

Assessment of the Daily Newspaper Readership and Accessibility in the Nairobi Metropolitan Area in Kenya: A Study of Public Engagement with Free Newspapers

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ABSTRACT

The study sought to determine the extent of daily newspaper readership, the accessibility of such newspapers, the range of issues covered, and to explore the feasibility of filling the gap left by the mainstream paid-for newspapers, such as the Daily Nation. The study was framed within three theoretical perspectives: Uses and Gratifications Theory, Agenda-Setting Theory, and Political-Economic Theory. Being an exploratory investigation, the researcher purposively picked Nairobi City County as it is the capital city of Kenya. The research purposively sampled 20 respondents: 10 readers and 10 non-readers of newspapers. The research utilised qualitative methodology, including semi-structured interviews and content analysis. The study findings revealed that content on politics, diplomacy, as well as issues affecting powerful, wealthy and elite, dominated major news pages of the *Daily Nation*, leaving issues of common man largely unaddressed. Most respondents reported reading the Daily Nation as it carried comprehensive political and business news. The research found a gap in coverage of topics related to small and medium enterprises (SMEs), entertainment, education, and social issues such as transport, water access, and crime. The study concluded that a free newspaper focused on addressing the concerns of the general populace, especially the grassroots, is not only viable but necessary in the Nairobi metropolitan area. The findings strongly suggest that there is a market for a publication that caters for everyday issues, offering accessible and relevant content. It is recommended that media organisations and stakeholders explore opportunities to develop free newspapers that prioritise grassroots issues, ensuring greater inclusivity and public engagement in media consumption.

Key terms: Accessibility, common man, free newspapers, metropolitan, newspaper, readership.

INTRODUCTION

Newspapers have, for decades, been a common form of print media communication around the world. Apart from bringing us news and information longer than any other media form, newspapers have always been the most inexpensive way for people to get news and advertising information. Most newspapers around the world are paid for, meaning they have a cost. This study focuses on emerging trend in print media: free newspapers, also known as free sheets.

In Kenya, the cover price of mainstream newspapers such as the Daily Nation and the Standard is sixty Kenyan shillings (KSH60). The price is a barrier to many would-be newspaper readers who would want to buy their own copies, as evidenced by research by Ipsos Synovate (as cited in Nyabuga & Booker, 2013), the forerunner of the Steadman Group, a Kenyan research company. The Synovate research revealed that slightly over three million Kenyans read a newspaper every day, with many not buying their own copies. The probe found one reason that newspaper readership was low due to high cost of the of the daily papers, with many arguing that they could not afford to buy a newspaper, which cost Kenya shillings forty (KSH 40).

It would, therefore, mean that even if the “grassroots” or “common man's” issues were being covered in the mainstream newspapers, many people would still not access the paid-for newspapers due to their prohibitive prices. Coverage of events in the mainstream newspapers is more likely to favour the powerful, the affluent and the elite. This means the range of coverage of grassroots or common man’s issues almost always published by such mainstream newspapers is narrow, mainly due to political-economic factors, which dictate that newspapers should carry content that would help them sell and, in turn, bring in revenue.

This indicates there is a need for a newspaper, especially a free one, which would not only cover the common man's issues in depth but also reach wider audiences at the grassroots level. Bigger audiences for these free newspapers would attract advertisements and, in turn, translate into increased revenues for the publishers. This study, therefore, sought to explore the possibility of starting a free newspaper, also known as a free sheet, to fill the gap left by

mainstream paid-for newspapers in the coverage of the common man's issues at the grassroots in the Nairobi metropolitan area.

The general objective was to explore the viability of establishing a free newspaper (free sheet) in Kenya and, in particular, in the Nairobi metropolitan area. Three specific objectives were: To establish the level of daily newspaper readership and accessibility in the Nairobi metropolitan area; To establish the range of issues covered in the *Daily Nation*, the leading mainstream paid-for newspaper in Kenya; and To explore the viability of establishing a free newspaper (free sheet) in the Nairobi metropolitan area.

Three research questions were: What is the level of daily newspaper readership and accessibility in the Nairobi metropolitan area? What is the level of daily newspaper readership and accessibility in the Nairobi metropolitan area? What is the level of daily newspaper readership and accessibility in the Nairobi metropolitan area?

