



Gendered Identities, Media Narratives, and Violent Extremism in Kenya: Rethinking Peacebuilding in the Gospel of Christ

Joy Mueni

Riara University, Kenya

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Abstract

Kenya's struggle with violent extremism is shaped not only by security dynamics but by the narratives through which communities interpret identity, harm, and belonging. This study examines how gendered identities and theological commitments influence Kenyan media and faith-based communication on VE, and identifies practices that support ethical, inclusive, and dignity-affirming public discourse. Anchored in Feminist Media Theory, intersectionality, and Gospel-Anchored Public Theology, the study integrates gender, representation, and theological ethics to illuminate how media and faith actors shape public meaning-making around extremism. A convergent mixed-methods design was employed where Kenyan media guidelines, regional P/CVE policy, African feminist hermeneutics, and public theology literature were synthesised through systematic content analysis. The second phase included primary data collection via an anonymous online survey. Data were analysed thematically and integrated across phases. Findings reveal persistent gendered tropes in VE reporting, yet counter-publics, particularly women's groups and Muslim youth initiatives are actively producing alternative, dignity-centred narratives. Media practitioners exhibit strong ethical instincts but face institutional gaps, including limited Islamophobia training, weak verification systems, and inadequate duty-of-care protocols. Faith leaders demonstrate commitment to gender justice and restorative communication but express low confidence in applying "do-no-harm" approaches under pressure. Both sectors affirm that ethical, contextualised reporting and theologically informed truth-telling can reduce tension and strengthen social cohesion. The study concludes that integrating gender-aware media ethics with gospel-anchored public theology offers a transformative framework for narrative-justice in Kenya's VE landscape.

Introduction

Following the Westgate and Garissa University terror attacks in 2013 and 2015, respectively, Kenya adopted a multi-layered counter-extremism architecture that couples dynamic security measures with preventive, community-oriented interventions. These initiatives, anchored in the National Strategy to Counter Violent Extremism (NSCVE) and decentralised County Action Plans (CAPs), represent an attempt to institutionalise whole-of-society approaches to prevention (NCTC, 2016; Lind et al., 2020).



Yet, despite these reforms, Kenya's threat landscape has become increasingly diffuse: al-Shabaab remains operational along the Somali border, while homegrown radicalisation, particularly via digital platforms, has intensified (Botha, 2022; UNDP, 2023). Media and journalistic practices further complicate this terrain, oscillating between reinforcing stigma—especially toward Muslim communities—and enabling constructive civic dialogue (Meyers and Zenn, 2020). These dynamics underscore the need for a nuanced theological, sociological, and gender-sensitive analysis of how identity formation, media narratives, and violent extremism intersect, and how faith-informed peacebuilding might mitigate identity harms.

This article advances three interrelated contributions: the first is a conceptual account of gendered scripts and their deployment within extremist propaganda and state counter-narratives; second, an interrogation of Kenyan media frames surrounding VE and religion, with implications for policy and pastoral praxis; and lastly a gospel-anchored peacebuilding framework informed by African public theology and feminist hermeneutics (Oduyoye, 1995; Juma, 2024).

Policy Architecture and Threat Landscape

The NSCVE positions prevention at the core of Kenya's national response, coordinated by the National Counter Terrorism Centre (NCTC). CAPs operationalise this vision at the county level, foregrounding participatory, gender-responsive, and context-specific interventions (NCTC, 2016). However, as comparative P/CVE analyses show, effective implementation depends on sustainable financing, interagency coordination, and robust monitoring systems—areas in which Kenyan efforts remain uneven (Hedayah and GCTF, 2020). Resource scarcity, donor dependency, and fragmented state-civil society relations continue to limit operational coherence (Botha and Abdile, 2016).

