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REPRESENTATION OF KENYA'S CULTURAL DIVERSITY ON CITIZEN TV AND KBC: AUDIENCE AND STAKEHOLDER PERSPECTIVES

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Abstract

Television plays a key role in shaping national identity and determining which cultural groups receive public visibility. This study examined how Citizen TV and Kenya Broadcasting Corporation (KBC) television represent Kenya's cultural diversity, focusing on the visibility, inclusivity, and authenticity of ethnic, linguistic, regional, and sociocultural experiences. Guided by a pragmatic orientation, the study employed an explanatory mixed-methods design. It surveyed 385 adult television viewers: 213 Citizen TV viewers and 172 KBC viewers. It also gathered qualitative data through ten key informant interviews and three focus group discussions. The researchers analysed survey data using frequencies and percentages and examined the qualitative data thematically. The findings showed that 60% of respondents frequently or always encountered Kenyan cultural elements in television programming. Similarly, 58.96% agreed or strongly agreed that the stations actively promoted Kenya's diverse cultures. However, the qualitative findings indicated that programming represented culture selectively, with greater attention to dominant ethnic groups and urban experiences. Indigenous languages, rural livelihoods, pastoralist communities, and minority cultures received limited visibility. Programs also tended to confine cultural portrayals to festivals, ceremonies, traditional clothing,

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and occasional special programs instead of incorporating them into regular programming. Audiences preferred programs that reflected familiar languages, humour, livelihoods, and contemporary social experiences. The study concludes that including local content does not necessarily ensure equitable or authentic cultural representation. It recommends that broadcasters adopt inclusive editorial guidelines, use indigenous languages more widely, decentralize content production, and regularly assess ethnic, linguistic, and regional representation.

Keywords: cultural diversity, cultural representation, Citizen TV, KBC, indigenous languages, Kenyan television, local cultural content

INTRODUCTION

Television shapes social reality by determining which people, languages, places, and experiences receive sustained public visibility. In culturally diverse societies, it provides an important platform for negotiating national identity. Local programming can connect audiences with familiar experiences and cultural practices, while persistent exclusion can position communities at the margins of national life. African audiences also interpret television content through their social and cultural contexts rather than receiving media messages passively (Willems & Mano, 2016). Kenya's cultural landscape comprises different ethnic communities, languages, artistic traditions, livelihoods, and regional histories. These are expressed through storytelling, music, dance, drama, oral traditions, ceremonies, material culture, and contemporary popular culture. Screen media can preserve and transmit such cultural knowledge, but they may also separate cultural images from the communities and meanings from which they originate (Semali & Asino, 2013). Cultural representation therefore involves more than recognizable cultural symbols. It also concerns whose experiences are portrayed, how they are framed, and whether the communities represented consider the portrayals authentic.

Kenyan television developed within a colonial broadcasting system characterized by centralized authority and imported professional models. These arrangements continued to shape programming and production after independence, even as broadcasting acquired national-development and public-service responsibilities. King'ara (2014) argues that television in Kenya was tied to the political and economic structures of late colonialism. Subsequent liberalization expanded the number of broadcasters and opportunities for local production, but it also strengthened commercial competition and dependence on program formats considered attractive to mass audiences. The expansion of television broadcasting has not automatically

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ensured the proportional representation of Kenya's diverse cultures. Imported programs continue to occupy substantial airtime, while locally produced programs favor familiar urban settings and dominant cultural narratives. Muthee (2022) identified an imbalance between local and foreign television programming in Kenya. Even where local content is available, it may not adequately reflect the country's linguistic, regional, and ethnic diversity or may be scheduled in time slots that limit its visibility.

Language is central to cultural visibility because it carries knowledge, humor, memory, and social identity. Indigenous-language broadcasting can make communities visible in their own voices and provide space for expressions that may lose meaning when translated. Ojwang (2017) shows how local-language media can support the reclamation of identity among Kenyan urban youth. However, mainstream television commonly privileges English and Kiswahili, leaving many indigenous languages at the margins of nationally distributed programming. Debates on African media decolonization therefore extend beyond increasing the numerical amount of locally produced content. They question the standards used to define quality, the concentration of editorial authority, and the limited recognition of knowledge originating outside dominant institutions. Mohammed (2021) argues that decolonizing African media studies requires attention to African epistemologies and to the structural conditions that determine whose knowledge is legitimized. Applied to television, this perspective requires scrutiny of whether local television programs reproduce narrow hierarchies or expand the range of communities able to represent themselves.