According to a study carried out in 2008 by the Steadman Group, now known as Ipsos Synovate, Kenyan print media readership is relatively small, with approximately 37 per cent of Kenyans saying they had not read a newspaper in more than a year. The study revealed that about 2.2 million people in Kenyan towns read newspapers daily, compared to 2.6 million rural folk (Steadman Group, 2008, cited in Mbeke & Mshindi, 2008). Picard (2011) observes that while the concept of free newspapers has been common in Europe, the Americas, and Asia, the idea seems relatively new in Africa, with free papers being available in only four countries: Morocco, Egypt, South Africa, and Botswana. As such, this researcher has identified a gap that has been left by mainstream newspapers in Kenya and will, therefore, seek to examine the viability of establishing a free sheet to cater for the large population that cannot access newspapers due to their high cost. According to Bowen, as cited in Allen and Gagliardone (2011), circulation of print media around the world has stagnated and, in some cases, gone down because of “affordability, given the high production cost and heavy taxation of newsprint. Circulation and sales, respond to the economy and the current situation is unfavourable” (Ongowo, 2011). A free newspaper will,

therefore, not only be the voice of the voiceless at the grassroots but also be accessible mainly to many poor people in both rural areas and urban centres, in particular in the Nairobi metropolitan area.

The concept of free newspapers is relatively new in Kenya, as evidenced by the fact that there is almost no literature on such publications. The closest Kenya came to having a free newspaper was between 2009 and 2010, when the country's leading mobile service provider, Safaricom, itself a subsidiary of Vodafone of the United Kingdom, used to sponsor *The Star* once every month. The newspaper, then costing Kenya shillings thirty-five (KSH35), would be distributed free of charge, mainly around the Nairobi metropolitan area, as well as parts of the country. By sponsoring *The Star* through advertising and having it distributed free of charge so Safaricom products appearing in the advertisements could reach as many people as possible, the publisher was, in effect, turning the then-young paper into a "free newspaper." Though there has not been documented research, vendors reported curious interest among readers and non-readers of newspapers, who would flock to newsstands early to pick free copies. It can, therefore, be arguably observed that such interest in the pick-up newspaper was a clear indication that there existed, and still exists, a gap in the newspaper sector that could be filled by a free newspaper. The mainstream newspapers in Kenya today, and in particular, the Nairobi metropolitan area, tend to cover and highlight the "big guy" events or agenda. Such newspapers tend to either reduce to brief stories on the common man's issues, relegate them to the inner pages, or ignore them altogether. To such mainstream newspapers, the common man's agenda is a non-issue unless such citizens are involved in committing crimes.

As Croteau and Hoynes (2003) observe, the media surround us, with our everyday lives being saturated by communications tools, including the radio, television, newspapers, books, the Internet, movies, recorded music, and magazines. The presence of a newspaper, as Sawisky (2010) observes, is a key component of maintaining the quality of life in an isolated city, town, or village by promoting and increasing civic engagement in the community in addition to presenting readers with information on decisions affecting their community.

McQuail (2010) observes that the early newspaper was marked by its regular appearance, commercial basis (openly for sale), public character and multiple purposes. Thus, it was for information, records, advertising, diversion and gossip. Fang (1997) writes that newspapers, as the new tool of communication, replaced some measures of oral communication. Given the opportunity, people preferred to read their information rather than hear about it.

In Africa, the newspaper can be traced back to the era when most countries on the continent were under colonial governments (Makali, (2003). Frank Barton argues that throughout Africa, "the Adam and Eve of Africa's newspapers were the government gazettes" (Makali, 2003). Such gazettes were introduced by the government as vehicles for transmitting state information to citizens. The earliest private Press served the socio-political interests of the immigrant races in settled colonies such as Kenya, where Whites had a stake in the continued subjugation of Indigenous people. The emergence of the Press in Kenya, therefore, followed the same trend as was the case in most colonies in Africa. However, none of Kenya's newspapers are free sheets. This study, therefore, seeks to explore the viability of establishing a free newspaper in Kenya, particularly in Nairobi City County, which is part of the Nairobi metropolitan area.

According to Correia-da-Silva and Resende (2013), a free daily newspaper distributes news to readers and sells ad space to advertisers. The world's first free newspaper is the *Metro*, which was founded by three journalists in Sweden in 1995 to serve the Stockholm metropolitan area, and it has since become the world's leading free sheet (Bergström & Wadbring, 2008). The success of the *Metro* free sheet tabloid newspaper inspired this study to assess the suitability of such a newspaper in the Nairobi metropolitan area. Apart from shoppers or advertisers, both given free of charge to shoppers at malls, there is no true free newspaper in Kenya. This study, therefore, sought to assess daily newspaper readership and accessibility in the Nairobi Metropolitan Area, which has a population of 3.1 million, with 97.7 per cent being able to read and write.

