

**WHAT MAKES NEWS ON THE FRONT PAGE? AN INVESTIGATION OF
CONCEPTIONS OF NEWSWORTHINESS IN THE *EAST AFRICAN STANDARD***

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ABSTRACT

Determining what is newsworthy is a daily challenge even to the very people who source news, produce and disseminate it. This study is part an exposition and exploration of the different approaches that media researchers have used to explain and determine the value of news. Like similar research before it, this study more specifically delves into the news selection process of news of one particular newspaper with the goal of investigating why and how news is selected for publication in the front page. News is the result of many forces: ranging from source power, journalistic orientation, medium-preference and market model, news values and production routines and processes.

The study briefly expounds on the different definitions of news as perceived in terms of the developed and developing world. Just as journalists do not operate in a vacuum, a close examination of the various definitions reveals that news cannot be defined in isolation. Its definition is intrinsically tied to that of news values. Also explored here are debates about news values and their Western rootedness. Here reference is made to literature regarding theories on the social construction of meanings and on the gatekeeping concept.

The study is informed by similar research in gatekeeping studies and sociology of news studies. It is important to state at the outset that the study is not concerned with how news is produced but why there is a bias for certain kinds of news. I am interested in explaining why and how the writers and editors at the *East African Standard* make decisions about what is worthy of being published on the front page of the newspaper. This distinction is necessary because the theories that inform this study transcend news sourcing and production. This study takes cognizance of the fact that one cannot separate social processes from the individual and vice versa. For this reason, this study investigates and analyses the biases of individual gatekeepers at the *East African Standard* as well as their collective biases. In the concluding section, this study calls for an alternative paradigm for journalism and news. The foregoing discussions in the other sections prove that a universal definition of news and what is newsworthy will not suffice and there is need to contextualise it.

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Chapter One

Introduction and Research Context

1.0 Introduction

This study is an investigation of what criteria, news values and processes dictate the way certain stories make news on the front page of Kenya's second largest circulating English daily, the *East African Standard*.

Specifically the study investigates the conceptions of newsworthiness held by the newspaper's editorial staff in choosing the specific topics and events that are prioritized for publication on the front page. Understanding these conceptions and values of news helps explain how and why particular types of stories are selected to appear on the paper's front page thus giving them prominence over other stories and alerting readers to their importance. I selected to study the *East African Standard* and not the other Kenyan dailies because of the advantage of its familiarity to me, having worked with the newspaper for ten years as a reporter. This familiarity enabled me to access documentary material as well as conduct interviews with the editorial staff. I also faced limited time and resources within which to conduct my research thus I had to deliberately choose a newspaper that would readily grant me permission to conduct the research.

As far as I can confirm, no similar study has been carried out in Kenya concerning this topic. This study therefore is a pioneering piece of work in the study of news values and gatekeeping in the Kenyan press. The potential value of the research lies in modestly filling a gap in the systematic study of the news values of the news gatekeepers in Kenya's press. It also leaves room for further research to make the present exploratory study more meaningful. It may also motivate other researchers to explore similar research topics within Kenya's mass media. The researcher is a career print journalist in Kenya. This study arises out of the researcher's personal and professional concern that in general the Kenyan media treats social and development issues as less newsworthy and therefore do not give such issues the prominent coverage that "political stories" get. This investigation of the values of news gatekeepers is in recognition of the immense power gatekeepers wield as individuals

and collectively, in determining what the public consumes in the news media and subsequently what debates and opinions the public engages in. Given the assumption that mass media, newspapers included, are a major social and political power resource (McQuail, 1994:1), it is imperative that media dynamics which determine what type of information are privileged be explored. McQuail (1994: 1) posits that as a power resource, “the mass media are a potential means of influence, control and innovation in society and that they are the arena where many affairs of public life are played out, both nationally and internationally”. He states that there are few significant social issues which are addressed without some consideration of the role of the mass media (1994:1).

This study is concerned that based on this assumption of the power and influence of the mass media, the presumed privileging of political stories in the *East African Standard* over non-political stories regarding socio-economic and development issues in Kenya, raises questions about the social responsibilities of journalism and the use-value of information published as news. According to the social responsibility theory, the news media have obligations to society and should be truthful, accurate, fair, objective and relevant (McQuail, 1994: 124). In relation to this, Addison (1995: 3) states:

...the social responsibilities of journalism imply some commitment to democratic values and social upliftment. The connecting link is the idea that communication serves the right of all the people to know about things that affect their lives directly... (1994:124)

The concept of the use-value of news as stated above, has been echoed by other media scholars, (for example, Williams 1987; Kasoma 1987) who contend that generally, news in Africa is beset by a complexity of events on a daily basis. And that because of this complex background, information only becomes news if it can contribute to people’s social needs. Williams (1987: 6) suggests that it is incumbent upon journalists to identify and report news that are useful to their audience. Williams argues that since majority of African countries are under developed, journalism taught at African institutions must specifically address the problems of social and economic development, that is, journalism programmes should be “development oriented” (Williams, 1987: 6). This view is shared by Ochieng (1992:5-6) who posits that journalists in the Third World Press need to be conscious of their societies’ needs and

self-interests. Ochieng castigates Third World journalists for “aping” of Western news values and calls for training that can instill “what is socially relevant and beneficial from the objective point of view” (1992: 83).

Ochieng states:

...I coined the term *know-why* to express this very idea, this commitment on the part of the communicator to the cause of social liberation from poverty, hunger, ignorance, disease and the international connection in these (Ochieng, 1992: 83).

Journalists therefore have the power to set agenda for public debates. The agenda-setting hypothesis states that mass media news and information reflect the content and order of priority issues in society (McQuail, 1994: 357). The importance of focusing on the news genre in this study therefore is to be found in the importance given to news by mainstream news media institutions. McQuail, (1994: 267) states that mainstream media institutions could barely exist without news, and vice versa. As the name suggests news is the central ingredient of the newspaper and it merits special attention in a discussion of media content. It is also the core activity according to which a large part of the journalistic and thus media occupation defines itself (McQuail, 1994: 267).

Two main points are often made about news discourses in media studies. First, that news is not a mirror on society (Branston and Stafford, 1996: 161). “It is not transparent, not the ‘window on the world’ it often sets itself up to be. (1996:161) This is demonstrated by the fact that news audiences only get to know of a few of the millions of events that happen in the world on any given day. This means that a deliberate selection of news items takes place in media houses. As part of their work, news professionals choose what gets published or broadcast. Manning (2001: 50) posits that, far from reflecting what happens in a society, the practice of news journalism involves a process of manufacture. Secondly, the different versions of events portrayed by different news media show that its constructed versions of events are not unbiased and usually serve different interests such as those of the powerful elite (Branston and Stafford, 1996: 161 and 167).

McQuail (1994: 381) posits that most media theory and evidence suggests that media tend to serve the interests of those who already have political and economic power in

society, especially those in a position to use the media for their objectives. These arguments echo similar ones made two decades before by Tuchman (1976) who posits thus:

To say that a news report is a story and no more, but no less, is not to demean the news, not to accuse it of being fictitious. Rather it alerts us that news, like all public documents, is a constructed reality possessing its own internal validity.

Hoch (1974: 97-100) posits that relatively few news stories get printed in newspapers. This, he says, lends a certain prominence to those that do. News as a genre, he says reflects a whole climate of relatively undefined understandings among editors, writers, readers and advertisers about what few things “deserve” prominence. Hoch’s contention is explored in this study and my findings reveal a common understanding exists between the editorial staff, the circulation department and the advertising department about which news deserves prominence in the newspaper. These understandings are in turn the product of a whole series of assumptions about society, the nature of politics and what is going on in the world (Hoch, 1974: 97-100).

This research is informed by the interpretive approach to news. This theoretical approach is appropriate because it assumes that news does not mirror society. Instead it assumes that news workers select certain events that happen in society and reconstruct them before disseminating them back to the public. This study examines the factors that inform the selection of certain events as newsworthy. Theories posited by Tuchman (1978), Manning (2001), and Branston and Stafford (1996) stress that defining what is newsworthy is determined by the attention that is paid to the activities of news workers and news organizations rather than an abstract set of social norms.

This study draws on both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. Since this study seeks to investigate and explain a media production phenomenon, in-depth interviews with selected editorial and circulation staff are my primary source of information and data collection. Personal in-depth interviews allow me to dig for depth of information. The depth of a study can be achieved through qualitative techniques concerned with description and explanation as opposed to quantitative techniques, which stress measurement and quantification (Wimmer and Dominick, 1994). I employ content

analysis in its simplest traditional form, that is, to simply count and categorise the sample news stories on the newspaper's front page. Wimmer and Dominick (1991: 159) describe this type of content analysis as "content analysis used in the descriptive manner: to identify what exists." They list several media research studies carried out over the years in Europe and America that have employed this simple form of content analysis.

The study is divided into five chapters. Chapter One is two-fold. The first section is an introduction that gives a mind map of the whole study. In the introduction, I outline my topic and research goals and reasons for undertaking this study. I explain why the research is necessary and its potential value. I present my research approach and the methods and tools used. The chapter also provides an outline of how the thesis is structured, chapter-by-chapter. The second section outlines the context of this study, that is, the socio-political history of Kenya and that of the *East African Standard*. The research context is intended to familiarize the reader with the history, structure and organization of the *East African Standard* in particular and the general trends of the press in Kenya from colonial to post-colonial times.

Chapter Two describes the theoretical framework within which the study was conceptualized. I draw intensively and extensively on expert texts and literature on the sociology of news, gatekeeping studies and conventional literature on news bias. The literature forms the basis of analyzing the structures and processes behind the selection of news. This chapter exposes competing theories about the news selection process

Chapter Three sets out the methodological procedures used in the study. Both quantitative and qualitative methods are employed to interrogate my hypothesis which states that the *East African Standard* privileges political stories over other kinds of stories. The concept of combining research methods- triangulation- is relevant in this study as it follows similar trends precented by other studies in media production. Bryman (1998:131) suggests that the logic of triangulation lies in the inherent need for social scientists to exhibit confidence in their findings. He states that this can only be achieved if the findings are derived from more than one method of investigation. In this study, the combined use of content analysis, in-depth interviews and non-

participant observation is a deliberate choice as it allows the researcher to dig out a wealth of detail in breadth and depth. "Where as quantitative methods strive for breadth, qualitative methods strive for depth" (Dominick and Wimmer, 1994: 140).

Chapter Four is devoted to presentation and analysis of the data. The link between what the study set out to do – its goals – and what it achieved is presented here. The raw data is synthesised and presented according to the dominant themes that arise in the research. Since I use the interpretive paradigm, my interest is in allowing the respondents' voices to be heard. The interpretive paradigm admits the value-laden nature of the study and therefore actively reports the respondents' values and biases as well as the value nature of information gathered from the field (Creswell, 1994: 6). The interpretive paradigm is opposed to the so-called "mirror theory" in news which proposes that journalists' duty is simply to reflect events in society. That journalists are transmitters of raw information with no bias or role in interpreting it. It is also in this chapter that the claim to the effective use of triangulation is tested. It is here that the connections and links between the interview data and content analysis are made.

Chapter Five, the concluding chapter, is a summary of the whole study. It discusses information in previous chapters related to the news values of the news gatekeepers at the *East African Standard* with a view to establishing whether the study met its aims of investigating the conceptions of newsworthiness at the newspaper. This chapter suggests areas of further research to expand the scope of this exploratory study. It points out some limitations of the study too concerning methods used.

2.0 Research context

The research context identifies the site and circumstances of the study. The need for context is best explained by McNair (1998) thus:

Journalism in all its forms is despite its claims to truthfulness, above all a construction: an intellectual product embodying the technological, economic, political and cultural histories of societies within which it is produced, inexplicable without knowledge of those histories, and impossible to interpret correctly without the context which they provide

In this study, the context is the print media in Kenya, with the *East African Standard* as my case study. My particular interest is to investigate why certain topics dominate over others in the newspaper's news coverage. Since the media does not operate in a vacuum, I therefore highlight the socio-political context within which the media in Kenya operate. This section also traces the history of the *East African Standard* from pre-colonial days when it was a broadsheet catering mainly for the settler community to its eventual transformation into a tabloid in the 1970s. This preface is necessary as an understanding of how news selection has evolved at the newspaper largely depending on its target audience. The chapter demonstrates that the change from a broadsheet to a tabloid was a necessary transformation occasioned by competition from its main rival, the *Daily Nation*.

2.1 A brief history of Kenya

Kenya was declared a British protectorate in 1895, and European settlement started in the early 20th century. A Legislative Council for settlers was formed in 1907, with the first election held in 1919. Local native councils were introduced in 1925.

(WorldWatch, 2003). In 1920 the change of status from the East African Protectorate to Kenya Colony resulted in discriminatory and oppressive policies being effected. The Africans reacted by forming political organizations in order to protect their interests. Leaders were drawn from the educated Africans, and many of them were ex-soldiers of the First World War (Ochieng, 1990:190). However by the mid-1940s, with the return home of African ex-servicemen in both World Wars, political awareness heightened and more political organizations were proscribed and their leaders detained. At the same time something positive was happening, namely, a steady expansion of secondary and higher education facilities while some indigenous Kenyans sought education abroad. This new crop of opinion leaders and shapers gradually formed the elite who clearly were aware of the political and socio-economic injustices meted by the colonial government. It was these elite who strategised the nationalist movements with the aim of overthrowing the colonial system (Ochieng 1990:193). Some of these anti-colonial government political movements were proscribed due to their radicalism.

The first genuine African nationalist movement, the Kenya African Union (KAU), was established in 1944, with Jomo Kenyatta, as its president. The KAU was banned

in 1953, Mr Kenyatta was imprisoned and all nationalist political activity was prohibited. Kenyatta was released in August 1961, led KANU to victory in the legislative elections of May 1963 and was appointed prime minister. A formal declaration of independence followed in December 1963. Kenya became a republic in December 1964, with Mr Kenyatta as its first president. He was succeeded in 1978 by Daniel arap Moi, who remained in power for 24 years. (WorldWatch, 2003)

2.2 Origins of the press in Kenya

Before the sudden appearance of a dozen or more African newspapers just after World War II, there was hardly an independent African press in Kenya, (Scotton, 1975:30). In 1921 a few issues of a Swahili broadsheet, *Tangazo* were published by freedom fighter Harry Thuku but it died when Thuku was jailed and his Asian printer went bankrupt. A Kikuyu language monthly, *Mwigwithania* (Reconciler) appeared sporadically in the 1920s and 1930s. It was edited by the man who later became Kenya's first president, Jomo Kenyatta. By World War II it had been banned (Scotton 1975:31) Post-war indigenous newspapers rapidly mushroomed all over the country, many having circulations in the thousands. The news and ideas they presented, mainly about nationalism and freedom, circulated widely throughout Kenya's African society. It is said a single issue of an African paper was often read by one African to dozens of illiterate villagers (Scotton1975: 32). Articles that greatly disturbed British authorities were those touching on racial discrimination. Kenyan African editors learnt to circumvent the issue by publishing about racism in the USA. They did the same with stories regarding nationalist movements by citing such movements in other African countries (Scotton, 1975:33).

