

Ethnic Influence among Kenyan Catholic Church Leaders in Nairobi on Choosing News Media

Don Bosco Onyalla¹
Tangaza University College, Nairobi, Kenya

Considering the salience of ethnicity in Africa, the potential involvement of church leaders in fanning conflict, and the role of the media in shaping attitudes of audiences, this study sought to examine the extent to which the ethnicity of colleagues and friends may influence church leaders' choice of and exposure to news media channels. The study sampled Catholic church leaders in Nairobi, Kenya and employed 16 elite interviews and three focus group discussions. The analyses of findings show mutual influence of colleagues, family members, and friends over selection of news media channels with most participants dismissing ethnicity as a factor in their own influences. There seemed to be a consensus about the influence of timeliness, objectivity, depth, and boldness in choices of and exposure to news media channels. Overall, participants expressed a cautious attitude toward ethnic influences and tended to attribute the negative effects of ethnicity to others. This was interpreted as fear to subscribe to exclusive solidarities bordering on ethnocentrism. Implications for future studies are explored.

Keywords: church leaders, colleagues, ethnic influence, friends, news media, social identity theory, uses and gratifications theory.

Introduction

Globally, people are moving across societies and forming communities consisting of members from different cultures, races, nationalities, religions, languages, ethnicities, among other distinguishing identities. Over the years, scholars have recognized this phenomenon and sought to examine the nature of such communities, with some studies focusing on communication between people of different distinctive identities. These studies have sampled specific populations and analysed a variety of issues in different contexts of the world.

Cultural and ethnic identities are among the distinctive identities that have attracted much research in different parts of the world (Ahmed, 2016; Aydin, 2013; Corona et al., 2017; Halawa, Ai, & Ma, 2017; Kılinc & Tarman, 2018; Lee, 2012; Robinson, 2017; Sendroiu & Mogosanu, 2018; Suliman, Shah, Ullah, & Jamal, 2016; Wu & Ida, 2018). However, despite this growing interest in research about cultural and ethnic encounter, a review of literature did not trace studies that have interrogated the influence of ethnicity on news media choices. In addition, studies that have considered ethnic influence among a population of religious leaders is yet to be established. The present study, which situates itself within the African context, sought to fill this scholarship gap.

Since the 1980s, ethnicity is one of the distinctive identities that has attracted much research in Africa (Aluko, 2003; Azarya, 2003; Basedau, Erdmann, Lay, & Stroh, 2011; Berghe, 1983; Carrier & Kochore, 2014; Lentz, 2000; Mhlanga, 2013; Roman, Makwakwa, & Lacante, 2016). A considerable number of these studies demonstrate the role of ethnicity in politics in general and in violent conflicts on the continent in particular (Bratton, Bhavnani, & Chen, 2012; Chogugudza, 2008; Desforges, 1999; Mbatia, Bikuru, & Nderitu, 2009; Osaghae, 2006; Paluck, 2009; Robinson, 2017). As Bratton et al. (2012) have noted, "In Africa, ethnic identity – that is, the inclination of individuals to define themselves in terms of cultural origins and descent-based traits – is widely perceived to be the predominant organising principle of society and politics" (p. 28). This points to the salience of ethnicity in Africa.

Over the years, the 1994 Rwandan genocide has been cited as one of the prominent illustrations of the role of ethnicity in conflicts (Carney, 2008; Desforges, 1999; Longman, 2001, 2013). In particular, the massacre demonstrated how church leaders can be directly involved in escalating violent conflict. According to Longman (2013), "Numerous priests, pastors, nuns, brothers, catechists, and Catholic and Protestant lay leaders supported, participated in, or helped to organize the killings" (para. 2). This has served to show that religious institutions and personalities are not immune to the challenge of ethnicity. Despite these damning revelations, there seems to be no scholarship examining ethnic influence among church leaders in Africa.

¹ Doctoral Candidate, Daystar University, Nairobi; C/o Bethany House, P.O. Box 21102, 00505, Nairobi.
Email: dbonline2005@gmail.com, Phone: +254712349777

Apart from ethnicity, media have been identified as having a significant role in society, including situations of conflict. During the Rwandan genocide, the radio seems to have played a critical role in fanning violence (Mitchell, 2007; Paluck, 2009; Paluck & Green, 2009; Straus, 2007; Yigit & Tarman, 2013). Studies have also shown the influence of other forms of media, both traditional and new media (Browne, Stack, & Ziyadah, 2015; Lazzolino & Stremlau, 2017) and in specific places such as the Middle East (Heywood, 2015; Shinar, 2003) and in conflicts like the Arab Spring (Aday, Farrell, Lynch, Sides, & Freelon, 2012; Bratić, 2008; Chouliaraki, 2015). In Kenya, the context of the present study, human rights groups, media monitors, politicians and other groups accused sections of the media of broadcasting hate messages aimed at inciting violence based on ethnic hatred and prejudice during and after the 2007-2008 post-election violence. All these examples seem to illustrate the potential influence of not only the media in general but also journalists in particular in either escalating or de-escalating violent conflicts.

Therefore, considering the salience of ethnicity in Africa (Nwozor, 2014), especially in Kenya (Carrier & Kochore, 2014; Ferree, Gibson, & Long, 2014; Kamaara, 2010; Wamwere, 2003; Yieke, 2011), the potential involvement of church leaders in fanning conflict (Carney, 2008; Longman, 2001, 2013), and the role of the media in shaping attitudes of audiences (Lazzolino & Stremlau, 2017; Somerville, 2008), this study sought to examine the extent to which the ethnicity of colleagues and friends may influence church leaders' selection of news media channels. The study employed a qualitative research design and sampled Catholic church leaders within the Archdiocese of Nairobi in Kenya.

While observing a celibate lifestyle (Anderson, 2016), participants in this study live in communities akin to families characterized by multi-ethnic and multi-cultural membership. Therefore, this study extended the ordinary meaning of family as consisting of a group of genetically related people formed through biological reproduction (Blake, Richards, & Golombok, 2014; Witt, 2014) to include adults who live together because of their religious choices. The social networks that are built through interpersonal communication have the potential for interpersonal influence and could even result in interpersonal conflict. For instance, there can be inter-ethnic conflicts over the selection of shared news media channels occasioned by ethnic hate, bias and prejudice. If church leaders are influenced by the ethnicity of their colleagues and friends in their selection of news media channels, these leaders may be limited in their information access, going only for channels preferred by members of their ethnic group. This might further limit the leaders' perspectives about life in general and current affairs in particular, a situation that could negatively impact on these leaders' integrity and credibility before their followers. As a result, the institution of the church may risk becoming irrelevant in society.

This study is significant because previous studies examining the influence of ethnicity seem silent about a population of church leaders and ethnic influence on news media choices. The results of this present study could help fill this research gap. The knowledge of how church leaders can be influenced by the ethnicity of their colleagues and friends could also raise awareness of integrity and credibility as significant components of family life among church leaders in Kenya's capital, Nairobi. This study also provides an occasion for the extension of social identity theory (SIT) and uses and gratifications theory (UGT) in the African context, a region known for paucity of literature in virtually all fields of study.