Kenya has regulatory provisions intended to promote local content, but numerical targets do not guarantee cultural plurality. Implementation depends on how broadcasters define local content, select stories, allocate airtime, and evaluate representation. Mulinya (2018) found that Kenya's media programming code was shaped by operational and institutional conditions. Consequently, compliance may coexist with limited linguistic diversity, urban-centered production, or symbolic portrayals of culture. Citizen TV and the Kenya Broadcasting Corporation provide suitable contexts for examining these issues. Citizen TV is a major commercial broadcaster whose programming decisions are influenced by audience ratings and advertising revenue. In contrast, KBC is the national public broadcaster and has responsibilities relating to national integration, public service, and cultural representation. However, the present study did not systematically code programs and therefore does not claim to measure the actual prevalence of individual cultures on the two stations. Instead, it examines audience and stakeholder perceptions of cultural representation. The study addressed the following research question: How is Kenya's cultural diversity represented in the programming of Citizen TV and KBC?

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LITERATURE REVIEW

Cultural Representation and Media Decolonization

Cultural representation refers to the processes through which the media construct and communicate meanings about people, identities, practices, and places. Representation is inherently selective because broadcasters cannot portray every social experience. They must decide which stories to include, whose voices are authoritative, and which cultural images to broadcast. These choices can promote cultural recognition or reproduce inequalities between dominant and marginalized communities. Media decolonization examines how colonial systems of knowledge and power continue to influence these choices. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013) describes coloniality as a continuing organization of power that survives formal political independence. In television, coloniality may be transmitted through imported formats, externally derived standards of quality, centralized decision-making, and assumptions that metropolitan experiences are more suitable for national audiences. Decolonizing television does not require foreign programming. Instead, it involves creating more equitable opportunities for local communities to produce and communicate their cultural experiences. Moyo (2020) presents the decolonial turn in media studies as a challenge to established structures of knowledge, production, and content circulation. A decolonized broadcasting environment should therefore assess programs not only by country of production but also by authorship, cultural authenticity, diversity, and community participation.

Language is both a means of communication and a repository of cultural knowledge. It conveys oral history, humor, social relationships, values, and ways of interpreting everyday experiences. Wa Thiong'o (1986) emphasizes that language is central to cultural memory and identity formation. When television excludes indigenous languages, it reduces the public visibility of the knowledge, values, and experiences in those languages. International evidence shows that indigenous-language broadcasting can contribute to cultural recognition when institutions give communities meaningful editorial participation. Daubs (2021) found that public-service broadcasting can support language revitalization but must address the institutional conditions that determine how indigenous voices are represented. In Kenya, linguistic inclusion cannot be reduced to occasional translations or special cultural programs.

Cultural content through language, clothing, music, cuisine, architecture, ceremonies, livelihoods, family relations, and contemporary social experiences. Abd Mubin and Yaacob (2018) found that locally produced Malaysian animation contained identifiable cultural symbols, although dominant cultural traditions received greater visibility. This illustrates how local production can incorporate cultural material while retaining unequal patterns of

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representation. Authenticity concerns whether cultural portrayals reflect the meanings and experiences recognized by the communities represented. It does not imply that culture should be presented as static or isolated from social change. Sand (2021) found that indigenous television must balance cultural responsibilities with audiences. Authentic cultural representation should therefore accommodate both traditional practices and the changing realities of contemporary communities. Commercial broadcasting requirements

Representation is by the conditions under which programs are commissioned, produced, and scheduled. Production commonly concentrates in cities where broadcasters, studios, advertisers, and trained personnel are located. Ekdale (2018) demonstrates how Kenyan cultural production emerges through interactions between global media practices and the creation of locality. These interactions can generate creative hybrid forms but may also favor producers with access to urban institutions. Commercial considerations influence whether broadcasters invest in programs centered on minority languages, rural communities, or less familiar cultural experiences. Broadcasters may select narratives expected to attract large audiences and advertising revenue. Fountaine (2020) shows that rural television representation established themes of connection and progress rather than the full complexity of rural life. This may produce recognizable but limited images of rural communities. Digital platforms provide additional opportunities for local storytelling, audience engagement, and distribution beyond conventional schedules. Dovey (2021) identifies internet television as an important space for African creative innovation. Nevertheless, digital expansion does not remove inequalities in finance, technical capacity, discoverability, and control over distribution.

Existing studies show that colonial histories impacted linguistic hierarchies, commercial pressures, and centralized production. Akpojivi (2018) shows that media reform in Sub-Saharan Africa operates within wider processes of democratization and institutional change. However, limited empirical research has examined how viewers and media stakeholders perceive the representation of Kenya's ethnic, linguistic, regional, and everyday cultural diversity on Citizen TV and the Kenya Broadcasting Corporation (KBC), representing the country's major commercial and public broadcasters, respectively. This study addresses that gap by integrating audience survey evidence with accounts from media practitioners, regulators, policymakers, producers, and focus group participants.