Most of the grievances published in the Kenyan African press involved an attempt to obtain redress of specific economic, social and political issues. Naturally the most important was the question of European occupation of land belonging to Kenyans (Scotton, 1975: 34). To counter the growing influence of the indigenous press, the British colonial government of the 1940s and 1950s, tried to launch its own vernacular language newspapers. It was a complete failure and the scheme was abandoned (Scotton, 1975: 34). The colonial government then became ruthless and passed new laws that allowed the administration power to seize presses used to print what it described as "seditious" literature. Consequently Asian printers refused to print

African-run newspapers and these newspapers resorted to hand-operated presses. Subsequently circulation of the African press dwindled. In October 1952, the colonial government declared a state of emergency and with it the banning of all independent African newspapers (Scotton, 1975: 34-35).

2.3 *East African Standard*: Pre and post-colonial years

According to various records the *East African Standard* started in 1902 as the weekly *African Standard* and for decades remained the mouthpiece of the conservative white settler population in East Africa (Hatchen, 1965: 201; Ainslie, 1966: 99; Ochieng, 1992: 193; Abuoga and Mutere, 1988: 2; Kariithi, 1994: 13-14). It was started by an Indian tradesman, A.M. Jeevanjee, in the coastal town of Mombasa. He brought in the paper's first journalists from England. Jeevanjee's paper was purchased by the English partnership of Mayer and Anderson, who immediately changed its name to *East African Standard* (Ochieng, 1992: 193). In 1910, the newspaper underwent two major changes. First the paper followed the colonial government to Nairobi, which became the capital city and the country's commercial and financial hub. Second it began a daily edition from May 24 1910. In 1918 the East African Standard Limited was incorporated as a public company with shares floated to the public (Ochieng, 1992: 193). The newspaper's shares are listed on the Nairobi Stock Exchange. The *East African Standard* had sister newspapers in the neighbouring countries of Uganda and Tanzania as well as a sister Swahili weekly, *Baraza*, which was editorially independent. *Baraza* advocated African political activity. The *Standard* grew parallel with the colony and was owned and staffed by, and published for, Europeans (Ainslie, 1966).

The first real challenge to the dominance of the *Standard* was the appearance in 1960 of the *Daily Nation* which was owned by the Aga Khan, leader of the Ismaili Islamic sect. A team of skilled journalists from Fleet Street were brought in to run the newspaper and its sister paper the Sunday Nation (Ochieng, 1992: 194). Whereas the *Standard* had stuck to the broadsheet format, the Nation brought a new tabloid format and focused on coverage of Africans. Ochieng (1992: 194) says of the rivalry, "The group soon proved a stiff challenge to the right-wing *Standard* by their liberalism and pro-nationalist posturing." Kariithi (1994: 13-14) notes that the *Daily Nation* "brought a new professionalism and sophistication to journalism with the tabloid

format and liberal use of pictures... bringing in the concept of the newspapers as an entertainer.” Although the *Standard* ignored the political winds of the 1950s which brought sweeping changes to Africa and the British Empire, the paper’s orientation changed after independence with the editorial tone taking on a more pro-government stance (Ainslie, 1966:103; Bourgault, 1995:163-167).

Four years after independence, in May 1967, the *Standard* group was purchased by Lonrho, a British firm with diverse investments in Africa (Hachten 1971: 210). In 1969, the *Daily Nation* overtook the *Standard* in circulation and remains the largest selling newspaper in East Africa (Ochieng, 1992: 193). In 1975 the *Standard* named its first black editor and changed its format from a broadsheet to a tabloid. The costs of establishing newspapers were high and so the two newspapers remained dominant in Kenya’s press scene until the 1990s (Bourgault, 1995:163-167).

Hachten (1971) and Ainslie (1965) posit that the news media in Kenya are a European phenomena and that the imprint left by seventy-years of British rule remained strong and pronounced. Thus although after independence the *Standard* did report news and comment of interest to the black majority, a good deal of attention to the European community was maintained long after independence with reports on social affairs, horse shows, agricultural fairs and news from Britain. One of the most conspicuous of its colonial legacy was the continued maintenance of a bureau in London up to the year 2002.

2.4 Regulation of the media

Government control over news and public information emanated from the Ministry of Information, Broadcasting and Tourism. However Kenya’s media system embodied both libertarianism and authoritarianism (Hachten, 1965:262). A factor Hachten attributes to the “strong democratic libertarian elements within the young government”. Kenya has since independence adopted a contemporary liberal democratic, capitalist system. Except for radio few of Kenya’s majority Africans read the newspapers or had access to television broadcasting which began in 1963 (Hachten, 1965: 263). Until the late 1990s, radio and television broadcasting was under direct government control. However, the daily press has remained relatively independent of government influence. There is no direct press censorship, but

pressures exist with the successive governments exhibiting high sensitivity to criticism (BBC online, 2003). The Kenyan media is the most diverse in East Africa, with a large middle class providing a base for substantial advertising revenue (BBC online, 2003). Recent liberalisation of broadcasting has had a profound effect in Nairobi, but outside the main urban centres state-run KBC provides the only domestic radio and TV for many listeners and viewers. Most Kenyans rely on the broadcast media, particularly radio, for news. Journalism in the private media is lively and informed and the era of self-censorship has largely passed (BBC News, 2003).

Moves by the government in 2000 to ban radio broadcasts in languages other than Swahili and English came to nothing, and vernacular broadcasting is thriving. A controversial media bill passed in May 2002 was criticised by rights groups who said it would muzzle the press, especially in the run-up to presidential elections. The bill however significantly raised publishing fees and gave the government more control over the distribution of papers and magazines. (BBC online, 2003). FM relays of the BBC World Service are on the air in Nairobi, Mombasa and Kisumu, and the Voice of America has an FM relay in Nairobi.

2.5 The media in Kenya:

2.5.1 The newspapers

At the time of this research, there are four daily newspapers in Kenya namely the *Daily Nation*, the *East African Standard*, *The Kenya Times* and *The People Daily*. The *Daily Nation* is published by the Nation Media Group and claims to have three quarters of the Kenyan newspaper market. It is widely regarded as being independent and balanced. The *East African Standard* is part public and part privately owned. It is the second largest English selling daily. *Taifo Leo* is Kenya's only Swahili-language daily and is published by the Nation Media Group. *The East African* is an English-language weekly published by the Nation Media Group. *The Kenya Times* is a political party owned English daily. *The People Daily* is owned by veteran politician Kenneth Matiba. The next section gives context to this study in terms of the media landscape in Kenya.

2.5.2 Television

The Kenya Broadcasting Corporation (KBC) is state-owned and has channels in English and Swahili. It has the widest radio and television broadcast reach in the country. Metro TV is KBC-operated. It is a Nairobi station targeting the youth.

The Kenya Television Network was the first TV station to break the state broadcasting monopoly and is now broadcasting in most of the major towns. Nation TV is a Nairobi-based station operated by the Nation Media Group but plans to extend its reach to other towns. Stella TV (STV) is a privately owned station while Family TV is a Christian station. (BBC online 2003)

2.5.3 Radio

The Kenya Broadcasting Corporation (KBC) is state-owned, with language-based networks in English, Swahili and 15 other indigenous languages. Metro FM is a national music-based station operated by KBC. Coro FM is a KBC-operated Kikuyu-language station in Nairobi. Capital FM is a privately owned news and music station. East FM is a privately owned station targeting Nairobi's Asian listeners. Nation FM is a Nairobi station operated by the Nation Media Group. Kiss FM is a widely listened-to news and pop music station. It is also privately owned. Kameme FM is a privately run station for Kikuyu speakers in Nairobi and central highlands. Radio Citizen is a privately run station operating in Nairobi, Nyeri and Nakuru. Rehema Radio is an Eldoret-based privately run station broadcasting in the Kalenjin language. Waumini Radio is a Catholic Church run radio station. (BBC online 2003)

2.5.4 News agency

Kenya News Agency is the largest local news agency and is state-owned. It publishes in the English language and distributes news to all the local media. Other international news agencies such as Reuters and Associated Press have bureaus in Nairobi and use them as operating centres for East and central Africa.

2.5.5 Conclusion

This first chapter outlines the topic and goals of the research. It explains the steps I took to make the research process work (from data collection to reporting). It also provides an outline of how the thesis is structured. The second section of this chapter

deals with the historical and contemporary context within which the research is conducted.

Chapter Two

Theoretical Framework

3.0 Introduction

This chapter presents an in-depth overview of literature relevant to the study. I draw on literature on past and current thinking in the fields of news as a genre, news values, sociology of news and gate keeping studies. For comparative purposes, I make reference to similar research studies such as the pioneering gatekeeping study by White (1950) of “Mr Gates” and a later one by Shoemaker et al (2001) regarding individual and routine forces in gatekeeping. This enables me make sense of my own findings. The value of these findings is in light of what has already been done in the field and hopefully what more can be done in the future.

4.0 What makes news?

An understanding of what informs and influences the news workers, particularly, editors of the newspaper, in choosing specific subjects and events will explain how and why a particular category of news stories are prioritized for publication on the front page of the newspaper. My hypothesis is that party-political and politician-profile stories are foregrounded to the neglect of social and development stories, which should be of media and public concern in a typical African developing country such as Kenya. The literature review in this chapter establishes a theoretical framework within which the research was conducted.

Subsequently the chapter demonstrates that news is indeed the end product of a complex process, which begins with the systematic sorting, and selecting of events for publication according to a range of professional values (Branston and Stafford, 1996: 162). It seeks to explore the link between news values and news selection. An exposition of the historical roots of news and news values and their Western rootedness is developed. A study of news values and news selection would be incomplete without delving into the gatekeeping theories. Gatekeeping studies feature in media research as the key to understanding why and how some messages, information and events come to be singled out as more important than others and thus warrant prominence and even dominance in the mass media. Tuchman (1978) posits that news workers claim that there are specific criteria of content against which news

is assessed and that a specific story's content therefore determines what category of news it falls under.

5.0 Gatekeeping: definition, history and place in media theory

5.1 Definition of gatekeeping

Shoemaker (1991: 1) defines gatekeeping as “the process by which the billions of messages that are available in the world get cut down and transformed into the hundreds of messages that reach a given person on a given day”. Basing her definition on a more microscopic level of analysis, Shoemaker argues that gatekeeping can also be thought of as the process of reconstructing the essential framework of an event and turning it into news (Shoemaker, 1991: 1). According to Oosthuizen (2001: 196-197) gatekeeping can be defined as “the process through which certain information passes a series of checkpoints (gates) before being finally accepted as news material. He posits that gatekeepers are the people, parties or institutions that influence the content of the media from the inside. This position is similar to one posited by Branston and Stafford (1996: 162) which states that news workers possess subconsciously held news values. These values are “professional codes used in the selection, construction and presentation of news stories in corporately produced press and broadcasting”. (O’Sullivan et. al., 1994)

News values are deployed by news workers in different ranks to judge what gets through the “gates” and eventually gets published. From the reporters in the field to the sub-editors and chief editor, stories are continually judged either as newsworthy or not to pass through the “gates”. Gates are often defined as series of decision points at which news items are either continued or halted as they pass along news channels from source to reporter to a series of editors (Shoemaker et al 2001: 233).

Manning (2001: 60-63) posits that journalists learn to select items which will sell as news. At a more complex level, he argues, journalists select stories that already make sense in terms of their own knowledge and experience. Manning’s assertion points to the role of economics as a major factor in a newspaper’s choice of stories. He posits that newspapers are no different from other business entities and therefore operate to make profits for their owners. Newspapers capitalise on readership as a source of

revenue although most newspapers' revenue comes from advertising. With news media, gatekeepers decide what is going to appear and how it is going to appear in the media. It is a given that more things happen in the world than can be reported and formed into news and also that journalists churn out more news than can be accommodated in the daily newspapers or on radio and television due to space and time constraints. Thus the need to have a selection of items fit for publication or broadcasting. It is what informs this "fitness" that this at the core of this study. (Manning, 2001:60-63)

Oosthuizen (2001: 197) quoted in Fourie (2001) states:

Once gatekeepers have selected the news events that they want to publish, they allot varying amounts of space (in newspapers) or time (on radio and television) to news items. This leads to the emphasis or de-emphasis of certain news events. If they allot more space or time to an event, it means they regard it as being more important...the chronology of events is also important...in the case of newspapers, the most important news is published on page one.

There are many types of gatekeepers in a news medium. Some are external and some internal. They include directorates, boards and group managers; editors, directors' general and departmental managers; administrative-hierarchical gatekeeping (Oosthuizen, 2001: 197) cited in Fourie (2001). My study focuses on the role of the editors at the newspaper but also acknowledges the role of other gatekeepers in the newspaper's news selection process. In essence, gatekeepers are either the individuals or the sets of routine procedures that determine whether items pass through the gates (Shoemaker et al; 2001: 235).

5.2 History of gatekeeping theory

The selectivity inherent in the communication process lacked a theoretical framework until American social psychologist Kurt Lewin provided the metaphor of the gatekeeper and David Manning White gave the gatekeeper life under the pseudonym of Mr Gates (Shoemaker, 1991: 3). Lewin believed that the forces that shape people's behaviour could be identified and studied. The gatekeeping theory is useful for understanding the various factors that shape the news selection process (Davidow, 1999: 11). Lewin concluded that not all members of a community are equally

important in determining what is eaten. He deduced that social change could be achieved by focusing on those people with the most control over food selection for the home (Shoemaker 1991: 6). Likewise, this study focuses on the news processors rather than the news gatherers because in editorial hierarchy, the editors have more control over what gets published than the reporters. Lewin believed that his theoretical framework could be applied generally. Thus Lewin (1951: 187) states: “This situation holds not only for food channels but also for the traveling of a news item through certain communication channels in a group, for movement of goods, and the social locomotion of individuals in many organizations...”

Shoemaker (1991:5) contends that the gatekeeper concept offered early communication scholars a framework for evaluating how selection occurs and why some items are selected and others rejected. It also provided a structure for the study of processes other than selection, that is, how content is shaped, structured, positioned and timed. Shoemaker (2001) points out that:

In fact, gatekeeping in mass communication can be seen as the overall process through which the social reality transmitted by the news media is constructed, and not just a series of “in” and “out” decisions (Shoemaker et al; 2001: 233).

The above sentiments echo Tuchman’s (1978) concept of news as a constructed reality. Tuchman states that news workers transform everyday occurrences into news events, sometimes explicitly (Tuchman, 1978: 184). Another media scholar, Schudson, contends that in gatekeeping news items are not just selected but constructed. He argues that regardless of the source of information, it is journalists themselves who write the words that turn up in the papers or on the television screen as stories:

Not government officials, not cultural forces, not “reality” magically transforming itself into alphabetic signs, but flesh and blood journalists literally compose the stories we call news (Schudson, 1989).

