ADDO

Transparency and trust: newsroom policies

Kenya

Contents

Code for Africa (CfA) has undertaken this analysis of editorial policies in newsrooms in Kenya to gauge whether existing newsroom policies adequately address news organisations' transparency about how they do journalism, and to being accurate, fair and inclusive. This research also gauges whether existing newsroom policies adequately surface and manage the risks presented by external influence.

Some of the policies that this research checked include: managing declarations of interest and vested interests by editorial staff, contributors and reporters; managing editorial staff non-partisanship; how articles are credited and attribution of information sources; policies governing gifts/gratuities and other benefits to editorial staff that may be perceived as inducements.

CfA also examined newsroom policies for managing training/fellowships and other professional development; policies for managing editorial grants/subsidies/support for reporting projects; disclosing media affiliations; and policies for providing transparency around media ownership and control, as well as disclosing media partnerships.

The research identified policy gaps in Kenyan newsrooms that could impact media accountability and contribute to diminishing trust in news media organisations.

Capture in this report refers to 'a situation in which the media have not succeeded in becoming autonomous in manifesting a will of their own, nor able to exercise their main function, notably of informing people. Instead, they have persisted in an intermediate state, with vested interests, and not just the government, using them for malign purposes.[1]'

a. Summary of key findings

- Only two out of the 41 newsrooms sampled in this research have published their full editorial policy guidelines on their websites.
- The contact page was the most common feature on the news websites we sampled. Only five media brands did not include ways to contact their newsroom.
- Only one news website has a corrections page, while three surveyed radio stations included a complaints page.
- A number of survey respondents indicated that the policies were private. However, our research found their editorial policies online. This suggests that some media staff were not aware that the public had access to their policies.
- Half of the respondents indicated that Artificial Intelligence (AI) was deployed in their newsrooms to identify news patterns and trends, but were not aware if there were policies that governed the use of it. There were no newsrooms with published AI policies.
- The majority of respondents were of the opinion that even though there were media policies, the audience did not know of their existence.
- Despite being the most popular source of news, radio outlets had the fewest public facing policies.

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[1] [Media have not succeeded in becoming autonomous in manifesting a will of their own](#), In the service of power: Media capture and the threat to democracy, CIMA 2017

b. Recommendations

Newsroom adoption of artificial intelligence and adoption of guiding principles. Use of AI in newsrooms is relatively new, but already plays a role in newsroom operations. It is deployed in areas such as recommendation of stories to readers, text to speech, and identification of media to accompany stories. Other potential areas of AI include synthetic media creation such as automation of sports results, and financial market updates. However, this is happening without appropriate policies to guide the deployment of AI, or understanding the effect the technology is having in shaping the narrative. A lack of AI and synthetic media policy which guides the use of such tools exposes the media to influence from foreign actors and technology firms, which could come in the form of research, tools, training and financing to set up AI operations in the newsroom and so influence the news agenda. This report recommends the development of policies to guide AI use in news.

Media organisations should simplify the process to file complaints and pursue corrections by readers. While this study has found that there has been a deliberate effort among some media organisations to make their policies public, only a minority have made clear to their audiences the avenues to complain about coverage and to pursue corrections.Aside from diminished trust, uncorrected errors have left media houses battling defamation cases and facing heavy costs. Litigation can be leveraged by bad actors to blackmail media houses, forcing them into compliance by publishing content beneficial to their interests.

All staff should be trained on the editorial policies, where these are published, as well as how to declare their possible conflicts of interest.

This analysis shows significant gaps in the publishing and accessibility of newsroom policies. It is recommended that the Kenya Editors Guild (KEG) is provided with an outline of best practice policies and templates, and works with newsrooms to adopt a standard.

2. Background and context

The media in Africa is facing an existential threat[2] brought on by factors including shrinking revenues and erosion of trust. Research has shown that trust in the media is declining. The 2023 Edelman Trust Barometer[3], which polled some 32, 000 respondents in 28 countries, including Kenya, on their level of trust in their country's media found that people trusted businesses more than the government and media. The findings were consistent with the 2022 report which established that 76% of Kenyan respondents felt the media was purposely trying to mislead people through spreading false information or gross exaggeration. In 2021, the report revealed that trust in the media was 'neutral' amid concerns about misinformation.

The contextual case in Kenya is no different. Kenya has a robust media industry serving its population of about 50 million people. CivicSignal's MediaData has to date mapped 623 media outlets in the country. The media industry was liberalised in the 1990s when the government allowed the private sector to provide media services, marking a period of growth of media brands across television, radio and print media. As a result, the country became one of the most diverse media scenes on the continent[4].

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[2] Modern journalism faces an existential threat, Media and Innovation Centre, Aga Khan University
[3] 2023 Edelman Trust Barometer
[4] Effects Of Liberalization Of Airwaves On Television Advertising In Kenya, Mbuba June, University of Nairobi

In 2023, for the third year in a row, a survey[5] commissioned by the Media Council of Kenya showed that the trust level in Kenyan media has dropped. The biggest concern the respondents had was 'fake news' and bias in the media.