Regional studies reinforce the significance of preventive strategies. UNDP's *Journey to Extremism in Africa* (2023) identifies socioeconomic precarity, governance deficits, and human rights abuses as primary drivers of recruitment, suggesting that development-oriented and rights-respecting approaches are indispensable complements to security measures. IGAD's working definition of VE—encompassing both violent acts and enabling activities such as financing, recruitment, and propaganda—emphasises gender sensitivity as a cross-cutting requirement (IGAD, 2020). Kenya's fragility ranking, characterised by exclusion, governance weaknesses, and intercommunal tensions, further illustrates the structural vulnerabilities that militant actors exploit (Fund for Peace, 2022).

Notably, al-Shabaab's operational capacity remains significant, with factions such as Jaysh Ayman conducting attacks in Boni Forest and along the coastal belt. The group's sophisticated propaganda ecosystem amplifies local grievances and erodes trust in state institutions, heightening the ethical responsibilities of journalists and religious leaders as communicators in moments of crisis (Carter et al., 2017). Three imperatives therefore emerge for Kenya's prevention ecosystem: (i) sustained financing and iterative monitoring of CAPs, including attention to rumour ecologies; (ii) integration of gender-responsive, trauma-aware practice to address dignity harms; and (iii) strengthening national-local-media interfaces to institutionalise ethical reporting and community voice.

Kenya's fragility also intersects with localised motivations—revenge, thrill-seeking, fractured parenting, and adolescent identity loss—illustrating how everyday psychosocial vulnerabilities can be mobilised into extremist narratives (Njoroge, 2021). Historically, Kenya's experience with terrorism—from the 1980 Norfolk attack to the 1998 U.S. Embassy bombing and subsequent al-Shabaab operations—reveals the interplay between transnational and domestic drivers. Political economy dynamics, including negative ethnicity, winner-take-all politics, and episodic electoral violence, sustain perceptions of exclusion exploited by extremist actors (Branch and Cheeseman,



2009). Geography exacerbates these vulnerabilities: porous borders and forested hideouts support insurgent logistics, while coastal and northern counties experience disproportionate exposure to militant activity.

Recruitment patterns are increasingly multi-ethnic and gendered. Women's participation—as recruiters, financiers, logisticians, and occasionally combatants—challenges reductive victim-centric narratives familiar in policy discourse (Wright, 2020). Concealment strategies, including cross-dressing, exploit gendered surveillance gaps. Designing reintegration and prevention interventions, therefore, requires recognising women's agency without reinforcing harmful stereotypes (Sjoberg and Gentry, 2011).

Although Kenya's gender policy landscape includes constitutional protections, GBV policies, and anti-FGM legislation, weak enforcement undermines these frameworks. Persistent FGM prevalence, failure to meet the two-thirds gender rule, and inequitable property rights heighten women's vulnerability and inhibit leadership in P/CVE spaces (Mutahi and Kamau, 2020). Families, meanwhile, remain pivotal prevention infrastructures: absent parenting creates identity voids that recruiters exploit, whereas attentive households can disrupt radicalisation trajectories. COVID-19 intensified GBV but also spurred women's groups to innovate through income-generating activities that enhanced household resilience.

Moreover, extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances continue to fuel grievance and revenge narratives. Evidence consistently shows that rights-violating security practices undermine prevention by delegitimising the state (Amnesty International, 2018). Recruitment hotspots often correlate more strongly with psychosocial distress—youth disaffection, teen pregnancies, hunger, and belonging deficits—than with income aggregates alone (UNDP, 2023). Digital platforms intensify these patterns: WhatsApp groups serve both as engines of rumour and mobilisation, and as potential spaces for dignity-affirming counter-narratives. Religious identity functions ambivalently as both a fault line and a protective resource. Although attackers sometimes weaponise religious tests, interfaith networks and faith communities remain among the most trusted infrastructures for prevention when equipped with trauma-aware protocols.

Current scholarship inadequately examines how Kenyan media construct gendered and intersectional representations of VE, thereby creating a knowledge gap. Research also rarely integrates feminist media theory with African public theology, leaving gaps in understanding how journalists and faith actors collaboratively shape ethical, dignity-affirming VE narratives, and hence the rationale for this research.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored in two complementary theoretical perspectives: Feminist Media Theory, enriched by intersectional and counter-public analyses, and Gospel-Anchored Public Theology, rooted in African theological traditions of reconciliation and social transformation.

