EXAMINING THE LINKAGES BETWEEN READERSHIP AND ONLINE NEWS CONTENT IN KENYA: A CASE OF THE NATION MEDIA GROUP

BY

RUKANGA, BASILLIOH MUTAHI

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this is my original work and has not been presented to any other university for a degree award or anywhere else for academic purposes.

Rukanga, Basillioh Mutahi

Registration No: K50/74092/2014

Sign**:** ………………………………… Date: …………………………………

Declaration by the supervisor

This project has been submitted for examination with my approval as the appointed supervisor.

Sign: …………………………. Date: ………………………….

Dr George Nyabuga

School of Journalism and Mass Communication

University of Nairobi

DEDICATION

This research project is dedicated my daughter, Nea, who is my daily source of inspiration and hope.

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ABSTRACT

The study examines the linkages between readership and online news content in Kenya. Using the Nation Media Group, the study sought to examine the type of content the Nation Media Group websites—the Daily Nation and the Nairobi News—serve to their targeted audiences and the resultant consumption dynamics. The objectives of the study were to assess readers' consumption patterns based on content subject, to determine the contribution of multimedia text to readership consumption, explore the relationship between proximity of issues and choice of content and examine the link between consumption of a story and its placement on the website. The study stemmed from the perceived challenges of Kenyan websites serving the "right" content to the diverse online audiences through various digital technology channels. The research employed a netnographic method — a study of online communities — to gather data. Observation, interviews with consumers, website editors and producers, as well as analysis of web consumption analytics were used in the research. The study found out that politics is the most dominant subject consumed by Daily Nation audiences, followed by crime. For Nairobi News, the subject matter was not a big consideration compared with the content's style and tone. Currency and resonance was also found to be important elements influencing consumption of content. Human-interest stories were found to be popular with the audiences. Evidence revealed that content placement had impact on the consumption of content, both positively and negatively. The study recommends restyling of content on the Daily Nation website in a manner that is more attractive to new audiences. Besides, publishing of more niche content is proposed, as well as more human-interest stories focusing on individual experiences.

CHAPTER ONE: BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

1.0 Introduction

"Content is king", a phrase first used by Microsoft founder Bill Gates in 1996, has become an oft overused phrase in media circles especially in reference to digital media. Even though it has been 20 years since Gates made the statement, content is still the most important factor in media consumption. Benkoil (2015) notes that once the issue of content is solved, other factors like distribution, measurement, and technology help to make consumption of media more efficient by, for instance, helping focus on a relevant audience. From the outset, this study is, broadly speaking, about content on online platforms and the dynamics of consumption.

Everything that happens online is driven by content, note Jackson and Deckers (2013). They point out that content, among other things, help draw audiences to the web, but without it, there is no audience. Online media producers seek to attract particular audiences to their platforms by providing the content they perceive will be consumed by the target consumers. In this regard, Bernstein et al, (2010) note that perceived audiences influence production of content and how it is presented online. Once a website figures out its preferred audience(s) or those that it hopes to attract, the next logical step is to develop specific content to meet the specific audience needs (Carroll, 2010).

Globally, different types and forms of content exist online to cater to different audience types. Media outlets consider several audience factors such as personal preferences, demographics (Tewsksbury and Rittenberg 2012) as they seek to gratify consumers' needs. Yet, websites have sometimes focused on raw numbers, that is, the number of page views and unique visits, which tend to focus on frivolous content, such as cat videos, rather than time-intensive journalism (Mullin, 2015). The emphasis on numbers leads to content that appeals to consumers' baser interests (Friend and Singer, 2007)

In Kenya, for instance, there seems to be a spar on which news website has more traffic as measured by Alexa.com or Google Analytics (Macharia, 2016). He points out that the situation has arisen because the market has become more fragmented, and thus the fight for a bigger share of audiences in order to get a bigger pie of advertising money. Wamunyu (2016) thus argues that

to attract high web traffic, some Kenyan websites offer content that appeals to audiences but lack depth. However, Macharia (2016) points out that the winners are not necessarily those with the highest numbers, but those that produce differentiated, interesting content and can find ways to monetise their ideas.

1.1 Background

Online news represent a dynamic, information-rich environment that is characterised by multimedia, interactivity and hypertext (Opgenhaffen, 2011), and provides a variety of content intended to appeal to wide-ranging audiences. According to Opgenhaffen (2011), online news providers incorporate interactive features in a bid to make the reader part of the news experience. This interactivity is seen in the reader's control over content, for instance, accessing the content through preferred channels and being able to share, comment and exchange views with others on a particular story.

Atton and Mabweazara (2011) note that a lot of research on new media and journalism is being undertaken in economically developed countries but very little has been done in developing countries. Perhaps because of that reason, Kawamoto (2003) notes that many of the contemporary media studies show audiences increasingly prefer to read online newspapers (as opposed to traditional print editions) as they are interactive, host multimedia content and report breaking news. Audience experiences, though, are different from country to country (Lesitaokana, and Akpabio, 2014). In their study of Botswana, Lesitaokana, and Akpabio (2014), found out news audiences' consumption patterns were skewed towards the more familiar print editions. Granted, Botswana has a lower percentage of its population using the internet than in Kenya. While newspaper content consumption in the country may differ from Kenya, there is one notable similarity—a lot of content on Kenyan newspapers online mirrors what is published in print (Mabweazara, Mudhai and Whittaker, 2014).

In Kenya, a study conducted by a consulting firm PwC (2015) indicated that the market spending on internet advertising is already bigger than the newspaper market. According to the research, the total spending on internet advertising in Kenya in 2014 was $547 million compared with $186 million for print newspapers. The study shows total print newspaper advertising market was $111 million in 2010, growing gradually to $186 million in 2014 and is projected to grow to $224 million

by 2019. On the other hand, the growth in spending on the internet has been more rapid —in 2010 it was about the same as newspaper's, at $112 million, but by 2014, it had grown to $547 million and is projected to grow to $1.4 billion in 2019. By then, it will have exceeded the combined revenues of television and radio, which will generate US$1.2 billion.

Advertisers' high spending on the web are partly attributable to the rapid growth of online audiences and the ability to reach very specific audiences. The PwC (2015) report shows the newspaper circulation will continue growing as it has been, albeit by a small percentage, and most of newspaper profits will still come from print advertising. It also shows the share of online newspaper spend will rise, from an insignificant 3.2 per cent in 2014 to 8.5 per cent in 2019. Yet, even though dominant media houses such as Nation Media Group (NMG) and Standard Group are adopting digital strategies, "digital ads will only represent a minor part of total newspaper revenue over the forecast period" (PwC, 2015, p.36). To survive a future with reduced newspaper advertising, the media houses may inevitably seek to control a bigger pie of online audiences.

For the newspaper industry, the search for more audiences could mean a reorganisation of newsrooms and formulation of digital content strategies to reach the desired audiences and address their needs efficiently (Waal, 2014). Mabweazara et al. (2014) points out that this is already happening in Kenya, citing an example of NMG's convergence strategy.

1.2 Statement of the problem

Halvorson (2012) points out that online audiences expect content to be available when they want it and in the form that they want it. The audiences engage and personalise the content in a way that is unique to them. Halvorson (2012), therefore, argues that this provides an opportunity for content creators to provide content that caters to the audiences' specific needs. The audiences could be global, or targeted and niche, although the actual target depends on a particular site and its goals (Halvorson 2012, Giles 2011). In meeting the audiences' needs, Halvorson, (2012) writes: "It's very important to consider your content from your user's perspective. Is it written so that your target audience will understand and relate to it?" (Halvorson, 2012, p.56).

Do Kenyan news websites' content reflect the preferences and habits of the audiences? Are there deliberate content strategies by Kenyan news websites to cater to their audiences? As Otieno (2009) writes, the digital news landscape in Kenya has forced journalists and media managers to adapt their processes for story-telling and rethink business strategies. He contends that big media houses remain the experts in organising and quickly disseminating credible information to large audiences. While that may still be true, large audiences are also drawn to content on emerging and specific content Kenyan websites and blogs such as Ghafla.co.ke and sportpesa.com, whose traffic ranking is comparable with that of mainstream Daily Nation and The Standard newspaper websites (Alexa.com, 2015).

1.3 Objectives

1. To examine the link between a story's popularity and its placement on the homepage of a news website.
2. To assess reader consumption patterns based on online news subject, for example, business, politics, sport, technology
3. To determine the extent to which multimedia stories contribute to readership choices.
4. To explore the relationship between proximity of issues and reader's choice of content

1.4 Research Questions

1. What is the impact of placement on popularity of online news content?
2. How does online news subject affect readership consumption?
3. What is multimedia's contribution towards consumption of content?
4. What is the relationship between proximity of content to reader consumption?

1.5 Justification

The media exists to serve many purposes. Wright's (1974) viewpoint is more generic, and is perhaps telling of the criticality of the roles – that media exist to serve the needs of societies and cultures. But how does media fulfill these varied needs? Do media actually offer content that the audiences want or are desirable? What informs these decisions?

For online audiences — which is the focus of this research — these questions are perhaps more critical. Online audiences today, referred to as "digital omnivores", are diverse and global, and consume varied content across platforms, channels, devices, environments and experiences (Lee, 2013, p.77).

In recent times, Kenya has seen a proliferation of news websites, a number of them offering lifestyle and entertainment content. Some of them are likely to frame mundane stories with attractive headlines that are seen to draw many readers to them. Though established news websites offering general content have the highest audience traffic, a number of Kenyan websites with entertainment as their main content offering also attract a lot of traffic, according to Alexa.com. For instance, on a random day in April 2016, the top eight Kenyan news websites are Standardmedia.co.ke, Nation.co.ke, thestar.co.ke, citizentv.co.ke, sde.co.ke, ghafla.co.ke, mpasho.co.ke and kenyamoja.co.ke, in that order (Alexa.com, 2016). Sde, Ghafla and Mpasho are listed as exclusive entertainment websites, according to their descriptive metatags. The rest provide more than one content types.

It may seem, from the foregoing, that besides general news, Kenyans have an inclination towards entertainment content. But such a conclusion might be misleading. Are there perhaps other types of content, that audiences want, but are inadequately provided for by Kenyan news websites? Are there underserved audiences by Kenya news websites?

Kenya's "most searched content", released on a monthly and annual basis by Google, is a useful pointer to the kind of content audiences are looking for. While search subjects vary from year to year or even monthly, there are some often-recurring themes. For instance, content on relationships, dating and reproductive health issues is listed as among the most popular searches across the years (Nairobi News, 2015; Muinde and Obwocha, 2014; Okulo, 2013; Shiundu, 2012).

The "most searched content" list on search engine offers insights into the specific content that online audiences are actively looking for. Rosenstiel, Jurkowitz and Ji (2012), however, aver that some newspapers may not be putting a lot of effort into the new digital content categories that could be expected to provide future growth. As observed here before, a lot of content on Kenyan newspaper websites is almost always similar to that published on print editions, which implies that not much effort has been made to identify and better serve the disparate online audiences.

In meeting the research objectives, this study examines the consumption of content on the *Daily Nation* and Nairobi News website by analysing sample content. The analysis takes into

considerations elements such as proximity and type of content, engagement, placement and multimedia elements.

1.6 Scope and limitations

The research study is limited to Nation Media Group publications; the *Daily Nation* website, www.nation.co.ke and its sister site nairobinews.co.ke. It is limited to live content, that is, stories that have not yet been archived.

This is a case study where content analysis is used to examine the data within the sample population. The codified themes are mainly developed from the websites' content categories. Interpretive meanings are derived from the descriptive statistics including frequency counts, which are used to summarise findings. The statistics are also used to make inferences. However, since coding schemes and coding involve interpretation (Insch et al. 1997), there is risk of bias. To a large extent though, this bias is mitigated by the fact that most of the subject categories on the websites are already defined.

Besides, the fleeting nature of web content is also a limiting factor and implies that data has to be collected quickly so that elements such as placement and framing (which may change with time) are recorded.

1.7 Summary

This chapter sets out to broadly demonstrate the linkages between online news content consumption and readership. It provides the background to the study and defines the research problem. The chapter also provides a rationale for conducting the study, as well as the scope and limitations of the research.

In the next chapter, a detailed literature review helps advance this study, by examining what scholars have said about the subject.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

Much has been written about online news content and its consumption patterns. Scholars such as Sen and Yildirim (2015), Allan (2006) and Salwen et al. (2005) have written about the rise of online news, its popularity and how it has transformed journalism. Szabo and Huberman (2010) note that the ubiquity of web services has transformed online content consumption in ways that were previously not conceivable through traditional means. Accordingly, the convenience of online news has seen new media gradually erode the audience base of older media (Gaskins and Jerit, 2012).

Gaskins and Jerit (2012) suggest that due to the erosion of traditional audiences, online platforms have begun supplanting certain media outlets within particular subsets of the audience population. This view is, however, disputed by other scholars, for example Dunu, Ugbo and Ezepue, (2015), Nguyen and Western (2006), and Dutta-Bergman (2004) who point out that traditional and new media consumption is complementary. Consumption patterns, nonetheless, have become fragmented, and as new media proliferates, simultaneous media consumption is common (Cunningham and Eastin, 2015).

This chapter seeks to critically review existing literature with the view of determining online media consumptions. The linkages between content and readership on the web are examined in greater detail. Broadly, some of the areas examined include trends in online readership, content preferences and audience measurement (analytics), which emerge as a core issue in understanding consumer habits and interests (Kelly, 2015). In the chapter, the researcher also examines relevant theoretical frameworks, such as the uses and gratifications and the niche theories.

2.2 Online readership

The way audiences consume information has changed with the growth of the internet and related technologies such as social media networks and mobile telephony (Tombs, 2014). As digital media infiltrates and changes the news media, online readers have had quick and direct connection to an

array of news sources and are more indiscriminate in their choices (Newman and Nielsen, 2015; Hachten and Scotton, 2012).

2.2.1 Trends shaping online news consumption

Online news consumption is influenced by several factors including technology, content and socio-economic factors (Dutton, 2013; HoL, 2008). Wunsch-Vincent and Vickery (2015) note that the drivers of online news include technology, changing media use, new business models and new internet intermediaries.

Consumers of online news are no longer tied to legacy titles (Rosenstiel and Jurkowitz, 2012). Yet, the newspaper industry is still trapped between "the gravitational pull of the legacy tradition and the need to chart a faster digital course" (Rosenstiel and Jurkowitz, 2012, p.4). In 1998, Nielsen Norman Group predicted that current media formats would die in about five to 10 years (Nielsen, 1998). While the jury regarding the death of legacy media is still out, the prediction on integration of media formats such as TV, text and analytical features has come to fruition. According to Waldman (2011), newspapers generally have changed to a medium of the internet age. Thus in "emphasising speed and dissemination in various platforms", the internet has increased the reach of some newspapers, such as the *New York Times* (Waldman, 2011, p. 55).

