for personnel; presenters, producers, and technicians who spent many hours in the studios.

The digital transformation

Traditional analogue broadcasting converted sound into a continuously electrical wave, a process that worked but introduced noise, signal degradation and limited the number of stations available in any given spectrum.

Digital Audio Broadcasting (DAB) changed the game by converting audio into digital data;

streams of binary information before broadcasting. The introduction of satellite radio in the 1990s provided listeners with a vast array of commercial stations, free music channels, news programmes, and sports broadcasts, free from the limitations of terrestrial signals. The 1990s also marked a significant change in Kenya's media landscape, the launch of FM stations, Capital, Kiss, and Easy ended the monopoly of KBC on radio broadcasting. The new stations were a

breath of fresh air providing the audience with choice of what to listen to. This brought unprecedented opportunities for those who wanted to join the broadcasting sector; musicians, comedians, and presenters.

Then the internet happened and changed everything again.

Streaming services emerged that allow listeners to access radio stations from anywhere in the world through a phone or computer. Music streaming services have facilitated curated playlists real time, radio streaming, and on demand music access has given audiences unprecedented control over what they want to hear and when. Streaming has enabled podcasting that is on demand audio content which resonates with traditional story telling of radio's golden age but gives creators and listeners complete freedom. This is yet another opportunity for media houses and individual content creators to interact with their audience in real time and provides an opportunity to interact with new listeners. Kenyan creators to share their content with the world and have the opportunity to make money

from their effort. Broadcasters' use of social media platforms has helped them to generate and share content, while digital editing tools have expanded the possibilities of what can be done with radio documentaries and podcasts.

Virtual radio experience is yet another innovation that integrates radio and television and enables streaming of live radio broadcasts on multiple platforms. Media in Kenya that own both radio and TV stations run radio shows on their TV stations giving the audience a whole new experience.

It would seem that innovators have refused to sleep, using their continuous creativity to unlock the power of radio. AI is likely to cause another disruption in the broadcast industry already there are roles that the technology has replaced or made easier, a far cry from the manual tasks that production personnel had to undertake. AI voice generators are used for continuity announcements and basic commercials tasks that required stations to hire freelancers to do. Other tasks that engage AI include transcription, audio editing, summaries, research and organization of information.

This year 2026 radio turned 106 years and radio as we know is today is total departure from what earlier generations listened to. Despite the disruption by technology that many may have feared would render radio obsolete, it has survived not by resisting change but by embracing it. It remains a the top of the most accessible and immediate forms of mass communication, reaching listeners in places no screen can.

The writer is a broadcast journalist of many years, media and digital trainer and former council member, Radio at the Kenya Editors Guild



A man listening to radio / AI ILLUSTRATED



A presenter in a studio engaging the listeners/ AI ILLUSTRATED

Trump has turned persecutor of the old lady who fattened him

By
KRJ Correspondent

It is a paradox that a large part of US President Donald J. Trump's rise to fame was highly mediated. Yet, his political strategy has leaned heavily on unrelenting wars with the media. Trump's media bashing took shape in the campaign period ahead of the 2016 presidential election. This was a sharp transformation from his earlier involvement in the media. From the 1980s to the mid-2010s, Trump was a media practitioner of sorts. He was a frequent presence in American media as a flamboyant commentator on just about any topic. From January 2004 to

August 2015, Trump hosted the globally popular reality show *The Apprentice*, with *The Celebrity Apprentice* added in January 2008. The abbreviated summary of Trump's involvement in the media, even without many more examples, makes him one of the US presidents who were media practitioners in one form or another, for good or ill. In the annals of the US presidency, he will join predecessors whose insertions in the media were beyond the conventional media-politics relations. We are not talking merely of the relationship between the media and US presidents. We are talking of presidents who practiced media writ large in

at least one guise. We are talking of a US president roughly equivalent to Tanzania's Benjamin Mkapa, a journalist-turned-president.

Trump, as a media practitioner of sorts, will be compared to at least four predecessors. Andrew Jackson (1829-1837) used private media such as the *Washington Globe* instead of official state media channels to stave off journalistic criticism. Warren G. Harding (1921-1923) was a journalist before his presidency. Franklin D. Roosevelt (1933-1945) used radio in the famous "fireside chats" to inspire a nation suffering the effects of the Great Depression. Ronald Reagan (1981-1989) was a film star and television host before entering White House.

Of all US presidents, however, Trump is the most sophisticated as far as intricate entanglement with the media goes. This is partly because his presidency has coin-

cided with an era of hyper media, underlined by the relentless surge in digital tech-driven information production and dissemination. Even though his relationship with the media before romping into the Oval Office was controversial, it morphed into an all-out war once he assumed office in 2017.

The story of Trump's fallout with the US media began during the 2016 elections. For the most part, mainstream US media were seen as supportive of Trump's competitor, former Secretary of State-cum-first lady, Hillary Rodham Clinton.

A few days after Trump's stunning triumph in November 2016, the Department of Homeland Security and the Federal Bureau of Investigation reported that Russian entities had infiltrated the US political system during the electioneering. This paved the way for a House Intelligence Committee investigation beginning in March 2017. In July, the committee confirmed Russian cyberattacks calculated to boost Trump's campaign against his competitor, former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. Pressure from the Democrats mutated into a full-fledged investigation by the Department of Justice's Special Counsel's Office, Robert Mueller, in May 2017. Trump thus entered office with the credibility of his election hanging over his then-new presidency. In both investigations, it was revealed that Trump and his campaign team were fully aware of what the Russians were doing to give him an advantage over Clinton.

The Russian involvement in the 2016 elections on Trump's side spawned a cottage industry around the practices of misinformation and disinformation. It was one of the first elections globally where opinion shaping on online platforms, particularly social me-



A reader going through the newspaper / COURTESY

dia, became a nefarious campaign strategy. Hacking servers and emails and spilling confidential information was another tactic. International affairs scholars coined the term sharp power to describe the technology-enabled infiltration of a US system hitherto thought impregnable to external influence. This development would inspire a US-led campaign against ostensible Russian and Chinese foreign information operations under heavily funded programmes labelled as "countering malign influence". The involvement of a UK firm, Cambridge Analytica, in the 2017 Kenyan elections followed the same pattern as the Russian tactics in the US.

American media, like its politics, is polarized along Republican and Democratic party lines. Broadly, the Republican, right-leaning media espouse conservative ideological values. They advocate a small federal government, individual over communal rights, liberal capitalism, and customary religious and family practices. The Democrat, left-leaning media are inclined towards so-called progressive values. They champion

a welfare state, liberal religious and family practices, protection of minorities, and strive for an egalitarian society. Across this major split, there are extreme positions referred to as far-right and far-left.

Ideological fissures have escalated since the first Trump administration, much more than in the presidencies of Barack Obama (2009-2016), George W. Bush (2003-2008), Bill Clinton (1993-2002), or the combined Ronald Reagan-George H. Bush in the 1980s.

There is no love lost between Trump and media outlets considered left-leaning, such as CNN, *The New York Times*, and MSNBC. Trump's favourite label for them has been "fake news", essentially spinning the brush with which these media houses have painted the President. The relationship has deteriorated beyond the conventional liberal media disagreement over ideology. It is essentially an information war.

Initially, Trump had the support of right-wing media outlets. Over the years, Republican Party-supporting media such as the *Wall Street Journal*, CBS, and Washing-



President Trump engaging journalist / COURTESY



Parallel to a combative attack on mainstream media, Trump has prioritized using his own social media platform and tapping into the echo chambers of the fringe right-wing outlets such as QAnon and Breitbart News.



Protests on media freedom / COURTESY

ton Examiner. These media have equally fallen out with Trump in opposition to some of the more extreme right-wing tendencies wrapped around the Make America Great Again (MAGA) doctrine.

We therefore see an unprecedented trend in which relations between Trump and the media have grown fractious across the board, both conservative and liberal. The antagonistic and partisan nature of American media, specifically, and culture and society more generally, means that any president is bound to have run-ins with journalists and editors. The animosity between Trump and the media is on a level never witnessed since the Richard Nixon presidency (1969-1974). Unlike Nixon, however, Trump takes a no-prisoners approach, openly denigrating the media as an enemy of the people, corrupt, unpatriotic, stupid, dumb, and nasty, among tens of other epithets. He has shamed journalists during press conferences. On June 26 this year, Trump used similar coarse language as he walked out of a live NBC interview after journalist Kristen Welker pushed for proof of the conspiracy-laden

claim that he won the 2020 election against the immediate former President, Joe Biden.

Trump's impact on the media is beyond mere vilification. A highly vindictive and litigious personality, Trump has launched suits against media establishments he disagrees with, threatened to revoke licenses, invoked national security and treason to intimidate them, revoked access to White House for some, weaponized investigations on journalists by the state apparatus, and cut budgets to public broadcasting media. It is no wonder that journalists and media owners across the ideological divide have often found solace in forging uneasy ties.

For the first time in decades, press freedom is so much under siege that advocacy organizations such as Reporters Without Borders rank it 64 out of 180 countries in its World Press Freedom Index, a major decline. The Committee to Protect Journalists, a New York-based press rights organization, has condemned the Trump administration over numerous violations of journalists' rights. In November 2025, Democracy Forward

sued the Federal Communications Commission over agencies' attempts "to police and limit speech and influence what the public can watch and hear". Similar legal redress has been taken by a growing number of organizations, extending legal action to issues such as data privacy, access to information, and discrimination.

Parallel to a combative attack on mainstream media, Trump has prioritized using his own social media platform and tapping into the echo chambers of the fringe right-wing outlets such as QAnon and Breitbart News. On these platforms, populist conspiracies flourish unabated, turning facts on their head in the service of Trump.

Internationally, Trump's inward-looking approach has neglected democracy promotion, such that the US no longer comes to the aid of countries where press freedom rights are trampled. Trump has indeed cast a long shadow on the media in the US and globally. It will take years for the impact to be corrected, or maybe Trump's legacy will endure into the future.

Paradigm shift

Re-tooling to keep up with journalism evolution

By
Erick Oduor



According to Thomas Khun's concept of paradigm shift, new ideas replace the old ones in generation of knowledge to make the society better. In the history of Kenyan newsrooms, there have been evolution in technology meant to improve efficiency, speed and reduced cost of gathering, processing and production of news.

