

ABSTRACT

Audience perception of wildlife conservation discourse in Kenya has been negative as evidenced in the results of conservation efforts. The purpose of this study was to interrogate the moderating influence of media content framing in the relationship between media and audience perception. The study employed convergent parallel mixed methods design. The population in this study comprised of three groups namely; sampled media practitioners in three media houses in Kenya; residents living next to national parks in four out of the eight conservation areas in Kenya as delineated by Kenya Wildlife Service; and park managers in the four sampled national parks. A questionnaire was administered to 83 human-wildlife conflict resolution committee members. This generated quantitative data while qualitative data was generated from interviews with 6 media practitioner, 12 park managers, and Focus Group Discussions with 4 groups of human-wildlife conflict resolution committee officials each comprising of 8 participants. The study applied both qualitative and quantitative analytical techniques. Results indicated that half (50%) of the total respondents from the three media houses focus on messages that can solve the conflicts that exist between wildlife and human beings as a factor when framing wildlife conservation messages touching on human-wildlife conflict. There was a general perception among participants that the media tend to emphasize the interests of state (KWS) more than those of the common man, thus the view that the media cannot fully be trusted to report matters from the perspective of the common man. This undermines the role of the media in educating the audience to appreciate wildlife and therefore conserve it. The study concludes that the target audiences are not satisfied with the manner in which these messages are communicated. As the media highlight the plight of the wildlife, it should equally communicate the plight of the communities. The study therefore, recommends more training of journalists and park managers to enhance sensitive framing and reporting of wildlife conservation messages.