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**ADVOCACY COALITION FRAMEWORK AND THE WICKED PROBLEM OF
TRAFFIC CONGESTION IN NAIROBI CITY COUNTY KENYA**

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Advocacy Coalition Framework and The Wicked Problem of Traffic Congestion in Nairobi City County Kenya

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Abstract:

Purpose of Study: This study investigates the influence of the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF) on the wicked problem of traffic congestion in Nairobi City County, Kenya. Specifically, it examines how media advocacy—a core ACF component—shapes policy responses to this complex, intractable urban transport challenge.

Methodology: Grounded in Complexity Theory and pragmatism, the study adopted a descriptive design. Data were collected from 168 transport sector stakeholders using simple random and stratified sampling. Semi-structured questionnaires and interview schedules achieved an 81.5% response rate (n=137). Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics.

Findings: Media advocacy demonstrated a statistically significant strong positive correlation with addressing traffic congestion ($r=0.736$, $p<0.01$)—the highest among all ACF constructs. Regression analysis confirmed media advocacy as the most influential predictor ($\beta=0.312$, $t=4.417$, $p<0.001$). Descriptive results showed strong agreement that media advocacy creates stakeholder awareness (mean=4.21, highest), pushes county government into action (mean=4.18), prompts solutions via incident-driven coverage (mean=4.17), utilizes multiple media tools (mean=4.16), holds power accountable (mean=4.15), and disseminates timely information (mean=4.13). Congruent, intense, sustained coverage compels actionable policy measures on traffic management.

Conclusion: Media advocacy is the most influential ACF component in addressing traffic congestion in Nairobi County. It creates awareness, holds power accountable, disseminates information, and drives stakeholder mobilization. Strategic, sustained, multi-platform media engagement is the most potent tool for advocacy coalitions seeking durable transport policy reform in Nairobi.

Keywords: *Advocacy Coalition. Wicked Problems, Media Advocacy, Traffic Congestion, SACCOS, Matatu Welfare Association*

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1. INTRODUCTION

Wicked problem never keeps still (Ritchey, 2013). A number of problems whereby some threaten the health of human beings have posed a challenge to policy makers in defining and responding effectively to them (Walls, 2018). This difficulty is as a result of defining features which ranges from undefined causes, heated debate on their understanding, their numerous, demand for collective action, lack of precise planning responses, complexity and framing cumbersomeness among stakeholders who hold strong values and beliefs. These problems more often attract strong professional issues, political and moral issues (Ritchey, 2013). The idea that wicked problem is pegged on stakeholders has resulted to little consensus on what the problem is all about and how to go about it.

Traffic congestion is a wicked problem bedeviling major cities in the world. In the year 2007 alone, United States of America suffered a huge cost loss of fuel and travel time worth \$ 87.2 billion equivalents to 2.8 billion gallons of fuel consumption and additional 4.2 billion of travel hours (Kono & Joshi, 2019). Similarly, in Japan, a whopping 8 billion travelling hours are lost every year as a result of traffic congestion. In Dar es Salaam Tanzania, traffic congestion consumes an average of 3 out of 10 working days (Mpogole & Msangi, 2016). As a result of this, workers are only able to work for only 1.4 times less the required duration due to loss of 2.5 hours of their time to traffic jams daily. In Accra Ghana, the source of stress, decline in productivity and sales is associated with traffic congestion (Agyapong & Ojo, 2018). The negative spillover is due to poor road designs, road traffic crashes, and the attitude of pedestrians, drivers and traders.

In Nairobi city Kenya, a total of 25.3 million grams of CO₂ (gCO₂e), 6.89 million gCO₂e, 1.82 million gCO₂e, 251, 683 gCO₂e and 181, 054 gCO₂e emissions were associated with private cars, public service vehicles, light commercial vehicles, heavy goods vehicles and motorcycles respectively (Sitati et al., 2022). Gachanja (2015) admits that complete eradication of traffic congestion in the city of Nairobi is an exercise in futility since its not affordable and equally possible. The contributing factors of the traffic congestion scenarios were lack of proper transport planning, lack of effective traffic management and control, inadequate transport infrastructure and increased vehicle ownership and inefficient spatial distribution of land uses. The state above caused by traffic congestion in Nairobi city calls for a panacea whose source is only a combined effort of key and season actor. It is from this perspective the current study examined the causal effect of Advocacy Coalition Framework on the wicked problem of traffic congestion in Nairobi City County, Kenya.

