

NMG's 11 rules of political advertising

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Kenyans are counting the months to a general election under a new constitution. Although a definite date has not been confirmed, all indications are that Kenyans will go to the polls in March 2013, at the latest. It will be the first time Kenyans will be electing senators and governors for their counties, in addition to members of parliament. There is no guessing that there will be fierce competition among candidates seeking various elective positions - including the presidency.

One way politicians will market themselves is through media advertising. The Nation Media Group (NMG) has already set the rules as far as political advertising is concerned. NMG - an East African media house that runs print and electronic media outlets - recently published guidelines for political advertising for candidates, political parties, support and lobby groups and agencies intending to take part in political advertising in any of its mediums.

The 11 political advertising rules from NMG range from how vetting of advertorials will be done, scanning adverts for profane or obscene language, factuality of information, and placement of adverts in newspapers. The rules also apply to online advertising.

The 11 rules

1. Any political ad/advertorial submitted for publication or as an infomercial for TV, radio or online shall be vetted and published or aired only when it passes NMG's Guidelines for Political Advertising.
2. Any material designed as advertorials or infomercials shall be clearly branded or signposted as Advertising Feature or Advertiser's Announcement or Advertising Documentary. If the advertisement is from a political party, it shall carry an identifying logo for the party that has been registered with the Electoral Commission of Kenya, or is being used consistently by the party. The logo or other identifier should be displayed in a clearly visible or legible manner in print and online, and for at least three seconds, either at the beginning or end of each television message.
3. Advertisement scripts must provide contact details, i.e. name of sponsoring individual, group, organisation or institution and an address.
4. In the event that NMG has any doubts about the identity of the sponsoring organisation or group, it will insist on a telephone contact to verify sponsors' bona fides. A letter of authority from the party accompanying the advertisement will suffice.

5. Advertisements shall be rejected outright if they contain the following:
 - a) Obscene or profane language or pictorial representation that, when taken in context, tends to or is likely to expose an individual or a group or class of individuals to hatred or contempt on the basis of race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, sexual orientation, age or mental or physical disability.
 - b) Unwarranted attacks on the election agendas of rivals. Candidates/parties, sponsors, lobbyists shall, however be allowed to promote their own election agendas.
 - c) If they are obscure and touting bizarre messages, and invoking the name of God.
 - d) Press cut-outs/rug-outs and archived footage shall be rejected except where they are used to rebut or clarify claims that have been made publicly and were reported in mainstream media.
6. Advertisements shall avoid exposing innocent relatives or friends of candidates to unwarranted political ridicule or hostility.
7. Political advertisements shall avoid projecting material out of context for purposes of driving a propagandist home.
8. Reasoned and factual comments on parties' or candidates manifestos should confine themselves to the issues actually raised by rivals, and maintain a moderate tone and language.
9. Placement: Political advertisements in NMG newspapers shall only appear after the Opinion - Editorial pages.
10. Advertisements should be sent to NMG for at least 24 hours in advance, but certainly no less than 12 hours before the time of the scheduled broadcast or print.
11. Political advertising shall not be aired or published in NMG outlets 24 hours prior to Election Day, and most definitely not on polling date itself.

Kenyan mediascape

NMG newspapers enjoy high readership in Kenya and self regulation can be interpreted as a way of accountability as the rules have taken the journalistic form of practice for accuracy and fairness including procedures for implementation. According to the latest media audience research data from the Kenya Audience Research Foundation (KARF), in the last quarter of 2011, the readership of *Daily Nation* (a weekly publication of NMG) stood at 87% which was a 2% increase from Q3 of 2011.

In terms of age group, 91% of the readers of *Daily Nation* are between 15-17 years, 88% are 18-24 years, and 45 years and above account for 84%. The gap between female and male readers is negligible with 87% male and 86% female. In terms of demographics, 90% of *Daily Nation* readers are from LSM 8-11.

However, as political parties prepare to spend billions of shillings in advertising it will be worth watching if NMG will keep to their word and if other Kenyan media houses will follow in NMG's footsteps.

The challenges

There are a few hurdles; first, the Kenyan media is mainly owned by the political class. Television station K24, newspaper *People Daily* and vernacular radio station Kameme FM is owned by Uhuru Kenyatta, who is currently the deputy prime minister and an aspiring presidential candidate. Kenya's second president Daniel Arap Moi has shares in Standard Group that operates the Kenya Television Network, Standard newspapers and Radio Maisha. Moi's son Gideon Moi recently took over as interim leader of a leading political party - the Kenya African National Union (KANU). Royal Media Group that runs a bouquet of vernacular radio stations, Citizen Radio - the top in listenership, and Citizen Television is owned by media magnate S.K Macharia who is said to be eying a political position. All over the world media ownership plays a significant role in media content.

The second issue facing Kenyan media is their dependence on advertising. The media with the largest audience share enjoys the lion's share of the advertising budget. The most competition media in Kenya is radio with a reach of 21 million - slightly over 50% of the Kenyan population which stands at 40 million. According to KARF data, the top three radio stations in terms of reach are Citizen Radio, KBC Kiswahili and Milele FM respectively. All the three are predominantly Swahili stations.

The political advertising budgets are expected to be spent mainly on radio, newspapers followed by television. Radio is the most used media in Kenya and with vernacular stations in almost every ethnic region, advertisers can easily segment their audiences. Politicians campaigning in rural areas will find it easy to spend their budgets in vernacular stations compared to national radio stations.

Before the 2007 general election, the Kenyan media was accused of polarising the country by taking sides. Complaints were mainly made about the slanted editorial coverage of political stories by Kenyan media which is said to have contributed to the post election strife that followed a contentious presidential result in 2008.

Earlier in April 2012, the Media Council of Kenya (MCK) released guidelines on political coverage which were signed by the Kenya Media Owners Association. These are some of the initiatives towards self regulation of the media in Kenya as the country prepare for an election. The MCK has said it will release a score card rating political coverage by media houses in the count down to the election. These initiatives are geared towards enhancing a responsible media in Kenya.

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