

## **Mass Media Coverage of East Africa Community Integration: A Case of Kenya**

By

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### **Abstract**

The purpose of this study was to examine Kenya's mass media coverage of regional integration in the East African Community (EAC) using mixed method research methodologies. Study begins by a brief history of EAC integration to demonstrate the dream and aspiration for regional economic bloc and political federation among EAC member states. The study then examines the channels of mass media coverage of the integration issues in terms of frequency of coverage, the number of issues covered per program per day, the length of coverage in minutes in audio and visual channels and columns allocated in print and internet sources. Using both probability and non-probability sampling techniques and employing qualitative and quantitative data collected through questionnaires from 99 respondents, the study found that the EAC dream of uniting under one economic bloc and political federation has been long and is still ongoing. The public in Kenya relied on the mass media as the main source of obtaining information on the EAC integration. Radio was predominantly the channel that most citizens received information regarding the EAC integration, because of its accessibility, affordability, and wide coverage. The citizens mostly receive information regarding the structure of the EAC, the leadership changes, new policies and amendments and economic related news. Further, the media covers 1-2 issues per program per day and the length of broadcast coverage in most programs falls below 60 minutes in audio and visual channels. In print media, 1-2 columns are allocated to issues related to EAC integration. This study recommends the media to fully cover issues of EAC integration so as to inform and influence the public opinion of citizens in Kenya towards the EAC integration. Study also voices the need to safeguard the independence of media which will ensure neutrality in reporting leading to dissemination of accurate information regarding the EAC integration.

**Key terms:** East African Community, Mass Media Coverage, Media Influence, East Africa Community Integration

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### **Introduction**

The role of the media in informing, covering and influencing regional integration has been a subject of extensive discourse (Trenz, 2013; Oranga, 2014, Makunyi, 2015; Odero 2020). Existing literature admits that mass media coverage has ripple effect in influencing not just the public but also policy (Liao, 2023). This notwithstanding, the search for more nuanced understanding on nature, need and challenges of regional economic blocs is still ongoing. As nations increasingly collaborate through integration, the media becomes a valuable source of information, shaping public perceptions and contributing to the discourse on collaborative efforts (Ausat Abu, 2023). In the context of Western nations, particularly in Europe, the media has played a pivotal part in covering integration issues. The comprehensive coverage by Western media has resulted in a better understanding of matter relating to regional integration within organizations like the Group of Twenty (G20) and the gigantic European Union (EU) (Hoskyn,1998). Thus, media entities are portrayed as integral players fostering the global economy. Media has been seen as a tool which shapes the thinking and ideologies of people and also influences socialization process. The media changes unwanted situation or views by creating mass mindset able to unite and take common stand about an issue and also creates positive mental image of a brand on organization on the image of the public (CC Plus, 2021). Therefore, the media is regarded as the fourth pillar of democratic policy.

Although the EAC integration is being fast tracked, the process is said to receive limited attention and media coverage (Mang'era, 2012) This little media attention has the potential of negatively impacting of enhanced communication through media channels becomes evident. Increased visibility and coverage can lead to a better-informed public, fostering support for integration initiatives and creating a conducive environment for collaboration among member states. This study examines the role of mass media in influencing the Kenya's public on the East Africa Community integration. By leveraging the media's influential reach, regional organizations can enhance their visibility and promote a shared narrative that fosters public engagement, thereby strengthening the foundation for successful and sustainable regional integration efforts (Lyimo, 2014). Somehow, there is scarcity of literature on the part of media in promoting regional integration process. Much of what exists is assessment of citizen awareness of the opportunities and challenges provided by the EAC. In Kenya, the role of print media but not the mainstream media has been analyzed. Existing literature therefore, leaves a gap on the role of mass media in promoting the integration process of the EAC which this study sought to fill. With reviews pointing towards dearth in academic discourse on Kenya's significant media outlets, such as, K24, Citizen radio and TV, Nation radio and TV, and KTN among other media houses. It is on this basis that the current study aims to determine the mass media's role and coverage in the EAC integration in Kenya.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The role of the media in fostering integration has been a subject of considerable discussion. Partner states of the East African Community (EAC) diverse and vibrant mass media networks that create a significant impact on the perceptions and attitudes of the people on many events. Adequate media coverage can encourage citizens to become more involved and support faster integration. Although most people agree that regional integration is a good thing, progress is being hindered by a lack of action of many stakeholders including media. The media also referred as the fourth estate is central in international relations and diplomacy. According to Diamond and McDonald (1982) concept of multitrack diplomacy the media is centrally placed and influence all other eight tracks of diplomacy. As powerful tool the media can escalate or de-escalate efforts towards integration. It informs and can influence the dynamics of integration by providing the voice of the citizens.