Theoretical Framework

Cultivation theory, developed by George Gerbner and his colleagues, explains how sustained exposure to television content can influence audiences' perceptions of social reality.

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The theory focuses on the cumulative effects of recurring television messages rather than the immediate influence of a single program. When cultures, languages, lifestyles, and social experiences are presented continually, audiences may gradually see them as normal or broadly representative of society. Cultivation theory: unequal cultural visibility can influence how audiences understand Kenya's diversity. Repeated portrayals of dominant or urban communities may make them appear more central to national identity; the continued absence of minority, pastoralist, or rural groups can normalize their marginal position. Potter (2014) cautions that cultivation analysis should account for message patterns, exposure, audience characteristics, and genre differences rather than assume identical effects on every viewer. The theory is an interpretive framework rather than a direct test of long-term media effects. The study examined audience and stakeholder perceptions of recurring cultural representation but did not measure individual exposure over an extended period. Cultivation theory therefore provided a basis for explaining the possible implications of sustained cultural visibility and exclusion without saying whether television produces identical cultural attitudes among all viewers.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a pragmatic research orientation and employed an explanatory mixed-methods design. This approach integrates quantitative evidence on viewers' perceptions with qualitative accounts of the institutional and editorial processes influencing cultural representation. The quantitative component established patterns in audience perceptions, while the qualitative component provided contextual explanations from relevant stakeholders. The mixed-methods approach was appropriate because the study examined both perceived patterns of cultural representation and the factors underlying those patterns (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Citizen TV and KBC were selected because they represent two distinct institutional models within Kenya's television sector. Citizen TV is a major commercial broadcaster whose programming decisions are influenced by audience reach, ratings, and advertising considerations. In contrast, KBC is the national public broadcaster with a mandate to promote national identity, cultural diversity, public service, and social inclusion. Selecting the two stations enabled the study to examine cultural representation within both commercial and public-service broadcasting contexts.

The study population comprised adult viewers of Citizen TV and KBC, television programming managers, media regulators, independent content producers, and government policymakers responsible for media and cultural affairs. The quantitative component involved

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385 adult television viewers. The sample size was determined using Cochran's formula for a large or unspecified population at a 95% confidence level, a 5% margin of error, and an assumed population proportion of 0.50. Respondents comprised 213 Citizen TV viewers and 172 KBC viewers.

The qualitative component involved ten key informants: three television programming managers, two media regulators, three independent content producers, and two government policymakers. The study also conducted three focus group discussions with television viewers, each comprising six to eight participants. The discussions captured variations in participants' age and gender.

A stratified random sampling method was used to select respondents for the quantitative survey. The viewers were first classified into two strata based on the television station they watched most frequently: Citizen TV and KBC. Simple random sampling was then applied within each stratum to select 213 Citizen TV viewers and 172 KBC viewers, giving a total sample of 385 respondents. This procedure ensured that viewers of both stations were adequately represented in the survey.

The study collected quantitative data using a semi-structured questionnaire administered through Kobo Toolbox. The questionnaire examined perceptions of ethnic and regional inclusion, indigenous-language visibility, rural and urban representation, authenticity, stereotyping, and the visibility of marginalized communities. For the qualitative component, researchers used key informant interview and focus group discussion guides. The study instruments underwent pretesting with ten television viewers, two key informants, and one focus group comprising six participants.

The study used IBM SPSS Statistics version 27.0 to clean and analyse the quantitative data. Data screening covered missing values, coding errors, invalid ranges, inconsistent entries, and outliers. All 385 questionnaires met the screening criteria and remained in the analysis. Frequencies and percentages summarized respondents' perceptions. For the qualitative data, researchers transcribed and coded the interviews and focus group discussions before conducting a thematic analysis. The study integrated the quantitative and qualitative findings during interpretation.

Daystar University's Institutional Scientific and Ethical Review Committee granted ethical approval, and the National Commission for Science, Technology, and Innovation provided research authorization. All participants gave informed consent and participated voluntarily. The study protected participants' confidentiality by removing personal identifiers and assigning codes to qualitative participants.

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RESULTS

Respondents acknowledged Kenyan cultural content on Citizen TV and KBC. As presented in Table 1, 32.21% indicated that cultural elements were frequently incorporated into television programming, while 27.79% reported that they were always incorporated. In contrast, 20.26% reported occasional incorporation, 12.99% indicated that cultural elements were rarely incorporated, and 6.75% stated that they were never incorporated.

