# Media Audience as Consumers of Ethnopolitical Journalism in Kenya

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# Abstract

The objectives of the study were to interrogate the utility of ethnopolitical Journalism to media consumers (audience) in Kenya. The study relied on the political economy of media theory by Vincent Mosco the propaganda theory by Herman and Chomsky and the theory of agenda setting by McCombs and Shaw The study used descriptive research design with population of the study drawn from Nakuru Town Sub-County. The researcher used observation schedules to obtain data from the televised political analyses shows and propaganda political videos clip. Interview schedules were used for media practitioners (editors, reporters and media sellers) and politicians (MPs and MCAs), while unstructured questionnaires were used for the media consumers (audience). All qualitative data were processed and analysed using the critical interpretative approach, while the quantitative data were presented descriptively in tables, graphs, charts and percentages generated using SPSS software. The study findings indicated that the mainstream media employed ethnopolitical journalism in television analyses, which were largely ethnic considering; limiting panellists to issues around two political sides and five ethnic groups. The study recommends that media, being the most influential cultural institution and player in the political economy, self-regulates to minimise ethnopolitics dissemination. The output of this study adds to the existing knowledge in communication and media studies and the political economy of mass media. The findings should be able to inform policy formulation among the mass media industry and media regulatory bodies in Kenya.

**Keywords**: Media audience, Ethnopolitical journalism, Media consumers

**Introduction**

In the analysis of Ray (2014), most news in our media are negative or based on the negative and is replete with crime, scandals, terror activities, disasters or negative human relations such as racism, ethnicity, tribalism among others. The question this study was interested in was whether media creates negative content or it responds to the audiences’ preference for negative information. Notably, Diamandis (2016) argues that the media does both; the readership and audience habit show strong preferences for bad news (such as ethnic discourse) to the good news because the audience is always looking for shocking, electrifying, and abnormal content as news. A study by Robinson (2007) consolidated 165 surveys in the United States and concluded that news that has bad news ranks high in the United States. Robinson (2007) reports that ‘the national news audience does not shift its news dies nearly so quickly as news organisations shift their news menu’, a position that recent reports such as by Rainie (2010), Pew Research Center US Politics and Policy (2017, 2018) continued to support. Along this line of thought, McCombs, and Marcus (2011) intimate that against the thinking of many that the audience can shape the way media presents news, he argues that what the media covers shapes the audiences preference of content. This means that the media has the power to shape the opinion and the preference of what is considered news; bringing on board the agenda-setting role of the media. It was the interest of this study to examine the Kenyan mass media reporting during elections in the glasses of agenda setting theory and if the Chapel Hill experiment still holds. The results were in the affirmative; showing mass media as manufacturers of ethnopolitical consent.

**Literature review**

Critical analysis of Diamandis (2016) shows that the mind of the audience, bombarded with too much information every minute, selects that which is important for survival. Echoing McCombs and Marcus (2011), Diamandis (2016) demonstrate that our minds call attention to negative stories and the media knowing that this is the behaviour of the audience, and takes advantage of it. This explains the reason why the majority of the news in the media is negative. In Africa, one of the most dominant threats, especially after elections, is violence and in most cases it is born of ethnic differences. Besides, the predicament and tragedy of African states be it corruption, violence and most political, social and economic evils are birthed under ethnicity. For this reason, ethnicity is demonstrated, even in this study as a cardinal threat to African democracy, if such a republic model exists.

Kahneman (2011) seemingly is a forerunner of Diamandis (2016); preferring to argue that human beings are always wired to cognitive bias, which keeps them negative because they tend to give information with negative content than with positive content. Rathje (2017) confirms in his analysis of US 2016 elections political frames that the confirmation bias on the side of the receiver of the messages, which tends to select only negative information and labelling it as more important ( as demonstrated by Kahneman, 2011) confirms our preexisting negative notions. This study concludes based on the above analyses, which the media consumers’ minds are always searching for negative news among the choices provided; in Kenyan situation such content is preferably ethnopolitics.

