



Evaluating Application of Editorial Policies in Shaping News Quality in Tanzania: A Case of Daily News and Mwananchi Newspapers

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Abstract— This study examines the application of editorial policies in Tanzania's print media newsrooms with a view to shaping news quality, focusing on two prominent newspapers: Daily News and Mwananchi. It aims to provide an understanding of how Tanzania's print media incorporate the contents of editorial policies into daily operations. A mixed-method, qualitative-dominant approach was used, whereby data were collected through questionnaires and interviews. Data were collected from 60 respondents, and thematic analysis was carried out on their perceptions to evaluate how the media integrate editorial policies into their operations, with the Gatekeeping Theory framing this study. The findings show that the methods of incorporating these guidelines vary, with 19 respondents (31.66%) identifying gatekeeping by editors as the primary mechanism. A total of 21 respondents (35%) pointed to training and awareness programs as methods used to enhance policy implementation. Twenty respondents (33.33%) cited other implementation methods, such as in-house style management and postmortem reviews. The findings suggest that the role of editors in enforcing editorial guidelines is lower compared to in-house training, awareness education, and other mechanisms. The study recommends that more efforts be made to familiarize journalists with editorial policies, emphasizing the effective application of policy content by ensuring a robust gatekeeping role and making editorial policies readily available for journalists to consult. This will elevate journalism standards in Tanzania.

Index Terms— Editorial Policy, News Quality, Tanzania, Daily News, Mwananchi.

1. Introduction

The global media landscape is increasingly challenged by factors that undermine the quality of news content. Economic constraints, intense competition among media outlets, and a surge in tabloidization have collectively transformed journalism. Heightened competition has amplified sensationalized news, with professional journalists increasingly drawn to softer news stories, as noted by Wang (2012). Economic pressures, in particular, compel news organizations to prioritize profitability over journalistic integrity, often reducing newsroom resources, investigative reporting, and focusing on sensationalist content to maintain audience engagement. This trend has eroded news quality, shifting

content from fact-based reporting to entertainment-driven narratives.

The proliferation of digital platforms and social media intensifies these challenges for traditional news outlets, which now adopt strategies to retain readership amidst rapid change. This shift encourages tabloid journalism, prioritizing celebrity gossip, scandals, or clickbait over substantive reporting. Such trends threaten journalism's core values, including accuracy, objectivity, and the essential watchdog role of the media in society.

In response, editorial policies have become crucial tools for maintaining news quality and credibility. These policies shape newsroom decisions, ensuring alignment with journalistic ethics and professional standards. Editorial policies help journalists navigate complex production demands, balancing profitability with public interest, maintaining objectivity, and upholding ethical standards amid political and economic pressures.

In Tanzania, the media faces these global challenges alongside unique domestic dynamics. Tanzanian media organizations rely on editorial policies to ensure balanced, accurate reporting. However, commercialization and government interference frequently compromise the application of these policies, impacting overall news quality. Media capture and market segmentation are driven by the dominant CCM, which uses regulatory frameworks to limit press freedom, compounded by stark divides between rural-urban and Zanzibar-Mainland regions (Pamela Jiménez Cárdenas, 2017).

Research by Katunzi and Spurk (2022) shows a twofold pattern in Tanzanian journalistic quality, with a notable improvement from 27% in 2019 to 31% in 2022 across various quality criteria, including multiple sourcing, multi-perspective reporting, and root cause analysis. However, Tanzanian media operates under the strain of political influence and economic constraints, with internal newsroom pressures further explaining quality disparities (Spark & Katunzi, 2023).

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2. Literature Review

One significant aspect of editorial policies is their influence on the role conceptions of journalists. Research highlights that editorial policies often emphasize ideals of neutrality, which can lead to a predominance of the disseminator role among journalists, thereby reinforcing traditional journalistic standards (Mellado *et al.*, 2020). This adherence to neutrality can impact how stories are selected and presented, often prioritizing hard news over sensationalism, as noted in the context of infotainment trends in media (Mellado *et al.*, 2020). Moreover, editorial policies can significantly affect how marginalized groups are represented in the media. Weak editorial policies can lead to biased coverage and a lack of support for social change, particularly regarding minority issues (Gitau *et al.*, 2023). This highlights the importance of robust editorial frameworks that promote inclusivity and diversity in news coverage.

To discover the factors that influence communications policy, however, one has to go beyond the conventional view of media and communication studies and try to combine them with policy studies. This is because communications policy is a product of politics, economics, and culture: interest groups and corporate bodies press for congenial policies, politicians and civil servants jockey for influence over outcomes, political problems occur during policy implementation, and so on, according to Papathanassopoulos and Negrine (2010).

The media do not tell people what to think but rather what to think about by focusing attention on certain issues over others. The media's ability to influence the public agenda is a powerful role, and editorial policies play a crucial role in guiding this process (McCombs & Shaw, 1972).

A. Theoretical Literature Review

Several theoretical perspectives in communication and media studies can help assess the role of editorial policy in shaping the quality of news, including Gatekeeping Theory, Agenda-Setting Theory, and Framing Theory. These theories have significant implications for the study of editorial policies and news quality.