The advent of social media and digital platforms have seen changes in the media ecosystems as journalists assume more roles to keep pace with the changing demands

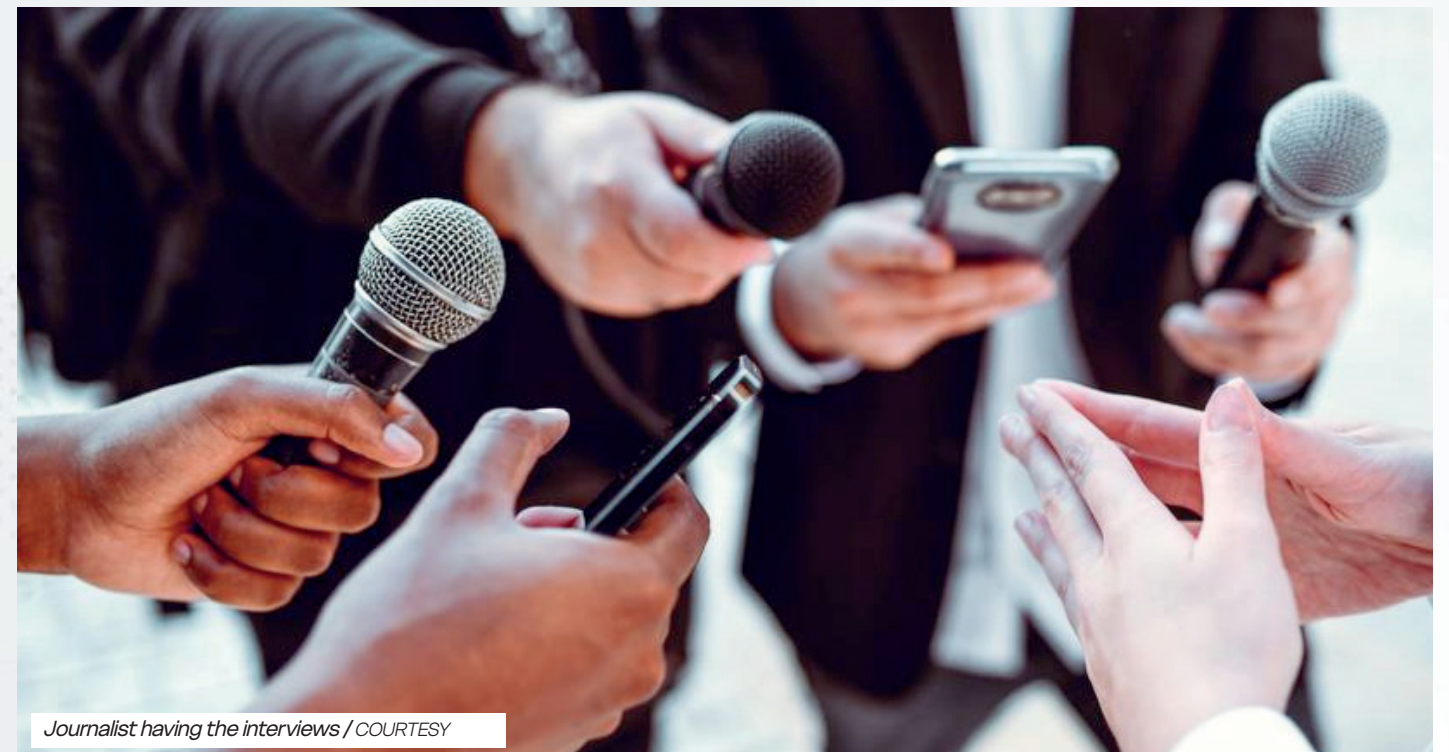
of news consumers in the wake of dwindling fortunes of private media houses. This has ignited a fierce debate on future of journalism and the right interventions for the journalism to remain relevant as content creators flood digital platforms with information.

From the era of typewriters, fax machines and reverse calls to the new dawn of smart newsrooms where technology has integrated newsgathering, data analysis, editing and production into one tool, journalists find themselves operating in a tough environment where more responsibilities have been added, but with reduced budgets.

While the news gathering, research and production techniques have changed over the years, the fundamental principles of jour-

nalism, which are at the core of the profession remain the same to shore up credibility, independence and public trust. Newsrooms in Kenya are smarting from an analogue technology to smart newsrooms where digital and data-driven newsgathering and production aided by Artificial Intelligence to meet the expectations of news consumers. Both print and broadcast media have experienced changes in newsgathering and production process that have reduced time taken to serve audience with quality newspapers and bulletins. Adoption of technology in newsgathering and production forced companies to adjust their budgets to accommodate the new kid on the block -- digital platforms. To feed the digital platforms there has been an increased pressure on journalists to adjust to meet the demand of delivering news into the market in a timely manner without compromising quality and code of ethics.

Generative Artificial Intelligence that has been adopted by news-



Journalist having the interviews / COURTESY

rooms in Kenya has brought a new twist in practice of journalism. However, that are pitfalls that media houses and journalists must avoid. Human intervention in news gathering and production is key to remove legal landmines that Generative AI may plant in a story and could slip through if there is no final human eye. The Code of Conduct for Practice of Journalism in Kenya assigns responsibility to the editor, which means editors must have the final professional touch on a story before its is cleared for public consumption. Nation Media Group, recently publish guidelines for use Generative AI in content generation, production and audience moderation to keep pace with changing technology in the world of news. This is in addition to the Guidelines the Media Council of Kenya published to help newsrooms in Kenya cope with increasing demands on editors to fulfill their public good obligations. These should not just be treated as documents produced to justify budget lines, but important resources that will contribute in shaping the new face of journalism.

The evolution of news production adds more responsibilities to journalists and editors in their

NUMBERS

Ksh 25M

Amount an editor and a journalist have been ordered to pay a lawyer for defamation by the High Court

day-to-day work rather than reduced workload that technologies are perceived to bring. The new Generative AI tools means that journalists must be vigilant in fact-checking to remove bias content, legal landmines as well avoid copyright disputes that may arise. In recent defamation awards in court, the judges have passed harsh verdicts on the role of editors in arresting errors and adherence to code of ethics. In recent High Court Judgement, an editor and a journalist have been ordered to pay a lawyer Ksh 25 million in defamation matter which the judge said journalists should not expect protection of media freedom in court when they have violated their own code of ethics.

Meeting audience expectations

on news is still key in the world of news despite the changing world of news, that has introduced other players. In fulfilling this obligation, journalists and editors must adopt retooling and development of skills as a strategy to fit in the job market. Restructuring and annual ritual in newsrooms that send journalists and editors into inflation is a new normal in the media globally. However, journalists who change with times in terms of acquiring skills that match the job market normally survive. As we embrace technology in our space, it is imperative that we talk about retooling to remain relevant for new roles in newsrooms and meeting ever changing consumption habit of the audience.

Media as the Fourth Estate, stands at a shaky ground due to economic and political pressure that has send business owners and media support group back to the drawing to cope with dwindling fortunes and sustained attacks from the state agents. As Kenya prepares for general election next year, journalists should embrace themselves for political pressure, demand to fight disinformation and misinforming. Information disorder has created new roles for journalists as citizens are looking up to them to fact-check and flag out disinformation and misinformation.

All these require resources and skills for journalists to remain relevant in the current media ecosystem. Political class will not stop spreading propaganda and hate speech that require journalists to flag out in their obligation to inform the public as well as holding the power to account.

The writer is the Secretary General, Kenya Union of Journalists
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From the jaws of death

A journey through cancer, courage, and consequences

By
Kizito Namulanda

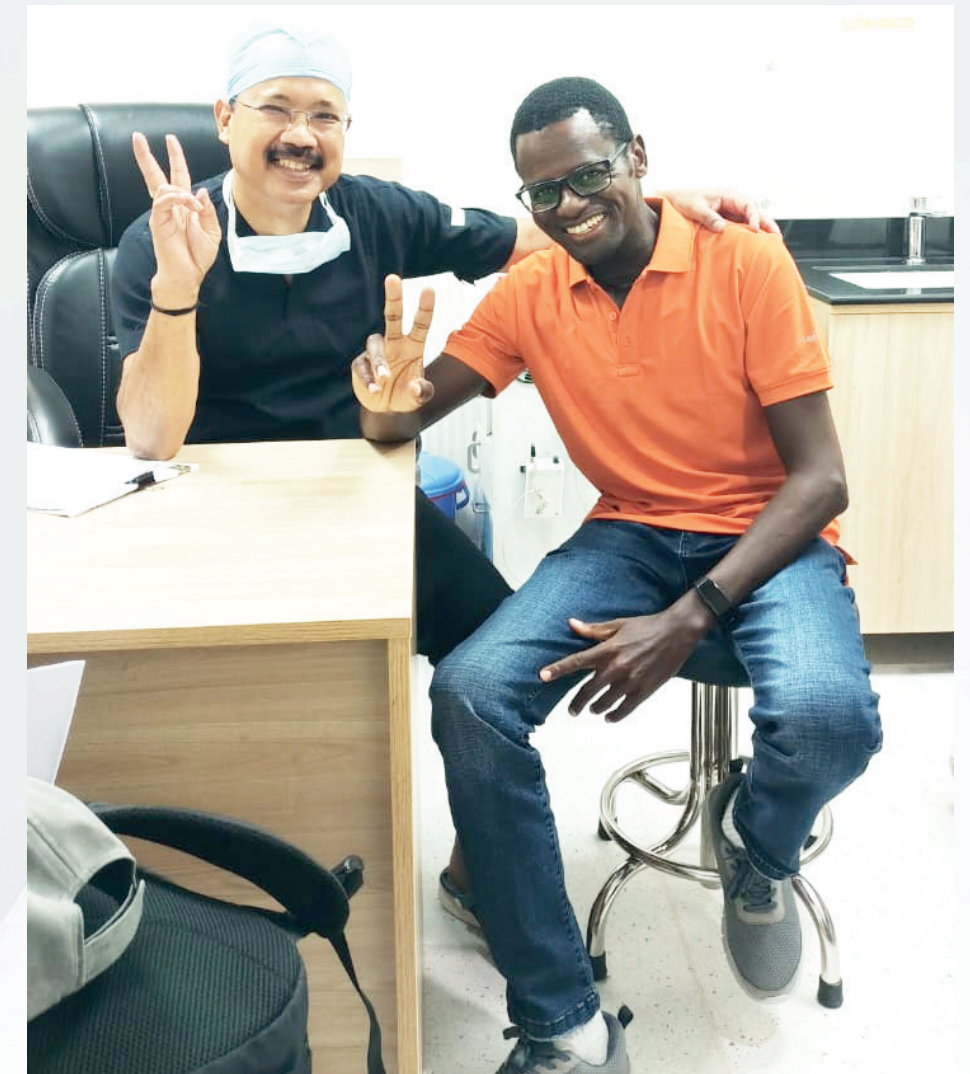
When I received the results of my biopsy, I was devastated. The results came via email, and as soon as I read the diagnosis, I dropped what I was doing and drove straight home. Standing at the door of my house, I looked at my two-and-a-half-year-old son and thought, “He hasn’t even started school.” I climbed the stairs, locked the door, and began to cry. Tears rolled down my cheeks freely. It was heavy—so many things rushed through my mind. I felt death crawling toward me, and I felt helpless.

