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## **Deteriorating Editorial Autonomy: What Influences the Selection and Publication of Environmental Issues in the Kenyan Mainstream Print Media?**

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## Abstract

This research aims to investigate editorial autonomy concerning the selection and publication of environmental issues in the Kenyan print media. A review of existing literature indicates that insufficient research has been conducted to comprehensively analyze the factors influencing the selection and publication of environmental issues in the Kenyan print media. Therefore, this study has a singular objective: to scrutinize editorial autonomy in relation to the selection and publication of environmental issues. The study was guided by a key research question: To what extent does editorial autonomy impact the selection and publication of environmental issues? Utilizing a qualitative research method and a case study research design, the study employed purposive sampling, with a sample size of twenty-six editors. Data collection involved intensive in-depth interviews, and data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis. The findings reveal that the editorial autonomy of the Kenyan print media is compromised by external influences such as political players, corporate interests, and advertising agencies. The study concludes that the Kenyan print media has limited editorial autonomy. The study recommends the need to strengthen editorial autonomy through the establishment of robust policies. Additionally, further studies are needed to determine the full extent of the implications of external forces on media and journalistic integrity. The present investigation was anchored in the framing media theory.

**Keywords:** *Print media, environmental Issues, editorial team, editorial autonomy, framing theory*

## Introduction

During the 10th century in England, newsletters known as editorials were a common means of communication with the public. Over time, editorials have become an integral component of major newspapers worldwide (Davis, 2013). The editorial as it is known today, however, has its origins in the 1830s, when it was primarily the opinion of the newspaper editor and was referred to as an article written and published by the editor (Arant & Anderson, 2001; Hasan & Islam, 2017). In contemporary times, the evolution of media technology has led to editorials being disseminated across various media platforms, rather than just through newspapers. Entman (2010) contends that editorials are not only confined to opinion articles authored and published by the editors of magazines or newspapers but are also broadcasted via television or radio stations. Okoro and Agbo (as cited in Davis, 2013), however, argue that the definition and scope of editorial have expanded significantly in recent times. By the mid-20th century, newspapers around the globe had started designating separate pages for editorials, often placing them on the left-hand side of the page (Firmstone, 2019). Presently, newspapers have expanded the editorial page to include contributions from emerging writers, guest authors, and columnists (Thrift, 1977), as is the case in the Kenyan Standard and Nation newspapers.

As per historical precedent, the editorial page serves as the solitary section of the newspaper that purely espouses opinion (Davis, 2013). Each published editorial seeks to convey the stance of the editorial board on a pertinent public issue (Sommer & Maycroft, 2010) and generally aims to apprise the populace on matters that significantly influence their lives. Extensive research conducted by media scholars across the globe reveals a common consensus that the responsibility of producing editorials rests solely with the editors. A team of editors within a particular media establishment is tasked with constructing editorials, overseeing its content, and disseminating it to the masses, prioritizing issues of public interest (Entman, 2010; Gray, 2015). Moreover, it is widely acknowledged that editorials often reflect the perspectives of the organization's top management, owners, or board of directors, and those of trustees. The argument advanced by these scholars suggests that these articles are drafted with the express aim of articulating the media outlet's position on specific issues deemed crucial to the public (Sadia & Ghani, 2019).