Theoretical Framework

In this study, while SIT formed the basis for an understanding of ethnic influences, UGT provided the basis for explaining church leaders' considerations in choosing news media channels. This section provides an explanation and major assumptions of these theories. The relevance of these theories to the current study is also explained.

Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT)

From its name, UGT serves to explain the reasons behind people's use of media and the gratifications gained when people access media. While some scholars (Dozier & Rice, 1984) have credited UGT approach with Schramm's (1949) model of immediate reward and delayed reward, comparatively more scholars have traced the theory "back to the beginning of empirical mass communication research" in the 1940s (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1974, p. 509). According to these latter scholars, Berelson (1949) and Herzog (1944) provided the pioneering studies of UGT approach, starting off a tradition that would focus on the orientation of audiences toward media. This research tradition brought a shift from what media can do to audiences expressed in the hypodermic model (Bineham, 1988) to what audiences can do with media (Jensen, 2002; Rubin, 2009). As Jensen (2002) has put it, the position of UGT "is frequently summarized by asking, not what media do to audiences, but what audiences do with media" (p. 142). UGT presupposed a shift of focus from what was thought to be media's direct influence on passive and isolated persons to audiences characterized with activeness and ability to choose and engage with media.

Since then, the theory has been widely used in mass communication research (Althaus & Tewksbury, 2000; Dimmick, Chen, & Li, 2004; Ratcliff, McCarty, & Ritter, 2017; Ruggiero, 2000; Rui & Stefanone, 2016) including new media contexts (Dolan, Conduit, Fahy, & Goodman, 2016; Florenthal, 2015; Gan & Wang, 2015; Schröder, 2015; Sundar & Limperos, 2013; Swart, Peters, & Broersma, 2017). Consequently, a number of assumptions underpinning this theoretical framework have been generated. Although a few seem unique to particular scholars, a good number of these assumptions seem common among many communication scholars and could be operationalized in this study.

For one, rather than being passive, the audience is conceived as being active (Katz et al., 1974; McQuail, Blumler, & Brown, 1972; Rubin, 2002). This means that audiences engage with the media purposively, actively seeking to gratify their needs from a variety of media. This assumption refers to audiences that Rubin (2002) has described as “relatively active participants who select media and their content” (p. 148) and seems to contrast with what Bogart (1965) had stated that audiences seem not to attend to media purposefully and with some specific expectations. The active character of audiences could be operationalized in this present study, with participants explaining what considerations they make in choosing particular news media channels.

Besides being active, a second assumption of UGT has it that audience members within the communication process take the initiative to link need gratification and the choice of the media (Katz et al., 1974; Rubin, 2002). As Rubin (2002) has stated, “According to uses and gratifications, the media and their content are sources of influence among other potential sources. Audience members take the initiative in selecting these media and are not simply passive targets of media messages” (p. 147). This assumption appears to place a limitation on what Katz et al. (1974) had described as “any form of straight-line effect of media content on attitudes and behavior” of audiences (p. 511). For the present study, rather than look at news media channels as doing something to the sampled Catholic church leaders, UGT assumes that the leaders seeking exposure to news media channels would be significantly active in their choosing of news media channels.

In addition, even though UGT “suggests that individuals use media channels for intrinsic gratifications and to satisfy their cognitive and affective needs” (Florenthal, 2015, p. 19), media do not enjoy the monopoly of need gratification. Media seem to compete with other need satisfaction sources for the variety of human needs. This assumption could be relevant to this study, providing insights into church leaders who might not be keen on news media channels, but rather gratified with their own social networks at the level of individual interpersonal relationships.

Some critics of UGT have noted theoretical, structural, and methodological shortcomings (Lichtenstein & Rosenfeld, 1983). For instance, critics have observed the lack of specificity of the theory in explaining media’s ability to meet particular gratifications and the theory’s failure to explain why audiences prefer certain media. In the face of such criticism, some scholars have sought to refine this approach by providing a clarification of the key concepts. In particular, Rubin, Palmgreen, and Sypher (1994) made a distinction between gratifications sought (GS) and gratifications obtained (GO). GS refer to the satisfaction audiences expect to receive when certain media are selected based on the channels’ media content. Meanwhile, GO refer to the outcomes, which audiences actually receive as a result of exposure to media content. Such refinement of this theoretical approach has served to strengthen the theory, facilitating its extension to more contexts including new media technology.

Overall, a study seeking to examine considerations, which church leaders make in choosing news media channels will put some of the UGT assumptions to the test, contributing to the operationalization of the theory in an African context. The fact that the approach has evolved over the years as a perspective that explains media effects (Ruggiero, 2000) and particularly audiences’ choice of media channels (Dolan et al., 2016; Ratcliff et al., 2017), the selection of media messages (Rui & Stefanone, 2016), the reception, interpretation, response and even impact of these media messages (Rubin, 2009; Sundar & Limperos, 2013) makes it a suitable theoretical framework for this present study. However, UGT might not provide sufficient ground for examining the influence of ethnicity. For this reason, the study has considered social identity theory for grounding the investigation of the influence of the ethnicity of colleagues and friends on the sampled church leaders.

Social Identity Theory (SIT)

Henri Tajfel and John Turner developed SIT in 1979. The theory was originally developed to understand the psychological basis of intergroup discrimination, that is, the tendency to identify with certain social groups and acting in a way that favours ‘in-groups’ (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). While an individual’s self-concept such as personal traits is considered, SIT brings a person’s social identity into focus, that is, the groups to which one belongs (Ashforth, Harrison, & Corley, 2008; Deephouse & Jaskiewicz, 2013; Kagema, 2018). In early 1980s, the theory was developed as a general account to explain group processes and the nature of social groups (Turner, 1982). More recently, the theory has been used to understand intra-group processes (Chiang, Xu, Kim, Tang, & Manthiou, 2017; Ferrucci &

Tandoc, 2018; Guan & So, 2016; Hornsey, 2008; Korostelina, 2014; Reid, 2009; Saw & Okazaki, 2008; Yigit, 2017;2018).

According to Reid (2009), “The core idea of social identity theory is that people are motivated to maintain or achieve a positive social identity, but that positive social identity results from the standing of one’s in-group vis-à-vis other groups” (p. 896). This is relevant to the present study that examined ethnic influence of colleagues and friends on audience members’ choices of news media channels. Specifically, Saw and Okazaki’s (2008) view that SIT consists of three core elements (social categorization, social identification, and social comparison) could apply to this research. The elements seem consistent with ethnic identities and groupings, which this study considered.