The public opinion gets shaped and expressed through the print media, television and radio as well as social media lately. The advantage is that the media raises awareness of issue to mass population. Since the dream of full integration of East African communities has not been realized, the partner states can leverage on the power of the media to address the challenges to integration. The media can frame and change negative perceptions that exist among the citizens. By doing so, the media can create a more constructive and optimistic environment that will help communities in EAC to move forward towards achieving integration. Efforts towards integration of communities are crucial and require the support of lobbying, advocacy, and public opinion shaping to ensure its acceptance by the masses.

The absence of active media engagement threatens to dim the aspiration of the leaders and the communities in EAC. The prioritization of some paid-up programs, politics and conflicts impedes efforts in disseminating information relating to integration. Therefore, the disparity existing between the overall envisioned role of the media and its actuality in informing, changing opinions has in one way or another hindered the prospects of amalgamation of EAC member states. This dashes the dreams and desires of citizens of the partner states of EAC who very well know the potentials and advantages of integrated economic bloc. It is therefore, prudent that this study is undertaken to provide answers on Kenya's mass media coverage in promoting integration in the EAC.

### **Objectives of the Study**

#### **General Objective**

The general objective of this study was to investigate Kenya's mass media coverage on East African Community (EAC) integration.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The study was guided by the functionalist theory and agenda setting theory. In the first hand, functionalism theory, developed by David Mitrany in 1948, offers a constructive approach to regional integration. The theory emphasizes the need for solving common problems collaboratively, rather than focusing on conflicts of interest. Mitrany (1948) believed that functionalism could help prevent war and establish world political institutions. He saw national coactivity, achieved through cooperation between states, as the key to achieving ideal peace. Mitrany (1948) suggested that creating a specialized international agency to handle problems

outside traditional diplomacy could encourage governments to work together to solve common problems for mutual benefit. He believed that this collaborative approach would take precedence over national sovereignty. Mitrany (1948) further identified the gradual process of this collaboration as federal installments, which would enable states to work together towards common goals and alleviates the challenges facing developing and highly industrialized countries. This theory aims to promote peaceful co-existence by introducing organization that transform state institutions in the global system by creating stateless that makes it hard to lay claims of sovereignty.

Functionalism serves as a relevant and comprehensive hypothetical framework for understanding the implication of mass media in the integration, both at the regional and global level. Functionalism, as a model seeking to promote inter-state cooperation calls for the participation of interstate organizations in fostering collective democracy and establishing peace in the world. This theoretical perspective prioritizes realistic strategies for solving problem on growth and development affecting many nations by promoting interdependence in and among nations. In the context of the EAC integration, functionalism aligns with the objectives of fostering cooperation, trust-building, and recognizing common interests among member states.

In this study, the need for the member states in EAC to cooperate, build trust on common interests aligned with the objectives of the EAC future integration prospects. The EAC seeks to enhance economic collaboration, social unity, and regional advancement through cooperation in various functional areas, including trade, infrastructure development, and political dialogue. Functionalism also highlights the reputation of professionals in the policymaking process. In the context of the EAC, this could include professionals from diverse fields contributing to the creation and execution of policies.

The involvement of professionals ensures a more informed and effective decision-making process, aligning with the functionalist emphasis on practical problem-solving. The role of mass media in promoting cooperation within the functionalist framework becomes evident in addressing informational and communicative requirements. Mass media serves as a crucial tool for disseminating information, fostering public awareness, and facilitating dialogue among member states. By providing a platform for information exchange and promoting shared narratives, mass media contributes to the creation and promotion of a collective regional identity and the advancement of common goals. The functionalist offers a good notion for assessing the importance of mass media in encouraging integration within the EAC. Further, mass media contributes to the functionalist goals of promoting social unity and regional advancement as aspired in the context of the East African Community.