Identification of the policy problem and likely suitable solution is what encompass policy analysis (Cairney, 2021). However, in the recent times the scope of policy analysis has expanded to include monitoring and evaluation of outcomes. Advocacy coalitions are born of actors who in a variety of ways coordinate their behaviors and with shared core policy beliefs purposely to influence decisions of the government of the day (Peters and Zittoun, 2021). This sole responsibility of influencing government policies, outcomes of subsystems and rules governing subsystems are achieved through development and adoption of diverse strategies. Advocacy coalition framework



offers insights to build up towards policy change whereby external sources, internal events, policy-oriented learning and negotiated agreements pathways greatly effect policy change (Jenkins-Smith, et al., 2018). The said policy change does not happen just like that but require a myriad of enabling factors among them; redistribution of coalition resources, heightened political and public attention, mobilization of minority coalition and change of the agenda.

Advocacy coalition framework is a theoretical approach that offer explanation on how public policymaking process is influenced by a group of people who take advantage of their shared common beliefs systems and also work closely and against their allies and antagonists respectively (Gabehart & Weible, 2023). In most cases majority of formed coalitions range from simple to complex formations that have strong bonds across jurisdictions. The ACF theory assumes policy actors are cognitively bounded therefore embracing belief-based goals and at the same time demonizing opponents with alternative goals. According to Weible and Sabatier (2017) the ACF has been applied successfully to drum up advocacy of environmental, energy, public health, education, water, drug and domestic violence policies in the developed world though the evidence suggest the application of the framework is on the rise in Australia, Africa, South America and Asia.

Advocacy coalitions have showcased stability and heterogeneity of beliefs (Markard, Suter & Ingold, 2016). For instance, coalitions influence the change of transition sending a signal of significant major policy in the future. Actors base their policy issue in the prism of technological change which is a key catalyst in ensuring change of policies that are of socio-technological transitions. In authoritarian and democratic regimes, advocacy collation framework theory is largely manifested by experts and expert-based information, policy change, policy brokers, coalition resources and advocacy coalitions who influenced policies in environment and energy, budget, information, civil society and governance, agriculture, health, transportation, education, domestic violence and information sectors (Osei-Kojo, Ingold & Weible, 2022).

Outcome of policy change-making process in Kenya is shaped by a variety of elements among them; discourses, narratives, institutions and networks, and actors (Njoroge, Ratter & Atieno, 2017). The process is initiated by a single action of social movement thereafter owned by the government. The process however faces a number of challenges among them; conflict of interest, policy process control, real play of power, relations, and inclusion and exclusion. With occasional media back-up business membership organizations in Kenya were successful in influencing legislation solely on inside strategy (Irwin and Githinji, 2017).

Holding power accountable, disseminating information for agenda setting and serving as the platform from which democracy ideals, social progress and civic engagement realized sum up the multifaceted role of the media in public policy advocacy (Jha & Chakarabarti, 2023). This way a more equitable, justice and participatory governance systems have been realized as a result. Social media channels have become a prudent platform for meaningful interactions between organizations and citizens (Guo & Saxton, 2020). Organizations and coalitions have successfully



conducted their advocacy work through social media and managed to influence public policy, facilitate collective action, mobilize supporters and raise awareness.

Despite prowess of Advocacy Coalition Framework in providing solutions and influencing policies little is known locally. The empirical evidence in place suggest that ACF is very effective in influencing complex matters in the spheres of environment, energy, public health, education, water, drug and domestic violence. If the same is adopted in the transport sector in Nairobi city County Kenya, solution to ever traffic congestion menace will be achieved. It is from this backdrop the current study is seeking to investigate the influence of Advocacy Coalition Framework on the wicked problem of traffic congestion in Nairobi City County Kenya. Equally, study is seeking to investigate the influence of media advocacy on the wicked problem of traffic congestion in Nairobi City County Kenya.

Statement of the Problem

The presence of traffic congestion is a testimony of public policy failure and equally its absence is an indication of things not working as planned (Marohn, 2021). Partially what contributes to traffic congestion is very simple and straightforward things hence terming it wicked problem. In both rural and urban areas, the phenomenon traffic congestion is a social menace (Jain & Paul, 2020). A number of attempts initiated to manage traffic and traffic congestion have failed to meet the desired goals due to lack of prudent techniques. Travel time and cost is reduced by a better transport system (Vijayalakshmi & Raj, 2023). The net effect of a better transport system is increased economic opportunities that is based on robust economic and behavioral decisions. This menace of traffic congestion requires a policy panacea that relies in advocacy coalition framework having successfully worked elsewhere on environmental, education, energy and climate change policies.