Under social categorization, “individuals naturally categorize their social environment into those in their ingroup and those in outgroups” (Saw & Okazaki, 2008, p. 1319). Such categorization can trigger in-group favouritism and outgroup discrimination (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Ferrucci & Tandoc, 2018; Okazaki & Saw, 2008). As Ferrucci and Tandoc (2018) have argued, “The practice of distinguishing between groups that a person belongs and does not belong to is the catalyst for in-group-out-group biases” (p. 109). In the present study, the ethnic factor of colleagues and friends can provide such in-group and outgroup categorization, considering that individuals categorize people according to how similar and different they are to each other.

Under social identification, individuals are thought to have multiple levels of identity that define who they are, the most basic being individual personality traits and interpersonal relationships. Saw and Okazaki (2008) observed, “Specifically, social identity includes those aspects of a person’s self-concept that are based on their perceived membership in social groups (e.g., Black, Catholic, university student)” (p. 1319). Ethnicity of colleagues and friends can be an aspect justifying social groups.

Under social comparison, “individuals engage in social comparison with other groups and view themselves as better than and different from members of other groups” in order to have a positive self-concept and social identity (Saw & Okazaki, 2008, p. 1319). The dimensions for such differentiation depend on social contexts. For example, ethnicity can be considered a salient attribute with which in-group and outgroup members are defined in many parts of Africa into social groups. This is relevant to this study because the ethnicity of colleagues and friends could be deemed an important attribute with which audience members, in this case sampled church leaders, define themselves.

Overall, in the light of SIT, a variety of social factors and variables such as ethnic bias can influence church leaders’ choices of communication channels. For instance, in accessing news media channels, church leaders harbouring ethnic hate and bias may consider factors like the ethnicity of their colleagues and friends when these media are in shared premises. The reviewed literature shows that the core elements comprising SIT seem consistent with ethnic identities and groupings. Hence, the ethnicity of colleagues and friends can be an aspect justifying social groups to which church leaders could consider as ‘in-group.’

Literature Review

A review of literature did not trace studies that have considered the influence of ethnicity on news media choices. Furthermore, studies that have examined the ethnic influence of colleagues and friends seem not to have sampled the population of Church leaders considered in the present study. Therefore, this paucity of literature limited the number of assumptions that could be made in the design stage of the current study. It is against this background that this literature review seeks to clarify variables examined in this study, namely, social networks and interpersonal influence, ethnicity, and news media. The review demonstrates how these three concepts have been examined in various contexts.

Ultimately, on social networks and interpersonal relationships, the review illustrates the diverse and complex nature of interpersonal networks; their necessity in people’s social and cultural lives; and the difficulty of being so precise about the extent of the influences of these networks. On ethnicity, the review concludes that the salience of ethnicity in Africa varies across nations; that Africans identify with multiple identities and particular ethnic groups but not uniformly; and that in Kenya, tribe and sub-tribe are the two ethnic identities by which majority of citizens define themselves. On news media, the review has concluded that there are a variety of motivations in selecting news media channels.

Social Networks and Interpersonal Influence

Various scholars have examined the concept of social networks and interpersonal influences in a variety of contexts (Jacobs et al., 2017; Krinsky & Crossley, 2014; Lee, Chung, & Park, 2018; Namkoong, Shah, & Gustafson, 2017; Parks, 2011; Wright et al., 2013). This scholarly tradition has demonstrated how people’s interpersonal and social milieus and networks influence their respective

livelihoods and well-being. As Lee et al. (2018) found in a survey of college students in a large Midwestern university in the United States, perception of social support through interpersonal networks predicted well-being outcomes in a consistent manner.

However, of particular relevance for the present study is the analysis, which Parks (2011) has presented in an effort to illustrate the “value of viewing interpersonal interaction within the broader context of relationships among relationships” (p. 355). He sampled studies that have demonstrated the variety of networks that constitute interpersonal relationships. For instance, individuals who regularly have contacts could be examined in terms of how their racial attitudes compare with the degree of their ethnic diversity (Kim & McKay-Semmler, 2009). Friendships that develop at the workplace could be compared with job satisfaction (Raile et al., 2008). Meanwhile, networks emerging from traditional and online support forums could be interrogated within the context of cultural adaptation (Ye, 2006). Specifically, Parks (2011) has explained how interpersonal relationships “form, develop, and deteriorate over time” (p. 355). In a Kenyan context where ethnicity seems salient, the formation, development and especially deterioration of interpersonal relationships could be along ethnic identities.

Parks (2011) has further explored four network perspectives regarding interpersonal communication: the fact that “interpersonal networks are the living tissue of social structure and culture” (p. 362); that individuals in a network are more active in working for the network through interpersonal links than passive – members of an ethnic group selectively evaluate social situations, forming plans and acting strategically in their search for individual gratifications, needs, and desires rather than feeling entangled in the group. The other perspective refers to the notion that “interpersonal behaviour is frequently transitive across individuals within a social network, thus creating social-contagion effects”, which means that whatever happens in a relationship does not seem to stay in that very relationship (p. 362). Lastly, there is a way in which individuals in a network may not be aware of the networks’ influence on their feelings, thoughts, and behaviour. As Parks (2011) has put it,

While we are quite deliberate about our social actions, we usually do not consider how far they might extend beyond their immediate targets or how the social situation we inhabit in the moment might have been influenced by the actions of people not present (p. 363).

All these four perspectives seem to show the necessity of interpersonal networks in a person’s socio-cultural lifestyle, the diversity and complex nature of interpersonal networks, as well as the difficulty of being precise about the extent to which interpersonal networks may influence a person’s way of thinking, feeling, or behaving. Relating this to the present study, it could be argued that church leaders form and develop networks in their interpersonal relationships; the nature of these networks can be diverse and complex; and it seems a challenging feat to be precise about how these interpersonal networks might influence attitudes and behaviour of church leaders sampled in this study.

In a study that sought to examine patterns of interethnic communication among college students using data collected over a five-year period from a U.S. university campus characterized with moderate-level ethnic diversity and a seeming harmonious interethnic climate, Kim and McKay-Semmler (2009) found evidence of in-group and out-group associations defined by ethnicity. In particular, while the study demonstrated that those who maintain ethnically integrated network of friends (both casual and close) seem more receptive toward others who are ethnically dissimilar to them, persons whose ethnic group seems comparatively sizeable tend to be less receptive toward members belonging to less sizeable ethnic groups. This is relevant to the present study, which sampled church leaders associating with colleagues and friends belonging to different ethnic groups.

Interpersonal influence and conflict. According to Dillard and Knobloch (2011), “Interpersonal influence is a phenomenon that pervades every aspect of humanity and does so in ways that matter” (p. 389). Scholars have identified three properties that provide a framework for an understanding of interpersonal conflict, which include some disagreement, the fact of negative emotions, and some form of interference (Barki & Hartwick, 2004; Roloff & Chiles, 2011). It is in this regard that Barki and Hartwick (2004) have provided the oft-cited definition of interpersonal conflict: “a dynamic process that occurs between interdependent parties as they experience negative emotional reactions to perceived disagreements and interference with the attainment of their goals” (p. 234). In contexts where ethnicity is seen as salient, conflict could be along ethnic lines.