2.2.1.1 Interactivity

Interactivity is one of the key characteristic of online media consumption, challenging the traditional one-way directional flow of news (Chung, 2008). Essentially, online media provides news audiences with many choices, even allowing them to participate in the production of information. This kind of interactivity thus promotes "back-and-forth conversations between newsroom personnel and the audience, and providing opportunities for personalized journalism" (Chung, 2008, p.659).

There are greater levels of interactivity and ability by audiences to participate in online news production processes (Meijer and Kormelink, 2015). Meijer and Kormelink (2015) have identified many ways in which consumes engage and interact with online news including by watching, searching, clicking, commenting, voting, linking and sharing. They argue that readers are likely to engage more with content that is informative and deep. Besides, they note, engaged news

readers develop the need for constant news updates, which is provided in the form of push notifications and alerts through smartphones.

Often, interaction enables media producers to anticipate readers' needs and preferences and adequately provide for them, especially when the consumers are proactive in selection of messages (Casagrande, 2014). For instance, with web and mobile apps, it is possible to push content that is highly specific to the individual reader. This also happens in social media where news producers have the ability to provide tailored content to the readers (Lavrusik, 2010).

2.2.1.2 Young audiences

Statistics suggest most online consumers in US, Europe and even in Africa are relatively young (Google, 2015, Perrin and Duggan, 2015; Jackson, 2013). The statistics for Kenya reflect a similar trend, where 64 per cent of internet audiences are aged below 25 years, according to a 2015 survey by Google (Google, 2015). Audience demographics for Kenya's *Daily Nation* newspaper website corroborates the Google finding, with more than two thirds of its readers aged between 25 and 44 years (Google Analytics, 2016)

2.2.1.3 Smartphones and other devices

A survey by Google (2015) notes that globally, smartphones play an important role in bringing people online. Smartphones are used at least as often as computers for accessing the internet, according to the survey. Across the world, Bell (2015) notes, news consumption is undergoing fundamental shifts, observing that audiences are increasingly accessing news through mobile phones and other digital devices. Clark (2013) makes a similar argument, noting that the increased use of hand-held digital devices has ensured that people have access to news from any location.

For many Kenyans, internet access is phone-centric, with 99 per cent accessing the internet through a mobile phone (CA, 2016). According to Google (2015), 28 per cent of those with smartphones in Kenya use them to access news at least daily (see table in the next page). The survey notes that at least weekly, 82 per cent visit social networks, 50 per cent go to search engines and 27 per cent watch short videos.

Figure 2. 1: Google survey on content consumption
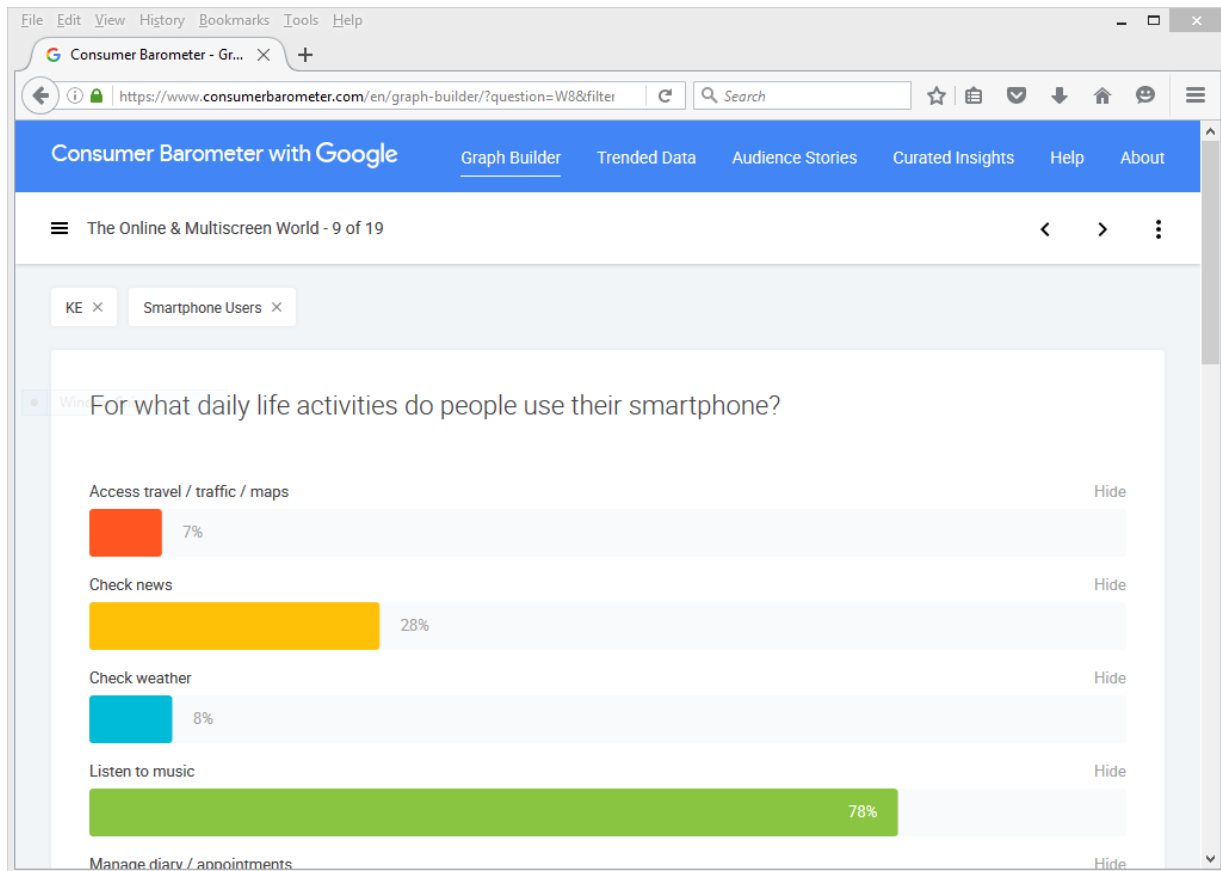
Source: Google Consumer Barometer Survey 2015

2.2.1.4 Social media

Caumont (2013) notes social media has grown as a source of news. Across the world, Bell (2015) observes that the people who read news through social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp or Twitter have been rising in the past few years. In Kenya, there are about five million Facebook users (IWS, 2016) and an estimated 700,000 monthly active users on Twitter, according to a report published by Kemibaro (2015). Another report by Bloggers Association of Kenya (2015), indicates that Twitter growth has been doubling in Kenya year-on-year. However, Facebook still dominates social media growth (Ventures Africa, 2014). Ventures Africa (2014) notes that social media activity is mostly centred in Nairobi, where majority of Kenyan social media users are located.

The Nation Media Group (NMG) in Kenya offers entire articles directly on Facebook's Instant Articles (Njanja, 2016). She points out that articles load and open directly on Facebook, meaning that readers would easily load and read stories on their own page. Through the offering, NMG expects to grow its superiority in online reach and improve user experience. The company seeks to leverage on the audience growth to make sustainable revenues online (David, 2016).

Kaigwa, Madung and Costello (2015) point out that Kenyan media routinely share updates and stories through social networks to drive audience engagement. They also observe that social media consumers also tip journalists on stories, leads and potential follow-ups. The use of mobile instant-messaging app WhatsApp by media houses in Kenya is also notable. Kaigwa et al. (2015) observe that local TV stations, such as Citizen TV and K24, use Whatsapp for audience engagement. The *Daily Nation* uses Whatsapp internally for news gathering, but has also used it to disseminate content to subscribers during major events, for example on the US President Barack Obama's visit to Kenya (Daily Nation, 2015).

2.2.1.5 Digital divide

Despite the trends shaping the usage of online content, web accessibility is a problem for some audiences. While this may seem like a minor drawback, it belies the bigger issue of digital divide not just in Kenya, but also in Africa and elsewhere. For instance, internet penetration in Africa is only 28 per cent and accounts for less than 10 per cent of global internet users (IWS, 2016). There are other issues that hamper access to content such as technological literacy and costs of accessing the internet (TIG, 2016). Aggarwal (2003) identifies other factors such as language, personal media style, education levels and social factors as affecting the way online readers consume content.

In Kenya, a number of factors inform access and penetration of internet, including infrastructure, poverty, generational factors, gender and literacy. In terms of infrastructure, most of the rural consumers have no access to electricity. They lack or have little access to mainstream technologies, and thus a considerable digital divide exists particularly between them and those living in urban areas (Wamuyu and Maharaj, 2011). Siegel (2003) points out that for some consumers, it is expensive to buy good quality mobile technologies and related services, thus hindering internet access.

Kaguara and Wanjiru (2012) aver that the internet is the domain of the literate, noting that the gap in internet use is influenced by the quality of education a person has or aspires to achieve. A study by Synovate (2009) cited in Kaguara and Wanjiru (2012) notes that at least 30 per cent of Kenyans may never use the internet given their literacy levels and attitudinal barriers. Synovate (2009) also notes that the youth in Kenya, between 18 and 34 years, are the most internet savvy segment of the population, pointing to a generational divide in internet usage. Statistics by Google (2015) in Kenya and elsewhere also show the same trend.

2.2.2 Measuring audience engagement (web metrics)

Online audience measurement, also known as analytics (Bateman, 2015), is the in-depth analysis of data patterns to determine trends or predictions in consumer behaviour (Kelly, 2015). Kelly (2015) notes that analytics show how many people visit a site, how often they visit, what pages they click on within the site as well as the pages from which they landed on the site and the clicks on links that took them off the site. According to Cooper (2012), there are many analytics tools for measuring many elements of readership and the usage statistics (web metrics).

Kelly (2015) points out that the most established and best-known analytics tool is Google Analytics, which businesses use to better understand the needs and interests of their customers and the performance of their web pages. And just like businesses analyse data to make their products or messages more alluring to customers, she says that news or media managers can use the same tools to decide on what content is most interesting to their readers. She writes:

> Using the information they collect about their visitors, they can learn more about who they are and what habits and interests are. This can help content managers and producers determine the most (and least) appropriate content for their site. If a lead story on politics coincides with a measurable drop in visitors to the site, the content manager may consider replacing the lead story with another story that more closely aligns with the interests of site visitors, who, for example, through their clicking behavior, show a distinct preference for arts and entertainment stories (Kelly, 2015, p. 87)

A report by Ofcom (2014) summarises the elements that web metrics are useful for as follows: First, Ofcom points out that metrics are important in measuring usage of a website – the numbers of people who are using the service, and the volume of their use. Secondly, they measure engagement, for example, the length of a user's stay per visit, and the extent to which they are engaging with and using the content. Thirdly, editorial performance can also be measured, allowing the performance of individual stories or treatments of a story to be compared and assessed. The fourth use of web metrics is assessing the competition, to understand what a service's peers and competitors are doing. The metrics also help in understanding how users get access and how they navigate around the service. Lastly, metrics track users' behaviour — how people are using, interacting and sharing the information they glean. (Ofcom, 2014, pp.4-5)

In essence, web analytics are useful in understanding the audiences—their characteristics, behaviour and other aspects that are crucial to understanding the relationship between readership and media choices. Graves, Kelly and Gluck (2010) indicate that the overall importance of analytics is to better understand audiences for both editorial and commercial purposes, such as selling ad space, marketing audiences to advertisers and evaluating competitors. Besbes, Gur and Zeevi (2014) also point out that with predictive analytics, digital news outlets are able to direct or recommend content to likely consumers. This happens as "the service provider also has access to a database of feasible articles with information such as topic classification, publish date, and click history" (Besbes, Gur and Zeevi, 2014, p.3).

One of the drawbacks of analytics, however, is when digital outlets send advertising content to targeted news audiences by aggressive marketers or spammers (Besbes et al., 2014). Stories can also become "more trashy, optimised for a demographic that seeks celebrity news rather than more demanding content" (Elkan, 2013 p.10). This can happen as many online audiences are in blurred boundaries and singling them out for their specific news consumption habits can be difficult at times (World Federation of Advertisers, 2009). Even in Kenya, Wamunyu (2016 cited in Sambuli 2016, p.1) argues that "the downside of looking at numbers is that you tend to get fluffier and more sensational content". The problem with fluffy content, suggests Morgan (2015), is that it may not attract the right audiences to attract advertisers (See also *2.3.1 Content and audience preferences*).

2.2.3 Online news audiences in Kenya

Kenya has an internet penetration of 82.6 per cent and 35.5 million internet users, according to published statistics by the Communications Authority of Kenya (CA, 2016). Of the users, CA notes that 99 per cent access the internet through mobile phones.

In Africa, internet use has been growing rapidly in the last decade, even though only 20 per cent of the population uses the internet (International Telecommunications Union [ITU], 2016). The continent's share of global internet users is only 9.8 per cent and ITU data shows it is the only region where mobile broadband penetration remains below 20 per cent.

Comparatively, Kenya's internet consumption — even considering the access barriers to internet content — is way above Africa's average. While that should be good news for Kenyan newspapers looking to grow audiences for their online content, the reality is that attracting and keeping audiences is a challenging task (Otieno, 2016a). As Otieno (2016a, p.6) argues, the "audience supply line is broken" because while every Kenyan newspaper used to have its core audience, the digital audience is indiscriminate and "a highly endangered species".

In addition, Otieno (2016a) indicates that the online audiences tend to be opinionated, impatient, and are often multitasking. They also include the diaspora, who rely on local websites for their news (Nyabuga and Booker, 2013).

Currently, Sambuli (2016) notes, many Kenyans get their news from radio, though the mobile phone is growing as a dominant web platform where Kenyans consume current affairs. Otieno (2016b cited in Sambuli 2016), acknowledges that most new young readers do not want to get their news by appointment, such as news hours, editorial releases, but in real time and at their convenience. In addition, Otieno (2016b) observes that technology and media have fused to meet the developments and satisfy demand for a dynamic market.

On social media, Kenya is ranked among the top active Facebook users in Africa (IWS, 2016) and on Twitter (Portland, 2016). The *How Africa Tweets* report by Portland (2016) notes that most of the issues driving conversations on social media are political and related to news events that sometimes transcend national borders. For instance, hashtags about the conflict in Burundi, Nigeria presidential elections, Tanzania President John Magufuli's actions in Tanzania and the climate change conference in Paris were among the most popular and widespread in Africa, the report

notes. Over the past few years, Mbatia, Busienei and Ndonye (2014) note that social media has emerged as a very powerful frontier for mass communication. They note that Kenya has been able to stage quite a number of social media initiatives arising from social media, such as #SomeonetellCNN, arising from news coverage of CNN on Kenyan events.