The research sought to advocate for a free newspaper that would be more accessible and help highlight

"small or common man's" issues that mainstream newspapers tend to ignore. The study will help advertisers assess if advertising their products in free newspapers will help them reach the widest possible audiences. The results may be the basis for further studies in the area of free newspapers in Kenya. The study hoped to give an insight into the newspaper sector in the Nairobi metropolitan area, with a view to motivating the Nairobi City County leadership, media houses, newspaper publishers, as well as local and international investors into considering a venture into the publication of free newspapers and, therefore, help enhance the dissemination of news and information to the widest audience possible. This is important, as a free newspaper would help more readers get free information about what is happening in their locality and the world around them. In addition, the study could be used in future to develop a detailed business plan related to free newspaper ventures.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept of free newspapers or free sheets is new in Kenya, as evidenced by the fact that there is almost no literature on such publications. As such, there is a lack of prior research studies in Kenya on the topic of free newspapers. However, for this study, there was a need to go through a lot of literature on free newspapers.

According to Mzungu (2013), the cost of paid-for mainstream newspapers has often been cited as a key barrier towards accessing a newspaper, especially among the rural population. The researcher observes that in the three traditional media platforms in Kenya (radio, television and newspaper), newspaper readership has the lowest incidence of weekly engagement amongst the adult population. Mzungu (2013) adds that six million out of the twenty-two million persons interviewed claimed to have read newspapers on a weekly basis, representing about 22 per cent of the adult population. According to the researcher, about three-quarters of the weekly newspaper readers are male and affluent.

Apart from purchasing their own copies, Mzungu (2013) observes that newspaper readers also source for such publications from other household members and also from the office or workplace. A slightly higher

proportion of the rural population who read the newspaper weekly purchase their own copy compared to the urban population, where a higher proportion of the readers access the paper from the workplace or office. Mzungu (2013) argues that print media will, therefore, need to be dynamic to be able to maintain and also generate audiences. The key to growth will be the need to provide local news, which is a key driver of newspaper readership, and more so with the redefined regional governance. There will be a need to provide content at both regional and nationwide levels and customise content to suit the media consumption habits of the different demographic profiles. Society, he adds, should definitely expect to see a highly fragmented media audience, the emergence of sub-brands of major media houses and the demand for quality content development tailored to the various media consumers.

Such findings inspired this researcher to find out if the cost of Kenya's leading mainstream newspapers, in particular, the *Daily Nation*, at Kenya shillings sixty (KSH60), is a barrier to many accessing newspapers in the Nairobi metropolitan area. It also made the researcher interested in seeking to find out how residents in poor areas in the metropolitan area access newspapers. In addition, this study sought to find out the residents' perceptions of the establishment of a free newspaper as well as what the content of such a newspaper should be.

Picard (2011) argues that the general potential audience of newspapers includes the literate population in a market. However, the author writes that there are three sub-groups of that audience. First, there are habitual readers. These are the core readers who regularly read newspapers and wish for a regular flow of information to understand the world around them and to make decisions. Secondly, Picard (2011) adds that there are occasional readers who want information and diversion but are less committed to devoting time or money to newspapers. Finally, there are those who can read but don't. They have never acquired the habit and believe that newspapers are not interesting enough to spend time or money on. Paid dailies have traditionally targeted habitual readers as their primary market and then sought to pick up more circulation among less committed or occasional readers. Free dailies primarily target the

occasional reader and some habitual and non-readers. To attract these readers, free dailies create an editorial profile based on short stories designed for quick reading. (Picard, 2011).

This study attempted to investigate if readership habits in the Nairobi metropolitan area would likely change with the establishment of a free newspaper. For instance, would non-readers of paid-for newspapers start reading if a free newspaper were introduced? Would habitual readers of paid-for newspapers diversify and start also reading free newspapers?

As Picard (2011) observes, the concept of free newspapers has been common in Europe, the Americas, and Asia, but the idea is relatively new in Africa. The author's findings inspired this researcher to conduct research to find out whether there exists an opportunity for the establishment of a free newspaper not only in Africa but in Kenya and, in particular, the Nairobi metropolitan area. As Zhang (2011) observed, researchers have gone out to explore what kind of groups make up the readers of free newspapers, the main question being: Do they change the habit of reading a charged or paid-for newspaper or have never read charged newspapers before?

