Sierra Leone

State of the Media Report

2016

Prof. Ritchard M'Bayo, Ph.D.
Series Editor

CONTENT

Foreword

This edition of the **State of the Media Report 2016**, is our Christmas present to our readers - the public, our stakeholders and our sponsors. We have assembled an impressive team of writers to share their perspectives on issues pertaining to the media in Sierra Leone. Our contributors traverse both the academic and professional worlds with active research agendas investigating the perplexing problems of journalism in Sierra Leone and in general media studies and communication.

Francis Sowa investigates the challenges of media management and the issues of profitability and sustainability and the concept of "media poverty" to proffer understanding of why our media systems are still not yet serious money-making agencies. He then collaborates with lawyer Joseph Kapuwa to make a case for the repeal of the Public Order Act of 1965.

Isaac Massaquoi takes on the controversial concept of "objectivity" and argues that the professional world of journalism should "ditch" that concept to save the profession.

Tony Musa looks at the growing phenomenon of Social Media and its impact on the electoral process. He focuses particularly on conversations on *Facebook* and *WhatsApp* and their impact on the coming March 7, 2018 general elections. He also writes about the need for fair distribution of the available radio frequencies in Sierra Leone.

Williette PRO James, our Gender Expert, provides an update of the vexing problem of women's struggle from both the global context and the Sierra Leone experience.

Our critical scholar, Tanu Jalloh, provides an introspective review of media practice and practitioners in Sierra Leone.

Abdul Swaray looks at the latent factors that drive media ethics and press freedom from a rhetorical perspective.

Our own resident media studies research scholar, Prof. Ritchard M'Bayo, who is also the *State of the Media* Series Editor, adds interesting and timely perspectives to the collection of articles in this edition. Like the other contributions, we hope you will find Prof. M'Bayo's articles on Fake News, 200 Years of struggle of Media Freedom, and the Press Freedom Index Report, interesting as well as instructive.

All our contributors are media research scholars, five of them Ph.D. candidates of the Department of Mass Communication, Fourah Bay College, University of Sierra Leone. A lawyer and an actively practising professional journalist add value to the work we have done this year in bringing out the 2016 edition of the *State of the Media Report*.

We are grateful to our key sponsor, UNDP; to the Media Reform Coordinating Group of Sierra Leone (MRCG-SL) and to Fourah Bay College.

Francis Sowa, Chairman

MRCG-SL
December, 2017

Fake News, Old Media, New Media
Implications for Journalism in Sierra Leone

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*A*ldous Huxley, in his 1932 classic novel, *Brave New World*, observed that (mass) communication is neither good nor bad. It is simply a <u>force</u> and as such it can be used for either good or bad purposes. Huxley was reflecting on the use of propaganda in that era and how this type of communication was used to brainwash people into seeing the world from only one perspective – that of the propagandist's. Radio and television, as technologies and as channels for communication, were once the weapons of choice in the propaganda battles of the Cold War in the early 1950s and 1960s. The emergence of powerful agencies such as the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and its *Empire Service*, and the Voice of America (VOA) were related to the battles for the minds of oppressed and dominated peoples of the world.

Hitler's w eekly radio broadcasts, according to historians, were so powerful that he succeeded in brainwashing Germans into looking at Hitler's Arian Race as pure and unadulterated. Hitler believed that "men were won over less by the written than by the spoken word, that every great movement on this earth owes its growth to great orators and not to great writers." [1] He told Germans through his propaganda that the Jews would corrupt the Arian race if something was not done to stop them. Hence, the German agenda under Hitler of ethnic cleansing and the holocaust, with Jewish people as the primary victims.

But so much has changed since then and arguably much has also remained the same. It is not by accident that the wealthy nations, also the "oppressors" of the contemporary world, owned and operate 80% of the most powerful agencies of international communication – CNN, BBC, etc. These are not neutral agencies, although that's how they will want us to see them. They are agencies of cultural domination and facilitators of both the positive and the negative aspects of globalization.

Through these agencies, according to M'Bayo (2000) [2], the African conception of *tolerance, freedom*, *truth*, *human rights*, *family*, *sexuality*, etc. are now defined to conform to values. Consequently, there are tensions in African societies among those who insist upon Africa-centered (Afrocentric) approach to these values and those accepting the conceptions of the values of globalization.

(In Sierra Leone today), these tensions are apparent among the…elite and the non-elite, among political authorities and their electorates, among the various publics of contemporary communication systems, between urban and rural populations and, above all, between Africa and the rest of the world. These tensions have re-energized the longstanding debates on the mutations of the African consciousness, a subject which Franz Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth*, W. E. B. DuBois' *Souls of Black Folks,* Carter G. Wilson's *Miseducation of the Negro),* etc. have so eloquently explored.

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[1] Hitler, Adolf (19430. ***Mein Kampf***. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.

[2] M'Bayo, R. T. (2011). ***Political Culture, Cultural Universls*** *ad the Crisis of Identity in Africa: Essays in Ethnoglobalization.* New York: Mellen Press.

Cultural universals are pushing the mutations of the African personality to new frontiers as Africans assert their identities through a complex of factors, some uniquely African, and others exogenous. Emerging from this complex of factors are hybrid cultures and identities that appear to be supplanting local cultures and the African personality. African communication values, particularly, are under stress imposed by technologically powerful impulses of the western world. And there is ample evidence that this process now defines for many how and what they communicate, especially through the channels of information technologies and other communicative processes.

Enter the New Media

The new media, the Internet and, most significantly, Social Media, have not only expanded the public space and public discourse, they are redefining journalistic practice and introducing new players – citizen journalists, bloggers, fake journalism, fake news, etc.

Members of the public are mobilizing around issues and affected interests in ways that we have never experienced before. A rich array of alternative voices are now part of the mosaic of public discourse. In Sierra Leone, and anyone with access to a computer/laptop or smart phone is potentially a journalist. There is excitement and personal gratification in the brave new world of communication! To be able to add one's voice to the plethora of voices in the market place of political communication gives some people a personal sense of gratification but a false sense of empowerment.

In the wake of the ECOWAS verdict, for example, one so-called political analyst, posturing as a legal expert, wrote lengthy piece on his *Facebook* supporting the idea that the ECOWAS court did not have jurisdiction over Sierra Leone and, hence, the SamSumana vs GOSL was a mute and "buff" case.

Another one wrote, just two days or so before the verdict was officially announced that the ECOWAS Court had voted 7-0 in favor of the government.

Almost everything written on Facebook about Kandeh Yumkellh, Mada Bio, and Samura Kamara, the leading presidential candidates for the March 7, 2018 general elections, are either half-truths, outright lies and fabrications or classic examples of fake news driven by political interests and personal vendettas. Very little effort is made to critically analyze the political agendas of these contending candidates. Rather than genuinely informing or educating readers about the issues, fake news gurus deliberately misinform the public; and members of the public then begin to share the misinformation with others. Soon the fake news becomes the reality and perceptions that may influence electoral decisions.

One can easily underestimate or overestimate the impact of the new media on contemporary affairs and political discourse in Sierra Leone in the absence of social scientific research. But the fact that everyone is talking about *Social Media*, *Facebook, WhatsApp* and the content they generate for public consumption is evidence of the impact of the new media. There is confusion for the average Sierra Leonean! And there is so much **_noise_** and so much **nonsense** with so many people talking at the same time about things they themselves barely understand. Welcome to Aldus Huxley's sequel to the _Brave New World_, the _Brave New World Revisited_!

Fake News

What are the implications for journalism and journalistic practice in Sierra Leone? As in other parts of the world, we have seen an unbridled emergence of what is now collectively referred to as fake journalism and fake news, a form of propaganda that packages information to appear as "news" or as "fact"[3].

Unfortunately, in many cases there appears to be only a thin line between fake journalists and fake news and mainstream media. The people who produce fake news are simply malicious and mischievous; they work to cause disharmony in society and to promote a view point or to seek political advantage for their patrons.

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[3] Consumer Action, 2017.

All of this is happening at a time when traditional, mainstream media, particularly newspapers, have hit the ground on the credibility index. Newspapers are gradually becoming an endangered species; single copy sales have dropped significantly because, among other things, they are no longer credible (or first choice) sources of news even for the elite, their primary clientele. With a few exceptions, most newspapers appear to thrive on fake journalism and fake news; plagiarism, cut-and-paste contents have also become part of the modus operandi.

Television – despite the added advantage of "seeing is believing" no longer controls a commanding lead on the credibility index; and spin doctors have largely taken over radio, the people's choice.

Because of these lapses, significant numbers of readers and viewers are shifting to social media, only to be fed with fake news.

Mainstream media should begin to endeavor to regain credibility in the eyes of the public by being mindful of the role of journalism in contemporary democratic societies [4], as outlined by Christians, et al:

(1) the _Monitorial_ or _Watchdog_ function – collecting, processing, and disseminating genuine and factual information, (2) _Facilitative Role_ – contributing toward

(2)

(3) improving the quality of life for all and promoting deliberative forms of democracy,

(3) _Radical Role_, focusing on exposing abuses of power and corruption and aiming to raise public consciousness of wrongdoing, inequality, and the potential for change, and (4) _Collaborative Role_, collaboration between media and state under unusual circumstances of crisis or emergency, or threats to the society from external or internal sources.

In line with the thinking of Aldous Huxley, consider your smart phones, laptops and desktop computers as forces of mass communication. As such they can be used for good or bad purposes. Always use your gadgets for positive purposes – to contribute to improving the quality of life of fellow citizens, to promote deliberative forms democracy, to expand the public space, to expose abuses of power and corruption, and to collaborate with the state in times of crisis or threats to society from external or internal sources.

This philosophy should be the credo of all practicing professional journalists in contemporary Sierra Leone.

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New Developments in Media Management: Sustainability, Profitability, Media Poverty and Media Business Model

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Abstract

This study is anchored on the proposition that some media institutions and agencies in Sierra Leone are sustainable but not profitable. The sustainability of media agencies is premised on the fact that most of them arguably deliver what they consider to be their key function: providing news and information programmes and services.

However, the operations of those media institutions with specific reference to the functionality of the structures that should support the proper execution of their perceived "journalistic mandate" are far from being in line with acceptable standards. This study argues that the media agencies in the country will not be profitable except they are run as viable businesses adhering to best management practices. This in essence means that their very sustainable attribute is questionable if they are not profitable. Archival/documentary search and personal observation are used as key research tools to obtain the relevant data.

Using the Systems theory, the study found that until the required "inputs" (labour, capital and equipment) are available, the "outputs" of the media (products) will not translate into real profit and hence sustainable.

Key words: Media Management, Sustainability, Profitability, Systems Theory, Business

Introduction

Three economic goals guide the strategic direction of almost every business organization. Whether or not the mission statement explicitly states these goals, it reflects the firm's intention to secure *survival* [sustainability] through *growth* and *profitability* (Pearce and Robinson 2005, p. 29).