This increasing mistrust comes as the news media faces growing competition from other sources of news such as social media, and has emboldened attacks on the media for being 'untrustworthy' or working against the interests of the state.

This distrust of the media and journalism in general is a sign of underlying institutional weaknesses as journalism's role in society becomes ever more important, courtesy of a global shift to repressive political tendencies[6].

In recent years, mainstream news organisations have had to contend with a sceptical public, but the scrutiny has reached a jarring level, thanks to the changing political landscape in the country.

Some of the challenges the news media face include competition for people's attention from a myriad of other sources of information, and the rise of partisan media[7]. Furthermore, with the increase of social media use, political actors have become less dependent on the news media to get their messages to the public[8]. While social media has made it possible to bypass the news media, it has also made them a target. This was seen in Kenya during the 2022 general elections.

For example, a tweet by Kericho Senator Aaron Cheruiyot[9] labelling the media as a cartel and calling for its dismantling received some approval from commenters despite condemnation from the media.

Screenshot of tweet calling for the 'crushing' of Kenyan media. (Source: Twitter)

CfA measured the public's sentiment on the tweet and found that it was moderately positive. The post went viral with 890 responses and 594 retweets. We performed the analysis using TextBlob, which returned a polarity score of 0.28 indicating a positive sentiment. TextBlob calculates the sentiment of a text, and returns numeric values for polarity and subjectivity. Values lie between -1 and +1, -1 indicates negative sentiment and +1 indicates positive sentiments. The low support the tweet received

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[5] State of The Media Report 2022, Media Council of Kenya, 09 February, 2023
[6] Lack of trust in the news media, institutional weakness, and relational journalism as a potential way forward, Seth C Lewis, 2018
[7] Challenges and opportunities for news media and journalism in an increasingly digital, mobile, and social media environment, Council of Europe, October 2016
[8] The New Media's Role in Politics, Diana Owen, Georgetown University, Washington DC, USA
[9] Twitter, Kericho Senator Aaron Cheruiyot, 07 March, 2023

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4

could suggest that the public still views the media as a good source of news, but some improvements needed to be made.

The erosion of trust that the media is facing makes a case for an increased openness so as to reclaim some of the trust bestowed on it. Codes of ethics, as well as press councils and media criticism, play an important role in promoting transparency and restoring a higher degree of credibility in journalism[10].

Political attacks on the media have increased since the 2010s, as phrases that refer to newspapers as only good for 'meat wrapping'[11] or as 'githeri media' gain common use. Since 2017, the phrase 'githeri media'[12] has been used to disparage media and draw ineptitude, or to outright discredit the media or its obsession with the trivial - a general view that mainstream media uses catchy headings but lack in substance. The usage of the pejorative term increased between September 2022 and March 2023, underscoring attempts by political actors to discredit the media.

An analysis using CrowdTangle shows that since September 2022, the phrase has occurred about 20,600 times on Twitter and 228 times in public pages and public groups on Facebook.

The incidents were caused by the mainstream media mistakenly referring to newly elected Kenyan president William Ruto as the deputy president. In this instance, the use of the word was pushed by leading political figures and picked up by their supporters.

The public-facing editorial policies of the newsrooms surveyed for this study communicated the news media organisations' value proposition: veracity and accuracy, or unbiased coverage.

Yet without public editorial policies to communicate to the audience the standard that the news organisation operates by, the public is in the dark about the true bias of the newsroom and their journalists.

Scholars on the subject of media transparency and conflict of interest in journalism have observed that 'the importance and influence of journalists and media is increasing and it is important for the audience (the society or community) to know which side of certain dilemmas or problems journalists support and what their values and attitudes to work are'[13]. The recipient of a media message has to know who 'explains' the world to them. In other words, the recipient should have trust in journalistic professionalism.

As the media space becomes more democratised, it is becoming ever more important that the public trusts the information they are receiving. If the public do not trust them, the media cannot claim to be effectively performing a watchdog role[14].

According to a study[15] by Reuters Institute polling news audiences in the US and UK, editorial practices such as corrections policies used by organisations feed into audience's expectations of what constitutes 'good journalism'.

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[10] Meier, W. A., & Trappel, J. (2022). Media transparency: Comparing how leading news media balance the need for transparency with professional ethics. In J. Trappel, & T. Tomaz (Eds.), Success and failure in news media performance: Comparative analysis in the Media for Democracy Monitor 2021 (pp. 255–273). Nordicom, University of Gothenburg.
[11] Uhuru accuses media of fanning rivalry among URP leaders, The Standard, 10 May 2015
[12] Kenya's 2017 elections: how new media stole the mainstream's thunder, The Conversation, December 14, 2017
[13] Mecfal, S. (2011). Conflicts of interest in journalism. A local journalist in the network of conflicts of interest. In J. e. S. Burdziej, Conflict of Interest in Central and Eastern Europe (pp. 99-113).
[14] Strömbäck, J., Tsfati, Y., Boomgaarden, H., Damstra, A., Lindgren, E., Vliegenthart, R., & Lindholm, T. (2020). News media trust and its impact on media use: toward a framework for future research. Annals of the International Communication Association, 44(2), 139 - 156.
[15] Listening to what trust in news means to users: qualitative evidence from four countries, Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism

Recently, the media in Kenya came under criticism recently during opposition-led protests in Nairobi for the presence of some members of the press in a politician's vehicle. The concern centred on the objectivity of the journalists considering their proximity and dalliance to the subjects in the story.