Ethnopolitical journalism starts with a framing that media is providing the best for the interest of both the public and the politician. For example, the 2013 elections were closely monitored and the news media sponsored and executed their first presidential debate in which Kenyans were given a chance to hear, from a common platform, what their prospective leaders had to offer (Ndonye & Ogola, 2015). This study notes that, such gestures by the news media functions to consolidate reputation and image and the regard that the advertiser and the media consumer should hold media in their supply of content. The other example is the fact that especially in Kenya, most investigative stories regarding government malfeasance emanate from private media such as Kenya television network (KTN), Nation Television (NTV) and K24. This way, media is projected as supposedly more responsive to the public demands in terms of reporting, entertaining and educating (Ouma, 2018) because they give the public what the public want. Moehler and Singh (2011) therefore conclude that for these reasons, the citizens’ trust media that give them content that concerns them.

The media and advertising (political or otherwise) have a long history since the realisation of the power of mass communication (Arens et al., 2017). Since it is aimed at the mass audience, it is a mass communication promotional activity. The communication process releases persuasive information for products, which could be goods, services, and or idea. In the media industry, information, which mostly is in the form of news, is considered and treated as goods for sale. In this study, this commodity value was examined under the tenets of political economy of media theory and the conclusion was that ethnopolitics and ethnopolitical journalism produces contents of high economic value to the mass media, either directly or indirectly. The corporate world has sponsors who pay media houses for advertisement products; just like the political world has political sponsors who pay for political promotion for their preferred candidates. In political advertising, therefore, mass communication is considered an important venture because its whole goal is to pass messages to potential buyers of goods and services. Stole (2013) has recommended that among the many marketing communication strategies, advertising is the most popular and effective mass communication when done through the right targeting media. In the last two elections in Kenya, starting 2013, the political public relations have been upped, with evidence of formation of coalitions to marshal resources and massive budgets allocated by political parties on all mass media forms for purposes of political PR and Promotion.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

## Utility of Ethno-Political Journalism to Media Consumers

In order to establish the utility of ethno-political journalism to the Kenyan audience during the elections of 2017, the research tested the audience in this section on ten aspects namely, their ethnicity, their region of origin, their party affiliation, their preferred media during electoral period, the kind of news they expect during electoral period, their take on the issue of ethnicity and media coverage, the ethnicity of the MCA they voted for in 2017, the ethnicity of the MP they voted for in 2017, their most preferred headlines from the given list and their preferred media in Kenya.

### Ethnicity of the Respondent

In order to trace ethnic responses, he researcher sought to find out from the beginning the ethnicity of the respondent. The results are as per table 6.1

Table 6. 1 Ethnicity of Respondent

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Ethnicity | Frequencies | Percentages |
| Luo | 6 | 20.0% |
| Kikuyu | 6 | 20.0% |
| Kamba | 2 | 6.7% |
| Kalenjin | 8 | 26.7% |
| Luhya | 4 | 13.3% |
| Kisii | 4 | 13.3% |
| Totals | 30 | 100.0% |

Table 6.1 shows that out of the 30 respondents for this part, 40 Percent were from 2 ethnic groups; the Luo 20 percent and kikuyu 20 Percent. Majority of the ethnic group is Kalenjin with 26.7 Percent while the rest are Kisii 13.3 Percent, Luhya 13.3 Percent, and Kamba 6.7 Percent. This statistic is extremely critical as it shows the composition of ethnic groups in Kenya by their numbers. In Kenya, the top five communities are the Kikuyu, Luhya, Luo, Kalenjin and Kamba and these communities are the ones that get the biggest share of national politics whether the ruling regime or the opposition. The ethno political oligarchy is determined by their coalitions and alliances. Therefore, their political opinions and views are to be of significance for this study. The only community that comes in because of the nature of the study area is the Kisii. Not among the largest communities but have a firm standing politically and they are evenly distributed throughout Kenya and especially in Nakuru where they dominate Nakuru west constituency; having a very strong backing of the opposition politics.