Media institutions are also business organisations. In the words of Kung (2008), viewed from a management perspective, media organisations have been largely addressed as businesses rather than organisations (p.5).

Unfortunately, the goal of survival, like the goals of growth and profitability, often is taken for granted to such an extent that it is neglected as a principal criterion in strategic decision making (Pearce and Robinson 2005, p. 29). This statement is very true when it comes to the operations and management of media institutions. Most media managers focused on gathering, processing and producing contents, while paying little attention to whether their institutions are sustainable and profitable.

The term sustainability is derived from the Latin sustinere (tenere, to hold; sub, up). Sustain can mean "maintain", "support", or "endure" (Douglas (n.d) and Charles (1964). In more general terms, sustainability is the endurance of systems and

processes. 'Sustainable' means able to last or continue for a long time.5

Crowther and Aras (2008) stated that sustainability is concerned with the effect which action taken in the present has upon the options available in the future.

Profitability is the mainstay goal of a business organisation. A firm's growth is tied inextricably to its survival and profitability (Pearce and Robinson 2005, p. 29). Profitable means making money; producing good or helpful results or effects.6

The three variables, sustainability, profitability and media poverty, have recently been at the centre stage of the discourse on managing media in Sierra Leone. In several fora and discussions in 2016, the comments and statements of most Editors and managers pointed to one conclusion: media institutions in the country face an "existential threat." The key factors as agreed by most media managers and practitioners are the triple issues of sustainability, profitability and poverty. Media institutions can only be sustainable if they are profitable. Hypothetically, sustainability depends to a large extent on profitability. But that profitability is hampered principally by poverty in the country which invariably affects the operations of media institutions. The assertion that media institutions are sustainable but not profitable, is an allegory or fable that should be treated with utmost caution.

The issues confronting media management are not new. As regards sustainability and accountability, Sierra Leone's Media Development Strategy noted that "the meagre market and strong competition make some of the media test the limits or even break them with sensational stories, brown envelope journalism, blackmail and allegiance to certain political and economic interests that finance some of the media. This, combined with low professionalism; low ethics and a politicised content constitute a challenging

media environment" (Bonde & Sowa 2014). Perhaps, it is the suggestion of creative and pragmatic approaches to addressing them that is imperative within the context of media management in Sierra Leone.

Theoretical framework

The systems theory/approach is used as the theoretical anchorage of this study. The theory is an approach to management that follows a **macro** perspective; that is, the entire organization is examined, and the study includes the environment in which the organization operates (Schoderbek, Schoderbek, & Kefalas, 1985). Organizations are similar to one another in that they are engaged in similar activities involving **inputs** (e.g., labor, capital, and equipment), **production processes** (the conversion of inputs into some type of product), and **outputs** (e.g., products, goods, and services).

In the systems approach to management, organizations also study the external environment, evaluating feedback from the environment to identify change and assess goals. Organisations are not isolated entities; they interact interdependently with other objects and organizations in the environment. The systems approach recognizes the relationship between the organization and its external environment. An organizational system is composed of people, money, materials, equipment, and data, all of which are combined in the accomplishment of some purpose.

The media industries do not operate in isolation but form part of a larger system that also includes political, economic, technological and social subsystems. Because system approaches are concerned with responding to and interpreting environmental influences on the organization, electronic media managers at the executive level (General Managers) may find these approaches to management useful (George & Jones, 2003, Pringle et. al, 1995).

Media institutions like other organizations are engaged in similar activities involving **inputs** in the form of labor, capital, and equipment. Labor in the media is required from employees like the managers, editors, reporters and other technical

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5 http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/sustainable

6 http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/profitable

staff. Therefore, without the required labor, the media institutions will not be able to perform their function in an efficient and effective manner.

The other aspect, **production processes** (the conversion of inputs into some type of product) is at the heart of media's operations. All media houses are engaged in production process of different sorts, ranging from collecting and processing information, facts and details from sources to the writing, editing, layout and design, broadcasting and publishing news stories, articles, commentaries, editorials etc. The production goes through several processes. The media **outputs** are in the form of products, goods and services like contents of newspapers and magazine publications and radio and television programming.

This theory is apt to situate the arguments in this article because sustainable and profitable media institutions are those with requisite inputs (trained and qualified staff); they undertake the required journalistic production processes; and they produce contents that conform to professional and ethical standards. In terms of profitability, media institutions publish and broadcast contents which are either sold or they serve as a means of wooing or enticing audiences which in turn attract advertisers to advertise, partner, sponsor or patronise with media institutions. In other words, good programming and content production ultimately help in raising the revenue base of media institutions.

Methods and Discussion of Findings

Archival/documentary search and personal observation were used as key research tools to obtain the relevant data. For this study, facts were obtained from records of media institutions in the country, key aspects of earlier IREX Media Sustainability Index from 2008 to 2012 dealing with media management and discussions on media management in 2016.

As at December, 2016, there were two hundred and ten (210) newspapers (including magazines), one hundred and forty-five (145) radio stations and twenty- seven (27) television and Direct to Home (DTH) services registered with the country's media regulator, the Independent Media Commission (IMC).

In 2008, the panelists at the IREX study in Sierra Leone were divided about the management of media institutions as profit-generating businesses. Spencer said: "The majority of media institutions are not being run as proper businesses. They don't have proper accounting systems, let alone accountants. They don't have personnel policies. It's just one individual who's in charge, and he decides what to do. He collects the adverts money and uses it the way he wants… but a few are being run like proper businesses."

Williette John touched on a fundamental issue. She said: "Most media houses cannot divorce management from the editorial staff; they are the same." Lewis was somewhat optimistic: "We are evolving, and we are getting there. I know for sure that a lot of us are now trying to ensure that we run our businesses more professionally and have been trying to bring in professionals for different areas, like accounting, and getting them to control our books."

In 2009, it was still stated that most media institutions, particularly newspapers, are sole proprietorships. Even some newspaper-owned printing facilities are run in the same manner. Abu Bakar Joe Sesay confirmed this, citing an example: "We have the media business owner controlling virtually everything; that is what happens in most newspapers I know, including mine… they operate as profit-generating businesses, but they do not operate as efficiently as they could."

For example, only a handful of newspapers and some radio stations hire professionals to operate their institutions. Many community radios are not run on a sustainable basis, panelists said, because of their dependence on foreign grants. Another obstacle to sustainability is the heavy operational overheads that burden many of these stations, given that they are in poor rural communities with no electricity. Some panelists charged that the state media are corrupt.

In 2010, panelists noted that efforts were being made in many news organizations to improve the management side of the business from the one-man-show management model of the past to well-structured institutions. Many of them have no resident accountants or human-resource personnel but would normally contract such personnel when needed. The panelists pointed out that there is still

"no clear line between the management and editorial boards," particularly for newspapers. The same problems relating to sustainability of particularly communality radio were restated.

In 2012, the IREX Media Sustainability Index noted on the area of efficiency and sustainability of media outlets that newspapers in Sierra Leone are largely owned by journalists who manage to raise enough money to operate them, sometimes from family sources or friends. They are normally referred to as managing editors. That position gives them both administrative and professional control. Bangura noted, "A lot of media houses are not well managed, including my own. Most of what we do is multiple tasking. I write, edit, and [do] layout," but the financial end of the business is done by others. Spencer said, "There are no real management structures. Anybody does everything. There are a few [media houses] that are managed well." When they file with the regulatory bodies, radio stations are asked to produce business plans to provide an idea of how they will make themselves sustainable. But Wright said those "business plans are usually presented only to get the radio stations registered or to get loans from banks, and they are abandoned immediately afterward."

"Inputs" versus "outputs" of the media- sustainability and profitability

The variables for "Inputs" were the availability of the required labour (management staff and journalists) capital and equipment and the "outputs" (the media products).

Regarding inputs like- staff, equipment, financial and technical resources, many media institutions in Sierra Leone do not have the required staff and adequate office spaces or equipment. The media market in the country is still very small, with too many media houses chasing few available business opportunities. Most media institutions are one man owned and managed, instead of a company or partnership, especially newspaper and magazines.

There are poor management structures which limit the potential of the media houses to run efficiently. The bigger competitors in the media market get the most out of the small space for successful media operations. It appears that there is not enough of an economy (advertisers and businesses) to foster media growth.

There is low capital and high production costs. Circulation and coverage of most media institutions are limited. Financial management such as keeping proper financial management records remains a huge challenge for most media houses.

The survival of almost all media institutions depends on advertising patronage. But advertising is also limited. One of the factors militating against profitability is the tendency of advertisers to default on payment. Unethical practices of advertisers (placement of adverts for kickbacks) and the monopoly of newspaper vendors that restricts when newspapers can be published also affect profitability.

The sustainability of media institutions at present largely depends on the management, that is, the group of people running the institution aided by the availability of the appropriate human and material resources. Most media institutions can be best described as 'operationally sustainable.'

The output for many media institutions is largely basic as evident in lots of music and phone-ins in radio stations and weak or poorly written contents by some newspapers.

The sustainability and profitability of media houses should start with a business plan, research market opportunities, proper management structure, financial management and records system.

The descriptions above of the media management system in Sierra Leone warrant an examination of two important concepts that will put the discourse into proper perspective. They are media poverty and mass media business models.

Media Poverty

In his celebrated work on 'Media Poverty: The Bane of Journalism in Sierra Leone', Sierra Leonean born Professor Ritchard M'Bayo appeared in defence of the media regarding their culpability in terms of the country's poor media management systems and performances. He stated that:

> "In the past we have basically blamed the victims (the media) for their own predicament - the lack of professionalism and unethical behavior among media practitioners. I have intentionally shifted the conversation to cover

new ground, one that sees the challenges of the media as part of the challenges of the state."

Essentially, he argues that "it is because the state is poor that the media also are poor with all the attendant factors associated with poverty." It is this malaise of the press he called *"media poverty"."*

Prof. M'Bayo noted that Sierra Leone is a developing nation. This has huge implications for all societal institutions, including the media. As a developing nation, the socio-political and economic problems of the state are also reflected in the institutions of the society. In almost every aspect of life, economic and financial constraints are not only pervasive, they have become entrenched in the body politic and culture of the nation.

In his view, this environment defines media operations, ownership, management, and professional practice. Hence, some of the intractable problems of the media in Sierra Leone may be attributed to this condition, *media poverty* - the lack of access to resources, the lack of quality training and, hence, the knowledge deficit or knowledge gap associated with what media practitioners do in reconstructing the narratives of how we relate to each other. The scope of this condition extends to the dearth of essential information, limited access to technology, limited research skills, poor remunerations for media workers, and corruption in the media as an outgrowth of business practices and culture in the country in general (M'Bayo, 2015, p.2)

Mass media business model

As Kung (2008) puts it, the business model for traditional media businesses (with the exception of public service broadcasting) is that they receive revenues from advertisers in return for 'delivering audiences' to them, those audiences having been attracted by the content media products offer. Characteristics of this model are that it has a significant component of indirect payment (a substantial proportion of costs being born by advertisers), is collective (payment methods are based on aggregating the largest possible number of consumers) and based on standardised products. Therefore, many media organisations producing advertising-supported media-newspapers, magazines, television and radio (non PSB)- operate

in a dual-product marketplace: in addition to producing content, they also 'produce' audiences-that is provide content to attract audiences, and these audiences are 'sold' to advertisers (Picard, 2002a; Naplo, 2003 quoted in Kung, 2008, pp. 9-10).