Environmental news on the other hand refers to all news reports that touch on all aspects of the ecosystem. Langat (2017) emphasized that for the world to realize economic sustainability; environmental matters must be positioned at the very top of the pyramid. Today, environmental issues are global concerns that influence every part of the world and result in the devastating menace that continue to affect millions of people (Otieno, Mareri & Khaemba, 2023). As Krassowska (2009) noted, Kenya is placed among countries with rich biodiversity, which can result in economic prosperity if adequately utilized. However, Wakhungu (2013) posits that most Kenyans live in rural settlements and agriculture is the significant economic activity and the backbone of the economy. Therefore, environmental issues must take center stage since, according to NEMA 2009 annual report, close to 64 percent of Kenyans' livelihood depends on agriculture (NEMA, 2009). Wakhungu (2013) further suggests that the success of any agricultural activity depends on the favorability of the environment. In the recent past, Kenya has suffered numerous environmental disasters that threatened the stability of her economy (Otinga, 2014; Ochieng, 2015). On the other hand, Beaubien (2021) affirms that the swarm of locusts that invaded northern Kenya and the drought that is currently ravaging most parts of the country has caused devastating losses to most farmers, and the country now stares at a possible food crisis. Millions of Kenyans are already suffering severe starvation having lost their livelihoods to drought. In addition, Krassowska (2009) further notes that global warming and climate change are real, and their impact is felt in many nations worldwide. In Kenya, some of these impacts include; unpredictable weather patterns, rivers like Mara drying up, floods becoming very common, prolonged and frequent drought, loss of biodiversity, landslide, and deforestation, among others (NEMA, 2009).

As Otieno and Ndongye (2022) emphasize, mass media is one of the platforms that can disseminate this information to the masses; there has been a great need to establish the role of the mass media (Television, Radio, and Newspaper) in the coverage and dissemination of environmental issues in the world including Kenya. In the print media, newspaper editorial boards are key in the selection and publication of news items (Ochieng, 2023; Otieno & Ndongye, 2020; Ochieng & Ileri, 2022) including environmental-related news stories. Therefore, editorial autonomy is vital when it comes to news selection and publication. This, therefore, justifies the current study that seeks to assess the media coverage of environmental issues in the Standard and the Nation newspapers and the role editorial boards play in the selection and publication of stories. The Standard and Nation newspapers are the two foremost newspapers in Kenya and they control more than half of the market share (Ileri & Ochieng, 2020; Elliott, 2015; Ochieng,

2022). The concern about environmental degradation has increased steadily. These days it is common to talk about the earth, the globe, and the global environment, and a lot of news and debates, which can be labeled under the umbrella concept of global environmental changes, are found in the media (Ingold, 2000). This is an encouraging trend and portrays a radical change in the level of awareness and concern for the environment among citizens. Therefore, the autonomy of the print media editorial board is crucial in propelling environmental information to the masses. This study is aimed at analyzing editorial autonomy in relation to the selection and publication of environmental issues. As compared to the previous times, social media has diminished the cost of production and dissemination of news to a scattered kind of audience with an interest in political information. It is very useful and has replaced the print media such as newspapers and magazines. Publishing news on these printing platforms requires more sources like machines and larger labor as compared to publishing online which is cost effective. After the boom in social networking websites like Twitter and Facebook, individuals have an easy medium to share their views and ideas on an agenda with their fellows and they can have a debate on it (Bakshy, Rosenn, Marlow & Adamic, 2012). Since technological advancements are taking over, the use of mobile internet is also increasing, which is giving easy access to social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter. These sites are becoming important platforms for political public discourse. Social media provides a vast reach to a wider audience and is not restricted like traditional media, which is one way of communication. Traditional media also doesn't provide a chance to exchange opinions or start a healthy debate on a topic (Pariser, 2011). Furthermore, from an estimation it is expected that by the end of 2019, the total population of the world using the internet and having access to social networking websites will become 72.8%. Based on this report, given by eMarketer, the world of the internet is becoming a keen place for public debate (Williams, McMurray, Kurz, & Lambert, 2015).

### **Statement of Problem**

The editorial board of any media outlet wields considerable influence in the curation and dissemination of the day's news items. Consequently, the autonomy of newspaper editorials assumes pivotal significance if the mass media is to perform its normative functions of informing, educating, and entertaining the masses and thereby serving the public interest. Any encroachment upon editorial independence, therefore, could impair the scope and coverage of news items, curtail public access to important information, and compromise the public's comprehension of vital matters. Despite extensive scholarship that delineates the role of newspapers in publishing news items, there appears to be limited research on the role of editorial boards in the selection and publication of critical issues such as environmental stories. This study endeavors to scrutinize the editorial autonomy concerning the selection and publication of environmental issues in the two leading newspapers in Kenya.