Ultimately, robust policies and practices are essential for safeguarding media freedom against influence operations by a variety of malign actors and, without them, the freedom of the press would be vulnerable to manipulation.

3. Methodology

This research covers a sample of 41 media organisations in Kenya. The study was conducted between January and March 2023. National media systems are overrepresented since the study focused on organisations that broadcast or publish their news in the official languages - English and Kiswahili.

In the television and newspaper mediums, there was certainty on which organisations we should study. However, the consensus was harder to reach for radio stations because of their sheer number. We eventually decided on stations that broadcast the news in either English or Kiswahili, and that have newsrooms.

We included only entities that have a newsroom and publish their news at a regular interval. For that reason, a number of radio stations that only play music, and television stations that broadcast only on YouTube were eliminated. We also made it a point to include content aggregators and online news websites that repurpose content published by larger media houses. We also thought it important that this research includes the largest media organisations in the country (by size and audience), as well as multiple brands from the same organisation that targeted different audience segments.

CfA carried out this research by combining the expertise from our own internal CivicSignal research analysts with a survey of senior editors, and by hosting a workshop with members from the Kenya Editors Guild (KEG). KEG is an association of editors in Kenya that includes practising print, broadcast and online editors, as well as former editors and freelancers who are now in academia.

The CivicSignal MediaData team checked the websites of the selected news organisations for the presence of the following policies:

- Privacy policy
- Copyright declaration
- Contact page
- Corrections page or a linked corrections policy
- Complaints page
- Ownership of the media organisation
- Management structure
- List of editorial staff
- Public facing editorial guidelines
- Ethics policy

Seventeen out of the 41 news media were radio stations, eight were print newspapers, 12 were digital-only outlets. Ten television stations were also part of the sample studied.

To identify the policies, we searched each platform's relevant webpages for the keywords 'editorial policy' or 'editorial guidelines' as well as related keywords like 'code of conduct' and 'newsroom guidelines'.

We also clicked through the various pages of the websites looking for any that contained any of the policies that were the focus of this research.

We also sent out a questionnaire, via KEG, to senior editors - the people who are responsible for writing and implementing the policies in the newsrooms.

The findings from the questionnaire have been matched with what our own research established to ensure that the results of this research are an unvarnished picture of the current state of the media in Kenya, and particularly newsrooms, as regards the policies they have in place.

4. Presentation and analysis of findings

The operations of the media - what they publish, how and when, are guided by both internal and external policies and codes. In Kenya, for instance, the Code of Conduct for the Practice of Journalism[16] by the Media Council of Kenya is one such document, as are other policies by the Communication Authority[17].

The biggest marker, however, are the policies that the newsrooms abide by to be accountable to their audiences. Editorial policies govern all the editorial content and staff in the various media platforms run by an entity. It is an overarching document that outlines expectations on professionalism, as well as providing direction in newsroom operations and administration[18].

Other areas stipulated by the policies include journalistic conduct in the field, their relationship with sources, and even their use of privileged information. Making these policies available and accessible to audiences is key to promoting transparency, accountability and ethical journalism, and reclaiming trust in journalism.

The research checked the websites of key news media organisations for the availability of a privacy policy, corrections page, complaints policy, management structure, the organisation's ownership, its editorial staff, a public facing editorial and ethics policy, as well as a contact page and a copyright declaration.

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[16] Code of Conduct for the Practice of Journalism, Media Council of Kenya
[17] Communications Authority of Kenya
[18] Media Accountability in Africa: A Study of Policies and Practices at Two Newsrooms in Kenya, Jared Obuya, Taylor & Francis Online, 2021

Total Number of Policies
News brands and the number of policies
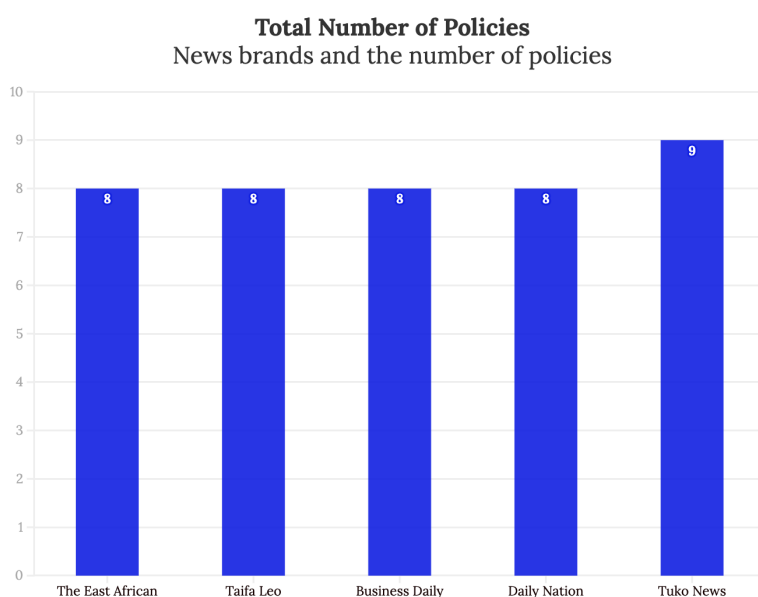
News brands in Kenya with the most number of policies that the study focused on. (Source: CivicSignal)