Ethnicity

Scholars have described ethnicity as the sense of belonging to a group of people characterized with aspects such as (but not limited to) shared identities like language, religion, myths, ideologies, geographical location, ancestral values, cultural and biological heritage, among others (Caselli & Coleman, 2013; Porter, 2011; Yieke, 2011). The expression “sense of belonging” in this description seems to contradict Getui’s (1999) view of ethnicity as being somewhat fixed, particularly in her assertion, “It is impossible to choose one’s parentage, family and therefore ethnic group” (p. 10). Still, writing about the Kenyan context, Wamwere (2003) has used the term ethnicity “only to refer to positive ethnic pride and ‘negative ethnicity’ to indicate ethnic hatred and bias” (p. 22). In his view,

negative ethnicity is the expression of harmful hate and bias against an individual or group of individuals, which “manifests itself when we begin to imagine that we are superior to others because our religion, food, language, songs, culture, or even looks are better” (Wamwere, 2003, p. 22). This is a significant distinction in Kenya where the term ethnicity has acquired a negative connotation. Bannon, Miguel, and Posner (2004) have shed some light on these perspectives, leaning toward the view of ethnicity as being less fixed:

Just as individuals possess repertoires of social identities that include both ethnic and non-ethnic group memberships, they also possess multiple ethnic identities: their language, their race, their tribe, and their sub-tribe, and, depending on whether or not one admits them as “ethnic” – scholars disagree on this score – also their region, their religion, and their nationality (pp. 11-12).

Salience of ethnicity in Africa. A review of literature revealed enormous scholarship illustrating not only the salience of ethnicity among Africans but also its significant role in violent situations on the continent (Chege, 2010; Chogugudza, 2008; Osaghae, 2006; Robinson, 2017), including coups (Harkness, 2016) and even genocide (Desforges, 1999; Paluck, 2009). Reinforcing this view, Mbatia, Bikuru and Nderitu (2009) have described ethnicity as “a means through which conflicts in many African countries are conducted and a powerful tool for political mass mobilization” (para. D). The oft-cited examples include the expulsion of the Asian business community from Uganda in the 1970s, the civil strife in South Africa during apartheid, the crisis in Sudan’s Darfur region, Nigeria’s civil wars, the strained relationship between whites and blacks in Zimbabwe, the 2007 post-election violence in Kenya, among other conflicts. All these examples serve to show the significant role ethnicity seems to play in conflicts in Africa.

In a different perspective, Bannon, Miguel, and Posner (2004) have dispelled what they described as “myths about the salience and origins of ethnic identifications in Africa” (p. 1). In their study, which involved over 14,000 respondents from nine countries in Africa, the trio did not see Africans prioritizing their ethnicity in self-identification. Their study has shown that collectively, majority of Africans in the sampled countries identified themselves more by class and occupation, which are non-ethnic affiliations, than by ethnicity. Only respondents from a couple of sampled countries ranked their ethnicity as their first and foremost identity, a finding that seems to demonstrate “that the national context matters for the salience of ethnicity” (p. 4) and that “Africans are not uniformly “ethnic” people” (p. 5).

In addition, the study by Bannon et al. (2004) found that education levels and occupation seem to significantly determine the salience of ethnicity. In particular, “individuals who are educated, working in non-traditional occupations, and living in urban areas – are more likely to identify in ethnic terms” (p. 8). The study sampled farmers, teachers and other government employees, miners, students, business persons, and the unemployed, but remained silent on religious leaders, a significant population in the African context. The present study could focus on the latter population. The same study also found that ethnic salience seems to weaken with exposure to news media channels. Besides, the proximity of national elections seems to increase the likelihood that individuals will identify themselves first and foremost in ethnic terms, a finding relevant to the Kenyan context where elections have been viewed as an ethnic census, as will be demonstrated. In the research design leading to these findings, neither a Kenyan setting was sampled nor was ethnicity treated as a multidimensional concept.

Ethnicity in Kenya. Bannon et al. (2004) sampled Kenya in the second part of their study. They surveyed 1,186 respondents in two market towns in Kenya and used the notion of multiple ethnic identities to examine the relative salience of “two of the multiple ethnic identities that most Kenyans have in their identity repertoires,” namely, tribe and sub-tribe (p. 12). The study, which recognized other identities such as religious affiliation and occupation sampled two linguistically distinct ethnic groups, the Kalenjin and the Luhya and focused on identifying the most salient ethnic identity as well as the conditions that explain this salience. The findings of this study “are consistent with a single overarching theory: that the scope of the social sphere in which a person operates affects the dimension of ethnic identity with which the person associates most strongly” (p. 14). In particular, while respondents operating within broad spheres occasioned by their advanced education, higher occupational status, and urban dwelling expressed strong association with their tribe, those in narrow spheres and localized networks due to lack of education, menial jobs or complete unemployment, and rural dwelling identified themselves more strongly with their respective sub-tribes. This study neither considered “the issue of whether ethnic identities trump non-ethnic ones” (Bannon et al., 2004, p. 12) nor did it pay particular attention to religious identity in assessing the conditions that explain the salience of ethnicity within the Kenyan context. What seems significant, however, is the finding that in Kenya, tribe and sub-tribe are the two ethnic identities by which majority of citizens define themselves.

Considering the latter finding, which seems consistent with media reports about Kenya over the years, the ethnic attitude that poses a challenge within the Kenyan context is that of tribalism,

which falls under the description of negative ethnicity (Wamwere, 2003). Tribalism has been described as the attitude of harboring strong feelings of connectedness with an individual's kinspersons while judging disapprovingly others not connected to that individual through family, clan or similar kinship ties (Nwaigbo, 2005; Onyalla, 2005; Sanou, 2015). In this regard, what was said about Rwanda, namely, that the blood of tribalism is thicker than the waters of baptism (Carney, 2008) could seem true about Kenya.

In Kenya, the challenge of tribalism, a manifestation of negative ethnicity, seems most pronounced during the electioneering period. Referring to the violence in Kenya occasioned by various disputed elections (1992, 1997, and 2007), Bratton and Kimenyi (2008) have observed, "Post-election violence in Kenya paints a picture of a country severely fractured by ethnic cleavages" (p. 1). Ethnicity does seem to play a significant role in various sectors of the Kenyan society, shown by the way politicians mobilize voters, how resources are allocated, the awarding of government tenders, as well as patterns of government appointments (Apollos 2001; Bratton & Kimenyi, 2008). In their study, which sought to examine voter motivations ahead of the 2007 elections in Kenya by sampling 1,207 Kenyan voters from across the country, Kimenyi and Romero (2008) found that while sampled voters indicated being motivated by a candidate's policy and character, ethnic patterns emerged when these voters were asked how they intended to vote. This study's survey has demonstrated significant low trust levels among the various ethnic groups, which originated from the perception that the government of the day seemed to favour particular ethnic groups, discriminating against others. The survey also revealed that ethnic lines seem to highly polarize Kenya.

