

Media Initiatives as Information Provider and Society's Watchdog on Peace Building in Kenya

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Abstract

Media has power to shape public discourse globally in its information. In its reportage it plays a multiplicity of initiatives that at times may be objective or other times subjective. This is as a result of various contexts in which the media professionals find themselves in. Media therefore can be used for good and evil purposes. This paper is based on a study conducted in Uasin Gishu County in Kenya, whose objectives were to investigate how media consider peace building while effecting their initiative as information provider, interpreter and watchdog. The study population comprised editors and journalists from media houses, opinion leaders, religious organizations and media analysts drawn from the academia, Non-Governmental Organizations and the Kenya National Council for Human Rights. Stratified and simple random sampling techniques were used to select a sample of 210 respondents drawn from the target population of 420. Data collection was done through questionnaires, interview schedules, focus group discussions, participant observations and analysis of documentary records. Data was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. From the study findings, it was revealed that the media as an information provider was highly significant just as being a watchdog and diplomatic initiatives. Within the context of information provision, interpretation and as a watchdog for society, the media influences society in many dimensions. As gatekeepers, they decide what information gets to the public; as watchdog and they represent the interests of the people against powerful interests. In economic development, the media provide the enabling environment for businesses and investments to flourish. In addition, they assist in empowering economically disadvantaged groups in the society; at the same time contribute to societal economic growth. In social development, the media can help fight corruption, prevent communal conflicts and provide useful information on disasters. The media are particularly useful for public health campaigns, especially against children diseases, communicable diseases, and in favour of a healthy environment.

Keywords: Effects, Media Initiatives, Information Provider, Society, Watchdog, Peace Building, Kenya

1. Introduction

The most fundamental function of the media is to keep the public informed. Therefore, the media provides people with important information about their environment (for example, political, cultural and social issues) which enables them to respond to imminent problems such as weather, traffic and natural catastrophes, among others. Therefore, a considerable proportion of daily decision making is influenced by information disseminated to the public through the media. Matters of conflict and conflict resolution are no exception. Therefore, it is reasonable to expect that perceptions of 'other' groups are influenced by what is disseminated in the media, especially in multi-ethnic, multi-lingual societies where the media is structured along ethnic lines, as is the case in Kenya. In such a situation, it is also normal for people to make political decisions based on what is disseminated in the media (Bratic & Schirch, 2007).

While the provision of information is a positive effect of the media, because it increases cognitive knowledge, public reliance on the media is all encompassing. Therefore, the media can increase knowledge, limit the range of ideas that the public is exposed to, or even disseminate falsehoods. Thus the media is overwhelmingly influential in determining the public agenda and framing the boundaries of public discourse (Price & Thompson, 2002).

However, merely disseminating information is not enough to build peace, particularly because peace building and conflict prevention require behaviour change. The first stage of behavioural change is concerned with transforming information into knowledge, which is a cognitive process. Thus the media begins behaviour change by supplying the relevant information to a person. This information must be acquired by the targeted recipient. However, the cognitive process of behaviour change cannot begin if peace building information does not reach the audience. This may happen because the public are not receiving the information from their preferred media channels (for instance, local language radio stations may not disseminate peace messages) or because the peace messages may be reaching the wrong target audience (for instance, information aimed at the youth may not be reaching them, because it is disseminated at the wrong time or via the wrong medium). Thus even the best designed media content will not work if it does not reach its target audience (Bratic & Schirch, 2007).

There is no special duty on the media to preserve human rights, but because of its role as a conveyor of

information to all persons, it has a responsibility to highlight and protect human rights because it relays information between the governors and the governed. The International Council on Human Rights (ICHR, 2001) points out that human rights protection relies on media freedom, which is closely associated with independent journalism practice. From the foregoing, it is reasonable to suggest that the right of the media to access and to disseminate information is as important as the right to life. Indeed, people have the right to know, if they are to succeed in attaining human equality and justice (Dahal, 2011). Restricting media freedom is inimical to the protection of human rights and undermines the development of free society, which may harm the very independence of the media in the long run. This is ably demonstrated by Watson (1998) who unequivocally states that human right is a key subject in the field of journalism.

During a conflict, lack of information can lead to public desperation, restlessness and vulnerability to political manipulation for violent ends. The uncertainty regarding the delay of releasing the results of the 2007 presidential election in Kenya was one of the factors which contributed to the explosion of violence. It has been shown that the ability to make informed decisions, which is only possible when there, is freedom of information and the media strengthens social cohesion and encourages economic growth, development of democratic institutions and positive future prospects. The foregoing are the reasons the United Nations Millennium Declaration emphasized the need “to ensure the freedom of the media to perform their essential role and the right of the public to have access to information (United Nations Millennium Declaration, 2000).