a. Declaration of editorial staff, including editor-in-chief or equivalent decision makers

Only nine of the newsrooms sampled declared their editorial leadership on their website. Users can easily access this information about the critical decision makers in the newsrooms of three organisations, one of them operating multiple brands across radio, television, online and print. Declaring the editorial staff would help to ensure that it's clear whether editors or journalists wear 'different hats' or moonlight for other organisations.

b. Declaration of interests policy: Non-partisanship, gifts/gratuities/benefits to media staff

Out of the 41 newsrooms surveyed, only three have a declaration of interests policy accessible to their audience. The overwhelming majority (38 newsrooms) did not have a policy published on their website. Without a declaration of interests policy in newsrooms, there is a heightened risk of external influence through gifts, travel or training in return for favourable reporting. By establishing a well-defined policy, newsrooms can lay out clear guidelines on how to handle these situations.

Editorial policies from the three newsrooms that have published the document online, and which we analysed for this study, were explicit about the news organisation's commitment to protecting and upholding public interest and stressed the importance of factual accuracy, fairness and balance.

The policies sampled showed that the newsrooms were particularly insistent that staff working for their outlets remain independent of vested interests or external influences.

One newsroom whose policy is public has included clauses that prohibit financial journalists using their platforms to influence the performance of shares or securities they, or their close families or associates have an interest in, and advises that any such scenario be disclosed to the editor.

The policy also prohibits trading, either directly or through proxies, in shares or securities their journalists intend to write about in the near future.

Other newsroom policies caution against accepting gifts, bribes or 'brown envelopes', favours, free travel, free meals or drinks, special treatment or privileges as these can compromise the integrity of journalists, editors and their employers. Having such a policy protects journalists and media organisations from threats to their independence that could present themselves in apparently benign ways such as travel or gifts.

An editor said that newsrooms needed robust policies guarding against conflicts of interest because 'sometimes journalists have to embed themselves with politicians, the police, military, but the question is how do you tell a balanced story? You need these people for your protection but supposing you get there and find something contrary, how do you tell that story? It is for that reason that I feel we need to come up with policies that guide us on this.'

c. Policy for training, fellowships or professional development

Respondents from one newsroom reported that any fellowship awards or professional development opportunities had to be reported to the editors, and through them the editorial director who had the ultimate say on how such opportunities would be handled. A follow-up interview with an editor revealed that newsroom management issued a memo directing the procedure for approvals for foreign travels for conferences, training and fellowships. Previous research by CfA established that training and junkets were one of the ways news organisations in Kenya came under foreign influence. Lacking a policy to guide foreign conferences, training and fellowships was one of the weaknesses that the study established as leading to media capture. This lack of policy as to who trains newsroom staff means that there could be a 'return on investment' expected from the trainers. It would also pre-define which actors they would not accept training from in order to safeguard against possible influence.

d. Privacy policy

Out of the 41 newsrooms surveyed, 27 had an easily discoverable privacy policy. The newsrooms explain to their website visitors how personal data is gathered and managed. Newsrooms are legally required to have a privacy policy document which informs their audience of the type of information that is collected on the website, and how the newsroom intends to use that data. A privacy policy also assures the website visitors that the newsroom is committed to following the data privacy laws. Lacking such a policy could impact negatively on the media organisation by suggesting a disregard for laws governing the management of private data.

Newsroom Policies in Kenya
Privacy Policy
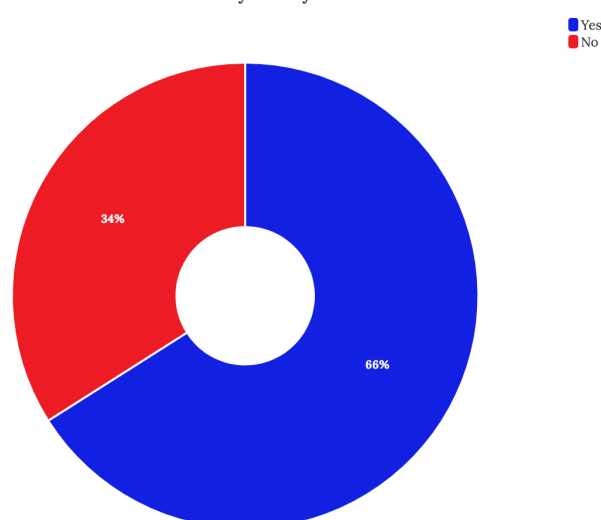
*Most newsrooms surveyed have public privacy policies. (Source: CivicSignal)*

e. Ethics policy and code of conduct

This research surveyed news websites for ethics and codes of conduct, and found that the overwhelming majority of sites include these in a single, comprehensive policy document. The exception was the government wire service Kenya News Agency's national values and principles page. Government agencies in Kenya are bound by the constitution to commit to the National Values and Principles of Governance[19] when discharging their duties.