What I Understood online

Before I got the results, I had spent a lot of time searching on Google. I already understood some basics. I immediately recognized that the tumors in my vocal cords were cancerous. The diagnosis read: Invasive well-differentiated squamous cell carcinoma. The reality was hard to swallow; I could not believe I had cancer. From where had this come? What had started as a hoarse voice had suddenly become a life-threatening condition.

I had read that most often, this type of cancer is caused by heavy smoking, yet I had never smoked—even half a cigarette in my life. I wasn’t a heavy drinker either. I had always been health-conscious—

eating well and going to the gym. From my Google searches, I learned that patients with this cancer who progress to stages 3 and 4 typically live, on average, for a maximum of six months. I had heard of cases where people deteriorated quickly and succumbed within six months of diagnosis. I could not imagine it. It was only later that I learned mine had progressed to stage 3.



Kizito Namulanda (right) with Dr. Biswajyoti Hazarika, Chief of Head & Neck Surgical Oncology at Artemis Hospital, New Delhi India (June 2023)

Turning Point: A message of Hope

After the heavy sobbing, I remembered that I still had to take the results to my doctor for interpretation the next day. Then I remembered I needed to call my uncle Dr. Humphreys Otele, a senior doctor in Nairobi. Considering how busy he was, I forwarded the biopsy results to him without explanation. He called me immediately and asked where I was. I told him I was at home. He said, “Please wait for me; I am coming over.” That reaction told me that all was not well.

On reflection, I asked him to meet me at a nearby shopping center so we could discuss private-



Fact check illustration / COURTESY



“
The doctors
prescribed
a combined
radiotherapy
and
chemotherapy
regimen
administered
concurrently.”

Kizito Namulanda poses at the reception of Max Super Specialty Hospital, Shalimar Bagh, New Delhi India (September 2022)

ly. He didn't take long to arrive. The first question he asked was what the doctor had said. I told him I was yet to see my doctor. We discussed many things after that. His objective was clear: let's wait for the final word from your doctor, but even if the worst is confirmed, you should know this is not a death sentence. You can still survive, and I want you to prepare for a fight. His simple, honest message of hope became everything I needed. After that talk, I made a resolve to put up a strong fight and change my outlook, focusing on beating the disease. The following day, I went to see Prof Isac Macharia accompanied by my uncle, and a further test—a PET-CT

scan—was prescribed.

Before undergoing the PET-CT, I continued going to work as the waiting list was a bit long. Things were not the same, but I kept everything to myself and prayed to God throughout. Only Dr. Mercy Korir—Editor in Charge of the Health Desk at the newly launched, modern digital newsroom that I had spearheaded as part of Standard Group's digital transformation journey—knew what I was going through. She was immediately very helpful, using her medical background and contacts to provide support and moral assistance. I told my colleagues about what was happening only much later.

When I finally had the PET-CT, the results confirmed what we had feared. From that moment, we decided to fly to India for treatment. We planned everything and identified a hospital—Max Super Specialty Hospital in Delhi—and eventually flew out in April 2022.

Treatment Regimen

When I arrived in Delhi, the hospital—Max Super Specialty Hospital in Shalimar Bagh—had sent a driver to pick me up at Indira Gandhi International Airport. I was filled with anxiety. We wasted no time; the day after arriving, my coordinators Madam Shivangi and Mr. Vivek organized a consultation with the doctor. We first met Dr. Archit Pandit, who reviewed my case and referred me to the Head of Radiology, Dr. Rajendar Kumar. I remember Dr. Archit asking a question between me and my brother Peter Musumba, who was the patient. Physically, I looked perfectly fine. But when I spoke, he immediately said, “It must be you. I can tell from your voice.” I recall a caretaker at the hotel where I stayed making a similar joke as I left for the hospital that morning, saying I looked like a business executive going to hospital for business rather than a patient seeking treatment.

After further examination, which included repeating all the tests I had done in Nairobi—including the biopsy and PET-CT scans—the doctors prescribed a combined radiotherapy and chemotherapy regimen administered concurrently. I underwent radiation sessions daily—Monday to Friday—with chemotherapy sessions running weekly. The radiation sessions were brief and easy, lasting about five minutes; you basically feel nothing, but as the days passed, I began losing weight and

feeling weaker. The chemotherapy sessions were more challenging. The team of doctors who treated me—Dr. Rajendar Kumar, Dr. Ajay Shamar, Dr. Naman Utreja, and Dr. Jyoti Mehta—were very friendly and kind, always giving me hope and praising my fighting spirit.

Return, Recovery, and Recalibration

After rigorous treatment, I was cleared to travel back home to recuperate. Though I remained very weak, my doctors advised that be-

ing in a familiar, family-centered environment would speed up my recovery. I lost a total of 34 kilograms, dropping from 74 to 40. Radiotherapy had targeted my throat, turning feeding into a painful challenge. I could only manage small amounts of finely blended foods after taking medicines that numbed my throat to dull the pain. The pain grew worse with each passing day. I had to stay strong.

The doctors gave me a lot of hope, explaining that they had treated worse cases and were confident I would be healed complete-

ly. Those words gave me immense strength.

Three and a half months later, I was cleared to travel back home after completing treatment. When I landed at JKIA, my uncle waited as I was wheeled out by my brother Peter Musumba, whom I had travelled with as my caregiver. My uncle quickly examined me and took me to where my wife was waiting. He had asked my wife not to come to the airport but to wait for me at a shopping center near home, where he would drop me after picking me up at the airport.

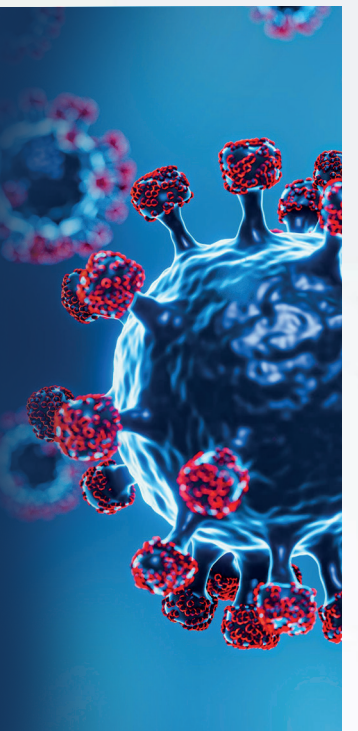
Covid-19 Precautions and Quarantine

Tears rolled down my wife's cheeks when she saw me. Communicating by phone hadn't prepared her for how wasted I looked. Before I traveled back, the government had issued Covid-19 spike alerts, so we had to be careful. The doctors had warned that my immune system was still very weak and could not fight infections, so we had to take every precaution to avoid infections. Covid-19 and malaria were major concerns.

It was tough. I was not allowed to entertain visitors or mingle with my family. Once home, I was effectively quarantined in my room, with no one allowed to enter. The only time some-

one came in was to bring food and collect the dishes afterward. In most cases, the person who delivered the food would leave it by the door and depart. I did everything possible to avoid contracting any communicable diseases. The hardest part, however, was containing my young son, who could not understand what was happening.

I was instructed to do blood tests every two weeks and send them over to Max Hospital in New Delhi for close monitoring before travelling back for review after three months. The only time I left my room was to do those tests; no one, not even close family members, could visit. Some relatives and friends could not understand the restrictions.



Echoes from Home

After some time, pressure from my family back in the village grew. Everyone wanted to visit, and there was concern that we might be hiding something. After consulting with my uncle, we decided to visit home for two or three days before returning, to ease the concerns and logistics without risking my health. We thought it would be easier for me to travel than allowing relatives to come to Nairobi

visiting.

The moment I arrived home and word spread, my compound filled up with visitors. After a session with my nuclear family, I had to entertain more guests. Managing the interactions was not easy. Tears streamed down my cheeks when I saw the reactions of close friends and relatives. It was very emotional.

One elder's response has never left my mind. He arrived while I

was resting, he was received and served food, I entered the room while he was eating. My voice was so weak that I needed an amplifier to be heard, so he didn't hear me when I said hello to him.

Moments later, he turned to one of the servers and said, “You people, I appreciate that you've given me some food, but what really brought me here is to see Mheshimiwa (that's how they call me in the village). Where is he? He contin-



Kizito Namulanda in a hospital bed at Artemis Hospital in New Delhi India, before undergoing laryngectomy surgery (May 2023)

ued, “Although I am eating, I can’t say I’m enjoying this meal.” The room’s faces shifted between awkwardness and humor. Then one person asked, “And who is that looking at you?” It was at that moment when he realized that I was actually there next to him and he couldn’t recognise me. In shock, he

stood, looked at me, and spoke in low tone in Kiswahili, “Mheshimiwa ni wewe?” (Mheshimiwa is that you?) I smiled and replied that it was me. Overcome with emotion, he simply washed his hands before leaving without saying any further words.

My village visit was very emo-

tional, friends and relatives turned up to support me in prayer and words of encouragement. But controlling interactions was becoming a problem. When a friend who was running for the office of the Governor of Busia County heard that I had come home, he decided to come visit. The moment he arrived; word went round and within minutes the compound was full of people as it was just a few weeks to elections. It became another campaign rally! It was at that point when we realised that we were not going to manage the situation. We cut short the visit and travelled back to Nairobi the following morning.

Throughout the visit, I drew a lot of strength from a saying that was repeated to me by so many people, Kwalulukha Kulooma. It’s a Luhya saying that basically means it’s better for a tree to shed all its leaves in a dry season than to dry up, for when the rain comes, it will sprout back to life again. I am happy that today I am healed and strong enough to start all over again, a true testament to this popular saying.

Recurrence and the Hard Choices

After three months, I traveled back for review and follow-up treatment as prescribed, and all went well. The doctors were happy with my progress. I was scheduled for another review after six months, which also went well, followed by another six-month schedule. As that second six-month mark approached, my voice began changing again—became hoarse and weak. Worried, I scheduled a review with my doctor in Nairobi. It wasn’t the news I had hoped for. Just when I thought I had beaten the monster, signs of recurrence emerged. A PET-CT scan returned

results I had prayed against.