### **Literature Review**

In the 21st century, environmental reporting still captures a very insignificant portion of the media in terms of reporting, yet environmental issues are at the heart of global discourse. As Adel (2013) argued, some causes of environmental degradation include; land damage through the overuse of fertilizers. Various forms of pollution such as air, water, and soil. Excessive landfills are generated from factories, industries, hospitals, and households. Rapid population growth over stretches the available natural resources hence deforestation in response to the population crisis. Deforestation is another cause that often leads to a decrease in forest size, thereby emitting too much carbon into the atmosphere resulting in global warming and climate change (Mungai, 2021). Lastly, natural disasters such as earthquakes, heavy storms, and wildfires. These natural disasters destroy the hydrosphere and the biosphere (Wakhungu, 2013). Philander (2008) posits that human beings are solely responsible for most of today's environmental hazards.

Newspaper editors play a crucial role in the selection and publication of environmental news stories (Bonyadi & Samuel, 2013). They are responsible for determining which stories are to be covered and how they are to be presented to readers. As noted by Hasan and Islam (2017), newspaper editors are responsible for selecting which news stories are covered by their publication. A study on media coverage of environmental pollution in China using a mixed method by Tilt and Xiao (2010) found that the two media outlets i.e. Xinhua News Agency and CCTV in China differ fundamentally in their coverage of environmental issues. In Xinhua, editors avoided the publication of politically contentious issues while on CCTV, the editors published stories condemning and exposing government cover-up of environmental and human health effects. When it comes to environmental news stories, editors are often faced with a variety of competing factors that can influence their decision-making process. These factors may include the newsworthiness of the story, the interests of their readership, the resources available to cover the story, and the potential impact of the story on public opinion and policy.

Moreover, according to Baker's (2007) survey on the rediscovery of traditional ecological knowledge as adaptive management, media outlets deliberately select environmental movements that align with their corporate interests and desire for newsworthiness, while neglecting others. Regrettably, the chosen stories often fail to serve the public interest, while the ignored ones are of significant importance to the public. Consequently, the media exhibits considerable dishonesty in terms of environmental coverage, thus curtailing the public's comprehension of environmental issues and conservation. Numerous instances exist where senior editors who act as gatekeepers in newsrooms and determine what is disseminated and what is not, exhibit a lack of appreciation for environmental matters.

In 2020, Mohamed and Larouz conducted a study in Morocco, which aimed to analyze print media coverage of environmental issues during the COVID-19 pandemic using a sample size of 308 issues of the three major newspapers, As-Sabah, Al-Akhbar, and Al-Massae, manually examined to identify the reported

environmental problems. The study's results indicated that the newspapers provided inadequate coverage of environmental issues during the pandemic. The print media's role in informing the public about environmental resource conservation during the pandemic is crucial. Regrettably, the newspapers' environmentally based stories were feeble and lacked interest. Thus, the print media's role in covering environmental topics to keep the public informed about environmental conservation during the COVID-19 pandemic was not achieved due to the newspapers' insufficient attention to environmental issues. According to Mohamed and Larouz (2020), the editorial team of the three media outlets did not seem to value environmental-related items to accord them sufficient coverage and publication.

One important factor that editors must consider is the newsworthiness of the story. For a story to be considered newsworthy, it must meet certain criteria, such as being timely, relevant, and significant to a broad audience. Environmental news stories that meet these criteria are more likely to be covered by editors. Another factor that editors must consider is the interests of their readership. Newspapers are businesses, and as such, they must cater to the interests of their readership to remain financially viable. If readers are not interested in environmental news stories, editors may be less likely to cover them. Finally, editors must consider the potential impact of the story on public opinion and policy. As Pegu (2017) posits, environmental news stories can have a significant impact on how the public views these issues and on the development of environmental policy. Editors must be aware of this impact and carefully consider the potential consequences of publishing a particular story.