Many studies demonstrate dearth of evidence in regard to Advocacy Coalition Framework on the wicked problem policies. Further there is little known how the wicked problem of traffic congestion is influenced by media advocacy a very crucial component of Advocacy Coalition Framework. Equally, empirical evidence in place present other various approaches to policy making but ignore coalition formations and their influence on policies on traffic congestion a wicked problem the city of the Nairobi has ever been trying to solve. It is from this backdrop the current study is seeking to fill this crucial gap by investigating the influence of Advocacy Coalition Framework on the wicked problem of traffic congestion in Nairobi City County Kenya.

Study Objectives

General objective; To investigate the influence of Advocacy Coalition Framework on the wicked problem of traffic congestion in Nairobi City County Kenya.

Specific Objective; To investigate the influence of media advocacy on the wicked problem of traffic congestion in Nairobi City County Kenya.



2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Media Advocacy and Wicked Problem

Berryman, Ferguson and Negy (2018) delved into the subject social media use and mental health among young adult. The study was a correlational in nature that involved 467 young adults. The parameters that were sought among the target population were the duration spent on social media, vague booking tendencies and social media importance in the day-to-day lives. The decreased empathy, anxiety as a result of social media, loneliness, ideation of suicidal and mental health symptoms from the general perspective were the outcomes considered. The inferences from the study indicated that impaired mental health functioning was not a predictive of social media. The study above focused on mental health among the young adults whereas the current study is focusing on traffic congestion an ever experienced wicked problem in Nairobi City County Kenya.

While at airbrushed media images and disclaimer labels in Britain, Paraskeva, Lewis-Smith and Diedrichs (2017) explored the subject consumer opinion on social policy approaches to promoting positive body image. The study was experimental research in nature which adopted mixed-method in soliciting social policy approaches and body image opinions from among the British consumers. The study revealed that the effectiveness of labelling images received plenty of skepticism and body image was unlikely to be improved by labelling. Rather, the effective strategies were found to be media diversity appearance and social norms reorienting were perceived to be very effective. The study above focused on consumers while the current study is focusing on transport stakeholders.

In South Africa, Zatoński et al., (2023) investigated the phenomenon framing the policy debate over tobacco control legislation and taxation. The survey was conducted in South Africa between 2018 – 2019 and it involved analysis of 132 media articles that were systematically searched from news articles. The study found out that media debates were guided by seven overarching frame but the most predominant ones were harm reduction and vaping, economic and health frames. The leading frame – economic frame – inherently consisted of unsupportive tobacco control legislation arguments. Think tanks, media celebrities, organizations of retailers, trade unions and tobacco industry spokespeople were found to advance economic arguments. The study above was conducted in South Africa whereas the current study is being conducted in Kenya.

Among the academic libraries in Nigeria, Firdausi, Manir and Bappah (2021) explored the subject advocating for the formulation and implementation of social media policy for implementation of information service delivery. The study found out that the lack of social media for information service delivery, social media tools like Facebook, WeChat, LinkedIn, blogs and twitter were found to be used interchangeably with zero consideration on their functions. The study above was however conducted in west Africa and every unique geographical location therefore its inferences cannot be generalized in east Africa.