Feminist Media Theory and Intersectional Analysis

Feminist media theory, emerging from second-wave feminist scholarship in the 1970s and refined through post-structural and intersectional turns, interrogates how media systems construct and circulate gendered meanings (van Zoonen, 1994; Gill, 2007). A central tenet is that media portrayals rarely mirror reality; instead, they reproduce ideological assumptions about gender, power, and agency. In VE reporting, recurrent tropes position men as protectors or perpetrators and women as mourners or passive victims, a pattern observed across global and African conflict contexts (Sjoberg



and Gentry, 2011). Such depictions render women simultaneously *hyper-visible* as symbols of suffering yet *invisible* as political actors, peacebuilders, or agents within extremist ecosystems.

Contemporary digital feminist scholarship extends these insights to networked spaces, showing how social media can both reproduce and contest dominant gender narratives (Banet-Weiser, 2018). Online feminist counter-publics organise around hashtags, testimonies, and visual storytelling that foreground women's leadership and communal resilience. Within Kenya, women's groups, mothers' collectives, and Muslim youth associations articulate alternative narratives that resist securitised stereotyping and centre dignity, belonging, and justice.

Intersectionality, articulated by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), provides a crucial analytic supplement by emphasising that gender does not operate in isolation. Instead, identities are shaped through interlocking structures of religion, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, education, and geography. In Kenya's coastal and northern frontiers, for example, Muslim women's vulnerability during security operations differs markedly from that of Christian women in Nairobi, not only in degree but in kind. Failing to account for these layered identities risks producing prevention programmes that are both ineffective and harmful.

Within media studies, intersectionality demands that journalists attend to *who is represented, how they are represented, and who is permitted to speak as an expert*. Islamophobia research demonstrates a persistent patterned harm: Muslim men are frequently coded as potential threats, while Muslim women are infantilised, portrayed as pitiable, or erased altogether (Saeed, 2007). Kenyan VE coverage must therefore adopt representational tracking, apply harm-benefit tests for visuals, and employ do-no-harm language that avoids collective attribution of blame.

Nancy Fraser's (1990) counter-public theory further strengthens this framework by highlighting how marginalised groups cultivate alternative communicative spaces to contest dominant narratives. These counter-publics – whether women's peace groups in Mombasa, youth-led digital platforms, or interfaith solidarity fora – produce their own knowledge, critique state abuses, and articulate justice-oriented visions of security. Recognising these groups as legitimate publics requires journalists, researchers, and policymakers to co-design safer interview protocols and broaden participation in narrative production.

Together, feminist media theory, intersectionality, and counter-public theory provide a lens that exposes the gendered, racialised, and structural dynamics shaping VE narratives in Kenya. They also clarify why prevention efforts must foreground women's leadership, Muslim knowledge production, and community-centred storytelling to counter stigmatisation and strengthen social cohesion.

Gospel-Anchored Public Theology

The second pillar of this study is Gospel-Anchored Public Theology, an African theological tradition that explores how Christian faith engages public life, promotes justice, and contributes to societal transformation. Rooted in the work of theologians such as John de Gruchy (1995), Miroslav Volf (1996), Desmond Tutu (1999), and contemporary African scholars such as Katongole and Rice (2008), public theology emphasises that reconciliation is not merely a spiritual aspiration but a public, ethical, and political practice.

A foundational tenet is that the church participates in the common good through truth-telling, justice-seeking, and human dignity. Public theology, therefore, situates Christian actors – journalists, faith leaders, congregations – as moral agents embedded in civic life, responsible for shaping public discourse, challenging injustice, and fostering communal repair.



Miroslav Volf's *Exclusion and Embrace* (1996) is central to this tradition. Volf argues that reconciliation requires *truthful naming of harm*, repentance, forgiveness, and a "costly embrace" that neither erases injustice nor collapses identities. His framework underscores the moral imperative of resisting scapegoating in times of insecurity—a critical insight for Kenya's VE context, where Muslim communities often bear disproportionate suspicion and blame.