Such observations prompted this researcher to explore whether the establishment of a free newspaper would likely affect readership trends among residents in the Nairobi metropolitan area.

Uses and Gratifications Theory

Proposed by Jay Blumer, this theory attempts to explain the uses and functions of the media for individuals, groups, and society in general. A medium will be used more when the existing motives to use the medium lead to more satisfaction. This study used this theory in an attempt to find out why people read newspapers and what they look for in newspapers they choose to read. This helped find out the range of newspaper readership and the basis for starting a free newspaper. As McQuail (2005) observes, the uses and gratifications approach seeks to explain the uses of media and the satisfaction derived from them in terms of the motives and self-perceived needs of audience members. Audiences are often formed on the basis of similarities in individual needs, interests and tastes. Typical of such 'needs' are those for information,

relaxation, companionship, diversion or 'escape' (McQuail, 2005). Media use, as Tan (1985) argues, is goal-directed, and people use the mass media to satisfy specific needs which develop out of people's social environment. Receivers select the types of media and media content to fulfil their needs. Thus, the audience initiates the mass communication process. And we are able to "bend the media" to our needs more readily than the media can overpower us (Tan, 1985). A study by the Media Council of Kenya (2012) revealed that media liking in Kenya is based on information, education and liberalism as the audience gets to discover events unknown to them that one would generally not know about and have the choice to choose from which media to receive this information. Since the audience is aware of its needs and can report them when asked, and they are also aware of their reasons for using the mass media, in particular newspapers (Tan, 1985), in this study, this theory was used to explain why readers choose the *Daily Nation*, the main paid-for circulation newspaper in East and Central Africa.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This being exploratory research, the researcher used the qualitative research method as it would help get in-depth data about the usage of stories, such as content, allocation of space, and placement on newspaper pages. The concept of free newspapers being relatively new in Kenya, an exploratory approach, as Baxter (2003) argues, is the best when a researcher examines a new interest or when the subject of study itself is relatively new. In addition, exploratory studies, according to Baxter (2003), are typically done for three purposes: to satisfy the researcher's curiosity and desire for better understanding, to test the feasibility of undertaking a more extensive study, and to develop the methods to be employed in any subsequent study. Exploratory studies are also quite valuable in communication research as they are essential when a researcher is breaking new ground. Such studies can almost always yield new insights into a topic for research (Baxter, 2003).

This researcher carried out the study in a bid to break new ground regarding free newspapers. The researcher was not only curious to understand the

issue of free newspapers but also to test the feasibility of starting a free newspaper in the Nairobi metropolitan area. In addition, the researcher sought insights into the topic area of free sheets.

Qualitative design also offered respondents the opportunity to describe their experiences of newspaper readership. The design allowed the respondents to express their views, giving words to experiences and describing situations on newspaper readership. The approach allowed the respondents to explain why they either read or did not read newspapers.

The qualitative approach was the most suitable as it helped yield findings that reflected the respondents' perspectives. This meant that the findings were relevant and could easily be transformed into interventions for potential media practitioners. Besides, the qualitative approach helped the researcher examine the respondents' experiences and emotions. The design, as Boeije (2010) argues, is described as the most appropriate when exploring topics that are strange, uncommon or deviate from the "normal". The topic of a free newspaper is still uncommon and strange and deviates from the norm in the Kenyan market, hence the appropriateness of this approach. As Boeije (2010) observes, the purpose of qualitative research is to describe and understand social phenomena in terms of the meaning people bring to them. Qualitative design also helped produce rich, descriptive data that needed to be interpreted through the identification and coding of themes and categories, leading to findings that contributed to theoretical knowledge and practical use.

Data Collection Methods

In-Depth Personal Interviews

This researcher used semi-structured interviews to seek answers to the research questions: "What is the level of daily newspaper readership and accessibility in the Nairobi metropolitan area? What is the range of issues covered in the Daily Nation as the leading mainstream paid-for newspaper in Kenya? and What" is the viability of establishing a free newspaper (free sheet) in the Nairobi metropolitan area?"

Qualitative interviews enabled the researcher to gather data on people's perceptions of free newspapers. The method also offered the researcher

the opportunity to gain insights into what the respondents perceived or knew about free newspapers. This approach was utilised to understand the issue of starting a free newspaper from the perspective of the audience. The approach also helped the researcher understand more deeply what respondents thought and felt about newspaper coverage and readership.