A review of these published editorial policies revealed the newsrooms have committed to being impartial and reporting credibly on issues of national and public interest and upholding the law of the jurisdictions in which they operate. Other news organisations have included, alongside their purpose, vision and mission statements, some of the values that drive them - even if they don't have a published code of conduct or ethics policy. The study also found that news organisations that had listed their ownership and management structure were more likely to also include the core values of the organisation.

It is noteworthy that two of the sampled media houses have published an internal whistleblowing policy in which they commit to abiding by the code of ethics for journalists and encourage members of the public to report any perceived wrongdoing by staff. This measure could be considered useful for accountability to a newsroom when their policies aren't adhered to. It also communicates that editorial staff are accountable for their actions, especially those deemed likely to influence their reporting.

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[19] National values and principles of governance, Kenya Law Reform Commission (KLRC)

Newsroom Policies in Kenya
Ethics Policy

Legend: ■ Yes ■ No

39%
61%
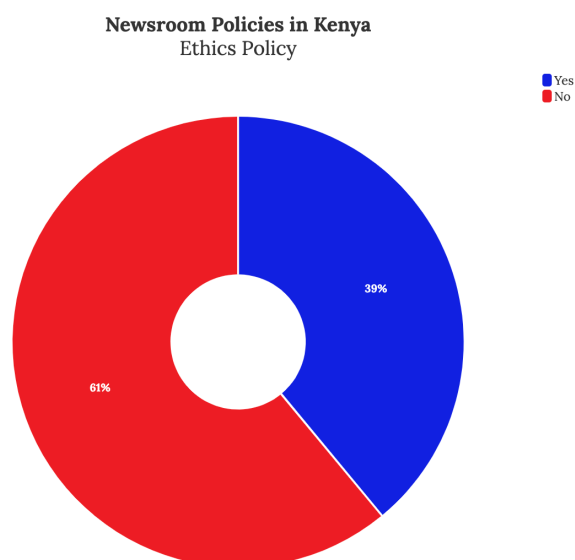
The occurrence of published ethics policies in the sample newsroom studied in Kenya. (Source: CivicSignal)

f. AI policy

This study established that artificial intelligence was still a new frontier for almost all newsrooms sampled. Respondents said they used AI tools to suggest stories to their audiences, identify news patterns and trends and to fact-check images. However, only respondents from one newsroom said they had internal policies which addressed the deployment of AI tools in the news gathering and dissemination process. Yet newsrooms are already affected by AI algorithms which determine how and which news gets to the audience[20]. Especially in Kenya, where Chinese made phones are ubiquitous, news media organisations are at the mercy of web browsers which serve both as search engines and news aggregators and their algorithms determine the order that users will see content. One of the most popular new apps is Opera News, a Chinese owned AI-driven personalised app that gives people more of what they like, from trending topics to funny videos. Newsrooms therefore require policies to guide the deployment of AI, as well as an understanding of the effect the technology is having in the news process.

g. Press code adherence

None of the newsrooms we surveyed linked to the Media Council of Kenya's Code of Conduct or the Media Act. However, one newsroom states in its policy that its editorial guidelines are intended to be read together with the Code of Conduct. The policy also anticipates instances where its internal guidelines could fall short and advises that journalists should, in that instance, follow the country's press code.
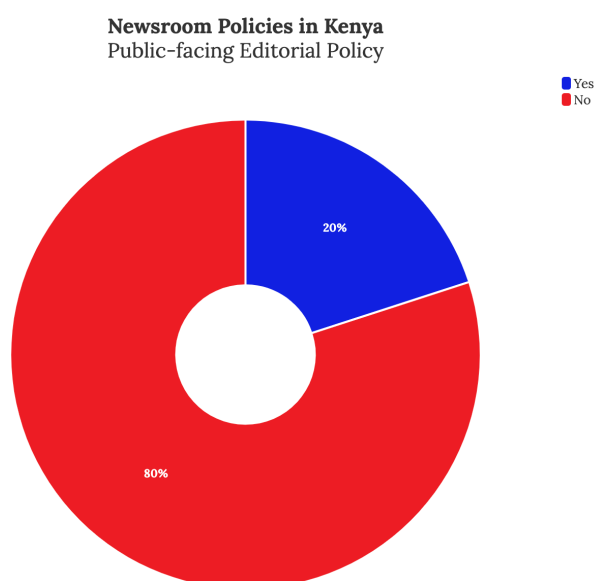
h. Public editorial policy

For this survey, the presence of public editorial policies was established by asking respondents whether they were aware if their policies were available for public access. Respondents that said their

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[20] How algorithms decide the news you see, Columbia Journalism Review

newsrooms had internal editorial policies were highest at 73%, while those that said they did not have any policies were 10%. The rest, 7%, said the policies did not apply to their newsrooms.