Meanwhile, according to Bratton and Kimenyi (2008), studies that have revealed the dominance of voting along ethnic lines "are usually based on broad generalizations arising from analysis of aggregate national data that are not well suited to revealing voter intentions" (p. 2). Their own research, which involved a nationally representative sample of 1,207 Kenyan eligible voters, seems to demonstrate that most Kenyans (43 percent) identify themselves first and foremost with non-ethnic identities (occupation, social class, gender, and religion) compared with 20 percent who defined themselves first along ethnic identities (clan, tribe, race, language, and sub-national geographical region). Hence, rather than going by the conventional narrative that Africans use cultural solidarities to define themselves, the sampled Kenyans seemed to prefer choosing from other social and economic identities, which seem to characterize modern societies. Bratton and Kimenyi's (2008) study seems to demonstrate a certain resistance on the part of many Kenyans to define themselves in ethnic terms yet in making electoral choices, their voting patterns seem to follow ethnic identities, including vernacular language identity.

This review of literature on ethnicity has shown that the salience of ethnicity in Africa varies across nations and that Africans identify with multiple identities and particular ethnic groups but not uniformly. In other words, members belonging to an ethnic group do not experience ethnicity the same way, a finding that seems to challenge conventional thoughts about ethnicity. The review has also demonstrated that in Kenya, tribe and sub-tribe are the two ethnic identities by which majority of citizens define themselves. These findings seem consistent with studies that have recommended examining ethnic identity from situational approaches, which the present study explored, focusing on the ethnic influence of colleagues and friends on church leaders as they select news media channels. The following subsection reviews scholarship around news media and its role in situations of conflict.

News Media

Various studies have demonstrated the role of media in situations of violent conflict. In Africa, radio has particularly been portrayed as significant in either fanning or de-escalating conflict with the 1994 Rwandan genocide oft-cited as a typical example of the former (Mitchell, 2007; Paluck, 2009; Paluck & Green, 2009; Straus, 2007). In this regard, Straus (2007) has stated, "Radio has become a symbol of the genocide in Rwanda, and Rwanda has become a paradigmatic case of hate radio sparking genocide" (p. 610). This assertion was demonstrated in 2003 when the United Nations International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) convicted three journalists (two from radio and one from print) for inciting the genocide (ICTR, 2003).

In Kenya, accusations have been levelled against sections of the media for broadcasting hate messages aimed at inciting violence based on ethnic hatred and prejudice. In particular, various groups among them human rights, media monitors, and politicians did accuse sections of the media of fanning violence during and after the 2007 general elections (Somerville, 2008; Weighton & McCurdy, 2017). These accusations contributed to the indictment of Kass FM radio broadcaster Joshua arap Sang by the International Criminal Court (ICC) for charges of crimes against humanity, among these charges, spreading hate messages and broadcasting false news that seemed to inflame ethnic violence (ICC, n.d.). Hence, bearing in mind the case of Rwanda and that of Kenya, the role of the media during situations of conflict seem a vitally important consideration, besides and even alongside ethnicity.

Other examples illustrating the influence of media in situations of conflict include the role of the media in the processes of interpreting strategies toward the resolution of the Middle East conflict (Shinar, 2003); how new media and old media reinforced each other in influencing the Arab Spring conflict, particularly in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and Bahrain (Aday et al., 2012); as well as specific radio programs in responding to conflicts in Cambodia, Central African Republic (CAR), Liberia, Burundi, DRC, Senegal, and Sudan (Bratić, 2008), among other countries.

News media in Kenya today. Ismail and Deane (2008) have described Kenyans as voracious news consumers. Recent reports indicate that in Kenya, there are 386 FM radio frequencies with well over 45 radio stations in operation; more than 20 television stations are on air; six daily newspapers, several magazines and weekly publications are in circulation (Ireru, 2012; Media Council of Kenya, 2005). The two leading newspapers, *Daily Nation* and *The Standard*, are accessible through their online versions. The advent of the Internet and smartphones has made social media channels more accessible and increased their use. While Kenyan media seem not to have any ideological leanings that differentiate them (Obonyo, 2003), Esipisu and Khaguli (2009) have identified ethnicity as one of the factors that influence the political leanings of Kenyan media beside ownership and business interests.

In a study that examined the interaction between new media and ethnicity in Kenya, Njoroge, Kimani, and Kikech (2011) found that the new media did reinforce ethnic issues prior to the general elections in 2007 and therefore contributed to the ethnic antagonism that followed. They have noted, “The ethnic violence that characterized Kenya’s elections appears to have been the result of deliberate manipulation and instigation by new media” (p. 57). The study points to the need for the Kenyan media to facilitate the redefining of ethnic relationships among Kenyans toward a recognition and an appreciation of ethnic differences as an enrichment rather than a weakness. This review of literature on news media seems to show that the media have the potentiality of influencing individuals to engage in ethnic animosity.

Overall, this literature review suggests that ethnicity is a significant factor in the lives of Africans who identify with multiple other identities as well as particular ethnic groups but not necessarily in a uniform manner. In Kenya, the majority of citizens seem to identify themselves by their tribe and sub-tribe, but not exclusively. Additionally, the reviewed literature has shown that multiple factors could influence individuals in their choices of media channels including social networks through interpersonal communication. However, the extent to which a significant factor such as the ethnicity of colleagues and friends can influence has not been captured in reviewed literature. Based on results of this review, the following research question guided this study.

Research Question

RQ1A. To what extent does the ethnicity of colleagues and friends influence Catholic church leaders’ choice of news media channels?

RQ1B. Eliminating ethnic considerations, what other factors influence Catholic church leaders in their selection of news media channels?

Methods

In this study, a review of available scholarship neither traced studies that have examined how ethnicity can influence the choice of and exposure to news media channels nor found any study that has investigated the ethnic influence of colleagues and friends on a population that includes church leaders. In line with many scholars who have recommended this method for exploratory research (Campbell, 2014; Creswell, 2013; Daymon & Holloway, 2002; Harding, 2013; Merriam, 2002; Yin, 2011), this study employed a qualitative method research design.

Research Design

Qualitative research design offers a means to report and interpret the viewpoints of interview participants, considering the role of the researcher and his or her association with interview participants. Rather than examine surface features, qualitative research probes for deeper understanding, seeking insights into social reality from the viewpoint of individuals in it (Creswell, 2013; Daymon & Holloway, 2002; Merriam, 2002; Morse, 2015). In this study, purposive sampling was used to select 39 participants from a population of approximately 450 Kenyan clergymen and religious men and women serving in the Archdiocese of Nairobi, Kenya. In particular, the present study took the paradigm of social constructivism, which regards knowledge as being socially constructed in and out of the interaction between people in their natural settings (Creswell, 2013; Golafshani, 2003).