Desmond Tutu's *No Future Without Forgiveness* (1999), grounded in South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, conceptualises reconciliation as holding memory and mercy in tension. This vision resonates with Kenya's own Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission (2008), which sought to confront historical grievances while envisioning social healing. Tutu's emphasis on restorative justice has direct implications for newsroom ethics, trauma-aware pastoral care, and community-led reintegration of individuals associated with VE.

Emmanuel Katongole and Chris Rice (2008) further conceptualise reconciliation as a journey of re-narrating identity in Christ and re-ordering social relations. This perspective highlights that identity transformation is central to peacebuilding: believers are called to resist narratives of enemy-making, elevate credible messengers from stigmatised communities, and cultivate non-violent discipleship. In VE prevention, this translates into designing reintegration mechanisms that honour victims' justice needs while affirming the possibility of new communal belonging.

Public theology thus equips Kenyan churches and faith-inspired institutions to act as principled, proximate, and practical peace agents. By collaborating with journalists, county CVE fora, Muslim leaders, and community organisations, Christian actors can model dignity-affirming speech, foster ethical media practices, and convene trustworthy spaces for civic dialogue.

Method

This study used a convergent mixed-methods design, integrating qualitative and quantitative elements to generate a multidimensional understanding. Phase 1 consisted of a desk-based documentary synthesis, drawing on three bodies of evidence: Kenyan media laws, editorial guidelines, and regulatory frameworks; regional and Kenya-specific P/CVE strategies, evaluations, and CAPs; and lastly, African public theology, feminist media theory, and cultural hermeneutics literature. Documents were analysed using systematic content analysis and thematic coding, enabling triangulation across policy, theological, and media frames.

Primary data collection was the second phase, during which anonymous online surveys were administered to clergy and faith leaders, lay community members, and media practitioners across selected Kenyan counties. Participants were recruited using purposive sampling, targeting individuals directly engaged in VE communication, pastoral care, or media practice, and in some cases, especially in the Northern frontier, snowball sampling. This method allowed participants to refer additional respondents within their networks. The instrument included Likert-scale items assessing perceptions of representation, stigma, and VE narratives; open-ended questions capturing lived experiences, ethical dilemmas, and theological reflections; and demographic parameters such as gender, location, role, and years of service. In total, 76 respondents completed the questionnaire out of 100 sent. Ethically, in accordance with the Kenya Data Protection Act (2019), informed consent was obtained and documented before data collection.



Results

This study sought to examine how Kenyan media and faith actors construct gendered and theological narratives around violent extremism, and to identify practices that promote ethical, inclusive, and dignity-affirming communication for peacebuilding. The results are presented herein.

Gendered Identities in Recruitment, Stigma, and Response

UNDP's 2023 study across several African countries underscores that livelihood insecurity, perceived injustice, and state abuses remain central in recruitment pathways, with gendered vulnerabilities evident throughout. In Kenya, women appear as survivors, caregivers, facilitators, or participants, yet policy and media predominantly frame them as victims, obscuring agency and complexity (UN Women; RUSI gender reviews). Recognising women's leadership in prevention – such as interfaith women's groups – advances equitable P/CVE approaches.

Conversely, masculinised ideals valorising toughness and vengeful protection can escalate retaliatory behaviours. Faith spaces – particularly pastoral and youth ministries – may reinforce or disrupt these patterns by modelling alternative masculinities rooted in empathy, service, and accountability. Gospel-informed formation thus has a unique role in nurturing dignifying masculinities.

Survey results revealed broad agreement that public discourse should affirm dignity and that media perpetuate harmful gender stereotypes. Respondents supported gender-inclusive leadership and faith-based collaboration, confirming the potential of teachings on forgiveness and truth-telling to de-escalate conflict. The country analysis highlights constitutional and statutory equality provisions coexisting with persistent inequities – inheritance disparities, FGM/C prevalence, and exclusion from religious leadership. Women in conflict contexts bear disproportionate caregiving and stigma burdens but are essential to prevention and reintegration when empowered.