For this study, the researcher purposively picked interviewees on the streets, at business and shopping centres, in estates, bus termini, in hotels and eateries, as well as at low-end barber shops and social gatherings. The researcher purposively picked the respondents he believed could give necessary data. The researcher mainly took notes during the face-to-face interviews as it was not practically possible to tape-record the respondents.

As Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias (2007) observe, the most flexible form of interviewing is the non-structured or non-directive interview. This researcher utilised unstructured interviews to get deeper information from respondents. As Baxter (2003) observes, qualitative interviewing is appropriate for learning about a phenomenon that cannot be directly observed, and data are gathered in an open-ended manner. In this study, the concept of free newspapers was a phenomenon that could not be directly observed, thus calling for open-ended interviewing.

Qualitative Content Analysis

The researcher employed the qualitative content analysis method to analyse the *Daily Nation* as the approach enabled the researcher to get in-depth data about the way stories were treated in terms of their placement on pages and usage in terms of length. Qualitative content analysis, as Baxter & Babbie (2003) observes, was done on how the *Daily Nation* treated stories focusing on the powerful, the affluent and the elite vis-a-vis those focusing on the common man at the grassroots. The focus was on how the *Daily Nation* heavily focused on the agenda of the elite and downplayed the agenda of the common man at the grassroots. Emphasis was on the placement of stories on the pages and their usage in terms of depth.

Through qualitative content analysis, the researcher was able to go beyond the mere number of stories used in the *Daily Nation* and analyse the reasons

behind their usage and how they were treated in terms of prominence, which is normally indicated by the depth of the story and the page on which such a story is placed. The analysis sought to find out the range of issues covered in the *Daily Nation* affecting the grassroots or common man in the Nairobi metropolitan area. However, the researcher used quantitative content analysis to determine the size of news coverage and themes during the study period.

The study revealed that the quality of treatment of “elite” versus “common man’s” stories differed sharply. While the coverage of the elite was generous with prominence, details and depth, with most occupying the front page as well as the first five pages, stories on the common man at the grassroots were mainly reduced to briefs and pushed to page six and beyond. It is worth noting that though the common man made positive news, the *Daily Nation* did not highlight such news.

Sample Size and Sampling Technique

The population of the study was newspaper readers, who are always the targets of media houses, as well as non-readers, who media houses work so hard to attract and convert to newspaper readers. This researcher used purposive sampling — a non-probability sampling — which is also known as judgmental sampling. Purposive sampling, as Tan (1984) observes, was appropriate for this study as the researcher would select the sample depending on the nature of the research aim, which was to explore the viability of a free newspaper.

According to Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias (2007), purposive sampling is the most common sampling technique, and the researcher actively selects the most productive sample to answer the research question. With purposive samples, researchers select units subjectively to obtain a sample that appears to be representative of the population. Baxter and Babbie (2003) observe that non-probability sampling is suitable for situations where there is no list of the population or research units. In this study, there was no list (sampling frame) of all readers or non-readers of mainstream newspapers.

The researcher purposively selected the *Daily Nation*, which is the largest circulation newspaper in Kenya

(Mbeke & Mshindi, 2008). The *Daily Nation* normally dedicates the first six news pages to what it considers the main stories of the day. The newspaper appears to give readers a break with a full-page advertisement on page seven. The researcher purposively selected the month of July 2013 for two reasons. First, there were no major stories that would have forced the *Daily Nation* to give them special treatment and allocate the first six news pages to the coverage of such events. July also marked the time the devolved system of county government in Kenya took shape following the reading of the national budget in the previous month of June. In the study, the total number of stories that appeared in the first six news pages of the *Daily Nation* in the month of July 2013 was 229.

In this study, the sample, too, was not representative of all newspaper readers or non-readers in Nairobi. The researcher purposively picked Nairobi City County as the capital city of Kenya. As Bryman (2004) observes, the *absolute* size of a sample is important, not its *relative* size. According to Baker and Edwards (2012), it is impossible to specify the number of qualitative interviews necessary to complete a project at its inception. Adler and Adler (as cited in Baker & Edwards, 2012) advise that graduate students sample between 12 and 60, with 30 being the mean. A large sample, Bryman (2004) also observes, cannot guarantee precision, so it is probably better to say that increasing the size of a sample increases its likely precision.