2.3 Media content

Media content is offered to a populace often with the understanding that they will consume it and for a particular need. Peng (2003) writes that people use media to fulfill basic needs and meet their interests. This could be, for example, seeking particular information for entertainment or answering questions.

The choices that people deliberately make in regard to media consumption can be explained through uses and gratifications theory. The theory focuses on why people use a particular media, and presents the use of media in terms of gratification of social or psychological needs of an individual (Blumler, Katz and Gurevitch, 1974). Some of the gratifications sought through the use of media include information, personal identity, integration and social interaction (McQuail, 1994), as well as surveillance, entertainment/diversion, interpersonal utility, and social interaction (Wenner, 1982).

2.3.1 Content and audience preferences

What content do online audiences prefer? The question is mute, since there are many audiences that require different types of content to gratify their desires and needs. Citing a case of the BBC, Harding (2016) notes that it is a challenging task for a media company to serve all the disparate audiences, though he points out that there are few stories that seem to get bigger audiences compared with many more that do not attract as many people.

Tewsksbury and Rittenberg (2012) note that in the selection of news content, journalists consider audience demographics, personal preferences and available choices. These considerations also influence decisions regarding how prominently each item should be displayed on the website (Tewsksbury and Rittenberg, 2012). However, according to Friend and Singer (2007), journalists clash on two issues — first, what they perceive as news values, which they define as providing what the public needs and, secondly, entertainment values that cater to what they see as baser

interests.

In the quest for high website traffic, Vandehei (2016, p.1), cautions that there is a risk of mass-producing content that draw in huge audiences through misleading headlines, "feel-good lists, sexy photos and exploding watermelons" He argues that as websites use the trick to get spikes in audience traffic, the value of the website goes down and they are hardly able to make revenue.

To satisfy consumers and make good revenues, Vandehei (2016) notes that the solution lies in creating content of consequence and value to niche audiences. This, he terms as the next phase of the media revolution. Fromm (2015, p.24) concurs, noting that niche news is facing a "rejuvenation in the digital age" focusing on specific content such as sports, culture, health, education or entertainment". Using data from Google, Clinton Obura (personal communication, March 1, 2016) sees a similar trend in Kenya, noting that niche content has a lot of value to specific consumers. He notes that advertisers are likely to spend more on 'prequalified' audiences, who tend to be more engaged and thus likely to spend.

2.3.2 The case for Kenyan content

A study on Kenyan, Nigeria and South Africa media markets by PwC (2015), suggested that Kenyan media companies should focus on the specific user experiences regarding content. WAN-IFRA (2015) quotes the report: "Today's media companies need to do three things to succeed — innovate around the product and user experience; develop seamless consumer relationships across distribution channels; and put mobile (and increasingly video) at the centre of the consumer's experience" (PwC, 2015, p.8).

Perhaps, then, it is because of the dynamics of online consumption that specific Kenyan media put together their varied multimedia content, including TV videos, text and radio broadcasts, into one website as Ratemo (2012) suggests. The *Daily Nation* and the *Standard* online platforms, for instance, are portals serving different categories of multimedia content produced by their parent companies in one place. The question, though, is: Are Kenyan websites serving the audiences well, including the niche audiences? Are there cases of underserved audiences? According to Otieno (2016b), it is the new reality that they cannot serve many audiences. He notes that Nation Media

Group, even with more than 20 news websites, there are still many content needs that have not been addressed.

In a session on analytics with Google Kenya, Clinton Obura (personal communication, March 1, 2016) suggested there are areas where Kenyan news websites do not serve audiences well, despite a huge interest by readers. In sports, for instance, he points out that many Kenyans get information about local issues, such as the Kenya Premier League stories and fixtures, from non-local websites. In addition, he noted that content on motherhood and pregnancy is hardly available on Kenyan websites and foreign-based websites such as kellymom.com and babycentre.co.uk fill the gap.

In essence, the need for media to cater to specific audiences has been explained by the niche theory, advanced by Dimmick (2003). The relevance of the theory is seen in media's need to differentiate itself in serving varied audiences in different locations and at different times. According to Dimmick (2003), if a medium does not differentiate itself competitively, then it will be not be able to survive or co-exist with other media. The differentiation can also occur from a content perspective, with publications either containing a wide variety of content to accommodate a broad audience (Campbell, Martin and Fabos, 2005) or specialised content. For specialised content, Husni and Main (2002) explains a concept of laser targeting, where media producers target readers' changing needs and also create consumers who are attractive to advertisers.

2.4 Theoretical framework
Reference has already been made to the relevance of uses and gratifications and the niche theoretical framework in relation to content and audience consumption. The next section broadly examines the two theories.

2.4.1 Uses and Gratifications
The uses and gratifications theory explains media choice and consumption. Stafford, Stafford & Schkade (2004) identifies types of gratification sought by consumers such as content gratification, process gratification and social gratification. Content gratification is where the use of a particular medium by a consumer is influenced by the type of content, for example, entertainment (Stafford et al., 2004). This kind of gratification explains why audiences seek content that is most appealing

to them as well as the reason producers provide tailored content to specific groups (Larose et al., 2001). Process and social gratifications, on the other hand, can be used to explain the experience of the web user while navigating/using the websites and the kind of social interactions that emanate therefrom (Stafford et al, 2004).

Notably, the uses and gratification approach is audience-centred, and seeks to find out what people do with the media instead of what the media does to people (Katz, 1959, p.2). Katz (1959) notes that uses and gratification approach begins with the assumption that the message of a media cannot ordinarily influence any person who has no "use" for it in the context upon which they live. Essentially, this means that an individual has control over what content they choose to consume. Mcleod and Becker (1981) point out the theory assumes an active audience whose media use is goal-directed media use. In essence their media consumption fulfills a wide range of needs.

The theory's assumptions are useful in explaining the use of online media. Morris & Ogan (1996), for instance, note that the emphasis on active media use by uses and gratifications approach makes it a natural focus for understanding the internet. Since online content is interactive, it means that the audiences are active users (Kaye and Johnson, 2002). Besides, the internet is a repository of varied content and thus it is able to serve different needs, with each consumer able to pull out the content that best suits them (Eighmey, 1997; Kaye, 1998). Ruggiero (2000) adds that the internet, through its interactivity, offers users the ability to access multimedia content, shop online or get any information they desire.

In sum, this approach is relevant for this research, as it provides insights into the behaviour of online consumers including their attitude, web usage and satisfaction (Xueming, 2002). This theory, however, is not without its criticisms. Firstly, the uses and gratifications theory assumption of an active audience is problematic. Windahl (1981, p.176) points out that the notion of activeness assumes the audience is "super rational and very selective, a tendency which invites criticism". Besides, Ruggiero (2000) avers, users' activeness is dependent on the setting. He notes that dependency and deprivation theories suggest that "some individuals under certain conditions such as confinement to home, low income, and some forms of stress form high levels of attachment to media" (Ruggiero, 2000, p.8). Rossi (2002) also notes that often, people consume media due to

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habit and not as a conscious undertaking. Secondly, the theory ignores the social context of media use, including that the utilisation may be forced, and not in pursuit of gratification (Ang, 1985). In a family setting, for instance, children may not have a choice on what to consume.

Other criticisms of the theory are that it is strongly individualistic and that it fails to reflect the influence of the overall media environment (Giles, 2003). Giles argues that because the theory is audience-centric, it fails to capture the influence of media on behaviour. Katz (1987) concurs, noting that the theory is uncritical of the dysfunction of an individual and society towards certain kinds of gratification. He also notes that it fails to pay attention to limitations of media texts. Bracken and Lombard (2001) also criticise the theory for its descriptive nature — it describes rather than predicts audiences' use of news — pointing to its inadequacy.

2.4.2 The Niche Theory

The niche theory emanates from the 1920s ecological niche theory of species (Vandermeer, 1972) but its application to media studies was first noted by Dimmick and Rothenbuhler (1984), who argue that media and communication firms compete to occupy a niche in fight for survival, just as plants and animals do in nature. The theory predicts the possibility of coexistence or extinction when two or more species compete for the same resources in a defined environment (Polechová and Storch, 2008).

The application of the niche theory to media studies was to address the problem of a narrow focus on audiences. Dimmick and Rothenbuhler (1984) find that the communication field concentrates on audiences and fails to address the industry as a whole. The niche theory partially addresses the limitations of the uses and gratifications theory, where use of a medium is considered independently from other media options (Feaster, 2009). Employing the ecological niche as a mass media theory would thus make the analysis of media consumption broader (Dimmick, et al., 2000; Dutta-Bergman, 2004). According to IRMA (2016), the theory allows scholars to understand how units adapt to new and sometimes competitive conditions. Thus, with a change in media ecological perspectives such as the introduction of such new technologies, niche can be used to describe how journalists and media educators reinvent themselves to meet the changing needs.

In terms of audiences, Dimmick, Feaster and Hoplamazian (2010) note that the niche of a communication technology is determined by the patterns of consumption within particular domains, such as in news media. Thus, to occupy a unique niche in any domain in terms of audiences, there must be differentiation from other media, in regard to content offered, such as news, politics, technology etc.

A criticism of the niche theory is that though specialisation allows efficient utilisation of resources, specialists may not have sufficient flexibility for survival with changes in environment (Li, 2001). Therefore, a media catering to the youth, for instance, may struggle to adapt when the interests of the audience changes. However, Chen (2015) points out that in competitive environment as today's, news outlets have to evolve to exploit different reader interests.

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter has looked at various arguments advanced by scholars on the dynamics of content consumption on news websites. It has examined the broad relationship between readership and content choices audiences make on online news platforms. These aspects, as seen, are underpinned by two theories: the uses and gratifications and the niche theories. The uses and gratifications approach explains the choices that readers make in making content choices, while the niche theory is seen in the context of the specific content that media offers to the audiences who are segmented and have varying needs.

In addition, this chapter explains how audiences consume content online, and the trends shaping online news consumption, including social media use. Content consumption is indiscriminate, as audiences are longer bound by their loyalty to legacy titles. Thus, the literature explains how digital outlets find ways to reach the 'new' audiences.

Besides, the literature explains web analytics, which are able to tell the composition of the audience, their characteristics and other information regarding what they are consuming. The metrics, which are able to show, for instance, the most read stories, reveal the truth of what the audiences are actually consuming, not what they are saying they are going to consume.

The chapter also examines the Kenyan context, the online audiences and the content that they consume. The literature review finds that Kenya's internet penetration and consumption habits are way above the African average. Yet, while Kenyan websites have attempted to cater to a multiplicity of audience needs, they still fall short, some of the literature suggests.

The next chapter explains the methods used to collect data to test the validity of some of these arguments. This is done by examining samples of the content offerings of Daily Nation and Nairobi News in relation to readership choices.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter examines methodology used in this study. It includes the research design, which is the overall plan for obtaining answers to the research questions (Polit and Beck, 2004). Epistemology is also broadly discussed, as it affects how the research answers questions and meets the study objectives. The setting, population, sampling and data-collection methods and techniques, and data analysis are also discussed. In addition, the scope and objectivity of the research and the validity and reliability of the data collected are also examined. The chapter also looks at ethical issues and shortcomings of this research.

3.2 Research design

A research design, according to McMillan & Schumacher (2001), is a systematic plan for collecting, analysing, interpreting and inferring meaning from information. The research design broadly identifies suitable methods and procedures for a study. It also includes the research location, scope and selection of the specific subjects that are the focus of the research. For this study, an interpretive research design is used.

3.3 Research approach

The research employs a mixed approach, that is, both qualitative and quantitative methods of gathering data, though quantitative data plays a secondary role. The quantitative aspect emanates from content analysis of individual stories, which produces elements such as frequency counts and percentages that are helpful in interpreting the findings.

Quantitative methods are techniques and designs that produce discrete numerical or quantifiable data (Mugenda & Mugenda, 1999). Qualitative research, on the other hand describe qualitative research as a "situated activity that locates the observer in the world," according to Denzin and Lincoln (2011, p.3), who note that it involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, while attempting to interpret phenomena in terms of meanings that people bring to them. Van Maanen (1979, p. 520) argues that qualitative research covers "an array of interpretive techniques which seek to describe, decode,

translate, and otherwise come to terms with the meaning, not the frequency, of certain more or less naturally occurring phenomena in the social world."

As an approach that examines phenomena in its "natural setting", qualitative research offers the best understanding of the experiences of online communities who are consumers or producers of content on *Daily Nation* and *Nairobi News*, the specific cases for this research. The meanings derived by the said communities is also captured through qualitative research. Some other characteristics of qualitative research make this approach ideal for this study, including the use of researcher as key instrument of data collection and use of multiple sources of data (Creswell, 2007). Creswell (2007) notes that researchers gather data from interviews, observations and documents, rather than rely on a single data source. The researchers then "review all of the data and make sense of them, organising them into categories or themes that cut across all of the data sources" (Creswell, 2007, p. 38).

Thus, through qualitative and quantitative inquiries, this research seeks to uncover the nexus between web content and audience consumptions without being bound by the cause-and-effect relationship among factors. The study seeks to learn more about the audience behaviour, taking into consideration the multiple realities or perspectives that individuals have, who are, in this case, readers and producers of news websites.

3.4 Ethnography (of online communities) as research method

Ethnography is described as a qualitative design where the researcher describes and interprets shared and learned patterns of a culture-sharing group (Harris, 1968). Creswell (2007, p.68) notes that ethnography, more than a study of a cultural group's characteristics, is also the "final, written product of that research". As societies have developed, different types of methods suitable to various ethnographic situations have emerged, which Whitehead (2005) has categorised as classical, non-classical, and core methods. He puts ethnographic methods that are linked to computer-assisted technologies, in the category of non-classical ethnographical methods.

Phippen (2004) avers that a lot of literature on evaluation of behaviour and usage of online communities is drawn from social anthropology and ethnography. Wilson and Peterson (2002) point out that in addition, technologies comprising the internet, including text and media that exist within it, are cultural products.

There are diverse approaches in the ethnographic study of the internet, which have increased in recent years (Figaredo, 2007). Even the terminologies for the approaches are varied: "digital ethnography, ethnography on/of/through the internet, connective ethnography, networked ethnography, cyberethnography ...." (Figaredo, 2007, p.1). In virtual ethnography, Hines (2000) notes that interactive media can be understood as both cultural and cultural artefact and one can learn about the internet by being immersed and conducting ethnography using it. Evans (2010) explains that virtual ethnography can use several computer-based methods of data collection in order to construct an ethnographic profile of a community. He notes, however, that participant observation remains the critical element of ethnographic process, even as the role of the ethnographer is different.