Table 1: Frequency of Incorporating Cultural Elements into Television Programming (N = 385)

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Always	107	27.79
Frequently	124	32.21
Occasionally	78	20.26
Rarely	50	12.99
Never	26	6.75
Total	**385**	**100.00**

The findings show that 60.00% of respondents perceived cultural elements as regularly incorporated into television programming. However, the remaining responses indicate that viewers did not consistently observe cultural representation in the stations' programmes. To assess the effectiveness of this integration, the study asked respondents to rate television programming that incorporated local cultural elements. As shown in Table 2, 31.42% rated the integration as effective, while 28.57% considered it highly effective. Another 18.18% rated it moderately effective, 16.62% as less effective, and 5.21% as ineffective.

Table 2: Perceived Effectiveness of Local Cultural Content Integration

Rating	Frequency	Percentage
Highly effective	110	28.57
Effective	121	31.42
Moderately effective	70	18.18
Less effective	64	16.62
Not effective	20	5.21
Total	**385**	**100.00**

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Overall, 59.99% of respondents rated the integration of local cultural content as either effective or highly effective. Nevertheless, the remaining responses indicate variations in the visibility, consistency, and perceived effectiveness of culturally relevant programming. The study further examined whether Citizen TV and KBC actively promoted Kenya's diverse cultures. As presented in Table 3, 32.99% agreed and 25.97% strongly agreed that the stations actively promoted cultural diversity. Conversely, 12.73% disagreed, while 8.05% strongly disagreed. A further 20.26% remained neutral.

Table 3: Audience Agreement That Television Stations Actively Promote Kenya's Diverse Cultures

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	100	25.97
Agree	127	32.99
Neutral	78	20.26
Disagree	49	12.73
Strongly disagree	31	8.05
Total	**385**	**100.00**

The findings show that 58.96% of respondents recognized Citizen TV and KBC's efforts to promote Kenya's cultural diversity. However, neutral and negative responses suggest uncertainty about the breadth, visibility, and consistency of this representation. Qualitative findings further indicate that including local cultural content did not necessarily yield balanced ethnic and regional representation.

Participants reported that television programming often emphasized dominant ethnic traditions and urban experiences, while rural, pastoralist, and minority communities received less attention. A participant in a rural focus group explained:

"We rarely see our own village life or indigenous festivals on TV. Who is telling our story?" (FGD_two, Rural)

A key informant similarly observed:

"Local stories exist, but the industry is Nairobi-centric. The rest of Kenya feels invisible." (KII-7)

Participants attributed this imbalance to the centralization of television production and editorial decision-making. They explained that broadcasters often prioritized stories with commercial appeal to urban audiences, leaving experiences from other parts of the country underrepresented.

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Indigenous-language representation also emerged as a concern. Only 12% of respondents reported regular exposure to programs featuring indigenous languages or content centered on minority communities, while more than 40% indicated that vernacular languages appeared only occasionally in television programming. Qualitative findings reinforced this pattern, with participants reporting that English and Kiswahili dominated mainstream programming. Broadcasters featured indigenous languages in selected programs or specialized segments, limiting their contribution to mainstream cultural representation.

Participants also distinguished between local cultural content and the authenticity of its representation. They observed that some programs presented culture through festivals, ceremonies, traditional clothing, and selected performances without adequately reflecting the everyday experiences of the communities portrayed. Audiences preferred programs that reflected familiar languages, humour, livelihoods, and social challenges. One participant observed:

"When local dramas reflect our realities, our struggles, humour, and language, they resonate more." (FGD_one, Urban)

A media professional similarly stated:

"Viewers are hungry for relatable content. When we air shows based on Kenyan legends or community heroes, the feedback is overwhelming." (KII-5)

Overall, the quantitative findings show that respondents recognized local cultural content on Citizen TV and KBC, with most expressing positive evaluations of the stations' efforts. However, the qualitative evidence reveals that both stations represented this diversity selectively. Programming gave greater visibility to dominant ethnic traditions and urban experiences, while indigenous languages, rural livelihoods, pastoralist communities, minority groups, and everyday cultural practices received less consistent attention. The findings therefore show that local content alone does not guarantee equitable and authentic representation of Kenya's cultural diversity.