### Respondents’ Region of Origin

The researcher also wanted to find out from the respondents their region of origin. The results are summarised in table 6.2

Table 6. 2 Respondents’ Region

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Region | Frequencies | Percentages |
| Rift Valley | 22 | 73.3% |
| Central | 3 | 10.0% |
| Nyanza | 2 | 6.7% |
| Western | 2 | 6.7% |
| Eastern | 1 | 3.3% |
| Totals | 30 | 100.0% |

Table 6.2 shows that 73.3 Percent of the respondents are permanent residents of Rift Valley Region, 10.0 Percent are residents of Central Region, 6.7 Percent from Nyanza, 6.7 Percent from Western, 3.3 Percent from Eastern Region and none from Coast Region. The justification for this requirement is that Kenyan politics are regionalised. The Western region, Coast, Lower Eastern and Luo Nyanza blocks are largely opposition while the Central, Rift Valley, North Eastern have been pro-government.

### Respondents’ Party Affiliation

The researcher sought to find out the party affiliation of the respondent and the results were tabulated in table 6.3

Table 6. 3 Respondents’ Party Affiliation

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Party affiliation | Frequencies | Percentages |
| NASA | 12 | 40.0% |
| Jubilee | 14 | 46.7% |
| None | 1 | 3.3% |
| Others\* | 3 | 10.0% |
| Totals | 30 | 100.0% |

Table 6.3 shows that 46.6 Percent of the respondents were affiliated to Jubilee Party while 40.0 Percent were affiliated to NASA coalition. Only 10.0 Percent were affiliated to other parties and 3.3 Percent said they had no political party affiliation. These statistics are microcosmic of the national and regional politics. Given that the study area was Rift Valley (Nakuru County), the largest portion was expected to have been Jubilee affiliated and this would have been opposite if the study area was in NASA strongholds such as Western and Nyanza regions.

### Respondents’ Preferred Media during Electoral Period

The researcher also sought to find out the respondents preferred media during electoral period and the responses were summarised in table 6.3

Table 6. 4 Respondents’ Preferred Media during Electioneering Period

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Media | Frequencies | Percentages |
| Television | 6 | 20.0% |
| Radio | 12 | 40.0% |
| Newspaper | 3 | 10.0% |
| Others\* | 9 | 30.0% |
| Totals | 30 | 100.0% |

Table 6.4 shows that 40 Percent respondents preferred radio, 30 Percent preferred other media, 20 Percent preferred television and 10 Percent preferred newspaper. The other media preference comes at the heist of internet and internet enabled gadgets, which largely constitutes the social media and blogosphere. The others constituting 30 percent are most likely the young generation, which finds new media more preferable compared to the traditional media. This finding substantiates Ndonye (2014a) study, which concluded that new media is convenient for political communication among the young generation in the 21st century. The radio large preference could explain why the largest budget 57 Percent for the 2017 elections went into radio advertising compared to other media.

### Kind of News Expected by Respondents during Electoral period

The researcher also sought to establish the expected kind of news by the respondents at the time of elections. The responses are as per table 6.5.

Table 6.5 Kind of News Expected by Respondents during Electoral Period

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Type of news | Frequencies | Percentages |
| Political | 26 | 86.7% |
| Business | 1 | 3.3% |
| Sports | 1 | 3.3% |
| Others\* | 2 | 6.7% |
| Totals | 30 | 100.0% |

Table 6.4 shows that 86.7 Percent expected political news as compared to 3.3 Percent who chose business and sports and 6.7 Percent for other types of news. The expectation of the audience is critical for media selling and buying during elections time and it determines the kind of news content that the news media hunt for during this time.

### Ethnicity and media coverage during campaigns

The researcher sought to find out if the audience was aware of the specific content dominant during electoral period and the results were tabulated in table 6.6.