For the purposes of this study, the gatekeeping definition will be confined to the aspect of selection of news items for use within the print media, in this case in the front page of the *East African Standard* .

5.3 Place of gatekeeping in media theory

Gatekeeping studies feature in media research as the key to understanding why and how some messages, information and events come to be singled out as more important than others and thus warrant prominence and even dominance in the media. Media research literature abounds with studies of the gatekeeping theory, from the earliest studies which almost exclusively focused on the selective function of news workers in the news selection process to the more modern constructivist definition of gatekeeping. The challenge of the gatekeeping theory for media scholars seems to be in deciding on what factor(s) determine news selection. The pioneering study by White (1950, 1964) concluded that personal biases played the biggest role in news selection. Much of the data in the study was based on explanations the wire editor gave for his selections. Another study by Gieber (1956) concluded that selection depended on deadlines and space limitations. Further gatekeeping studies in the 1950s and 1960s added new determining factors which included; the organizational role and norms of the news worker; value orientations towards news stories, and professional standards of journalism. (Fishman, 1977: 14)

Subsequent studies have since refined and reformulated the factors influencing news selection. Gans (1979: 78-79) outlines three possible determinants of news selection as follows: journalist centered: this theory argues that the news is shaped by the professional news judgement of journalists. A second type of theory, favoured by social scientists locates the routinization in the news organizations and shows how story selection is influenced by organizational requirements. A third approach is event centered: the so-called mirror theory, which proposes that journalists just reflect events in society. This theory began fading in the 1960s as journalists' influence over stories was established by social science studies in individual and institutional practices of news workers.

6.0 News values

Most definitions of news are derived from the developed world model. For it is in the developed world that most media scholars have based their studies. Consequently the definition of news and news values seems to have defied geographic and cultural differences and almost acquired a universal definition. Branston and Stafford (1996:

162) posit that the argument that news is constructed by the people who source and produce it has accompanied the development of theories of news values. They posit that these news values are not consciously held values.

Manning (2001: 63) argues that comparative studies of newsrooms around the world confirm that despite cultural and social differences many journalists share common news values. He argues that tried and tested subjects such as news of political elites and powerful people, sex, crime, law and order are common favourites among news editors. The foregoing arguments illustrate the complex structures that influence news selection. This research aims to employ a multi-dimensional approach to argue that news is the outcome of a social construction of information. The significance of human agency as well as the influence of the practices of media institutions and other factors is documented in this study with the aim of understanding the forces that influence news selection at the *East African Standard*. Many media scholars cite news values as objective criteria allowing journalists to decide on what makes news. The hypothesis of this study posits that there is a dearth in issue-based journalism at the *East African Standard*. This form of journalism emphasises the obligation of the journalist to act rather than react, to initiate coverage rather than wait for events.

For a practical elaboration of news values, this study will borrow from a model proposed by Lule (1987). Lule contends that news values can be categorized into the political and economic slots of a First, Second and Third World. I submit that the distinctions are necessary in view of the hazards of generalizing news which itself allows for distinctions not only among countries but also among varied media in the same country. There is abundant literature devoted to the subject of First World news values. The better known ones, Galtung and Ruge (1973), Rubin (1979), and Hester and Eberhard (1980), have compiled their own listing of news values. Although they differ in their ranking of news values, there is a general agreement on a number of concepts. These include; timeliness, proximity, personality, unusual events, human interest and conflict. Lule identifies the Second World as that of nations aligned to the former Soviet bloc. Within the media of the Second World, primary characteristics of news values can be ascertained namely; ideological significance, party concerns, social responsibility, education and human interest. Third World news values are

broad and varied just as the nations that make up this bloc. Table 1 shows a listing proposed by Lule on specific Third World news values.

Table 1: Lule’s proposed Third World News Values

Development	In the Third World news is progress and growth
Social responsibility	Because of the fragile structures of Third World countries, this news value is imperative. But it has a flip side. For in calling on the press to exalt the good and the positive, it also asks that the bad, the negative and failures be ignored. This some journalists argue is tantamount to repressing press freedom.
National integration	This value is the logical extension of the developmental and socially responsible journalism. Exaltation of positive achievements could serve as a stimulus for national unity.
Education	Just as in the Second World, in the Third World, news teaches and instructs. As an educational tool, news can be used to set the agenda of the nation.

Lule contends that it would be incorrect to assume that traditional First World news values are completely absent or alien from the Second and Third Worlds. He argues that timeliness, proximity, prominence and human interest are values that transcend across all “three worlds”. News values are based on among other things personal orientation of individual journalists and the economy and politics of the First, Second and Third World. (Lule, 1987) The section that follows therefore addresses the political and socio-economic context within which media operate.

7.0 Sociology of news

The media do not operate in isolation. To understand the media, one has to locate them as part of a larger social world (Croteau and Hoynes: 2003: 24). It is for this reason that part of this chapter is dedicated to a sociological aspect of news. News is the result of many forces: ranging from source power, journalistic orientation, medium-preference and market model, news values and production routines and processes.

There are millions of events that happen at the personal, family, community, national and international level all over the world twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, yet we only get to know of a few chosen ones mainly through the mass media. News as viewed by Gans (1979: 80) is:

information which is transmitted from sources to audiences, with journalists - who are both employees of bureaucratic commercial organizations and members of a profession -- summarizing, refining, and altering what becomes available to them from sources in order to make the information suitable for their audiences (1979:80)

Hoch (1974) argues that news does not fall from the heavens, already tagged, but reflects a whole climate of relatively undefined understandings among editors, writers, readers and advertisers about what few things 'deserve' treatment, and what even fewer things 'deserve' prominence. These understandings are in turn the product of a whole series of assumptions about society, the nature of 'politics', and what is going on in the world. Hoch posits that because so few items get printed lends a certain prominence to those that do. "Thus news becomes a commodity to be judged by the standards of the market with the enterprising reporter taking his cue from his grader and provides material that has top down conceptions of truth and saleability" (Hoch, 1974: 97-100).

Understanding the nature of the conceptions of newsworthiness in the newspaper will help explain how and why particular types of stories, arguably those concerned with party-politics and those which profile politicians, continually get privileged over other issue-oriented stories which advocates of development and civic journalism would rank as a higher priority (Galtung 1990: 17).

8.0 Media and development

This study is premised on the argument that the media can be employed to achieve economic and social development. That where media exert influence they also cause change. Different theories offer different versions as to whether media are a cause or an effect of social change. The theory of media and development has been re-evaluated over the years, however a post-Second World War school of thought flourished with claims that by spreading the message of modernity through mass media the world could achieve economic and social development. (McQuail, 1994: 84)

Although such causal determinism has since been discounted in the light of limited success in terms of the original development goals, the mass media still remains a powerful tool for change. (McQuail, 1994: 84). McQuail posits that:

The model of media influence deployed was very much a mechanistic transmission model which did not take account of the realities of social context...the much greater significance of local power structures, traditional values and economic constraints relative to what mass communication can achieve has been recognized. The media remain one tool for implementing change... (1994: 84)

The media are not neutral. They can be liberating or oppressive but never neutral. They have the power to enable people to act upon and therefore transform their world or simply adjust to it. (Richards et al, 2001: 5) As such, it matters what information gets selected for publication and onward dissemination to the public. Masterman (1985) suggests that a transformation of social relations can be encouraged by a media education underpinned by a Freirean philosophy.

He argues that when interrogating media texts it is necessary to problematize objective knowledge, to ask how and why information has been selected, by whom and in whose interests this knowledge is directed. (Richards et al, 2001: 5). This study does just that. The basic assumption here is that the mass media, namely, newspapers, television and radio occupy one of the main public spheres in modern societies. McQuail (1994: 1) states, "The media are a power source, a location where public affairs are played out, a major source of definitions of social reality and the primary key to celebrity and fame". This study shares McQuail's (1994: 1) view that it is because of this importance and centrality of the media in modern societies that "they

have been subject to much public scrutiny and regulation as well as theorizing.” This perceived utility or role of the media in society is what informs the importance of this study. At this point it is important to acknowledge that many of the issues to be discussed in this research—questions of the gatekeepers’ perceptions of news, news values—are really at the core, ideological issues. On a day-to-day basis, the *East African Standard* operates much within the same constraints as any modern newspaper. It is a newspaper operated for profit and is heavily dependent on product advertising revenue. Several studies show that one of the casualties of such commercialization has thus been content. McQuail has described commercialisation of the newspaper press as having evolved a new kind of newspaper that is “lighter and more entertaining, emphasizing human interest, more sensational in its attention to crime, violence, scandals and entertainment...” As this study presumes, this trend towards infotainment is at the expense of publishing information with a use value.

In making a case for a development-oriented newspaper, Galtung (1990) posited that such a newspaper should focus not only on economic matters but also on the military, political and cultural aspects of development. He argues, as does this study that the development discourse should not be limited to economic factors. He posits that quoting of data and statistics alone cannot suffice. These must be accompanied by a human face, real people, therefore making the statistics more realistic and less superficial. Development, he states, is also human development.

9.0 Conclusion

This chapter establishes the theoretical framework within which the whole study is impinged. Expert texts in gatekeeping theories and the sociology of news illuminate the different procedures and factors that determine the selection of news items generally within the mass media. The examination of diverse literature in this chapter enables this study to produce a multi-dimensional understanding of the forces that influence news selection. The next chapter looks at the methods employed in conducting this research. It takes cognizance of the fact that I have worked as a journalist at the *East African Standard*. This personal engagement with this newspaper and the people I interviewed allows me to include my own professional

understandings of the workings of the newspaper. I am therefore able to identify gaps and missing facts that occurred during interviews.

Chapter Three

Methodology

10.0 Introduction

As stated in chapter one, this study seeks to investigate the conceptions of newsworthiness at the *East African Standard* and how these conceptions therefore affect what kinds of stories are published on the newspaper's front page. It hypothesizes that political stories are foregrounded to the neglect of other stories of importance that should ideally concern a developing country like Kenya. The study therefore investigates the extent to which political stories are privileged over other kinds of reporting on the newspaper's front page. In order to achieve the goals of this study, I use two data collection techniques found within the qualitative and quantitative research paradigms. The combined use of qualitative and quantitative research methods is referred to as triangulation by media research scholars. Triangulation allows for the use of different data collection techniques as well as data analysis methods when examining a research problem. The argument for triangulation in this study is explored further in section three of this chapter.

11.0 The nature and virtues of qualitative and quantitative research paradigms

In any given research, the method of inquiry is central and two are widely discussed in research methodology literature namely, the quantitative and the qualitative paradigms. Bryman (1988: 1-10) posits that the debates on these research paradigms have centered on the advantages and disadvantages of data collection methods found within them and also on the possible integration of the two. However Creswell (1994) points to further dimensions identified by researchers to include debates around "ontological, epistemological, axiological, rhetorical and methodological approaches." (1994: 4)

Creswell (1994: 4) posits that according to literature on research methodology, the quantitative research paradigm is defined as the traditional, the positivist, the experimental or the empiricist paradigm. The qualitative paradigm on the other hand is termed, the constructivist, naturalist, interpretive approach or post-positivist and post-modern perspective. The quantitative is therefore seen as more scientific oriented

than the qualitative. Creswell (1994: 4) states that the basic difference between the two research paradigms lies in the emphasis or de-emphasis of measurement of variables (quantitative) and processes (qualitative). Qualitative lays emphasis on processes and meanings that are not rigorously examined or measured.

Denzin and Lincoln (1994) concur with Creswell:

Qualitative researchers stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry. Such researchers emphasise the value-laden nature of inquiry. (1994: 4)

In contrast quantitative studies emphasise the measurement and analysis of causal relationships between variables and inquiry is purported to be within a value-free (objective) framework (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994: 4). Advocates of quantitative research maintain that the researcher must be a “detached observer”, while qualitative approaches require that researchers openly state their subjective biases. Creswell (1994) states that qualitative research is interpretive research. As such, the biases, value and judgement of the researcher become explicit in the research report. (1994: 147) Regarding findings in a study, Creswell (1994: 7) posits

that findings in quantitative research can be generalized to populations while those in qualitative can be generalized to theory. This is mainly because sample sizes in qualitative research are normally small and cannot therefore be a true representation of a population. Creswell’s argument is reflected in this study and consequently in the concluding chapter I have suggested that a similar study should ideally use a much larger study sample in order to make broader conclusions about news values of the press in Kenya.

Further differences between the two paradigms are found in the debate about which is the right stage to theorise in a study. Wimmer and Dominick (1994), Bryman (1988: 68) and Denzin and Lincoln (1994) argue that qualitative researchers are “atheoretical”. That is, qualitative researchers prefer to formulate theories in tandem with data collection and not prior to the data collection. In contrast the quantitative researchers use research to test pre-ordained theoretical framework. Bryman (1988: 68) contends that imposed theory may constrain the researcher and the participants in a study. However as this study and others in media production show the threat of a theory vacuum in qualitative methods can be countered by using quantitative methods

in a triangulated approach. This research holds that human beings are unique individuals regardless of the fact that they may work in the same environment. This is in line with observations by Denzin and Lincoln (1994) that qualitative research holds that human beings are unique individuals and should be studied as such as opposed to being regarded as a homogenous group by quantitative research (1994: 5).

Differing data collection techniques therefore arise out of the above philosophical distinctions between the two research paradigms. Some theorists such as critical theorists argue that there are no general or universal methods of study and that in order to study a phenomenon adequately, the researcher must take into consideration its spatial and temporal context (Jansen, 1989: 78). They argue that since social reality is an evolving process, a research method cannot be determined before establishing the nature of the subject matter (Jansen, 1989: 79). Although proponents of either methodology may argue that they are too philosophically and technically opposed to be used together, increasing numbers of social science researchers are combining both methods to gain breadth and depth of their research subjects.

11.1 The need for triangulation

Although each research method or technique boasts its own merits, no one method is absolutely suitable for all research problems, thus the need for triangulation. Creswell (1994) notes that the term triangulation was first used by Denzin in 1978 and is based on the assumption that, “any bias inherent in particular data sources, investigator and method would be neutralized when used in conjunction with other data sources, investigators and methods” (1994: 174). In the broader meaning of the word, Dominick and Wimmer (1994: 481) define triangulation as, “using combined quantitative and qualitative approach to solve a problem”. Bryman (1988:131) concurs, adding that by combining the two methods, the researcher’s claims for validity of his or her conclusions are enhanced if they can be shown to provide mutual confirmation. However the logic behind the use of triangulation is best explained by Webb et al (1996) cited by Bryman (1988: 131), who posit that the inherent need for social scientists to exhibit confidence in their findings can only be achieved if the findings are derived from more than one method of investigation.