On the second hand, Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw introduced a concept called the Agenda Setting Function of the Mass Media in their publication in 1972. This concept has been an essential contribution to the field of media studies and helped shape our understanding the influential role of the media in shifting peoples' opinion. According to this theory the media has a significant role in shaping public discourse by emphasizing important public issues and influencing people's opinions. They provide factual information and help people determine how much attention to give to a particular topic. Newspapers and TV news offer various cues that effectively communicate the importance of an issue to the public.

Accordingly, the news media can serve as a constructive force by highlighting key public issues and shaping public opinion around them. By prioritizing important issues, the news media

can play a crucial role in building a knowledgeable community by giving prominence to the most pressing matters. The news media plays a critical role in providing information and images about public affairs, which are often inaccessible to most citizens. It is the primary source of information about the world, and what we know about it is largely based on what the media decides to tell us. However, it is important to understand that the media's view of the world strongly influences the public's priorities. Media's coverage of public issues over time creates an agenda that shapes public opinion. While some issues are emphasized, others receive minimal coverage or are not mentioned at all.

### **Review of Related Literature**

Muhammad et al. (2023) and compatriot Li et al. (2022) underscore the strategic importance of integration of states in regional economic blocs as a means to achieve economic development. Their observations emphasize how integration expands markets, acting as a stimulus for investment. Additionally, integration fosters collaboration among states, playing a role in resolving existing conflicts. However, the success of integration initiatives relies heavily on effective communication within and across member states, as highlighted by Ndolo (2005).

The media, spanning various forms including conventional outlets, stands out as one of the most potent vehicles shaping global public discourse (Renold, 2019). It possesses the capacity to change public opinion, disseminate information, carry and propagate political propaganda and transmit important information that not only educates but also promote the desire of a people in a region to come together and integration (Trenz, 2013). The media, with its broad reach and influence, becomes instrumental in bridging communication gaps and creating a shared narrative that supports integration efforts. By providing comprehensive coverage and analysis, the media can contribute to building a collective understanding of the benefits and challenges associated with regional integration (Kibret, 2000).

The role of the media in fostering integration has been a subject of considerable discussion, particularly in the context of successful integration efforts in regions like the European Union (EU), as noted by Trenz (2013). Trenz's examination emphasizes the press's function in fostering unity, regional cooperation, awareness of milestones of the organizations and contributions of each member states to the realization of the future aspiration of the regional blocks. In the case of the EU, the media in EU countries played a pivotal role in creating narratives, stories and public awareness campaigns the integration of the EU economic bloc. This highlights the media's potential to shape narratives, influence public opinion, and contribute to the success of regional integration efforts. Bereketeab's (2012) contribution offers a similar insight in regards to role of media in disseminating information, facilitating social change and in mobilization of masses in the African economic blocks. Bereketeab (2012) conducted thorough research using a mixed-methods approach, incorporating surveys, and analysis of media reports fused with content analysis.

Raymond (2013) acknowledges the assertions of Bereketeab (2012) while offering a distinctive perspective in his own study. Raymond's research focuses on probing the crow's nest of African leaders in regards to ongoing endorsement of regional integration as a crucial element within their development agenda. Employing widespread interviews and policy research, Raymond (2013) noted that all African leaders recognize that regional integration as a strategy will attract foreign investments, enlarge markets and spur growth and economic development in

Africa. This research provides a unique vantage point on the underlying reasons that drive regional integration and underscores the significance of media in effectively communicating leaders' objectives and fostering popular support

Smith (2015) undertook research focusing on the impact of mass media in facilitating the integration process of the East African Community (EAC). The study was conducted in Kenya using mixed-method approaches. The data analysis on media coverage was done using polls of public opinion. The research by Smith (2015) noted the mass media is crucial in circulating information, molding public perspectives and views about regional integration in the EAC. Smith (2015) further observed that the media can effectively rectify existing misunderstandings on some policies by sharing precise information regarding the prospects of political integration, hence fostering public understanding of issues at stake.