Table 6.6 Ethnicity and media coverage during campaigns

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Statements | Strongly disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly agree | Total |
| The most common content from media during elections in Kenya is ethnic | 0(0.0%) | 0(0.0%) | 2(6.7%) | 11(36.7%) | **17(56.7%)** | 30(100.0%) |
| I look for ethnic content in media during elections | 1(3.3%) | 2(6.7%) | 3(10.0%) | 9(30.0%) | 15(50.0%) | 30(100.0%) |
| Politicians who capitalise on ethnic politics are widely covered by media | 1(3.3%) | 2(6.7%) | 1(3.3%) | 4(13.3%) | 22(73.3%) | 30(100.0%) |
| I depend on media reporting to determine my leaders, both at county and national levels | 0(0.0%) | 2(6.7%) | 1(3.3%) | 11(36.7%) | 16(53.3%) | 30(100.0%) |

Table 6.6 shows that the respondents, recorded strong agreement with the statements provided. They agreed that ‘most common content from media during elections in Kenya is ethnic’ at 56.7 Percent. Given that politics in Kenya is about ethnicity (Munene, 2013), the dominant content is therefore expected to be full of ethnic undertones and overtones.

The respodents also agreed that they “look for ethnic content in media during elections” at 50.0 Percent The audience as consumers of news content is seen to determine what to be given. The question as to who set such an agenda is an egg-chicken one but the results shows that in Kenya ethnic content is normalised and media takes is as an item of use value during electioneering period. This normalisation explains why the respondents also strongly agreed, “Politicians who capitalise on ethnic politics are widely covered by media” at 73.3 Percent In their effort to supply demand news content to the audience, the media ensures that their news content carries the wants of their audience, or they find it already unavoidably irresistible. This reporting goes a long way in shaping the behavior of the voters as they strongly agreed they “depend on media reporting to determine leaders, both at county and national levels” at 53.3 Percent At this level, media becomes a critical influence in the way citizens behave and express their political worldviews and choices and therefore the final national and regional political formations and their sustainability.

### Ethnicity of the MCA the Respondent Voted for in 2017

Respondents were requested to indicate the ethnicity of the MCA whom they voted for in the 2017 general elections, not necessarily the ones who won. The results show that majority of the respondents voted for candidates from their own ethnicity as depicted in Figure 6.1

Figure 6. 1 Ethnicity of the candidate that was voted by the respondent as MCA

### Ethnicity of the MP the Respondent Voted for in 2017

Respondents were also requested to indicate the ethnicity of the Members of National Assembly (MP) whom they voted for in the 2017 general elections. The results show an even greater ethnic inclination on voting patterns as depicted in Figure 6.2

Figure 6. 2 Ethnicity of the candidate that respondent voted in as MP

### Respondents’ Preferred Headlines from the Given List

The respondents’ preference of selected headlines was of interest since the same may give indications about ethnic content preference.

**Ethnic Content versus Development Content Preference**

Two headlines that were presented had ethnic inclined content while the other two related with development/innovation. The results are summarised in Table 6.7

Table 6.7 Respondents’ preferred headlines

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Statements | Frequencies | Percentages |
| Kalonzo ditches Raila | 20 | 66.7% |
| President launches a new hospital in Eldoret | 15 | 43.3% |
| Reasons why Kikuyus will never vote Ruto in 2022 | 21 | 70.0% |
| A surgery’s breakthrough: Doctors in Kenyatta hospital separate twins | 10 | 26.7% |

Table 4.18 shows that 70 Percent preferred reading a headline that had the term Kikuyu and Ruto while 66.7 Percent preferred reading content on Kalonzo and Raila. The results show that 43.3 Percent of the respondents were interested the story about new hospital launch while a only 26.7 Percent preferred reading about a surgeons breakthrough at Kenyatta hospital.

**Preference of Given Headlines Based on Political Affiliation**

Further analysis of the choice of the stories show a more delicate and detailed selection criteria considering the political affiliations of the respondents as in table 6.8 below.

