Chapter 9

Interviewing for Television: A Forgery of Practice and Influence

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ABSTRACT

An examination of television interviewing in Kenya provides an emerging sketch of its practice and theory. This Chapter considers television interviewing at three levels that it considers as prioritized by the times - interviewing at the change frontier site, interviewing on behalf of bio-change beings that Kenyans have become, and interviewing with pollen grains of theory in journalism and consequent echoes of its outcome. The Chapter considers three case studies of interviewing in Kenya - the presidential debate, live field reporting and TV opinion polls. The Chapter concludes with a sketch that also suggests certain claims - that television as a medium has not risen to its natural place because it’s cameras are not focused on the space of great needs of the people particularly at the change frontier; that moving to a high value question interviewing and a treatment of interviewing as a full-fledged production is a fresh and a rich depth offer for viewers; and that the television interview is a critical forgery of rhetoric in a change thirsty society.

INTRODUCTION

A Perspective of Past Politics and Media Coverage in Kenya

The following is a summary of responses of public rating of media following roundtable discussions organised by the Media Council of Kenya in 2005 in major cities of the country –

- Liberalization of the airwaves was very welcome and was good for the population. Perspectives critical of government could now be broadcast
- However, news and interview programmes were too personality centred rather than issue focused
- There were mistakes in accuracy by the journalists which those who were on the ground found to be glaring and difficult to explain

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- There was little analysis in news and in current affairs interviewing
- Sources were mainly from urban areas and the rural person’s perspective was lacking
- There was a new phenomenon of use of comedians to interview and to discuss serious issues facing the country rather than journalists in the new FM radio (Kamweru 2005 p)

In 2006, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung and the African Women and Child Feature Service carried out a study on how the Kenyan national newspapers covered the national referendum campaigns of 2005. In the study, the reporters and the editors reported that one out of every three news story is changed by editors to suit their political position or to suit political interests (FES and AWC 2006, p14). Two of the leading newspapers also own two of the three leading television stations who all share a common newsroom. Another study by Oriera et al (2010) has a conclusion that may perhaps explain why editors would do this. In a research they title Kenyan Media Vulnerabilities Study, the researchers state, “Kenyan audiences demand media that are loyal and that satisfy their unique political susceptibilities and sensitivities. Media are under pressure to do what audiences want” (Oriare 2010, p 61). Another explanation may be found in a Media Council of Kenya inquiry on perceptions of journalists on the Kenyan politician and vice versa, the perceptions of Kenyan parliamentarians on Kenyan journalists. The journalists perceived the Kenyan politician as corrupt, casual, a non-performer who will be voted out in the next general election, and a dishonest person (MCK 2007, p 33).

Meanwhile, the Media Council of Kenya in 2012 carried out a study of pre-election coverage by Kenyan newspapers which had the following conclusions –

- The political coverage was predominantly personality – and not issue driven.
- Differences reported between parties or politicians were limited to debates about political alliances and the approval or rejection of the 2013 election date.
- The most frequently covered politicians were Raila Odinga, Uhuru Kenyatta, William Ruto, and Musalia Mudavadi. The activities of other presidential candidates were rarely considered as newsworthy.
- The daily press contributed to hyping election matters beyond reasonable proportion. More than 60% of the lead stories on page 1 were devoted to election issues.
- Reporting unconfirmed rumours and publishing sensational headlines added to the unnecessary heightening of tensions.

Nguri (2007) elaborated Harold Lasswell’s areas of media research as areas through which influence strategizes itself through content, source, channel, and the audience itself. In news, documentaries, news features, studio discussion programmes, in dramatic programmes, - content, source and channel, carry potent pollen grains of influence. Simultaneously, the audience itself has an impetus for shaping in coming content into a certain direction(Nguri 2007, p 24).

The Media and the Theory of Influence

Wadak (2007) argues that “discursive practices may have major ideological effects – that is they can help produce and reproduce unequal power relations between (for instance) social classes, women and men, and ethnic/cultural majorities and minorities through the ways in which they represent things and position people (Wadak 2007, p 186). A corollary ought also to be the case, that the media can also