Reliable information is important in any conflict situation because conspiracy theories, rumours and propaganda abound and have to be counteracted. Straightforward and neutral information is also essential for relief organizations if they are to win necessary support and trust of the population involved in conflict. Such information may not be news in the strict sense but should be objective and credible. Susan (2009) observes that Radio is the most prevalent, effective and affordable medium suiting local conditions and reaching a variety of audience. Humanitarian organizations are required to use the right information at the right time and therefore must use all means of communication available to provide answers to the many support activities that they are offering.

Informing people in conflict zones can aid in acceptance and trust. However, simply informing people is not enough because it is a one way process. Media organizations should create avenues through which both sides in a conflict can actually communicate, listen to, and be open to all those who have suggestions, questions, doubts or criticism.

There is no doubt that the press helps to influence public opinion. In newspaper, magazine, radio and television, people are invited to express themselves on matters of public interest. At the same time, the press helps to guard people’s interest and government officials or policy-makers do realize that without favourable public opinions, they are greatly handicapped in carrying out their policies. The press is the voice of the people in a democratic society. It represents the people by asking officials of government the kinds of questions that hold them to account for the exercise of their public trust; and thus are representative in fighting the daily battle to protect democracy (Bratic & Schirch, 2007).

As pressmen became imbued with a sense of responsibility, they contend that the public has a right of access to information as a basic right to be informed, and that the press is the agent of the public in breaking down barriers to the free flow of the news (Birt & Jay, 1975). Some journalists observe that so far as the president and many others in government are concerned, what they read in newspapers and magazines, hear from the radios and watch from the televisions constitute the most important elements in their universe public opinion (Siebert, Peterson & Scram, 1956, p. 91). In other words, the press represents public opinion manifestly or directly. Others maintain that it provides an institutional means by which the public gets its questions asked. In this sense, the press speaks for a larger public that does not have the reporter’s opportunities to interrogate officials (Cohen, 1963). As representative of the public the press’ activity and justification in the daily political process becomes justified. Hence, the press performs a political function that is sanctioned by classic democratic philosophy.

The mass media play strategic role in the formulation and aggregation of public opinion. Agee, Ault and Emery (1994) quoting Walter Lipmann, says that: “the world we have to deal with politically is out of reach, out of sight, out of mind... It has to be explored, reported and imagined” (They cited the Watergate Scandal of 1970s in the US to assert that the pictures in the minds of the society are, collectively, what constitute public opinion). Accordingly, Adeyanju (2001) posits that “... the larger political community (the politicians issue activities, Interest groups leaders, journalists and media consultants) participates actively in shaping the expression of public opinion” (p. 26). This means that the mass media is a veritable avenue through which people arrive at some of their opinions in their day-to-day activities and interaction.

The role of the press is to provide factual information originating from home and abroad to the Kenyan citizens. According to a wire-service reporter, “The reporter is the eyes and ears of the public, and if he cannot translate what he sees and finds out in popular terms, then the whole purpose of the reportorial process is lost” (Cohen, 1963, p. 23). The press gives factual information to the public, so that the people can make their own judgments about the issues of public interest. This confirms that it is the people who make decisions in a democratic society

(ibid.). Here the press is provided with the obvious responsibility of supplying information on which our popular decisions are based. And by implication, the better the job is done by the press in supplying information, the better the capacity of people to make intelligent judgments.

The people depend on the press for information; the alternative will be for the public to make judgments that are parochial. Newspapers, magazines, radios and televisions give information to help People's judgment. To buttress on the importance of the informative role of the press to the society, a United Nations publications asserts that the role of the press in informing the world public is transcendently important and that every newspaper is an encyclopaedia of local history and world movements. By highlighting them raw, the media will by extension equip the masses on potential causes of conflicts. Therefore, adequate information is clearly a necessity if not a sufficient condition, for intelligent policy choices.

Broadcasting news by using community radios can help to reach people in different areas, even with different languages, more easily. This way, people can be addressed directly and their own personal experiences and lives can be incorporated much better, than with foreign media. This is because radio is a well established medium whose parameters and possibilities are well known, and it is unlikely to cause surprises or uncomfortable moral issues, in the way that the internet often does. On the other hand, the danger of manipulation and inflammation of ethnic tensions, however, cannot be ignored, as the experience of Rwanda and Kenya shows. Another advantage of local media, especially radio, is that in border areas it is possible to convey peace messages to fighters and refugees alike (United Nations Office for West Africa, 2005).

Whether or not this use of radio alone will be effective in a peace-building context depends on many factors, but it is clear that democratic media structures need more than this. It is vital that the use of information within a society is not solemnly passive but that the population gets actively involved in creating content and broadcasting it (Deutsche Welle, 2008). Thus, while the role of media as an information provider is a crucial one, providing information alone is not enough to instigate change in a society.

The operation of a modern industrial democracy requires that those who purvey information provide information that is, in fact, not a judgmental distortion of reality and fact, but as accurate as humanly possible – or else a society can quickly, with the permissiveness of modern media, be thrown off balance.