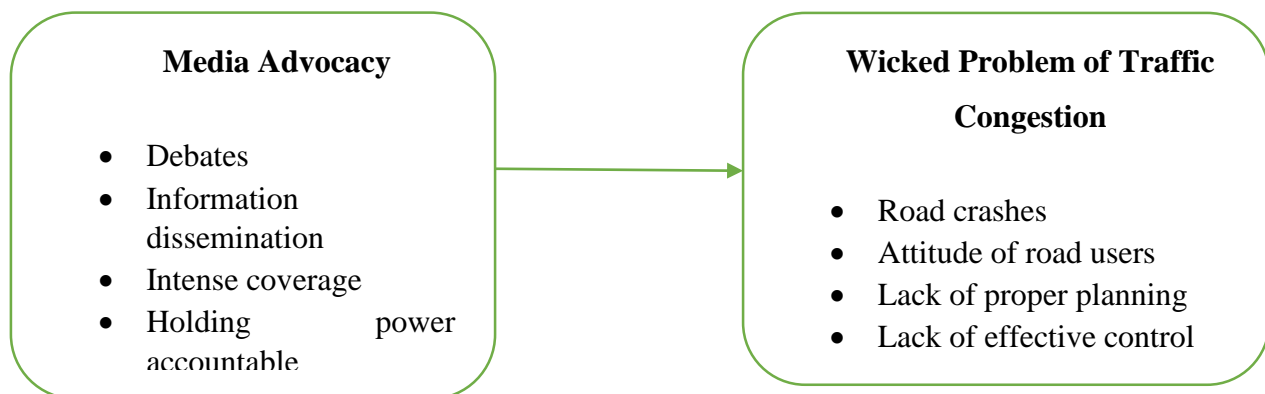
With the focus being advanced family planning initiatives in Kenya, Choge et al., (2023) investigated the phenomenon media advocacy in catalyzing actions by decision makers. The study revealed that advocacy from the media contributed to the advancing initiatives of family planning and are a powerful catalyst to actions of decision-making across Kenya to address the issue of adolescent pregnancy. The actions were centered on policy implementation fast-tracking, ensuring availability of contraceptive methods and strengthening accessibility. The study above was on family planning whereas the current study is on traffic congestion.

With the focus being on illicit brew consumption in Kenya, Mwangi (2018) delved into media influence on public policy. For the period 2005 – 2015 the study fetched data for analysis from the leading daily newspapers through content analysis. It was revealed that public policy and government action was influenced by incident-driven media, congruent and intense coverage. The findings suggested the presence of media reporting weaknesses and influencing politicians what to talk about, current happenings and the difficult it had encountered in asking the same politicians what to do hence curtailing their watchdog role. The study above revolved around the aspect of illicit brew consumption whereas the current study focuses on traffic congestion.

Complexity Theory

The proponent of the theory is Stuart Kauffman of Sante Fe Institute in New Mexico in 1980s. The premises of the theory lie in the hidden behavior of complex systems whether these systems are production lines, organizations, ecosystems or national economy. Complexity theory offers an explanation on how collective behavior is attained through relationship in a firm, system grow, evolve and adapt, a given system or organization interacts with the environment, and initiates negotiation with other entities (Sammut-Bonnici, 2014). Further, the theory explain how some organizations emerge out of situations that are chaotic and the ability of giving insights on how to account for new structures from within an organization. The theory will also help the study unpack how the county government of Nairobi City County employs new approaches purposely to organize, think, lead and manage the wicked problem of traffic congestion with the partnership of other actors.

Conceptual Frameworks





3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study adopted pragmatism research philosophy as it advocates for the adoption of mixed methods, quantitative or qualitative, it serves as a philosophical program for social research and provides an essential approach to broadly understanding social research (Morgan, 2014). The research was biased towards adopting descriptive research design due to its suitability for the study in the sense that there is no room for manipulation of study subjects but rather have them in their state (Siedlecki, 2020). Simple random, purposeful and stratified sampling techniques were employed to select 169 representative sample from SACCOs plying the various routes of the city's estates, senior officials from Matatu Welfare Association, National Transport and Safety Authority, National Transport Services Authority and Ministry of Transport, Usafiri Bora limited, Mazingira Mema group and Smart City Movement Group. Primary data were collected using a questionnaire and an in-depth interview schedule.

4. FINDING DISCUSSION

Demographics

The study targeted 168 respondents sampled from various stakeholders within the Nairobi transport sector. Out of the 168 questionnaires administered, 137 were duly completed and returned, translating to a response rate of 81.5%. The majority of the respondents were male at 65.0%, while female respondents accounted for 35.0%. A larger portion of respondents fell within the 36–45 years' age bracket at 35.8%, followed by those aged between 46–55 years at 27.7%. Respondents aged below 35 years constituted 20.4%, while those aged 56–65 years and above 66 years accounted for 11.7% and 4.4%, respectively.