Philander (2008) highlights some of the expected effects of environmental degradation, including the loss of biodiversity responsible for balancing the ecosystem through the restoration of nutrients, stabilizing climate, protecting water sources, and combating pollution. Another effect is the depletion of the Ozone Layer responsible for preventing harmful Ultraviolet rays from directly reaching mother earth. When the Ozone layer is depleted, it results in the emission of harmful radiation, causing diseases. Chlorofluorocarbons and hydrochlorofluorocarbons in the atmosphere are causing the depletion of ozone. Other effects include; a negative impact on human health, loss of the tourism industry, and negative economic impact. The United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP) report of 2007 highlighted five significant ways in which environmental education and the creation of awareness are to be achieved. They include creating essential awareness and education, community and adult training programs, reorienting current awareness programs, training and awareness programs for technical, vocational, and professional persons, and the use of available media to reach the masses (Philander, 2008).

According to Kaul (2017), the significance of media in the propagation of environmental awareness and the illumination of the formidable crisis looming over our society cannot be overstated. The detection of environmental issues is typically within the purview of scientists. However, the media frequently assumes a pivotal function in the diffusion of information affecting individuals' attitudes

and promoting public consciousness. Media, being the foundation of public opinion, serves as a catalytic agent for transformation. In this regard, the editorial independence of print media is indispensable in determining the stories to be published by media establishments.

A mixed-method study by Sayo (2014), using surveys and in-depth interviews on media and environmental awareness in the case of Kenyan TV, found that media still plays a significant role in informing the audience on matters of the environment. “However, many felt that the media’s potential in raising awareness on environmental issues has not been fully explored. Many of the respondents felt that due to their commercial nature, the media in Kenya are skewed towards politics, sports, and soap operas as these are thought to attract audiences and ultimately advertisers” (p.29). Similarly, a mixed-method study by Shanahan (2011) on why the media matters in a warming world using qualitative and quantitative study methods found that environmental reporting is still marginalized in the news media. Many editors do not find environmental reporting lucrative enough to allocate much airtime.

After conducting a meticulous review of pertinent literature on the subject of investigation, a conspicuous body of scientific evidence reveals that numerous investigations have been undertaken to scrutinize diverse aspects of media coverage of environmental issues across the globe. Prior research has scrutinized the function of mass media in fostering environmental consciousness, the representation of environmental pollution and degradation in media coverage, as well as media reporting during the coronavirus pandemic. In addition, numerous other studies have explored media biases in reporting, the function of editors in framing environmental narratives, and editorial choices regarding the content to report. Other areas that have also been probed include the framing of environmental issues by newspapers. However, there exists no research that has specifically tackled the element of editorial autonomy by analyzing the factors that impact the coverage and dissemination of environmental issues by Kenyan newspapers. Consequently, this study seeks to assess editorial independence by examining the determinants that influence the selection and publication of environmental issues in two reputable Kenyan newspapers.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The framing media theory is attributed to Erving Goffman and the theory is closely related to the famous agenda-setting media theory (Littlejohn & Foss 2009; Wimmer & Dominick, 2003). It emerged in the 1970s and as Goffman (1974) and Anderson (1996) explain, the framing theory suggests that if media present information to the audience in a certain way it influences their perception and choices but more importantly how audiences process information. It involves how the mass media chose to report a given matter to the audience, the frames, and the news angles they use in their reporting (Griffin, 2012; McQuail, 1994). The frames and angles used by reporters influence the general perception of the media audience (McQuail, 2010; Griffin, 2009). For instance, if the mass media chooses to focus on the negative attributes of a person, an institution, or an issue in their

reporting, then the audiences who are exposed to such negative reporting will develop a negative perception of the person, or the institution or the issues being reported by the media (McQuail, 2005; Miller, 2005; West & Lynn, 2010). This theory will be appropriate in trying to analyze how editors decide on news frames to use and how they influence environmental stories published in their print media.