Hefeker and Gros (2019) highlight the necessity of creating a unified legal and policy foundation to foster successful integration. This concept aligns with the goals of the EAC, which will establish a common market and promote cooperation among its member states. Understanding the importance of policy harmonization becomes crucial for addressing challenges and facilitating a seamless integration process within the East African region.

The study conducted by Johnson *et al.* (2012) done in Tanzania focused on examining the place of mass media in fostering and cultivating a sense of regional cooperation and identity in EAC integration process. Through qualitative interviews and questionnaires, the authors aim was to shed light on the role of media in shaping public understanding and perceptions on matters of regional integration. Johnson et al (2012) emphasized the importance of media in rectifying misunderstandings and disseminating precise information about the integration process. They argue that effective communication through media channels contributes to the development of a collective regional identity and fosters cohesion among the populace. In Uganda, Gilbert and Opondo (2022) conducted a comprehensive investigation to examine the unique contributions of each mass media platforms in creating awareness and changing public perception on regional integration debate.

The study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative approaches in research, such as interviews and questionnaires. Gilbert and Opondo (2020) delve into the multifaceted role of radio, newspapers, and television in disseminating information and shaping public attitudes regarding regional integration within the East African Community (EAC). The use of a mixed-research approach allowed Gilbert and Opondo (2020) to capture a holistic understanding of how various media platforms contribute to awareness and public engagement in the context of regional integration. The study recognizes the unique strengths and roles of television, newspapers and radio in conveying information to the public and molding public attitudes.

Brown (2018) in a study conducted in Rwanda, analyzed the role of newspapers in coverage of regional integration issues. The author chose the newspapers since it is regarded as conventional media channel in many nations. The method used involved newspaper content analysis and interviews with journalist. Brown (2018) concluded that the newspapers in Rwanda do by large extend create awareness on issues of regional integration among the public in Rwanda. They do so by offering many opinions and examining policy consequences of some decision undertaken by reginal leaders.

Rwigema (2022) conducted a study in Burundi to examine the influential role TV can

play in influencing opinions and molding public perceptions, and attitudes of the citizens toward regional integration in EAC. Using qualitative approaches, the researcher examines the nature of television programs and its influence on the viewers. Rwigema (2022) highlighted concluded that TV programs have high capacity of influence. Television programs, including news bulletin, panel discussions and documentaries do effectively portray individuals' narratives on EAC integration. Further, television was observed to promoted feelings of inclusion and connection with members of the local community.

Ndlovu (2016) undertook a study focusing media coverage integration. The study examined problems and challenges the mass media faces in ensuring balance coverage within the EAC. The objective of Ndlovu (2016) investigation was to provide insights about the quality of information and extend of media coverage of matter relating to EAC integration process. This piece of literature found out that mass media has inherent biases. This bias affects how the media receives and portrays information on integration-related matters within the EAC. Accordingly, Ndlovu (2016) asserted that the media coverage of the EAC integration process was full of criticism as it is perceived to be inadequate in depth and exhaustiveness. Although Ndlovu (2016) noted that exploration of EAC matters by the media was by itself delicate and complicated due to the intricacies of all aspects of integration.

Bartoszewicz and Eibl (2022) also make a contribution to media coverages of regional integration issues. The authors observed that many media stations are more preoccupied by superficial elements about integration, while neglecting to explore the broader social, economic, and political dimensions of regional integration. We endeavored to categories which are the themes regarded as main and subsidiary to EAC integration process. We in particular weigh in on matters of custom union, currencies, the common market protocol and the future prospects of political federation. This study will single and describe matters that are mostly focused by the media. The review pointed towards issues like, politics, elections and disputes in the EAC. The limited scope of information provided by the media poses a potential obstacle to the public's comprehension and involvement in the integration process.

A well-rounded understanding of regional integration requires attention to a wide array of factors, including economic cooperation, political harmonization, and social integration. Neglecting these aspects in media coverage may hinder the development of an educated and engaged population, as individuals may lack the necessary information to fully appreciate the multifaceted nature of the integration process. Another significant finding from Ndlovu's (2016) research was the identification of biases and preconceptions existing in some media outlets. The author observed that certain media platforms were found to be portraying integration in a more biased or unhinged manner. The media bias may have negative influence on the communal opinion and brashness toward the integration process. Biases and typecasts possess latency that obstruct impartiality in reporting hence negate gains attained in integration.