Jansen (1989) posits a similar point thus:

In the modern world complex structures and rapidly changing conditions in fact necessitate research from various points of view and with different purposes in mind. Within this context the crucial issue can hardly be whether there should be one or several approaches. The crucial issue is much rather for what purpose a particular approach may be used. (1989: 85)

Jansen's observation is similar to one made by Bryman (1988: 173) that, "the critical issue is to be aware of the appropriateness of particular methods (or combinations of methods) for particular issues". Triangulation is also credited with strengthening validity and reliability of findings, the two issues that any researcher strives for to present his or her study as relatively objective. Ball (1981) and Merriam (1998) note that the idea of triangulation is founded upon the notion that every form of data is potentially biased and that the use of a variety of methods of data collection can either eliminate or highlight these biases by convergence

This research follows in the footsteps of those conducted before it regarding the news production process. Hansen et al (1998: 94) comment that several of the classic studies of news production combine observational methods, interviews and content analysis. These studies include Gans (1979), Fishman (1980), and the Ericson, Baranek and Chan trilogy (1987, 1989, 1991). Hansen et al (1998) posit that the choice of method in a research "should principally reflect the purposes and objectives of the study with consideration for pragmatic factors such as convenience, costs, resources and time". Deacon et al (1999: 114) concur stating that the choice of techniques should be dictated by the task at hand and the questions a researcher is seeking to address. They further support the use of triangulation thus:

Different methods may be appropriate to the different stages and focuses of your research, while the use of more than one analytical method has the advantage that the weaknesses of any single method...are balanced by the strengths of other methods. (1999: 114)

Although observation is widely recognized as a suitable method for researching social action, it is not always possible to conduct a full ethnographic study. As Deacon et al (1999: 8) note, there are many reasons that could lead a researcher to work with a "pared-down" version of ethnography. This subsequently would require the researcher to employ other methods such as interviewing and group discussions. In this study, I had limited time and resources to spend a sustained period observing the news

workers at the *East African Standard*. Thus I had to employ other methods namely, content analysis and personal interviews. In line with this, Bryman (1988: 47) observes that observers may not be able to observe all relevant situations and processes and may need to glean more information by conducting interviews. Philosophical issues also arise out of making a case for triangulation. Deacon et al (1999) argue that what separates interpretive research from positivism research is not whether figures are used but rather how they are used. Whereas qualitative research in this study only describes whether political stories dominate over others, quantitative research makes it possible to report the exact number of stories that are political. And although this research has a small sample size, it has been established in other studies that quality is more important in sample selection than quantity. Interpretive researchers argue that figures never speak for themselves and remain devoid of meaning until they are interpreted (1999: 9). Although each research paradigm seems dismissive of the other, it is instructive to note that the opportunities opened up by combining different methods is undisputed and widely used in media studies. Thus my deliberate choice to use a combination of content analysis and personal interviews. The two methods have been proved to be mutually reinforcing in similar news production studies.

12.0 Research methods

12.1 Introduction

Qualitative and quantitative research is each associated with distinctive techniques or methods of data collection and research strategy (Bryman, 1988). However the differences are not always obvious and methods may overlap. Deacon (1999) notes that both methods can employ empirical method of data collection, as not all data has to be converted to numbers. The same argument is supported by Denzin and Lincoln (1994), who point out that qualitative research does not have exclusive methods of data analysis and may use semiotics, narratives, content, discourse, archival, phonemic and even statistical analysis. Bryman (1984: 89) argues that infact the two methods have common features which include: the use of brief transcripts of verbalizations of respondents in a survey; the use of the terms ‘many’, ‘frequently’ or ‘some of the time’ by qualitative researchers yet these terms are quantitative in nature.

In this study I used two data collection techniques, which resolved into a triangulated model in two stages. First, I conducted a simple content analysis of selected front pages of the *East African Standard*. Then I conducted a series of semi-structured, in-depth, personal interviews with selected editorial staff of the newspaper.

Methodologically, this study follows the same models used in several of the classic studies of news production, which combine observational methods, interviews and content analysis (Hansen et al, 1998: 94). Examples include Gans, 1979; Fishman 1980; and the Ericson, Baranek and Chan trilogy of 1987, 1989 and 1991 and Davidow, 1999 (unpublished MA thesis). In the next section I discuss the two methods in turn.

12.2 Content analysis

Hansen et al (1998: 95) describe content analysis as a quantitative method whose purpose is to:

...identify and count the occurrence of the specified characteristics or dimensions of texts and through this, to be able to say something about the messages, images, representations of such texts and their wider social significance. (1998: 95)

(Deacon et al, 1999: 117) note that content analysis does not delve into the complex processes of meaning making within a text; rather it reveals what is evident or manifest meaning. The method therefore is suitable to support, qualify or refute the research questions posed in a study (1999: 117). Deacon et al (1999: 116) posit that the purpose of the method is to quantify salient and manifest features of a large number of texts, and the statistics are used to make broader inferences about the processes and politics of representation. This research is concerned with determining the kind of news stories that appear on the front pages of the *East African Standard*. Therefore by using content analysis I expect to gain direct answers to the question “what”, rather than “how” or “why” particular news stories are used on the front page. To answer the “how” and “why” of this study, I employ qualitative in-depth interviews of selected news workers. The importance of using complimentary methods that answer the “how” and “why” of a research is supported by Deacon et al (1999) who posit that using a variety of methods of enquiry in mass communication “offers a variety of data that answer the questions about the what, how and why of a phenomenon.”

In developing a sampling strategy, I have followed the general rules used in previous studies covering press output. These include defining the “population” of my research in which case it is an analysis of the coverage of political stories in the front page of the *East African Standard*. My analysis is restricted to news stories as opposed to editorials and commentaries. For this study, simply counting the number of articles in the categories I identified was an adequate and sufficient indication of the extent of coverage of political stories. Wimmer and Dominick (1991: 159) write that several studies have used content analysis in the traditional, descriptive manner, that is, to identify what exists. They argue that these descriptive studies have been used not only in describing communication content but also to study societal change. Bryman et al. (1998: 106) discuss this issue extensively in reference to defining analytical categories. They state that,

Because the cataloguing or categorizing of communications content is a time-consuming and laborious task, it is extremely important to include for analysis only those dimensions or characteristics of texts which can reasonably be expected to yield ‘useful’ information...of relevance to the research questions. (1998: 106)

The next step was to identify a unit of analysis. According to Wimmer and Dominick, (1983),

The unit of analysis is the thing that is actually counted. It is the smallest element of a content analysis...In written content, the unit of analysis might be a single word or symbol, a theme (a single assertion about one subject), or an entire article or story. (1983: 164).

I chose to use theme analysis because of its wider application in communication research as noted by Deacon et al (1999: 119). Hansen et al (1998: 112) make a similar observation that a key objective of most content analyses is to classify types or sub-categories of coverage within a general area of investigation. The focus is not to explore the lexical content of my samples but rather to recognize and analyse the themes in the texts. According to Deacon et al (1999),

Theme analysis ...does not rely on the use of specific words as basic content elements but relies upon the coder to recognize certain themes or ideas in the text and then allocate these to predetermined categories. (1999: 119)

The unit of analysis in this study is sourced from the headlines of the stories on the sample front pages of the *East African Standard* published in 2001. Between January and December 2001, a single front page was selected for each month. I chose to

analyse the headlines as opposed to the actual text or story. This decision was based on recent articles and research by the Poynter Institute which examine the importance of headlines as visuals that help readers decide what to read and subsequently what newspapers to buy. Garcia (2002) is quoted by the Poynter Institute:

Headlines get us into stories, or help us decide to bypass a certain story in search of another. Because they are large and prominent -- at least three times the size of the text in which most stories are set -- they command attention. With more readers now practicing the art of scanning as they move through their daily newspaper, the role of headlines also has tripled in importance.

Moses (2001) whose article is also quoted by the Poynter Institute concurs:

Graphics, photographs and headlines get far more attention from readers than text does. Readers take in 80 percent of the artwork and 75 percent of the photographs in the paper. *They see 56 percent of the headlines.* But they are aware of only 25 percent of the text, and read just a portion of that. Only about 13 percent of the stories in the paper are read in any depth – that is, at least half-read. (Italics my emphasis)

Finberg (2004) also quoted by Poynter Institute, posits that for newspapers, a headline is often the most important element on a page. The focus of my content analysis is based on determining the frequency and prominence of political news stories in the front pages of the *East African Standard* and therefore involves the categorisation of news from the selected page samples. News categorisation gives a basis to conduct the interviews and informs the kind of questions asked. This study follows the trend set by earlier studies on how to identify relevant sampling content. In this regard, Hansen et al (1998: 104) observe that, "...general analyses of newspaper coverage of certain issues tend to exclude advertising content, weather forecasts, stock markets, sports pages and cartoons..." (1998: 104). In line with this observation, my study strictly examines the stories on page one and excludes other items published on the sample pages such as pictures, advertisements and teasers. It is also important to note here that the sample pages I used for my content analysis are of a different time period from the time the interviews were conducted at the *East African Standard*. As stated in the previous paragraph, page one samples of the year 2001 were chosen and not 2002 (when the research idea was formulated and executed). This is because 2002 was an election year in Kenya and the front page stories published then were skewed to politics in direct response to the build up of the Kenyan general elections, which took place at the end of 2002. Hansen et al (1998: 103) caution that care should be

taken to avoid relying on sample periods which coincide with seasonal variations or other events affecting the nature of coverage lest a researcher ends up with “atypical” conclusions which are skewed in his or her favour. Wimmer and Dominick (1983: 164) also note that “systematic bias in the content itself” is a problem that needs to be examined during the sampling phase and those researchers familiar with their topics can generally detect and guard against distortion of data.

This research is premised on the hypothesis that political topics are continually given prominence over press coverage of socio-economic issues at the *East African Standard*. If samples from the year 2002 had been used for content analysis, then my hypothesis would have been null as the stories published in 2002 were almost all political in nature due to the transitional politics that had literally preoccupied debate in Kenya’s public spheres. I confirmed this as a fact during the process of creating a research framework within which to work. In the initial design of the research, I conducted a preliminary survey of the front pages of the *East African Standard* of the period between January and June 2002. I perused the filed library copies of the newspaper stored in the newspaper’s library at the head office in Nairobi. I found that on a daily basis, with very few exceptions, all the lead stories published between January and June 2002 were political. Thus I justified the rationale to use samples from the 2001 front pages of the newspaper. Hansen et al (1998: 103) comment that a reasonably representative sample is thus:

Taken to mean a sample which is not skewed or biased by the personal preferences or hunches of the researcher by the desire to ‘prove’ a particular preconceived point...it is thus important, when deciding on a sampling plan, to be aware of the cycles and seasonal variations which characterize much media coverage. (1998:103)

To avoid bias for selecting samples that would automatically fit the profile of political stories identified in the hypothesis of this study, I asked one of the librarians at the newspaper’s in-house library to select and photocopy at random samples of front pages for the period January to December 2001 and to include at least all days of the week. A similar randomisation was used by Brown et al (1982, cited in Lemert 1989) in their content analysis of a study of front-page stories of several newspapers in America (Lemert, 1989: 103). Although Brown et. al. only used content analysis and no other method in their study, they noted that as a method content analysis is limiting

as it “captures only the end product of pressures and other forces that the content itself may not adequately reveal” (Lemert, 1989: 102). As earlier stated, such limitations are avoided in my study through the use of interviews as a complimentary research method.

The next step was to develop news categories relevant to this study and a definition of “political stories”. From the outset, the operational categories were based on the hypothesis, thus the first category identified the stories either as political or non-political. The two broad categories cover a variety of sub-categories and only those identified in the hypothesis were recognised for purposes of the study. For example, the term “political” covers party politics and political personalities as sub-categories that are relevant to the study. The categories served as a method of organisation and gave coherence to the numerical aspect of this analysis. Deacon et al (1999: 123) advice that a researcher using content analysis must identify systematically which units of the sample fall within the remit of the study. In line with this, I devised a standardised procedure for differentiating political items from non-political items. Consequently, I drew up a list of four qualifying criteria for identifying relevant items. An item was treated as “political” if it mentioned any politician (either by name or inference); political party; political event or process; or made reference to any government cabinet minister. As noted by Deacon et al (1999: 123), one advantage of identifying the basic qualifying criteria is that it allows the researcher to stipulate further terms for inclusion. For instance in this study I decided to only include items that refer to politics within Kenya and not international politics as this would have included text not relevant to the research questions. Secondly I coded items that have politics as their main focus as well as those that were reported incidentally. It was possible for me to analyse the results manually because my content analysis was rudimentary. This is in line with an argument by Hansen et al (1998: 121) that where a content analysis is simple and rudimentary, the researcher may analyse the data by hand rather than by computer.

12.3 The semi-structured, in-depth interviews

The next stage of the study is qualitative in nature. It makes use of the semi-structured, personal interviews with selected editorial staff and the circulation manager of the *East African Standard*. Denzin and Lincoln (1994: 5) observe that

qualitative research holds that human beings are unique individuals and should be studied as such as opposed to quantitative research, which regards human beings as homogeneous. For this reason qualitative investigators use detailed interviewing and observation while quantitative ones rely on “remote, inferential, empirical materials” (1994: 5). For this study the use of personal interviews gives it depth making it more informative. The emphasis here is on finding the subjective meanings the gatekeepers make of their role in the news selection process. Consequently the conclusions are interpretive and rely on the context within which the gatekeepers work. In the analysis, the use of selected verbatim quotes from various interviewees demonstrates the interpretive aspect of this study.

As Shoemaker (1991: 2) states, there are many players in the gatekeeping process. As explained in the theory chapter gatekeepers are the individuals who select and process the news items that are to be published. . A gate is basically an ‘in’ or ‘out’ decision point (Shoemaker, 1991: 2). Gatekeepers, as demonstrated in this study, operate at different geographic locations and status/rank within a media organisation. They wield different roles and powers at the specific “gates” for which they are responsible. This study therefore recognizes the importance of letting the individual voices be heard rather than treat them as a homogenous group. Each gatekeeper has a distinct role to play as the stories are transmitted from one to the other in the chain of communication. Although there are many gatekeepers in the chain of command, it is the senior editors who have charge of what will appear on the front page of the newspaper. Taking cue from a study done by Shoemaker et al (2001), this study also asserts that “individuals exert minimal influence on content unless they hold substantial power within the organization.” Using my prior knowledge of the workings of the newspaper, I therefore identified who the key gatekeepers were and deliberately targeted them for the interviews. A similar case of typical case sampling was used by Strelitz (2002) in identifying which students to include in his focus groups. He needed Indian students for his focus groups and had prior knowledge that the majority of them on campus study Pharmacy. He therefore deliberately recruited some from that department.

The importance of an interview as a research method is captured by Hagen (1992) who posits that, “the interview is not a free conversation, but one initiated by the

knowledge interests of the project, the topics defines as relevant, and the way in which the researcher asks questions” (1992: 87). He posits that the respondents are recruited because they have certain characteristic or practice, which the researcher is trying to understand. Hagen (1992: 87) observes that qualitative interviews can take many forms, ranging from open-ended questions to loosely structured conversations. The choice to use semi-structured interviews in this study is appropriate as it is less structured than a questionnaire but more structured than normal everyday conversations. This requires the use of an interview guide, which lists topics and questions to bear in mind when talking to the interviewees.