Two implications arise. First, the public already embraces gender-responsive, dignity-centred discourse; the main barrier is infrastructural – namely, control over platforms, editorial standards, and the resourcing of women and youth to lead. Second, gender and religion intersect in patterned marginalisations: visibly Muslim women face invisibility or pity, while Muslim men are stereotyped as threats. Thus, gender-aware media ethics must integrate anti-Islamophobia practices – precise labelling, careful sourcing, and harm-benefit assessments. Gender, therefore, is integral to narrative justice, not an ancillary concern.

Media Narratives and Practitioners

Between Alarm and Stigmatisation

Kenyan media navigate intense pressures when covering terrorism. The Media Council of Kenya's (MCK, 2025) revised Code of Conduct emphasises accuracy, context, and victim protection. Nonetheless, analyses reveal a persistent bias associating Islam with threat. Muslim scholars (Sheikh, Malakwen, and Obuya, 2024) have criticised this framing and initiated “open mosque” dialogues to promote understanding. Ethical reporting and newsroom literacy remain foundational to “do-no-harm.”

Trust in violent extremism (VE) coverage averaged 2.88/5 – mirroring perceived sensationalism (2.88). Media experts showed the highest trust (3.75) yet also greater recognition of sensationalism (3.00); clergy and community respondents rated both lower. Participants strongly agreed that ethical journalism reduces tension (4.48) but noted under-representation of community voices (3.84) and alarming imagery (3.72). Faith leaders' portrayals were only moderately fair (3.04), while the lack of context ranked lowest (2.36).



This dual perception of distrust and sensationalism signals structural weakness. It reflects Kenya's history of political violence and the media's framing of crises in binary narratives. Citizens' recognition of absent context—governance deficits, socioeconomic strain, and state abuses—reveals opportunity: richer, contextualised reporting fosters trust while countering stereotype-driven harm.

The Digital Front: Platformed Propaganda and Counter-Narratives

Al-Shabaab's digital strategy, pioneered during the Westgate attack, continues through short-form videos that amplify fear. Kenyan scholarship (Ogenga, 2024) identifies emerging online radicalisation in Western Kenya, linked to low media literacy. Effective counter-narratives must avoid top-down slogans; credibility requires locally authored, dialogical content embedded in trusted institutions—faith networks, women's associations, youth clubs.

Digital reach amplifies both empathy and fear. Kenya's politicised media landscape—shaped by electoral heat, ethnic divisions, and security crises—creates "surge" moments where identity rhetoric hardens. Thus, digital velocity is not neutral: emotional content determines whether communication fosters polarisation or peace.

Journalists: Ethical Instincts, Institutional Gaps

Journalists scored highly on ethics—avoiding graphic content (4.5/5), stigmatising language (4.25), and emphasising verification and the inclusion of affected voices (4.0). Yet formalised checklists (3.5) and duty-of-care protocols were weak. In scenario testing, all participants chose best practices—verifying viral material and anonymising victims—but only some had Islamophobia training.

This gap between ethical intent and institutional capacity echoes national realities: deadline pressures, political and commercial interference, and resource limitations in community media. Regional dynamics—propaganda from al-Shabaab networks—demand technical capacities (OSINT, deepfake verification) beyond most local outlets' means.

A pragmatic response entails staged capacity-building: county-level editorial forums, shared verification desks, and micro-grants enabling community radio to apply seven ethical guardrails—consent, anonymisation, precise labelling, harm-benefit testing, safe imagery, rapid corrections, and duty-of-care debriefs.

Clergy and Faith Leaders: Motivated but Under-Resourced

Faith leaders reported encouraging gender-transformative practices: addressing harmful masculinities (4.2), challenging stereotypes (4.0), empowering women preachers (3.8), and youth co-creation (3.6). Yet confidence in "do-no-harm" communication remained low (2.6). This reflects high-pressure environments where clergy mediate grief, rumour, and political expectations.

