

The Role of Mass Media in Sustainable Development

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ABSTRACT

Communication via the media is the reflection of the societal issues by reporting events and happenings, normally for economic, political, social, and aesthetic purposes. The study set out to investigate the role that media plays in shaping the public's perception of the pastoralist communities and its resultant impact on the development. In particular, it aimed to investigate the role of the print media in shaping public's perception of the pastoralist communities, Pokot community in particular. It also assessed the impact of print media portrayal on the development of the Pokot community and identified the various communication barriers that have hindered accurate projection of information. The research finally explored on the various media approaches that can promote neutral reporting by the print media. The study embraced the agenda-setting theory developed by McCombs & Shaw (1968) which states that, mass media (print) sets the agenda for public opinion by highlighting 'certain issues' considered important (news) by the mainstream media. The study shades light on the reality and the media's selection reality and the influence of this selectivity on public's perception. The study was carried out in West Pokot County. The research adopted a case study design with a sample size of 300 participants selected from the target population through purposive sampling. Questionnaires were administered and purposive interview schedules were also employed to key respondents to gather special and valuable response from fields of interest. Data analysis and interpretation was done quantitatively. Findings, conclusions and recommendations to the relevant authorities were finally made.

Keywords: *Print Media, perception, Pastoralists, Pokot, Pokatusa.*

Introduction

The fact that media has become part and parcel of our daily lives is incontrovertible, media determines; what we think what we do, what we ought to do and even how we do it. Technology has made the world a small village where a rumour can be shared among millions of people living in and a round the globe within fractions of minutes through various media i.e. the Internet, the print, the radio and television. However, Monaco, (1998) posits that, it is easy to overlook how extensively the development of civilization always has depended upon the flow of ideas and images between people. The government for instance has paid less attention or not at all on the role of the media in portrayal of the community's ideas, images and for this reason, the pastoralists have suffered the brunt of negative media presentation. In the current world, so crucial is the media that, the 'mighty' in the society use it to maintain their social class and authority through manipulation of the media. According to Bollen, N. (1981:4) any communication through media is a form of advertisement, whose purpose is to present a course in either favourable or otherwise, so that, the decision audience is influenced to "feel" and "act" in a desired manner. For instance, research conducted by various opinion-poll firms in Kenya e.g., *Steadman Poll, Consumer Watch* and *Strategic poll* reveal that, politicians (ruling class) invest millions and millions of money and resources in an attempt to have the media paint them in favourable light. The extent to which media influences our action and thoughts on pertinent issues, more so how our world-view is shaped and its effect on development constitutes researchers' big concern. In a new world-Bank report, Bruce Owen (UNDP 2005) a Washington-DC based consultant acknowledges that, media has the ability to act as the catalyst for change and growth in the societies for it provide consumer and commercial information to their audience which can trigger development. This study therefore sets out to assess the role played by the media in constructing and sustaining publics' perception of the Kenyans especially the marginalized pastoralist communities.

From the Kenyan media representations (programs) communities have been branded specific images that have made lasting impressions. Stereotypes have been upheld and cultivated through media so that, *kikuyus* for example are perceived as money minded and in fact thieves. *Luos* are looked at as extravagant, bossy and stylish. On its worst, Politicians from other communities describe them as cowards capitalizing on the fact that the community does not practice circumcision. For long in Kenyan history, Luo leaders have found it hard to convince the public to the contrary because the notion has been deeply entrenched in people's mind. *Luhyas* are portrayed as cooks, watchmen, petty thieves and thus should not be taken seriously as it is the case local comedies like *Churchill live* in NTV, *Papa Shirandula* in Citizen Television or *Makhokha* in Vioja

Mahakamani just to highlight but a few. In print media; tribal sentiments are echoed in programmes like *The Sunday Nation's* paper head on collision column that make jokes that carry "loaded" tribal accents.