I interviewed a total of 15 people. They included 10 editors of different ranks and in different geographical locations, four reporters and the circulation manager. Those I interviewed included the group managing editor; the chief sub editor; senior editors; the news editor; the provincial news editor; the circulation manager; the picture editor and three bureau chiefs. The interviewees in this study are not referred to by their actual names but rather by their editorial rank. This is in keeping with an agreement reached between the researcher and the newspaper’s management to maintain anonymity of those who agreed to be interviewed. The interviewees are coded according to their title, editorial rank and editorial responsibilities. (See Appendix B). Due to the nature of the geographic organisation of the company, I had to physically shuttle between two different office premises in Nairobi in order to conduct the interviews. The news reporters, news editor and provincial editor interviewed in this study were based at the newsroom, which was located in the Central Business District of Nairobi. On the other hand the senior editors (not the bureau chiefs) were based at the head office, which was located about five kilometers from the Nairobi city centre. On all occasions I had to use public transport to shuttle between the offices in order to conduct my interviews. This was time consuming and limited the time I could spend with each interviewee. The bureau chiefs were based in towns located in different provinces of the country and I therefore had to contact them by telephone. Because of the expenses involved in making long distance calls, the telephonic interviews with the bureau chiefs were kept short and more focused. However, this did not compromise the quality of the interviews, as the bureau chiefs were required to answer basically the same questions as their counterparts in Nairobi.

Interview appointments, with a commitment of at least half an hour for each respondent in the study were arranged. Most lasted for more than half an hour. No interview request was refused although some editors kept canceling at the last minute due to work pressures. However due to poor telephone communication lines and clashing schedules, only three bureau chiefs out of a possible five were interviewed for this study. It is my contention that the three bureau chiefs are representative of the rest. It must be noted here that the co-operation received from all the respondents was facilitated mainly by the fact that I had worked as a journalist in the same newspaper and therefore I was professionally and socially familiar with the people I interviewed. The use of semi-structured in-depth interviews for this study takes cue from models established by seminal studies of gatekeeping by the pioneers namely, White (1950), Gieber (1956), McNelly (1959) and Bass (1969). These seminal studies progressively covered what Shoemaker (1991: 4) regards as the five levels at which gatekeeping influences can be analysed, namely, individual communicators' gatekeeping decisions; the influences of communications routines; organizational-level gatekeeping; social and institutional factors; and social system influences such as ideology and culture.

12.4 Data analysis

Denzin and Lincoln (1994) posit that data analysis methods arise out of the data collection approaches. That is, the methods of collecting data can determine the methods used in analyzing the data. They argue that although there are overlaps in research analysis methods, qualitative research has no distinct methods of data analysis as it uses semiotics, narratives, content, discourse and even statistical analysis (1994: 6). They posit that authors of qualitative texts use personal informal language while quantitative researchers use mathematical models, statistical tables and graphics and often present their research in impersonal, third-person prose. For this study I employed different analysis techniques based on the two methods of data collection that I used. For the content analysis I used tables to illustrate the frequency and categorization of the political and non-political stories from the sample pages studied. My study employs content analysis in the traditional descriptive manner, that is, basically to identify what exists. Wimmer and Dominick (1994: 159) note that several recent media studies exemplify the use of content analysis for this very purpose. They quote studies by Signorielli (1989); Lowry and Towles (1989) and Myerle and Rarick

(1989) as some of the researches identified as “descriptive” in their application of content analysis.

In analyzing the interviews of this study, I use mainly narrative description and explanations to express the findings as opposed to coding and presenting it as quantitative data. Where I have given verbatim quotes from respondents during interviews, these have been limited to be representative illustrations. This idea has been borrowed from a media audience study by Strelitz (2002) where he uses verbatim quotes from his respondents as illustrations. In a similar study of gatekeeping, Davidow (1999) extensively uses verbatim quotes in her analysis of the interviews with gatekeepers in her study. According to Bryman (1988: 48) many qualitative researchers prefer to employ verbatim quotations from interviewees’ replies in order to illustrate general points than to code the information gleaned from such interviews.

13.0 Conclusion

In this chapter I discussed the two research paradigms used by social scientists; the two stages of my research process, which included the data collection techniques, I used; and I briefly mentioned the data analysis approaches that I used. I also discussed my reasons for employing triangulation as a research method. Although the two methods have distinct data collection and analytical processes, they often overlap but were adequate in that this research is concerned with day-to-day practice within the *East African Standard* and not with the broader ideological and structural concerns. The interviews are the cornerstone of the research and were conducted informally, in a dialogue fashion with the senior editors choosing to conduct them in their respective offices. The study combines a quantitative analysis, which looks at the frequency and manner in which political stories are represented with a qualitative interpretation of how and why the stories get to be selected. Newspapers are cultural texts and are therefore open to multiple interpretations. Consequently the unit of analysis in this study is very specific in order to draw logical conclusions related to the goals of the study. The next chapter examines the actual research analysis and a discussion of the findings of this study.

Chapter 4

Findings and Discussion

14.0 Introduction

This chapter presents and discusses the data collected in this research. Due to the nature of the research, which is exploratory and descriptive, this chapter combines the process of presenting and discussing the research data rather than treating the two as separate processes. It is here that I establish whether the research has provided answers to the questions and goals set out in Chapter One and referred to in subsequent chapters. The study set out to investigate what kinds of stories are published on the front page of the *East African Standard* and the conceptions of newsworthiness held by the newspaper's editorial staff. The study is based on the hypothesis that political stories dominate the front pages of the *East African Standard* at the expense of other stories.

The interpretations and discussions in this chapter are informed by the goals of the study as well as the theories governing the study. This chapter combines findings from face-to-face in-depth interviews and basic content analysis as described in chapter three. The qualitative aspect of the study allows me as the researcher to include prior knowledge acquired from being a journalist at the same newspaper at the time of the study. In this regard Creswell (1994: 6) notes that the qualitative researcher admits the value-laden nature of the study and actively reports his or her values and biases. In analyzing the data, three main themes emerged in the rationale for news selection. These themes are consistent with the theories discussed in earlier chapters. The themes are market driven factors, political economy of news and the development model. Each of these themes is discussed in depth in this chapter

14.1 Overview of sample pages studied

This chapter presents the findings of the content analysis of 26 front-page stories of the *East African Standard*. Other findings are derived from interviews with the editorial staff outlined in Appendix B. Of the 12 page one sample pages selected, all days of the week were covered except Monday and Saturday. There was no special reason for the exclusion of these two days from the sample but rather an oversight during the sampling. Two samples were derived for Tuesday, three for Wednesday,

two for Thursday, two for Friday and three for Sunday bringing the total to twelve samples (see Appendix A).

14.2 Presentation of findings

The working assumption was that the news selection process could be understood by capturing the individual and collective (organisational) orientation and production routine processes at the *East African Standard*. The data is presented in a narrative form and the most significant quotations and tables are used to illustrate the major findings of the study. In analyzing the data, three main themes emerge in the rationale for news selection. These themes are linked with the theories discussed in earlier chapters. They are, market based news production; political economy and the libertarian or development model. The findings are presented, illustrated and corroborated with quotations arising from in-depth interviews alongside tables illustrating findings from the content analysis. Literature on qualitative research supports quoting raw data as an essential characteristic of good qualitative research. I therefore quote from the raw data I collected during the personal in-depth interviews. It is in this chapter therefore that the respondents' voices are heard. This study locates itself in the interpretive paradigm, which means the interest is in how others shape their reality, and the best way to do this is to use their own words.

14.2.1 Content analysis of page one stories

As Table 1.1 indicates, of the 12 sample pages from January to December 2001, two lead stories were foreign while 10 lead stories were local. Of the two foreign headline stories, one was political while the other was non-political. Of the 10 local lead stories, seven were political while three were non-political.

Table 1.1: Overview of the lead stories in the study

Position of story	Foreign stories	Local stories	Political stories	Non-political stories
1 st Lead	2	10	8	4
2 nd Lead	1	9	8	2
3 rd Lead	2	2	0	4
TOTAL	5	21	16	10

The second lead stories recorded nine local stories, one foreign, while two front pages did not have second lead stories. Of the local stories, seven were political, two were non-political. Only four sample pages carried third lead stories. Of these four, two were local while the other two were international events happening at a local level and therefore their reportage had a local angle. All four third lead stories were non-political. The third lead stories were identified by their relatively smaller and less bold font compared to the lead and second lead stories. Out of a total of twenty-six page one stories sampled, ten stories were non-political while 16 were political. The results of this numerical analysis of samples of front-page stories support my prediction of a dominance of political stories over other stories in the *East African Standard*. The frequency and prominence of political stories as the preferred choice as headline news manifests a bias of the same by the gatekeepers at the newspaper. The results also directly address one of the goals of this study, which is to determine what kinds of stories are published on the front page of this newspaper. Clearly the results show that among the headline stories, political stories hold sway on the front page. These stories were about party politics as well as individual politicians. Likewise second lead stories show a definite higher number of political stories than non-political stories. However of the third lead stories, none of those in the sample were political. But as their status suggests (third lead), they were also less prominent than the headline and second lead stories.

McNair (1998: 78) posits that this concept is further explored by assumptions that the news form tends to favour narratives of events over process, effect over cause and conflict over consensus. Regarding news bias, Hackett (1984: 229), posits that conventional research on news bias is associated with several key assumptions namely: that news can and ought to be objective, balanced and a reflection of social reality; that political attitudes of journalists or editorial decision-makers are a major determinant of news bias; that bias in news content can be detected with existing reading methods; and that the most important form of bias is partisanship. Hackett (1984: 229) states that in a news content study, typical categories are assumed to both describe the message and to enable inferences about the intentions or biases of the communicators. He says of content analysis:

Content analysis is associated with the problematic of bias for at least three reasons. First, the bias is often conceived in quantifiable

terms...Second, the tabulation of frequencies is assumed to be a useful indicator of the message the audience is receiving. Third, the real objects of content analysis are the intended message and motives of the communicator...using the application of the principles of scientific research to the analysis of communication content. (Hackett, 1984: 241)

Table 1.2 illustrates the above findings.

Table 1.2: Categories of news stories in the study

Date	Day	Page	Story position and Category
January 28 2001	Sunday	Front Page	Lead story -international calamity 2nd lead -local politician 3rd lead - Financial aid
February 2 2001	Friday	Front Page	Lead story -local politician 2nd lead -local labour issue 3rd lead -local politics
March 27 2001	Tuesday	Front page	Lead story -local tragedy 2nd lead -local politics 3rd lead -no third lead
April 11 2001	Wednesday	Front page	Lead story -local crime 2nd lead -local health 3rd lead -no third lead
May 20 2001	Sunday	Front page	Lead story -local politician 2nd lead -local politicians 3rd lead -no third lead
June 13 2001	Wednesday	Front page	Lead story -local politics 2nd lead -local politics 3rd lead -no third lead
July 5 2001	Thursday	Front page	Lead story -local politics 2nd lead -local politics 3rd lead -local tourism
August 3 2001	Friday	Front page	Lead story -local politician 2nd lead -local politician 3rd lead -no third lead
September 12 2001	Wednesday	Front page	Lead story -international tragedy 2nd lead -no second lead 3rd lead -no third lead
October 2 2001	Tuesday	Front page	Lead story -local tragedy 2nd lead -refugees 3rd lead -international terrorism

November 22 2001	Thursday	Front page	Lead story -local politics 2nd lead -no second lead 3rd lead -no third lead
December 30 2001	Sunday	Front page	Lead story -local politics 2nd lead -local economics 3rd lead -no third lead

Significantly the personality based political stories reflect a high element of drama, a factor that news organizations perceive as newsworthy (Galtung and Ruge, 1965).

McNair (1998: 78) posits that newsworthiness accrues to the doings of elites in all walks of life, but especially politics, the entertainment industry and sport.

People defined as important by their position in government or their fame and fortune, are automatically newsworthy, even if they have done nothing which might reasonably or statistically count as a deviation from the norm. (McNair, 1998: 78).

Such stories are dominant as front-page material as I deduced in the content analysis. Table 1.3 illustrates how many stories were personality based as opposed to party politics or “other” politics such as government or parliament based.

Table 1.3: Types of political stories

Position of story	Political stories	Political personalities stories	Party politics stories	Other politics stories (Government, parliament etc)
1st Lead	8	4	1	0
2nd Lead	8	3	1	2
3rd Lead	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	16	7	2	2

14.2.2 Analysis of interview data

The second goal of this study is to explore the conceptions of newsworthiness held by gatekeepers at the *East African Standard*. The hypothesis in this study implies that there is a bias that ensures that political stories dominate the front page of the newspaper. The significance of this preference cannot be inferred from the counting

process alone and inferences are made drawing on the interviews. It was therefore appropriate to test this hypothesis by interviewing the selected editorial staff while they carried out their daily routine duties at the newspaper. As stated in Chapter 3, I interviewed 15 people. They included 10 editors of different ranks and in different geographical locations, four reporters, and the circulation manager. Among the editors interviewed were the chief subeditor, senior editors, the news editor, the picture editor and bureau chiefs (see Appendix B).

This study demonstrates the series of decision points that news items pass through on their way to publication at the *East African Standard*. Some of the decision points include the daily editorial meetings where senior editors select news items for publication. Although reporters do not attend these particular editorial meetings, I interviewed four reporters from the news desk in order to establish whether or not they had a say in the process of selecting stories for page one. Of the four reporters I interviewed, two were fairly new in the profession. I will refer to them as “cub reporters” to distinguish them from the other two who were seasoned reporters and whom I will refer to as “veteran reporters.”

Despite their different levels of experience, the four reporters interviewed did not seem to think that they individually played any significant role in the news selection process. The two cub reporters believe that the stories they source and write get published almost by luck. In their view they are competing with the more experienced journalists who they claim “already know what the editors want”. They expressed frustration about knowing what counts as newsworthy and what does not.

Cub reporter 1:

You see, it is difficult to even know what these people (editors) look for in a story. Sometimes you write a story thinking it is Page One material only to find it used as a brief in the paper the next day.

The veteran reporters were more confident about what defines a “good story”. They said they occasionally directly alerted editors about stories that they have written and “feel” or “know” may be used prominently. In this way, they influenced the way their stories were treated during the daily news selection meetings by editors.

Veteran reporter 1:

You see, editors don't always know what the big stories of the day are. So sometimes we need to "fill them in" since we are the people on the ground.

Both veteran reporters exhibited confidence about knowing what is newsworthy and even what can be potential page one material. They conceded that political stories always have higher chances of making it to the front page. Regarding "other" stories that are non-political, they intimated that, "such stories belong to the features pages". They were both conscious of the fact that at the end of the day whatever story was picked as the lead story had to "sell the paper". In the absence of written policy about the newspaper's story preferences, reporters are socialized with regard to the norms of their jobs. According to Breed (1997: 109), reporters discover and internalize the rights and obligations of their status and their norms and values. Drawing from my personal experience in the newsroom as a journalist, I know that the normal procedure would be for reporters to come from the field and debrief the news editor about what story they have. Together they discuss how to shape a story. It is through such debriefing and the subsequent discussions of story angles that reporters gradually gain insight into which stories are preferred by editors. Schudson (1989: 15) posits that organizational theorists argue that it does not matter the status of a reporter; they will be socialized quickly into the values and routines in the daily rituals of journalism.