However, the tendency of modern media to twist news stories in order to gain the most profit is checked somewhat by the existence of alternatives. Thus, if a newspaper distorts a headline story, the reader only has to check another newspaper to verify what s/he has read. This also applies to newspapers and radio. However, the situation is drastically different where there is a media monopoly, either state based or private. In such a situation it is possible for the media to lie to the public with little scope for sanction. It is to avoid such scenarios that media.

1.1 Media Initiative as an Information Interpreter

The importance of the media in conflict prevention and peace building was underlined by Bratic and Schirch (2007), who states that the mass media, particularly the electronic media, provide people with important information about their environment and gives them an opportunity to respond to proximate challenges. Furthermore, the media is responsible for interpreting events that are beyond the physical perception of individual persons and it assists people to make sense of these phenomena. Furthermore, the constant development of technologies and the advancement of new media such as the internet and social media, the role played by the media as an interpreter of information is becoming increasingly prominent in daily communication and entertainment (Bratic & Schirch, 2007).

Due to daily reporting and interpretation by the media, the media agenda essentially becomes the public agenda. One view of the agenda setting function of the media is that during a conflict, the media simply reflects public disorder and that it does not instigate or contribute to conflict. This suggests that the media are incapable of directly causing conflicts, but in the context of the socio-economic and political framework of the. Agenda setting (which is a consequence of media interpretation) operates under the assumptions that the media does not reflect reality. On the contrary, they filter and shape it, especially in Kenya where people trust the media that they are connected to, often through ethnic affiliation; and their concentration on a few issues and subjects (their agenda) leads the public to perceive this agenda as more important than other issues (McQuail & Windhal, 1993). Thus it is possible for a media owner to use the interpretive role of the media to set an agenda that is either favourable or unfavourable to conflict prevention and peace building.

On the other hand, there are findings to suggest that members of the public are not just passive consumers of media. This has been shown by Dearing and Rodgers (1996), who point out that audiences are constantly participating in social-economic and political debates at any particular moment. This means that although the media interpret the information that they disseminate to the public, the public subsequently reinterprets what it has received from the media. Dearing and Rogers (ibid.) argue that the media reinforces ideas and contexts in which information is perceived. However, these ideas and contexts are created by the public, and are only shaped by the media. Therefore, the agenda setting process is not fixed in time, but is a continuous competition for

significance in the eyes of the media by different issues in the sphere of public discourse (Dearing & Rodgers, 1996, p. 22). This had earlier been acknowledged by McCombs and Protess (1991) when they stated that the public learns what issues are important from the news agenda of the media and adopts a similar set of priorities in their own personal agendas. However, personal agendas will differ according to the natural differences between people and the media outlets that they most frequently access for information. Indeed, when individuals are highly interested in political issues, their interest will have a strong influence on their agenda setting (Kelyango, 2010, p.8).

As stated earlier, although the media interpret the information that they provide, they have no control over the subsequent interpretation of that information. The simplest form of the agenda setting model is top-down linear mass communication, in which information is sent from the source (such as politicians), through a vector (the media) to the receiver – the public audience (McQuail, 2010). However, this transmission happens under the influence of distortions from physical and psychosocial factors, which reinterpret the message. From the receiver's point of view, the receiver's own state of mind and cultural environment affect the way in which the message is perceived. Therefore, our worldview is only partially shaped by the media agenda. Nevertheless, it is still possible for the source, vector and receiver of information to share the same worldview, and in this event it becomes very easy for politicians to manipulate the public to cause conflict, or conversely for the media to prevent conflict and build peace. Ultimately, the biggest responsibility in the chain of information is in the hands of the media, as they can choose not to convey negative messages, and even insert their own positive messages into the process.

This responsibility is explained by Dahal (2011) who insists that free, independent and responsible media can assess whether the power wielded by opposing sides in a conflict is legitimate and in agreement with the public's hopes for peace, democracy and social justice or whether the opposing sides are simply resisting each other's power in order to seek dominance. Conflict inevitably creates a degree of political uncertainty, thus it is important to emphasize how political actors can jointly achieve common good rather than the factors that cause them to oppose each other. For these reasons, the process in which information is gathered, processed and disseminated within a political system is a matter of great significance to the public. This is succinctly explained by Hartley's (1992) statement that "the media defines what is right by describing what is wrong."

The only justification that journalism needs for its existence is that it serves society. The highest manifestation of this service is when the media not only helps to distribute information but also when it counters hate-speech and creates what Koven (2004) calls an information equilibrium, in which there is an environment of balanced opinions. This can be achieved with a national media which respects professionalism, but it is harder to do so when there is a multiplicity of small media outlets whose main agenda is parochialism. It is hard for the media to balance the need to prevent harm caused by hate speech and protecting freedom of expression. Nevertheless, attaining this balance is absolutely imperative in conflict situations. It is irresponsible for journalists to merely re-publish press releases. Instead they should concern themselves with presenting an accurate, balanced and fair account of events. To achieve this, the media have to avoid prejudicial representations and describe facts without exaggeration (Koven, 2004). A fundamental prerequisite for democracy is that the right of society to access news and information should be upheld to the furthest extent possible by the media, through unbiased analysis of the *status quo*, debate, practical exchange of information and entertainment. It is not feasible to impose the peace building strategy of media in one country on another country, as conflicts and their contexts are unique to their environments (Deutsche Welle, 2009).