Conclusion

Generally, from 2008 to date, much had not changed. Most media institutions are still not being run as proper businesses. There are still improper management and accounting systems. Many staff are employed and given identity cards to fend for themselves. Most media houses are still one-man businesses (sole proprietorships). This runs contrary to their registration status which showed that a good number of media houses are companies and not sole proprietorship. Media houses are still mostly owned by journalists, a situation that makes them operate as both administrators/managers and media practitioners. There are few media houses that are now moving up to the task. But that number is small for a country that has a long history of media presence and practice.

Any positive change in media management systems and practices with specific reference to profitability will be largely dependent on national economic growth. That is not to say that the media institutions are left with no task. An understanding of mass media business model as briefly explained above is another key factor in ensuring sustainability and profitability of media institutions in Sierra Leone.

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200 Years of Struggle for the Emancipation of the Media in Sierra Leone

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This article is an abbreviated history of the struggle for media freedom in Sierra Leone. It seeks to establish a link between the past and the present relative to the protracted struggles for press freedom and the emancipation of the media in Sierra Leone.

When William Drake established the **New Era** in Freetown in 1855, he wasted no time and minced no words in letting the colonial authorities know that the mission of his newspaper was to expose falsehood and vigorously enunciate the truth (Omu,1978, p. 9). The authorities saw this bold proclamation as an affront for which the West Indian born Drake would pay dearly. Unfortunately, Drake died only four years after the founding of his paper.

However, by the time of his death, Drake's legal troubles with the colonial government set a major precedent in defining the limits of political authority over newspapers and redefined government-press relationship during the 1850s and onward.

Thus, the struggle for the emancipation of the press has lasted for nearly 200 years, beginning with the *New Era* in1855 to the present. For the most part, during this period, the press and media practitioners have operated in a climate of fear, punctuated by a plethora of state-sanctioned rules and regulations designed to control the media. The overriding concern in most cases was political. Hence, when the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society established the *Sierra Leone Watchman* in 1842, it became embroiled in local politics like other papers and was forced to fold in 1846 under pressure from the government (Kaplan et al 1976, 148).

Without political parties, and in the absence of a democratically elected government and strong opposition parties, the press was the most effective constitutional weapon for ventilating grievances and influencing the trend of events (Omu, 1968, 279). For many educated Africans the press was also the launching pad into the political arena. In the dawn of political independence following World War II, political activity intensified, and political parties started to emerge. This new era gave rise to a new kind of journalism and a new genre of the newspaper establishments, the political party newspapers.

The first such newspaper established in 1945 by the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) was the **Bo Observer;** in 1955, it established another paper in Freetown, the Vanguard and Unity in 1965. The United Progressive Party (UPP) established **Shekpendeh** in 1954; the All People's Congress (APC) established **We Yone** in 1963.

In his highly nostalgic treatise on West African journalism, Jones-Quartey wrote that "when memory or interest in the past returns to Sierra Leone, the younger generation will find great fascination and pleasure in some of the things their fathers did and said. In few, if any, of the institutions of the past will they find greater instruction than in their press of the nineteenth century" (Jones-Quartey 1959, 230). He referred to these early newspapers as pioneers in West African journalism and said that:

> "these gazettes were for years true newspapers, complete with all the usual features, including letters and articles from private individuals ...

> many being critical of certain policies and actions of the government of the day. Some of these were not mere criticisms but heart-searching, deeply-felt examinations of the whole aim and direction of British policy in the West African settlements" (Jones-Quartey 1959, 235).

He added that "the quality both of thought and expression in these pioneer papers was extremely high" (Jones-Quartey, 1959).

The Chicken and Hen Metaphor

The democratic culture correlates with a free press system, and a free press system enhances the democratic culture. Since the 16th century when newspapers are said to have emerged, the press and the state have had a parallel growth pattern, and the relationship between the two has historically been thorny. And the primary predictive factor of that relationship has been the nature and type of the prevailing regime. Where the state was authoritarian, the degree of press freedom and the right to free expression of ideas was low or non-existent. Where regime type was democratic, the opposite outcome prevailed. But 16th, 17th and 18th centuries governments generally were not democratic and, hence the press was not as free as they are in modern societies. In fact, although journalism remains to be a dangerous profession in many societies, persecutions of journalists in the earlier centuries far exceeded anything we can imagine in contemporary society.

State Control of the Media through Regulation

Over the years, the press of Sierra Leone acquired a peculiar attribute, a hydra syndrome of sorts, whereby the more government authorities tried to curb it, the more it flourished. That peculiar resilience of the Sierra Leone press has been put to test time and time again depending on the mood and temperament of state authorities and what they perceived as unbecoming behavior on the part the of the press. From colonial times to the present democratic dispensation, whenever the government was unhappy with the press, it

adopted a heavy-handed method with restrictive regulations, the instruments of political authority,

in curbing the press. That was true in the case of William Drape and his *New Era* in 1855, I. T. A. Wallace-Johnson and his *African Standard* in 1939, and the series of press rules adopted by subsequent administrations in post-colonial Sierra Leone.

If there is one thing in common among the various administrations that have governed Sierra Leone, from the colonial era to the present, civilian or military administration, it is their attitude toward the press as expressed in the various press regulations. Each regime, from President Siaka Stevens (1967-1985), President Joseph Saidu Momoh (1985-1992), NPRC under Chairman Valentine Strasser (1992-1996), President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah (1996-1997), AFRC under Johnny Paul Koroma (19971998), to the restored administration of President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah (1998), adopted or attempted to adopt at least one regulation or set of guidelines pertaining to the press.

In 1993, for example, when it came under severe press attacks and scrutiny, the NPRC formulated a set of press regulations which the military government referred to as "Guidelines for Newspaper Registration," and an expression of government's "continued intention to see the press as a viable and vital component in the process of development, progress and national interest (NPRC, 1993). The truth was that it was a veiled attempt to put in their place those journalists who criticized the NPRC administration.

There are at least 12 or so regulations in Sierra Leone all designed one way or the other to curb the press in the country. These regulations are either remnants of colonial policy or inspired by discarded English libel laws of the 17th and 18th centuries, including: (1) the Newspapers Ordinance of 1924,
(2) the Undesirable Publications Ordinance of 1939, and (3) the Public Order Act 1965, which criminalizes libel and defamation.

Although the climate of fear has diminished significantly over the years, certain key areas continue to pose threat to press freedom and the right to free expression of ideas in contemporary Sierra Leone. These areas continue to define how the state relates to the media:

(1) State Functionaries and Political Authority
(2) Journalistic Performance
(3) Media Ownership
(4) Media Polarization

State Functionaries and Political Authority

Political authority, the exercise of political power over the press by those vested with such authority is the primary source of the most frequent threat that media practitioners face in Sierra Leone. Over the years, there have been a preponderance of clashes between law enforcement officers, such as the police and other security agents, or reports about state functionaries who exercised hostile political authority over members of the press or against some media organizations.

One recent report has suggested that although the laws in this country provide for freedom of speech and of the press, the government at times restricted these rights in practice; and there were numerous cases of intimidation, threats, detention of journalists and closure of radio stations on orders of the state or state functionaries (US State Department, 2016).

Journalistic Performance

An ideal role of the media is not just to provide information to the public but also to provide information on the ultimate meaning and significance of events they report to their audiences (Dominick, 2009, p. 31).

Journalistic performance embodies everything that makes journalism a *profession* – integrity, fairness, excellent communication skills, adherence to a code of conduct and ethics, etc. One of the most useful socio-political functions of the media in contemporary society is to extend the scope and promote the quality of political discourse (Nwanko, 2005).

Unfortunately, in the prevailing climate of public discourse, a good number of media practitioners have become spin-doctors who manage the public presentation of information or ideas on behalf of political patrons to maximum advantage (McQuail, 2005, p. 567).

Despite their shortcomings, one can argue that media practitioners in Sierra Leone have won their first freedom – the freedom to publish or establish broadcast outfits. With few restrictions, media

ownership is virtually open to all who wish to be media entrepreneurs or managers. The second freedom and, probably the most significant – the right to free expression of ideas and the freedom of the press is yet to be won decisively.

Media Ownership & Control

Ownership and control of the media as threat factors have attracted quite a bit of attention in recent years. Broadly speaking, the debates over ownership are partly concerned with the profit motive (business consideration) as the primary driving motivation, the advances in communication technology and the use of the new media. These innovations have not only spawned a convergence of the various forms of mass communication but have also been highly conducive of the conglomeration of media organizations. The new forms of ownership now include what has been called vertical integration, in which a media giant can own all forms of mass communication and use each component element to help other components of the system. AYV (Africa Young Voices) television, for example, owns at least one radio station and a newspaper; STAR Television, also owns a newspaper and a strong connection with at least one radio station. These media "giants" are the most powerful in the country, in terms of audience reach – readership and viewership. Quite often and not surprisingly, they speak with one voice and take similar positions on controversial issues.

Corporate media ownership is gradually emerging in Sierra Leone. The emerging media barons of Sierra Leone are said to be connected to powerful politicians, the banking system, and telecommunications industry in ways that may not be apparent to the average citizen. These industries do not always receive the critical assessment of their operations and customer relationships as one would expect.

Media Polarization

As M'Bayo (2013) has observed:

> in post-conflict Sierra Leone, a polarized media community and environment appear to have emerged in the wake of the transitional political institutions and the ongoing process of building a new political order. This polarity is based on

new and old alliances among media practitioners and the various publics and affiliations, overtly or covertly, with one party or another or the adoption of different political ideologies among media practitioners.

These alliances and ideologies are sometimes openly espoused in media content. In Sierra Leone today, with few exceptions, there appears to be no "non-aligned" media. Some newspapers and their online versions even openly declare their support for one party or the other. Hence, party affiliation and other such alliances clearly color the 'facts' and how journalists report and interpret those 'facts'.

New Media

The new media, the Internet and most significantly, Social Media, have not only expanded the public space and public discourse, they are redefining journalistic practice and introducing new players – citizen journalists, bloggers, fake journalists, fake news, etc

With the current situation, one can easily underestimate or overestimate the impact of the media on contemporary affairs and political discourse in Sierra Leone.

So much has changed since the days of William Drape and I. T. A. Wallace-Johnson in the late 1800s and early 1900s, the era of *advocacy journalism*. Although the climate of fear for the practice of journalism has diminished significantly, the struggle for media freedom and the emancipation of the media in general remain unabated. Journalism and the practice of the profession have improved tremendously. But there is also plenty of evidence of bad journalism as well as the propensity of the state and state functionaries to resort to heavy handedness in dealing with media malfeasance.