This study deliberately avoided interviewing more reporters and I made a deliberate decision to focus on news workers at the more senior levels. The rationale for this is supported by Shoemaker et al (2001: 237) and Donohue et al (1997: 95). Shoemaker et al suggest that "individuals exert minimal influence on content unless they hold substantial power within the organization" and Donohue et al posit that editors are often seen as having a "backstopping" role in the gatekeeping process...and must make the final decision about where, when and how messages will be published. Given the limitations of time and inconvenient geographical locations of some of the interviewees during the research process, it was necessary for me to concentrate on respondents whose status and roles in the editorial department would inform the study more richly. I did not ignore the reporters' responses but rather chose to treat the information as peripheral. The same applied to information I obtained from the picture editor.

Almost all the respondents said they had never had a chance to discuss in depth what their jobs involved or what their role was. In general they seemed to be challenged by the questions asked but nonetheless responded freely. The interviews consisted of an initial list of 15 open-ended questions that were asked of all respondents (see Appendix C). Follow up questions were asked according to the responses and not all interviewees were asked additional questions for each response, nor were the follow-up questions the same in each interview. Some of the interviews took longer than the allotted time of thirty minutes. This stage of the research was exploratory, seeking individual expressions and impressions as to what constituted news along with personal views of what factors influence news selection at the *East African Standard*. One of the themes that emerged was that the newspaper is a business entity. That is, media content is a product, which must be sold to consumers. Advertisers are the main source of revenue and the desire to court advertising is a major goal of the newspaper as explained by some of the editors. All the interviewees were aware of the need for the newspaper to make profit through good sales. These market-driven factors are discussed in more detail in the section that follows.

14.3 Themes

14.3.1 Market driven factors

This theme clarifies the logic of news selection in an era of increasing economic rationalism in print and broadcast media (McManus, 1995). Parallel to this, traditional notions of separation of editorial and commercial interests are weakening (McChesney, 1997: 29) wrote of the U.S. media. This view is shared by Underwood (1993) who posits that “marketplace pressures have led to the appearance of a new kind of editor, a cross between an editor and a marketing team” (1993:15). Although these assertions were made in regard to the U.S. media they could apply to the print media situation in Kenya and probably worldwide. The commercialization or commodification of news as a media product on sale was evident in this study. And as revealed by the assistant editor (production) the profit interest of the newspaper has become a powerful influence on how much space is allocated to news in comparison with advertising. The production assistant editor said that 40 per cent of the newspaper’s space was dedicated to advertising while 60 per cent was dedicated to editorial material. Albarran (1996) defines the media’s economic or business function as that of a “dual-product market” where media operate by selling content to the

public and by selling audiences to advertisers. According to McChesney (1997), the print media's dependency on advertising revenue make them "anti-democratic forces" focused mainly on providing advertisers with target audiences rather than providing the public with information.

Assistant editor (production):

Normally we keep the 60/40 balance but sometimes advertising eats into the editorial pages.

The circulation manager was a unique respondent as he was the only non-editorial staff attending and actively participating in the daily editorial meetings. His presence was so crucial that when he was absent, his deputy would represent him at the editorial meetings. Although the circulation manager had no direct working relations with the reporters and majority of the editors, he evidently had a major say at editorial meetings and massive influence over what was carried as the lead story in the newspaper. His decisions about what kinds of stories can sell the newspaper were based on sales figures he received on a daily basis from his circulation sales teams working around the country. He said he always presented these sales figures during the editorial meetings in order to statistically show what kinds of lead stories were popular with readers. The circulation manager said his department was in charge of newspaper sales, distribution and revenue collection.

Circulation manager:

I participate in the editorial meetings with a focus on choosing the headline of the day...my story choices are based on what can sell the newspaper. I recommend stories from a sales point of view.

According to the circulation manager sales greatly determine what gets published on the newspaper's front page. This is in line with McManus' (1995: 301) observation about changes in journalism in the United States. He posits that journalism is undergoing fundamental changes with "a move away from reliance on craft norms defining what is newsworthy and how to report, toward a journalism based on serving the market place."

Circulation manager:

We are in a business and our business is to sell the newspaper. Our circulation figures tell us on a daily basis which stories are more popular with the readers. I can confidently say that the readers favour political stories and that is what we give them.

In answer to what kind of stories actually bring good newspaper sales the circulation manager said, “politics, national or international disasters, human interest stories and sports, in that order”.

Again McManus (1995) argues that pragmatists claim that journalism is being reinvigorated with news media giving readers and viewers what they want. The economic logic in this model holds that at the heart of commercial news production lie four markets (McManus, 1995: 305):

In the first and most familiar, readers and viewers trade their attention...and per copy fee to media firms in exchange for information. In the second, the sources trade their information...to reporters for the attention inclusion in the news may bring to them, their ideas, or both. In the third, the advertisers pay money in return for the attention of potential customers. Finally, owners-investors contribute capital and expect to share in profits and growth in the value of stock.

McManus (1995: 332) argues that the market driven model also challenges conventional journalism ethics' orientation toward the individual newsworker as the critical decision-maker. Equally convinced that sales are the priority in headline selection was the Provincial editor. His take on the issue was similar to what Reese (2001: 182) describes as “extra-media level”. This is one of the five levels that Reese identifies in the hierarchy-of-influences model. This model or framework identifies crucial concepts and connections that research questions in media may address. At the extra-media level, Reese describes the power to shape content as not the media's alone but is shared with a variety of institutions in society. These institutions include other media organizations. The provincial editor's concern about the sales of the newspaper were hinged on the fact that the newspaper has to compete with other media organizations such as the 24-hour radio and television stations.

Provincial news editor:

A competitive media environment makes us package our news uniquely and refreshingly. We have to package the stories in an attractive manner

because by the time readers buy the paper in the morning, they have usually already heard and seen these same stories on radio and television.

The provincial news editor and his bureau chiefs are the custodians of 70 per cent of the stories generated for the newspaper on a daily basis. They are in charge of news coming from the country's seven provinces. The eighth province, Nairobi, is also the capital city and the main news desk under the authority of the news editor covers it. The provincial news editor identified one of the main challenges facing his team as that of "packaging" the news. He said that because of the nature of news values such as proximity of an event, readers in provinces sometimes demand provincial editions to serve their particular interests. Being the immediate supervisor of news emanating from the provinces, the provincial editor supervises reporters in the provinces through the bureau chiefs. He said that experience and statistics had proved that political stories were a favourite as headline stories in the provinces.

Provincial editor:

Sometimes we even have different headlines for the provinces from that carried in the city edition. So for example if there is a big political story concerning political individuals from a particular province, we angle the story to attract readers in that province. This is what I mean by proximity. What may be of interest to readers in Eastern province may be of little interest to readers in Western province simply because they don't know the individuals or are not familiar with the issue(s) in the story.

Reese (2001: 182) posits that this factor may be seen in the form of competitive market pressures. Another respondent, the deputy managing editor (deputy ME), said he does not take individual responsibility for selecting material for use on the front page and instead insisted that "decision-making is not for an individual, it is a collective process". His view is noted by Reese (1990: 393) and Reese (2001:180) who posits that newsmaking is a consensual process and that individuals do not work alone nor "have complete freedom to act on their beliefs and attitudes, but must operate within a multitude of limits..." In this regard the deputy ME was referring to the daily editorial meetings at which editors decide on what stories to publish. The deputy ME concurred with the circulation manager's assertion that readers favour political stories over and above non-political stories.

Deputy ME:

Stories on politics are almost guaranteed to make headlines...but the paper just reports what is happening in the society. You see, the media operates within a society, not in isolation. We just report what is going on in the society.

He said that political stories were not always dominant in the newspaper's front page but rather that the editors took into account other topics when selecting news.

Deputy ME:

A lead story, regardless of whether it is political or non-political, sells itself and all that editors have to do is "panel-beat" it to fit page one. By "panel-beat" I mean re-writing and editing a story with the aim of giving it an angle that can be used in the front page.

His assertion that the newspaper just "mirrors" what is happening in society is however countered by the number of political stories recorded in this study and the assertions of other editors about the perceived or proven marketability of political stories. The deputy ME's own words about "panel beating" contradict the very notion of media mirroring society. This theme relates to Branston and Stafford's (1996) assertion that "news is not a mirror on society, its constructed versions of events are not unbiased and they usually serve the dominant interests of the powerful elite". The mirror theory, which proposes that journalists just reflect events in society, began fading in the 1960s as journalists' influence over stories was established by studies in individual and institutional practices of news workers. Yet some of the editors interviewed still held the view that the stories they published were event-centered and completely unbiased. Even studies on news production such as Epstein (1973) and Fishman (1977) took cognizance of the need for locating common biases among news personnel. Epstein's analysis showed how organizational self-interest selected and distorted social reality (McManus (1995: 302). Fishman's analysis notes that individual bias is considered the result of some common social background of newsmen. He concludes that research in institutional practices cannot therefore completely rule out the role of individual bias in news work. Fishman (1977:15)

The news editor had a completely different take on the whole process of news selection. He chose to use the word "elimination" rather than selection. His argument was that the process of "elimination" of stories actually begins with the daily

recordings of potential news events of the day in the news desk diary. He started by explaining how the stories are sourced.

News editor:

We get story ideas from the reporters while others come via faxes, emails, telephone calls and even personal invitations to cover events. News sources are many and range from individuals to public relations companies, non-governmental organizations and government departments among others.

Explaining further the concept of elimination, the news editor said that if an event is not booked in the diary as an assignment to be covered by the reporters, its chances of ever materializing into a story are very minimal. This is because all events are potential news stories on any given day and must be covered and written out by reporters in order for the editors to read, edit and decide on how to frame them and prioritise them. The news editor explained that not all lead stories came from the docket. Some came from outside of the docket. A docket, he explained, is a condensed version of the main news diary and is prepared by himself or his deputy. Stories in the docket get shaped and angled as potential lead stories. According to the news editor most of the stories recorded in the docket have political leanings thus the likelihood of a political story becoming a headline. The news editor said he prepares another more refined docket or list of stories for the afternoon editorial meeting, by which time he says, the main stories of the day have already been identified through a process of elimination. The docketed stories are listed in order of prominence and priority. He said that 90 per cent of the time, political stories got listed at the top and therefore had better chances of making the headlines. Once again, like some of his fellow respondents, the news editor contended that the newspaper favours political stories as headline news. He justified this saying that the country (at that time) was facing unprecedented transitional politics and that Kenyans in general were fixated with all the unfolding events regarding the country's changing political landscape.

News editor:

It is more like instinct. After years of working for a local newspaper you learn what stories the senior editors favour and you learn to have a nose for them. Unless it is a very dramatic or tragic story, non-political stories rarely make it to the front page.

Another respondent, the associate news editor was of the opinion that a newspaper is a business entity and its main priority is to make profits from high circulation figures as well as advertisements.

Associate news editor:

The bottom line in story selection is, we publish stories that will sell the paper. It is circulation figures that count. Other criteria for newsworthiness are, relevance to readers and freshness of the issue or news event.

Similar statements were made by the group managing editor (GME) when responding to the question about what factors influence news selection. The GME said some of the criteria for a newsworthy story include relevance to the readers and legal standing, that is, a story should not be libelous or defamatory. The associate editor revealed that sometimes unusual methods are used in breaking a stalemate regarding what to publish as the lead story.

Associate editor:

Sometimes when we have a stalemate over what to carry as a headline, we do a random test on colleagues to see what their “automatic” choice for a lead story would be. We present our colleagues with a couple of choices and if a majority picks on a certain story over another, we go with the majority’s choice.

The associate editor is the only respondent who made reference to this unusual manner of deciding on a headline story. Other respondents dismissed it saying that it rarely happens and it is not the conventional method they use for story selection. At the centre of the news selection process is the man who almost single handedly determines what stories are carried in the inside pages of the *East African Standard* – the chief sub editor. The chief sub-editor, by default excludes certain stories from getting to the front page by using them on the inside pages. During the interview he said that “Kenyan’s like politics” and therefore political stories sell well when carried on the front page. The chief-sub said there was stiff competition for stories to make it into any page of the newspaper, let alone onto the front page.

Chief-sub:

On average we have a daily newspaper of 32 pages. We receive over one hundred stories per day from the reporters but the paper can only accommodate about 30 stories per edition. The other 70 “die.”

The chief sub-editor attributed this large amount of “dead” stories to the fact that the advertising desk solely determines how much space gets allocated to stories per day. He said the number and size of advertisements determine the number and size of stories the paper will carry per day. The chief sub said that although political stories dominated the front pages of the newspaper, all other stories that are non-political got “fair” coverage on the inside pages.

Of the possible five bureau chiefs I could have interviewed, I managed to conduct telephonic interviews with only three of them. This was mainly because of time constraints on their part and poor telephone communication in certain provinces combined with high costs of making long distance calls from Nairobi to the provinces. However, I am confident that the three bureaux, Mombasa, Eldoret and Kisumu are representative of the attitudes, values and workings of all the other bureaux. The bureau chief in Mombasa said his role in news selection was very limited, almost non-existent. In fact he limited it to preparing the news docket where he lists the potential big stories of the day from his province. He then faxed or emailed the same docket to the editorial head office in Nairobi.

Mombasa bureau chief:

I am not really involved in news selection in Likoni (head office). Once in a while I get consulted about some stories but generally they (editors) just go with whatever I give them in the docket. Actually the only selection I do is when I am preparing my docket. I decide which stories to include and which ones to leave out. But when there is a big story from here, I alert the bosses in Likoni and together we discuss it and develop it as a page one story.

In contradiction, the Kisumu office bureau chief stated that he felt included in the news selection process, as there was continuous communication between himself and the editorial bosses in Nairobi throughout the day:

Kisumu bureau chief:

I receive regular updates throughout the day from reporters in the field and I choose what is relevant before forwarding it to the bosses in Nairobi. Although there is regular communication between the bureaux and the editorial bosses in Nairobi, the bureau chief makes judgments about stories at the provincial level.

In a departure from what previous editors had contended to be popular page one stories, namely, political stories, the Kisumu bureau chief was adamant that “human interest stories” were the best candidates for headline news. According to him, the best stories that can ensure good sales of the newspaper would be human interest stories and not necessarily those with a political twist to them. He conceded that the *East African Standard* has a bias for using political stories on the front page. He said that the best sales days for the newspaper were when human interest stories hit the headlines. He had no official statistics for this claim but was convinced that this was a fact he had confirmed from years of experience both as a reporter and as an editor.