Gatekeeping Theory has guided this study in considering the role of editorial policies in newsrooms' operations to determine what should and should not be published.

Gatekeeping Theory, initially developed by Kurt Lewin (1947), focuses on how information is filtered and controlled by those in decision-making positions, such as editors in the newsroom. According to this theory, editors and newsroom leaders act as gatekeepers who control the flow of information by selecting, shaping, and filtering the news content that reaches the public.

In Tanzania, media institutions play a crucial role in shaping the information flow to the public. Gatekeeping Theory, with its focus on editors and decision-makers controlling the flow of information, has specific nuances in the Tanzanian setting. Here, editorial decisions are often influenced by political pressure, regulatory frameworks, and financial constraints. These realities can limit the ability of editors to operate autonomously, leading to selective gatekeeping practices. Tanzanian media operate under laws like the Media Services

Act of 2016, which introduces legal frameworks that influence editorial freedom. Editors may filter or suppress information to avoid government scrutiny, thus impacting news quality by limiting diverse perspectives.

Many Tanzanian media outlets are privately owned or controlled by entities with political or commercial interests. Editorial policies may, therefore, reflect the interests of the owners rather than journalistic independence. The editorial gatekeeping process may limit the diversity of viewpoints presented, affecting the objectivity and credibility of the news. This, in turn, shapes how Tanzanian audiences trust and consume media content.

Editorial policies in Tanzanian media may prioritize issues that align with commercial interests, such as business ventures of media owners, while giving less attention to critical public concerns like poverty, health, and corruption. The quality of Tanzanian news may be compromised when editorial policies align too closely with political or commercial agendas, potentially leading to imbalanced reporting. As a result, the public agenda might not reflect the most pressing societal concerns, creating a skewed representation of reality.

B. Empirical Literature Review

A study by Shoemaker and Reese (2014) explored the impact of editorial policies on news content in U.S. newsrooms. They found that organizational routines, influenced by editorial guidelines, significantly shape the type of news published. The study used content analysis of various U.S. news outlets and concluded that editorial policies often prioritize economic and political interests over public service journalism. This leads to a narrowing of news diversity and depth, affecting the quality of news by under-representing minority or controversial perspectives.

A study by Oso (2012) examined how editorial policies in Nigerian media are shaped by regulatory frameworks and political influences. The study employed interviews with media professionals and a content analysis of newspapers. It found that editorial policies in Nigeria are heavily influenced by government regulations and the political affiliations of media owners, leading to biased reporting.

Wasserman and de Beer (2005) conducted a study focusing on how editorial policies in South African media influence public interest journalism. The study used case studies of major South African newspapers and interviews with editors to explore how editorial guidelines prioritize or de-prioritize certain types of content. The researchers found that, although South Africa has a strong tradition of independent journalism editorial policies are increasingly influenced by market pressures, leading to a focus on sensationalism and entertainment at the expense of serious public interest reporting. The commercialization of media has led to a shift away from in-depth investigative reporting, with editorial policies increasingly driven by audience ratings and advertising revenue, the study shows. Therefore, the research study argues that as editorial policies prioritize profitability over public service, the quality of news is compromised, particularly in terms of depth, accuracy, and balance.

In Tanzania, a study by Mwakalobo (2015) explored the relationship between editorial policies and media freedom in the country. The study conducted surveys and interviews with journalists and editors across leading Tanzanian newspapers. It found that editorial policies are often influenced by government oversight and ownership structures, which limit editorial autonomy. Journalists reported instances of self-censorship, particularly when covering politically sensitive topics. The research established that editorial policies in Tanzania are constrained by political interference, which hinders free and independent reporting. Journalists feel pressured to adhere to editorial guidelines that align with government interests. Hence, the quality of news suffers as editorial policies lead to self-censorship, resulting in limited critical reporting on political issues.

Also, Ndumbaro (2018) examined how editorial policies affect investigative journalism in Tanzania. The study focused on two major Tanzanian newspapers and used interviews with investigative journalists to determine how editorial guidelines either support or hinder in-depth reporting. The findings indicated that while some newspapers have editorial policies that promote investigative journalism, many impose constraints due to financial limitations or external pressures from advertisers and political actors. The study asserts that editorial policies often restrict investigative journalism, particularly when stories involve powerful political figures or sensitive topics like corruption. Financial and political influences play a significant role in shaping editorial decisions.

3. Methodology

This study employed a mixed-methods approach, primarily qualitative analysis supported by quantitative analysis, to provide a comprehensive and multidimensional understanding of how editorial policies are communicated to editorial staff to shape news quality in selected newspapers (Daily News and Mwananchi). This approach allowed for the exploration of patterns and numbers (quantitative data) as well as contextual insights and experiences (qualitative data).

For the quantitative aspect, the research collected data on the numbers and percentages measuring indicators of news quality within editorial policies, such as comprehensiveness, accuracy, balance, and diversity. Paper and online questionnaires were used to gather quantitative data from journalists.

On the qualitative side, the study used interviews with key informants (editors) to explore how editorial guidelines are communicated. Semi-structured interviews with editors provided in-depth, contextual insights into how editorial policies are implemented and how they affect news quality. This approach was essential for understanding the real-world experiences of those involved in news production.