Table 6. 8 Respondents’ Preferred Headlines Based on Political Affiliation

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Political Affiliation | | | | | | |  |
| Statements | **NASA** | **Jubilee** | | **None** | **Others** | | | **Total** |
| Kalonzo ditches Raila | 4 (19.0%) | 15 (71.4%) | | 1 (4.8%) | 1 (4.8%) | | | 21 (100.0%) |
| President launches a new hospital in Eldoret | 2 (15.4%) | 9 (69.2%) | | 0 (0.0%) | 2 (15.4%) | | | 13 (100.0%) |
| Reasons why Kikuyus will never vote Ruto in 2022 | 13 (65.0%) | 5 (25.0%) | 1 (5.0%) | | | 1 (5.0%) | 20 (100.0%) | | |
| A surgery’s breakthrough: Doctors in Kenyatta hospital separate twins | 3 (37.5%) | 3 (37.5%) | | 0 (0.0%) | 2 (25.0%) | | | 8 (100.0%) |

**Kalonzo ditches Raila**

This headline is bad news to NASA followers and good news to jubilee. As a results, the 71.4 Percent of Jubilee preferred reading it compared to a lesser 19.0 Percent NASA followers who preferred it.

**President launches a new hospital in Eldoret**

This headline is for a story that would be giving Jubilee party a political milestone and that explains why 69.2 Percent of Jubilee affiliates read it while only 15.4 Percent meaning NASA would rather avoid reading a story that seems to drum for their opponents.

**Reasons why Kikuyus will never vote Ruto in 2022**

This story headline is bad news to Jubilee and given the avoidance behavior, only 25.0 Percent of Jubilee affiliates preferred it while 65.0 Percent of NASA preferred to hear and read about the fall of the jubilee.

**A surgery’s breakthrough: Doctors in Kenyatta hospital separate twins**

This headline points to a politically neutral story about the surgeon’s breakthrough at Kenyatta hospital. The preference for the story is balanced receiving equal percentage of a low of 37.5 Percent. It shows that during a time like this, stories without political taste have limited place in the minds of the audience.

### 6.2.9 Respondents’ Preferred Media in Kenya

The respondents were required to indicate their preferred media by brands from the list provided and their preferences were analysed against their political affiliations. Multiple choices were allowed. The results are given in table 6.9.

Table 6. 9 Respondents’ preferred media in Kenya

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Political Affiliation | | | |  |
| Media(Group) | **NASA** | **Jubilee** | **None** | **Others** | **Total** |
| Nation Media Group e.g. NTV and Daily Nation | 3(37.5%) | 5(62.5%) | 0(0.0%) | 0(0.0%) | 8(100.0%) |
| Standard group e.g. KTN and Standard Newspaper | 4(80.0%) | 1(20.0%) | 0(0.0%) | 0(0.0%) | 5(100.0%) |
| Media Max e.g. K24 and The People Daily Newspaper | 2(40.0%) | 2(40.0%) | 0(0.0%) | 1(20.0%) | 5(100.0%) |
| Royal Media Services e.g. Citizen TV | 3(37.5%) | 4(50.0%) | 0(0.0%) | 1(12.5%) | 8(100.0%) |
| Kenya Broadcasting Corporation (KBC) | 1(33.3%) | 2(66.7%) | 0(0.0%) | 0(0.0%) | 3(100.0%) |
| Totals | 12(40.0%) | 14(46.7%) | 1(3.3%) | 3(10.0%) | 30(100.0%) |

Table 6.9 shows that out of the eight (8) respondents who preferred NTV and Daily Nation products, 62.5 Percent were affiliated to Jubilee while 37.5 Percent were affiliated to NASA. On the other hand, out of the five (5) respondents who preferred KTN and the Standard Newspaper 80 Percent were affiliated to NASA while 20 Percent were affiliated to Jubilee. The differences in preference emanates from the media geopolitical coverage. The daily nation and the products from Nation Media Group have been found to do well in Jubilee-affiliated regions as the media house remains uncritical and largely pro-government and thus, giving content that is palatable to Jubilee affiliates. On the other hand, the Standard Group through its media outlets has been critical to the government and the ruling regime, taking the voice of the opposition. As a result, they have curved a niche in the opposition zones as they are deemed to speak for the opposition. As a result, the opposition affiliates prefer the media that speaks their minds and for them.