Many contemporary conflicts tend to be internal, within a state. They usually develop within the context of a unique history. Local media are better placed to understand the local political structures, as well as the motivations of the participants in the conflict and the changes that culminated in the outbreak of violence. The local media are therefore well placed to influence society both before and after the conflict by recognizing and properly addressing the issues. International media are often strangers when covering conflicts, as they do not recognize the context. On the other hand, local media are recognized and accepted by society hence they have the ability to amplify or diminish fears. Journalism can escalate conflicts to the extent that the potentially positive influence of media on conflict has been overlooked. The media have the power to hold tensions in check before they get out of control, and to monitor the activities of government, opposition and society. By providing reliable information and reaching the widest audience possible, the media contribute to and promote democratic principles. After a conflict, the media can play a significant role in reconciliation and societal development (Westphal, 2004). The author notes that the media can point to stories that examine the context in which the conflict developed and explain the causes of violence. Reporters should identify common experiences and narratives, and analyze conflict resolution methods and any political manoeuvres. By holding both parties to account during the dispute resolution phase, the media provide the public with a means of making informed judgments about the parties and their actions.

The role of media as an interpreter bears great responsibility and should be executed with care, as there is always a possibility of unintended positive and negative consequences. By merely providing information, without

interpretation, the media may inadvertently motivate citizens to act against their own and their community's best interests. A sterling example of how media's interpretive role can influence public opinion is the coverage of the Vietnam War, which the MacBride Report (1981) described as "the most recent examples of the press's ability to unearth facts, to forge opinion and to encourage the people to act." Williams (1993) relies on this statement, among others, to justify the use of the terms "objective journalism" and "neutral observer." However, the foregoing does not imply that the media cannot be manipulated to make wrong interpretations. For example, McLeod (2009) describes how the western media abused their interpretive role in the run up to the Iraq war, arguing that governments used the media to manufacture misleading information which was accepted with very little questioning. Such situations may lead to conflict between the different roles of media such as investigating, questioning and providing varying versions of official explanations. This instance is an example of the media failing to properly employ its interpretive function of the media, namely, its duty to be vigilant on behalf of the citizenry.

The image of the press as a supplier of factual information is implicitly an image of the press as an educator. We are often inadequately informed to be able to come to just and wise decisions without the press (Fenwick, 1968, p. 1). This is more so considering that only a very small fraction of the public has any real knowledge of any single issue much less a mastery of all issues or subjects yet, every day the Kenyan people and government take decisions on issues on which our lives and survival depend. To make sound decisions, the people must be informed: they depend on the free press. An extension of this role of the reporter includes informing people on what they ought to know (Cohen, 1953).

The advocates of the theory of social responsibility retain the democratic transition that the public ultimately make decisions and they charge the press with the duty of informing, guiding and leading the public in an intelligent discussion. The press has, therefore, the duty to keep the public alert and not to direct attention or the energies to the irrelevant or meaningless (Siebert, 1965, p. 29).

Next to the purveyor of information and education as the basic role of the press in the democratic society, comes interpretation. Notwithstanding, the interpretation implies judgment about the significance of events, it is widely held by reporters to be a necessary part of the news dissemination process, and editors interpret the thoughts 'of the people they serve through editorial columns'. This interpretation function of the press is regarded as an essential component of the news itself. Evidence also shows that there is a distinction between interpretation or explanation on one hand and editorializing or the passing of preferential judgments on the other. Through the newspaper columns, experts analyze plans and policies of government and point out ways to avoid committing mistakes that will not be in the interest of the government and people of Kenya.

A reporter highly regarded by his colleagues has this to say:

My instructions are not to write a story unless I can put into it some analyses and interpretations, otherwise, I stick to straight new reporting. Nevertheless, I have to interpret, explain and advance issues. Often, after a press conference I will start off with interpretative lead, about the significance or meaning of the events, sometimes, I am wrong and sometimes, I am right (Cohen, 1953, p. 26).

While the BBC has argued that explanation is important, it is the task of the reporter to report to the people what is happening in the world and not to colour report which he conveys to his audience; yet the greater use of backgrounders and feature articles and programmes is a movement towards breaking out of what is happening in the world. Birt and Jay called interpreted news "the atomized presentation of events" (Birt & Jay, 1975, p. 27).

This interpretative role of the press has been "forced" on the press in Kenya and the world over because of the growing complexity of the role of the press as well as by technological development in the mass communication field in the recent time.