Three supports are essential. First, trauma-aware pastoral formation should include consent protocols, survivor safeguarding, and referral pathways. Second, congregational media-literacy—source verification, rumour management, and "language audits"—reduces harmful amplification. Third, a standing newsroom-faith partnerships can institutionalise checklists and rapid-response communication. Theology thus meets practice: truth-telling and restorative communication require operational frameworks, not just moral exhortation.

Discussion

The study's findings strongly affirm the analytic power of Feminist Media Theory, intersectionality, and counter-public theory in explaining Kenya's gendered experiences of violent extremism. Consistent with feminist media scholarship, the data highlight persistent tropes that cast women



primarily as victims, caregivers, or mourners—positions that obscure women’s agency even when they serve as facilitators, leaders, or active participants in prevention or response efforts. This reflects van Zoonen’s (1994) and Gill’s (2007) arguments that media representations systematically reproduce gendered hierarchies and align with Sjoberg and Gentry’s (2011) critique of women’s hypervisibility as symbols yet invisibility as actors. The survey’s recognition that media perpetuate harmful gender stereotypes reinforces this theoretical claim. At the same time, the documented leadership of interfaith women’s groups and Muslim youth associations demonstrates the vitality of counter-publics—marginalised communities generating alternative narratives that contest dominant frames. Their dignity-centred discourse exemplifies Fraser’s (1990) conceptualisation of counter-publics as sites of resistance and knowledge production.

The findings further validate intersectional analysis, showing how gender intersects with religion, class, geography, and visibility in shaping vulnerability and stigma. The patterned experiences of Muslim women—often pitied or erased—and Muslim men—frequently coded as threats—echo Crenshaw’s (1989) argument that single-axis gender analyses obscure the lived realities of those positioned at the intersection of multiple structural oppressions. Respondents’ affirmation of gender-inclusive leadership and concern for stereotypical portrayals underscores the need for media ethics that integrate both gender-awareness and anti-Islamophobia safeguards. Thus, the empirical evidence demonstrates that gender is not merely an auxiliary concern but a central axis of narrative justice, exactly as intersectional feminist theory contends.

The analysis also supports the insights of Gospel-Anchored Public Theology, especially its emphasis on dignity, truth-telling, restorative communication, and relational repair. The broad agreement among clergy, media practitioners, and community members that public discourse should affirm dignity reflects core theological commitments articulated by Volf (1996), Tutu (1999), and Katongole and Rice (2008)—namely that reconciliation begins with the truthful naming of harm and the reconstitution of social identity in ways that resist exclusion and scapegoating. Faith leaders’ efforts to challenge harmful masculinities, empower women preachers, and foster youth co-creation resonate with public theology’s insistence that Christian formation is inherently civic, shaping the moral imagination of communities.

At the same time, the relatively low confidence among clergy in “do-no-harm” communication reveals the operational gap between theological ideals and institutional capacity—a tension that public theology anticipates. Volf’s (1996) notion of “costly embrace” and Tutu’s (1999) insistence on holding memory and mercy together require structures of support, accountability, and trauma-awareness. The study’s findings—particularly the call for pastoral safeguarding, referral pathways, and media-literacy formation—demonstrate the practical necessity of translating theological ethics into embodied practice. Muslim scholars (Sheikh, Malakwen, and Obuya, 2024) have criticised this framing and initiated “open mosque” dialogues to promote understanding. Ethical reporting and newsroom literacy remain foundational to “do-no-harm.”

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This dual perception of distrust and sensationalism signals structural weakness. It reflects Kenya's history of political violence and the media's framing of crises in binary narratives. Citizens' recognition of absent context—governance deficits, socioeconomic strain, and state abuses—reveals opportunity: richer, contextualised reporting fosters trust while countering stereotype-driven harm.

Newsroom–faith partnerships, ethical checklists, and shared verification desks operationalise public theology's principles by embedding them within concrete communicative routines.