In netnography, another variant of ethnography of online communities, Kozinets (2010) points out that researchers should utilise the methodological approach best fitted to the level of analysis and type of data needed. He argues that "netnography, like an older sibling, ethnography, is promiscuous. It attaches itself to and incorporates a vast variety of different research techniques and approaches" (Kozinets, 2010, p.42). Kozinets (2010) describes netnography as a method of researching online communities and cultures, as well as other forms of online social behaviour. Netnography uses computer-mediated communication as a source of data to arrive at the ethnographic understanding and representation of a cultural or communal phenomenon. The study is primarily based upon the observation of textual discourse, an important difference from discourse and observed behaviour that occur during in-person ethnography (Kozinets, 2002)

In essence, Phippen (2004) notes that virtually all techniques used in evaluating online communities can be grouped into two categories. First, there is primary evidence from participants, such as interviews and surveys of user groups within the community. Secondly, he points out document analysis of emails, newsgroups, discussion forums etc. to identify behaviour, attitudes and other aspects of online communities.

Yet, Phippen (2004) observes that these research techniques have failed to develop the virtual aspect of community evaluation. In his analysis, the suitability of advanced web analytics as a non-intrusive means to evaluate the behaviour and usage of virtual communities has hardly been

discussed in literature. He notes that web analytics are not just concerned with website statistics, but the relationship and interaction between a web site and its customers. Tussyadiah and Inversini (2015) concur, pointing out that a researcher could take advantage of the unlimited array of online user data that can be collected in web ethnography, such as analysis and insights data from web analytics platforms such as Google Analytics or Facebook Insights.

In view of the foregoing qualities of the approach, ethnography of online communities is considered ideal for this research. Besides, the researcher has access to advanced web analytics on the research cases and is also a content producer for the *Daily Nation*. This makes the researcher a participant and a key instrument of collecting data, which is a key element of ethnographic research.

3.5 Data collection methods and procedures

The procedure of collecting data is aimed at ensuring that the research gets as much readership information as possible.

3.5.1 Interviews

In this research, interviews—as Stewart, Treasure and Chadwick (2008) note—are used explore the views, experiences, beliefs and or motivations of individuals on specific matters. The researcher conducts formal and informal in-depth interviews with content consumers as well as producers. The interview feedback is synthesised for important themes that help answer the research questions.

3.5.2 Quantitative content analysis

The researcher analyses individual content items using the codified themes and examines the related consumption analytics. From the analysis, quantitative data such as frequency data and percentages are produced. Besides, the researcher notes other parameters provided by analytics, such as how often consumers share particular content on social media platforms.

In collecting data from the content sampled, themes are first identified. The themes include the content categories, as they are on the websites' navigation bar, such as news, politics, business, sports, counties, sports, blogs and opinion, entertainment/showbiz, health, travel, women and style, family etc. They are as well themed according to their geographical source, namely national,

continental (Africa), county and international content. In addition, the "most popular" stories are noted in terms of whether they have multimedia elements attached to them, such as photo slideshows, video, graphics etc.

3.5.3 Observation

As an online producer for the *Daily Nation*, the researcher employs participant observation, observing how producers make content decisions and other elements regarding this research. As a method, it helps develop a holistic understanding of the phenomena under study that is as objective and accurate as possible (Dewalt and Dewalt, 2010).

3.6 Research setting/location

The setting for this research is virtual. Users of online content are geographically dispersed across the globe, and are not confined by space or time. However, content, a key variable of this research, is produced at a physical location. Data from content producers is collected at Nation Centre, Nairobi. Nation Centre is the hub of the *Daily Nation* and *Nairobi News* as well as other publications.

3.7 Research population

Mugenda & Mugenda (2012) define population, in research, as the set of all the elements, units, objects or subjects in the universe of interest for a particular study. The totality of individuals, objects, items, cases, articles or things with common attributes or characteristics are what constitutes the population. For purposes of this study, the "population" is the entirety of *Daily Nation* and *Nairobi News* article database, which contains close to 400,000 individual stories published since 1998. Many of the stories, especially those published after 2008, have embedded multimedia content, with video, photo(s), still and interactive graphics, timelines, hyperlinks, related stories or documents attached to them.

The total number of readers (users) also forms the population, even if the number fluctuates from time to time and is dependent on many other factors. For the month of February 2016, the number of monthly unique users (counted as the readers) is about 4 million for the *Daily Nation*. The population also comprises the total number of online editorial and technical producers (for Daily Nation and Nairobi News) who number about 20. Information is collected from a sample of this

population segment.

3.8 Sample frame and size

Sampling frame is the set of source materials from which a sample is selected (Turner, 2003). It provides a means for choosing the particular members of the target population to be interviewed for the research study. It helps determine who is to be interviewed from the population, depending on the kind of results the researcher is seeking to get from the study. Even the size of the sample to be drawn from the population is determined from the frame. According to Kumar (2005) this size will be determined by: a) the level of confidence with which the researcher wants to test the results, b) the degree of accuracy the researcher requires to estimate the population parameters and c) the estimated level of variation with respect to the main variable being studied.

The sampling frame that this research study has utilised includes, firstly, the list of articles on the Daily Nation and that on Nairobi News web databases and the relevant web analytics. The list of online editorial and technical producers and finally all online consumers of the two websites, all form the sampling frame.

3.9 Sampling techniques

In this study, the individual stories are the unit of analysis. Using the content population, purposive sampling is employed. This is because of the unique nature of web stories – for instance, stories can at times disappear from the content pages and their attributes often change as opposed to, say, articles in a newspaper, which don't change in any way, including their placement. The sampling, therefore, is done at a specified time. The stories selected are assessed as at that time, including their attributes at the same time for consistent analysis.

3.9.1 Technique for sampling content

A total of 210 stories are selected continuously over a seven-day period for analysis and are recorded using a codified sheet. Every day, between 7am and 10pm, 15 most popular stories (by number of pageviews) for each of the two websites are sampled at a random time. The time is seen as appropriate since, according to an analysis of Nation's website traffic, this is the period when the number of people coming to the website is at its highest/stable, and therefore the widest readership and reach. A sample web traffic graph, showing hourly traffic, for a single day (March

1, 2016) is illustrated below. The traffic starts rising from early morning and is fairly consistent until some point during the night.

Figure 3.1: Sample web traffic for a day
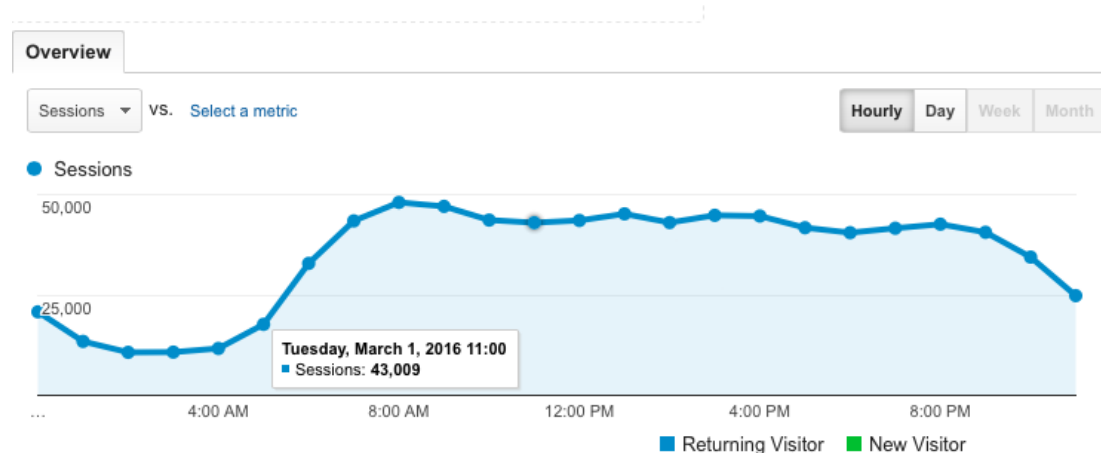
 Source: Google Analytics for www.nation.co.ke, March 1, 2016

3.9.2 Technique for sampling users

Google Analytics (2016) for *Daily Nation* indicate the biggest percentage of all users or visitors (22 per cent) are located in Nairobi. Thus, a purposive random sampling of users in Nairobi are selected. This is not based on representativeness but on specific purposes associated with answering a research study's questions (Teddlie and Yu, 2007). For content producers, who number about 20, including the researcher, random sampling is used.

3.10 Data analysis and presentation

Since the content sampled is the "most popular" by pageviews, an analysis of the articles by themes helps the researcher identify audiences' preferences in terms of type of content, and any other aspect that may be observed during the research. The researcher also examines comments made on these articles, so as to note the type of engagement/interaction that consumers make with the content and better understand the consumers.

In analysing collected data, the aim is to bring order, structure and meaning to the synthesised information. This, Juma (2013) points out, helps to deduce findings in relation to subject matter of the research and infer conclusions. For this research, the data that is captured from interviews,

document analysis and observation will be analysed for trends, patterns and relationships that emerge between the variables "content" and "readership". It is noteworthy that the analysis here is largely interpretive, and looks at meaning from the trends, patterns, relationships, similarities, differences etc., that could as well suggest further avenues of inquiry using qualitative approaches to seek further insight. The presentation of this study is in the form of descriptions and explanations, with quantification and statistical analysis playing a subordinate role.

3.11 Objectivity, strengths and limitations

Ethnographic study is advantageous in this case for being holistic and in-depth, employing several techniques to collect data. While in ethnography the involvement of the researcher may be considered subjective, the methods used, such as interviews and content analysis are time tested and the data produced is objective. Besides, Peshkin (1988, p.18) makes the case that in ethnography, one subjectivities "can be seen as virtuous, for it is the basis of researchers making a distinctive contribution, one that results from the unique configuration of their personal qualities joined to the data they have collected". This applies in this research, where the researcher has been involved in producing content for online audiences for years.

Some of the other strengths of ethnography of the internet is that it is unobtrusive and convenient as well as economical (Kozinets, 2010). In addition, through web analytics, researchers can know how many people are reading a page, at what time and location and for how long. At the same time researchers also get demographic data such as age, gender. Thus, the analysing of audiences from the web analytics is seen as able to reflect the most accurate behaviour of the user (Dvir-Gvirsman, Tsfati and Menchen-Trevino, 2013).

The method has limitations, including its inability to offer the full and rich detail of lived human experience (Edwards and Skinner, 2009). Kozinets (2002, p.3) also notes that limitations netnography are drawn "from its more narrow focus on online communities, the need for researcher interpretive skill, and the lack of informant identifiers present in the online context that leads to difficulty generalising results to groups outside the online community sample." In addition, the researcher must be at least conversant in web technologies including web analytics.

3.12 Reliability and validity of data and methods

Kozinets (2002) argues that ethnography depends upon credibility and dependability rather than validity and reliability for judgment of the quality of the research. Burns (1999) points out reliability is concerned with the reproduction of procedures and findings. He points out that for a study to be considered reliable, the assumption is that it can be repeated using the same procedures of the original research. While accurate replication is difficult to achieve, Burns (1999) argues that this can be addressed by describing the methodology as comprehensively as possible. Thus, this study has described the process in a very detailed way so that any researcher can follow the strategies used. Besides, the data and methods used are credible, and in addition, web analytics data provide very accurate descriptions of audience behaviour and are dependable.

The validity of data was addressed through triangulation, with multiple methods employed. Moreover, careful analysis and cross-validation of the online data was considered to avoiding being misled by overly zealous or vocal community members, as Kozinets (2010) notes.

3.13 Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations in this study were on whether the procedures used were ethically appropriate. For ethnographies, informed consent of the community is important (Kozinets, 2002). There is no clear consensus, though, on what would have informed consent on public cyberspace such as the *Daily Nation* and *Nairobi News* websites. Consent here is assumed rather than explicit since these websites and contributions thereof by the audiences are in the public domain. Other than that, the study posed no serious ethical problems. The researcher obtained a Certificate of Fieldwork from the University of Nairobi as a clearance to collect data from the field (see Appendix 1). At the end of the research a Certificate of Corrections was issued (Appendix 5). This project is the researcher's original work (See Declaration of Originality Form on Appendix 3 and Plagiarism Results page on Appendix 4).

3.14 Reflexivity

The researcher works as an online editor at the Nation Media Group, which is part of the motivation to do this research. This research study reflects some of the experiences of the researcher, as a participant.

3.15 Summary

The chapter explains how the research was conducted. This is a case study, which involved the study of online communities using the case of two Nation Media Group websites. The focus was on content consumption dynamics in relation to content on the websites. The study of online communities through ethnography, also referred through other terminologies, was employed in the study. Observations, interviews and content analysis, methods that can be employed in ethnography, were also used and the procedures were detailed. The data collected in this study informs the discussions in the following substantive chapters.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the results of the study and the analysis that arise therefrom. It begins with an overview of study findings, briefly giving explanations of the critical issues that emerge from the research. These are: the various motivations for consumption of the content, audience behaviour and a critical examination of the audience needs.

The findings are categorised according to the specific objectives of the study. On audience consumption by subject, for instance, the study shows that many audiences who visit the Daily Nation website are inclined to read a lot of content that is related to politics. For Nairobi News, readers largely consider the tone and style of the content.

From such findings, related issues are discussed, including how they relate to theoretical paradigms cited in earlier chapters. Besides the subject areas, there are other themes such as placement of stories, proximity of news and use of multimedia, under which the findings are presented and discussed. At the end of the chapter, further observations and a critical summary of the findings arising from the study are given.

4.2 Overview of Daily Nation, Nairobi News audiences and consumption

Overall, Google analytics show that the majority of audiences for both Daily Nation (DN) and Nairobi News (NN) websites are male. DN, however, has a bigger share of male audiences than NN. DN has 82.1 percentage of male audiences versus 17.9 per cent female. The NN audiences are 63.1 male and 36.1 female.

The NN website is primarily meant to appeal to young audiences, according to the website's news editor. The DN, on the other hand, is a general-audience newspaper and is not tagged to primarily serve a particular age set. It is a "supermarket of content", according to Nation Media Group's managing editor for digital. By definition, a "supermarket of content" means that the website publishes different content to serve multiple audiences at the same time.

Majority of readers on both websites identify themselves as political junkies (7.86 per cent of DN audiences and 6.71 per cent for NN), according to Google data. However, NN producers interviewed see the website as serving a mainly non-political audience, which is backed by this study's analysis of its content consumption. For the DN, the next biggest segment of DN audiences identifies itself as sports lovers (5.45 per cent). For NN, the second biggest segment

is identified as "news junkies and avid readers and entertainment and celebrity news junkies (6.27 per cent).