Kisumu bureau chief:

The basic criteria I use when choosing the stories to include in my docket is human interest stories. I believe these are the kind of stories readers are interested in. Over the years I have noticed that every time we have a human interest story on the front page, we have better sales and sometimes we even sell out. It is true people like political stories but they also like human interest stories once in a while.

The Eldoret bureau chief, like his Kisumu counterpart, felt confident that he had a role to play in the initial stages of the news selection process. Among the duties he performed on a daily basis included preparing a daily provincial docket with all the top stories he deemed newsworthy from his province. He forwarded the news docket to the provincial news editor and the other editorial bosses and liaised with them via phone or fax about the key stories. Asked how he identified a newsworthy story, the Eldoret bureau chief said:

You know a good story when you see one. Most of the good ones have some controversy in them, so court stories and political stories qualify for this.

The Eldoret bureau chief concurred with what some of the other editors had already said regarding political stories being top contenders as headline news. His only regret was that bureau chiefs are geographically excluded from the final news selection

meeting at the head office where headline stories are decided. He however defended the prevalence of political stories from his bureau saying the province is a natural “hotbed for ruling party politics”. His argument was that there was no bias on the part of the bureau chiefs or editors regarding the dominance of political stories on the front page of the newspaper but rather that what was reported was what was happening on the ground.

Eldoret bureau chief:

Many of the stories that are filed in by the reporters are already political or personality-oriented in nature. So the choice really is between which political stories to choose over which one. Non-political stories are there but they are few and most of them are not of national interest. That is why they are carried in the inside pages.

In a similar study carried by Curran et al (1980) in relation to the British press, it was established that human interest stories consistently obtained the highest readership scores because they appealed to all categories of reader, whereas public affairs issues only attracted a minority following concentrated among certain social groups. This was attributed to competitive market pressure to maximize sales.

Although market driven forces appeared to be the main theme in the findings of this study, another theme also emerged regarding selection of news stories for the front page. It emerged that there was a subtle way in which the proprietors of the newspaper communicated their message of what was and what wasn't suitable material for the front page. This is discussed in the next section.

14.3.2 Political economy of news

The link between ownership of news organizations and news coverage is not easy to determine....Can patterns of ownership be tied to specific habits of reporting?...the link between ownership and market structure on the one hand and news content on the other is not apparent. (Schudson, 1999: 178)

Schudson (1989: 10 –13) posits that at a rudimentary level, the political economy perspective assumes that the directors of a media company dictate to editors and reporters what to publish. He argues that in reality most reporters do not even know the directors of the companies they work for. However, at a more complex level he argues that:

It is true that American media corporations are interlocked with other major corporations. It is equally true that fewer corporations control more and more of the American news media. In these circumstances it would be a shock to find the press a hotbed of radical thought.

This same corporate scenario can be applied to the case of the Kenyan press where the political elite of the country owns three of the daily newspapers. Evidence of how much influence owners of the *East African Standard* had over story selection for the front page is best explained by the interview responses of the Group editorial director (GED) and the deputy managing editor. In this study the group editorial director shall be referred to by the acronym GED. Because of his position in the company and therefore his proximity to the principal shareholders of the newspaper, I asked the GED if he ever got direct orders from the owners regarding what news to publish on the front page. GED said that dictates for news selection by the owners was “rare” and that story selection operates on a routine laid down procedure. The decision about what to publish on the front page was usually reached through consensus among the editors.

GED:

In fact, our 4pm meeting is a culmination of a day-long process of news selection that starts with news dockets arriving from the main office in the city centre and from the bureaux countrywide. There are many mini-editorial meetings going on throughout the day during which time stories are sifted and sorted. In the end only those stories that are newsworthy make it to the newspaper.

According to the GED a newsworthy story has to appeal to the readers and has to sell the newspaper. GED was aware of self-censorship practiced by the journalists and editors in general. He said this kind of censorship was rare and was based on the potential impact of a story on the principal shareholders. That is, if a story had the potential to step on the toes of shareholders then it would be likely be shelved or “toned down”. He observed that besides the interests of the shareholders, the market considerations also imposed new forms of internal censorship.

GED:

For example if a story affects a particular advertiser or some people in the corporate world, then it can sometimes be shelved in order to retain the advertiser (s).

As observed by Herman and Chomsky (1988) this would be a normal practice as the media industry is dependent on advertising for its profits. This view is also noted by Curran (2000: 123) who states that politicians and public officials are increasingly and routinely involved in decision-making that can affect the profitability of private media enterprises. Curran notes that the media are not only compromised by their links to big business, they are big business themselves and therefore need a business-friendly environment within which to operate. The GED said that politicians continue to expect constant and favourable media coverage and that they employ all manner of strategies to achieve this. It is this point that demonstrates the wider relations of power in which the media in general are situated. This point is well illustrated by Herman and Chomsky (1988) who argue that the “media serve to mobilize support for the special interests that dominate the state and private activity. However, Curran (2000:125) counter-argues stating that private media need to maintain audience interest in order to be profitable and therefore the subordination of these media by the political and economic interests of their shareholders is minimal, a view, which the GED subscribes to. Editors have certain responsibilities to the owners of the media organizations they work for; to their editorial staff and to the public. Sometimes these responsibilities may be in conflict resulting in editorial independence being seen as an illusion.

Assuming that because the deputy managing editor is ranked the number three in the editorial department’s hierarchy of power, he would also regularly come into contact with principal shareholders of the newspaper, I asked him to comment on the assumed shareholder’s influence over headline selections. The deputy ME responded that the newspaper’s board of directors did not undertake direct consultations with editors about news selection but that “one just knows what to carry or not”. This response revealed a complex situation of self-censorship where editors are free to publish as long as they know what stories to avoid in order to avoid conflict with the newspaper’s owners. The circulation manager who said that reporters and editors act professionally and independently expressed similar sentiments. That their choice of news is independent and sales-oriented rather than influenced by the owners.

Deputy ME:

There are no direct consultations between editors and the newspaper's Board of directors or principal shareholders regarding what stories to carry on page one. One just knows what to carry or not. Stories on politics are almost guaranteed to make headlines. Politics determine our destiny as a people and permeate our everyday lives, so we can't avoid political stories.

However, the associate editor held a different view on this issue. While most of his colleagues skirted around the question of the amount of influence the principal shareholders of the newspaper have over selection of headline stories, the associate editor said that the editors hold shareholders interests in high regard.

Associate editor:

This is a newspaper where the main shareholders are also key political players in this country. We operate in a fragile market and stories that fly in the face of principle shareholders must die.

The chief sub was in agreement: "owners do play a silent role - you can't touch owners and their colleagues". The political economy of news therefore recognizes media institutions within an economic context with shareholders and managers playing a strong role in the newsroom. This theme also considers the media to be sensitive to the interests of the political elite and their business agendas because media institutions have vested economic interests like advertising contracts and joint partnerships or ownerships. And although some editors may deny it, it was evident that the sensitivities of the owners rose above journalistic convictions. One of the convictions being that journalism chiefly acts as the fourth estate by checking on government and meeting other needs of society.

14.3.3 The development model

This is the third theme that emerged in the rationale for news selection in this study. The development model is the biggest victim of news journalism. Some respondents in this study were verbally sympathetic about development and democracy in the society and assumed that by publishing and disseminating the news that they do, they were fulfilling their role as the Fourth Estate. However, the data collected and analysed in the content analysis, shows that the perceived sympathies of the gatekeepers about development and journalism were not in tandem with what was

published on the front pages of the newspaper. Thus my assertion that the development model is the biggest victim of news journalism. Kariithi (1994:30) posits that development journalism was a media role that was never well articulated right from its inception in the 1960s. This he notes is evident from the multiplicity of definitions and raging debates over its applicability.

In Africa, a need to report development issues has existed since independence, but the effective participation of the media in development has been adversely affected by historical links, ownership and ability. (Kariithi 1994: 30).

It is however instructive to note that the forces which encourage a bias for political news headlines are powerful. The *East African Standard* operates in a competitive media market while its journalists' institutionalized professional practices are equally important in encouraging the bias for political stories. One editor who clearly sympathized with issues of development and democracy was the deputy managing editor. He was emphatic that the newspaper consciously reported on the institutions that represent democracy. These he said included the executive, the legislature and the judiciary.

Deputy ME:

The executive, the judiciary and the legislature are the cornerstone of democracy. Stories that come from these institutions are regarded as important because of the role these institutions play in democracy.

The deputy managing editor stated that the newspaper had a social responsibility towards its readers and the citizens in general and therefore always included "other" stories in its coverage such as issues of unemployment, poverty, health and education. What he did not emphasise though was the fact that these "other" stories were rarely headline stories.

It is instructive to note that the deputy managing editor's and other editors' understanding of media and development does not encompass the ideal development model as explained here. Ideally the development model would encompass issue-oriented journalism, which by its very nature would include events that unfold over a long period of time. The nature of the daily cycle of news production at the newspaper

does not favour gradual unfolding stories as headline material. In this regard,

Manning (2001) notes:

...news organizations operating on a daily or faster news cycle will select sudden or dramatic events but are less likely to select news stories that deal with gradual, unfolding processes. The latter do not suit the frequency of the news organization operating to a daily cycle. Thus events, which occur over a long time span, will go unrecorded unless they reach a dramatic climax.

Thus the nature of news values held by the gatekeepers at the newspaper resemble those described by Manning (2001), “the dramatic, the immediate, sudden events, stories with human interest angles, stories that can be constructed around personalities are all likely to interest... news editors.” In this study, not only were political stories favoured for the front page, but also majority of them were of political personalities (see table 1.3).

Manning (2001) notes that in some recent studies in the United Kingdom, some news editors have expressed the fear that market pressures are compelling news journalism to embrace popular, tabloid news values. Manning (2001) argues that academic and non-academic positions regarding the issue of dumbing down can be found, with some academics arguing that opportunities for serious and investigative journalism can co-exist with tabloid topics within the tabloids as exemplified in some of the European up-market tabloid newspapers. However, Curran (2000: 129) counter-argues this view and states thus:

Market-oriented media tend to generate information that is simplified, personalized, decontextualised, with a stress on action rather than process, visualization rather than abstraction, stereotypicality rather than human complexity...this is a by-product of processing information as a commodity.

According to Manning (2000) many commentators, both academic and from within the industry fear that commercial pressures within the newsroom may lead to a drift away from hard or serious news formats such that even if there is quantitatively more political information communicated via the news media than ever before, the information is hollow. The issues of the use-value of news was discussed in chapter two with the main point being that news or information is not published for its own

sake but rather that it has to cause some action or reaction from its consumers. The consumers have to find value in the news.

Deputy ME:

The media is not isolated. It operates within the society and its role to influence change for the better is prime. For example, the *East African Standard's* role as a member of the Fourth Estate is undisputed. We are on track and our existence for 100 years shows goodwill from the public.

The development model requires journalists to provide background, context and perspective required for readers to form reasoned judgment not superficial opinion. This form of journalism emphasises the obligation of the journalist to act rather than react, to initiate coverage rather than wait for events. However due to various factors discussed in the earlier sections of this chapter, news has become simple items of information without explanation, context or history. Yet the news editor disputed this assumption saying that generally newspapers do set agendas for the readers. These agendas are evidently debated in public and private spaces.

News editor:

Like now, the reason most of our big stories are political is because Kenyans are anticipating major political changes soon. However, alongside politics, we still cover the regular beats such as crime, court and parliament.

Regarding the newspaper's role as a member of the Fourth Estate, the news editor was emphatic about what Galtung (1990: 21) describes as "letting the people talk". Galtung challenges the media to not only expose the system but also praise it and give a voice to the people. To this end, the news editor stated that the newspaper provides various spaces within which readers could air their opinions about any issues.

News editor:

We have the letters to the editor page where readers write in on various issues. We also have a popular page called "Face the facts" which allows readers to actually engage with those in authority. And then we have the weekly guest column where any reader can write extensively on a certain topic.

The news editor said part of the reason the newspaper had to devise methods of being more interactive with its readers is because of the competition it faced from FM radio stations and the talk shows and phone-in programmes on television. The chief subeditor who has discretion over what stories are carried on the inside pages of the newspaper said he makes a deliberate decision to carry “other” stories that are non-political. This enables the newspaper to have diverse topics that readers would be interested in.

Chief sub editor:

I have almost exclusive determination about what stories to carry on the inside pages. I use most of the stories on merit. I try and avoid using political stories and instead go for stories on social stuff like education, court cases etc.

Similar sentiments were expressed by the group managing editor who stated that the newspaper does not ignore issue-oriented stories. He however acknowledged that such stories were normally relegated to the inside pages.

GED:

For example we have pages that accommodate opinion pieces, some by experts in various fields. We also have features pages where various social issues are written about at length.

14.4 Conclusion

In this chapter I presented and discussed the findings of my research. Potential news items from the main news desk in Nairobi and from the bureaux competed to get selected as page one stories and as outlined in the findings there were a number of forces that determined the final decisions. I have combined the interviews with content analysis to determine whether a story is newsworthy just by virtue of whether it is political or not. As the study’s hypothesis predicted, the newspaper’s routine of determining what is headline material was heavily influenced by individual and collective bias of the editors for the use of political stories. With the exception of the circulation manager and the group managing editor the other interviewees individually had a low influence over what stories should be published on the front page. I can infer here that the circulation manager and the group editorial director exerted intense influence over the other editors in selecting stories for page one.

As seen from the theme on market driven factors, the news is designed to get the attention of a large audience and therefore fulfill the goal of creating higher sales for the newspaper. For this reason, stories that are sensational and dramatic were selected over stories that were gradual or unfolding. Like all daily newspapers, the *East African Standard* operates on a fast news cycle thus events which occur over a long period will not be favoured as page one material unless they reach a dramatic climax (Manning 2001). This seems to be in tune with what Fishman (1977) identified as routine news stories. He argues that “think pieces” and “news analysis” are rare because journalists actually prefer to write stories that are already partly formulated by sources. Fishman contends that this “invisible subsidy” holds down labour costs for newspapers as “ a good deal of the formulation of the written story has already been done...costing the news organization nothing other than the reporter’s time to collect what is available.” It would be naïve to assume that editors can have total editorial independence. Media owners, editors, journalists, advertisers and audiences exist in a mutually dependent system, each needing the other to function effectively. Therefore there is a need for compromise between editorial values and business goals. Gibbons (1992: 295) posits that it cannot be expected that editors will ignore the need to maximize circulation figures nor that they will be unaware of the subtle pressures that advertisers may bring to bear. Thus a compromise must be reached between news media as a business and as an institution for public good. It is not enough to have newspapers or magazines with a niche on topics that are under-reported. Instead there is a real need to mainstream such issues and this may mean a change in news values and a new way of reporting on under-reported or misrepresented or ignored issues.