## 

**Discussion and Conclusion**

**Respondents’ Ethnicity, Region of Origin and Party Affiliation**

The findings indicated that the ethnic composition of the sampled audience tended to reflect the national ethnic numbers with the Kalenjin at 26.7 Percent, Luo 20 Percent, Kikuyu 20 Percent, Luhya 13.3 Percent, Kisii 6.65 Percent, Kamba 6.65 Percent, and others at 6.65 Percent. This demographic is microcosmic of the larger population in Kenya that places the five ethnic groups at the top of others in terms of numbers. These findings are in line with demographics from the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS, 2010) statistic of the 2009 national population census showing that ethnically, the Kikuyu leads at 17 percent, followed by Luhya at 14 percent, Kalenjin (which was not consolidated as a tribe in 1962 census) at 13 percent, Luo at 12 percent and Kamba at 10 percent. The demographics of ethnic numbers in Kenya remain the same even with sampled populations as for the study. This agrees with Morgan (2000) who recorded that since the national census of 1962, the ethnic geography in Kenya remains constant.

The findings also indicated that 73.3 Percent of the respondents were from Rift Valley Region, 10.0 Percent from Central Region, 6.7 Percent from Nyanza, 6.7 Percent from Western, 3.3 Percent from Eastern Region and none from Coast Region or from other regions. Given that the study was carried out in Nakuru County, it is expected that majority of the respondents are predominantly Kalenjin although Nakuru is a cosmopolitan town. The findings also indicated that 46.6 Percent of the respondents were affiliated to Jubilee Party while 40.0 Percent were affiliated to NASA coalition. Only 10.0 Percent were affiliated to other parties and 3.3 Percent said they had no political party affiliation. The political geography of Kenya has been stable over the last ten years with the central, upper eastern and rift valley remaining as a united voting bloc while Nyanza, western and Mombasa and lower eastern making another voting bloc.

**Respondents’ Preferred Media and Party Affiliation**

The findings indicate that the audience most preferred radio (40.0 Percent), television (20.0 Percent), newspaper (10 Percent) and 30 Percent preferred other media such as internet, social media. The preference of radio has been there traditionally because it is considered the most egalitarian media with the United States Nielsen Report of 2017 indicating that radio had the highest audience base of 93 percent (Harper, 2018).

The findings on the preferred specific media outlet in Kenya show that, out of the eight (8) respondents who chose Nation media group (NMG) 62.5 Percent were Jubilee affiliates and 37.5 Percent were NASA affiliates. On the other hand, out of the five (5) respondents who preferred Standard Group (SG) 80 Percent were affiliated to NASA while 20 Percent were affiliated to Jubilee. This is a clear indication that media in Kenya provided content to their target audience based on region of origin, which definitely falls within ethnic blocks. For a long time, media has been subtly and explicitly addressing specific audiences and in Kenya, they target ethno-political blocs. This agrees with the Pew Research Centre (2004) findings that in the US, news media display partisan political coverage with leading media houses such as Fox News Channel being popular with the political conservatives and Republicans while CNN providing a soft landing among Republicans and independents.

The findings indicate that 46.6 Percent of the respondents were Jubilee Party affiliates, 40.0 Percent were NASA coalition affiliates, 10.0 Percent indicated they support other parties, and 3.3 Percent said they had no political party affiliation by the time of data collection. Given the area of study, which is largely Jubilee bloc, the demographics are expected to favour Jubilee party.

**Respondents’ Expected Content during Electoral Period**

The findings indicated strong agreement with the statement that the respondents “depended on media reporting to determine leaders, both at county and national levels” at 53.3 Percent. McCombs and Show support this finding in their agenda setting conceptualisation which holds that the mass media determines the issues that the public see as salient as demonstrated in their ‘Chapel Hill Study’. These issues shape their affiliations and later voting behavior.