DISCUSSION

The findings revealed that local cultural content does not necessarily ensure the equitable representation of Kenya's cultural diversity. Although most respondents acknowledged that Citizen TV and KBC incorporated cultural elements and promoted Kenya's diverse cultures, the qualitative findings indicated that programming remained concentrated on dominant ethnic groups and urban experiences. Broadcasters may therefore satisfy general expectations for local content without adequately representing the country's ethnic, linguistic, regional, and social diversity. From a cultivation theory perspective, repeated exposure to a narrow range of cultural

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narratives can influence how audiences understand Kenyan identity. When dominant urban areas receive greater visibility, viewers may gradually view them as more representative of the nation than rural, pastoralist, and minority cultures. The limited visibility of some communities may therefore reinforce unequal cultural recognition within the national television landscape. The limited use of indigenous languages further demonstrates the difference between local programming and culturally inclusive programming. Although Kiswahili is the most used language in Kenya, reliance on Kiswahili and English can restrict the visibility of the country's linguistic heritage. Fadibe and Olawuyi (2024) identify African-language media as an important mechanism for reclaiming cultural spaces and strengthening indigenous expression. Greater inclusion of Kenyan languages would let communities encounter their cultural identities more directly within mainstream television.

The findings also show that audiences valued programs reflecting familiar livelihoods, humour, languages, traditions, and social experiences. This preference challenges the assumption that audiences primarily favor imported content. Oko-Epelle and Shodipe (2022) observed that continued exposure to foreign television content can affect viewers' cultural orientations. The present findings suggest that culturally relevant local programming can be an alternative by connecting television narratives to viewers lived experiences. However, participants reported that cultural portrayals limited to festivals, ceremonies, traditional dress, and occasional special programs. Such portrayals may increase cultural visibility but do not sufficiently represent the changing and everyday realities of Kenyan communities. Githaiga (2011) observes that public broadcasting has an important responsibility to represent the diversity of national life. Citizen TV and KBC therefore need to move beyond symbolic inclusion by integrating diverse cultural perspectives into drama, documentaries, news, children's programming, talk shows, and other regular programme categories. The findings indicate that Citizen TV and KBC have made visible efforts to represent Kenyan culture, but representation remains uneven across ethnic, regional, linguistic, and social coverage. Meaningful cultural representation requires consistent inclusion of marginalized communities, indigenous languages, rural experiences, and contemporary cultural realities rather than occasional or ceremonial portrayals.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study found that Citizen TV and KBC incorporated local cultural content and viewers as promoting Kenya's cultural diversity. However, local content did not necessarily balance cultural representation. Television programming remained inclined towards dominant ethnic groups, urban experiences, and the use of English and Kiswahili. Consequently, indigenous

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languages, rural communities, pastoralist groups, and minority cultures received limited visibility. The findings further showed that cultural representation was sometimes occasional and symbolic. Culture was portrayed through ceremonies, festivals, traditional clothing, and specific features rather than being integrated into regular television programming. It increased the visibility of selected cultural practices but did not adequately reflect the everyday changing experiences of Kenyan communities. Audiences expressed a stronger preference for programmes that reflected familiar languages, livelihoods, humour, social challenges, and contemporary experiences. The study therefore concludes that Citizen TV and KBC have made progress in promoting Kenyan culture, but need greater ethnic, linguistic, regional, and social inclusion to achieve equitable and authentic representation.

Citizen TV and KBC should adopt clear editorial guidelines for representing Kenya's ethnic, linguistic, and regional diversity. These guidelines should ensure television programming includes communities that are rarely represented on mainstream television. Television stations should use indigenous languages across different programme categories rather than limiting them to specialized programmes. Subtitling can make indigenous-language programmes accessible to wider national audiences. decentralized by strengthening regional bureaus and involving community-based producers. This would increase the visibility of rural, pastoralist, and minority communities while reducing the concentration of television narratives around Nairobi and other urban centres. Broadcasters should move beyond ceremonial portrayals of culture by incorporating cultural perspectives into drama, documentaries, news, talk shows, children's programmes, and other regular programming. Such content should represent both traditional practices and contemporary cultural experiences. Finally, Citizen TV and KBC should establish mechanisms for periodically assessing cultural representation in their programming. The assessment should consider ethnic inclusion, regional balance, language use, authenticity, scheduling, and the representation of marginalized communities.

LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

The study relied on audience and stakeholder perceptions rather than a systematic analysis of programmed broadcast by Citizen TV and KBC. The findings therefore reflect perceived cultural representation and do not establish the precise amount of airtime allocated to individual communities, languages, or cultural practices. In addition, the pooled quantitative analysis did not determine whether cultural representation differed significantly between the two stations. Future research should conduct comparative content analysis of Citizen TV and KBC programming, including programmed genres, languages, representation, scheduling, and the roles assigned to cultural groups. Longitudinal studies could examine changes in cultural

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representation following regulatory or institutional reforms. Further research should also investigate how rural audiences, young people, ethnic minorities, and digital-platform users interpret representations of Kenyan culture.

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