In another study on the East African Community (EAC) cooperation framework, Mburu and Ndiku (2020), observes that integration-related matters are mostly sidelined by the Kenyan media. The study's findings revealed a tendency in media coverage to prioritize politics tensions and how disputes emanate in the of study. Hardly do media houses emphasize the positive dimensions of regional integration. This skewed stresses risks and existing potential to shape public perceptions and hinder a comprehensive understanding of the collaborative efforts within the EAC. The study's findings align with the broader discourse on media coverage of regional

integration matters within the EAC, where political events often take precedence in the media narrative. This emphasis on political tensions can overshadow the positive aspects and achievements of regional cooperation, potentially contributing to a skewed public perception of the integration process.

The presence of uneven attention, as such identified in Mburu and Ndiku (2020), this study underscores the importance of media outlets providing balanced coverage that highlights both challenges and successes in the integration process. A more comprehensive representation of integration-related matters ensures that the public receives a nuanced understanding of the complexities involved, fostering informed opinions and constructive dialogue. The influence of political prejudices, as suggested by the prioritization of political tensions in media coverage, raises concerns about the potential for biased narratives. Media organizations must be vigilant in avoiding political bias and strive to present information objectively, enabling the public to form opinions based on accurate and impartial reporting.

In another study by Ndung'u and Ndeti (2019), the focus shifted to examining the relationship amid media stations, its owners and the influence it has on the EAC integration process. The study accentuated the worth of considering media proprietorship, its structures, the composition of editorial boards and policies, and the methods of journalism used in passing information and how these media attributes influenced public opinion. Ndung'u and Ndeti (2019) noted further that, ownership of media outlets and the prescribed policies guiding editors in that media house has direct consequences of mass media ability to relay information on integration. This study sheds on how editor allocate time and space to types of information and which will catch the headline and which one will not. It is therefore, imperative is matters of EAC integration catch headlines of leading dailies and news bulletin.

Tiampati and Onyango (2022) probed further into how the portrayed matters of regional integration and the media impact on the public and how the public endorsed achievement of EAC integration. The research aimed to examine how news on integration is framed and presented, as well as its consequential influence on the general mood within the public sphere. One of the key aspects explored in the study was the framing of integration-related news. Framing denotes to the manner in which information is presented, emphasizing certain aspects and perspectives while downplaying others.

The reviews above have shed understanding on how the media framed stories about EAC integration, whether highlighting the positive aspects, challenges, or potential benefits. Recognizing and addressing this disparity in media coverage is crucial for fostering a more informed and engaged public, which, in turn, can contribute to the success and sustainability of regional integration efforts in East Africa (Tiampati, 2022). In this context, the research aims to bridge this gap and shed light on the crucial role that media can play in shaping perceptions and facilitating meaningful dialogue on integration within the East African Community.

## **Methodology**

Both probability and non-probability sampling techniques were used. The study adopted a mixed method survey design which involved collecting and analyzing both qualitative and quantitative data. The study was conducted in Nairobi County and it relied on both primary and secondary data to source information. Data was gathered through interview schedules and questionnaires from the participants of this study. The target population comprised members of



the public, journalists and editors, government officials, and the members of civil society. This study made use of mixed sampling approaches and techniques. The techniques used were convenience and purposive sampling. The size of the sample was 99 participants.

## **Data Presentation Analysis and Discussion**

### **Brief History of East Africa Community Integration**

The ambition for uniting the Countries within East Africa under one confederation goes back in history to the colonial period (Odebero, 2011; Odero, 2020). The colonial administrators in the region began to establish social and economic cooperation in 1897 by constructing railway from Kenya to Uganda (Kirungi & Okello, 2011). They also founded bodies to regulate trade and commerce among the countries (Donald, 2007). These bodies included the formation of the Customs Collection Centre in 1900, the establishment of the East African Currency Board in 1905, the formation if the Court of Appeal for the Eastern African region in 1909. Later on, the East African Customs Union was founded in 1919 at the end of World War one. To realize a political federation, the East Africa Governors Conference was started in 1926. This was followed by the formation of the East Africa Income Tax Board in 1940. Other bodies were also formed during the colonial period Mutisya (2011).