In the realms of education, majority of the respondents held graduate-level qualifications at 49.6%. Those with Higher Diploma constituted 34.3%, while certificate holders were the least represented at 16.1%. The study established that majority of respondents had between 7–10 years of experience in the transport sector, constituting 38.0%. Those with over 11 years of experience followed at 23.4%, while respondents with 4–6 years of experience accounted for 27.7%. The least represented group comprised those with less than 3 years of experience at 10.9%. It was revealed that the majority of respondents had been involved in traffic congestion solution initiatives between 7–10 times, representing 37.2% of the sampled population. This was followed by those who had participated 4–6 times at 30.7%. Respondents who had been involved over 11 times constituted 19.0%, while those who had participated less than 3 times were the fewest at 13.1%.

Descriptive Statistics



Influence of Media Advocacy on the Wicked Problem of Traffic Congestion in Nairobi City County, Kenya

The study sought to investigate the influence of media advocacy on the wicked problem of traffic congestion in Nairobi City County, Kenya. Respondents were presented with statements on a five-point Likert scale to gauge their level of agreement.

Influence of Media Advocacy on Traffic Congestion

Statement	SD f(%)	D f(%)	N f(%)	A f(%)	SA f(%)	Mean	Std
Incident-driven media coverage prompts transport stakeholders to find solutions.	3.6	5.1	8.0	37.2	46.0	4.17	0.90
Congruent and intense coverage by the media has pushed the county government into course of action.	2.9	4.4	9.5	38.7	44.5	4.18	0.86
Advancing media initiatives have provided insights on tackling the wicked problem of congestion.	3.6	5.8	8.8	37.2	44.5	4.13	0.90
Various media tools have been used to push the county government to provide transport policy solutions.	2.9	5.1	8.8	39.4	43.8	4.16	0.87
Media debates held at various outlets have had positive effect in shaping traffic congestion issues.	3.6	6.6	9.5	36.5	43.8	4.10	0.92
The media is known for its harm reduction and issue-framing approach on traffic congestion matters.	4.4	7.3	10.9	35.8	41.6	4.03	0.99
Media is ever known for holding power accountable regarding traffic congestion in Nairobi City.	3.6	5.1	8.0	38.7	44.5	4.15	0.89
Media advocacy activities have created awareness among	2.9	4.4	7.3	40.1	45.3	4.21	0.84



stakeholders, swinging them into action.							
The media is always effective in disseminating information regarding traffic congestion to stakeholders.	3.6	5.8	8.8	37.2	44.5	4.13	0.90
The traffic congestion problem has been reoriented as a social norm by the media.	4.4	6.6	9.5	37.2	42.3	4.07	0.96

Source: Field Data (2024)

As shown in Table 4.8, the findings revealed that the majority of the respondents strongly agreed that incident-driven media coverage prompts transport stakeholders to find solutions to traffic congestion (SA=46.0%, A=37.2%), as supported by a mean score of 4.17 and a standard deviation of 0.90. Reactive media coverage of road incidents places the congestion crisis on the public agenda, compelling institutional responses.

The study also revealed that the majority of respondents strongly agreed that congruent and intense media coverage has pushed the county government into taking course of action on transport policy (SA=44.5%, A=38.7%), supported by a mean of 4.18 and a standard deviation of 0.86. Sustained media pressure functions as an external catalyst that accelerates the policy response cycle.

Furthermore, the study revealed that most respondents strongly agreed that advancing initiatives by the media have provided insights on tackling congestion within the city (SA=44.5%, A=37.2%), with a mean of 4.13 and a standard deviation of 0.90. Media-initiated investigative features serve a constructive role in surfacing evidence-based solutions to complex transport challenges.

The study revealed that the majority agreed that various media tools have been deployed to push the county government to provide solutions to traffic congestion (SA=43.8%, A=39.4%), supported by a mean of 4.16 and a standard deviation of 0.87. The multi-platform nature of modern media advocacy amplifies the reach of congestion-related messaging to diverse stakeholder groups.

The study further revealed that most respondents strongly agreed that media debates at various outlets have positively shaped issues of traffic congestion (SA=43.8%, A=36.5%), as supported by a mean of 4.10 and a standard deviation of 0.92. One respondent from Mazingira Mema Group noted during an interview: 'Public debates on radio and television have significantly elevated public consciousness about the health and economic consequences of traffic gridlock in Nairobi.' This finding is consistent with Zatoński et al. (2023), who established that media debates are a critical instrument through which advocacy coalitions frame wicked problems and mobilize public opinion for policy reform.



