

**MEDIA AND ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS IN KENYA: THE CASE OF TV OTINGA**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Kenya's economy is highly dependent on natural resources. However, these natural resources are at risk of extinction due to environmental degradation. The general perception is that environmental degradation is partly due to lack of environmental awareness. Studies have shown that many Kenyans rely on and trust the media for information. This research sought to establish the role television as one of the media channels can play in creating awareness on environmental issues. This research used the media framing theory to show how frames such as timing, audience preferences and content influence the reception of environmental messages on television by audiences. To establish this, the researcher interviewed 30 key informants who included editors, TV producers, reporters and environmentalists. The researcher also used survey method where 200 respondents from Ruai division filled in questionnaires regarding their perception on the role of television in creating environmental awareness. Ruai division was purposively chosen because it is a semi urban area and also because it is home to Nairobi's sewerage plant hence bears the brunt of environmental degradation.

The findings of this study were that many of the respondents are aware of some of the environmental issues affecting Kenya today and most of this information is gotten from the media. The media was given credit for playing its traditional role of informing, entertaining and educating; however many felt that the media's potential in raising awareness on environmental issues has not been fully explored. Many of the respondents felt that due to their commercial nature the media in Kenya was skewed towards politics, sports and soap operas as these are thought to attract audiences and ultimately advertisers. Respondents also felt that the current television content on environmental issues was very little, aired at non-prime time and of poor quality. On quality, respondents felt that current TV shows on environment used complex terms while some were simply regurgitated from foreign media houses which made the stories irrelevant to local audiences. Poor content of environmental TV shows was attributed to limited environmental knowledge among reporters and editors and lack of synergy between environmentalists and media personnel.

Based on the findings, the research put forward a few suggestions that could help fully realize the potential of TV in raising awareness on environmental matters in Kenya. These include the introduction of an award scheme for television stations that air environmental matters to act as an incentive. The researcher also recommends a collaboration mechanism between media personnel and environmental stakeholders to ensure frequent and quality content on environmental issues is produced. All these, if effected will lead to an increase in the level of awareness among Kenyans and ultimately save the environment from degradation.