The shock was overwhelming. For a day or two I felt like giving up, but with my family’s encouragement I pulled myself together and resolved to fight again. My mind wandered to what happened, but I knew I had to refocus. The options ahead were not encouraging. Since I had already undergone chemoradiation, the only viable option left was surgery—the removal of my entire voice box. The first, second, and third opinions all agreed: because the disease recurred after radiotherapy, I had no option but a total laryngectomy – meaning the whole voice box

Glimmer of Hope

That was all I needed—a glimmer of hope to cling to. I immediately started mobilising resources to travel to New Delhi again, this time to Artemis Hospital in Gurgaon. The doctors at Max where I had been before had ruled out the possibility of a partial laryngectomy.

When I arrived at the airport, my coordinator Mr. Manmohan Rawat, working closely with Madam

would be removed.

The doctors explained how technology was advanced with artificial voice boxes that can enable communication, but I kept the hope of saving my voice. I prayed endlessly to God to save my voice or at least part of it. I set out to seek a fourth opinion.

One morning, around 10 a.m., while at work (I had kept going to work as I sought out the best treatment options), I received a call from Mr. Chiragh Gandhi of Parishay Healthcare (formerly of Max Super Specialty Hospital—Nairobi). Mr. Chiragh had committed to finding me a doctor

Deepika Sundas, arranged for a driver from Artemis Hospital to pick me up. I was in the hospital the next morning and very happy to finally meet Dr. Biswajyoti Hazarika, who was accompanied by Dr. Priyanka Reina. He remembered our phone conversation. Once again, we began the examination stage, repeating all the tests, which included a direct laryngoscopy, a PET-CT scan, and a biopsy.

who could save my voice. That morning, he connected me with Dr. Biswajyoti Hazarika, the Chief of Head and Neck Surgery at Artemis Hospital in Gurgaon, New Delhi. Dr. Hazarika, after studying my records, said it was difficult to promise anything, but he would do his best to preserve my voice if I travelled to Artemis. He empathised, saying I was still young and needed my voice to earn a living as a broadcast journalist. He said he would be able to give a concrete diagnosis after further examination in Delhi.

After full examination Dr. Hazarika again explained to me that the position of the cells looked tight, but he would try everything possible to spare the voice box. I remember him saying, “if you wake up and find that the whole voice box has been removed, just know that I really tried everything I could, but it didn’t work.” He promised me he would really do his best to save my voice.

The Surgical Moment: Voice Preservation and Hope

By the time I was heading to theatre, I was already receiving two sets of preparations—one for a partial and another for a total laryngectomy. I prayed day and night and clung to that little glimmer of hope. I remained optimistic that God would answer my prayers.

When it was finally time to go to the theatre, I had to summon every bit of courage, hope, and optimism in the world. In such moments, I usually turn to gospel songs for uplift, but at that hour they overwhelmed me with emo-

tion and always found myself sobbing. I realized that I needed something to steady me, so I turned to soukous songs mostly by Kanda Bongoman. His music reminded me of my high school days, and my high school friends’ support had been a powerful ballast during that difficult moment. Kanda Bongoman himself, who is also a close friend, had personally encouraged me to go through the surgery without worrying much about the outcome, and at that hour I found courage in his songs as I prepared for the surgeon’s knife.

Before anesthesia, I offered silent

prayers and surrendered everything to God. When I woke up, it felt like a movie scene: I was in ICU, strapped and immobile, with beeps all around. My wife who had accompanied me stood nearby, overwhelmed. Nurses checked me, and the doctors confirmed I had woken up. Though exhausted, I was still very eager to know how the operation went. Soon after, Dr. Priyanka Reina, who had worked closely with Dr. Hazarika, arrived at my bedside smiling with good news: they were able to keep part of my voice box after performing a partial laryngectomy. I felt imme-

ciate relief—my prayer had been answered. I smiled and silently thanked God.

Dr. Hazarika later explained that the operation was extremely complex—one that many doctors usually avoided – but he took it on because he really wanted to save my voice so I could continue earning a living as a broadcast journalist and not lose my job.

Termination Amid Recovery

Recovery was a very rough journey, particularly the first month, when I could only feed through pipes. After returning to Nairobi, I required regular trips to New Delhi for follow-up treatment, which I still make to this day, though not as regular as was the case immediately after surgery. On my first post-surgery review, three months later, I received a cruel blow: I was served a termination notice from my employer. A colleague had sent me a message to inform me he had received a termination notice and was reaching out to thank me for giving him a chance to work at KTN. I was in shock, as I wasn't aware of any retrenchment plans in my department, but I encouraged him to stay strong and seek other opportunities.

Unknown to me, a similar letter had already been emailed to me. When I finally saw it, I didn't know what to do. I was completely shaken and confused, but an inner voice urged me to prioritise that which was most important – health. After listening to that voice, I chose to focus on praying for a good medical report from the doctors. God answered again—the medical results were favorable. After recovering, I returned to Nairobi to plead my case, but the company stood firm: the decision was final. The company had blocked my access to office and my

official email. I tried various ways to have that decision reversed but they stood firm, I had to go!

They later emailed my termination letters to formally indicate that my termination was not being revisited in any way, when I failed to pick them on the day they had indicated. I gave up hoping for a miracle and finally went to collect the letter. The company was offering severance payments in ten equal monthly installments rather than a lump sum. I pleaded for a one, or two-installment settlement given my condition, but they refused to discuss anything before I signed the termination letter. In fact, I was warned that if I delayed, I would miss the first installment, which was due in a month. In desperate need of that money, I signed. And that became the end of that chapter. 24 months later down the line, I am still pleading for settlement of my severance package. Not even that first installment was paid. It was just a bait to make me sign the documents. I have written several emails to explain how bad-

ly I need this money to get me out of my current financial strain that is threatening to take me back, but I still haven't gotten any breakthrough. Still, I remain hopeful as I pray for a miracle.

Lessons learnt

I have learned many lessons going through this journey, but two stand out: first, God will never forsake you if you put your trust in Him; second, when faced with multiple battles, you must choose your priorities wisely. The journey was and is still tough, but I thank God I am in good health now and ready to start afresh. Each morning, like a football striker emerging from a drought, I pray for that one chance to put the ball in the net and bring back the joyful moments.

Kizito Namulanda, a former KTN Managing Editor, led the Standard Group's editorial digital transformation in a separate appointment. Now editor and founder of KOLLEA HUB

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Kizito Namulanda (left) with Dr. Rajender Kumar, Head of Radiation Oncology at Max Super Specialty Hospital, Shalimar Bagh, New Delhi India (June 2022)



Magazine market is small, but room for growth remains huge



By
Mbugua Ng'ang'a

In Mapping the Magazine, American journalist and scholar Tim Holmes described them thus: “Magazines, then, are vectors of pleasure, they encourage acquisition of knowledge, they may play an important role in the formation of identity, they are open to resistant readings, they easily encompass and incorporate flexible and varying conditions of consumption and production, and they form a readily accessible community focus”.

As vectors of pleasure, stand-alone magazines are poised on the pedestal of visual display, which is not afforded to other media, including newspapers, which have a traditionally higher circulation in countries like Kenya, and which are considered their primary competitors. They are, by and large, produced to excite the senses first and foremost, before using this hook to entice audiences into digging their teeth into the meat of the knowledge that they offer. And, depending on their orientation, this knowledge can range

anywhere from current affairs and politics — the forte of notable magazines in Kenya — business, lifestyle, culture and sports, and family affairs, which often also incorporate issues to do with gender.

Magazines' visual display is meant to inject pleasure into the otherwise serious act of reading. More importantly, however, it is meant to immerse the audience into the text, which is also designed to speak to the subject preferences of the audi-

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ence. For instance, magazines like the Nairobi Law Monthly have sections on book serialisations and reviews, cognizant of the fact that the primary audience — which is more psychographic than demographic — prefers readings that are intellectually stimulating and that can also lead them off the page and into a bookshop — or movie theatre — in pursuit of further aggrandisement of this sense of pleasure.

In addition to these local current affairs publications, this psychographic also demands international magazines, particularly The Economist, which is the centerpiece of the bouquet that offers a broad perspective and analysis of international geopolitics. In that bouquet is to be found magazines such as The Harvard Business Review, which is popular with the business class and corporate honchos. These readers appreciate that the political and economic happenings in Kenya — say, an increase in fuel prices or higher dollar demand by central banks — are directly influenced by what happens internationally, such as the conflict between America and Iran or the rapprochement between China, Russia, and India.

Interestingly, research indicates that 2026 is the peak year for magazine circulation. According to 6Wresearch, the Kenya magazines market was estimated at \$188 million (Sh24.4 billion) in 2025 and was projected to grow marginally this year before reaching \$257 million (Sh3.3 billion) by 2032. 6Wresearch describes itself as “a commercial strategy and growth advisory firm that helps organisations build stronger businesses through sustainable growth and market leadership”. Interesting as its data is from a media practitioner's point of view, the question that cannot escape asking is, where is that money going?

According to 6W, enhanced digital distribution channels and enhanced accessibility countrywide,

were expected to be the key drivers of magazine circulation in 2026. By contrast, in 2025, that growth was driven by youth-centric content.

The shift to digital is critical to understanding emerging trends in Kenya. A survey conducted by the Media Council of Kenya — the media industry regulator — showed a decline in newspaper readership as more audiences turned to social media platforms as their primary source of news. This shift to online has also affected magazines, making it necessary for them to play in that space to pull in audiences. And due to the emergence of AI Overviews on Google search engines, many newspapers and magazines have witnessed a decline in visits, except in instances where platforms have deliberately eschewed the use of Artificial Intelligence to write stories, in which case, audience engagement continues to grow.

One notable trend is that due to the digital shift — with audiences using social media as the outlier leading source of news and content — it has become inevitable for magazines to either cut back on their print circulation or discontinue printing altogether. In some instances, magazines such as Business Monthly, edited by Prof Hannington Gaya, only prints when the advertising is sufficient to carry the weight of publication and distribution costs. Its counterpart, The Nairobi Business Monthly, a sister publication of Nairobi Law Monthly, by contrast, publishes regularly and is sold as an e-paper while others like The Platform are distributed as free publications. The fact that these magazines remain in circulation is largely attributed to funding by their publishers.

Overall, however, though there is a market for niche magazines, such as Management, Msafiri and Construction Kenya, this remains small and hardly registers on the Richter scale of media consumption patterns and trends.

The brand recognition of magazines generally is growing among target, potential and discerning audiences and with Kenya poised for a general election in 2027, their presence in the market will be felt more

The positive side, the brand recognition of magazines generally is growing among target, potential and discerning audiences and with Kenya poised for a general election in 2027, their presence in the market will be felt more. This is because, aspirants and candidates will be seeking publicity while their supporters — and critics — will follow this coverage, either for validation or for information on which they can counter their agenda as the case may be. The latter is what Holmes referred to as “resistant reading”. It means audiences engage with a text because they robustly disagree with its broad standpoint.

