



CLIFF OOGA OBWOGI,
SENIOR RESEARCHER

How Kenyan universities can boost their quality of research



On January 1, 2024, I read an article by Sam Chege, Professor of Journalism and Mass Communication at Kenans State University in the US. In one of the details expounding on the need to review requirements for Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) and Master's students to publish peer reviewed journal articles before graduation, I agree with the Prof Chege on a number of issues that he raised, especially that the publication process may have been compromised by a few individuals. Indeed, some students do not invest the time required to produce high quality journals, perhaps due to their rush to graduate.

Secondly, some supervisors who have a responsibility to guide the students sometimes do not pay much attention to the papers being published due to time constraints. ... Commission for University Education (CUE) provides clear guidelines on the requirements for a student to graduate with a PhD or MA/MSc. Among them is that the candidate should publish at least two academic papers for a PhD and one paper for a Master's degree to qualify for graduation. In my view, this is a noble and well-thought-out policy guideline that should be upheld. This requirement ensures that graduate students' scholarly output is shared with the international community and as such I do not concur with the proposal to scrap the requirement on the premise that universities are not managing the process well. Instead of scrapping this requirement, I would propose a reformist approach to make the process better.

The Kaizen philosophy encourages continuous improvement to get to the optimum and thus we need to analyse what is not working with a view to ensuring that corrections are adopted for better results. This Japanese business philosophy concerns the processes that continuously improve opera-

tions and involve all employees.

The following are my thoughts. Universities should develop and implement guidelines that are closely monitored to ensure that quality research papers are extracted from the research works of students.

Research is a process not an event, and therefore procedures must be followed and adhered to and supervisors should guide students to extract publications, just as they do in thesis/project supervision.

Universities can implement a raft of measures to ensure that quality is assured through quality assurance departments. Among these measures can be that candidates defend their academic papers, just as they do during thesis/project defences.

Moreover, to ensure that the shortcomings are overcome, universities should ensure that empirical research is encouraged. Empirical research enhances the chances of novel findings which are the basis of arriving at patents. In the process of meeting graduation requirement, the same research will help solve the many challenges/problems facing our society. Universities

should not allow rushed research to merely meet the CUE requirement but should, through laid down regulations, ensure that quality papers are produced.

It is concerning that Kenya did not feature recently in the top-10 list of universities' ranking in Africa. But this is expected because our universities have been out-published by the higher-ranked institutions. Research contributes a great deal to such ranking.

The proposal to scrap the publishing requirement for candidates therefore is a sure way to make our universities to continue sinking deeper into oblivion in terms of ranking on continental and international stage. We cannot compete at all with other top-notch global universities if we do not publish.

In the same vein, universities are required to allocate 2 per cent of their budget towards research. This has not been forthcoming. Scholars have ideas that need to be developed into research output but they cannot do so due to poor funding. Candidates need to be funded to produce high quality research.

Once the papers are authored and quality output is guaranteed, a knowledge management framework should be put in place to systematically disseminate the findings to the relevant stakeholders.

Research whose findings are on Climate Change for example should be shared with the Ministry of Environment, Climate Change and Forestry and the Inter-governmental Authority on Development Climate Prediction and Applications Centre, among other stakeholders. This way, solutions will be offered towards solving problems in society. This will also bring to visibility the research output from Kenyan universities which will in turn improve on the ranking index of universities regionally and globally.



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Media

State order on adverts undermines consumer choice

KUBAI NJUGUNA



In a move that raises questions about consumer rights and the fairness of media representation, the government recently directed that all its television and radio advertisements be aired exclusively on the Kenya Broadcasting Corporation (KBC). This undermines the very essence of consumer choice.

The directive will not only stifle competition but also perpetuate a monopolistic approach that is detrimental to both consumers and the media landscape at large. One of the fundamental principles of a democratic society is the freedom of choice, particularly in media consumption.

Consumers have the right to choose the content they engage with, including the advertisements they see or hear. Airing all government agencies' ads solely on KBC will restrict consumers' freedom to access diverse content across different media platforms.

Moreover, the government's insistence on using KBC exclusively for advertising purposes sends a contradictory message about its role in fostering a vibrant and competitive media industry. If the government truly values a free and fair media landscape, it should refrain from favouring one platform over others and instead support the growth and sustainability of all media outlets, both public and private.

This directive not only threatens the viability of private media houses but also sets a dangerous precedent of government interference in media operations. By effectively monopolising advertising revenue, KBC may become financially sustainable in the short-term, but at the cost of stifling innovation and creativity in the industry as a whole.

Unfair advantage

Furthermore, the double-standards evident in this directive are concerning. While the government insists on funneling advertising revenue exclusively to KBC, government officials continue to seek publicity from private media houses due to their wider viewership and reach.

This creates an unfair advantage for KBC while undermining the competitiveness of private media outlets.

Instead of relying on government directives to prop up KBC, the corporation should focus on innovation and adaptability to attract a larger audience and advertising revenue.

By offering compelling content and leveraging modern technologies, KBC can compete effectively in today's dynamic media landscape without resorting to monopolistic practices.

Ultimately, consumers deserve the freedom to choose their preferred media outlets based on individual preferences and tastes. Imposing restrictions on advertising only serves to limit consumer choice and hinder the diversity of voices in the media.

If the government truly wishes to support KBC's revival and profitability, it should explore alternative strategies that promote healthy competition and innovation within the media industry. This directive however, well-intentioned, is not the solution and undermines the principles of fairness, choice, and diversity in media consumption.

Mf. Kubai is a public relations and communications practitioner based in Nairobi. Kubai.njuguna@gmail.com