Among newsrooms in Kenya, our research found that only Nation Media Group (NMG) and Tuko Media have published their editorial policy online.

The proportion of news brands with public editorial policies among newsrooms studied in Kenya. (Source: CivicSignal MediaData)

Survey results showed that the majority (80%) of news organisations had not published their editorial policies, while only 20% of newsrooms shared their editorial policies and standards with their audience.

Tuko's policies are found under a policies and standards page on its website, while NMG's policy is hosted on its parent organisation's corporate website.

However, NMG has made strides towards greater accountability, announcing the publication of their editorial guidelines, including a link for the public to access the document. The media organisation also appointed a public editor in 2019 whom they describe as an independent news ombudsman who handles readers' complaints on editorial matters, including accuracy and journalistic standards.

The public editor receives complaints from the public and addresses them in a regular newspaper column. In an article outlining the reasons for the publication of its editorial policy, the organisation said that it was giving the public a standard by which to judge them.

In follow-up interviews with some of the respondents who said their newsrooms had internal policies in place, it was established that these policies were available on the intranet and their newsroom enforced familiarity with the guidelines. For instance, at the beginning of every year, the Standard Group required every one of their editorial staff to peruse and sign the Editorial Policy and Code of Conduct for the Practice of Journalism.

Some 83% of respondents said their newsrooms had strict policies for verifying and fact-checking reports to ensure accurate and unbiased reporting. However, these were not made public.

Another respondent, an editor at a large print outlet, said in a follow-up interview that all newsrooms had similar policies and likewise, a disregard for them. 'Newsrooms are run on consultation basis and individual discretion rather than, "what does the policy say on this?'

The public policies we researched outline the conditions for the publication of opinion pieces, underlining the need to accommodate numerous view points on a topic, but also the identification of the columnists' and commentators' name, expertise and affiliation. The insistence on attribution of news, articles and opinions and clear labelling of sponsored content was considered as a commitment to ethical journalism.

Participants in the workshop expressed the need for journalists to be part of the policy making process in their newsrooms because 'we cannot have editorial policies without editorial judgement. We need to be involved in the process of making these policies'.

Another participant said that while the policies were in place, there is a lack of awareness around them - and were often neither read nor internalised. 'I might have read all the policies but if you give me an exam on it, I guarantee that I will fail. My newsroom has all of its policies online, but I bet if you ask around the office how many know about the policies, or that they have been published, the figure will be really low.'

However, newsrooms just having policies is not sufficient to guard against capture. As one participant noted, the policies need to be reviewed and adapted to the prevailing environment to avoid the use of unwritten rules which in turn make organisations susceptible to capture. 'As an industry, the times we are in now have forced the newsrooms to keep reviewing the policies. The media is dynamic, you may have policies today and in the next hour you need to make a different decision and end up relying on discretion and unwritten rules.'

i. Ownership and management structure

This survey found that less than half of newsrooms (41%) have made an attempt to be transparent about their ownership and management structure by listing the owners of the organisation, or their board of directors.

Out of the 41 news organisations sampled for this study, 18 had either their owners, or board of directors as well as executive members listed.

The majority (59%) of media organisations had not listed their ownership. The lack of clear ownership disclosure can create suspicions, especially when newsrooms publish potentially controversial investigations. This exposes the media organisation to media capture by either politicians or other foreign influences. Moreover, journalists in these media organisations could be under the editorial influence of their owners or could self-censor when reports cover their owners.

Editors at the workshop said that ownership has a bearing on the editorial process - especially during elections. Participants said they were often put in the difficult position of choosing between reporting impartially or according to the wishes of the media owners.

'When we talk about media capture, everyone immediately thinks of the state, but there is capture internally as well. One of the challenges that we face internally is ownership. A story is brought to the newsroom and the instruction is that the owner wants the piece aired. What do you do as an editor in

that instance? Do you go by what the newsroom policy states or by what the owners of the newsroom want? It has become a huge problem especially during the election period. When newsroom owners declare their political affiliation and bias, it trickles down to your journalists as well.'