Conclusion

The struggle for media freedom will continue until, for example, the Public Order Act of 1965 is expunged (or at least repealed) from the law books of Sierra Leone. Mindful of personal interests and corporate missions, media practitioners and entrepreneurs are using self- censorship to steer clear of the implications of the Public Order Act on the work they do. How this impacts the quality of political discourse in the country also remains to be seen.

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"With the current situation, one can easily underestimate or overestimate the impact of the media on contemporary affairs and political discourse in Sierra Leone."

Ditch Objectivity and Save Journalism

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Abstract - The call for Journalists to quit their slave-like commitment to the principle of objectivity in news reporting is gaining momentum despite journalists continuing to hold on stoically to the concept like Christianity does with the resurrection as the basis of its existence.

From across a wide spectrum of society – the media industry, business, civil society and academia there is concern about how much journalism can achieve in helping society understand an increasingly complex 21st century world while clinging on to objectivity in the way it does.

Academics, media practitioners and a growing segment of society that have led the effort to ditch objectivity may not celebrate the expected paradigm shift any time soon but there is no doubt that significant tremors have resulted from their strength and courageous engagement with the issues which cannot be ignored in any serious conversation about the impact of journalism on people's interaction with state institutions, corporate bodies and even the world of entertainment.

Government, corporate bodies and interest groups are continuously allocating substantial sums of money from their annual budgets to sharpening their news management and public relations skills with the ultimate objective of controlling the political and corporate narrative and keeping public opinion on their side. This articles drills into the debate with the situation of Sierra Leone in focus. The main plank of article is the conclusion that for Sierra Leone and other countries facing the same socio – political and economic circumstances, unless journalistic objectivity is ditched now, the profession itself might become irrelevant in those countries before long.

Key words: Objectivity, paradigm shift, news management, political narrative, public opinion,

The daily rituals and peer culture of journalism advance a host of assumptions about politics, power, people, public opinion and democracy. How could it be otherwise? Journalists need ideas and convictions to guide their search for news; these for the commonsense of the profession or to put in another way, its soul (Rosen, J. What are Journalists for? 1999, p27)

Introduction

The concept of objectivity has remained one of the great confusions of journalism since it appeared in journalistic discourse in the first half of the nineteenth century. In fact, in modern times the meaning of the word in theory and practice is lost.

When the concept originally evolved, it was not meant to imply that journalists were free of bias. Quite the contrary. It emerged in the 1920s out of a growing recognition that journalists were full of bias, often unconsciously. To deal with that objectivity required journalists to develop a consistent method of testing information – a transparent approach to evidence – precisely so that personal and cultural biases would not undermine the accuracy of their work (Kovach and Rosenstiel, 2001p, 73).

According to Tuchman (1972) to Journalists, like social scientists, the term 'objectivity' stands as a bulwark between themselves and their critics whenever they are attacked for a controversial presentation of 'facts', journalists defensively use objectivity as a 'strategic ritual' to protect themselves from their critics.

The idea of maintaining objectivity even as a so called strategic ritual is coming under serious threat from many sides – from a significant body of practitioners who find the insistence on journalism being slavishly loyal to the dictates of the prescriptions contained in media Codes of Practice

aimed at ensuring objective reporting too inhibiting to impactful media practice.

Significant improvement in technology and the increasing loss of the gate-keeper function by media editors to the growing army of citizen-journalists who produce and distribute media without being bound by Codes of Practice has also added considerable weight to the argument that unless objectivity is abandoned as the ultimate goal of journalistic practice, the profession could drive itself into irrelevance.

This article will explore the issues in this debate as far as possible and suggest that a paradigm shift is possible and indeed sooner than anyone expected.

Theoretical Framework

Because of the overall drift envisaged for this work, the Agenda-Setting theory is deemed necessary to serve as the foundation on which conceptual pillars will be constructed to support the positions that will be canvased. Before proceeding to outline the major underpinnings of the Agenda-Setting theory, it serves well to set out a few comments about the theory itself.

At all times and for all the news media, the repetition of a topic day after day is the most powerful message about its importance. When that is the situation, the public uses that salience cue from the media to organize their own agendas and decide which issues are most important. Over time, the issues emphasized in news reports are regarded as most important among members of the public. The agenda of the news media becomes, to a considerable degree, the agenda of the public (Mccombs, 2004 p, 2).

The Agenda- Setting theory is concerned with public opinion. And public opinion discourses center on the distribution of opinions in terms of how many are for, how many are against, and how many are undecided. There is no doubt that many people hold opinions on a variety of issues but in the end only a few topics really matter to them. The agenda-setting role of the news media rests on their salience of an issue and the influence the news media exert on people's perceptions of what they consider important issues of the day (Ibid).

This theory can thus be explained as the media's attempt to create and transfer salient issues into the

public domain to enable the public discuss, deliberate, or debate on these issues to make informed decisions. The main objective of this theory is to talk about the assumption that the media through its productive processes and gatekeeping functions gives prominence to certain socio-political issues while neglecting others of similar importance. The two proponents of this theory Malcolm McCombs and Donald Shaw in 1972 argued that the media makes certain political, economic, and social issues salient in the society.

There are two main ways by which the agenda setting theory as conceptualized is operationalized, chief among which is framing and priming. With framing an analysis can be made about how the media presents issues to the public and by this people are able to accept one meaning of an issue over another. In an indirect and unconscious way, the media positions the minds of the audience by directing them to specific issues to discuss or ponder about for hours, days or even years.

Walter Lippmann, considered the intellectual father of the Agenda-Setting theory first observed this function, in the 1920's. Lippmann then pointed out that the media dominate over the creation of "pictures in our head" and that the public reacts not to actual events but to the pictures of those events in our head.

According to Filipova (2006) this impact of the mass media - the ability to effect cognitive change among individuals, to structure their thinking - has been labelled the agenda-setting function of mass communication.

In short, the mass media may not be successful in telling us ''what to think, but they are stunningly successful in telling us what to think about'' (McCombs and Shaw, 1972, cited in Filipova). Agenda-setting functioned as a 3-part-process:

1. Media Agenda - issues discussed in the media;

2. Public Agenda - issues discussed and personally relevant to the public;
3. Policy Agenda - issues that policy makers consider important.

In order to understand the nuances of agenda setting, an understanding of frames, schema and

priming is essential. This is primarily because they are the elements that go into setting an agenda. When people attempt to connect the world outside their family, neighborhood and workplace, they deal with a second-hand reality created by journalists and media organizations. With the perennial problem of time and space constraints, the mass media focus their attention on a few topics that are deemed newsworthy. Over time, those aspects of public affairs that are prominent in the media usually become prominent in public opinion. This ability to influence which issues, persons and topics are perceived as the most important of the day is called the agenda-setting role of the mass media (McCombs, 2004 p, 2).

It must be made clear however that there are some drawbacks that take some shine off the agenda-setting theory. Sometimes, particularly in modern times some of these issues given prominence in the media are far less important than those ignored – politics for example is considered too divisive and complex while celebrity and other lifestyle matters are given priority.

The eye-catching issues captured in headlines and on front pages, sometimes do not have any connection with the main articles or content of a particular publication and the pictures attached to these headlines are sometimes disturbing especially in tabloid newspapers. In fact the agenda setting theory in recent times is viewed as having latent reasons aside the main function.

For the purpose of this article therefore, the point must be made that by situating it within the Agenda – Setting theory, it becomes possible for the media to refuse being bound and sometimes gagged by the dictates of professional Codes of Practice provisions on objectivity in the course of carrying out that role otherwise, when journalists make normal newsroom decisions like selecting, ordering, framing and priming the news on a daily basis (activities which are basically routine), their decisions can be called into question.

The Case for Objectivity

It is in the United States that the concept of objectivity has its most diehard adherents as opposed to Europe where journalists are known to

be unashamedly partisan and can openly back political parties based on their ideological outlook or the socio-political or commercial interests of their proprietors as in the case of Rupert Murdoch's media industry in the United Kingdom.

Western philosophy notes three types of objectivity: ontological, epistemological and procedural (Megill, 1994, pp.1-20; Roberts, 2002; Ward, 2005 pp.14-18; Ward, 2010, pp.138-139). Kovach and Rosenstiel argue "objectivity called for journalists to develop a consistent method of testing information – transparent approach to evidence – precisely so that personal and cultural biases would not undermine the accuracy of their work," (2001, p.72). In this context it is perhaps worth noting the notion of objectivity has largely remained a principle that is implied within the numerous codes of ethics and not explicitly defined. The notions of balanced, honest and fair reportage or as the April 28, 1923 American Society of Newspaper Editors' Canons of Journalism suggests "sincerity, truthfulness, accuracy"; the distinction between reportage and opinion; and reportage of essential facts without suppressing relevant available facts all fall under the rubric of journalistic 'objectivity'.

Garber (2010) argues that at the core of the notion of objectivity and certainly in terms of traditional journalism education, lies the idea that for most, if not all, news stories, there is a 'truth' waiting to be revealed.

It means therefore that all reporters seeking genuine objectivity must search out for the best truth possible from the evidence that the reporter, in good faith, is able to find. And the means devised for presenting this 'truth' is the well-known 'inverted pyramid, which itself is underpinned by the belief that there is only one 'correct' way to structure a news story - with the most important aspects of the story coming first.

This is done by ensuring that the opening paragraph answers the classic '5W' questions - 'Who, What, Where, When and Why". Subsequent paragraphs, the mantra goes, should contain the next most important information, with the least important at the bottom – awaiting the sub-editors ready knife. This format superseded the idea that journalists told their 'stories' either in a partisan way to suit the politics of their newspaper, or even more traditionally, in a narrative chronology (Ibid).

To its ardent proponents, objectivity does not mean clinical or scientific precision but instead an effort by journalists to produce news stories and news casts that are emotionally detached and separate fact from opinion. To many others in the industry, academia and society as a whole, it means factual reporting, straightforward descriptive presentation of material obtained and processed by a process that is open and transparent for all to see and understand.

Richard Sambrook (2004) who used the word 'impartiality' instead of the much maligned objectivity while dealing with essentially the same questions argued '...it is wrong to think of impartiality as some perfectly defined end product...Impartiality is far more about the way we conduct our journalism, an openness of mind and approach that ensures fairness and proportionality to a range of views..."

Philip Meyer, North Carolina University's Knight Chair in Journalism says "true objectivity is based on method, not result. Instead of implying that there is an equal amount of weight to be accorded every side, the objective investigator makes an effort to evaluate the competing viewpoints." This method in the 'objective' news report involves a transparent process including attribution and right of reply.