14.4.1 Pointers for further research

This study had several limitations which included lack of adequate time, costs, convenience and resources. And although it follows in the footsteps of similar studies regarding the news production process, this study did not have the scope to employ observational methods. Therefore the triangulation I used was limited to interviews and content analysis. I suggest that a similar study must employ either participant or non-participant observation as one of the main methods of data collection in order to capture the normal flow of events as they happen in their natural environment. This method is also crucial in identifying the disparities between what is said by respondents during interviews and what they actually practice. Wimmer and

Dominick (1983) posit that observation is particularly suitable in gatekeeping studies because “quantification of gatekeeping is rather tenuous.” Various scholars have noted that observation as a technique of research includes within itself other methods such as interviewing, examination of documentary evidence (in this study it would have been the news diaries and news docket) and output. I would also suggest that the sample size in the content analysis be increased either to include more pages from one newspaper or more pages from different newspapers.

Future research should include other levels of analysis such as the hierarchy-of-influence model suggested by Reese (2001: 173-187). This model includes five distinct levels of analysis namely, the individual journalist, news routines, organisational level, extra-media level and ideological level. Reese (2001: 173) notes that many studies concentrate on the individual level to examine the views and characteristics of individual journalists while this model takes into account the larger structure within which these journalist function. Shoemaker et al (2001: 242) note that Reese’s model would permit gatekeeping studies to be seen as extending beyond a series of discrete decisions made by individuals to recognising that news gates are surrounded by forces that compete with one another to move stories forward or to stop them.

Chapter Five

Conclusion

14.5 Introduction

In this chapter I summarise the main findings of the study with a view to establishing whether the study met the aims of investigating how the conceptions of news values lend to the prioritization of political stories at the *East African Standard* and whether indeed political stories dominate the front pages of the newspaper.

My problem statement is well articulated by Tuchman thus:

To presuppose that the social structure produces clear norms about what is newsworthy is to negate the activities of individual news workers as well as routinised processes within news organisations which determine and shape events into news, (Tuchman, 1978).

With this assumption in mind, I set out to establish the individual and collective professional news judgments of journalists as well as organisational routines and other forces that inform news values of the gatekeepers at the *East African Standard*. I collected data through the triangulation technique which in this study involved in-depth personal interviews and a content analysis of sample pages of the newspaper. The benefits of using triangulation as a method are explained in chapter 3 among them being that the method allows for the discovery of the disconnect between what is said by respondents during interviews and what they actually practice. One of the difficulties encountered with the personal interviews was getting the news workers to make time for the in-depth interviews because they were all working against routine editorial deadlines. It was clear they were sacrificing time from their working hours to respond to my queries.

Throughout the study I referred to both seminal and recent work in order to explore the contending theories and concepts regarding news selection. In appearance headlines in a newspaper seem simple and straightforward. They howl out to readers to buy the newspaper. Yet there is a whole complex process through which headlines and front page stories are created, selected, modified and presented to the viewer. Decisions are made at each gate in this complex process. It is evident that news selection at the *East African Standard* was influenced by several factors. However, some editors implied that there exists a normative orientation of what gets selected as

a front-page story. There were suggestions that the news stories in the newspaper “mirror” what goes on in society and therefore there was no bias for political stories. However, the content analysis of the front-page sample pages revealed that there was a bias for political stories, as 16 out of 26 stories sampled were political. Majority of the editors interviewed defined their readers as “political animals” and almost unanimously declared that the newspaper records higher sales when political stories are used on the front page. The editors were in essence confirming Tuchman's (1978) argument that the traditional view of news as a reflection or “mirror” of society has long been discredited by latter-day studies of news using the interpretive approach as I did in this study.

...as news workers simultaneously invoke and apply norms, they define them. That is notions of newsworthiness receive their definitions from moment to moment, as, for instance, newspaper editors negotiate which items are to be carried on page one (Tuchman, 1978:184).

14.5.1 Findings

The findings show that the *East African Standard's* interest is to have high sales rather than commitment to the value and importance of issue-oriented journalism.

All indications were that the newspaper had no specific news beat that addressed socio-economic issues concerning development in Kenya. As pointed out by the provincial editor, the print media is increasingly facing fierce competition from 24-hour live news coverage by the broadcast news media (radio and television). Thus the need for the newspaper to package news in such a way that it attracts buyers and readers. It would appear that the traditional tenets of the media of informing, educating and entertaining have been collapsed to a single objective – infotainment. The current trend of deliberate sensationalisation of news in order to sell is evident in this study and is noted by Chalaby (2000: 37) who states that, "journalistic content is fast being replaced by the entertainment value of communication. The result is the blurring of the frontier between news and entertainment: infotainment".

Writing about the Anglo-American society, Hoch (1974: 191) criticised at the modern popular newspaper as the offspring of monopoly capitalism whose primary objective is to make profit. He says of news, "news becomes a commodity to be slickly handled and brightly packaged..." (1974: 17). Hoch's view as demonstrated by this study still

holds true even for a third world newspaper like the *East African Standard*. The study establishes that commercial imperatives are the overriding factor in determining what gets published in the front page of the *East African Standard*. The presence of the circulation manager during the daily editorial meetings that were held to specifically select stories for the front page confirmed the importance the gatekeepers attach to the newspaper's circulation and sales. This preference for publishing for high sales at the expense of publishing for useful information is at odds with a national newspaper that should ideally practice social responsibility with regards to the context of the socio-economic conditions of the country within which it operates. As stated in Chapter 2, Kenya is among the world's poorest countries. The socio-economic challenges that accompany such poverty are not adequately articulated in the print media as shown in this study. Haugerud (1995: 136) captures the depths of poverty in Kenya when she says, "Livelihood in Kenya is precarious for reasons that range from the flux of national politics, economy and institutions to the vagaries of weather, health and interpersonal relationships". As noted by Galtung (1990: 22):

Nobody assumes that the media are causes of development, underdevelopment or overdevelopment. The deeper-lying causes are located elsewhere in our structures and cultures. But it is the task of the media to mediate between deep structure and culture, the reality of events and the surface image of the news.

Galtung (1990: 22) argues that alternative reporting may inspire people to action and make them more conscious of their goals. This he says may stimulate development, democracy and participation instead of the current standard reporting where newspapers are not very interactive with their audiences and preferably give voice to the elite while the masses are ignored or given very little space to voice their concerns. An alternative paradigm for news may sound idealistic considering the entrenched individual and institutional routines and influences that maintain the status quo. However, as Bird (2000: 30), points out, "journalism is not a universal phenomenon that transcends national and cultural boundaries. Issues that are important to journalism in one context may be irrelevant in another". Thus the need to have context-specific news as suggested in this study.

My prior personal engagement with the newspaper as a journalist takes into account my understandings of the workings of the newspaper and therefore is an advantage in countering rhetoric that may have risen during the personal interviews. Rhetoric by

some editors about objectivity and “mirroring society” has been negated by the count of stories reflecting one category as more important and dominant on the front pages than others. This is confirmed by majority of the editors who claim that front page story choices are almost always confined to making a choice between one political story and another. Non-political stories apparently may even be allocated bigger space and accompanied by pictures. But they are relegated to the inside pages of the newspaper. Thus their prominence or importance is not immediate to the buyer/reader of the newspaper. Through the interviews and content analysis, the measurement of newsworthiness was confirmed to be based on political news stories. That is, if the story was political, it stood a high chance of being placed on page one than a non-political story. The overall prominence was characterised by frequency and placement. The frequency and placement and story classification were measurable through content analysis. My study was not concerned with space allocation because placement on front page was proof enough of a story’s newsworthiness. And this was regardless of whether it was a lead story, second lead or third lead. Going by the convictions of the circulation manager, most readers will buy a newspaper based on what they see on the front page. This suggests that placing a story on the front page is a verification of its newsworthiness.

14.5.2 Significance of the study

As far as I could establish, no similar academic research has been carried out and documented in the Kenyan press. The qualitative research methods used had reliable results, which can be used as a framework for further research for example by a researcher wishing to delve beyond page one. Being an exploratory study, the open-ended nature of qualitative research employed here offers the most appropriate methodology for a follow-up study. Lindloff (1987: 88) posits that "qualitative research embarks on a voyage of discovery rather than verification and is likely to stimulate new leads and avenues that may be used as a basis for further research." It is my hope that this study would stimulate other similar studies in the print media in Kenya.

The significance of the study primarily lies in the desire to objectively establish the extent to which political stories overshadow other news stories in the front page of the *East African Standard*. Extant literature about news as a genre in media indicates that

agenda setting and framing of news is significant at the level of what registers on the public or political agenda. According to Curran (2000), " media can play a pivotal role as agents of information and debate therefore facilitating development and democracy, provide public arenas for political participation and promoting accountability by leaders."

The newspaper's historical context in Chapter 2 brought to fore the similarities and differences between the past and the present news values. It informs the findings (Chapter 4) with regards to convergence and divergence of contemporary news values at the newspaper. The study reveals that just like the interests of the British colonial settlers in Kenya dominated the newspaper's front pages, the interests of the Kenyan black bourgeois elite and socialites now dominate those pages. Thus it can be concluded that independence idealized and romanticized the notion that news values would change once the "africanisation" (see Chapter 2) process was in place. Whether or not gatekeepers consciously promote political stories, advances an interest in how such stories legitimate the main point made in the introductory chapter – that news is not unbiased and usually serves the interests of the elite. This study challenges the normative assumptions that news workers are necessarily ideologically driven when selecting news stories. It reveals that the boundaries between political and non-political stories are fluid and there was nothing foreordained about the variables/categories they produced in the study. Evidence in the study shows that news discourses are not conceived in the same way as they were in pre- independence days when the issues were race oriented. Sub-conscious news values, story prejudices, sales and circulation, bureau editions, all inform the contemporary gatekeepers' decisions in front page story selection at the *East African Standard*.

14.5.3 Limitations

One of the limitations of this study is its small sample size used for content analysis. Only twelve front pages of one newspaper were evaluated for the study. I suggest that a similar study should use a bigger sample that should include two or three prominent daily newspapers, and should include all days of the week. This study inadvertently did not analyse any Monday or Saturday page samples, an oversight that is explained in chapter 4. The sample covered only the year 2001. This was also limiting considering the wider historical and contemporary context within which the

newspaper has operated in. In view of the focus of the study on political stories, a similar study would include context and content on the changes in the history of Kenya (from colonial rule to independence); national politics in Kenya (from a one-party state to multi-party); and also changes in ownership of the *East African Standard* (from British owned to Kenyan owned). Wimmer and Dominick (1983: 158) suggest that, “if measurements are to be made over intervals of time, comparisons of the numerical data from one time period to another can help to simplify and standardize the evaluation procedure”.

14.5.4 Further research

This study allows room for future researchers to experiment theoretically with a number of themes informed by contemporary theories of the press, globalization issues, and political economy theory. The findings of this study should be of interest to Kenyan journalists, existing and potential investors in Kenya's print media industry and Media Studies' scholars. The study hopefully contributes to the existing literature on news values and gatekeeping in the print media. The issue of story selection for the front page is much larger than the choices made by editors either as individuals or collectively. It includes, the preferences of the owners/proprietors of a newspaper, the sales of the newspaper and the advertising department. This study did not have the scope to explore beyond the gatekeepers and it is my suggestion that a similar study should include these other angles in order to have a more wholesome and inclusive conclusion about story selection for the front page.

Appendix A

Pages of the *East African Standard* analysed in the study

Month	Date	Day	Page	Year
January	28	Sunday	Front Page	2001
February	2	Friday	Front Page	2001
March	27	Tuesday	Front page	2001
April	11	Wednesday	Front page	2001
May	20	Sunday	Front page	2001
June	13	Wednesday	Front page	2001
July	5	Thursday	Front page	2001
August	3	Friday	Front page	2001
September	12	Wednesday	Front page	2001
October	2	Tuesday	Front page	2001
November	22	Thursday	Front page	2001
December	30	Sunday	Front page	2001

Appendix B

List of interviewees

- 1) Group Managing Editor (Overall editorial department boss)
- 2) Deputy Managing Editor (Deputises the Managing editor of the daily as opposed to the Sunday paper)
- 3) News editor (runs the daily operations of the news desk, mainly concerned with hard news)
- 4) Chief Sub editor (runs the daily operations of the sub-editors' desk mainly concerned with hard news and pictures/images to be used in the paper / also in charge of a team of sub editors)
- 5) Provincial editor (manages the daily operations of the provincial desk, mainly concerned with hard news filed by correspondents in the provinces, excluding Nairobi)
- 6) Selected bureau chiefs (3) (they manage the daily operations of the individual bureaux and deal with all news including hard, soft, features, sports etc)
- 7) Circulation manager (head of circulation department of the newspaper. Deals with newspaper sales distribution and sales revenue collection)
- 8) Selected reporters (4) (All reporting to the news editor at the news desk and attend to the regular news beats)
- 9) Assistant editor (Production) (represents the editorial department in the daily production meetings where deadlines, design, circulation, production, editorial, advertising and IT issues are discussed in detail).
- 10) Picture editor (manages the photographic department. Assigns photographers daily beats and selects pictures for use in the paper. Liaises daily with the news editor and other editors)

Total number of people interviewed was 15.

Appendix C

Interview guide

(i) A sample of the questions asked

Full names:

Job title:

Job description:

Do you play a role in the news selection process at the East African Standard?

Describe your role

What is your definition of news?

What in your opinion sells as news to Kenyan readers and why?

Is your opinion the same as that of the EAStandard?

Who reports to you? Do they in your opinion influence news selection?

Who do you report to? Do they in your opinion influence news selection?

What in your opinion determines news selection at the EAStandard?

Is news from the bureaux treated differently from news in the capital Nairobi?

Explain your answer.

In your opinion are there non-editorial factors that affect news selection? Name them.

What in your opinion is the relationship between owners and editors at the newspaper and how does this affect news selection?

Add any other information directly related to the news selection process at the newspaper.

(ii) Topics to cover

News values

Editorial/owner relationship

Gatekeeping

Hierarchical influences (individual and organisational)

Appendix D

Letter of request to conduct research

From: Roseleen Nzioka
Department of Journalism and Media Studies
Rhodes University
Grahamstown
South Africa

To: The Group Editorial Director
East African Standard
Nairobi
Kenya

Date: 21st June 2002

Dear Sir,

RE: Permission to conduct research at the *East African Standard*

I am writing to seek permission to conduct a media-related research at the East African Standard. The information obtained will be used to write up my thesis in partial fulfilment of the requirements for an MA degree in Journalism and Media Studies at Rhodes University, South Africa.

The research is about gatekeeping at the newspaper, that is, the selection of news items for publication. My focus will be to observe the main news desk but I will want to interview selected reporters, selected editors, you and the bureau chiefs. I will also need to attend the various editorial meetings and make copies of the daily news docket.

Everything observed or said will be treated confidentially and identities of interviewees will remain anonymous. The research will take about three (3) weeks starting June 28th to July 20th, 2002, weekends included. Upon arrival, I will explain the research goals in more detail.

Please acknowledge receipt of this request.

PS: Ms Anthea Garman is my thesis supervisor.

Yours sincerely,
Rose Nzioka

CC: Anthea Garman

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