After independence of Tanzania and Uganda, the East African Common Services Organization was formed in 1961. The framework of cooperation and commerce established by the colonial master became the building blocks for the formation of the East African Community in 1963. These pre-independent arrangements were stable until the year 1977 when the EAC collapsed because of a number of factors not limited to incompatibility of the government of the three founding counties of the community (Mutisya, 2011).

Even after collapse, the wish of people and leaders to form a cooperation and to integration as partner states of EAC still continued. During the signing of the EAC winding up agreement in 1984, the leaders of the countries tasked their Foreign Affairs Ministers to explore avenues for future cooperation. The three nations founded Tripartite engagement and had regular meetings which culminated to the signing of treaty for the formation of the EAC in the month of November 1999. The treaty entered into force in July 2000. This rekindled the dream for integration of the East African states. The EAC today comprises of nine members states namely, Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda, Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Southern Sudan and Somalia.

### **The Role of Media Coverage in East Africa Community Integration**

This study focused on assessing the influence of mass media coverage on public perception of EAC integration in Kenya. It focuses on the preferred mass media channel for covering EAC integration, the number of issues in relations to EAC covered in one mass media programs per day, the number of Columns Discussing EAC Integration Process news in print media, and the time allocated for EAC News in terms of minutes

### **Preferred Mass Media Channel for Covering EAC Integration**

The study begun by assessing mass media channels for conveying information. The findings were as tabulated.

**Table 1: Channels conveying information**

<b>Channel</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
TV	20	20.0
Radio	32	42.0
Newspaper	15	26.0
Internet Sources	9	12.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source:** Field Data, 2023

From table 1, radio was predominantly the channel that most respondents received information regarding the EAC Integration process i.e. 42%, and this is as a result of low cost of purchasing radios which makes most Kenyan households to afford them, and also because they are portable and available on trader’s mobile phones. They reported that they can listen to news while engaging in their business activities. They further reported that purchasing newspapers daily has become too expensive especially with high levels of inflation. 26% and 20% of the respondents reported to be receiving information on newspapers and TVs respectively. Only 12% of the members of public received information on internet sources. These findings are in congruence with the findings by Mangera (2012) who observed that the radio was the leading channel in disseminating information on the EAC integration.

The second commonly used method or channel for disseminating EAC news was the newspaper followed by social media and finally the television. According to Hans-Jorg Trezn (2013), the mass media is understood to comprise of many forms including print as in newspapers and magazines, television, radio broadcast and programs, film, arts, exhibitions, and lately the emerging new media in digital platforms. All these forms of media are very powerful instrument capable of influencing public opinion, disseminating information, promoting political agendas, educating, entertaining, and fostering national integration, as noted by Hans-Jorg Trezn (2013).

### **Frequency of Mass Media Coverage on EAC Integration**

This study investigated the frequency of coverage on information about the EAC integration by Kenya’s mass media and observed as follows.

**Table 2: Frequency of Coverage of EAC integration**

<b>Access of Information</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Once in a week	57	75.0
Daily	2	3.0
Thrice Weekly	12	16.0
Monthly	5	6.0
Yearly	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source:** Field Data, 2023

From table 2: majority of the respondents 75% received the information on the EAC Integration process once in a week. 16% of the respondents reported to be receiving the EAC Integration process information thrice weekly, while 6% and 3% respondents received the EAC integration process information monthly and daily respectively. This indicates that either media gives little attention on the EAC Integration related issues or they lack sufficient information regarding EAC Integration to air frequently.

### **Number of issues in relations to EAC covered in one mass media programme per day**

This study sought to know the average number of issues in relations to EAC covered in one mass media programme per day. The issues under review included the establishment of the common market, free movement of persons, goods and services, the right to establish business and reside in any place within the region, free movement of capital, the role of EAC legislative assembly, the functions of the EAC court of justice and the proposed political federations. The issues were categorized as 1-2 issues, 3-4 issues and more than five issues. The information gathered was analyzed as presented in table 3.