## **Methodology**

This research utilized a qualitative approach, specifically employing a case study research design. As articulated by Stake (2000), Yin (2009), Creswell (2018), and Yin (2003), this design was selected for its ability to focus and study particular samples in-depth. The research was conducted at the Nation and Standard media center, and the target population was editors from the Standard and Nation media group consisting of environmental and climate change editors, newspaper editors, news editors, subeditors, substantive editors, agricultural editors, and senior editors. Purposive sampling was employed and as Maxwell (2013), Creswell (2007), Merriam (2009), Patton (2002), Richards (2009), and Schwandt (2007) define, it is whereby individuals are selected based on their ability to perform specific functions. The sample size comprised twenty-six different editors who have an interest in matters relating to the environment or interact with such stories often and was drawn from two media houses. In-depth interviews were utilized as the primary data collection tool, given their ability to elicit personal experiences and insights, as observed by Daymon and Holloway (2011), Oliver (2014), Rubin and Rubin (1995), and Prairie Research Associates, Inc. (2001). The data analysis process encompassed several distinct phases, including the systematic classification of data into distinct groups and the meticulous annotation of relevant information (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Gibbs, 2007). A subsequent step involved an interpretive analysis informed by theoretical frameworks to elucidate the underlying significance of the data and to uncover salient themes that emerged during the analysis. Thematic analysis was then used to analyze the data, as Silverman (2006), Creswell (2009), Stake (2010), Mason (2002), and Stenbacka (2001) posit, owing to its effectiveness in organizing and providing a detailed and rich account of the data.

### **Table 1: Study Participants**

Number	Name	Acronym	No. of Participants	Media Outlet
No.1	Senior Editors - SE	NMGSE	1	NMG
	Senior Editors - SE	SMGSE	1	SMG
No.2	Environmental Editor - EE	NMGEE	1	NMG
	Environmental Editor - EE	SMGEE	1	SMG
No.3	Copy Editors - CE	NMGCE	4	NMG
	Copy Editors - CE	SMGCE	4	SMG
No.4	Senior Reporter - SR	NMGSR	6	NMG
	Senior Reporter - SR	SMGSR	6	SMG
No.5	Newspaper Editor - NE	NMGNE	1	NMG
	Newspaper Editor - NE	SMGNE	1	SMG
Total			26 Participants	

## Results

The findings in this section were obtained through the in-depth interview. During that exercise, study participants identified and discussed eleven themes, however, in this paper, only three were discussed and they include; the significance of environmental issues, factors influencing the selection of environmental issues, and lastly, forces influencing the publication of environmental issues. The illustrations of their descriptions are presented in the paragraphs below.

### Significance of Environmental Issues.

Upon acquiring from the study participants whether environmental issues were of great importance to them and their media outlets, all participants in this study cohort indicated that environmental stories are very important and that they are very passionate about the topic. Participant SMGEE said that she has a column where she writes about environmental issues, and according to her, the environment touches on almost every single aspect of our lives and is worth everything. However, there are many challenges involved when it comes to environmental stories and their publications. The participant narrated with a vivid example:

“The only challenge is that many journalists and reporters cannot link environmental stories to other spheres of life. For instance, when there is a landslide in Meru or Elgeyo Marakwet counties, journalists do not seem to report it as an impact of global warming and climate change; instead, they report it as a landslide. They fail to realize that the two news items are interconnected. Therefore, story framing is key moving forward.”

Another Participant SMGSR1 from the standard group said that:

“As a proficient editor, I have meticulously curated a plethora of news articles and feature stories on climate change and other ecological concerns that have been proffered to me by diligent reporters. Thus, it is incontrovertible that environmental issues hold paramount significance and are consistently accorded with the utmost gravity.”