The sharp decline in circulation figures for second-tier newspapers is also likely to play into the hands of magazine editors and publishers as audiences seek platforms with higher believability quotients. Trust has emerged as the currency for media audiences, meaning that platforms that leverage this, and play up their strengths on social media, will enjoy a competitive advantage into the near future, especially in the face of the onslaught of fake news and dis-information emerging from misuse of Artificial Intelligence and other digital media technologies.

Traditionally, as Jennifer Light,

a professor of science, technology and society at the Michigan Institute of Technology argues in her essay, ‘Putting Our Conversation in context’, “print journalism remained an important medium in adult political society and for young people as well”. Now and in the future, however, with the shift to social media as a primary source of content, magazines will continue to grow audiences as they build their brand presence, largely because they offer an expertise in perspective and analysis that is not always afforded to newspapers, which are under constant pressure to publish daily in an environment that has been stripped of institutional memory due to the exit of editors of long standing.

And although advertising and paid partnerships have been slow in coming for quality news and analysis magazines like the Nairobi Law Monthly and The Nairobi Business Monthly, both of which I edit, the numbers and narratives have been changing. Advertising is growing, albeit slowly, and so are partnerships, which are accelerating faster compared to traditional advertising. Part of that growth has come from brand-building initiatives, which have grown audience numbers over the last two years, meaning that making brands stronger is one of the keys to sustainability. The other, of course, is significant, or sufficient, as opposed to intermittent external funding to build capacity for magazines to become self-sustaining in three to five years, which is the average time it takes for media products to break even.

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Celebrating a legend

When experience becomes legacy

Reflections on Fred Obachi Machoka and media veterans

By
Otuma Ongalo



The iconic advertising slogan, “Sanyo juu, Sanyo tops”, reigned the Kenyan and regional airwaves from the mid-1970s through 1980s to announce the arrival of a radio programme that would launch one of Kenya’s most enduring broadcasting careers.

Behind the programme was an enthusiastic young former General Service Unit (GSU) officer whose booming and commanding voice would, half a century later, become the face of national conversation of media legacy and mentorship.

The man was and still is Fred Obachi Machoka, the blackest man in black Africa – in his own words. It is perhaps befitting that Machoka’s own story began not in a journalism school but in a lesson on mentorship.

Flashback. The year is 1975. Machoka, a young GSU signal controller, wins the Voice of Kenya “Sanyo Juu, Sanyo Tops” listener competition. His gifted voice and charm attract attention. A mentor, the late Said Amariko Sonko, guides and sharpens the raw talent. By December 1976, Machoka embraces broadcasting full-time, after leaving the security service.



Veteran journalist and broadcaster Fred Machoka poses with KEG President Zubeidah Kananu at a media launch hosted by MCK

The rest is history. A history woven and entwined with the country’s broadcasting history and media industry in general. Fifty years later, that seemingly chance encounter is a stark reminder that journalism has always been sustained not only by institutions but also by experienced practitioners willing to recognise talent, open doors and patiently pass on the craft.

Later in the year – precisely in September – the veteran broadcaster will be celebrating his Golden Jubilee anniversary in the industry, and he would not be alone.

The Media Council of Kenya (MCK), in partnership with the Kenya Editors Guild (KEG) and other stakeholders, will use the celebration to launch a structured framework for recognising media

veterans, documenting their contributions and engaging them in mentoring younger journalists.

This momentous occasion shall elevate the celebrations from a personal milestone to an important epoch in the history of Kenyan journalism. According to the MCK Chief Executive Officer Mr David Omwoyo, the initiative seeks to move the industry from brain drain to brain gain by ensuring that veteran journalists continue contributing their knowledge, networks and professional values. The goal is to create a legacy that will outlive the current generation and benefit future journalists.

The same sentiments were echoed by Kenya Editors Guild President Ms Zubeida Kananu, who emphasised the need to protect mainstream media and the impor-

tance of tapping into the knowledge and skills of veterans to support the next generation.

Incidentally, Machoka's on own journey to the broadcasting pedestal is a living testimony on the role of young journalists' mentorship through veterans in the industry. His 1976 journey did not begin in a journalism school or through a graduate recruitment programme.

Journalism has always been an apprenticeship as much as it has been an academic discipline. Long before media schools became widespread, young reporters learnt the craft by working alongside experienced editors, broadcasters and photographers. Newsrooms were classrooms while deadlines became veritable examinations. Constructive criticism, many always not delivered in flowery terms, was often the most valuable certificate one could receive.

Looking back on my own years in journalism, I increasingly appreciate how much of what shaped me came not from formal instruction but from seasoned professionals who quietly modelled the values of the profession. One of the people who left an indelible mark on



From left: Veteran broadcasters Pamela Mburia, Fred Machoka, Media Council of Kenya CEO David Omwoyo, former Moi spokesperson Lee Njiru, and Kenya Editors Guild President Zubeidah Kananu during the launch of a national framework to honour veteran broadcasters.

me was the late Joe Kadhi, former Managing Editor at Nation Newspapers.

His classes were unlike many others. He rarely confined himself to theories of news writing or editorial practice. Instead, he breathed life into journalism through stories from the newsroom.

The true moment of learning journalism, especially newswriting

and editing, began when Joe – as we fondly referred to him – put aside his lecture notes, adjusted his trademark suspenders before proceeding to hold us spellbound with stories drawn from decades in the newsroom. These were stories no journalism textbook could tell and anchored us in journalism practice.

“Publish and be damned,” every editor or reporter who passed through Joe’s hands remembers his most quoted remark. He often encouraged budding journalists to publish the truth without fear, provided it was accurate, fair and ethically obtained. The maxim became part of his enduring legacy.

Joe literally brought the newsroom into the classroom. Through his anecdotes we could see reporters chasing deadlines, sub-editors wrestling with headlines, editors debating difficult editorial decisions and photographers returning from assignments with stories that pictures alone could tell.

. He was a great storyteller and sometimes it was difficult to tell

whether his stories were real or flavoured but nevertheless, they portrayed newsroom realities. Like that rookie reporter who was sent to cover a prominent personality but returned to the newsroom without the assigned story. He made an about-turn before reaching his destination because he heard that the person he had to interview had been killed.

“That was the story!” I still vividly recall Joe jumping and screaming as he exclaimed. A great lesson in news judgment and news values. More than a theorist journalism professor or career academic could teach.

Joe Kadhi was not an isolated case. He belonged to a remarkable generation of media practitioners who built Kenyan journalism while quietly building those who came after them. As the industry prepares to celebrate Machoka’s golden Jubilee, it has an opportunity to recognize a wider fraternity of seasoned professionals whose experience remains an invaluable national asset.

Machoka represents the enduring power of broadcasting. Lee Njiru, for instance, remains a repository of institutional memory in public communication. Tom Mshindi exemplifies thoughtful newsroom leadership, Macharia Gaitho and Kwendo Opanga continue to demonstrate the value of incisive public affairs commentaries, while Jeff Koinange speaks to television journalism and international reporting,

Dorothy Kweyu has inspired generations through her editorial leadership and writing, Isaya Kabira offers decades of broadcasting and media management expertise, Salim Lone brings a rare blend of international journalism, strategic communication and global media experience, while Pamela Sittoni continues to exemplify editorial excellence and newsroom stewardship. The list is endless.

While knowledge can be acquired from books and technology mastered through training, wisdom is largely passed from one practitioner to another. For

decades, Kenyan newsrooms understood this instinctively. Young reporters learnt as much from conversations across newsroom desks as they did from formal training.

Today’s newsroom is different. The profession has become younger, faster and increasingly digital. Artificial intelligence is transforming research, writing and production. Newsrooms have become leaner and staff turnover higher.

It is against this backdrop that the MCK-KEG initiative is a welcome idea. Veterans preserve much more than memories of past events. They embody the profession’s accumulated judgement. They remember why editorial principles evolved the way they did. They understand the historical context behind contemporary debates. They know that every generation believes it is confronting unprecedented challenges, even as many ethical dilemmas remain remarkably familiar.

Machoka’s celebrations will be remembered not merely for honouring a broadcasting icon but inspiring a lasting culture of learning mentorship and professional continuity in Kenya’s media industry.

Fifty years ago, someone heard promise in the voice of a young GSU officer who had walked into a broadcasting station to collect a competition prize. That simple act of recognising talent changed not only one man’s life but enriched Kenyan journalism. The profession now faces the same question. Who among today’s veterans will recognise the next Fred Machoka before the rest of us do?

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Veteran journalist and broadcaster Fred Machoka during a media launch hosted by MCK on July 9, 2026

Waning hope: 25 years in jail, Eritrea's silenced voices—perhaps forever

By
Nduko o'Matigere

Trends in repression of freedom of expression across sub-Saharan Africa illustrate a worrying continued deterioration of civic space across the region. The 2024 CIVICUS Monitor: Tracking Civic Space report rates civic space in 43 out of 50 countries in the region as obstructed, repressed or closed. Only Cabo Verde and Sao Tome and Principe are rated as the only countries whose civic space is open, with countries like Mauritius, Namibia and Seychelles, that previously stood out as positive examples for democratic governance and civic freedoms declining to the categorisation of 'narrow'.

A common thread among the poorly rated countries is authorities' disregard for national con-

stitutional commitments to democratic governance and outright contempt for their regional and international human rights obligations. A rising tide of authoritarianism across the Africa is intimately linked to the overall constrained civic space on the continent. Repressive governments continue to weaponise the rule of law and justice systems to punish independent journalists, critical writers, artists, social media commentators and peaceful protesters.

Weaponisation of legislation and rule of law are by no means

“A rising tide of authoritarianism across the Africa is intimately linked to the overall constrained civic space on the continent.”