Internal conflicts do not occur spontaneously but tend to have a history. Local media usually have a deeper understanding of the existing political structures, the participants of the conflict as well as the changes preceding the outbreak of violence. The media can therefore not only influence society before the conflict by recognizing and properly addressing the issue but also afterwards. Unlike international media covering conflicts, local media are a recognized part of society with the ability to accelerate and magnify fears or reduce them. Thus local media can clarify what may initially appear to be an intractable problem. It should not be imagined that only foreigners need interpretations of events during conflicts. In any conflict situation, and especially in the aftermath, there are bound to be diverse opinions over what took place and what should be done in the future. Responsible media helps the public to make sense of the conflict and peace building process, and to build consensus. In the absence of such an interpreter of information, voices of the strongest would be the only ones heard, which would generate resentment and potentially precipitate more violence.

One should not forget that journalism can play a role in escalating conflicts, which also demonstrates the potential for positive purposes. The media have the power to defuse tensions before they even reach a critical point to and keep a critical eye on government, opposition and society. By supplying credible information and reaching a large audience, the media help in managing conflicts and promote democratic principles. In the

aftermath of a conflict, reconciliation and societal development can be encouraged as well (Westphal, 2004). Because modern democracy is such a complicated affair, inevitably there will be some people who cannot comprehend certain aspects of the machinery of government. The media plays an invaluable role in demystifying such processes, and thereby encourages the civic participation of greater numbers of people, which may have advantages in a peace building process, as more citizens will be more familiar with public processes and will be more willing to participate.

1.2 Media Initiative as a Watchdog

The media is often called upon to act as a third party 'watchdog' to inform the public on various problems. The other two parties are the government and the public. Media can reveal hidden stories through investigative reports. An example from the US is of a journalist who exposed a dilapidated, rat-infested, and uncaring military veteran's hospital (Priest & Hull, 2007). This brought to the public's attention how US soldiers are treated before and after their military service. Media productions can play a complementary role in the post conflict reconciliation processes by highlighting critical social issues and encouraging dialogue about them.

The duty to act as a watchdog may sometimes confront the role of merely providing information. In conflict situations, some journalists have renounced standard journalistic practices. For instance, BBC journalist Martin Bell warned that the BBC standard of impartiality and objectivity is rendered irrelevant by the circumstances of war. He expressed his dissatisfaction with reports emerging from Sarajevo which gave equal air-time to both victims and aggressors, and discarded the ideal of absolute objectivity in favour of what he described as journalism of attachment, or engaged journalism (Bell, 1998).

The media have been described as the watchdog of democracy, which is closely connected to their role as the fourth estate, which in contemporary terms describes them as the fourth arm of government. The key characteristic of the media as watchdog is that they speak for the people, represent their interests, and act as a check on government. In the words of Schuepp (2000), a watchdog should defend society, be loyal to it, and attack those who threaten social rights. Indeed, the media can also be described as the "eyes and ears" of the public in their capacity as watchdogs. This is because of their responsibility to inform the public and to uphold human rights (Watson, 1998, p.94). Nevertheless, the watchdog role of media is also open to abuse, from the alternative or sensational media (often referred to as the gutter press). They pretend to be watchdogs, but they engage in misinformation and falsehoods (ICHRP, 2001).

The critical role of a free press in a free society has a long and honourable history. The press, in what is called librarian philosophy, was charged with the duty of keeping government from overstepping its bounds. The press provides the check needed on government that no other institution could provide.

A few journalists try to maintain rigid distinction between news and views. They try to argue mechanically that criticism should come only on editorial page and not in the news columns. Such advocates forget that a reporter can interpret his critical responsibility directly so that critique is by definition news; after all, the fundamental job the press is to check on government operations and to report findings as objectively as possible. And the reporter can perform this critical task by reporting as news the criticism of other people, including other reporters and media houses.

Also the reporter can define his critical role in classic terms as watchdog against arbitrary position, procedure or practices within the governmental policy making structure. On another level, the reporter defines his role as a critic, not in respect to arbitrary practices, but rather in respect to wrong policies. As one columnist remarked "our job is to perceive and point out the main directions of policy even the failings on policy" (Cohen, 1953, p. 34).

Reporters admit to criticizing policy in their stories, and recount with pride the occasions when the press has forced a reconsideration of policies by pointing out inconsistencies and errors. For instance, when the press says there is no real leadership in our policy, the press is saying it in the context of particular stories. Then the issue becomes to find out what a lack of leadership really means. Also by asking question as to whether a policy is soundly based, the press may force a reconsideration of it. In other words, by pointing out what is not being done, the press causes it to be done.