Dennis (2006) defines objectivity as merely a method and style of presenting information and quickly draws attention to what the defenders of the concept who championed the shift of the media focus from the partisan sensationalism of the 1920s to the following standards:

1. Separating fact from opinion
2. Presenting an emotionally detached view of the news
3. Striving for fairness and balance, giving both sides an opportunity to reply in a way that provides full information to the audience

It does not require an extraordinary person to deliver objective journalism as envisaged above but certain professional characteristics must apply to every professional journalist. According to Kieran (1995):

> A good journalist must have had experience of covering various human tragedies, social issues or political events. With little or no

previous experience, a journalist obviously does not have a basis upon which to make the necessary comparisons, because, especially in the coverage of political stories, there is necessarily a comparative element in the interpretation and evaluation of events and characters. This must come with training in in technical skills starting from how to acquire information to writing, filming and editing (Ibid).

The ideal reporter must eschew ingrained prejudices or commitment to pushing a particular agenda in the course of doing his work. This is not the same as telling a reporter he should not possess and prejudices, sentiments, or views concerning a particular story. The crucial point is that the reporter should be open to the possibility that the prejudices he has may be mistaken; hence, he or she should look to see whether the story confirms or falsifies his prejudices rather than viewing the story as an instantiation of them (Ibid).

A good journalist must also have some empathy or delicacy of information and that will open up his sense of why people might have acted in a certain way – their possible emotions, motivations and intentions. Through emphasizing the sympathetic imagination, he or she will be able to understand characters from the inside...that is if understanding an issue is not confused with assent (Kieran, 1999 p, 56).

Calcutt and Hammond (2008) cite (Allan 1997) as saying that historical accounts of the concept of objectivity tended to identify three key moments: (1) the emergence of the bourgeois public sphere in the eighteenth century; (2) the development of the mass-circulation press as a business in the late nineteenth century; and (3) the institutionalization of professional norms of objectivity and impartiality in newspaper and radio journalism in the early twentieth century. These questions confound the profession's normal view of itself.

Journalists tend to see themselves as observers; their job is to tell the truth,

These were all efforts aimed at helping the media hold a proper line as they go about their democratic function of holding, particularly the ruling class and generally the powerful in society to account in a fair

way. Anything short of being verifiably objective would pave the way for the media to run around making villains of people and institutions. The existence of the concept of objectivity checkreins that appetite among journalists to go off on a tangent and create heroes and victims as and when they require. Isolating the journalist from their perceived objectivity invites criticism, which is entirely justified. This is because it could easily be used as propaganda, or a means of hegemonic control.

Objectivity has persisted for some valid reasons, the most important being that nothing better has replaced it and many of the journalists who are shinning lights in the profession believe in it, at least as a necessary goal. Objectivity or the pursuit of it, separates the journalist from the unbridled partisanship of much of the European press and it helps the practitioner make decisions quickly as disinterested observers and protects them from the consequences of what they write.

Almost all the key tenets in journalistic ethical codes emphasize detachment rather than participation: the maligned but still influential doctrine of objectivity, the related emphasis on fairness and balance, the separation between the news columns and the editorial page, the treasured watchdog role, the adversarial stance, the injunction to "let the chips fall where they may" (Rosen, 1999, p54).

Media practitioners must of necessity be able to invoke some concept of objectivity to be able to process facts about social reality because unlike social scientists, media practitioners must make immediate decisions concerning validity, reliability, and 'truth' in order to meet the problems imposed by the nature of his task – processing information called news, a depletable commodity produced daily. Processing news leaves no times for reflexive epistemological examination. Nonetheless, the newsmen need some working notion of objectivity to minimize the risks imposed by deadlines, libel suits and superior reprimands (Tuchman 1972)

The Case against Objectivity

The media have come a very long way since the objectivity brigade of the 1920s took the world by storm. Today, the world stands on the brink of a definite paradigm shift. Objectivity is not likely to be obliterated as a professional journalistic aspiration

but a significant body of opinion from academia to practitioners in the industry, is moving away from holding on to objectivity as a guiding principle of their work. The reasons for that are many and varied, depending who is facing the question of whether objectivity must survive in media Codes of Practice.

What could really be an acceptable definition of objective reporting? Defined in strict term it would be reporting that is detached, unprejudiced, unopinionated, uninvolved, unbiased, omniscient – and infallible...The objective report would, in effect, match reality; it would tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. Where do we find this kind of reporting? No reporter knows the truth; no reporter can write a story that can match reality (Dennis and Merrill, 2006 p, 113).

> All reporters, in addition to being limited in their objectivity by the inadequacy of language, are also conditioned by experience, by physical state, by education, and by many other factors. They do not come to their stories as blank slates on which the reality of events is to be written. They may want to be unprejudiced, balanced, thorough, and completely honest in their reporting but they simply cannot be (Ibid)

According to Kovach and Rosenstiel (2001, p,73 – 74) the notion of an objective method of reporting exists in pieces, handed down by word of mouth from reporter to reporter...These informal strategies have not been pulled together into the widely understood discipline that Lippmann and others imagined. There is nothing approaching standard rules of evidence, as in the law, or an agreed-upon method of observation, as in the conduct of scientific experiments.

The older conventions of verification have also not been expanded to match the new forms of journalism and although journalism may have developed various techniques and conventions for determining facts, it has done less to develop a system for testing the reliability of journalistic interpretation.

Watson (2003, p,) argues that at the micro level of operations three related and interconnecting goals

can be identified - objectivity, impartiality and balance, which together comprise a golden triangle of public service principles that apply to media. Objectivity therefore is defined as the giving of facts as they are, without subjective slant, coloring, innuendo or expression of personal opinion.

J.H. Boyer (1981) writing in the American Journalism Quality on how editors view objectivity, suggests the following criteria:

1. Balance and evenhandedness in presenting different sides of an issue.

2. Accuracy and realism in reporting.

3. Presenting all main relevant points;

4. Separating facts from opinion, but treating opinion as relevant;

5. Minimizing the influence of the writer's own attitude, opinion or involvement;

6. Avoiding slant, rancor and devious purposes Watson (2003, p, 113) quotes McQuail as posing a number of queries as to the possibility of attaining all or any of the six points advanced by Boyer against the background of editorial decision making and the concept of objectivity.

First, in news, items have to be selected; all reported event have to be presented in wider frames of reference; omissions, gaps and silences are unavoidable and may represent implicit judgements about relevance and assumptions about society and it values; and news is always produced within a context of numerous powerful internal and external pressures (Ibid).

When objectivity as a guiding principle in journalism came under attack in the 1960s and 70s it was because of the development of new forms of practice which determined to abandon objectivity just as the media were separating from their partisan roots and establishing as businesses.

Today, we hear about Advocacy journalism by which journalists concentrate on particular causes, putting aside the impartial objective tradition, Precision journalism, the proponents of which say by using

social science methods like surveys and research tools, they are able to determine what is going on in society thus freeing themselves from the encumbrances of objectivity.

Civic journalism which developed much later in the 90s was built around the idea the media must abandon their detachment and take an active part in the life of their communities, helping to set the agenda and seeking policy solutions as opposed to doing impartial reporting (Merrill and Dennis, 2006 p, 141).

This discourse would never be complete without mentioning the views of world famous war correspondent, Martin Bell who made his name covering the war in the former Yugoslavia in the 90s.

As a BBC correspondent, he broke from the well-honed tradition of objectivity and introduced the concept of *Journalism of Attachment.* The main driving force behind this approach to journalism could be described as attempting to bring the conflict being reported out of the abstract, and form it into something real and palpable; to shock people and wake them to the horrors taking place.

Naturally, Bell faced a lot of criticism even from this BBC colleagues. He defended himself with a further clarification of his concept in his second book titled *Through the Gates of Fire* arguing that *Journalism of Attachment* 'can be defined as a journalism that cares as well as knows. It is a practical and humane code of practice that has gained ground through the turbulent times at the end of one century and the beginning of another, when the old ways of doing things proved inadequate (Bell 2003, p, 152).

A journalism that is constrained by the slavish desire among its practitioners to be objective will never be able to adequately respond to the overriding public interest concerns that underpinned journalism since it came into being. When journalism allows itself to be so fettered, the vital public interest questions are left answered. That is not good enough. There is a long and noble history of journalism fulfilling this role on behalf of society like holding the authorities to account – and that includes exposing fraud, deceit, corruption, mismanagement and incompetence.

For clarity, Moore (2007) argues that in an increasingly complex world with different layers of

authority and changing lifestyles and attitudes to governance in particular, public interest journalism was the way to go. This kind of journalism finds, digests and distils information that helps the public form views and make decisions because the world is increasingly inter- related and complex and there is need for a media that genuinely seek to explain, rather than frighten.

This high ideal is under serious threat in many democracies from untrusting governments that would largely not countenance the need and value of the fourth estate; from increasingly powerful and image-conscious corporations, that have today exponentially expanded corporate public relations and spin; from a bombarded and bewildered public consuming media more than at any time in the past and feeling a little hopeless in making decisions about their next move – from what to buy from the shops to electoral choices; and from media that are failing to live up to their public interest responsibilities even when the issues steer them in the face because they continuously hang on to so-called objective journalism. Significant as these threats may be, they are not irreversible because of the somewhat overwhelming influence of technology.

New technology has empowered millions more individuals and groups to take on the roles previously ascribed to journalists – from environmental groups searching out information in the public interest, to individuals publishing secrets of corporate malpractice. Technology has also given existing journalists access to many more sources and has acted as a catalyst for change in existing news organizations. But these developments are haphazard and often motivated by personal as opposed to public interest. If genuine public-interest journalism is to have a future, it has to be promoted and nurtured – and this will not happen until people recognize the extent of the danger we face (Ibid).

In Sierra Leone politicians have deliberately squeezed the space for public debate through pernicious use of archaic media laws, threats and intimidation to the effect that national conversations have been turned into constant political point-scoring contests between the two main parties – the All People's Congress and the Sierra Leone People's Party. And the media have

been all too willing to frame issues along those lines and defending that editorial stance as being in conformity with the dictates of objective journalism.

Objectivity makes journalists weak while exacerbating the tendency to rely on official sources as a tried and tested format for getting the "he said", "she said" done quickly and in the process striking the much sought after "balance."

It also prevents journalists from pushing a particular point too hard when interviewing, say the president or some senior political figure for fear of being accused of having a political bias. It may sometimes result in further access being denied.

Garber (2010) says as attractive as the suggestion that journalistic objectivity is possible, anything that leaves in place the notion of objectivity, whether as something to be aspired to or as a form of practice, is doing journalism a disservice because objectivity is, and has always been, a dangerous concept because it ignores the obvious - that journalists have a gender, an ethnicity, a family, a social background, a personal history, a set of prejudices and more, all of which affect their 'way of seeing'".

To the extent that the threat of being accused from bias inhibits reporters from cutting through this kind of manipulation, challenging it, and telling readers about it, then the dominant professional norm of journalism needs to be scrapped. It makes no sense, in fact continuously attempting to be objective pushes journalism into the realm of irrelevance because, according to Altschull (1984) "...the notion that news has a kind of independent character or that stories tell themselves is simply wrong, just as it is incorrect to think that reporters and editors somehow stand apart from the economic, social and cultural system that shaped them...to imagine that journalists are a breed apart, somehow able to be "objective" about the world around them in ways that others cannot is to believe in a logical absurdity."