The above characterizations have an impact on the perception of the public of specific community members as well as to an individual, towards 'the self' as portrayed by the media. Its positive or negative effect depends on how specific characterization impact on Kenya's diverse communities and whether it curtails or exacerbates positive development and coexistence. The impact posed by media presentation to a particular community does not only affect the community in question but also the surrounding neighboring communities and states as in the case of *Uganda-Karamoja* and *Sabiny*. Media affect how we learn about our world and interact with one another. Media literally mediate our relationship with social institutions. We base most of our knowledge on government news accounts, not experience. We are dependent on the media for what we know and how we relate to the world of politics because of the media-politics connection. We read or watch political debates followed by instant analysis and commentary by "experts." Politicians rely on media to communicate their messages. Similar dynamics are present in other mediated events such as televised sports and televangelism. Media is part of our routine relations with family and friends. They therefore define our interaction with other people on a daily basis as a diversion, sources of conflict, or a unifying force. Media have an impact on society not only through the content of the message but also through the process. For example, the portrayal of *Pokot* people as bandits, cattle rustlers and hostile creates fear to other communities and makes the pastoral communities to be looked at as "evil".

Media's reporting on issues that involve pastoralists have been categorically defined and confined into; banditry and cattle rustling. The AK47' has been glorified by the media as if it is an achievement to own it as witnessed in the press where journalists regularly visit these places to take photos holding the AK47 and report tantalizing stories about their ownership. The biggest problem blamed on the media is bias and exaggeration of figures especially involving stolen animals from one group to another. Goldberg (2006) argues that media tells us, twist the facts and distort people's perception of the world to match the views of the smug, clannish liberals who control them. He goes further, "this isn't to say that the broadcasting companies have a carefully thought out a scheme of misinformation... the sin according to Goldberg, is almost unconscious..." This has led to unnecessary penalties against other groups by the government security, which has called for retaliation and thus, media's participation in the conflicts among the pastoralists. The study therefore attempts to bring to the fore some of the implication, as well as suggest subsequent probable solutions to the problem.

Statement of the Problem

Many arguments have been advanced on the power of the media in shaping our perception of 'others'. It is clear though that media is a double-edged sword that can cut on both ends. Goldberg (2002) argues that, its ability to make or break reign supreme, the media subjects are thus left at the mercies of media controllers and those who have what it takes to manipulate it. The pastoral communities in Kenya have been shown by the media to own guns and other dangerous weapons, the *Pokot* are portrayed as people who derive pleasure in cattle rustling as well as killing innocent blood. The positive role that the communities contribute to the national economy is not factored in the overall news coverage. Goldberg (2002) points that, government has continually relied on media reports in its policy making and implementation regardless of whether the media's projection is fair or not, it remains the government's information yardstick. The *pokot* community suffered immensely from press misrepresentations that have lead to several military operations - compared to their neighbours. This has impoverished the *pokots* and made then fully dependent on relief food from donor funding. During military operation, for example in 1984, corrupt military officers took advantage of the

situation to round-up animals and loaded them to trucks, which transported them to slaughterhouses.

There is a skewed perception and the study seeks to correct it so as to be able to develop insights on the role that the print plays in the development of pastoral communities. In any case, the study is geared towards laying bare the ills perpetuated by the media and suggests the options media can offer in boosting development in the Pastoralist communities and the nation as a whole in a bid to meet the vision 2030 and beyond.

Research Questions/Guide

- What is the role of print media in shaping perception?
- What are the effects of print media representation on the development of the communities?
- What are the challenges that hinder accurate reporting?
- What are the alternative media approaches can enhance development in the community?

Relevance of the Study

“Does a fish know it’s wet?” influential cultural and media critic Marshall McLuhan [in Baran J. S (2004)] would often ask. The answer he would say, is “No” The fish is dominated by water that only when water is absent is the fish aware of its condition. So is it with people and mass media. The media so fully saturate our everyday lives that we are often unconscious of their presence, not to mention their influence. Media inform us, entertain us, and annoy us. They move our emotions, challenge our intellects, and insult our intelligence. Media often reduce us to mere commodities for sale to the highest bidder, media help define us, and they shape our realities.

It is therefore expected that, the study provides a basis for continued initiation, negotiation and investigation of the media’s inherent potential in the shaping of the publics’ perception of the pastoral communities (Pokot) and how this has an effect on the development. Chapagne (1999) concedes that the media is a unique feature of the modern society and that it is hard to imagine life would be without it. As such, the study looked at the way media can hamper development as a result of unfair and inaccurate portrayal of the marginalized communities like the pokot.