Journalists do not shy away from difficult, sensitive or uncomfortable topics such as human rights abuses. In this context, journalists can be considered the helpers of all human rights defenders for they have committed themselves to ethical and moral standards in reporting as well as to addressing important topics in way that can be productive for everyone involved (Berry, 2008). Thus the media do not, and should not, choose what to report, as by keeping silent in the face of abuses, the media becomes complicit in their commission, and thus loses credibility. While there is no media that is correct all of the time (as demonstrated by the apologies that media houses sometimes have to make) the media's role as a watchdog depends on a high level of trust between the media and the public. There is no corresponding level of trust between media and government, because the government is often the perpetrator of abuses, and government, by its very nature, is opaque to scrutiny from members of the public. Thus the media's watchdog role is crucial in "keeping the government honest."

Assistance from public opinion is and always has to be the goal of any reporting since without reaching a broad

audience that can take action, the effect of the media is limited at best. Therefore, non-democratic governments try to harass and persecute journalists in order to keep them in line and prevent them from exposing misconduct and abuse of power. Increasingly, this practice can be observed in democratic countries as well and is being heavily criticized (Freedomhouse, 2010). It is noteworthy that despite the fact of democracy being the rule of a majority, a truly democratic framework also demands and ensures that those elected must be accountable. This includes protecting against gender discrimination, protecting the rights of minorities, protecting freedom of speech, and more importantly they do not have the right to justify any transgressions by endorsing new laws (Deutsche Welle, 2008). This shows that the media does not exercise its watchdog initiative in its own name, but at the request and behest of the citizenry. It is the activism of the citizen, for example, through letters to the editor that gives the media the mandate to ask tough questions about government.

Citizen involvement is also key in setting the public agenda. Occasionally, the media will act as the gatekeeper of public issues, and sometimes it will respond to the groundswell of public opinion. This synergy between the media and the public can often be used to affect policy, as the subsequent section will show. The media performs the watchdog initiative especially in political transparency and the fight against corruption. As the fourth estate, the media provide the checks and balances in relation to the three branches of government, as created by the Constitution. Media are particularly important in facilitating nation-building, especially of post-colonial societies and those experiencing ethnic and religious diversities.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

Majority of the literature on conflict prevention and peace building (Bratic, 2006; Hamelink, 2002; Wolfsfied, 2004) holds a dismal opinion on the role of media initiatives in the peace building processes. Existing literature portrays the media as vital in reporting and generating discussion on conflicts (Bratic, 2006). Scholars on the conflict prevention and peace building phenomenon conclude that the crisis is deeply rooted in political and ethnic violence and based on negative ethnicity that is fuelled by politicians. However, media initiatives in the conflict, as well as its ability to mediate in peace building are not adequately tackled. Much has been done on its role in escalating conflict than building peace.

There are still serious inter communal conflicts in Africa leading to loss of lives, destruction of property and thus economic stagnation. There are many examples from Kenya, including the Tana Delta, Massai and Kisii Border, Kericho/Kisii, Baragoi among other inter-communal conflicts. In most of these cases, the media has been accused of facilitating these conflicts and not using its privileged position to prevent conflicts between communities. Based on Kenya's post-election violence of 2007/2008 following the release of the disputed results, IMS (2009) opines that three views emerged over the role of media that it failed to stoke the violence by failing to report media actually fuelled the violence. It showed the roles of media as both positive and negative and provides a linkage between media freedom and human dignity. However, if it is possible to use the media for a bad purpose, then it should also be possible to use it for a good purpose. No wonder the state censored live news coverage immediately conflict erupted in 2008.

Uasin Gishu County being cosmopolitan experienced violence in the previous elections cycles and had serious conflicts resulting in deaths, displacements and loss of property. In the field of Communication, it is of interest to know empirically the role of media in peace building considering the continual escalation of conflicts, particularly, in Uasin Gishu County and even globally.

1.4 Limitations of the Study

The findings of this study are specific to the context of inter communal relations in Uasin Gishu County, Kenya. The possibility for the general applicability of the findings is limited by the scope, the sample, and the cultural context of this study. Although there could be common features, the findings may not have general applicability to other systems. Despite these limitations, it should be noted that a research study of this nature would hopefully contribute to the generation of new ideas and perspectives about conflict prevention and peace building. The study will be a further step in the scientific analysis of role of media in conflict prevention and peace building.

2. Materials and Methods

This study was carried out in Uasin Gishu County that lies in the mid-west of Rift Valley in Kenya. The County borders six counties, namely Elgeyo Marakwet County to the East, Tranzoia to the north, Kericho to the south, Baringo to south East, Nandi to the south west and Bungoma to west. The County derived its name from the Illwusin-Kishu, a Maasai clan that used it for grazing their animals. With the coming of the colonialist the name was coined as Uasin Gishu. The County is largely a cosmopolitan hosting the Kalenjin who are the majority. Other communities with notable presence include the Kikuyu, Luo, Luhya, Kamba, Kisii among others. It has a population of 894,179 according to 2009 census report.