Cunningham (2003) believes that in attempting to redefine their place in public life having regard to the objectivity question, the time is now Journalists (and journalism) to acknowledge in a public way that the profession "is far more subjective and far less detached than the aura of objectivity implies – and the public wants to believe. If we stop claiming

to be mere objective observers, it will not end the charges of bias but will allow us to defend what we do from a more realistic, less hypocritical position".

And that when all is said and done, reporters must be encourage to develop expertise on their beats and must never be shy to use that to sort through competing claims, identify and explain the underlying assumptions of those claims, and make judgements about what readers and viewers need to understand what is happening. In short, we need them to be more willing to "adjudicate factual disputes" (Ibid)

The twin concept of truth and objectivity has 'long roots' in journalism running back to the advent of the periodic news press and modern journalism ethics was built upon the twin pillars of truth and objectivity...today; the pillars of truth and objectivity show serious wear and tear." The notion of journalists objectivity has taken a serious battering from a post-modern scepticism of the objective truth, a cynicism of ethics in profit-seeking journalism, and a suggestion of the merits of non-objective writing in a 'interactive' media landscape populated by 'citizen journalists' and bloggers (Ward, 2009).

The point is we are in a time when journalism is undergoing more changes – both in terms of formats and content – than at any time in the past. It goes without saying that change has been a constant factor throughout the history of the media, ever since Johannes Gutenberg hit upon the idea of moveable type. However, the change we are now witnessing is having a profound impact on our understanding of the very concept of journalism. Objectivity remains the holy grail of journalism. Many Journalists continue to hang on to it simply to get their critics off their backs. A good many journalists think objectivity demands trying to let the facts speak for themselves, and in academia the general idea is that objectivity requires a systematic method of performance and operational transparency accounts.

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The Impact of Social Media on Political Discourse: A Content Analysis of WhatsApp and Facebook Conversations about the 2018 Elections in Sierra Leone

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Abstract

Sierra Leone will have other multitier elections on the 7th March 2018. It is very crucial to analyse the role of the communications media in this electoral process, since they have a responsibility to promote free, fair, credible and peaceful elections.

The prospects of social networking sites for the pending elections in Sierra Leone include increasing mass participation in the electoral process especially those who can access and use social media for informed or issues based conversations. In this way social media would enhance transparency and accountability throughout the electoral process. On the other hand social media might pose challenges in terms of disseminating hate speech or messages, malicious propaganda and lazy reporting. They will also increase the chances for episodic reporting among journalists which might not help the public to understand certain issues well. Hence the User Created Content might obviously pose some security threat to the process and other ethical challenges that deter democratic conversations.

Generally speaking communications media's role in democratic elections include informing the public about the process, educating citizenry about the procedures and processes required, monitoring the Electoral Management Body, political parties and civil

societies, mobilizing voters and facilitating open dialogue for conflict prevention and management especially when the new communication systems are to be utilized. Thus Technological Determinism has been used as the theoretical framework to analyse the content of social media obtained for this study.

Introduction

This paper examined the extent to which social media is impacting on public conversations on the electoral process in Sierra Leone for 2018. The researcher used quantitative content analysis of WhatsApp conversations, and Facebook postings and comments from different groups and individuals to gauge the spirit of public conversations on critical issues pertaining to the electoral process. Data points centred on number of sources, use of multiple viewpoints, presence of anonymous sources and presence of electoral information in these social networking sites. The unit of analysis was individual text messages or postings found in each platform for the week selected.

Sierra Leone will have democratic elections in March 2017 for presidency, members of parliament and

local councils. The preparations for the elections and the conversations on the process have already started. Major events already completed include the appointment of electoral commissioners, the registration of voters, delimitation of electoral boundaries and registration of new political parties. Political parties are also organizing conventions to have their parties' structures in place and to get their candidates for the various electoral positions.

In this context there are on-going debates or conversations about public policies, political charisma, integrity, development programmes etc. for informed decision-making elections pending 2018. Hence it is worthy to discuss the significance of modern communication systems and how they are impacting on democracy.

Statement of problem

The use of social media in Sierra Leone is mainly limited to urban communities where some people can afford mobile phones and access effective Internet connections, so there are more people who

are not enjoying this democratic platform. Recently, also government has expressed serious concerns about the misuse of social media that if not addressed may pose security threat through misrepresentation, misinformation, disinformation, malicious propaganda and the spreading of insightful statements. But some critics have argued that since social media might influence regime change especially during elections as experienced in Africa most incumbents are always jittery to allow open space for critical conversation especially through the use of new communication systems. There is also no specific legislation on the use of social media and hate message or speech in Sierra Leone.

Objectives

I. To analyse the intensity of WhatsApp and Facebook usage to make the electoral coversations participatory.

II. To identify the degree of positive or negative impacts for using WhatsApp and

III. Facebook to stimulate controversial debates in the electoral process for the pending elections in Sierra Leone 2018.

Literature Review

Modern communication systems are based on digital connectivity and interactivity of people across the globe. Blogs, tweets, Facebook postings, You Tube videos, WhatsApp conversations, and several other social networking pages have increased public representation and participation in decision-making. These systems allow users to generate or create their own content to facilitate their conversations.

The content created and distributed by "the people formerly known as the audience" are making remarkable impact on democracy and even journalism (to use Jay Rosen's particularly apt term) dwarfs information available from one-time giants of mass communication such as daily newspapers, weekly magazines and network television are now under pressure as a result of new communication technologies.

Significantly these modern communication systems are promoting democratic culture especially in the area of elections coverage. Election coverage helps with citizens with information and broadens their conversations about the electoral process or to decide who should represent them in political positions. Usually Democracy works best when there is continuing conversation among citizens that aimed at deciding "What shall we do?" A healthy civic conversation requires effective and independent sharing of information and opinions about service providers, policy makers and law enforcement agencies. This is where the Internet is making considerable impact in the 21_{st} century global society.

The Internet technology known as Web 2.0 technology allows browsing and blogging of web information. The Internet, as is now well understood, restructured the architecture of information and has tremendous impact on open conversations which democracy depends on. So some researchers claim that the Internet has become the great democratiser since the beginning of is exponential growth in the early 1990 (Baran 2015). It is a tool of liberation through which

marginalized views can reach a wider audience-not only free of state censorship but unmediated by decisions of the publishers and broadcasters. In this light the Internet is participatory platform that could be used to enhance government transparency and accountability, and to improve the quality of political participation in several ways. One of the obvious aspects for this is the proliferation of social networking sites.

Reynolds (2010) states that social networking web site is a site whose purpose is to create an online community of Internet users that enables members to break down barriers created by time, distance and cultural differences. Social networking Web sites allow people to interact with others online by sharing opinions, insights, information, interests and experiences. Thus members of an online social network may use such site to interact with friends, family members, and colleagues- people they already know-but they may also wish to develop new personal and professional relationships.

Baran (2015) similarly states that social networking site Facebook debuted on the Internet in 2003. Within five years it grew to 100 million users, and in October 2012, the company proudly announced it had 1 billion members visiting monthly networking in over 70 languages (Delo, 2012). Major popular sites are Facebook, Twitter, IMO messenger, Instagram and host of others. For example, Facebook brings people together by posting pictures of personal and public activities, what they had for lunch and dinner, gossiping etc. Another popular social media impacting on elections is Twitter.

Reynolds (2010) conceptualized Twitter in the following words:

> "Twitter is a social networking service that enables its users to send and read each other's text-based posts, known as tweets. A tweet is supposed to answer the questions "what are you doing?" in 140 characters or less. Many people use Twitter as a means of staying connected to friends, relatives, and co-workers; others use for professional networking."

He further states that in June 2009, Iran held its presidential elections. Within hours of the polls closing, the interior ministry proclaimed that the incumbent, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, had defeated

the reformist candidate, Mir Hossein Mousavi, by a margin over 11 million votes.

So one of the widely use social media in Sierra Leone is WhatsApp, a popular mobile application for providing instant messaging service in smartphones. It uses Internet services to communicate different type of text and multimedia messages between users or groups. Its users worldwide have crossed the figure of one billion in February 2016 (www.informaticsjournals.com).

The effect of WhatsApp on society keeps on increasing. It is also becoming popular tool for marketing in businesses and publicity in politics. People generate or reconnect with relationships daily. It has increased public debates and discussion almost on every subject. News reporters in Sierra Leone have started what the writer calls WhatsApp news gathering. This involves exploring and analysing opinions, audios, and pictures for mainstream news reporting. There are short comings in terms of the veracity of news reports. This growth of number the users of this platform has therefore drawn the attention of researchers to understand the implications and effect of WhatsApp on its user's social and personal life.

One of the distinctive characteristics of social media, as compared with other media, is that they have become a strong focal point for debate on the nature and scope of freedom of expression in democratic society. At the time of writing, the question of social media regulation is a matter of urgent policy debate in the United Kingdom and Europe.

Sample and Sampling

A purposive sample of social media content was selected because no master social media content list existed from which a probability sample could be drawn. To begin the selection process, the website cyberjournalist.net was browsed for clear understanding of scientific analysis of online content. Cyberjournalist.net is a site that is dedicated to examining how technology affects newsmedia (Dube, 2005). After understanding the framework used by researchers using their model of sampling frame, the researcher selected 25 individual posts on personal Facebook walls. At the same time 5 posts were selected from different

social groups on Facebook and further selected 5 groups on WhatsApps platforms for analytic content examination.

The Facebook groups included Journalists for Development, Radio Democracy FM 98.1, Sierra Leone Political Debate, Concord Times and Society for Climate Change. The WhatsApp groups included FBC Alumni Worldwide, Save Sierra Leone, SLPP for 2018, Daily Post and Emerging issues.

The selected individual Facebook walls selected included *Sayoh Kamara, Idrissa Conteh, Andrew Keili, Paywahun, Claudius Beckley, Sylvia O. Blyden, Gunther A.B Daramy, Hannah Fullah, Karim Bah, Lawrence Leema, Kabs Kanu, Abdul Malik Bangura, Jarasky Conteh, Fayaia Amara Fayaia, Fonti Kabaia, Umaru Fofanah, Dixocracy, Sallu Gbow, Murtala Mohamed Kamara, Albert Momoh, Kmal M Barie, Kortor Kamara, John Alfred Baimba Sesay, Damon Andrew Umaru Samai, Mohamed Massaquoi,*

The study utilized two different sampling techniques because of the chances that there would be an over-representation of social media conversation (Greer and Mensing, 2006). To compensate for the expected smaller number of postings available daily, social media content was captured every hour (on 16 September 2017) the Day the Sierra Leone Peoples Party had their Party Convention in Kenema, while group postings and comments were captured every day for a week after completing the Convention.