The existence of robust policies declaring the ownership and management of a media organisation and their roles in the editorial process can help guide the operation of the newsrooms, and inform the audience the extent of their influence in the news.
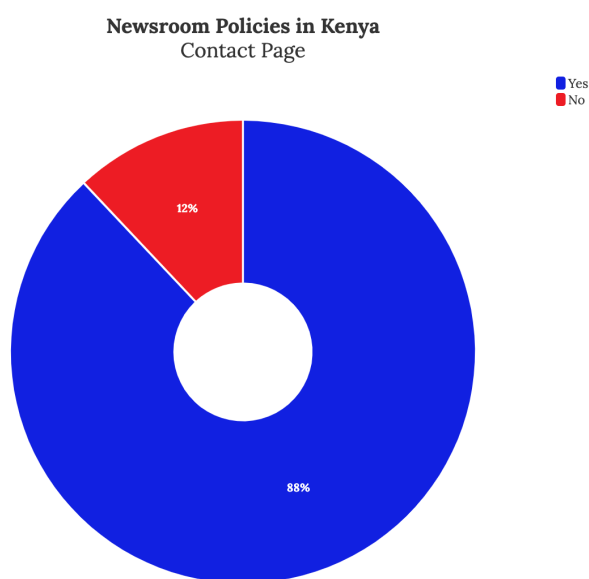
Newsroom Policies in Kenya
Management Structure
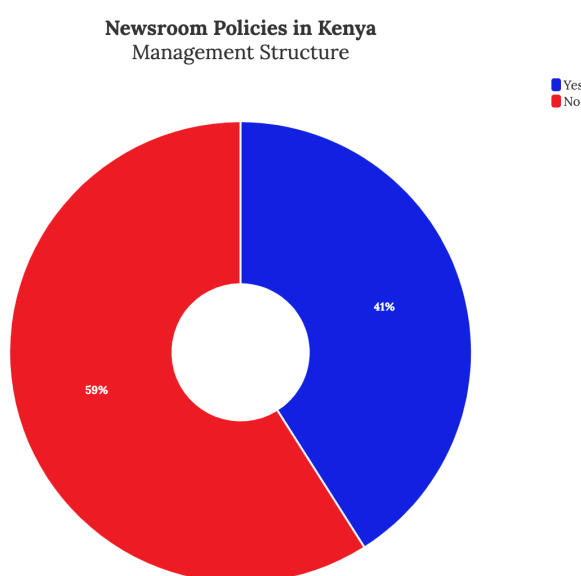
Kenyan news sites that declare their management structure. (Source: CivicSignal MediaData)

j. Contact information

The contact page was the most common feature this study observed on the websites of the newsrooms studied. Some 36 news websites provided their audience with a contact number, email address, mailing address and a physical location.

A number of them, radio stations especially, provided contact information for booking advertisements, yet failed to provide alternative means to reach the newsroom. Only five news organisations, or 12 % of the sample, either did not include a way to contact their organisation, or provided a dead link to a 'Contact Us' page.

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14

Newsroom Policies in Kenya
Contact Page

- ■ Yes
- ■ No

12%

88%

Share of outlets with a contact page among newsrooms surveyed in Kenya. (Source: CivicSignal MediaData)
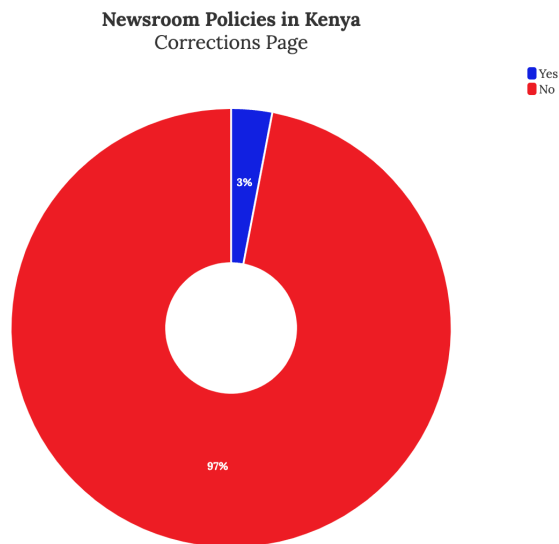
k. Corrections policy

The majority of newsrooms analysed for this study did not have a public corrections policy and explicit avenues for audience feedback.

Our research found that only one news organisation had made the criteria for retracting stories public, while only one online news brand included a corrections page on its website.

However, seven print publications have made it a policy that corrections are published on page 2 of the newspaper, and provided an email for readers to raise issues about their coverage.

It's crucial for media organisations to receive feedback from their audience, not just to maintain their reputation, but also for audience input in the way an organisation operates. In fact, one digital news brand had to change their way of working after receiving feedback.

Newsroom Policies in Kenya
Corrections Page

Yes ■
No ■

3%

97%

Most newsrooms studied did not have corrections policies or a corrections page. (Source: CivicSignal MediaData)

l. Complaints

The survey revealed that print and online newsrooms were more committed to receiving feedback from the public in the form of complaints. From the study, we found that 11 print and digital media brands had systems in place to receive complaints. Only one TV brand had a complaints mechanism. Overall, only 27 % of the news brands included a complaints page.