This study was guided by the mixed methods approach that combines both the quantitative and qualitative research. This study adopted an integrative mixed methods design which affords a rigorous and integrative analysis of qualitative textual evidence and quantitative numeric data as observed by Schwandt (1994). The study utilized descriptive case study design. This is because a good research design ensures that the information

collected is consistent with the objectives of the study and that the procedures regarding data collection is accurate and efficient (Kratwohl, 1998).

The target population for the study included editors and journalists from Radio, Television and Newspapers, public that is made up of citizen's opinion leaders and religious organizations and policy category includes media analysts drawn from academia, NGO and KNCHR. The study adopted the stratified and simple random sampling procedures in selecting the required sample for this study. A sample size of 210 respondents representing 50% of target population made up of media representatives (composed of editors and journalists from radio, television and newspapers) in Kenya, public made up of (opinion leader and religious organizations) and policy category includes (media analysts drawn from academia, NGO and KNCHR) were selected for the study. The sample covered both gender in equal representation of the study area.

The study used the following instruments to collect the data: Questionnaire, Interview Schedule, Focus Group Discussions, personal observations and Survey of documentary records methods. The data for the study was coded for completeness and accuracy of information at the end of every field data collection day and before storage. Data capturing was done using Microsoft Excel. This is a study of relationship of various variables. After the data collection a correlational analysis was performed to ascertain the existence of relationship between the variables. The data was analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 18.0. Descriptive statistics such as frequency distribution was used to describe the characteristics of the media in conflict prevention and peace building as well as to profile the respondents' personal information.

3. Results

3.1 Prevailing Status of the Media as Information Provider and Interpreter

The study focused on the effects of the media's initiative as information provider and interpreter. The responses to the items were elicited on a 5-point scale (1-strongly disagree, 2-disagree, 3-undecided, 4-agree, 5-strongly agree).

The results presented in Table 1 indicate that respondents perceived the media as being active in its initiative as information provider and interpreter. In particular, they tended to agree that the media helps to establish networks of information and facilitates the maintenance of a collective memory (M=4.44, SD=0.674); that the media provides them with important information about the environment (M=3.99, SD=0.990); that the media warns about potential causes of conflict (M=3.97, SD=0.866); that the media assists them to make sense of events (M=3.94, SD=0.985); that the media responds to imminent problems (M=3.77; SD=1.170); that media interprets events beyond physical realm (M=3.68, SD=1.098); and that the media persuades the audience with information disseminators point of view (M=3.64, SD=1.209). The respondents were however undecided on how other groups in society are judged based on media (M=3.22, SD=1.293).

Table 1: Prevailing Status of Media Initiative as Information Provider and Interpreter

	Mean	Std. Deviation
Media provides people with important information about their environment	3.99	.990
Media respond to more imminent problems	3.77	1.170
Judge other groups in society based on the media	3.22	1.293
Media motivate citizens decisions about whether to choose political to vote for in elections	3.64	1.378
Media interpret events beyond the physical realm	3.68	1.098
Media assists people to make sense of events	3.94	.985
Media persuades the audience with information disseminators' point of view	3.64	1.209
Media acts like an information early warning system to warn about these potential causes of conflict	3.97	.866
Media helps to establish networks of information and facilitate the maintenance of a 'collective memory'	4.44	.674

The results reported in the table were further supported by the interviews conducted. When asked to state how media initiative as information provider affected conflict prevention and peace building in inter-communal relations, close to 90% of the respondents indicated that the media helps different communities understand each others' diversity. It was, however, feared that some people in the study area had little or no access to media.

In addition, when asked to state the ways the media as an information interpreter influences conflict prevention and peace building several aspects were raised. Mainly, the respondents noted that the media ensures the audience get the peace messages in simple language which they clearly understood. Besides, they argued that the media sets the agenda for conflict prevention as well as peace building, and giving educative measures.

3.2 The Media Initiative as Watchdog

The study further sought to establish the effects of the media's initiative as a watchdog on conflict prevention

and peace building. Media as a watchdog was measured using nine items. Results presented in the Table 2 shows that respondents appeared to agree that the media was proactive initiative as a watchdog. In particular, respondents agreed that the media brought out hidden stories to the public (M=4.45, SD=0.627); that the media as watchdog provided feedback to the public on local problems (M=4.31, SD=0.825); that the media acts as a peace promoter (M=4.03, SD=1.070); that the media manages expectations, while building trust in state institutions (M=4.02, SD=0.935); that the media sets the agenda, filters issues and tries to maintain balance of views (M=3.96, SD=1.007); that the media promotes particular sets of ideologies (M=3.89, SD=1.070), and that the media aids the formation of an inclusive national identity and fosters a participatory and engaged citizenry (M=3.79, SD=1.465). Respondents were, however, not sure as to whether the media helps build trust and prevention of community destruction (3.49, SD=1.465).