While Participant SMGSE on her part point out that:

“The phenomenon of climate change, coupled with the attendant global warming and other interconnected environmental concerns, is an issue that we regard with the utmost gravity, and it frequently constitutes a focal point of our journalistic reportage. If you have analyzed our newspapers, as you have suggested, you may have gleaned that we have dedicated several sections of our publication to featuring stories that revolve around the intricacies of climate change.”

From the nation media group, Participant NMGEE added his voice and stated:

“My friend, I am very passionate about environmental issues and their coverage, and I think my media house does too. If you ask whether environmental stories matter, the answer is yes. These stories might seem forgotten, but they matter. If an environmental story breaks today, it will receive sufficient coverage in our print media that I know! The only challenge is the lack of sensitivity and different ideologies regarding print media story prioritization.”

Participant NMGSE on her part said that:

“Undoubtedly, environmental concerns hold paramount importance to us here at the Nation news center, and we place immense value on these narratives. As a senior editorial authority in this media enterprise, I attest to the fact that environmental topics represent crucial focal points, and in the event of breaking news, we will assuredly provide coverage.”

Meanwhile, Participant NMGSR3's view was that:

“In my capacity as a copy editor stationed at the national center, my typical editorial workload encompasses a multitude of journalistic pieces. It is noteworthy, however, that environmentally-focused reportage seldom graces my desk for revision, in sharp contrast to other topical domains.”

From the significance of environmental issues interview excerpts of the editorial selection and publication of environmental issues, the participants in this cohort seem to agree that environmental issues are vital, and they have an interest in anything that pertains to the environment. They also believed that their respective media outlets value environmental issues and their publications. However, participants were of diverse viewpoints concerning the media's challenges in publishing environmental issues. One participant believes the challenge is the lack of proper understanding of environmental issues by journalists and that most journalists are inept in environmental reporting and coverage. Another participant suggests that the challenge is a lack of sensitivity and ideological differences regarding story prioritization by media personnel.

## **Factors Affecting the Selection of Environmental Issues**

The study participants in this cohort highlighted why some environmental issues are preferred and published while others have never seen the light of day. They pointed out that some environmental issues are very sensitive and should be handled with the utmost care. Participant NMGEE added that sometimes environmental issues are highly politicized, and this, in a way, influences the selection of stories to be published. NMGEE went on to state:

“Yes, to some extent, I could say some factors dictate the publication of environmental issues. For example, you remember that story on the deforestation of the Mau forest. That story was and is still very sensitive, highly politicized, and poorly reported. Poor reporting can cause an alert, so we, editors, are very careful with such stories. Mau was political with a political angle. However, if a story comes and it is worth being told, we tell it and deal with the consequences later, and this is a common phenomenon in most newsrooms.”

Participant NMGSE from the nation center said that:

“Undoubtedly, diverse determinants exert an influence on the curation of environmental narratives alongside other reportage rendered by our correspondents. These factors comprise the story per se, as well as the actors implicated in it. Although an exhaustive account is not within the scope of this discourse, the actors in question encompass commercial entities, promotional agencies, and sundry individuals.”

Participant SMGEE pointed out the aspect of corruption and the unquenchable appetite for money by journalists, reporters, and editors. Politics and corruption in newsrooms are real, affecting journalism's quality. “A story can be killed based on who is mentioned in the story,” she added. SMGEE recounted his experience as follows:

“These people know editors in chief and other senior editors, and they are powerful, so when they, for whatever reason, are implicated in a story, that story might not air. Other issues at play regarding environmental coverage and other news coverage, in general, are, among others, brown envelope menace, journalistic greed, corruption, and lack of journalistic ethics and integrity. For example, nothing will prevent a broke journalist or editor from calling the so-called “Mweshimiwas” also known as “honorable members” and tipping them off about their names being mentioned in a story. A simple reporter will kill such a story but mostly by senior editors upon receiving some brown envelope. It is crazy. hehehe. It is a crazy world.”