This sampling procedure produced 6, 485 posts and comments. To make the study more manageable while maintaining the meaningfulness of the data, post and comments were randomly reduced because of the large number of social media members (n=2,221) and (n=4,264) post and comments retrieved. Post and comment were randomly reduced to 500 for Facebook and 500 for WhatApps. From the available 1,000 comments selected from 25 WhatsApps members and 25 Facebook walls, some post and comments were discarded because they dealt with other subjects or issues different from the pending elections. After removing the unusable comments and post from the 1,000 post and comments, 962 were available for analysis.

Coding categories

For the number of sources coders recorded the number of sources used for real post and comments, including documents sources. Source anonymity was noted if the source identity was impossible to establish especially with WhatsApp. The presence of multiple viewpoints was measured on controversial issues. Controversy included physical, intellectual and ideological conflicts for instance the missing data of the Voter register, the chances for regime change or not. Viewpoints were categorized as (1) all opinion, (2) mostly one opinion (at least 66 percent of assertions), (3) two views (no one view.

Findings

An independent t-test was used to determine which publication type was most likely to generate more comments. The analysis revealed significant differences existed in the average number of issues commented ($p < 0.001$). Social media debates (n = 480) averaged 1.37 postings. A goal of many Facebook postings is to maintain or gain readership and comments and reactions.

Conclusion

Social media are very powerful machinery to increase public education and participation in democratic elections. These content analyzed had some sensitive information especially the threat from anonymous source to assassinate the Chief Electoral Commissioner and the Commissioner Western Region. The circulation of this information warranted NEC to come to report to ONS and the media the need to strengthen the security for NEC personnel and to mount investigation about the threat. Also, the outcome of the SLPP Convention was highly predicted by the postings preceding the Convention.

The issues of presidential candidates for both the incumbent APC and the opposition SLPP remain very debatable on all social networking sites examined and new trends unfolds from these conversations. Most of the conversations are issue based especially where there are support of Official correspondence like between the NEC Chairman and the Office of the President, resignation letters from party members, or defection of supporters, budget and funding for the elections, court rulings on petitions and personal correspondences

between contestants for party tickets for presidency.

At the same time it is evident that social media is setting agenda for the main stream media in reporting the electoral process in Sierra Leone. Journalists search for information and public opinion on critical issues for news, commentaries

and discussion programmes. Social media platforms are widely used to disseminate information about radio programmes, television shows and front page of newspapers and motivating headlines about the elections. Peculiar examples are the coverage of the missing voter register data, government funding of NEC to conduct the elections, APC reactions about the integrity and credibility of NEC Commissioner.

An outstanding impact of social media on the conversations on the electoral process is impeding the agenda of the extension of the date for the elections.

Recommendations

One of the main recommendations from this study is to organize media literacy campaign to enhance responsible and accountable use of social media platforms. This will enable more controversial debates to might lead to informed decision-making.

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Global Women's Struggle and their Media Manifestations in the Sierra Leone Context: New Challenges or New Opportunities

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"Now, what particularly signalizes the situation of woman is that she - a free and autonomous being like all human creatures – nevertheless find herself living in a world where men compel her to assume the status of the Other." - Simone de Beauvoir[7](1908-1996)

Abstract

Before now, the trajectory of women's role and function in society could only be traced domestically. The importance of women was specifically linked to reproduction, child rearing and caring for family members. Women were not expected to concern themselves with issues at community or national levels. Society was patriarchal in nature and this institutionalized the fabric of male dominance in every sector of life. As time progressed, women no longer kept silent about their struggles. They advocated for their rights and decried the inequalities and injustices they suffered. Realizing their potentials and understanding their relevance in society, they challenged the status quo. A case in point is that of Sierra Leone, where the women successfully participated at various levels to quell the conflict [8] . In a paper titled **Peace Agreements as a Means for Promoting Gender Equality and Ensuring Participation of Women** presented at an Expert Group Meeting of the United Nations - Division for

the Advancement of Women (DAW) Isha Dyfan submits thus:

> *"Women's groups participated in the two national consultative conferences – Bintumani (1) in 1995 and Bintumani (2) in February 1996 -- which set the agenda for elections and the peace process. Women's participation and votes in these two conferences became the turning point in the national decision to proceed with multi-party elections and a negotiated settlement of the conflict." (UN, 2003)*

Another example is South Africa; the massive Women's March to the Union Buildings in Pretoria over 50 years ago. Women fearlessly signed petitions and risked being arrested and detained, just to advocate against officials who had restricted their freedom of movement. (South Africa History Online, 2017) To date, women continue to determinedly address their diverse challenges on numerous fronts, using the media as a tool to advance their course.

Women in the Sierra Leone media have equally suffered similar challenges in their domain. They have also been affected by those challenges women face globally, and have been trumpeting their own grievances using their unions as channels to make their complaints. The question however remains: As individuals who form the professional team of those who are responsible to inform, educate and entertain the masses, and with their advantage of unlimited access to the various media platforms,

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[7] See article published in Hackett E. & Haslanger S. (2006)

[8] The period in Sierra Leone between March 1991 when the civil war broke out and 1999 when civilian government was reinstated.

have they been effective in appropriately articulating issues of women's struggles? What impact has their input created within the profession in Sierra Leone? Are new challenges looming? What new opportunities are there? This article, among other things, endeavoured to answer, either directly or indirectly, the forgone questions and also presents an opinion on what the prospects are for women in the Sierra Leone media.

Key words: Women's struggles, challenges, Standpoint theory, media contents, opportunities, prospects.

Introduction

Globally, rights issues have been foremost among the issues surrounding women's struggles. Women in communities all around the world are contending with the negative effects of globalization and are using every means possible including "the transnational political stage to press for social, economic, environmental, and political justice." (Naples and Desai, 2002) To ensure that women's rights are not violated, a lot of efforts have been made by the international community to develop treaties that will adequately address the challenges that culminate in women's struggles. One such document that could be referred to as the most detailed of all, is the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). This document was produced by the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, the body set up in 1946 to assess the situation of women and to work towards ensuring that women's rights are upheld. After having worked for thirty years the Commission came out with the convention that captured several areas in which the rights of women were denied. (UN, 2000-2009)

Despite the fact that over a 150 countries are signatories to the document, some have reneged on implementing it, others have problems with article two which mandates them to commit themselves to a policy to ensure that all forms of discrimination against women are eliminated and there have been

objections also on section 16 which advocates equality in family life. These queries brought up by different parties, indicate that more needs to be done in terms of getting parties to understand the spirit of the Convention and accepting the conditions outlined therein. Salma Khan [9] puts it succinctly when she said that "if a country enters a reservation on the very basis of the convention - which guarantees the general principle of equality - then it really becomes a matter of concern...when you enter a reservation on Article 2, you are violating and nullifying the whole concept and sense of the Convention." If parties continue to object the key principles of the Convention, it is an indication that the gap in inequality will continue to exist and women will continue to undergo numerous challenges. That being said, the question that one might want to ask at this stage is: what are the key challenges that comprise women's struggles?

Theoretical Framework

History records how feminist movements organized themselves into formidable entities to articulate women's issues especially those rights based; social, education, economic, political and personal. Feminists sought to establish opportunities for women that are comparable and equal to those of their male counterparts. In the process several feminists' theories [10] were propounded. These theories which were focused on examining gender inequality were developed on several areas like anthropology, literature, sociology, communication and many more.

The Standpoint theory, the theoretical framework of this study, suggests a perspective from which we examine the world. Standpoint theorists Sandra Harding and Julia Wood believe that one of the surest ways to find out how the world operates is to begin the operation from the viewpoint of women and other groups in society. The two are of the view that "the social groups within which we are located, powerfully shape what we experience and know as well as how we understand and communicate with ourselves, others, and the world." (Griffin, 2006 p482) Harding provides a candid illustration of the effect of Standpoint creating a mental scenario that

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[9] Chairperson, NGO Coalition for Beijing Platform for Action, Former Chairperson, UN CEDAW

[10] See: **Feminist Theories for Dramatic Criticism,** Gayle Austin (1990) & **Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment,** Patricia Hill Collins 2014

assesses whether a stick standing in a well is either bent or standing straight. Observing the mental picture from different locations some may say it is bent and others may say it is straight. In all, this points to what Griffin (2006) calls the "theory of light refraction that provides the argument of visual distortion." On the whole standpoint theory postulates that several inequalities of gender, sexual orientation, class, race, can be used to observe how different locations within the social hierarchy tend to generate distinctive accounts of nature and social relationships. As stated in Griffin (2006), Harding asserts that "when people speak from the opposite sides of power relations, the perspective from the lives of the less powerful can provide a more objective view than the perspective from the lives of the more powerful." Whereas Harding's main concern is the standpoint of the marginalized women, Wood is noted to have constantly used "standpoint logic" in the communication field. Hesse-Biber & Yaiser (2004) explain this logic as the "start thought from marginalized life and take everyday life as problematic." For Wood (n.d) however, all perspectives are partial, but she also firmly holds on to the view that other standpoints are "more partial than others since different locations within social hierarchies affect what is likely to be seen."

There is no way one can communicate women's struggles, challenges, opportunities and prospects without looking at them from women's standpoint. Women are the most suited to tell their stories. Any other perspective that women's issues are discussed from will not be authentic if it does not come from women themselves who are the authoritative voices.

Global Women's Struggles

Women struggles are numerous. However, a summary of four significant themes can be looked at; Education, Poverty, Gender-Based Violence and Gender Stereotyping in the media.

Generally speaking, one of the essential necessities that accelerate the development of any nation is Education. Education is a basic human right that every nation must provide for its people. However, the inequalities in this sector has crippled the

progress of many women and girls. In a report[11] published by the World Bank Group, it is stated that among an estimated 780 million illiterate adults worldwide, nearly two-thirds are women. (Poverty and Shared Prosperity, 2016 p2) Globally women have suffered lack of access to quality education.

UNESCO, in their bid to foster quality education among women, have underscored the point that

"With […] quality education, women and girls can break the vicious cycle, and shape the world according to their aspirations. They can make informed choices, improving the lives of their families and communities, and promoting the health and welfare of the next generation. Empowering women and girls means empowering societies as a whole. It's one of the strongest foundations for lasting peace and sustainable development."

The major causes related to this lack of education among women and girls are numerous and can be attributed mostly to poverty, linking many other causes; pregnancy, early marriage, violence in schools and discriminatory gender norms. These have served as major obstacles to girls' education globally. Some added obstacles have been the fear held by parents that girls will be violated on their way to and in school, and the belief that girls are to take care of domestic work. These and many others have prevented many girls and women from being educated. However, CEDAW article 10 makes it clear that "states have the obligation to take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in order to ensure to them equal rights with men in the field of education…" (Right to Education, 2017)

In most countries, women experience a higher rate of poverty as they earn less than their male counterparts in their work places. Women also work longer hours, but they are not paid for most of those duties. They are mostly engaged in care-giving roles and other low-paid jobs.