The target population included 80 reporters and editors working under employment contracts with the two newspapers, Daily News and Mwananchi. However, 54 participants completed and returned the questionnaire (both online and on paper), and six editors participated in face-to-face interviews during data collection.

4. Findings and Discussion

A. Findings

The findings are based on examining how editorial policies in the Daily News and Mwananchi are communicated to shape news quality in Tanzania. This involves analyzing the role of editors in making editorial content understood by journalists, as well as providing training to junior journalists and using other methods.

1) *Communicating Editorial Policies Through Editors*

Among the 38 respondents surveyed via an online questionnaire, 13 emphasized that editors play a central role in communicating the contents of editorial policies, as they are responsible for reviewing and approving news articles submitted by journalists. Face-to-face interviews with all six editors revealed a consistent emphasis on their gatekeeping responsibilities, confirming their role in actively enforcing editorial policies within the newsroom. The remaining 16 respondents who completed paper questionnaires did not mention the role of editors in this aspect. Table 4.1 below presents the extent to which editors communicate editorial content.

Table 1
Editors' communication on editorial contents

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Online questionnaires	13	21.7
Paper questionnaires	0	0
Face-to-face interviews	6	10
Total	19	31.7

Source: Research Data, 2024

2) *Communicating Editorial Policies through In-House Training/Building Awareness*

Fifteen respondents who completed the online questionnaire highlighted training and awareness-building initiatives for journalists as methods used to impart an understanding of editorial policy contents. Additionally, six out of the 16 respondents who answered via paper questionnaires supported that training is a means to integrate editorial policy contents into daily operations. However, this aspect was not mentioned in the face-to-face interviews. Table 4.2 below presents the extent to which training is used to communicate editorial content.

Table 2
The extent to which training is used to communicate editorial contents

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Online questionnaires	15	25
Paper questionnaires	6	10
Face-to-face interviews	0	0
Total	21	35

Source: Research Data, 2024

3) *Communicating Editorial Policies Through Other Channels*

A total of 10 respondents who completed the online questionnaire pointed to additional methods, such as adhering to in-house style guides, conducting regular morning postmortem reviews, and distributing the editorial policy document to ensure familiarity with the guidelines. Similarly, 10 respondents who completed the paper questionnaires also

mentioned these channels. Table 4.3 below presents the extent to which editorial policies are communicated through these other channels.

Table 3
The extent to which communication is done through editorial policies to other channels

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Online questionnaires	10	16.7
Paper questionnaires	10	16.7
Face-to-face interviews	0	0
Total	20	33.4

Source: Research Data, 2024

Overall, the data show that of the 60 respondents: 19 respondents (31.7%) identified gatekeeping by editors as the primary mechanism. A total of 21 respondents (35%) pointed to training and awareness programmes as method used to enhance policy implementation. 20 respondents (33.4%) cited other implementation methods, such as in-house style management and morning postmortem reviews.

B. Discussion

The findings from this study highlight the significant role of training and awareness-building as means of enforcing editorial policies within the Daily News and Mwananchi. However, they also reveal nuanced insights that contrast with some existing studies regarding editorial independence and policy enforcement in Tanzanian media.

The reliance on training and ongoing awareness programs aligns with Gitau et al. (2023), who emphasized the importance of capacity-building in newsrooms. Gitau's research suggests that such initiatives strengthen journalists' adherence to editorial policies and ultimately support higher news quality. The current study affirms this view, with 35% of all 60 respondents identifying training as a key factor in upholding editorial standards, particularly in the face of political or economic challenges.

However, Ndumbaro (2018) found that Tanzanian media outlets rely heavily on the role of editors to enforce policy adherence, reflecting the gatekeeping role observed in this study. Editors at the Daily News and Mwananchi serve as the first line of enforcement for editorial guidelines, ensuring that published content aligns with ethical and journalistic standards. Similar to Ndumbaro's study, which revealed that gatekeeping reduces the influence of external pressures on reporting, this study also shows that editors actively work to uphold policy adherence by filtering and managing content quality.

Additionally, Wasserman and de Beer (2005) highlighted that private media outlets tend to have greater editorial independence than state-owned outlets, given their reduced susceptibility to government control.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

While editors play a critical role as gatekeepers, this study highlights those additional strategies, such as formalized training programs and regular postmortem reviews, also enhance policy adherence. Tanzanian media organizations would benefit from consistent training initiatives that promote

understanding and implementation of editorial guidelines across all staff levels, ensuring that editorial integrity is upheld despite external pressures.

Furthermore, to bridge the gap between editorial policy knowledge and effective enforcement, Tanzanian media may consider increasing transparency in policy dissemination by making editorial guidelines readily accessible to all staff members. This approach would not only foster greater compliance but also reinforce the professional standards that define quality journalism.

Future research should examine the evolving impact of digital platforms on editorial standards, particularly as online and social media channels increasingly influence content production and consumption in Tanzania. By exploring these dynamics further, Tanzanian media can develop a more resilient framework for upholding news quality in an increasingly complex media environment.

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