Participant SMGSE added his voice and stated:

“In the realm of environmental journalism, the curation of stories for publication necessitates a nuanced consideration of various factors. The empirical evidence on a given issue, as well as the stakeholders implicated therein, must be conscientiously weighed. Particularly salient in this process

is the recognition that certain stories of an environmental nature may be imbued with a heightened degree of sensitivity, and thus require a judicious and discerning approach.”

Other factors that stood out strongly from the responses of study participants were the questions of who is directly or indirectly involved with the story, what news values stood strong in the story, and the impact of the story. Some news values that stood out were the aspect of impact, personalities, oddity, and story relevance. The participants believe these factors could tilt the decisions regarding selections and publication of stories.

### **Forces Influencing the Publication of Environmental Issues**

All participants in this cohort, when asked whether internal and external forces influence the publication of environmental issues, said there are forces sometimes at play. However, they indicated that these forces are faceless but insisted that they exist in print and electronic media. Participant SMGEE added her voice and stated:

“Well, I cannot point out these forces, but generally, when it comes to media and dissemination of information, there are forces at play. In my experience as an editor, you receive calls about specific stories directing you to either kill the story, delete some parts of the story or delay the story for further consideration for whatever reason. These calls often come from the so-called “big boys and girls” who are politically connected and have immense powers in the political arena and/or the corporate world. However, sometimes stories are published then fences of friendship are mended later. You know what I mean. Hehehe.”

Participant SMGCE2 from the standard media group added that:

“The publication of stories in news outlets is subject to the impact of both endogenous and exogenous forces. In the process of curating content for dissemination in a media house, meticulous scrutiny of the story's salient attributes is paramount.”

From the Nation media group, Participant NMGEE postulated that:

“Oh my! Yes, there are forces in the media industry that often dictate or influence the publication of stories in general. However, it is not easy to point them out, but they exist. When an environmental story breaks and touches on some very influential and powerful people, then it is possible that that story will not see the light of day. However, I have to say this; a story worth publishing will be published.”

Additionally, Participant NMGCE4 stated that:

“As a sub-editor, I encounter various news and feature articles, and predominantly published are those with a lower degree of controversy. Through my experience, I have discerned that narratives emphasizing prominent personalities in an unfavorable context frequently falter during

the editorial selection process. Specifically, those that implicate corporate entities and influential individuals encounter higher levels of scrutiny and are less likely to be approved for publication.”

From the forces influencing environmental coverage interview excerpts of the editorial selection and publication of environmental issues, the participants seem to allude that, indeed, there are external forces that influence the coverage of environmental stories. However, they all posit that it is very difficult to point them out, but one thing they have in common is power. The participants, however, are of a similar opinion that despite the power these “people” have, if a story is worth telling or publishing, then it will be published, and then the media can deal with the consequences later.

## Discussions

Across various media platforms both locally and globally, a pivotal team known as the editorial team assumes a critical role in decision-making. Specifically, the editorial team in print media bears the onus of selecting news stories for dissemination, as well as shaping the framing of such stories in accordance with the editorial policies of the given media outlet. Moreover, the editorial board is charged with the solemn responsibility of composing editorials, which serve as the media house's official stance on a particular matter of public interest. Nevertheless, there exist certain factors that may exert an influence on the editorial team's determinations regarding a specific issue, as indicated by research findings.

All participants in this study cohort indicated that hidden forces often influence media publications, and environmental publications are not exceptional. A participant said, “In the media industry, forces often impact a story in various ways. However, it is difficult to point them out, but they exist.” Another participant said, “A good environmental story can be suspended, part of it deleted or killed because it is rubbing the wrong person.” One participant said, “One obvious force is advertisers, these people are very powerful, and they are capable of affecting the lifespan of a story. However, suppose a story is worth telling. In that case, it will be told no matter what” These observations made by participants imply that there are powerful forces that interfere with environmental publication at different levels, from coverage and packaging to the time the story is published.