Review of Related Literature

The Agenda setting theory

Agenda setting describes a very powerful influence of the media- the ability to tell us what issues are important. As far back as 1922, the newspaper columnist Walter Lipman was concerned that media had the power to present images to the public. The agenda setting theory was first developed by McCombs and Shaw after investigating presidential campaigns in 1968, 1972 and 1982. Dwelling mainly on the mass media communication content, they state that the press is selective when reporting the news, most reality is not covered in the media thus presenting its (media) own reality. The theory attempts to explain why people with similar exposure place importance on the same issues. It tries to explain that, although different people may feel differently about issues at hand, most people feel the same issues are important. The agenda setting theory comes from a scientific ground (perspective), because it predicts that if the same people are exposed to the same media, they will place importance on the same issues.

In support for this idea, McCombs and Shaw (1972:176-185) states that, the media (mainly the news media) aren’t at all successful at telling us what to think, but they are quite successful at telling us what to think, for instance, what people know about the same issues. It is therefore indicated that the press and the

media do not reflect reality; they filter and shape it. So, media's concentration on a few issues and subjects for, example cattle rustling in Pokot leads the public to perceive those issues as more important than other ones. In general, media sets the agenda for public opinion. Just like the media reports of the Pokot people, it sets the ground for subsequent discussion and negotiation.

Media and Socialization

Socialization is the process of developing a sense of self connectedness to a larger social world through learning and internalizing the values, beliefs, and norms of one's culture. Graber (1980) states that, the mass media is a powerful socializing agent and that has taken over the traditional forms of socialization. Johnson (1985) describes socialization as the processes through which people learn to behave, think, and feel as individuals in relation to social and physical environments. Through socialization we learn to perform certain roles as citizens, friends, lovers, workers, and so forth. Through internalization our culture becomes taken-for-granted. We learn to behave in socially appropriate and acceptable ways. Some social institutions have explicit roles in instilling these responsibilities by socializing the young through various agents i.e. the family, schools and others which have less intentional but still powerful roles in the process for example to groups such as adolescent peers.

For sociologists, significance of the media is not limited to the content of media messages but also how these messages affect how we learn about our world and interact with one another. For individual social life is a continuing process of interpreting perception and making choices as we think, feel, and act in relation to other people. Therefore what we learn and how we learn throughout our lives is what socialization is all about the media

The mass media: television, radio, movies, books, newspapers and magazines produce a steady-stream of images that reflect ideas about how we should look and behave towards one another. Ellis and McClintock (1990) also agrees that, to establish a character in the minds of the audience, media often rely on the use of obvious (assumed) or superficial characters so that, the notion of banditry and cattle rustling would always recur on the media purposely to satisfy their audience expectation of the nature of news from *Pokot*, *Turkana*, *Marakwet* or other pastoralist communities in general. The power of the media lies primarily in the fact that they portray what is often beyond the experience of many readers, and thus images of social life can replace direct experience as our source of information about the social environment.

Farrel J. et al (1995) argue that, the media is a pervasive feature of the environment in which we play our lives and so, the messages and information we receive through the media have an extensive impact; from influencing our choice of friends thus affecting our understanding and treatment of civil and criminal actors as in the case of the unending tribal clashes and cattle rustling in the north Rift.

Media and perception

Bernard Cohen (1963) stated "the press may not be successful much of the in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about" The media's role in shaping the perception of *Iraq* and *Saddam* is something that can easily brush out of our minds. The media in the US began running stories on Iraq, the tone of which was extremely hostile; all the stories were slanted against Iraq. Exaggerations about people killed by *Kurds* were reported, in a campaign to prepare the world psychologically against *Islam* and *Arabs*, and we actually believed it. On media presentation and fairness, Fairclough (2001) states that, it is rather obvious that the people and organizations that the media use as source in reporting do not represent equally all social groupings in the population; it is therefore less clear but nevertheless highly important in terms of whose perspective is adopted in reports.