Overall, the data shows that except for one segment, the audiences are affiliated to the same content categories, although with differing priorities (See Fig. 4.1, below).

Figure 4.1: Audiences' content affinity
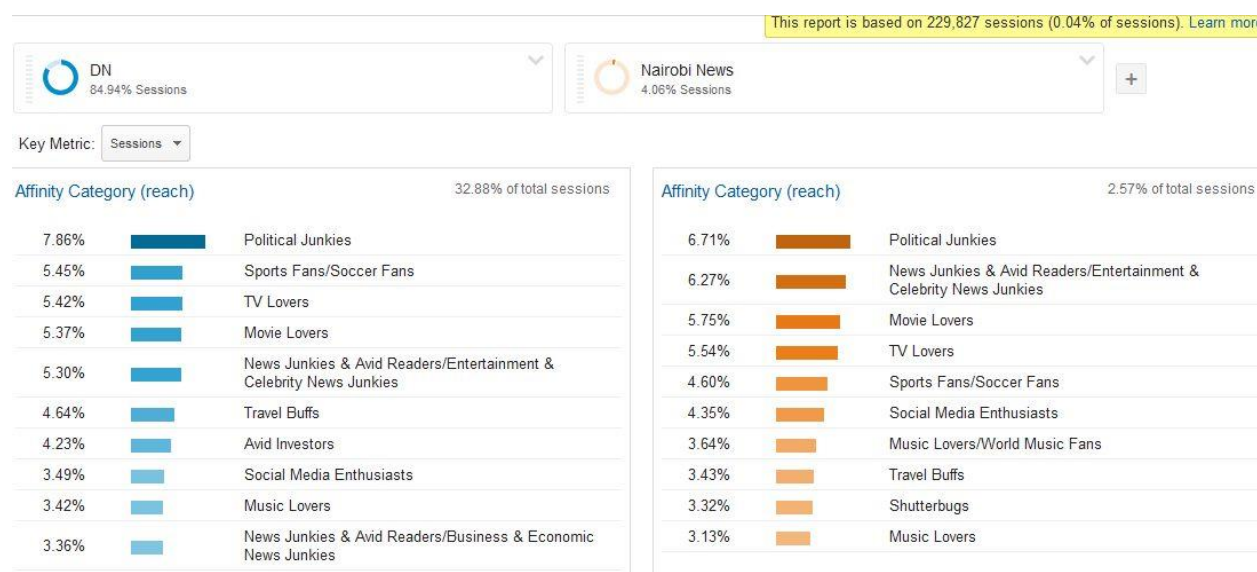
Source: Google Analytics, August 16, 2016

4.2.1 Audience behaviour and meaning

Generally, NN attracts a marginally bigger percentage number of new visitors to its website (17.9 per cent) than for DN (12.5 per cent). Conversely, DN has a larger percentage of readers who are returning visitors, indicating that most of those are loyal audiences whose content gratifications are met. One of the technical producers interviewed (Julius Bett, personal communication, August 8, 2016) for this study concurs. Having interacted with the audience consumption data for years, he points out that the expectations of the DN visitors are fulfilled. This, he notes, is explained by the fact that return visitor numbers have been consistent. This affirms the theoretical argument that audiences seek media that provides content gratifications, as Schkade (2004) points out.

DN users, on the whole, spend more time per session on the website than they do on the NN website. DN visitors average about 5 minutes and almost 3 minutes on the NN website. Bounce rate – the percentage of visitors to a particular website who navigate away from the site after

viewing only one page – is higher on NN (31.89 per cent) than on DN at 19.98 per cent (See Fig 4.2). A high bounce rate means that the content is either not interesting or is off-putting and perhaps does not offer the gratifications sought. The NN could be providing content that primarily caters to audiences' baser interests as opposed to providing what the public needs, as argued by Friend and Singer (2007).

Figure 4. 2: Audience consumption overview

Sessions	Users	Pageviews
DN	DN	DN
474,234,449	64,237,245	2,015,243,089
Nairobi News	Nairobi News	Nairobi News
22,744,009	7,591,056	62,324,901

Pages / Session	Avg. Session Duration	Bounce Rate
DN	DN	DN
4.25	00:05:01	19.98%
Nairobi News	Nairobi News	Nairobi News
2.74	00:02:55	31.89%

% New Sessions
DN
12.50%

Nairobi News
17.95%
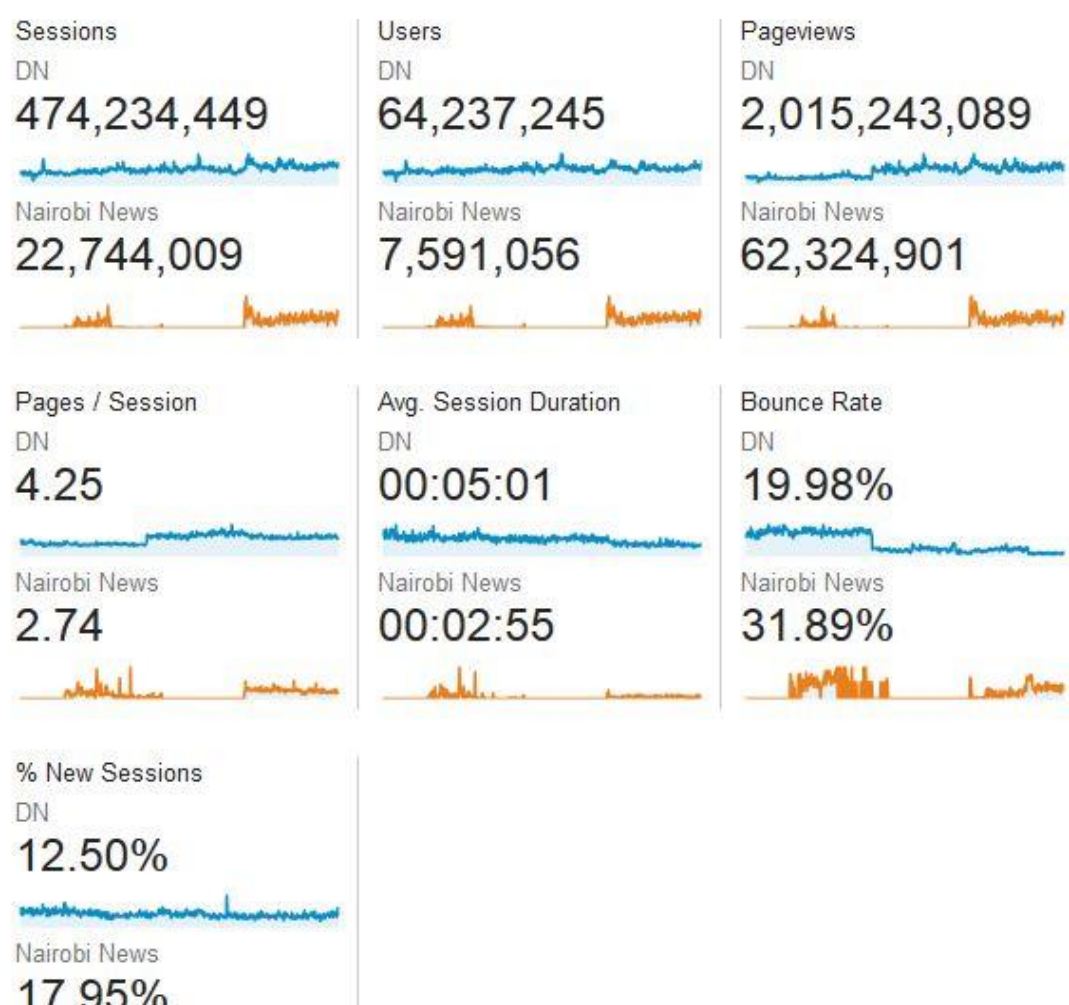
Source: Google Analytics, August 17, 2016

The NN editor (Kenfrey Kiberenge, personal communication, August 9, 2016) notes that audiences also consider the credibility of the website that is providing the content. Thus a website that has taken time to build a loyal audience base through credible content would have lower bounce rates. To illustrate the point, he notes that when the Nairobi news website became

a sub-domain on the DN website (the NN website address, www.nairobinews.co.ke, redirects to nairobinews.nation.co.ke), the bounce rates were much lower. The editor's inference is that the DN website is more familiar and Kenyan readers, who are the primary audiences of the websites, would readily trust the content therein.

Audiences may also find content with misleading headlines off-putting. Two of the website content producers and consumers interviewed for this study indicated that they are likely to move away from a website that offers titillating headlines but without substantive content supporting the headline. They quickly move out of the website as soon as they that the stories do not meet their needs. Vandehei (2016, p.1) indeed notes that there is a risk of mass-producing content that draw in huge audiences through misleading headlines, and other "feel-good" content. Elkan, (2013 p.10) explains that in such cases, the content could become "more trashy, optimised for a demographic that seeks celebrity news rather than more demanding content".

Thus, given the higher bounce rates on NN, it could mean there is an issue with the content published on the website. Essentially, the NN editors may want to offer content that will not just attract a lot of new audiences, but also devise a way of ensuring that they (audiences) keep coming back.

4.2.2 Motivations for consumption

It is notable that readers who come to the two websites fundamentally have different motivations. This corresponds with a key assumption of the uses and gratifications theory that the audience members make a conscious choices when selecting a specific media channel and content (McQuail, 1994). A respondent (Joel Muinde, personal communication, July 10 2016) notes that he mostly visits the DN "to get detailed information about events, and understanding what is going on. Once in a while, I visit the site to read trending columns and feature stories". He reads the NN "for information, mostly new information when trying to make sense of events", pointing out that the DN does not break new ground in terms of the kind of content offered, while the NN does. Indeed, the analytics available corroborate the respondent's view given that, overall, the percentage of stories attracting unique (or new visitors) on NN is higher than that on DN.

A second reader (Peter Mwai, personal communication, July 7, 2016) interviewed points out that the biggest motivating factor is the trust they have for "the Nation website as a news source. When there are several versions of a story, breaking news or not, I know Nation's version is

closer to the truth than the others," he notes. On the other hand, he says that "Nairobi News provides stories for gossip and entertainment stories". Other readers cite various factors for reading content online, such as seeking "news, breaking news and the current trends in entertainment and sports" on the DN and another reading NN because the "news there is entertaining."

4.2.3 Serving audience needs

The way content is presented to NN audiences is different from the way DN does it, an NN editor who has previously handled DN content explains. The primary reason is that consumption habits and the demographic differ. The headlines on NN, for instance, are deliberately written in a way that will make people click on a story, while the DN is perhaps more concerned about the exactness and fidelity to the facts of the story. The NN editor notes that elements of a story that are unusual, dramatic or shocking are deliberately played up so as to attract more page views.

In an interview, a NN producer (Emmanuel Onyango, personal communication, August 26, 2016) points out that being younger, NN audiences gravitate towards content that they do not find on websites like the DN. He says the DN focuses more on breaking news and politics, which it considers "important". However, he points out that content like gossip and scandal is more alluring to many of the NN audiences. They thus provide more of it. Indeed, this study points to evidence that entertainment stories, categorised as Chillax on NN website, attract some of the highest page views as seen in Section 4.3.

It is evident that audiences make choices out of the varied content offerings by the two websites. As Eighmey, (1997) and Kaye (1998) note, the internet is a repository of varied content and thus it is able to serve different needs, with each consumer able to pull out the content that best suits them.

4.3 News subject and readership

In the illustrations that follow, the 105 most read articles (based on page views) sampled for the study are classified according to their subjects. Many of the subject categories are as they appear on the website, for example, blogs/Oped, lifestyle, Africa, politics, county and business. For crime, drama and health the category is determined through an analysis of individual items.

Table 4.1 and Fig 4.3 show that most of the top read articles on DN fall under politics, followed by crime. For NN, the most read stories are in the general news category (See Table 4.2 and Fig 4.4). This is followed by articles categorised as 'Chillax' on the NN website. By subject,

these are entertainment stories. Crime stories are also popular with NN visitors as they are the third biggest category according to our analysis. Granted, these illustrations indicate what subjects are popular with audiences. A deeper analysis of this data and insights from the other methods used such as interviews give context to the findings.

Table 4. 1: Summary of top articles by subject/DN.

SUMMARY FOR DN		
	Blogs/Oped	4
	Lifestyle	5
	Africa	1
	Foreign	4
	Politics	28
	Business	4
National	Crime	26
	Drama	2
	Health	2
	Others	2
County	Politics	15
	Crime	11
	Others	1
Sum Total		**105**

Source: Author's research analysis

Figure 4. 3: Top story subjects by page views for DN
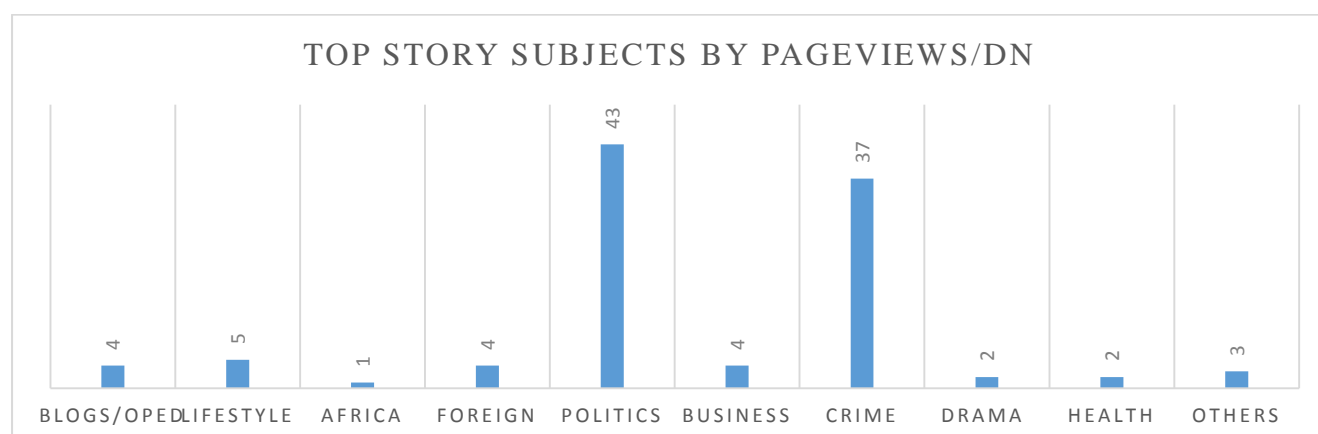
Source: Author's research analysis

Table 4. 2: Summary of top articles by subject for NN

SUMMARY FOR NN		
	Blogs	3
	Chillax (entertainment/light reads)	20
	Life (listicles)	6
News	Politics	14
	General news	40
	Crime	16
	Business	1
	Sport	5
Sum total		105

Source: Author's research analysis

Figure 4. 4: Top subjects by page views for NN
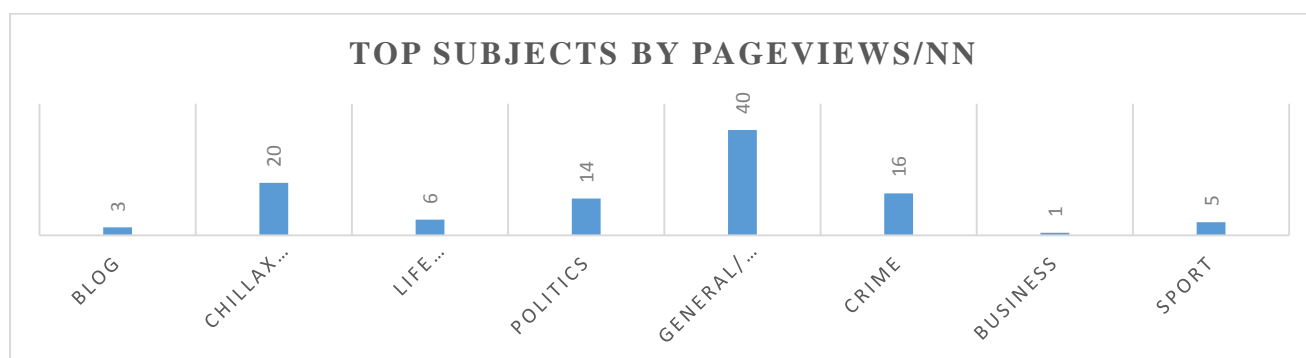
Source: Author's research analysis

4.3.1 Politics is dominant for DN

From an analysis of the 105 most popular stories sampled across seven days, political stories appear to be the most preferred. For example, one of the most popular stories involved Raila Odinga. The story titled 'Irate youth disrupt Raila rally at Shibale market' (July 22, 2016) is a political story, placed on the 'politics' section of the website.