Media practitioners' strong ethical instincts, coupled with limited institutional tools, further reinforce this connection. Public theology frames communication not merely as information transmission but as a moral act with formative power; thus, the identified gaps in formalised checklists, Islamophobia training, and duty-of-care protocols highlight the need for ethically grounded institutional reform. The finding that richer, contextualised reporting can rebuild trust echoes theological calls for truth-telling and accounts of structural injustice—namely, governance deficits, socioeconomic strain, and state abuses identified by participants. This is precisely the form of socially attuned truth-telling that African public theology envisions (Katongole and Rice, 2008).

Similarly, the discussion of masculinised ideals—valorising toughness and retaliatory protection—aligns with public theology's critique of destructive identity formations and its call to nurture dignified masculinities rooted in empathy, service, and accountability. Youth ministries and pastoral spaces are uniquely positioned to model these alternative masculinities, illustrating how faith communities can interrupt cycles of grievance and revenge.

Finally, the findings on digital radicalisation and counter-narratives bridge both theoretical lenses. Digital feminist theory warns that online spaces can reproduce hierarchies or create avenues for subversive storytelling (Banet-Weiser, 2018), while public theology highlights the importance of credible, locally authored narratives rooted in communal belonging. Respondents' emphasis on collaborative, context-aware counter-narratives affirms that effective communication must draw simultaneously from feminist attention to representation and theological commitments to truth, dignity, and reconciliation. Digital reach amplifies both empathy and fear. Kenya's politicised media landscape—shaped by electoral heat, ethnic divisions, and security crises—creates “surge” moments where identity rhetoric hardens. Thus, digital velocity is not neutral: emotional content determines whether communication fosters polarisation or peace.

In essence, the empirical results substantively reinforce the study's theoretical architecture. Feminist media theory explains the patterned gendered harms, representational biases, and counter-public resistances observed. At the same time, gospel-anchored public theology illuminates the moral, relational, and restorative dimensions of communication that faith and media actors must steward. Together, these frameworks offer a coherent interpretive lens through which Kenya's violent extremism narrative landscape can be understood and transformed.

The study is limited by its reliance on self-reported data, which may be subject to social desirability bias, and by an online sample that excluded individuals without digital access. The qualitative depth was constrained by survey-based responses rather than interviews, and policy documents reviewed may not capture rapidly evolving P/CVE practices.

Conclusion

Kenya's challenge with violent extremism is not only kinetic but deeply narrative. Citizens routinely encounter VE content, express moderate distrust and perceive sensationalism, yet they also believe that ethical, dignity-affirming communication can defuse tensions. Across sectors, the pattern is



consistent: clergy are motivated but uncertain about “do-no-harm” communication; journalists demonstrate strong ethical instincts but lack standardised checklists, legal protection, and duty-of-care systems; communities show individual discernment but few collective routines for verification and rumour control. Political heat, inequity, and cross-border insecurity compress complexity and make language both risky and powerful.

The solution lies not in more information but in more trustworthy speech. A gospel-anchored, gender-responsive, media-aware praxis can translate insight into action. First, operationalise dignity (Imago Dei) as a measurable standard—precise labelling that avoids collective blame, anonymisation of vulnerable persons, visual harm-benefit tests, and explicit affirmation of the worth of victims and even returnees. Second, institutionalise joint ethics across county platforms, newsrooms, and faith actors through concise checklists: two-source verification with community input, flagging of unverified items, rapid visible corrections, trauma debriefs, and briefings on gender sensitivity and faith bias. Third, build small, dependable capacities—pooled verification desks for community radio, trauma-aware pastoral formation, rumour-pause rituals in congregations, and micro-grants enabling women and youth to lead credible storytelling.

Progress should be tracked through narrative-justice metrics: declines in stigmatising language, shorter rumour-to-correction times, greater diversity of sources, and improved contextual accuracy, feeding into CAP reviews to guide resources.

Ultimately, prevention means reshaping narratives when fear threatens to harden identities. When dignity becomes operational, ethics shared, and capacities reliable and trusted, speech itself becomes a civic asset—making trust visible, one headline, sermon, and message at a time.

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