Until *Saddam* was 'brought to the noose,' the world had no mercy on him because the US media had demonized him and made him perceived as a threat to life.

In Kenya, pastoralists activities for instance, the ownership of the AK47 is a form of self-defense and self-preservation (protection) from external aggressors something they feel government has failed to offer; the neighbouring communities like *Luhuyas* feel Pokots have been advantaged while the government see the act as a threat to national security and depending whose side media takes, the community receives its share of concerns from the entire world. Ferrell (1995) asserts that, it is impossible to reject an understanding of the media presentation as having significant social and psychological impact which in turn affect decisions that largely have an impact on both personal as well social development.

In her book. 'Open the Box'. Root, Jane (1997) agrees that media has a role in defining what we think...and it helps to map out who 'we' and 'others' are. In Kenya, the media determines what we make of others (communities/tribes) and these affect our entire lives towards each other. Curran and Gurevitch (1991) agree that in essence, the mass media creates a general coherence in our lives and establishes an order in which we anchor our existence. The media therefore is a major source of behaviour modeling in our social relationships. O`ullivan et al (1998) adds that media images, to a large extent, are a major factor in construction and circulation of social understanding and social imagery in modern societies. The media has continually portrayed images of hate against the pastoralists; this has shaped their perception and behaviour which to a large extent as exacerbate animosity amongst them. Naggin and Tremblay (1999) argues that the influence of mass media, however strong or weak, can best be viewed as one of the many potential factors that help shape people's behaviour towards each other.

The media's power to influence the way we think about others cannot be overemphasized, Tory (1993:14) observes that, nearly everyone in the modern world is to some degree influenced by the media (advertising) and other forms of communication (communication). Media was largely blamed for fanning tribal animosity that lead to hundreds of people losing their lives in 2007 Kenya's Post Election Violence (PEV). Peterson et al (1992: 101) state that, the media's influence and ability to change perceptions and behaviour is so strong that traditional analytical tools it's influence on society are insufficient.

On the impact of the western media on the developing world, Schiller (1973:56) points, the third world countries are media filled with the western world's way of living, believing, and thinking. Burk and Shaw (1998) posit that, media does not only carry information, they also very powerful in forming attitudes and forming opinions. In other words, media teach and they teach not only what they say but also with how they say it.

McQuail (1994) observes that, the media are continually offering pictures of life and models of behaviour in advance of actual experience. Garfinkel (1967) a Sociologist, describes this act by the media as the act of presenting the "familiar common sense" of the world which is built entirely on assumption and expectations which in turn control both the actions of the members of a society and their interpretation of the actions and behaviour of others as the case is in Kenya. Such assumptions and expectations are implicit back-grounded, taken for granted i.e. the case of cattle rustling and conflicts among the pastoralist communities.

Technological advances in communication networks worldwide provide a fertile avenue for stimulation and projection of different groups (tribes) attributes and identities i.e. their social, cultural and economic lifestyles. Since the world war 11 the evolution in media communication: print especially, has not only been extensive but startling.

Mass Media and Conflict

The perception created by the media about the pastoral communities can also be attributed to the continued conflict among the pastoral communities. William G. Cunningham (1998) introduced the concept of 'negative identity' – that can be propelled by the media, which according to them can lead individuals or communities turning into maladaptive behaviour.

The continued reporting of "heart-touching" issues from the pastoralist communities never cease to puzzle. Fairclough (2001) look at it as 'a survival technique' where, the media tries to create 'news' which they cannot do on their own. To make source credible they have to cooperate with security agents who are in dire need for public relation vessel, and thus they what would best be described as scratch my back... I scratch yours. Ferrell (1995) looks at this aspect and describes it as a symbiotic interconnectedness where the police will tend to offer information that would generate organizationally (media house) advantageous. From the pastoralists' communities, the police normally provide series about extreme cases of crimes that the public consider 'newsworthy' and the police are viewed as a force that is in control contrary to what they really are. It leads to a continued stream of crimes; the continued reporting of the 'extremes which have a residual effect on the mind of the spectators (readers) as well as the subjects in question.