The study revealed that most respondents strongly agreed that the media is known for its harm reduction and issue-framing approach on congestion matters (SA=41.6%, A=35.8%), supported by a mean of 4.03 and a standard deviation of 0.99. This reflects the role of media in normalizing discourses around transport governance and accountability.

Moreover, the study revealed that the majority strongly agreed that media advocacy activities have created awareness among stakeholders (SA=45.3%, A=40.1%), supported by a mean of 4.21 and a standard deviation of 0.84 — the highest mean in this section. This underscores the unparalleled capacity of media advocacy to mobilize institutional and public actors toward concerted traffic management action.

Additionally, the study revealed that the media is effective in disseminating timely information on traffic congestion to stakeholders (SA=44.5%, A=37.2%), supported by a mean of 4.13 and a standard deviation of 0.90. Timely information dissemination reduces response lags and enables proactive rather than reactive congestion management.

The study further revealed that most respondents agreed that the traffic congestion problem has been reoriented as a social norm by the media (SA=42.3%, A=37.2%), supported by a mean of 4.07 and a standard deviation of 0.96. The normalization narrative perpetuated by media, if unaddressed, risks eroding public urgency for structural transport solutions.

Lastly, the study revealed that the majority of respondents strongly agreed that the media consistently holds power accountable regarding traffic congestion in Nairobi (SA=44.5%, A=38.7%), supported by a mean of 4.15 and a standard deviation of 0.89. This finding aligns with Mwangi (2022), who found that accountability journalism in Kenya's urban transport sector has strengthened governance responsiveness by compelling authorities to publicly justify policy inaction.

Correlation Analysis

Pearson correlation analysis was performed to establish the nature and strength of the bivariate relationships between the independent variable (media advocacy) and the dependent variable (wicked problem of traffic congestion).

Pearson Correlation Matrix

Variable	Traffic Congestion	Sig. (2-tailed)	N
Media Advocacy	0.736**	0.000	137

****Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).**

Source: Field Data (2025)

Media advocacy demonstrated statistically significant and strong positive correlations with the wicked problem of traffic congestion at the 0.01 significance level. Of all the constructs of



advocacy coalition framework, Media advocacy recorded the highest correlation coefficient ($r=0.736$, $p<0.01$). These findings confirm that media advocacy is a meaningful predictor of the traffic congestion outcome variable, thereby justifying the subsequent regression analysis.

Regression Coefficients

Variable	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	0.412	0.218		1.890	0.061
Media Advocacy (X2)	0.318	0.072	0.312	4.417	0.000

Dependent Variable: Wicked Problem of Traffic Congestion.

Source: Field Data (2026)

Media advocacy recorded the highest standardised beta coefficient ($\beta=0.312$, $t=4.417$, $p<0.001$), implying that it is the most influential predictor of outcomes related to the wicked problem of traffic congestion. These findings specifically affirm the significant role of media advocacy component in addressing the wicked problem of traffic congestion in Nairobi City County. The findings affirm the findings by Choge et al., (2023) advocacy from the media contribute to the advancing initiatives of family planning and are a powerful catalyst to actions of decision-making across Kenya especially in addressing the issue of adolescent pregnancy.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The study concluded that media advocacy constitutes the most influential component of the Advocacy Coalition Framework in shaping responses to the wicked problem of traffic congestion in Nairobi City County. The finding that media advocacy creates awareness, holds power accountable, disseminates timely information, and drives stakeholder mobilization underscores its critical position within the policy advocacy ecosystem. The study concluded that strategic and sustained media engagement, leveraging diverse communication platforms to maintain the salience of the traffic congestion issue on the public agenda, represents the most potent tool available to advocacy coalitions seeking to drive durable transport policy reform in Nairobi City County. Policymakers and advocacy groups must therefore prioritize collaborative media strategies as a cornerstone of their engagement frameworks.

The study recommended that transport advocacy coalitions, including Mazingira Mema Group, Smart City Movement Group and Usafiri Bora Limited, should develop comprehensive, multi-platform media advocacy strategies that leverage both traditional and digital media to maintain sustained public pressure on policymakers. Partnerships with investigative journalists and public interest broadcasters should be formalized to ensure consistent, evidence-based coverage of traffic congestion issues and policy progress. Given that media advocacy emerged as the most influential predictor variable, coalitions should allocate dedicated budgets for professional media



engagement, including the development of compelling, data-driven communications materials that resonate with both public and institutional audiences.

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