The research purposively sampled 20 respondents: 10 readers and 10 non-readers of newspapers. The respondents were just picked as they either relaxed or went about their businesses. The researcher picked respondents he believed would provide relevant information.

Data Analysis and Presentation

The analysis involved segmenting and reassembling the data, and this was done through a coding process. Coding meant categorising segments of data with short words or summaries. Coding was aided by coding manuals and coding schedules. Coding was the first step in moving beyond concrete statements in the data before making analytic interpretations.

When coding, the researcher distinguished themes or categories in the research data and named them by

attributing a code, which was a label that depicted the core topic of a segment. While coding, a researcher was looking for descriptions and in-depth statements that went beyond the concrete observations in the specific sample.

The researcher employed open coding, axial coding, and selecting coding. Open coding involves breaking down, examining, comparing, and categorising data, while axial coding involves putting data back together after open coding by making connections between categories. Selecting coding refers to looking for connections between the categories in order to make sense of what is happening in the field.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Content Analysis

Size of News Coverage and Themes

The results revealed that out of 229 stories, 74, or 32.3%, were on politics and diplomacy, 41 (17.9%) on crime and security, and 34 (14.8%) were on courts. Stories on education were 27 (11.8%); economics and business 24 (10.5%); health, environment and wildlife 12 (4.4%); accidents and disasters 10 (5.2%); and human-interest and religion were 7 (3.06%)

Concept and Need for the Establishment of Free Newspaper

The researcher sought the views of the respondents on whether they would support the introduction of a free newspaper in Kenya, and in particular in the Nairobi metropolitan area. The respondents were probed further as the researcher sought to know why they would support or not support such an idea.

Most of the respondents, 16 out of 20 (80%), were of the view that such a newspaper was viable (see Figure 4.5). Some of those for the idea were of the opinion that a free newspaper would make more people read and get informed. A free newspaper, they argued,

would encourage many people to develop a reading culture. A free newspaper, others argued, would help highlight the common man's issues, especially at the grassroots level as well as in rural areas. Some respondents said that many Kenyans would welcome a free newspaper as most people just like free things. Many argued that a free newspaper would not only help readers get free information but also help them save money. Others argued that a free newspaper would help them to relax and keep them busy.

R1, who described himself as a keen newspaper reader, stated: *"Free newspapers should target those poor people in rural areas or at the grassroots who cannot afford newspapers. They should educate the people to think out of the box in terms of jobs and careers – that is, to think on diverse issues and to educate the people on what they can do after college without necessarily looking up to careers they studied for at college."*

There was a respondent who argued that instead of having free newspapers, media houses "such as Nation," should subsidise the cost of newspapers. He argued he would not "waste" his money in buying a paid-for newspaper if a free newspaper was introduced.

R2: *"The cost is high. It should be between KSh25 and KSh30."*

Many argued that a free newspaper would help cover the common man's issues at the grassroots level in depth. Such a newspaper, they argued, should highlight issues at the grassroots so other people could know what was happening.

R3, a keen newspaper reader and a buyer, stated: *"The (free) newspaper can help discover talents in sports, for instance in football. If local talents are highlighted and have been exploited, we can have people of national caliber."*