**Table 3: Number of issues on EAC covered in one mass media programme per day**

<b>EAC Issues Discussed</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
1-2	60	79.0
3-4	16	21.0
5 and above	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Source:** Field Data, 2023

From table 3, it was found out that 1-2 EAC related issues were discussed in one media coverage at 79%, followed by 3-4 at 21%. This indicates that there is lack of in-depth analysis and reporting of the EAC Integration process by the mass media. As Mwesige and Wasswa (2017), observed that the common theme features in the media's reporting of regional integration matters in of the EAC was regional politics and conflicts in the region.

There was a consensus among the 12 media representatives who acknowledged that there was a good representation of EAC Integration process in the media. Participants highlighted the various issues addressed by the media organizations regarding the EAC Integration process contributed to a well-informed public. Among the topics reported by the respondents that were addressed by media houses included educational, politics, business/job related and EAC structure and leadership, new policies and amendments. The participants reported that the media conveyed a balance view of the EAC Integration process with both positive and negative aspects.

One of the respondents from Citizen TV indicated that economic related issues in regards to EAC Integration was mostly covered in their broadcasts. He further reported the media fraternity acts a watchdog by monitoring the EAC Integration activities on behalf of the citizens in Kenya hence promoting transparency and accountability. From time to time, the media airs programs highlighting the progress. They are many instances where this has happened and I can over examples of the programs and talk show our station has run. Respondents from the Daily Nation, a Newspaper managed by the Nation Media house indicated that EAC issues hardly made it on the front page of the newspaper from the media house. He further indicated that EAC

issues are often given little attention. The EAC issues that are mostly covered are political and economical in nature. One media representative from KTN also highlighted that they broadcast various programs on women empowerment that are aired to recognize the impact of women in the developmental process. They reported that the development in the EAC cannot occur without women active participation.

There was a consensus among all the 12 media personalities interviewed that media faced various challenges in the coverage of the EAC related issues. Among the challenges included, limited press freedom, whereby media is not able to broadcast sensitive issues regarding the EAC Integration process for fear of mistreatments. A reporter from K24 noted it is very hard to get the EAC Integration information since most of the meetings are closed therefore, limiting media presence. Further, external pressures from economic interests and political influence comprises the neutrality of our reporting. The media houses were having financial constraints.

Ministry of EAC respondents highlighted inconsistent nature of the media coverage of the EAC Integration process. The participants indicated that there was need for a reliable and consistent coverage of EAC Integration process for a long-term awareness. The participants indicated that coverage was not satisfactory and there was a need for a comprehensive coverage i.e. an in-depth analysis and reporting rather than surface-level reporting in order to be well versed with EAC Integration process. Respondents from the ministry of EAC indicated that media houses are commercial entities and therefore are not able to fully cover EAC Integration related news since they accrue no financial gains.

### **The Time Allocated for EAC News Coverage in Minutes**

Mwesige and Wasswa's (2017) research exposed irregular patterns in media coverage, revealing a lack of sustained attention to integration-related issues. The duo also observed that there is skewness in issues being reported and time allocated to matters relating the EAC integration process with more time allocated to political events in media coverage. This study sought to ascertain time allocated to common themes in the EAC integration process. The time was measured in terms of less than 30 minutes, more than 30 minutes but less than 60 minutes and above 60 minutes. The findings were as follows.

**Table 4: Minutes allocated to the EAC related issues**

<b>Minutes Allocated to EAC integration issues</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Less than 30 minutes	40	53.0
30-60 minutes	27	35.0
More than 60 minutes	9	12.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Source:** Field Data, 2023

As indicated in table 4, approximately 53% of the respondents reported that less than 30 minutes was allocated in discussing the EAC related issues in a one media coverage. 35% reported that the discussions were allocated 30-60 minutes. Only 12% reported that the EAC related issues discussions were allocated more than 60 minutes. This indicates that less time is allocated in the

discussion of the EAC related issues thus limiting the amount of information received by the viewers/listeners.

### **Number of Columns Discussing EAC Integration Process news in Print Media**

This study further investigated the number of columns devoted to matters of EAC integration process in the leading print media in Kenya and observed as follows.

**Table 5: Number of column/s allocated to EAC integration**

<b>Number of Column/s</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
One column	54	71.0
A few columns	20	26.0
Many columns	2	3.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Source:** Field Data, 2023

Data in table 5 demonstrates that in the print media only one column was allocated to the discussion of the EAC related issues at 71%, followed by 26% which was reported to be allocated a few columns, and 3% who reported that EAC related issues in the print media was allocated many columns.