According to Fodor (1982) Repletion Theory of Mind (RTM) cognitive mechanisms extract information from the outside world and process, store and retrieve such information and therefore whenever news from the pastoralists is mentioned, the mind expects it to take a particular motive. The tendency of the print media reporting unconfirmed figures seem to 'fix' the group in question as a group who in turn tend to be defensive. For example, about the number of stolen animals by cattle rustlers in the pastoral communities has been so rampant, many communities have always complained that "other" communities have been using the media to deprive them of their wealth. The problem normally occurs when the security agencies use media reports to tackle conflicts in the affected communities. So that when asked by the media reporters, they (affected parties) normally exaggerate the figures with the hope to be over compensated, this adversely affect those communities that steal from their neighbours, *Pokot* being at the center of other pastoralist communities have always been on the receiving end.

Hostile media effect

Results of negative media effect; a phenomenon that was first proposed and studied experimentally by Robert Volome et al (1995), the hostile media effect sometimes called the hostile media, is a media phenomenon referring to the finding that people with strong biases towards an issue (partisans) perceive media coverage as biased against their opinions. Proponents of hostile media effect argue that these findings cannot be attributed to the presence of bias news, since partisans from opposing sides of an issue rate the same coverage as biased against their side and biased in favour of the other side. This is a common phenomenon with neighbouring communities when involved in conflicts as the case is with cattle rustling activities in the North-Rift among the *Pokot*, *Turkana*, *Sabiny*, etc.

A case in point is that of Giner-Sorolla's (1994) on pro-Palestinian and Pro-Israelis: the first research, they interviewed pro- Palestinian and pro-Israeli students pertaining to then, recent *Subra* and *Shatila* massacre of the Palestinians refugees by Christian Lebanese Militia fighters in Beirut during the Lebanese civil war. The pro-Israeli students reported seeing more anti-Israeli references and fewer favourable references to Israel in the news report and vice versa. Again, both sides said a neutral observer would have more negative view of their side from viewing the clips, and that the media excused the other side where it blamed their side. What is crucial to note from their research

is the fact that the two sides were not asked questions about subjective generalizations about the media coverage as a whole such as what might be expressed as "I thought" that the news has been generally biased against this side of the issue. Instead, when viewing identical news clips, subjects differed along partisan lines on simple objective criteria such as the number of references on the given subjects. The research suggests the hostile media effect is not just a difference of opinion but a difference of perception (selective perception) a case that might be working against uniting the pastoralist communities since they always think the media is for the "others" leaving them with "closed minds" as Jacques (2006) likes to put in reference to print media effect.

Media and Developmental NGOs

Developmental NGOs play a major role in Kenya's human development process, with minimal support from the media. Robinson (1995:16) on media and NGOs argue that media is vital in informing the general public of such events and thus influencing the extent and success of fund-raising activities by the emergency and donor community. Highlighting of NGO activities will by implication uphold trust and accountability between organization and other stakeholders in development. He further argues, media portrayal of barbarism and anarchy among Kenyan communities especially the pastoralists lessen the sympathy felt by the aid giving communities and can thus impact directly onto the amount of funding raised for emergency and development work.

In Bangladesh for UNDP (2005) report indicate that, developmental NGOs of Bangladesh are among the most active in the world in linking up with the media and they have been very successful in helping the government to achieve its targets in human resource development. Gaining independence much later after Kenya, Bangladesh has recorded some of the developing world's most rapid advances. According to the World Human Development Report (2005) the success of Bangladesh demonstrates what can be achieved through stronger state action and civic activism. Hudoc, (2003) acknowledge that, knowledge transmission and enhanced transparency are regarded as key ingredients of an effective strategy by development policy makers expected to be done in liaison with the media. Ojo (2005) adds that Promoting good governance and development requires improvement of media capacity for reporting on social economic and developmental such as public health and education. Unfortunately in the Kenyan case, the only time NGOs are given attention is when they are involved on scandals and grand corruption. It is clear therefore that NGOs in Kenya need media support to inform and mobilize people. Distance and lack of interaction between media and NGOs over issues like poverty, education women's rights and human rights, have made it hard for Kenyans to appreciate their role.