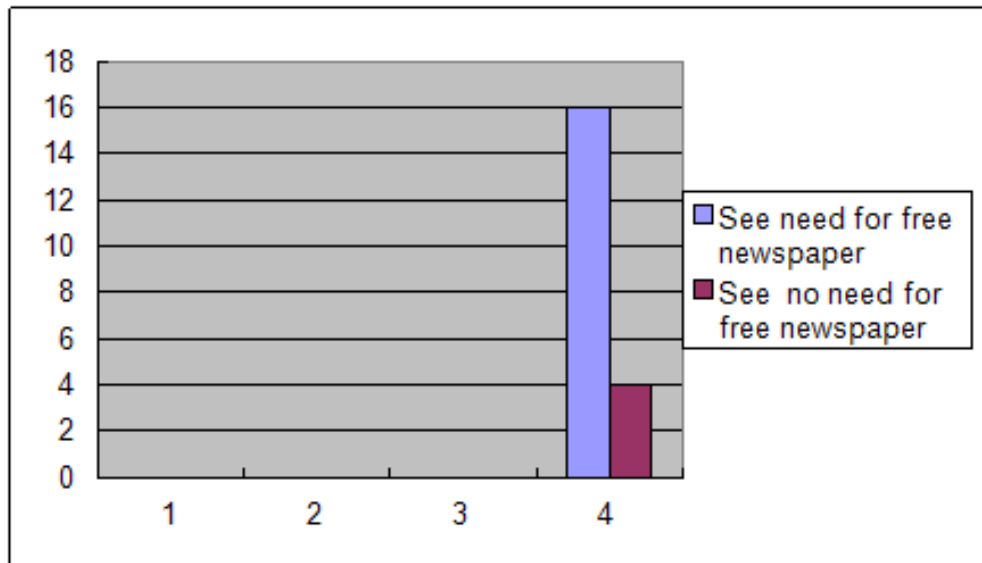


Figure 4.5: Need for a Free Newspaper

The few respondents who were opposed to the idea of a free newspaper argued that such a publication should not be offered as most publishers would not make profits, and still, people who did not know how to read would not read them at all, even if the papers were freely available to them. One respondent said publishers should start county newspapers and sell a copy at a subsidised cover price of, say, between KSH20 and KSH30. Other respondents argued that some people would misuse a free newspaper, as many do with free things.

R1: *“I think free newspapers cannot give quality, well-researched information. They better cover a lot of stories and sell.”*

The few respondents who were not for the idea of a free newspaper argued that such a newspaper would either not make profits or would not have quality content. As such, people would not read it. Others said many people do not like free things.

R2, an owner of a small stationery shop, stated: *“People do not like free things. They would misuse it. They would use it (the free newspaper) as toilet paper.”*

Newspaper Readership and Accessibility

In newspaper readership, it was observed that the *Daily Nation* was the most popular newspaper, as all the respondents reported reading it. One respondent said the *Daily Nation* had detailed news, especially business stories, which he always looked for in the newspaper. The paper was also attractive and well-designed.

It was observed that people read newspapers for varied reasons. The study found that readers access newspapers differently, and all the respondents stated they did not read them daily for varied reasons. Many of those who read newspapers said they did so to get news about current affairs, especially politics. Others sought business stories, while a few read for relaxation. Some readers said they go for newspapers to read advertisements, including property and vehicles for sale, as well as job vacancies.

There were those who said they read newspapers for relaxation. Others seek newspapers to read advertisements.

R1: *“I read to be informed. To read current news, in particular political affairs. I also read when I am idle, to keep me busy.”*

Another respondent, an engineer, reported seeking newspapers to read politics, opinion and science news. He stated that his busy work schedule in East Africa demanded flying a lot. Therefore, he could not buy newspapers on a daily basis. He reported he reads the *Daily Nation*, his favourite newspaper, online on his mobile phone.

R2: *“I read online because most of the time I am travelling. I buy when I am at home on weekends, and when relaxed. If in the house on weekdays, I buy.”*

Another respondent reported reading newspapers mainly to get sports news.

R3: *“I read sport. I like football news, but not in detail. I look for job opportunities for my children. I also read*

advertisements on vehicles, and obituaries to know if a relative or someone I know has died.”

Yet another respondent reported reading newspapers only to get stories on human interest as well as advertisements.

R4: *"I read politics, human-interest stories, advertisements, mainly on plots and cars."*

Another, an employee in a small business engaged in stationery, stated that he, in particular, reads *Daily Nation* as it is rich in business news.

R5: *"Nation has a lot of business news which I like reading. It is also attractive in layout, design and fonts. It carries in-depth stories, mostly on business."*

A college student said she reads newspapers, mainly the *Daily Nation*, to *"Get information on what is going on in the country. Stories on youth, fashion, entertainment."*

Using the Uses and Gratifications Theory, this study concludes that the respondents chose the newspaper seeking to gratify themselves on various issues.

The study sought to know if those who read newspapers bought them and how often. This question was meant to assess the accessibility of newspapers. Most said they access the newspaper in offices, workplaces, kiosks, barber shops (kinyozi) or borrow it from friends and neighbours.

When asked if the readers bought newspapers, the majority of the respondents stated they did not buy them because they could not afford them. The cover price of Kenya shillings sixty (KSH60) for mainstream newspapers was said to be prohibitive among the majority of the respondents.

R1: *"I would like to have my own but I cannot afford it. Sh60 is a lot and I better use it on something else."*

Another respondent stated:

R2: *"I used to buy every day until 2010 when my children had not joined school. Now I cannot afford. The price is too high for a common mwananchi."*

Yet another respondent said the high price has since forced him to stop buying the newspaper.