Newsroom Policies in Kenya
Complaints Page

Yes ■
No ■

27%

73%
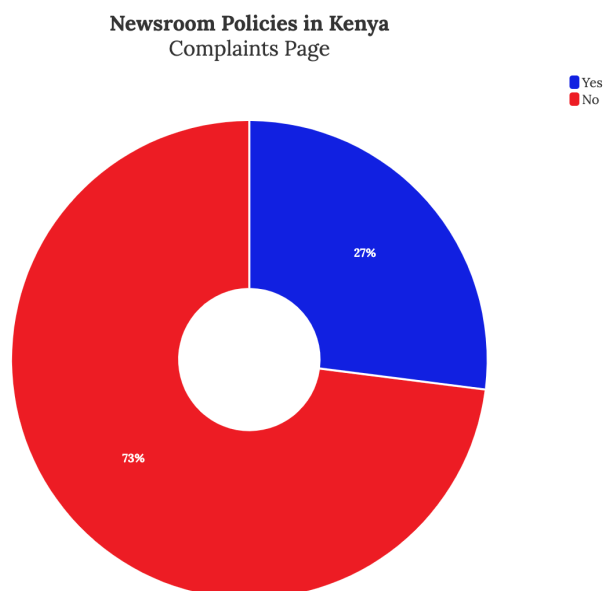
The percentage of news brands that include a complaints page on their websites. (Source: CivicSignal MediaData)

5. Conclusion

The 2022 Reuters Digital News Report shows trust in news in Kenya at 57%, a 4pp drop on the year before. This is still high compared with other countries, with Kenya at number 6 of the 46 countries surveyed. It is essential to halt this decline, and take advantage of the current high trust that audiences have in Kenyan news organisations. Having policies that are well articulated and accessible to audiences and journalists alike is part of the mechanism that can help insulate news media organisations against attacks on their credibility and sustainability. The alternative is we run the risk of media capture because editorial independence can be compromised by pressure put on journalists by politicians, owners, professional organisations or publishers in the absence of accessible policies.

It is important that we increase the audience's understanding of how journalism works, especially the decision-making and newsgathering processes that shape how news is made. This will differentiate reputable news organisations from other less professional sources. While we have used some of the more popular and larger media organisations in Kenya as samples for this study, the media space is quickly transforming. Audience choices are gradually switching away from mainstream to social media, blogs, and even partisan media - which sometimes present as vernacular or community media organisations.

Our recommendations cover areas of support to media houses to develop up to date policies and guiding principles for their operations. Systems that rank the trustworthiness of news sites use AI-driven analysis of a site's structures to score a news organisation's vulnerability to information manipulation. News sites that do not have easily discoverable editorial policies and ownership structures will inevitably score low on these metrics, with a potential knock-on effect on revenue.

The awareness of the existence, variety and nature of accountability measures used by media increases the audience's trust, and news media can improve their relationship with readers by creating and maintaining an infrastructure of accountability practices that is accessible to those looking for it.

As Code for Africa 2021 studies into disinformation risk for Kenya and South Africa, co-authored with the Global Disinformation Index, found[21], 'transparency about a newsroom's operations can be a key mechanism for building online user trust in news sites by dispelling any concerns about conflicts of interest or shadow owners.'[22]

The absence of key operational policies that are easily accessible was highly correlated with sites that were assessed as producing more sensational content, clickbait headlines and stories that negatively targeted groups. 'Similar relationships between a site's operational integrity and the reliability of a site's content emerge from the findings, particularly when sites in the sample were found to have clear correction policies and processes as well as statements of editorial independence.' Implementing and making available operational and editorial policies decreases news organisations' vulnerability to information manipulation and erosion of trust.

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[21] Disinformation Risk Assessment: The Online News Market in Kenya, Global Disinformation Index, 2021
[22] Media Market Risk Ratings: South Africa, Global Disinformation Index, Amanda Strydom, 2021

Code for Africa (CfA) is an ecosystem builder. It is the continent's largest network of non-profit civic technology and open data laboratories in 22 African countries. CfA builds digital democracy solutions that give citizens unfettered access to actionable information that empowers them to make informed decisions, and that strengthens civic engagement for improved public governance and accountability. This includes building infrastructure like the continent's largest open data portals at openAFRICA and sourceAFRICA. CfA incubates initiatives as diverse as the africanDRONE network, the PesaCheck fact-checking initiative, the machine-learning research and analysis lab at CivicSignal, the iLAB disinformation investigative team, and the sensors.AFRICA air quality sensor network. CfA also runs one of Africa's largest skills development initiatives for digital journalists, and seed funds cross-border collaboration.

CivicSignal is Africa's largest non-profit media monitoring/mapping initiative that uses machine learning/natural language processing tools for 'AI' analysis of media content across the continent. CivicSignal's analysis includes mapping media ownership and understanding the underlying media economy that shapes online content.
Its products, MediaCloud (for tracking content) and MediaData (for tracking media ownership) are regularly used by development agencies and regulators to develop intervention strategies.

The African Data and Democracy Observatory (ADDO) is a member-driven voluntary network of independent watchdog CSOs that use cutting-edge digital analysis and forensic research to better understand influence operations that seek to subvert or usurp public discourse across Africa. ADDO was originally co-founded by the continent's largest civic technology and open data non-profit, Code for Africa (CfA), in partnership with the Atlantic Council's global Digital Forensic Lab (DFRLab) and the DT Institute in 2020 to help coordinate their ongoing research into foreign disinformation and propaganda campaigns that targeted an initial 21 sub-Saharan African countries.