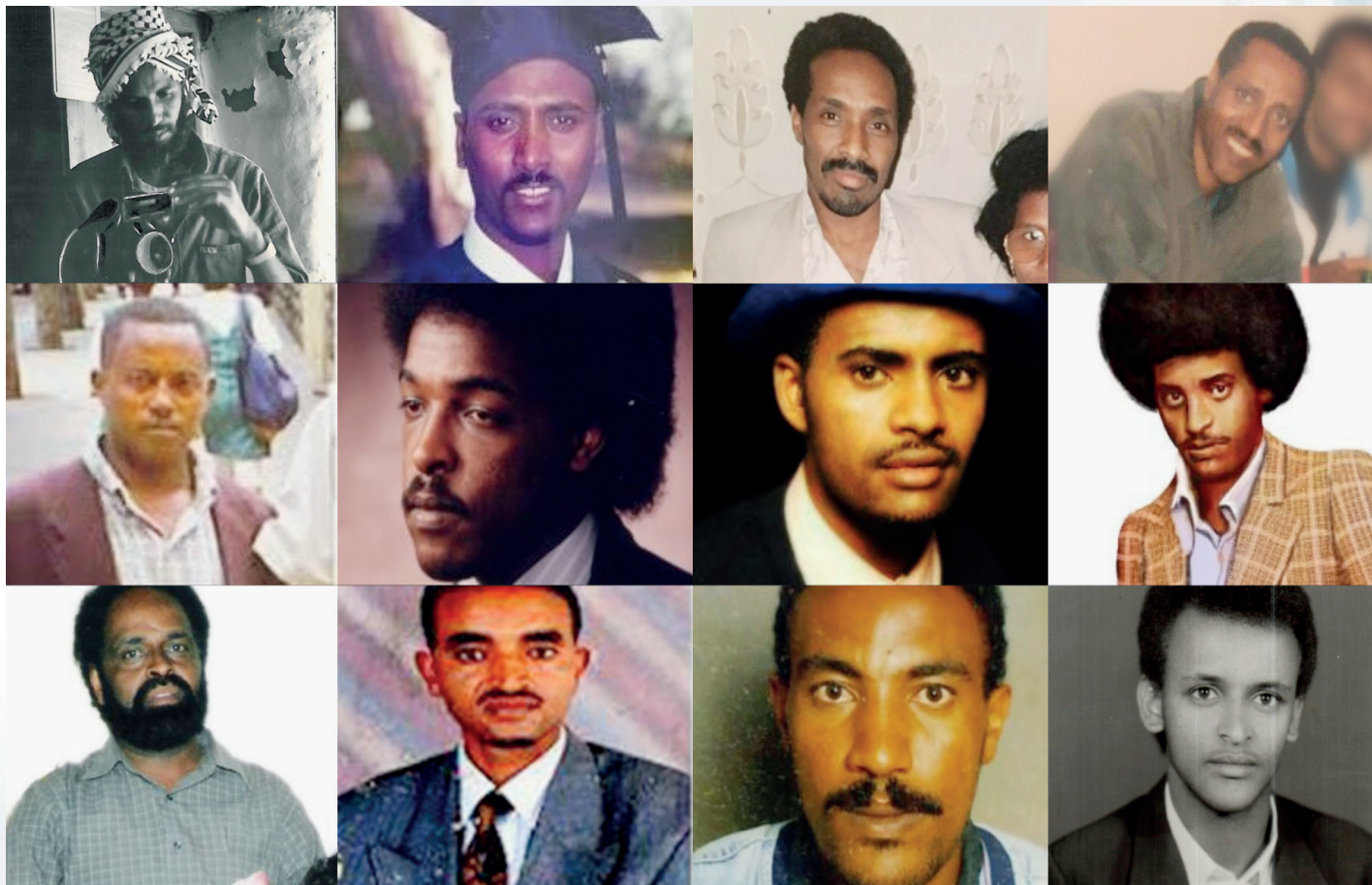


Man in handcuffs inside prison / COURTESY

a new phenomenon in the toolbox of repressive governments. The paradox however is that since independence, virtually all countries in sub-Saharan Africa continue to retain colonial era statutes originally aimed at silencing anti-colonial sentiment and expression, including critical commentary about government officials and other powerful interests. These often vaguely defined laws typically criminalise insult and defamation as well as prohibiting 'offences' against 'public order'; 'national security'; 'public morality'; 'disturbance of peace'; and 'incitement', among others.

Such laws are frequently used to criminalise and restrict the right to peaceful protest, while 'public morality' legislation is used to silence expression on topics such as gender and sexual orientation, deemed taboo by dominant social and cultural power systems. Furthermore, three global events: the post 9/11 so-called 'Global War on Terror' and the spread of anti-terror legislation that followed; the rise of internet-enabled crimes leading to the necessity of cyber-security policy and legal frameworks; and emergent needs to counter online and offline misinformation, disinformation and hate speech – all ironically presented repressive governments additional fiat to suppress free speech rights.

Never mind that there is no ruling party in any country on the continent that goes by more authentic names like 'National Repression Party' or 'Despotic African Congress' or 'Anti-Democracy Liberation Front'. Ironically it is the names of what is repressed that ruling parties on the continent appropriate and make rubbish of: freedom, justice, democracy, development, liberation, equality - and many other promising nouns for



12 Writers and Journalists who disappeared in Eritrea/ Photos Courtesy of PEN

free speech, press freedom, artistic and literary freedoms and everyday human liberties. Pseudo-democratic governance and autocratic state conduct are the real harm: not the ruling party manifestos or national constitutions. It is what the powerful men and women in power choose to do or not do that imperils free speech and the plight of journalists across Africa.

Let us consider the example of Eritrea. The Horn of Africa country has been governed since its 1993 independence from Ethiopia by the People's Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ). The military totalitarian, Isaias Afwerki has been its president since independence by personal fiat, having trashed the country's 1997 constitution which had decreed Eritrea as a country founded on the principles of democracy, social justice

and the rule of law. Here is how the authoritarian interpreted these founding principles.

On 18 and 19 September 2001, Eritrean authorities launched a massive crackdown targeting government critics. Security forces rounded up a group of dissenting members of the ruling party, PFDJ on charges of 'committing crimes against national security and sovereignty'. The group of politicians, popularly known as the G-15 had earlier published an open letter in which they denounced abuse of office by the Executive and called for peaceful democratic reforms. In the crackdown, the authorities also cracked down on the Eritrean independent press. The weekly newspapers: Meqaleh, Setit, Tsigenay, Zemen, Wintana and Admas were all closed down for publishing the G-15 open letter and

for conducting media interviews on the issues raised in the letter. The Eritrean independent press has remained banned ever since.

Over September and October 2001 journalists and editors, all associated with the banned independent media outlets, were rounded up by security forces and detained. Some of these journalists are also writers, poets, translators, playwrights, song writers and art critics and they include: Amanuel Asrat (writer, critic and Editor-in-Chief of Zemen newspaper); Dawit Habtemichael (teacher and journalist for Meqaleh weekly); Dawit Isaak (Swedish-Eritrean co-owner and editor of Setit); Fessehaye 'Joshua' Yohannes (journalist, poet, playwright, story writer, lyricist and co-owner of Setit); Matheos Habteab (deputy editor of Keste-Demena); Methanie Haile

(co-founder and editor of Meqaleh weekly); Sahle 'Wedi-Itay' Tsefezab (writer and freelance journalist for the newspapers Keste Debe-na and Hadas Eritrea); Said Abdelkadir (chief editor of the Admas newspaper); Said Idris 'Aba Arre' (writer, journalist, translator and mother-tongue advocate arrested after denouncing the arrests of other journalists); Seyoum Tsehaye (freelance journalist who had written articles critical of authorities); Temesgen Ghebreyesus (journalist, writer, comedian, actor and photographer); and Yousif Mohamed Ali (editor of Tsigenay).

This year marks 25 years since the state of Eritrea arbitrarily arrested and detained these writers and journalists without trial. They have been held incommunicado and their whereabouts, state of health and wellbeing or fate remain unknown to their families, friends, colleagues and to the world. Over the years, there have been unverified as well as credible reports that several of the detainees died in custody due to ill-treatment and neglect.

The Eritrean state has persistently ignored calls by regional and international media freedom and human rights organizations as well as treaty bodies and mechanisms of the African Union and United Nations for the authorities to uphold their regional and international human rights obligations in the case of the arbitrarily detained individuals. A 25th Anniversary campaign was launched by PEN International as part of the long journey of solidarity and action for accountability and justice for the detained and disappeared journalists and writers.

Beyond Eritrea, independent journalists continue to suffer persecution for simply doing their legitimate media work of social investi-

gation, truth-saying, commentary and amplification of societies of voices. According to CPJ's 2026 annual prison census, a total of 34 journalists and media workers were held in prison across sub-Saharan Africa at the end of the year. These include 16 journalists, among them the writers and poets imprisoned by Eritrea since 2001. Other countries jailing writers include Ethiopia (6); Rwanda (5); Cameroon (5), with Burundi and Senegal jailing one journalist each. Furthermore, according to IFJ, 10 press workers were deliberately killed in connection to their work in Sudan (6); Somalia (2); Chad (1) and DRC (1).

In dominant conversations, repressive conduct against critical expression is framed as a matter of law. What if it was not? What if the gorilla in the house is actually more disturbing, like some pathological irritable syndrome among the mighty and powerful that disposes them to repressive behaviour when views that contradict their own are expressed? Or a vital vitamins deficiency among authoritarians that suppresses or eliminates their sense of humour to a point that cartoonists, satirists, comedians, musicians, reporters and po-

ets who poke fun at the wealthy despot next door are detected as a threat to national security. Also remember that for the authoritarians, separation of their ego and the state ends at speculation and not reality.

Cameroon is but an example. On 9 October 2024, the Minister of Territorial Administration Paul Ntanga Nji issued a communiqué forbidding all media debate on President Paul Biya's health, following speculation that the then 91-year-old president may have died. The decree stressed that 'offenders' against the decree would face the full force of the law and tasked governors with forming 'monitoring cells' to identify those who write 'tendentious comments' online and in private media, threatening them with prosecution.

From use of repressive laws and arbitrary clampdowns to violent attacks and killings of journalists and other critical voices, the repressive tactics by authorities across Africa are all forms of systemic censorship. As expected, the desired outcome of authoritarians is a constrained civic environment in which their abusive conduct and actions go unchallenged and impunity for the powerful guaranteed. Independent media organisations, journalist association, press freedom and human rights organisations must intensify their resistance to these trends. What is sure is that repression is perishable; freedom is not. Yet repression never concedes without a fight for freedom, social justice and accountable governance. That is the task for all of us who believe that liberty is not a gift from political systems: it is an inalienable human right and it must be protected.

The writer is the Head of Africa Region at PEN International

Resilience in turmoil

How KEG is shaping conversations on the future of journalism

By
Wendy Mangale



The first half of the year tested journalism in new ways. From artificial intelligence and digital disruption to mounting attacks on press freedom and difficult questions about newsroom sustainability, the media industry found itself navigating profound change. For the Kenya Editors' Guild (KEG), these six months were not simply about responding to events but about helping shape the conversations that will define the future of journalism.

A profession undergoing change

The first six months of the year were marked by intense engagement as KEG worked to strengthen the journalism profession, support its members and position newsrooms for the future. Through advocacy, capacity building, strategic partnerships and public engagement, the guild placed editors and journalists at the centre of debates on press freedom, media sustainability, digital transformation and democratic accountability.