While the small sample sizes associated with qualitative research prevents generalization of results to a broader population, this particular limitation did not pose problems for this study, which did not seek to generalize the results beyond the Archdiocese of Nairobi. Besides, as Tuckett (2004) clarified, “While there are no closely defined rules for sample size, sampling in qualitative research usually relies on small numbers with the aim of studying in depth and detail” (p. 49). In line with the

recommendation of many scholars over the years (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Golafshani, 2003; Mays & Pope, 1995; Morse, 2015), the explanation of the processes involved, including how data was collected and interpreted, the description of the research setting, the participants and how they were selected, the measurement instruments, and the overall data collection procedure help to explain the quality of this study, providing an assurance of validity and reliability.

Data Collection

This study used elite and focus group interviews to make observations and record data. These interviews allowed participants to provide *rich, thick descriptions* of their views about ethnicity and their personal choices of news media channels. While the thick descriptions provided contexts of experiences as a process including intentions and meanings as scholars have recommended (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Golafshani, 2003; Morse, 2015), the elite and focus group interviews considered the intentions of participants, embracing both description and interpretation. In addition, while elite interviews examined individuals, focus group interviews enabled observation of important themes and patterns that emerged from discussions, both verbal and nonverbal interactions.

Elite interviews. A set of 11 interview questions was used as a guide to discuss how the ethnic background of friends and colleagues influenced choices of and exposure to news media channels. Each participant also shared his or her observations about how his or her colleagues and friends might have been influenced by others to choose news media channels, and if ethnicity featured as a factor in such choices.

Focus group interviews. A set of nine interview questions guided the focus group discussions, during which the researcher engaged participants at different times and venues around the influence of ethnicity in participants' choice of news media channels. In particular, participants gave views about how they have been influenced by friends and colleagues in their choices of and exposure to news media channels and if the ethnicity of their colleagues and friends was a factor in such influences. These participants also shared their observations about how their colleagues and friends might have been influenced by others to choose news media channels, and if ethnicity was a factor in such choices.

Participants

A screening questionnaire was administered to potential participants from May 20 to May 31, 2014 mostly through personal email accounts. Eventually, data were collected from 39 participants in 16 elite interviews and 3 focus group interviews: all Kenyan Catholic church leaders ministering in Nairobi Archdiocese, consisting of 19 males and 20 females. The average age of the participants was 42. The youngest participant was 35 and the oldest was 65. This was a homogeneous sample consisting of individuals who have dedicated their lives to the service of God in the Roman Catholic church through daily prayers, rites and ceremonies as either clergymen or consecrated men and women. All participants were in leadership positions, some even having multiple leadership roles. Some had fellow clergymen and religious as their followers. Others had the laity as their followers. Still others had both categories of followers, for instance parish priests who also had diocesan leadership roles. The homogeneity of the participants was further illustrated by their leadership role over followers hailing from multi-ethnic backgrounds.

Participants were from seven different ethnic backgrounds, 12 of these participants having been brought up in cosmopolitan contexts. Some in this latter category did not know their vernacular languages considering that they had been socialized in multi-ethnic contexts. However, a majority of the participants were familiar with their ethnic languages and confessed to using them often. The ethnic groups of the participants included the following: Kalenjin, Kamba, Kikuyu, Kisii, Luhya, Luo, and Meru.

Apart from being Kenyan Catholic clergyman or religious, eligible participants had to be having or have had experiences of leadership roles over members from multi-ethnic backgrounds as well as regular exposure to Kenyan news media channels. Living in a community consisting of members from different ethnic groups in Kenya was also a requirement. Having a professional background in studies related to anthropology and culture was considered an added advantage for eligibility of participants. Selection of participants was also based on diversity of ethnic backgrounds and ability to contribute diverse perspectives.

Setting

This study took place in dwellings and workplaces of 39 Kenyan Catholic church leaders in Nairobi, Kenya. This was in line with Daymon and Holloway's (2002) observation: "Qualitative investigations are carried out in people's natural environments such as in their offices.... However, focus groups involve groups of strangers meeting together in an unfamiliar setting such as a conference room" (p. 6). The interviews took place in either offices, religious community houses, or institutional

conference rooms. In all cases, measures were taken to ensure not only privacy and confidentiality but also a quiet interview environment through actions such as closing doors and sometimes windows and the use of tags labelled *meeting in progress*, *busy*, *not available*. The focus group participants sat in a circle and passed to each participant speaker the unidirectional microphone connected to the digital recorder.

Measurement Instruments

The elite interviews and focus group discussions started with a pre-brief, presenting the researcher and a brief explanation of the research and its purpose. This was followed by consent during which the permission to conduct the interview was sought from participants. The researcher then engaged participants in the interview, beginning with open-ended and grand-tour questions around the themes of ethnicity and news media channels. Before the debrief, which followed the interview, the researcher sought the views of participants on how Catholic church leaders are influenced by ethnicity in their choices of news media channels and if there were other factors that influenced these leaders in their exposure to news media.

Research Procedure

This study received institutional review board approval on May 14, 2014. Field research began with distribution of a screening questionnaire to collect demographic data from potential participants. Eligible and available participants were then assigned to elite and focus group interviews. The options for elite interviews and focus group discussions were based on the complementarity of these two methods (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2002). Elite interviews explored personal experiences in more depth while focus group discussions enabled observation of important themes including verbal and nonverbal interactions among several participants.

Church leaders with executive duties and specific training in particular academic fields were selected for elite interviews. Besides, the schedules of these participants did not permit them to take part in focus groups discussions, constituted by youthful church leaders in lower ranks. The first focus group interview had eight participants, the second had seven, and the third eight. Each interview was recorded on a digital recorder connected to a unidirectional microphone passed between the researcher and the participant. The researcher also took notes during the interviews. The average duration for the elite interviews was 40 minutes. The focus group interviews lasted between 60 and 75 minutes. The process of data analysis continued with listening to recorded narrative data, coding, and categorizing into themes.

Data Analysis

The analysis of data collected during the study involved transcriptions from the interviews. In line with a scholarly tradition around qualitative data analysis (Creswell, 2013; Creswell & Miller, 2000; Daymon & Holloway, 2002; Merriam, 2002; Morse, 2015), the recorded narrative data were listened to, coded, and categorized into major themes and patterns around the research question. Similarly, the researcher's notes were reread and content included in relevant categories. The researcher selected quotations from the interviews to illuminate the themes. During this analysis process, memos were written and a reflective journal was kept.