The respondents from the civil society highlighted that EAC news in Kenya are aired at least once in a week to inform Kenyans on the EAC Integration process. They also reported that events presided over by the heads of state could make it on the front of the headlines in TVs, Radios and Newspapers but EAC other issues are given little attention and hardly make it on the headlines. The respondents indicated that EAC information covered in media is often political and socio-economic in nature.

One respondent from the civil society noted the need for media organizations to collaborate with experts, policymakers and representatives from EAC member states in their various programs in order to have meaningful discussions and enable the citizens listening to have a deeper understanding of the EAC Integration process. Moreover, two respondents from the private sector representatives acknowledged the role media played in the EAC Integration process. They indicated that there has been an increase in the level of awareness by the citizens on the EAC Integration process. The respondents from media houses indicated that the media houses work in partnership with the public sector in program prioritization and policy formulation in the integration process. The role of the media is to create a conducive environment for trading activities contributes greatly to the EAC Integration.

The respondents from the Ministry of EAC and ASAL indicated that a well-informed public is able to actively participate in the EAC developmental process. They highlighted that as a ministry they have been able to conduct various campaigns to create awareness of the opportunities from the EAC Integration such as education, employment and trade. They believe that with the development of new technologies and introduction of platforms like Facebook and Twitter awareness creation becomes easy because many young people are on social media. They further indicated that there is need to leverage the digital platforms for advocacy and sensitization on EAC Integration, highlighting its opportunities and benefits to encourage citizens to support the process. However, they highlighted weaknesses in the media coverage of

EAC Integration process. They argued that by acknowledging both weaknesses and strengths of the media organization in addressing the EAC Integration process can contribute to a more accurate, reliable and consistent media coverage for a well-informed public. According to Alot (2017), there are four ways in which the EAC Secretariat intended to use media in integrating communities, which includes, awareness creation of the EAC Integration process, encouraging stakeholders to engage in dialogues on the key issues of the EAC, promoting the visibility of EAC efficiency and effectiveness, and its achievements.

## **Conclusion**

Media is regarded as the fourth pillar of democratic policy and has been striving to become more efficient and effective as a medium. Media has been seen as a tool which shapes the thinking and ideologies of people and also influences socialization process. The different channels of mass media i.e. newspapers, radios, television and internet sources have played an important role in enlightening, propagating, educating, creating national identity and strengthening the process of regional integration. The radio was predominantly the method used to spread information on EAC Integration, followed by newspaper, social media and television. The wide variety of media sources in the EAC region is enough to influence the attitudes and perceptions of the citizens to actively participate in the integration process. The study concludes that media has been regarded as a watchdog, a mediator between the society and the state, and a tool which enhances agenda building and setting. Media plays a huge role in creating awareness by dissemination of information regarding EAC Integration process, the opportunities and challenges therefore creating a regional identity and enhancing active participation of the citizens in integration activities. The study further concludes that media channels were featuring EAC news once in a week. And the most topics covered by media include structure and leadership changes, new policies and amendments, business/job opportunities, politics, and educational information. The study concludes that the most common method used by participants to receive information regarding the EAC Integration process was through radio followed by, newspapers, television and internet sources. Radio was preferred because it is affordable and portable, and for some participants it comes in built in their mobile phones. Finally, journalists view that media is an important tool for enhancing the EAC Integration process, and that the external pressures they face from economic interests and political influence compromises the neutrality of their reporting. They indicated that there was need to safeguard their independence from the external influences and to be engaged in continuous capacity building trainings by the EAC secretariat to enhance how they disseminate information on EAC Integration process with integrity.

## **Recommendations from the Study**

The study recommends safeguarding the independence of media fraternity from external influences which will ensure neutrality in their reporting. As a result, leading to disseminating of accurate information regarding the EAC Integration. There is also need for continuous awareness creation of the members of the public regarding the EAC integration to do away with the existing myths and in accurate information surrounding it to enhance active participation in the developmental process of EAC region. There is also need for the mass media to collaborate with policymakers, and experts on the EAC integration, as this will help media solicit ideas and broaden their knowledge to make their impact more recognized in the EAC Integration process.

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