In collaborative efforts and initiatives under the Kenya Media Sector Working Group, industry forums and global observances

including World Radio Day and World Press Freedom Day, the guild continued advocating for a media environment where journalists can operate safely, ethically and independently.

The focus remained ever clear – journalism must evolve with changing realities while preserving its essential role in informing citizens, holding power accountable and strengthening democracy.

Rethinking media sustainability

One of the biggest conversations shaping the media sector has been the question of sustainability. During World Radio Day celebrations, the Media Council of Kenya launched research examining monetisation challenges and op-

portunities for Kenyan media in the digital economy.

The findings highlighted the difficult financial reality facing news organisations. Half of the media houses surveyed still rely mainly on advertising, while many have yet to develop sustainable digital revenue models. The research showed that more than half of media organisations earn less than 10 per cent of their revenue from digital platforms.

The findings reinforced a critical lesson: quality journalism cannot survive without financially resilient newsrooms.

KEG President Zubeidah Kananu said the future of Kenyan media will depend on innovation, responsible adoption of new technologies and rebuilding audience trust.

“

The future of Kenyan media will depend on how boldly we innovate, how responsibly we integrate AI, and how intentionally we rebuild audience trust and viable business models

Zubeidah Kananu

”



Members of the Kenya Media Sector Working Group during a press conference

“The future of Kenyan media will depend on how boldly we innovate, how responsibly we integrate AI, and how intentionally we rebuild audience trust and viable business models,” she said.

Those themes of innovation, trust and sustainability would continue to define the guild’s engagements throughout the year.

Shaping Africa’s media future

A major milestone was the inaugural Pan-African Media Summit, where KEG joined continental partners in convening policymakers, editors, journalists, regulators, technology companies, civil society and development actors to address the challenges facing African media.

The discussions examined the impact of artificial intelligence, digital platforms, misinformation, media sustainability and information integrity.

It was noted that the key challenge facing societies today is not only access to information, but ensuring that it is accurate, credible and trustworthy.

Participants reaffirmed that reliable, evidence-based information remains essential to democracy and development. The summit concluded with a commitment to strengthen cooperation between media actors, regulators and technology companies-- including improving transparency around algorithms, content moderation and digital platforms.

The decision to transform the summit into an annual continental forum would certainly provide a platform for continued conversations on the future of African journalism.

Defending press freedom and journalist safety

While looking ahead, KEG re-



KEG Executive Council member Agnes Mwangangi giving opening remarks during a press club held in Nairobi on June 24, 2026

mained focused on urgent challenges facing journalists today. The guild continued raising concerns over attacks, intimidation and hostility targeting journalists and media organisations, particularly during politically sensitive periods. Such threats undermine not only individual journalists but also the public’s right to access independent information.

KEG has consistently demanded accountability for perpetrators and stronger protections that allow journalists to perform their watchdog role without fear. The guild also expanded conversations around safety within newsrooms, recognising that press freedom cannot exist without safe working environments.

During the Pan-African Media Summit, KEG convened discussions on sexual harassment in newsrooms, highlighting the need for stronger workplace policies, leadership accountability and cultural change. Research presented during the forum showed that

while sexual harassment remains a global challenge in media, the situation in Kenya requires urgent attention.

The discussions reinforced the message that newsroom safety is a fundamental part of protecting journalism itself.

Investing in journalists

Beyond defending journalism, KEG continued investing in the people behind the profession. Through partnerships with institutions such as the Retirement Benefits Authority, the guild supported journalists to strengthen reporting skills while improving their understanding of financial literacy and retirement planning.

The initiative encouraged journalists to tell stronger public-interest stories on pensions while also preparing for their own financial futures. Addressing the participants, financial expert Charles Machira urged journalists to begin preparing for retirement long before leaving active employment.

“Financial security is a necessity, not a luxury. Journalists should actively participate in pension schemes and understand their retirement benefits,” he said.

The guild also strengthened newsroom leadership through its NextGen Initiative, mentoring young journalists and encouraging them to explore new opportunities emerging from digital transformation.

During an engagement with journalism students at the Technical University of Kenya, KEG Executive Council Member Andy Kagwa challenged young journalists to think beyond traditional newsroom roles.

“There are very many opportunities beyond the newsroom. You must broaden your mind,” he told students.

The message reflected a wider reality: the future of journalism will depend on investing in people as much as technology.

Creating platforms for public debate

KEG continued using its platforms to facilitate conversations on issues affecting Kenyans. Through the KEG Press Club, editors, experts and policymakers examined national issues ranging from women’s economic empowerment and climate resilience to taxation and public finance.

A forum on women in agriculture highlighted persistent barriers affecting women’s access to land, finance, technology and markets despite their critical contribution to food production.

Another discussion examined climate-smart agriculture and the need to support farmers with knowledge, innovation and resilient practices. On fiscal accountability, KEG hosted an X space that convened experts and the public to discuss Kenya’s budget priorities, taxation and public debt.

The discussions examined the balance between raising revenue and protecting citizens from increasing financial pressure. They reinforced the importance of sustained scrutiny of government decisions and their impact on everyday lives.

The conversation continued through a partnership with the International Republican Institute, where editors and civil society actors explored public debt accountability and fiscal justice.

Led by economist Ndiritu Muriithi, the forum examined how responsible borrowing, transparency and effective public finance management can support sustainable development.

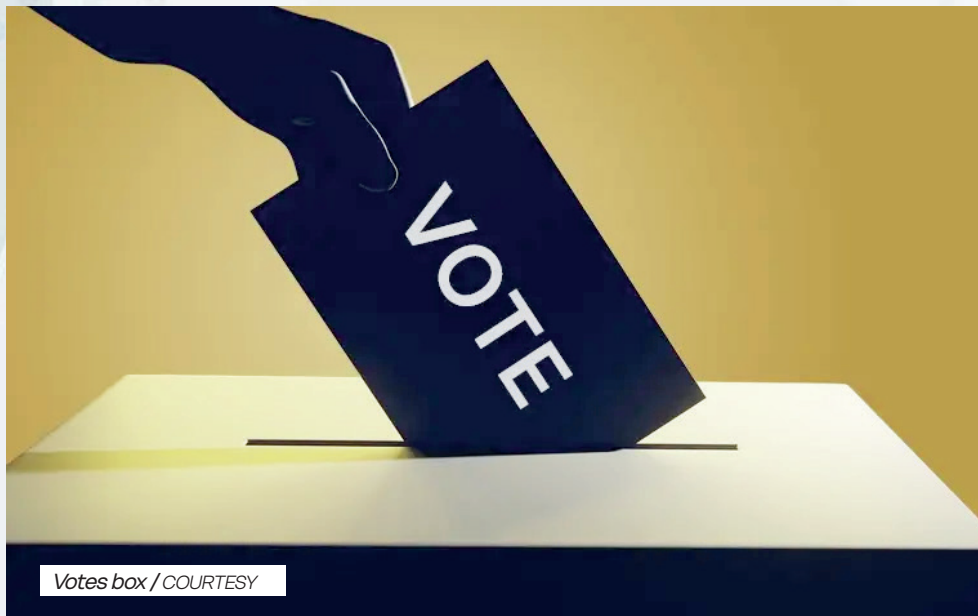
Strengthening partnerships

A consistent theme throughout KEG’s work has been the importance of collaboration. During the Guild’s Partners’ Breakfast, President Kananu emphasised that pro-



An illustration of a saving model / COURTESY

“Financial security is a necessity, not a luxury. Journalists should actively participate in pension schemes and understand their retirement benefits



Votes box / COURTESY

protecting journalism requires collective action.

“No single institution can solve the challenges facing this country alone. Not the media. Not government. Not civil society. Not the private sector. We need each other now more than ever,” she said.

The guild strengthened partnerships with institutions including the Kenya Deposit Insurance Corporation, National Land Commission, Commission on Administrative Justice, National Social Security Fund, Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission, Kenya Revenue Authority, Judiciary and Safaricom.

These engagements focused on strengthening access to information, journalist safety, media sustainability and democratic governance. Through these partnerships, KEG continued positioning itself as a trusted convenor bringing together diverse stakeholders around shared public-interest goals.

Preparing for 2027

As Kenya approaches the 2027 General Election, KEG has also prioritised election preparedness. Through the Kenya Media Sector Working Group, the Guild signed

a Memorandum of Understanding with the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission to strengthen cooperation on responsible and credible election coverage.

The partnership comes at a critical time, with many journalists expected to cover elections for the first time. The changing information environment, including the rise of artificial intelligence and digital misinformation, makes preparation and capacity building essential.

The initiative seeks to strengthen public trust, improve election reporting and support informed citizen participation.

Beyond activities: shaping the future

The work of the past six months goes beyond meetings, workshops and partnerships. It reflects a broader effort to protect journalism while preparing it for a rapidly changing world.

KEG has worked to defend press freedom while confronting difficult questions about sustainability, technology, newsroom culture and information integrity. It has invested in experienced editors while

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As Kenya approaches the 2027 General Election, KEG has also prioritised election preparedness

creating opportunities for emerging journalists. It has built partnerships because the challenges facing journalism cannot be solved by one institution alone.

The future will bring continued disruption. Artificial intelligence will reshape newsrooms, financial pressures will test media organisations and threats to press freedom will require constant vigilance.

But the first half of 2026 has demonstrated that journalism’s future will be shaped by those willing to anticipate change, build partnerships and invest in the people who keep the public informed. That is the conversation KEG has helped lead – and one that will continue shaping the future of journalism in Kenya and beyond.

The writer is a digital communications specialist and currently serves as the Communications Lead at the Kenya Editors Guild

Editorial integrity

A critical review of the 2025 Code of Conduct for Media Practice in Kenya

By Catherine Muhatia,
Jemima A. Akoto
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Since the 2013 Code of Conduct was adopted in Kenya, the media ecosystem has been in rapid transition. Legacy media; newspapers, radio, and television are now competing against, and coexisting with, digital media, social media influencers, podcasts, and AI-supported content creation. According to the Reuters Institute Digital News Report (2025), while trust in Kenyan news remains comparatively high at 65%, legacy media consumption has decreased significantly, with a fall in weekly viewership of Citizen TV from 76% to 68% and online readership of the Daily Nation from 59% to

51% between the two rounds of surveying. Social media especially Facebook, WhatsApp, X (formerly Twitter), TikTok, and YouTube have emerged as primary news sources, particularly among young people in urban centers and the influential Gen Z cohort.