Coding and categorizing. According to Daymon and Holloway (2002), "Codes serve as labels or shorthand devices which enable [researchers] to tag segments of interest in the data," helping researchers to reduce and simplify evidence in order to interpret it (p. 234). Employing inductive strategy, the researcher started preliminary data analysis with the first recorded interview and written notes by searching for emergent themes in this first data. The researcher kept tentative thematic logs during the interviews and focus group discussions and refined these thematic logs later, playing back the recorded voices multiple times and referring to the notes after each interview session. In focus group discussions, the researcher distinguished between individual opinions from group consensus. Attention was also given to opinions of less prominent participants. Moreover, in coding focus group data, the researcher took note of talks between participants, including questions and anecdotes.

Analysing and interpreting themes. The dozens of categories required some system through integration for the researcher to interpret them and make sense of them all in relation to the research question. The researcher employed a deductive process of data analysis (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2011), working back and forth between the dozens of coded categories and identifying relationships between these categories. Emerging themes and patterns were identified and categorized, either according to expressions and concepts used by participants or according to terms the researcher created. The researcher formulated propositions and went back to data to test their plausibility, keeping analytical memos, which indicated connections between the data. The researcher identified broad categories and themes such as influence of ethnicity, role and challenges of church leaders, influence of news sources, ethnicity of news sources, influence of local languages, and influence of the media, among others.

Reliability and Validity

According to Morse (2015), qualitative research operationalizes validity by how well the study does represent the actual phenomenon in answer to questions such as, "Can the description be recognized by others who have had the experience, or appreciated by those who have not had the experience? Is the description detailed? Decontextualized? Abstracted? Expressed logically?" (p. 19). Meanwhile, reliability refers to the ability to reach the same findings if the study were to be repeated. This study operationalized rich, thick description as one of the strategies for ensuring validity and reliability (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Golafshani, 2003; Morse, 2015). The researcher spent considerable time with the participants in their dwellings and/or places of work, establishing trust that resulted in more revelations and rich data. Besides, in line with scholars who have recommended multiple methods of data collection to guarantee validity and reliability (Creswell, 2013; Creswell & Miller, 2000; Golafshani, 2003), this study combined elite interviews and focus group discussions. As Golafshani (2003) advised with regard to social constructivism paradigm that acknowledges multiple realities in the mind of participants, "To acquire valid and reliable multiple and diverse realities, multiple methods of searching or gathering data are in order" (p. 604). Overall, in this current study, the researcher employed the basic strategies for ensuring rigour in qualitative studies by being systematic in the research design, collection of data, interpretation, as well as communication of the entire research procedure. The transcriptions of the recorded interviews, the rereading of the researcher's notes, the writing of memos and the keeping of a reflective journal aided the realization of good quality research, whose findings are given below.

Findings

In this study, participants were expected to give views about how they have been influenced by friends and colleagues in their choices of and exposure to news media and if the ethnicity of their colleagues and friends was a factor in such influences. They were also expected to share observations about how their colleagues and friends might have been influenced by others to choose news media channels, and if ethnicity may have been a factor in such choices. Other than ethnic considerations, participants were also to give testimonies of other factors that influence their news media selection.

Collected data revealed that although colleagues and friends have an influence on the choices of and exposure to news media channels, their ethnicity did not seem to be the principal factor. Participants recalled situations when they had either influenced or discouraged colleagues, friends and family members from accessing particular news media channels. Such influences were considered normal among participants who live in religious communities and watch news in a common setting. "Whoever is first in the common room at news time chooses the channel and we all sit and watch. Sometimes, a member changes the channel, especially when there are too many adverts on the current channel," a participant shared in one of the focus group discussions.

Similarly, many participants acknowledged that colleagues, friends and family members had encouraged them to select certain news channels. Participants also recalled colleagues, friends, and family members dissuading them, at one time or another, in choosing particular news media channels. These participants did not attribute the mutual influence to ethnicity. However, in one elite interview, a participant shared about a collective ethnic bias against one of the national television stations in Kenya saying, "We had been told that K24 is owned by a Kikuyu politician. Because of ethnic bias, no one in our (religious) community wanted this television channel." The participant added, "A visiting member liked the channel and took us there. We realized it has balanced news." When probed about the background of the ethnic bias of the members of his community against the television station, the participant linked the collective decision to perceived political leanings of the national broadcaster during the Kenyan constitutional referendum in 2010, referring to the way the country gets sharply divided along ethnic lines ahead of any national election. The participant clarified that the influence of the visiting member to revert to the television channel was not ethnic.

However, while many participants did not think the ethnicity of friends and colleagues had been the underlying factor in these influences, two participants shared contrary views. One participant said, "I know that there are people from a particular region who will only access media channels owned and managed by people from their ethnic group. And they will influence members of their tribe to choose those channels." Another participant told a story of priests gathered in their rectory during the 2008 post-election violence in Kenya. He recalled one priest telling another, "Change the channel because this one is against our party. The channel was indeed changed. And given that they were numerically advantaged, the others respected their preference. But this was clearly an influence of ethnicity." These two testimonies serve to demonstrate ethnic influence of colleagues and friends on the population under study.

In response to the second part of the research question, a majority of participants cited aspects like timeliness, objectivity, depth, and boldness of news media channels as factors used to justify

preferences and influence. “We have found ourselves watching news from a television channel that begins its news broadcast just in time,” one participant shared in a focus group discussion. In another sharing that demonstrated boldness, a participant said, “NTV is known for having bold anchors who interrogate interviewees with the professionalism of good journalists.” “I tune into Citizen television because news reports on this channel seem well researched and characterised with depth,” a participant shared in one of the elite interviews.

Overall, these results demonstrate that all participants agreed that colleagues, family members and friends have a mutual influence over choosing news media channels. Although a few participants reported that the ethnicity of friends and colleagues played a partial role in some instances, no one claimed that he or she had been significantly influenced by ethnicity. Participants seemed to attribute the negative effects of ethnicity to others. Participants admitted being influenced by timeliness, objectivity, depth, and boldness in their choice of and exposure to news media channels.

Discussion

Reviewed literature showed a growing interest in research examining cultural and ethnic encounters among various members of society in different contexts. However, studies that have considered ethnic influence among a population of church leaders could not be established. Also, studies that have focused on ethnic influence in choosing news media could not be traced. Recognizing this gap, this research sought to integrate SIT and UGT into the examination of ethnic influence among church leaders on choosing news media channels. Overall, the findings provide evidence for mutual influence of colleagues, family members, and friends in selecting news media. However, most participants did not see ethnicity of their colleagues and friends as characterizing this influence. Instead, participants identified timeliness, objectivity, depth, and boldness as factors that influence their selection of news media channels. These findings have a number of theoretical implications.

First, this study offers additional insights into the concept of ethnicity. For instance, while the reviewed literature showed that the salience of ethnicity in Africa varies across nations (Akpan, 2018), the findings in the current study seem to show that the significance of ethnicity goes beyond nations to particular groups in society. In this study that sampled a population of church leaders, not a single participant claimed that he or she had been significantly influenced by ethnicity in choosing news media outlets. The participants’ testimonies denying ethnic influence of colleagues and friends on themselves and attributing ethnic influence to others can be interpreted to mean that the salience of ethnicity can vary across groups of people and could depend on circumstances.