Of the 105 most popular stories, more than a third (43) of them are political stories. On July 18, 2016, for instance, the story that attracted the highest number of page views was titled 'Raila on charm offensive in western amid ODM revolt'. On July 19, the second most popular story was titled 'Raila receives heroic welcome in Budalangi'. The story jumped to top position the following day. In the next two days, the most read stories (in terms of page views) were all on politics, and especially those involving opposition leader Raila Odinga's tour in western Kenya.

It is evident that political stories are popular with DN audiences irrespective of where they are placed on the website. Stories about prominent politicians are still popular even when they are not categorised as political stories on the website. Thus, it can be said that DN visitors' affinity for political stories is very high. It can be argued, thus, that the affinity for political stories demonstrate audiences' ability to find media messages that provide them with particular gratifications, as Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch (1974) point out. In this case, the audiences could also be seeking out media portrayals of specific politicians to strengthen their social identity, as Harwood (1999) notes. Yet it could also mean that the DN does well in providing political content so that the website becomes attractive to people who love politics. This may explain why the DN struggles to attract new visitors, given that its overall unique visitor numbers have only risen by a marginal percentage in the last four years. In an interview, a technical producer argued that DN could have a bigger growth in new visitors if it constantly experimented with new types of content ((Daudi Gicheru, personal communication, August 7, 2016),

Contrasting with the DN, the NN has fewer political stories among its 105 most read articles. Unlike the DN, NN does not have a 'politics' section on its website and for this research, the stories that were considered political are those where a politician is mentioned. Some of the top stories that were considered political on the NN website include 'Five things about Sonko's pastor caught up in 'snake in church' drama' (July 18, 2016), 'Why Ruto's childhood friends still can't believe he is Deputy President' (July 22, 2016) and '10 times Uhuru and Ruto were 'boys''(July, 22, 2016). The total number of political stories was 14, a far smaller number that on the DN. The NN editor points out that they often deliberately ignore "mainstream" political stories unless there is a human interest angle in the story.

The story about the DP's childhood friends had the overall highest number of page views. However, the story that attracted the highest number of new visitors is 'Panic in church as snake slithers out of woman's handbag.' From the foregoing, NN audiences do not seem to have a high affinity for political content, given that there were only 14 political stories out the 105 most read stories.

This finding affirms the choice of gratifications that the different audiences have, as the uses and gratifications arguments affirm. It affirms why audiences would go to the specific websites — DN or NN, in this case. It is because they are looking for the type of content that is likely to gratify their needs, be they social or psychological needs (Blumler, Katz and Gurevitch, 1974).

4.3.2 Human-interest/individual experience stories attract more interest

From an analysis of time spent on pages, it appears NN readers take most of their time reading human-interest stories describing the individual experiences of people.

For instance, visitors who clicked on the story titled 'Meet law student who applied to become Kenya's new chief justice' (July 19, 2016) spent on average 2 minutes 52 seconds reading it. This is the highest among the stories sampled. The next biggest story was titled 'How desperate varsity graduate lost Sh300k in search of police job' (July 17, 2017). Readers spent on average 2 minutes 29 seconds on the story page.

Readers also spent the longest time on these stories, cumulatively. For the week under review, readers spent a cumulative average time of 15 minutes and eight seconds on these two stories. In contrast, readers spent an average of 8 minutes 26 seconds on the two most popular stories by page views ('Why Ruto's childhood friends still can't believe he is Deputy President' and 'Panic in church as snake slithers out of woman's handbag' (July 17, 2016)). These stories were very popular by page views, but people spent less time on them. It appears the readers get their gratification (curiosity) quickly and move on.

Readers lingered on the two individual-experience stories, because the content is more useful or easily relatable to their day-to-day experiences. The typical NN website reader is mostly young, in school or recently graduated, and the experiences of a desperate university graduate would likely resonate with them. In essence, the readers could be looking for values that they can identify with in these stories to affirm their personal identity as McQuail (1994) points out.

This finding can also be explained through Lavrusik's (2010) argument on an increasing personalisation of news on the web. He argues that many audiences increasingly discover stories through social networks, that is, stories that friends have commented or shared. Thus, audiences mainly engage with stories that are personal and relate to the day-to-day human experiences.

4.3.3 Content style and tone are important for NN

While politics attracts many readers to DN, there is no particular subject that NN readers privilege. Traffic to NN is determined by the style and tone of content. Forty of the 105 most popular stories sampled on NN were general news articles. The style and tone of the articles and headlines, rather than their subject, were what made them popular. The NN editor also pointed out that a number of the popular stories are social media-driven (Kenfrey Kiberenge,

personal communication, August 7, 2016). Some examples include: 'Chief atheist received a bible gift and Facebook is ungovernable' (July 20, 2016), 'Drama as former policeman undresses at Lang'ata Police Station' (July 20, 2016) and 'Rev Natasha's PA equally hot video' (July 19, 2016).

The NN editor points out that younger readers are more likely to share and discuss articles with "juicy" headlines even when such headlines are inaccurate or misleading. Besides, an NN producer argues, the more "mainstream" a story is, the less likely it is to attract traffic. In a follow-up interview (Emmanuel Onyango, personal communication, August 18, 2016), an NN producer says a story like, 'Kidero told to be 'ruthless' in getting titles for public school lands' (August 18, 2016), which only attracts about 1,000 views a day, compared with a blog written by controversial writer Njoki Chege that gathers about 200,000 views. However, he notes that just by tweaking a headline, a story can change from a boring one to one that attracts a lot of people, even if the content matter does not change.

This finding can be explained from Friend and Singer's (2007) argument on how online media tweak headlines to appeal to audiences 'baser' interests. Further, it has been argued herebefore that online audiences are mostly young ((Google, 2015, Perrin and Duggan, 2015; Jackson, 2013) and thus content is styled in a way that is attractive to this demographic.

Evidence collected in this study further reveals the kind of stories that NN readers prefer. Bizarre stories such as 'Panic in church as snake slithers out of woman's handbag' and 'Women live in fear of armed gangsters sucking breasts' attracts a lot of readers. On July 19 and 21, 2016, these were respectively the most popular stories by page views. On July 20 and 22, stories the stories with the highest number of page views were 'Man miraculously walks out of freak accident on Ngong road-PHOTOS' and 'Ruto's childhood friends still can't believe he is deputy president'. These are considered feel-good inspirational-type stories that also appeal to many NN audiences.

In contrast, DN readers' preferences are different. The story titled 'Women live in fear of armed gangsters sucking breasts' (July 21, 2016) that appeared on NN website was also published on the DN website. Yet, the story attracted relatively fewer page views. The explanation by one DN online sub-editor (Henry Gekonde, personal communication, August 18, 2016), is that DN readers often do not expect to find bizarre stories on the site and thus may have thought the article was misplaced.

4.3.4 Popularity of crime stories

Crime stories attract a lot of attention from both NN and DN readers. Crime stories related to terror draw great interest even from non-conventional audiences, including new visitors from outside Kenya. For instance, the story 'Kapenguria OCS, six police officers dead in attack' was published on July 14, 2016. The story was about a rogue policeman who laid siege and killed his colleagues at a police station. Due to the incident, on that day there was a huge spike in traffic to the DN website (See Fig 4.5). Terror incidents have caused similar rise in DN web traffic, including the Garissa University College attack by Al-Shabaab in 2015 and the Mandera bus terror attack a year earlier.

Evidence from this study showed that all crime stories, even those filed and published as specific 'county' stories attracted many page views. Some examples included 'Teacher stabbed by boyfriend for ending relationship' (July 20, 2016) and 'Students arrested in police crackdown' (July 20, 2016. Both stories were published in the county pages.

For DN, the popularity of crime stories came second after politics. Out the 105 most popular stories sampled for DN, 37 were crime stories. NN had 16 crime stories, which was significant given that NN readers are more attracted to the style and tone of the stories rather than the content subject. (See Tables 4.1 and 4.2).

Patterson (2000) explains the interest in crime stories as driven by sensationalism that initially draws people's attention, but which fades away over time. To some extent this holds true, through in Kenya, the interest may arise from the fact that crime affects a wide spectrum of the society if not everyone, as the NN editor points out. Thus, the interest may not be necessarily driven by sensationalism.

Figure 4.5: July 14 traffic spike
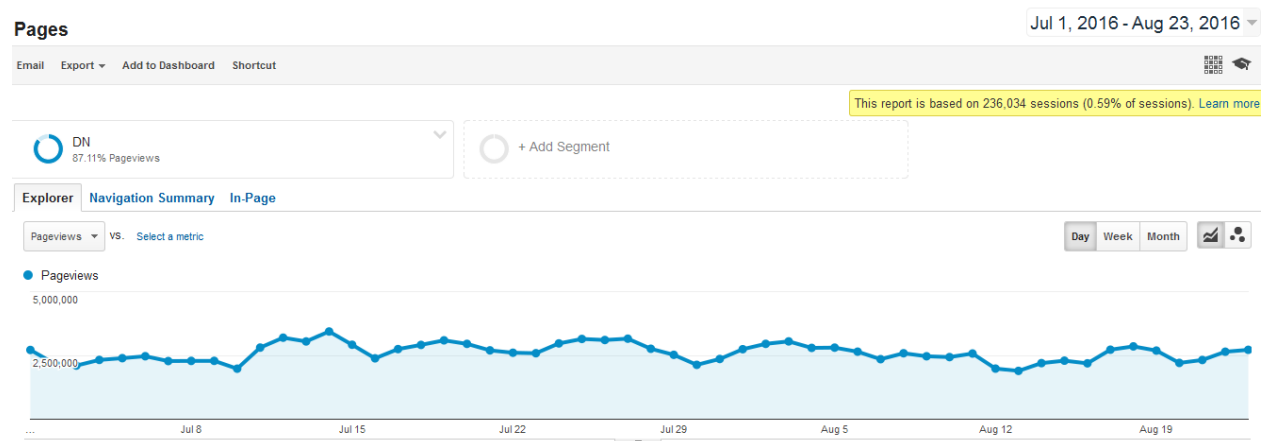
There was a spike in web traffic on July 14, 2016. Source: Google Analytics

4.3.5 Specific columnists/bloggers attract readers to NN and DN

Mutuma Mathiu's opinion article on former President Mwai Kibaki's legacy in Kisumu and Bitange Ndemo's blog on the declining value of higher education in Kenya were the only two stories that made it to the list of 105 top stories sampled for this research. On the NN, a blog by Njoki Chege "CITY GIRL: Ladies, want to get to the C-Suite? Get a sponsor!" (July 15, 2016) made it to the list. On the blog section, the NN only published posts by Njoki Chege. Occasionally, however, the site would publish other writers. The DN had a variety of opinion articles and blog posts by different authors published every day.

The fact that the most popular opinion article on the DN had a political theme was unsurprising. This is given the fact that DN audiences have a high affinity for political content, according to the evidence adduced in this study. Similarly, the top opinion article on NN, mirrored the kind of content that appealed to many NN audiences. The choice of politics-themed opinion article and a controversial blog by NN audiences can be explained from a uses and gratifications theoretical standpoint. The controversial blog by Njoki Chege corresponds with the typical NN audience, whose choice of popular stories is determined by the style and tone of the stories. In this case, the controversy in Njoki Chege's story appeared to be one of the main factors driving its consumption, given how widely the story was shared and the comments that it generated.

4.3.6 For foreign stories, currency and resonance are important

Foreign stories do not often attract much attention from DN or NN readers, except perhaps when they are big and current world events or resonate with Kenyan audiences.

Out of the 105 most popular stories sampled, only four were foreign stories. They included 'Thousands of South Sudanese flee to Uganda' (July 23, 2016) and Don't call me Your Excellency - Philippine's Duterte' (July 21, 2016). The others are 'Melania Trump hit by plagiarism controversy' (July 19, 2016) and 'Erdogan seeks control after coup attempt in Turkey' (July 16, 2016)

In some of these stories, there was an element of resonance with the Kenyan audience, who constitute the majority of the NN and DN audiences (Google, 2016). The South Sudan story, for instance, was relevant to many Kenyans who have some interest in South Sudan affairs. The Duterte story has an element of oddity, while the other two related to the biggest current affairs events happening in the world. The NN does not routinely publish foreign content, and thus no analysis could be made here.

4.3.7 Niche areas do not do well

Stories on categories such as sport, business and health (which can be considered niche as they target a specific narrow group within the larger DN and NN target market) o not attract much attention from readers. Only a handful of stories in these categories featured in the list of most popular stories sampled. Stories on more narrow and focused subjects such as motoring, relationships career etc. are not even in the list. An editor at the NN (Emmanuel Onyango, personal communication, August 12, 2016) sums it thus: "In my view, the audience, in its current state, is not sophisticated enough for niche content. A website focused solely on one kind of content is bound to struggle."