This introduces new ethical dilemmas; the distinction between commercialized influence and traditional journalism has eroded, algorithms amplify emotion-driven content rather than facts as established journalistic ethics struggle to keep pace with livestreaming and generative AI content. The MCK’s 2025 Code responds to these challenges. Crafted after a High Court ruling on the unconstitutionality of parts of the previous Broadcasting Code, and in response to the rapid integration of AI technologies into

newsrooms according to (Umejei et al., 2025), the 2025 Code marks a pivotal transition from a journalism focused regulatory framework to a broader ecosystem approach that covers any entity disseminating public content. It is upon this backdrop that this paper aims to critically review the provisions of the 2025 Code that are new or significantly recast vis-à-vis the 2013 Code, against evidence of media ethics observance in Kenyan traditional and digital media platforms.

The 2025 Code of Conduct for Media Practice in Kenya was drafted in response to three media regulatory trends in the Country. First, the High Court ruling (Kenya Union of Journalists vs.

Communications Authority of Kenya & Another; Media Council of Kenya (Interested Party), Petition No. 501 of 2019 [2024] KEHC 13677 (KLR), 7 November 2024) invalidated some sections of the previous Broadcasting Content Regulations, revealing the regulatory framework’s shortcomings in safeguarding vulnerable populations in the digital age. Second, the Kenyan media ecosystem, similar to the global media ecosystem, had in the last decade undergone a rapid digital transformation, with new digital media platforms (e.g. social media channels such as Youtube, X, Tiktok, etc) replacing conventional mass media channels (e.g. newspapers, radio and television) as the main source of news for many. Third, the adoption and use of AI in news production as reported in Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya, and South Africa by Umejei et al. (2025) had brought efficiencies as well as ethical challenges that the now defunct 2013 Code of Media Practice in Kenya was not designed to address.

Therefore, the 2025 Code of Conduct for Media Practice was



A radio studio / COURTESY

birthed to address these emergent regulatory dynamics that could no longer be ignored by transforming MCK from an ‘ordinary media regulator’ to a ‘convergent media regulator’. The broadened definitions in the 2025 Code where “media practitioner” now includes digital media creators and influencers, and “media enterprise” now includes platforms.

However, the parent law - the Media Council Act (Cap. No. 46 of 2013) (411B) has not been duly updated to indicate this expanded scope. The definitions of media enterprise and journalism in the Act still have their basis in the conventional mass media models, and do not mention digital content creators, social media influencers, podcasters, or user-generated content platforms.

4.0 Novel and Substantially Reframed Provisions of the 2025 Code

4.1 Expanded Definitions and Scope of Coverage

The previous code was expressly limited to “journalists” and “media houses” rooted in newsroom cultures. The 2025 Code introduces and defines terms such as “claim” (a verifiable statement expressed as fact), “graphics” (visual media with editorial content) and importantly, “watershed”, the period between 5:00 a.m. and 10:00 p.m. in which all content must be family-friendly. These terms extend the ethical reach of MCK to digital content creators, podcasters, and social media influencers for the first time, addressing a governance oversight gap that had left public communicators without accountability to a code of ethics. To support this, Mudavadi et al. (2026) captured the views of Kenyan journalists on their transition

from traditional newsrooms to individual digital platforms, observing that social media platforms “have not historically abided by a clear or consistent code of ethics”.

4.2 Artificial Intelligence: Transparency, Disclosure, and Safeguards

The 2025 Code’s AI requires media practitioners to disclose the use of AI tools in content creation and curation, bans the use of AI generated deep fakes or other deceptive media, and sets an ethical standard for media practitioners to verify the use of AI before publishing. This addresses the current trends in AI use in Kenyan media. However, remedy depends on the MCK’s ability to guide compliance and regulatory frameworks.

4.3 User-Generated Content, Livestreaming, and Editorial Responsibility

The 2013 Code’s emphasis on the professional journalist as editor and gatekeeper did not anticipate the rise of unmoderated livestreams and comments. The 2025 Code requires media enterprises to better distinguish between editorial content and user-generated content (UGC), to provide moderation guidelines for livestream publishing, and to assume corporate responsibility for harmful UGC published on their platforms, a major shift of editor responsibility that extends to platform governance.

Moyo (2015), in her research on citizen journalism ethics in crises in Zimbabwe and South Africa, identified that in the absence of editorial accountability in digital media, falsehood and incitement spread rapidly especially during elections. The 2025 Code’s UGC provisions aim to hold publisher platforms accountable for the UGC they publish. However, the

“Media practitioners’ responsibilities regarding hate speech to include platforms’ role in algorithmically amplifying inflammatory content, rather than focusing solely on the authors of the content.”

Code does not create an “adequate moderation” framework for small digital media organizations or digital podcasts.

4.4 Enhanced Protection of Children and Vulnerable Groups

The 2025 Code significantly expands protections for children and other vulnerable groups compared to the previous code. These include more rigorous guidelines for reporting on children content, more explicit prohibitions on content that sexualizes, stigmatizes, or ex-

ploits children, the formal recognition of the watershed period (5:00 a.m.-10:00 p.m.) during which all broadcast content must be suitable for the whole family, and improved guidelines for reporting on victims of sexual violence and persons with mental illness. These changes are a direct response to the High Court’s ruling on the unconstitutionality of the Broadcasting Content Regulations.

Ng’etich et al. (2025) reported persistent ethical concerns in popular morning radio shows in Kenya. Patanisho Show on Radio Jambo and Kesi Mashinani on Radio Maisha, citing numerous violations of accuracy, objectivity, fairness, and privacy. The study found hosts often broadcast calls about marital problems and family issues without the permission of all parties, leaving individuals vulnerable to public embarrassment and defamation.

4.5 Hate Speech, National Cohesion, and Digital Amplification

While the 2013 Code addressed hate speech and national cohesion, the 2025 Code stands out for its explicit references to amplification in digital media. The Code broadens media practitioners’ responsibilities regarding hate speech to include platforms’ role in algorithmically amplifying inflammatory content, rather than focusing solely on the authors of the content.

In Kenya’s media-related electoral violence, Ireri (2016a) investigated “the corruption dragon” in the Kenyan media, tracing the ethical dilemmas posed by the dominance of commercial and political considerations over professional practice, insights that are relevant to the issue of hate speech, where business incentives for clicks may encourage inflammatory speech.

4.6 Advertising, Endorsements, and Influencer Marketing Transparency

The 2025 Code details advertising, sponsored content, and influencer marketing, which were either completely absent or poorly defined in the 2013 Code. Advertisers now must identify sponsored content; disclose any commercial relationships in endorsements, and ensure that betting and gambling advertising is controlled.

An example is the explicit regulation of gaming, betting, and lottery advertising. The 2025 Code prohibits such advertisements from being broadcast during the watershed period (5:00 AM–10:00 PM) and bars them from targeting children or vulnerable groups. This is a significant regulatory intervention given the explosive growth of sports betting in Kenya, where platforms such as Sportpesa, Betika, and Odibets have been aggressively marketed to young audiences through social media, SMS, and radio. Kenya has one of the highest sports betting participation rates in Africa, with a disproportionate concentration among youth aged 18–35 (Communications Authority of Kenya, 2023). The 2013 Code had no provisions addressing this industry’s advertising conduct, leaving a glaring accountability gap as betting companies became major media advertisers and, in some cases, media owners.

6.0 Summary of Findings

In view of the findings of this paper, the 2025 Code is a necessary normative milestone in enhancing independent regulation of the shifting Kenya’s media landscape; it is indeed a holistic effort to update Kenya’s media regulation to reflect the realities of the new and convergent, AI-driven, and influenc-



Computer keyboard with Hate speech / COURTESY

er fueled digital media landscape. However, the evidence presented in this paper posits that the Code’s transformative potential will majorly be achieved if the following five conditions are satisfied.

First, the MCK needs to issue compliance guidelines for each new provision, especially the AI transparency and UGC moderation provisions. Adjin-Tetty et al. (2024) revealed that African journalists rely on discretionary judgment when considering AI ethics,

which the 2025 Code must be supplemented with specific sectoral guidelines to address.

Second, voluntary accreditation and ethical certification for digital practitioners (podcasters, YouTube creators, influencers) would offer both a carrot and a stick for compliance with professional norms. Madrid-Morales and Ileri (2021) argued that the decentralized nature of digital media in Africa has rendered conventional regulatory frameworks ineffective.

Third, the economic vulnerability described by Mudavadi (2025) and Ileri (2016b) needs to be tackled as a prerequisite for ethical practice. Ethical codes are most effective where practitioners enjoy the economic stability to resist market and political pressures. Campaigning for better pay for journalists, greater newsroom autonomy, and mental health support for journalists are not optional extras to media ethics; they are its foundations.

7.0 Conclusions and Recommendations

The Code of Conduct for Media Practice, 2025, brings timely and robust innovations, especially on digital ethics, artificial intelligence, user-generated content, watershed protections, and influencer marketing that are a significant step beyond the 2013 Code. These provisions address identified regulatory gaps and reflect Kenya’s constitutional guarantees of freedom of expression, press freedom, and access to information (Articles 33–35). They also align with the international consensus, promoted by institutions like UNESCO and research in journalism studies, that convergent media demand convergent regulation. Yet, amid documented ethical violations in traditional radio, partisan coverage, misinformation online, and the economic challenges faced by Kenyan journalists, these provisions risk becoming aspirational unless they are enforced, capacity built, and championed within the industry. Progress will only be achieved by looking beyond the code to foster a professional culture where ethical practice is recognized not as compliance, but as the bedrock of journalistic authority and public trust in a democratic Kenya. This paper contributes to that project by documenting the disconnect between normative and operational levels and by outlining the conditions that will see the 2025 Code realize its transformative potential.

- This paper therefore recommends the following:
- That the Media Council of Kenya (MCK) develop and publish sector-specific compliance guidelines for each novel provision of the 2025 Code, particularly the AI transparency and user-generated content moderation provisions within twelve months of the Code’s commencement, so that abstract obligations are translated into actionable standards that media practitioners, digital creators, and influencers can meaningfully follow.
 - That MCK, in collaboration with the Communications Authority of Kenya (CAK) and the Kenya Film Classification Board (KFCB), establish a voluntary accreditation and ethical certification scheme for digital media practitioners including podcasters, YouTubers, and social media influencers as a mechanism for extending professional accountability norms to the rapidly growing unregulated digital media space without over relying on statutory enforcement, which remains resource-constrained.
 - That an expanded contextual study be done to seek redress to the challenges facing implementation of the 2025 Code using key-informant interviews and/or focus group discussions with the major stakeholders of the Media Industry in Kenya.

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