The world over, media communication has been dominated by politics, social failures, crimes, and executives who can manipulate the media. The media in this case have no room to instill positive thinking to the public and even make no efforts to give the society a new direction. On the other hand Uttamachandani (2005) thinks, journalism committed to development needs to look at situations in a broader context. To him developmental journalism should pay attention to news from all fields regardless of the monetary gain it reciprocates to the media house for example. Namra (2004) adds that, it should focus on the needs of the poor, deprived, and the marginalized, and should emphasize their participation in development planning, a clear paradox of what happens in Kenya where media is only interested in controversial issues like the recent Standard Gauge saga, Railway, Anglo-Leasing payments, KDF in Somali, NSSF- *Tassia* Saga etc that concerns mainly the rich in the society.

Research Methodology

The research adopted a relativist paradigm, thus a qualitative approach was adopted in data generation, presentation, analysis and interpretation. The research adopted a case study, where the Pokot community formed a case and the various parties involved i.e. general population, NGOs and government ministries representative formed an embedded case study.

The research Results and Discussions

The first question on whether print media played a role in shaping their perception: the majority strongly felt what they read in papers, magazines and books determined how they think and feel about other and by extension, determine how they interact, whom to choose for friendship and more so whom to choose for a spouse. The participants also noted that; the media information about people from various communities, influences on whom to trust and even who to trust in business partnership and therefore affect how business is done.

Table 1 Table indicating Positive vs. Negative information

| | Positive Information | | Negative information |
|---|--------------------------------|---|-----------------------------|
| 1 | Education progress reports | 1 | Cattle rustling |
| 2 | Limestone mining investment | 2 | Banditry& High way robbery |
| 3 | Attraction sights and archives | 3 | Starvation/malnutrition |
| 4 | NGO/Group operations | 4 | FGM Stories |
| 5 | Rich Cultural heritage | | |
| | Peace race | | |

The above table on the evaluation of the nature of media representation of the Pokot and their affairs; the participants were divided on their views on whether media was accurate in reporting but they almost agreed on the fact that reporting was skewed towards the negative or otherwise news that would be considered "bad." The elites cited examples of cases where they have been called by their friends to "catch up" on some news on TV or read newspaper column and that this were likely to be news that were either leaning towards what they called "extreme" a baby sucking her dead mother, hunger stricken families, crude circumcision practices, people bathing along the river on a market day, and generally, reports about mass killings by the pastoralist communities.

Results on what are the effects of print media representation on the development of the communities; the findings indicated that negative media has effect on education where teachers have feared working in the pastoralist areas due to insecurity. Teacher recruitment done also indicate these areas advertise many positions only to be transferred after a short period. The education official also confirmed majority of teachers cited insecurity as the main reason therefore, to many recruits, the area provide a stepping stone to getting employment. This leaves the education sector underdeveloped.

Economically, the fear instilled by biased nature of media reporting on i.e. banditry, the investors shy away leaving the community to heavily rely on donor funding for the basic needs

On politics: the research results indicate that majority of politicians have capitalized on enhancement of the negative perception to intimidate smaller tribes or clans therefore lower democratic space

Results On the challenges that hinder accurate reporting: the participants cited misunderstanding of facts by reporter, they also cited illiteracy levels among community members, lack of responsibility by the mainstream media, preconceived ideas, hostility from the locals, poor infrastructure, poor leadership as well as lack of representation in the mainstream media also, cultural beliefs and taboos also was noted i.e. the issue of number of animals, or property of any kind.

Result on alternative media approaches to enhance development in the community: the participants suggested active participation of the locals and government agencies in reporting through civic education. The participants suggested tough penalties to reporters who are found misinforming the mainstream media.

Conclusion and Recommendations

From the above results and discussions, it is evident that the mass media still hold a key place in the society. The effects of mass of mass media have far reaching impacts on the major agents of development i.e. education, NGOs, government agencies as well as the various communities and their ways of live. The economic decisions and activities in various places majorly depend on the information in the media therefore a key element in development as a whole.

The research findings calls for more involvement in the effort to monitor mass media communications with the effort to better the society's image and by extension create a conducive atmosphere for investors to invest in social, economic, cultural and political issues.

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