On the audience expectations during the electoral period, 86.7 Percent of the audience expected political news and content, 3.3 Percent selected business and sports, and 6.7 Percent indicated they expected other types of news. That 56.7 Percent of the respondents agreed with the statement that ‘most common content from media during elections in Kenya is ethnic’ is evident of the media’s influence in setting the agenda during this time and normalising it. The treatment of political news in this study resonates with the recent growth of political news as a pop culture whose consumption across the media is remarkably high (Velarde, 2013; Zverina, 2013; Lucia, 2017). Lucia (2017), specifically, notes that in 2016 US elections Chartbeat showed that there was a rise in political coverage and readership and media was looking for writers who are able to write well both on culture and politics. Quoted by Lucia (2017), Bustle editor Kate Ward observes that there is dominance of political conversation that had been observed noting that everyone wants to talk and hear about it. This is not possible during off politics season as noted even in the United States that before elections period, the interest of political news is low (Lucia (2017). Upping the political news coverage during elections period brings about audience growth even in Kenya.

The agenda setting function is demonstrated by the audience strong agreement that they “look for ethnic content in media during elections” at 50.0 Percent and that “Politicians who capitalise on ethnic politics are widely covered by media” at 73.3 Percent. This finding agrees with Diamandis (2016) and Dominika (2016). Analysis that peoples’ minds are inclined towards negative information and media is out to provide as much of such news as possible. It is in this regard that mass media has taken seriously the practice of murk racking—finding out and bringing to the audience the high demand negative news.

The power of the ethnic content and considerations by media is demonstrated by the respondents’ choice during elections, which reflected their confession that they ‘depended on media reporting to select their leaders, both at county and national levels’ at 53.3 Percent. The propaganda model explains this phenomenon as resultant of media operating in a capitalist economy model where they source a type of news content that caters for the interests of political and economic elites, both institutions and individuals. The Political economy of media, as McChesne (2008:3) argues is ‘shaped by ownership, market structures, commercial support, technologies, labor practices, and government policies.’ This choice benefits the media economically in as much as it ensures supply of audience preferences during political campaigns.

The findings on the ethnicity of the member of county assembly elected by the respondent during the 2017 elections, irrespective of whether they won or not, indicate that 60 Percent voted for MCAs from their own ethnicity and further 70 Percent voted for the MP of the same ethnicity. This behavioral pattern in voting is well documented by Maweu (2017) who demonstrated that ethnicity has played a significant role during elections in Kenya since independence.

On the Respondents’ preferred headlines from the list provided, it was evident that 70 Percent of the respondents preferred reading a headline that had the term Kikuyu and Ruto while 66.7 Percent preferred reading content with terms Kalonzo and Raila. Further, 43.3 Percent of the respondents were interested in the story about new hospital launch and 26.7 Percent. First, there was high propensity to selecting political headlines compared to headlines pointing to other matters. According to Robinson (2007), what the media covers most shapes the audiences preference of content. This conclusion is in line with the agenda setting theory of media and explains why different blocs in Kenya prefer news with specific political tastes. For instance, given the geopolitical demographic of the Rift Valley—as the stronghold block for Jubilee during the 2017 elections, it was expected that majority of the readers would want to hear about the candidates they support and their political side thus explaining the high preference for headlines with the terms Kikuyu and Ruto. If this interview happened in NASA stronghold, the results would be reversed. This coverage pattern is explained by Herman and Chomsky (2010) who explains the common interest of media with other sectors in a capitalist economy as it maintains the economic and political stance that ensure profit generation.

It is also important to note that it is not that Kenyans do not want to hear about transformative projects such as hospital launch, the fact is that mass media during elections overemphasises political content and thus rendering any other subject as if of no value at all in their agenda setting function. It is this cultural modification that media endeavors to create through the propaganda ideals of manufacturing consent by agenda setting for the society. The political economy of media forces them to resort to a reporting that maximises their accumulation of power and influence among the audience and thereafter-commercial value for their airtime. The way the political, economic, and social forces converge to influence media reporting is what political economy of media is concerned about as a critical theory.

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