Arguably, the reason why niche content struggles to attract audiences is that neither DN nor NN strive to provide highly specialised content to specific audiences. To serve niche audiences, Dimmick (2003) notes the need for media to differentiate itself in serving varied audiences in different locations and at different times, which the DN and NN have not. Laser targeting of specific audiences (Husni and Main, 2002) is also something that these websites have not done.

4.4 Proximity and reader consumption

In discussing the linkage between the proximity of stories and their consumption across the DN and NN websites, it is perhaps important to examine the source of the audience. Most of the audiences to both websites are from Kenya (about 60% for DN and 70% for NN), according to Google Analytics (See Fig 4.5). The next biggest audience base comes from the US and the UK. About 10 per cent of the audience locations are undefined.

In this context therefore, proximity is mainly seen in how the content resonates with the disparate Kenyan audiences. In this regard, foreign stories are able to attract page views as long as they are current, resonate with the Kenyan audience or have "oddity" or "unusual" element.

Figure 4. 6: Source of traffic for DN and NN

Country		Sessions	% Sessions
1. Kenya			
	DN	9,800,809	60.84%
	Nairobi News	1,208,137	70.92%
2. United States			
	DN	1,744,786	10.83%
	Nairobi News	77,770	4.57%
3. (not set)			
	DN	1,583,443	9.83%
	Nairobi News	174,691	10.25%
4. United Kingdom			
	DN	412,933	2.56%
	Nairobi News	22,731	1.33%
5. Sudan			
	DN	314,561	1.95%
	Nairobi News	39,368	2.31%
6. Netherlands			
	DN	240,660	1.49%
	Nairobi News	27,471	1.61%
7. India			
	DN	202,549	1.26%
	Nairobi News	11,704	0.69%
8. United Arab Emirates			
	DN	180,495	1.12%
	Nairobi News	20,990	1.23%
9. Canada			
	DN	151,090	0.94%
	Nairobi News	3,966	0.23%
10. Germany			
	DN	143,738	0.89%
	Nairobi News	5,707	0.34%

Source: Google Analytics, August 16, 2016

The proximity factor can also be seen in the consumption of county stories. Micro-audiences from the counties could be more interested in stories coming from their respective counties. Available data, however, show that for county stories, audiences flock to content that they already have interest in, such as politics and crime, and thus are not attracted by geographical proximity. Such stories are consumed because they are close to the audiences' local

community. Vaughn (2008) points out people also use these stories when they plan to visit the places, or have been there before, and thus extend the proximity beyond physical location.

4.5 Placement and consumption of stories

To determine how placement of stories informs consumption, this study utilised Chartbeat analytics tool, which is able to assign numbers depending on the number of people who have clicked on a particular story at a set time. The screen grab below (Fig 4.6) for instance, displays the DN stories read on July 11, 2016 at 1828hrs. This way, the story performance (by concurrent page views) in relation to their position on the website could easily be examined.

Figure 4. 7: The ranking of stories by number of page views

Source: Chartbeat analytics, July 11, 2016 at 1828hrs

The Chartbeat display also indicated the percentage of visitors who read a particular section of the website. For example, in the following display (Fig 4.7), Chartbeat indicated that only 54 per cent people read until that point. That means if a story was placed below the News content belt on the website, the likelihood of the story being read diminished. On the DN website, Counties, Life and Style, Politics and Video sections are among some of the content sections below the News category as one navigates to the bottom of the website.

Figure 4.8: Chartbeat placement shows how audiences read DN content

Source: Chartbeat Analytics, July 8, 2016 at 1225hrs

4.5.1 Homepage stories attract more page views

Evidence from this study indicated that stories placed on the top stories window on the DN homepage (Homepage 1 to Homepage 4) had the highest number of page views. There were, however, few instances, where these stories did not attract the highest number of page views (See example in Table 4.3 below). This corresponds with eye-track research (Nielsen, 2006) that shows that most online readers first focus on stories on the upper part of the content area, which has implications on ideally how news websites should place content on the website.

Table 4.3: Story ranking by pageviews vs placement on DN website, July 7, 2016 at 0734hrs

Ranking by pageviews	Story position	subject/category	Story title
1	Homepage 2	News/topical	Mystery of tall, dark man in lawyer's murder
2	Homepage 1	News/health	Hepatitis outstrips Aids, TB as killer
3	News 2/sideba	Politics/news	Ababu quits ODM post, says Raila betrayed him
4	News 1/sideba	Politics/news	Raila meets western Orange MPs to stem rebellion
5	Homepage 4	News	Torment of Mavoko 3 recounted in court
6	Sports football	Sports	Ronaldo ends Wales's Euro fairytale
7	Counties 2	Counties news	Three die in accident at Kenol blackspot
8	Life & Style 3/s	Real estate DN2 feature	APARTMENTS: Another block coming up in Westlands
9	News 4	News	Student commits suicide after losing football bets
10	News 3	News/social media	Netanyahu traffic fires up Twitter
11	Life &Style 4/si	Real estate DN2 feature	Find a niche market to survive in the property industry
12	Hmpg sidebar :	News	Interior ministry 'irregularly awarded Sh3.5bn contract'
13	Homepage 3	News/sports	Top athletics agent remanded in probe over doping cases
14	Life &Style 5/si	Real estate DN2 feature	Never leave an entire project to a foreman
15	Counties 1	Counties news	Threats and stigma scaring sodomy victims from reporting cases

Editors interviewed for this research pointed out that they place what they consider 'most important' stories, (that is, those seen as likely to attract audiences by considering such factors as prominence, proximity and other news values), on the top story window. Evidently, the

majority of the audiences read these stories. The indication, therefore, is the readers often affirmed the editors' choices.

There are other instances though when a story placed prominently failed to appeal to audiences, meaning that the audiences did not always agree with editors regarding the importance of a story. In Table 4.3, for instance, the third top story on the homepage (Homepage 3) was ranked number 13 by page views and, as such, it may not have merited the top position it was assigned by the editor. In contrast, there were stories that are placed in section pages (and thus not immediately seen by a person visiting the website) that ended up having as many page views as stories in the most prominent position on the homepage. Such instances thus portray a subjective story selection by the editors. Tewsksbury and Rittenberg (2012) argue that some readers enter a site with specific interests in mind, meaning that their story selection is not dependent on placement. They point out that if there are topics the readers do not care about, they may not read them even if the stories have been recommended by the editor.

4.5.2 Social media reduces the importance of placement

An NN editor argued that while placement is important, it did not necessarily matter. Some stories' prominence rose due to how many times they were shared on social media, and how audiences reacted to them. Oftentimes, unusual and big breaking stories are picked up by readers, who may not have come directly to the website. In fact, when a story incorporates key words that make it easily searchable via search engines, it may still attract readers irrespective of where it appears on the website. In the sampled content, for instance, there were stories that were placed in a less prominent section on the website. But despite the placement, the stories emerged as top read stories by page views. In the list on Table 4.4, some stories (highlighted in bold) attract many page views even though they were placed in less prominent sections of the website.

With the advent of social media, audience consumption of content has changed (Tombs, 2014). As Bell (2015) has observed, there are people who read news through social media. These are unlikely to be affected by news placement, as some do not even access the website directly. Moreover, with the DN opting to use Facebook Instant Articles ((Njanja, 2016)), social media can direct people to articles that are not in any prominent position on the website.

Table 4. 4: Story ranking by page views vs placement on the DN website, July 8, 2016 at 1225hrs

July 08 1225hrs				
	1	Homepage 2	Business/News	Kenya Airways axe hovers over 600 jobs
	2	Homepage 1	Foreign/News	Five police killed at US race bias protest
	3	Homepage 3	News/politics/local	BBC reveals how it roped Wetang'ula into BAT scam
	4	News 1	News/topical	Willie Kimani dedicated his life to exposing rogue officials
	5	**Politics 2**	**Politics**	**ODM still strong after duo left: Raila**
	6	Business 2/Sideba	Business/News	Relief for firms as Rotich halts penalties for withholding tax
	7	Sidebar 2	News	Fresh row looms over recruitment of medical students
	8	News 2	News/Tech	Bloggers raise storm over draft ICT Bill
	9	Sidebar 5	News	What lawyers want in new Chief Justice
	10	Sidebar 1	News/topical	Lawyer defended the poor, fought police brutality
	11	Hmpg 4	Regional/news	Little to celebrate as South Sudan turns five
	12	Politics 1	politics	Uhuru, Ruto to have final say on party officials
	13	**Counties 2/news**	**counties**	**Ministry to adopt bloodless circumcision tool in 10 counties**
	14	Sidebar 4	news/topical	Probe to go on despite burning of police post
	15	Politics 5/news 7	politics	Raila meets western Orange MPs to stem rebellion

## 4.6 Multimedia content enhances readership

In gathering data, respondents offered different views regarding consumption of multimedia content. According to one consumer (Joel Muinde, personal communication, July 7, 2016), any multimedia "has to be compelling" to attract them. "I am likely to look at photographs, especially if they have captions". A second person (Joseph Kioko, personal communication, July 10, 2016) said multimedia items "enhance my experience when I have already decided to read the story. It will, however, affect the time I spend, more so if it is video." Yet another respondent (Christine Aganyanya, personal communication, July 10, 2016): "Yes, because graphics attract more attention." A video producer (Anthony Makokha, August 25, 2016) pointed out that video content particularly attracts diverse audiences if it is entertaining.

Of the content sampled from Google Analytics for DN, only one photo is listed among the top 105 items (stories) ranked by page views. It is a photo gallery titled 'DP Ruto's brother laid to rest' (July 20, 2016). The sampling from Charbeat analytics, which focused on real-time consumption of content has videos: 'University students die in a road crash along the Kisii-Kilgoris highway' (July 3, 2016), 'Slain lawyer Willie Kimani laid to rest' (July 10, 2016), and 'ODM squabbles threaten Luhyia unity' (July 17, 2016) among the individual content items with highest page views, indicating that at some point of the day, video attracts high traffic to the website. Thus it may be a good thing for NN and DN to consider more videos to tell the stories. For those who watch video on these websites, the evidence gathered point to a better experience for them. Indeed, as Opgenhaffen (2011) notes, news websites incorporate interactive features, such as videos, in a bid to make the reader part of the news experience. The websites are therefore able to better gratify the audiences' needs.

4.7 Further observations

Granted, from an overview and analysis of all the research data collected, the indication is that both NN and DN website publications adequately serve their loyal audiences. However, one observation is that there has been a marginal growth in traffic to the DN website in recent years. The website, though maintaining its popularity with its core audience segment, has failed to attract new visitors. The growth in unique views is also marginal while time spent on stories has reduced over the years.

Figure 4.9: The drop in average time spent per session for DN
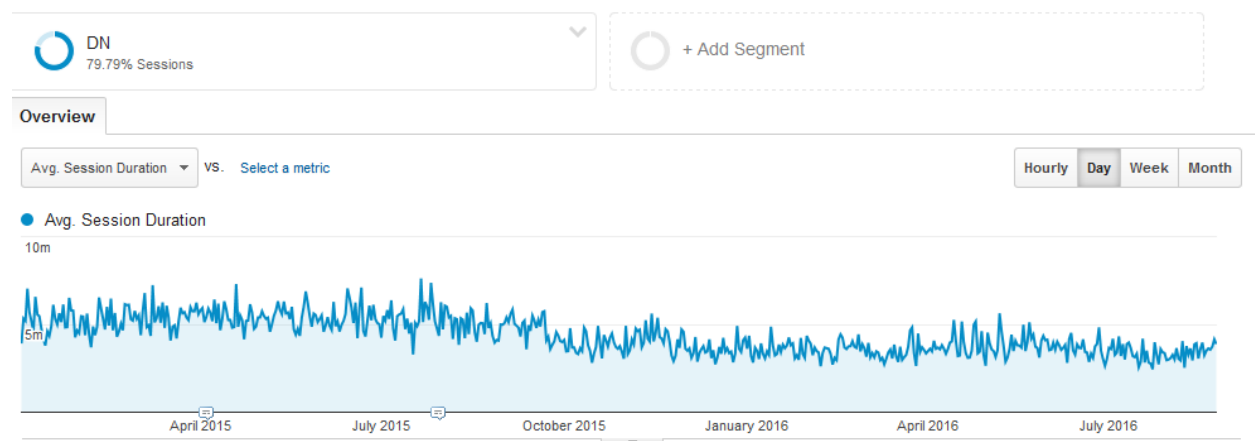
Source: Google Analytics, August 25, 2016

The marginal rise in new visits, according to one technical producer, is due to a growth reaching a saturation point. Thus, he suggested new subject areas and style of writing that would help improve traffic. He pointed out that there were more new visitors to Nairobi News website because of the content. Increasingly, the audiences were also spending more time reading stories on the NN. For instance, of the 105 individual stories sampled on both platforms, the average time spent on a story on the Daily Nation was 23 seconds as compared to 1 min 45 seconds on the Nairobi News platform. It could have meant that on average, the top NN stories were more engaging to the audiences than DN stories were. However, in an email exchange, the DN managing editor pointed out (Churchill Otieno, personal communication, September 15, 2016) that the average time spent "usually go down as absolute numbers climb — the more activity/users, the more difficult it is to sustain a higher average time spent." Nonetheless, he noted that a website has a better chance of attracting advertisements when traffic and average time spent there are both high. "So it's a goal we [Nation Media Group] must chase," he pointed out.

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Essentially, the main goal of DN and NN websites is to attract as many audiences as possible and retain them. It is primarily the way these websites can make revenues. This implies that the content produced must be attractive enough to attract new audiences and ensure that readers stay for long on the websites. In this case, balanced mix of content presented in different ways would gratify the needs of disparate audiences. However, this study shows that while DN and NN content serves loyal audiences well, it does not appear to attract a very wide range of audiences.

Even for a "supermarket" of content meant to attract many audience types, the DN mainly appeals to a few big categories. The website provides little gratification to those who are not interested in politics and crime, which affirms the view by Harding (2016) that media houses find it challenging to adequately serve disparate audiences. In terms of presentation, most of DN content is in text form and audiences who prefer multimedia content such as video, audio, graphics have less of a choice.

4.8 Conclusion

This chapter has presented the results of this study, noting their linkages to the theoretical arguments that have been advanced before. In the overview section, the chapter examines the Daily Nation and Nairobi News audiences' behaviour and meaning. In addition, the section addresses the motivations for consumption and how the websites serve these audiences needs through the content they provide.