Taken in the context of SIT, the assumption that the ethnicity of colleagues and friends would have provided the ingroup and outgroup categorization (Ferrucci & Tandoc, 2018) does not seem to apply to the sampled population. In this study, the social categorization of SIT in which people view their social contexts as comprising of ingroups and outgroups would need to consider other aspects beyond ethnicity. However, while social categorization seems less precise for the sampled church leaders, SIT’s category of social identification in which individuals define themselves by multiple identities seems applicable to this study’s findings (Damgaci & Aydin, 2013). In this regard, rather than justify their social group membership to a single identity such as ethnicity, sampled church leaders seem to have considered multiple identities, including their affiliation to the Christian church and membership to the Catholic denomination.

The limitation of applying social identification to the findings in this study could however be that the study did not seek to establish whether personality traits and interpersonal relationships were the primary levels of the populations’ multiple identities as the reviewed literature showed (Saw & Okazaki, 2008). A different study could explore the identity levels with precision, seeking to examine which of the church leaders’ multiple identities trumps the other. The same study could consider interrogating SIT’s social comparison category where individuals cultivate a favourable self-concept and social identity by comparing themselves with members of other groups, eventually viewing themselves in a comparatively better light than members of other groups.

In addition, the findings about ethnic influence in this study seem inconsistent with those by Bannon et al. (2004) who found that “individuals who are educated, working in non-traditional occupations, and living in urban areas – are more likely to identify in ethnic terms” (p. 8). While church leaders sampled in the current study were well educated and lived in a cosmopolitan urban setting, they did seem to identify themselves in ethnic terms. Two reasons could explain this variation. For one, Bannon et al. (2004) did not include a population of church leaders in their study sample, a unique social grouping whose value system is based on spiritual considerations. Two, their study established that ethnic salience seems to weaken with exposure to news media channels. Church leaders’ regular exposure to news media outlets might have weakened their reliance on ethnic affiliations and related influences. Meanwhile, Bratton and Kimenyi’s (2008) study, which found that most Kenyans identify themselves first and foremost with non-ethnic identities such as occupation, social class, gender, and religion seems consistent with the present research.

Second, the findings in this study seem consistent with the perspectives regarding networks in interpersonal communication. The reviewed literature showed that interpersonal networks in people's lives are necessary, that these networks are not only diverse but also complex, and that it is difficult to be precise about the extent to which interpersonal networks influence people's thinking, feeling, or behaving. In this study, sampled church leaders seem to have formed and developed diverse and complex networks in their interpersonal relationships and that it seems challenging to be precise about how these interpersonal links might influence their attitudes and behaviour, including the precise role of their respective ethnic affiliations.

Considering the background and religious calling of the population in this study, the awareness of the implications of having ethnicity of colleagues and friends as the underlying factor in the mutual influence in choosing news media channels may have contributed to the findings. Participants may have felt that putting the ethnicity of colleagues and friends into consideration could have implied subscribing to exclusive solidarities based on tribe, a reality that would have suggested nepotistic attitudes. The mutual enriching interactions between participants and their colleagues and friends may have contributed to the participants' admittance to having had mutual external influences over choices of and exposure to news media channels. In this study, all participants confirmed having lived in multi-ethnic communities and having interacted with people from different ethnic backgrounds. Most participants described these interactions as having been enriching.

Similarly, the many years of formation Catholic church leaders undergo in the process of becoming clergy and religious could also inform the cautious attitude toward ethnic influences. As church leaders, participants may have been keen not to show that they form cliques based on ethnicity with other individuals, be they friends or colleagues. Ultimately, this could be interpreted as an attempt by sampled church leaders to reject the notion of negative ethnicity in order to remain impartial and carry on their role in society of unifying rather than distinguishing among groups.

Third, the findings in this study seem to extend UGT within an African context. UGT explains the reasons behind individuals' use of media and the gratifications gained when these individuals access media content from a variety of available media. Participants' testimonies of friends and colleagues encouraging and dissuading each other in choosing news media channels offers evidence of the existence of a variety of news media channels in the study context. The participants' sharing about the considerations they make in choosing particular news media channels also demonstrates the active character of audiences as explained in UGT. In this study, some participants admitted being biased in their choice of news media, exposing themselves to channels that seemed to satisfy their social identities. In using news media channels that gratified their social identities, these participants operationalized one of the assumptions of UGT that considers audiences as active and able to purposively choose and engage with media, gratifying their needs from a variety of news media outlets.

The citing by most participants of aspects like timeliness, objectivity, depth, and boldness of news media channels as influential factors in choosing news media channels seems consistent with the reviewed literature, which showed a variety of motivations in selecting news media channels. Considered in the context of possible ethnic influence, the various motivations could be interpreted as ways of showing participants' awareness of the negative implications of exclusive solidarities based on ethnicity. Overall, in this study, participants seemed aware of the influence of ethnicity and consciously took actions to overcome its negative effects.

Limitations and Implications for Future Research

In this study, the participants' testimonies denying ethnic influence of colleagues and friends on themselves and attributing the influence on others in addition to the realisation that the salience of ethnicity can vary across groups of people could serve as a basis for further exploration. In this study, most participants tended to attribute ethnic influences to others rather than themselves. Future studies could consider operationalizing attribution theory to explore with precision the factors behind attributions of negative ethnicity to others and the attitude of avoiding personal recrimination.

Future research could also consider expanding research methods to include observation. The combination of findings from observation, elite interviews and focus group discussions would add value to the research findings and interpretations, especially about participants who deny the influence of ethnicity. Finally, this study focused on Catholic church leaders that included clergymen and religious men and women. Future research could consider including the laity with church leadership roles. The views and perspectives of this new category of church leaders would add value to the study. For instance, the laity would be expected to share their views about the extent to which they view their church leaders as being influenced by ethnicity in their day to day interactions. Mixed methods could serve to enrich such study examining the complex phenomenon of ethnic influences and news media choices.

Conclusion

Founded on UGT and SIT, this study sought to explore how the ethnicity of colleagues and friends may influence the media choice decisions of Catholic church leaders in ways that reinforce the ethnic bias and prejudices of these religious figures. The analyses of findings have demonstrated mutual influence of colleagues, family members, and friends over sampled Catholic church leaders' selection of news media channels. Most participants dismissed ethnicity as a factor in their own influences; a few participants reported that the ethnicity of friends and colleagues played a partial role in some instances; and there seemed to be a consensus about the influence of timeliness, objectivity, depth, and boldness in choices of and exposure to news media channels. In this study, participants did express a cautious attitude toward ethnic influences and tended to attribute the negative effects of ethnicity to others. This was interpreted as fear to subscribe to exclusive solidarities bordering on ethnocentrism. The negation of these seeming negative sentiments about ethnic influences would best be explored with precision by operationalizing attribution theory and employing observation method in a future study.

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