Table 2: Perceptions of Media Initiative as Watchdog

Media Initiative as a Watchdog	Mean	Std. Deviation
Media acts as watchdog which provides feedback to the public on local problems	4.31	.825
Media can bring hidden stories out to the public	4.45	.627
Media sets the agendas, filters issues and tries to maintain a balance of views	3.96	1.007
Media portray themselves as "balanced and fair"	3.77	1.174
Media promote particular sets of ideologies	3.89	1.052
Media acts as a peace promoter	4.03	1.070
Media involves in activities that managing expectations, building trust in an oversight of state institutions	4.02	.935
Media aiding the formation of an inclusive national identity and fostering a participatory and engaged citizenry	3.75	1.301
Media help in building of trust and prevention of community destruction	3.49	1.465

Once again the analyzed results regarding the media as watchdog were, reflected in the results from the interview schedule. When asked to state how the Media's initiative as a watchdog affects conflict prevention and peace building, the respondents indicated that the media helps to identify perpetrators of conflicts and brings them to the public limelight. Besides, they concurred that the media enhances conflict prevention and peace building by overseeing and suggesting solutions to possible conflict situations.

4. Discussion

The research sought to find out extent to which the media's initiative as information provider and interpreter influence conflict prevention and peace building. Through analyses of questionnaire together with the analysis of the interview schedule, the study identified that respondents perceived the media as active in its role as an information provider and interpreter. In particular, they tended to agree, that the media helps to establish networks of information and facilitates the maintenance of a collective memory. The results were further supported by the interviews conducted. Close to 90% of the respondents indicated that the media helps different communities understand each other's diversity. Furthermore, the respondents noted that the media ensures the audience get the peace messages in simple language which they clearly understood. They also argued that the media sets the agenda for conflict prevention as well as peace building, and giving educative measures.

Regarding the relationship between media initiative as information provider and conflict prevention and peace building, the study established that there is a positive correlation between the two. Indeed the high value in the media as information providers and interpreter ($\beta=0.200$, $p<0.01$) indicates that the correlation is quite strong and highly significant. The study therefore indicates significant standardized coefficient for media as information providers and interpreter. One per cent (1%) increase in media efforts towards informing and interpreting is likely to boost conflict prevention and peace building by 0.2%.

The findings regarding the media as information provider and interpreter are consistent with the findings by Price and Thompson (2002) indicating that the media is overwhelmingly influential in determining the public agenda and framing boundaries for public discourse. Besides, the findings also support the findings by Bratic and Schirch (2007) that people are likely to make political decisions based on what is disseminated in the media. The findings that some people don't have access to media and are not able to benefit from media information concurs with the views of Bratic and Schirch (2007) that even the best designed media content will not work if it does not reach its largest audience.

The findings regarding the media as an interpreter of information, further supports the findings by Bratic and Schirch that the mass media with particular emphasis on the electronic media provides people with important information about their environment and gives them an opportunity to respond to proximate challenges. These views support the views of (Price & Thompson, 2002) that the media is overwhelmingly influential in determining the public agenda and framing the boundaries of public discourse.

The research also sought to establish the effects of media's watch dog initiative on conflict prevention and peace

building. The study finding show that respondents appeared to agree that the media was proactive in its initiative as a watchdog. In particular, respondents agreed that the media: brought out hidden stories to the public; as watchdog provided feedback to the public on local problems; acts as a peace promoter; manages expectations, while building trust in state institutions; sets the agenda, filters issues and tries to maintain balance of views; promotes particular sets of ideologies, and aids the formation of an inclusive national identity and fosters a participatory and engaged citizenry.

Once again, the analyzed results regarding the media as watchdog were, reflected in the results from the interview schedule. The majority of the respondents indicated that the media helps to identify perpetrators of conflicts and bring them to the public limelight. Furthermore, the multiple regression analysis indicate that media as watchdog was a significant predictors of conflict prevention and peace building ($\beta=0.195$, $p<0.01$).

These findings relating to the media as watchdog are consistent with other similar findings. According to Schuepp (2000), a key characteristic of the media is that they speak for the people, represent their interests, and act as a check on government. Consequently, the media is expected to defend the society, be loyal to it and attack those who threaten social rights. The findings also support the findings by Watson (1998), that the Media's responsibility is to inform the public and to uphold human rights.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

Within the context of information provision, interpretation and as a watchdog for society, the media influences society in many dimensions. As gatekeepers, they decide what information gets to the public; as watchdog and they represent the interests of the people against powerful interests. In economic development, the media provide the enabling environment for businesses and investments to flourish. In addition, they assist in empowering economically disadvantaged groups in the society; at the same time contribute to societal economic growth. In social development, the media can help fight corruption, prevent communal conflicts and provide useful information on disasters. The media are particularly useful for public health campaigns, especially against children diseases, communicable diseases, and in favour of a healthy environment.

In reporting, the media must take cognizance of national security and the welfare of the people. Media practitioners must not be influenced by the interests of ownership, both government and corporate. More media outfits should be established in rural communities to facilitate development and provide more access to information. This will assist in reducing incidences of false or negative reporting.

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