R3: *"There was a time I used to buy. But the price has affected me."*

The findings indicate that due to economic reasons, many people preferred meeting other financial obligations, such as buying food, to buying their favourite newspaper. The findings revealed that such people who could not afford newspapers would be more than willing to accept and read a free newspaper made available to them.

Some respondents explained their habits of accessing and reading the newspapers:

R4: *"I read at the kiosk when I am having lunch or taking tea."*

R5: *"At Sh60, the newspaper is costly. That's why I read at the office."*

R6: *"Sometimes I don't buy because it is costly. I borrow from a friend, or go to a kiosk to read the newspaper. I buy tea which I take as I read the newspaper although my main purpose is not tea. At the kiosk, we dismantle the paper and many people read different pages at the same time."*

It was apparently clear from the findings that the cost of newspapers was a great barrier in terms of newspaper accessibility among newspaper readers.

Those who did not read newspapers had varied reasons, with many, especially business people, explaining that they were too busy working at their businesses and chasing money to get time to read newspapers. Some said they were not interested in reading newspapers because they did not give them what they wanted. They stated they preferred reading stories about human interests, education, business, and sport, arguing that mainstream newspapers mainly carried political stories.

One respondent, among those who said they were not interested in newspapers, stated:

R1: *"Not that I don't have funds, but I don't see benefits of a newspaper. They are always full of politics."*

A roadside kiosk operator stated:

R2: *"Reading is like relaxation and life is hard. I have to be working all the time to look for money."*

Still others said they did not read newspapers because they got news through radio, television, Facebook, mobile phone, and "gossip." There was one who said she did not read newspapers because she did not like them.

R3: *"I just don't like newspapers."*

One respondent, a graphic designer, admitted not being interested in reading newspapers save for the time she hears people talking about an interesting human-interest story, mainly on relationships. Even then, she would not buy a copy but only borrow one from friends.

R4: "I read very rarely, when there is dramatic stories, such as relationships, and killings."

The findings were in line with the Uses and Gratifications Theory, which advances the argument that people selectively go for the media that gratifies them.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion: The findings indicated that quite a significant number of people accessed mainstream newspapers either by reading at offices, workplaces, eateries, barber shops or borrowing from friends. They did this because they could not afford the relatively high cost of newspapers. The findings indicated that there is a need for a newspaper that would address the common man's issues at the grassroots. Such a newspaper should be published for free so as to reach a wider target, including those who cannot afford to buy their own copies. The findings showed that the price of mainstream newspapers at Kenya shillings sixty (KSH60) was a major barrier to potential newspaper readers. Many reported accessing newspapers mainly by borrowing from friends and neighbours or reading at offices, places of work, eateries or barber shops. It can be deduced that most news events affecting the common man at the grassroots of the Nairobi metropolitan area do not make their way into the *Daily Nation*, which is a national mainstream paid-for newspaper. Instead, politics, diplomacy, and issues affecting the powerful, the wealthy, and the elite continue to dominate major news pages of the *Daily Nation*. As such, there is a huge gap left by mainstream newspapers as far as the

coverage of grassroots or common man's issues in the mainstream newspaper is concerned. The study revealed that a free newspaper is viable in the Nairobi metropolitan area. A newspaper focusing exclusively on the Nairobi metropolitan area could help address the trend. Although the level of daily newspaper readership and accessibility in the Nairobi metropolitan area seems to be average, media houses or publishers should explore ways of enabling their target audiences to access more newspapers. Greater reach would attract advertisers, who would, in turn, bring in the much-needed revenue.

Recommendations: The researcher recommends publishers of such free newspapers should engage freelance distributors or agents to help make the free sheets accessible to more people within the Nairobi Metropolitan Area. As some respondents argued during the research, instead of having a totally free newspaper, such publications could have subsidised cover prices. The researcher, therefore, recommends further research on the need to subsidise the cover price of such a free newspaper that would publish news and articles only on grassroots or common man's issues in the metropolitan area. Such a subsidy would enable as many people as possible to access newspapers by buying their own copies. This would, in turn, save many potential readers the trouble of depending on copies in offices, workplaces, eateries, public transport vehicles such as matatus, *kinyozi* (barber shops), or even borrowing from friends or neighbours. The researcher also recommends further investigation to determine whether free newspapers would attract a wider readership and, in turn, increase advertisements, translating into growing revenues for the publishers. In addition, there is a need for further research on the impact of free sheets on the revenue of newspaper publishers.

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