In line with the objectives, the chapter presents the findings of the several aspects of the study: the link between content subjects and readership, how placement of stories and their proximity relate to consumption, and the role of multimedia in the dynamics of consumption.

The findings indicate that DN and NN audiences have a high affinity for particular content subjects. Content on crime and politics, for instance, are popular. The style and tone of the content is also important in determining how content is consumed. Multimedia also influences how readers consume content. Ultimately, there are discussions on how these findings relate to theoretical arguments advanced in previous chapters.

CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

5.1 Introduction

This chapter summarises the objectives, research methodology and the main findings of the study. It also presents conclusions and recommendations, based on objectives of the study.

The main objective of this research was to examine the linkages between readership and content connsumption at the Nation Media Group, with specific focus on the Daily Nation and Nairobi News. The specific objectives were to assess readers' consumption patterns based on content subject, to determine the contribution of multimedia text to readership consumption, explore the relationship between proximity of issues and choice of content and examine the link between consumption of a story and its placement on the website. The research found that the Daily Nation and Nairobi News serve their audiences well through the content published on respective websites, although there exist some gaps. These include the disproportionate focus on particular audience categories at the expense of others seeking content gratification from the two websites. Finally, the researcher makes recommendations, including suggestions for further studies on this topic.

5.2 Summary

5.2.1 Objectives

The objective of this research was to examine the linkages between readership and online news content in Kenya. Specifically, the study aimed at examining the link between a story's popularity and its placement on the homepage of a news website, assessing reader consumption patterns based on online news subject. It also sought to determine the extent to which multimedia stories contribute to readership choices. Lastly, the research sought to explore the relationship between proximity of issues and reader's choice of content.

5.2.1 Methodology

The research employed ethnography of online communities, using interviews, observation and quantitative content analysis of stories and their consumption analytics to collect data. The researcher selected DN and NN's 15 most read stories by page views each day for seven days, totaling 210 stories. Each storied was analysed using codified themes, and the quantitative data results presented in tables and graphs. Subsequently, the researcher interpreted the data in accordance to the set objectives, noting the relevant theoretical paradigms. For interviews, editors, producers and consumers of were purposively sampled.

5.2.2 Findings

The study broadly found out that politics is the most dominant subject consumed by Daily Nation audiences, followed by crime. For Nairobi News, the subject matter was not a big consideration compared with the content's style and tone. Currency and resonance was also found to be important elements influencing consumption of content. Human-interest stories were found to be popular with the audiences. Evidence revealed that content placement had impact on the consumption of content, both positively and negatively. It was also observed that niche content on Daily Nation and Nairobi News did not attract a lot of readership, with evidence revealing that both websites gave less focus on such content.

More specifically, the research found that content subject areas were a big consideration for the DN website, and to a lesser extent, the NN website. Many DN readers identified themselves as political junkies, something that this study agrees with. The research also found that crime is a big attraction for many DN online audiences. Other news genres were, however, not as popular. Sports, for instance, did not attract much online readership. For instance, no single sports story appeared in the top 105 stories that were sampled for this study. Consumption of health, technology, business, and opinion content did not even show on the data sampled. This finding thus exposed a gap between what the type of audiences that the websites seeks to serve and the people that are actually adequately served. The DN in this case, appeared not to adequately serve crucial audience segments such as those who like sports, health, business and health. For NN, people who like sports content were not served at all.

This research also showed that many of the most popular stories by page views on the NN website were general stories. The study showed that the style and tone of the content was more attractive to the readers than the subject. This meant that as long as elements of the story such as angling and headlines were well done, stories could attract audiences irrespective of subject categories. Human-interest stories, especially those that narrate people's experiences, also attracted many readers to the website. Stories that the audiences could relate with were especially important. The research noted that the need for personal identification among the audiences was among the reasons why they chose this type of content. This explanation is derived from McQuail (1994)'s uses and gratifications arguments. This finding brought to the fore the issue of whether DN and NN websites' adequately covered the common experiences of the targeted audiences.

The study showed that niche content did not attract many page views. Often, niche content reaches specific segments of the population and may therefore not be popular. However, the study concluded that being a general content website, DN could endeavour to attract many audiences other than its core political base. Content that interests only a few people may not attract many page views — if this is taken to be somewhat representative of the number of people who click on a story. However, fewer audiences do not mean that the content is less important, or even that such audiences are less significant. This study has shown that often, other parameters such as how people audiences engage with a story, or how long they stay on it may be more indicative of the importance of stories rather than the number of page views.

There are specific bloggers and columnists that attracted many audiences, even though they are not published as often as the regular content. The finding that the biggest opinion articles by page views have political themes was unsurprising given the high affinity for political content. Additionally, the study found that controversy also helps draw attention to readers. Foreign stories did not often attract much attention from DN or NN readers, except when they were relevant and current world events or resonated with Kenyan audiences. Given that the audiences are spread across the globe, this made sense. From evidence in this research, offbeat foreign stories also attracted readers' attention.

Overall, multimedia items attracted audiences to the DN and NN websites. This was especially true for stories that had accompanying audio-visual content. This was an affirmation that audiences are likely to spend a lot more time on multi-text stories fulfilling numerous gratifications. Notwithstanding this finding, most stories on the DN and NN websites did not have multimedia items.

5.3 Recommendations

From the foregoing, this study makes the following recommendations, which may be useful for media companies seeking to adequately serve content needs of their target audiences.

First, the research has shown that both DN and NN have underserved audiences, whose content needs are not adequately provided. DN for example, where many audiences prefer content subjects other than the popular crime and politics subjects, could isolate specific content areas such as football and entertainment, which are identified by audiences as important but do not seem to attract many page views.

The isolated topics can be deliberately placed in prominent areas of the website so that they are easily seen by the audiences. As this study has shown, many of the stories that are prominently

placed on the homepage attract a lot of page views. As noted, research shows that readers focus most on stories that are on the top section of the homepage (Nielsen, 2006; Ofcom, 2014). On the homepage, the specific content categories should be easily identifiable so that those looking for similar types of content could easily navigate to the specific pages. Additionally, the websites could ensure a more constant stream of interesting and fresh content that is informative and useful to the audiences.

Secondly, DN and NN websites, as do many other news websites, have 'peak' and 'off-peak' periods, referring to the time when audiences visit the websites. For the DN, most visit the website from early morning (about 5am to 9am), through the rush-hour period when people would be travelling to work and settling at their places of work. By 9am, the traffic slightly falls and remains flat until 5pm. A lot of the content that is already popular with audiences can be published during off-peak period, that is mid-morning to afternoon, while the less popular content but potentially able to attract audiences can be published during the peak hours for maximum exposure. The number of stories that are produced in niche categories could also be increased during the peak hours to ensure that the audiences have more choices.

Thirdly, multimedia elements, such as video, audio and graphics, have not been used extensively on both DN and NN websites. On a day-to-day basis, few text stories have accompanying video. Most of the videos produced for DN, in fact, tend to be standalone items. Extensive use of video, graphics and slideshows embedded along with text stories would attract more audiences. In addition, this would be useful in retaining loyal audiences as well as attracting new ones. Interesting videos create a deeper understanding of the story. It could help elicit discussions, and ensure stories are widely shared. Moreover, more interesting content would undoubtedly also attract advertising, which as noted by PwC (2015) is a key factor that determine the type of content and how it is presented to targeted audiences. This would then enhance the websites' and newspapers' bottom lines.

Fourth, to attract more readership, editors should invest in restyling the web headlines. Evidence from NN shows that story styling matters, perhaps more than the subject of the content. Thus, besides publishing a lot more subjects, DN could consider styling its content in a manner that is more attractive to audiences. Thus listicles, "how-to" explanatory stories, can be considered. In addition, more in-depth "Day 2" stories can be considered. In essence, this study proposes a middle ground between DN and NN-type content, that is, a mix of soft, human-interest news stories and hard news. This is because more of NN styled content could

lead to stories that are dumbed-down or inaccurate. During the study, the research found some content that was deemed so inappropriate that Google ads provider, adsense, recommended their removal (see Appendix 2). Essentially, content that is able to attract new audiences, such as what NN content does and one that keeps loyal audiences coming, as DN content does, is most preferable.

Fifth, by analysing content on both NN and DN websites, this study revealed that proximity matters. To attract and retain audiences, it is recommended that more human-interest stories that audiences can relate with be published. The audiences are also likely to share or discuss on social media stories that they are interested in. This could further increase the visibility of a website content to new audiences.

Lastly, it is recommended that overall, the DN could be more innovative. The DN website seeks to appeal to general audiences but as this study reveals, many of its readers have a bias towards political content. Thus DN publishes a lot of political content to meet audience needs, and the justification here would possibly be that politics sells. Yet as a general website, it may be failing to adequately provide for other potentially big audiences, and thus keeping them away. It is recommended that innovation is the only way the website can attract and keep as many disparate audiences as possible. The DN could leverage on social media and other technology tools to ensure that the content is disseminated to multiple audiences. This content would necessarily be as diverse as the target audiences. For NN, a similar approach is recommended. Other than entertainment, the NN could equally put a lot more effort in packaging other content to attract diverse audiences. Areas such as dating, education, and career choices would perhaps attract more people to the NN platform.

5.4 Conclusion

The study concludes that there are many ways that online news websites can adequately serve disparate online audiences, without leaving some readers underserved. This is irrespective of the primary targeted audiences. The website publishers first need to understand the content needs of every audience group and ensure that different content types are provided to them in different formats. However, the researcher notes that innovation is a key factor in achieving this goal. The study has noted that technological advances continues apace and as online audiences grow, there will be a lot more focus on the type and value of content that is provided to them. Many more niche audiences are also likely to emerge. This research provides a starting ground in addressing the needs of such audiences.

5.5 Recommendations for further research

This study proposes further research on consumption of video and other multimedia items for a better understanding of content consumption. The linkage between social media and content consumption can also be further explored. These are areas that are likely to provide more insights into the linkages between content and audience consumption.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1

UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI
COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES
SCHOOL OF JOURNALISM & MASS COMMUNICATION

Telegram: Journalism Varsity Nairobi
Telephone: 254-02-3318262, Ext. 28080, 28081
Director's Office: 254-02-231-4201 (Direct Line)
Telex: 22095 Fax: 254-02-245566
Email: director-soj@uonbi.ac.ke

P.O. Box 30197-00100
Nairobi, GPO
Kenya

REF: CERTIFICATE OF FIELDWORK

This is to certify that all corrections proposed at the Board of Examiners meeting held on _20-06 2016_ in respect of M.A/PhD. Project/Thesis Proposal defence have been effected to my/our satisfaction and the project can be allowed to proceed for fieldwork.

Reg. No: _K50/74092/2014_

Name: _BASILLIOH RUKANGA MUTAHI_

Title: _THE LINKAGE BETWEEN READERSHIP AND ONLINE NEWS CONTENT IN KENYA: A CASE OF NATION MEDIA GROUP_

DR GEORGE NYABUGA
SUPERVISOR

CNyabuga
SIGNATURE

_27/6/2016_
DATE

Dr Samuel Siringi
ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR

Siringi
SIGNATURE

_01/08/2016_
DATE

Dr. Ndeti Ndati
DIRECTOR

SIGNATURE/STAMP

_2016_
DATE

Appendix 2

Hello,

This is a **warning message** to alert you that there is action required to bring your AdSense account into compliance with our AdSense program policie
We've provided additional details below, along with the actions to be taken on your part.

Affected website: nation.co.ke

Example page where violation occurred: http://nairobinews.nation.co.ke/news/nairobi-still-a-hotbed-of-prostitution-anal-sex-on-the-rise/

Action required: Please make changes immediately to your site to follow AdSense program policies.

Current account status: Active

Violation explanation

Our program policies do not permit any alteration to AdSense code which artificially inflates ad performance or harms advertiser conversions. Your pu
account offers a number of options when generating the ad code, which we hope will allow you to create an ad layout that fits in with your site. It is als
allowed to place ads on mobile optimized sites so that they cover any part of the site content or implementing parts of a webpage to cover any portion
ads. Please be aware that if you have a responsive website design that ads may shift into non compliant positions as the format of the screen changes.

In order to remain fully compliant please ensure that your site and ad layout remain compliant across all devices. For more information this policy can
found on our help center and this short video.

Appendix 3

UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI

Declaration of Originality Form

This form must be completed and signed for all works submitted to the University for examination.

Name of Student _Basilliols Mutahi Rukonga_

Registration Number _K50/74092/2014_

College _Humanities and Social sciences_

Faculty/School/Institute _Journalism and Mass Communication_

Department _School of Journalism and Mass Communication_

Course Name _MA Communication Studies_

Title of the work

DECLARATION

1. I understand what Plagiarism is and I am aware of the University's policy in this regard

2. I declare that this _Project_ (Thesis, project, essay, assignment, paper, report, etc) is my original work and has not been submitted elsewhere for examination, award of a degree or publication. Where other people's work, or my own work has been used, this has properly been acknowledged and referenced in accordance with the University of Nairobi's requirements.

3. I have not sought or used the services of any professional agencies to produce this work

4. I have not allowed, and shall not allow anyone to copy my work with the intention of passing it off as his/her own work

5. I understand that any false claim in respect of this work shall result in disciplinary action, in accordance with University Plagiarism Policy.

Signature _Ball_

Date _10/11/2016_

[Stamp: UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI — DIRECTOR — 10 NOV 2016 — SCHOOL OF JOURNALISM & MASS COMMUNICATION]

Appendix 4

Appendix 5

UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI
COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES
SCHOOL OF JOURNALISM & MASS COMMUNICATION

Telegram: Journalism Varsity Nairobi
Telephone: 254-02-3318262, Ext. 28080, 28061
Director's Office: 254-02-2314201 (Direct Line)
Telex: 22095 Fax: 254-02-245566
Email: director-soj@uonbi.ac.ke

P.O. Box 30197-00100
Nairobi, GPO
Kenya

REF: CERTIFICATE OF CORRECTIONS

This is to certify that all corrections proposed at the Board of Examiners meeting held on
_01|11|2016_ in respect of M.A/PhD. Project/Thesis Proposal defence have been effected to
my/our satisfaction and the project can now be prepared for binding.

Reg. No: __K50|74092|2014__

Name: Basilioh Mutahi Rukanga

Title: "Examining the linkages between readership and
Online news content in Kenya. A case of the Nation Media Group."

DR GEORGE NYABUGA   10|11|2016
SUPERVISOR   SIGNATURE   DATE

Dr Samuel Siringi   10|11|2016
ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR   SIGNATURE   DATE

Dr. Ndeti Ndati   18.11.2016
DIRECTOR   SIGNATURE/STAMP   DATE

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