From the data obtained, there is a strong indication that environmental stories are vital to most media outlets, but there are countless challenges, such as ineptness of journalists, reporters, and editors, lack of sensitivity in reporting, and the aspect of ideological difference in terms of prioritization of newspaper content. One participant said, “I have worked in the environmental editorial desk for some years, and I can tell you that many journalists are not well equipped to cover and interpret environmental issues. Even some senior editors do not seem to grasp these ideas well.” Another participant added, “Some of these reporters lack sensitivity when reporting some environmental stories; a very good example is how poorly Mau deforestation has been reported.” Again, in almost all newsrooms, people are of varied ideologies, and many people believe in different things; therefore, it is possible to find a senior editor who does not believe that environmental stories are key, then one will end up getting limited updates. These

observations suggest that these challenges pose a bigger problem regarding environmental story framing and publication. Another participant added, "*Things such as news value, particularly the aspect of story impact, relevance, and personalities involved in a story, could also be a factor that can tilt the decision made by print news editors.*" From the findings of this study, it is evident that there is a deteriorating editorial autonomy and that editors are not as powerful as it seems in their roles of selection and publication of environmental issues.

Earlier findings cited under the literature review sections of this paper show that some researchers had established factors such as societal orientation towards politics, commercial entities, and advertising agencies to interfere with the editorial freedom in the selection and publication of environmental issues. A study by Baker (2017) on the rediscovery of traditional ecological knowledge as adaptive management observes that most media outlets pick up environmental stories that capture their corporate interest and the demand for newsworthiness while conveniently leaving out stories of great interest and concern to the public. According to Baker, the media does much dishonesty in terms of environmental coverage, thereby limiting the public's understanding of the environment and environmental conservation. This previous study concurs with the current study findings, where all participants indicated that there is much interference by political players, corporate bodies, and advertisement agencies regarding environmental news publications.

The varied comments made by participants of the study suggest that framing theory remains pertinent when discussing print media coverage of environmental issues. The framing theory, which was developed by Goffman in the 1970s and has since been fronted by numerous scholars, argues that media uses different news angles to report a given matter, person, or institution and that, in a way, influence the choices that the audience makes on how to process the information (Goffman, 1974). These angles are also known as frames. McQuail (2010), on his part, postulates that the news angles journalists use could influence the public's perception of a given issue. For instance, if the mass media chooses to focus on the negative attributes of a person, an institution, or an issue in their reporting, then the audiences who are exposed to such negative reporting will develop a negative perception of the person or the institution or the issues being reported by the media.

On the other hand, the study participants seemed to say the same thing that environmental issues tend to take a political angle. One participant said, "Environmental stories touching on prominent persons or organizations must be framed properly lest you get into trouble." These sentiments above are just examples of participants' point of view, which seems to support the framing theory that has been fronted for several years by various researchers to explain that the news angle used in reporting a given story influences how the public process a story (Littlejohn & Foss, 2009). The responses from study participants seem to reflect the proposition by the proponents and scholars who have fronted the framing theory.

## **Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations**

This investigation aimed to scrutinize the determinants involved in the curation and dissemination of environmental matters within the prevalent Kenyan media. The findings corroborate the notion that the independence of editorial boards in the print media is eroding, leaving them with minimal authority to determine which environmental concerns to feature in their publications. Furthermore, the study divulges that various external factors, including commercial interests, political stakeholders, and advertising conglomerates, exert considerable influence in shaping the media's editorial decisions regarding the selection and dissemination of news on environmental issues.

Based on the research's objectives and findings, the study surmises that editorial autonomy in the Kenyan mainstream print media is at a minimum. Furthermore, it appears that forces beyond the media outlet itself, such as the political elite, corporate entities, and advertising agencies, exert considerable influence over news selection and dissemination within the country's leading newspapers.

The paper's empirical data and corresponding inferences suggest that it would be advantageous for the Kenyan mainstream media to fortify their editorial autonomy by implementing robust policies aimed at curbing extraneous influences. Furthermore, the research suggests that additional inquiries are necessary to ascertain the complete extent to which extraneous pressures may encroach upon the media's integrity and journalistic standards.

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