Another big challenge for women is gender -based violence (GBV). This epidemic affects women across all regions of the world. It is believed that no place is safe for a woman except her own home, but even this idea is debatable. More than 700 million women globally are subjected to physical or sexual violence

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[11] Talking on Inequality : Poverty and Shared Prosperity 2016

at the hands of their male counterparts. (World Bank, 2014) Although GBV is a global problem, it is particularly acute in West Africa especially in post-conflict countries. (Mills et all, 2015)

Of the many influences on how we perceive each other, the most pervasive are media. Media contents are woven throughout our daily activities and as a result of that they become easily digestible and have a way of sticking in our memory. Media publishes images of the sexes, most of which suggest things to us that are limiting especially to the female gender and they become very stereotypical. Media contents suggest common themes: "women are underrepresented which falsely implies that men are the cultural standard and women are unimportant or invisible. Second, men and women are portrayed in stereotypical ways that reflect and sustain socially endorsed views of gender. Third, depictions of relationships between men and women emphasize traditional roles and normalize violence against women." (Wood, n.d, p 31.)

The Sierra Leone Situation: Are there New Challenges?

Sierra Leone falls at the 180th position out of 187 countries on the Human Development Index and is listed among one of the poorest countries in the world. Poverty is pervasive in the country; the UNDP estimates that more than 60 percent of the population lives on less than US$ 1.25 a day. (UNDP, 2015) This poverty spills over and trickles down on nearly all sectors of the country, the media inclusive. As a result of the poverty within the media, umbrella institutions cannot survive on payment of dues from journalists. To carry out major exercises geared towards empowerment of journalists within their constituency, an organization like WIMSAL would have to rely on support from donors; UNDP, UN Women or Westminster Foundation for Democracy. (Alpha, 2017 [12]) The poverty within the media is such that even newspapers like the Women's Voice have to cease publication because the publisher is not financially empowered to run the business and is also having difficulty penetrating the market. (Kamara-Jalloh, F. 2017)

Education

In Sierra Leone, unemployment and illiteracy levels are high especially among the youths. Most female journalists are unable to acquire tertiary education, and this mostly accounts for the low quality output. Asmaa James[13], agrees that not being appropriately educated limits women's understanding of issues and how they respond to work. "Some women are unable to do independent reporting and some female reporters who go on coverage cannot come with any meaningful reports so it's difficult to assign certain beats to them." (James, A. 2017) Fatmata Kamara-Jalloh,[14](2017) agrees with James (2017), but she adds that some of the women themselves are the cause of their problems. She narrates how women were given opportunity in 'Women in the Media Sierra Leone' (WIMSAL) to utilize a scholarship scheme that would give them access to sponsorship for tertiary education but they rejected it based on internal politicking in the association.

Gender-Based Violence

During Sierra Leone's civil war which started in 1991 it was reported that up to 250,000 women and girls were victims of gender-based violence. Reports[15] state that "rape was used systematically by all factions and, although peace was declared in 2002, the trauma of war has left scars which run through the fabric of households, families and communities." (Mills et all, 2015) To date, gender based violence has become a pandemic in Sierra Leone. In 2007 the government passed some gender laws aimed at establishing women's rights and clamping down on sexual violence, but because there has been a lot of struggles regarding the implementation of those laws crimes against women are still challenging to curb. Within the media there have been several reports of sexual harassment though none has been prosecuted. What has also been glaring recently is the way some women have been accusing each other either wrongly or otherwise of promiscuity. This has gone to the level where female journalists have been sued under the criminal libel laws; Public Order Act of 1965. James A., (2017) is of the opinion that journalists should practice comportment and stop castigating each other.

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[12] Interview done with Tiana Alpha, President of WIMSAL, November 2017 for this research.

[13] Asma James is the Station Manager of Radio Democracy FM 98. Interview done September 2017 for this research.

[14] Fatmata Kamara-Jalloh is the Financial Secretary of the SLAJ. Interview done September 2017 for this research.

[15] See (Mills et all, 2015)

Radio Station	Region/District	Station/ Programmes Manager	Hours of Broadcast	No of Programs	No of Programs Featuring Women's Issues
Skyy Radio	West/Freetown	woman	24	12	6
Society for Radio Democracy	West/Freetown	woman	24	16	7
Sierra Leone Broadcasting Corporation (SLBC)	West/Freetown	woman	24	15	5
Culture Radio	West/Freetown	woman	20	16	1
Capital Radio	West/Freetown	woman	24	0	0
Sierra Leone Broadcasting Corporation (SLBC)	East/Kailahun	woman	24	20	5
Sierra Leone Broadcasting Corporation (SLBC)	East/Kenema	woman	18	10	2
Voice of Women	Bonth/South	woman	12	16	2
Voice of Faith	Bo/South	woman	18	10	6
N'Jala University Radio	Moyamba/South	woman	17	31	3
Sierra Leone Broadcasting Corporation (SLBC)	Tonkolili/North	woman	18	13	2
Radio Maria	Freetown	Woman	24	30	5

Source: Research conducted in October in Freetown

Gender stereotyping & Women Changing the Narrative

It goes without saying that stereotypes are commonly used by individuals daily, but within the media, gender stereotyping tend to affect women and girls. The case in Sierra Leone is the same globally, however the question that has been asked many times over, is what women in leadership positions are doing to change the narrative from women being objectified within the media, to projecting notable issues regarding women. To analyse the situation, an assessment of programming was done on 12 broadcast stations in Sierra Leone where women were in top management positions. Their broadcast hours were considered, total number of programmes and the number of programmes in which women's issues were featured daily were all assessed.

It came out that of the twelve broadcast entities with women as station/programmes managers, only three stations; SKYY FM, Radio Democracy and Voice of Faith, had programmes designed to address women's issues. Voice of Faith also devoted 60 percent of their daily broadcast hours to handling issues featuring women, Skyy Radio and Radio Democracy devoted 50 percent each and the rest were below 35 percent. Capital Radio stood out as having no programme featuring women's issues. With this appalling statistics, one wonders how women can actually make a change when they are strategically placed to do so, but are doing sweet nothing to create the desired impact.

As it is now, there are new challenges that women journalists in Sierra Leone have to rise up to. New technologies are invented often, and social media is posing a greater threat to traditional media even though it provides the reporter the opportunity to source easily accessible information that will give depth to her story. However, women have to be enlivened to face the emerging trends if not the problems will compound to the point that they will become even more difficult to address.

Prospects

Are there prospects? Dr. Fatu Taqui[16] sums this up by saying that the obstacles are not insurmountable, women can overcome them if they are determined

and ready to work as a team. "At 50/50 we train women, women journalists inclusive. We provide counselling and moral support for them." This places the institution strategically to attend to the issues of women and even advocate for them at certain levels.

The Way Forward

For James, A. (2017) female journalists should be more assertive and carry out "relegated tasks assigned to them." She is of the opinion that women should maintain high moral values in the way they dress, interact with their colleagues, so as to avoid high rate of sexual harassment. Handling of resources and relationship with other members of the public she believes must be highly professional to avoid giving room for unnecessary blames.

To further conclude, it must be noted that a gender policy in SLAJ is crucial for gender equality in the profession. A policy that establishes the fact that female and male journalists have equal rights will provide the atmosphere for journalists to achieve gender equality in practice. For SLAJ to successfully curb gender inequality there must be a document that commits the association to it. On the part of women, the sooner they understand the strength they possess to work as a team, the better it is for them. Women must understand that they are the best mouthpiece to channel their issues and they must take advantage of every little possibility to achieve greater result.

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Rhetorical Underpinnings of Media Ethics and Press Freedom

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Introduction:

The debate on Media Ethics and Press Freedom is not just limited to Sierra Leone and other developing countries but Western developed countries as well.

Press Freedom has become an integral phenomenon in modern day democracies the world over hence the debate on the latitudes, the wrongs and rights of the Media appears to be an unending trend.

"If individuals are to play their roles effectively and efficiently in society, then they must be adequately informed with sufficient facts upon which to make national judgments and decisions; daily graphic, 2011.

The Article in the Daily Graphic continues; that freedom of the Media in the widest sense represents the collective enlargement of the freedom of expression of all citizens. It is a fundamental right.

This has been reinforced by Prof. Kofi Kumado who notes that "the right to information is an integral part of freedom of expression. Speech is undeniably an important way in which we fulfill ourselves as human beings. Secondly, Freedom of expression enables us to participate in the process by which our Public Affairs are managed, namely government. This in a sense, the right to information defines both our humanity and our citizenship".

To hang on the import of the above quote: this situation with Media Freedom in Sierra Leone is absolutely not clear. Yes, certain structures and legislations have been put in place to ensure Press Freedom but the continuous existence of part (5) of the Criminal Libel Laws In our Law books (The Public Order Act of 1965) clearly inhibits the practice of Press Freedom in Sierra Leone.

The umbrella body of Media practitioners in Sierra Leone has been actively engaging the Government to see reasons to expunge that aspect of criminalizing Libel in our Law books.

Again, Freedom of Expression is being guaranteed in the 1991 Constitution of Sierra Leone i.e. Article (25) (1) states "Except with his own consent, no person shall be hindered in the enjoyment of his freedom of expression, and for the purpose of this section the said freedom includes the freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart ideas and information without interference, freedom from interference with his correspondence, freedom to own , establish and operate any medium for the dissemination of information, ideas and opinions and academic freedom in institution of learning:

Provided that no person other than government or any person or body authorize by the President shall own, establish or operates a television or wireless broadcasting station for any purpose whatsoever".

The Media and Journalists are there to serve as a defense against corruption and oppression, as defenders of the fundamental rights of the people and the safeguard for the rule of Law. This is the only means to give meaning and function to democracy. They are to work toward the promotion of the Liberty of the people. And as Richard Brinsley Sheridan noted, no matter how powerful a Government or a Politician is, once the Media operates freely and responsibly, they can hold them to account to the people.

This postulation directly relates to the Agenda setting theory: which describes the "ability of news Media to influence the salience of topics on the

public agenda i.e. if the news item is covered frequently and prominently, the audience will regard the issue as more important.

For instance, in the case of the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ), they have engaged both the Public and Government to see reasons why the Criminal Libel Laws should be expunged from the Law books of Sierra Leone yet this has not yielded any dividends as we speak.

SLAJ, in its ranks has offered so many concessions but this has not seen the light of the day as both the Public and the Government are apprehensive as we move closer to the 2018 General Elections.

The Government on the other hand has requested SLAJ to offer an alternative to the replacement of the act: even through SLAJ has made so many reforms within ranks, no positive response is yet to come from Government.

Ethical Rhetorics in the Media
What is Rhetorics?

Rhetoric is the study and practice of Communication that persuades, informs, inspires or entertains target audience in order to change or reinforce beliefs, values, habits or nations.

It is also the strategic use of communication to accomplish purpose within target audience. It can be used for Ethical and unethical purposes, but ought to be used for good ends and to enhance truthful and honest messages. "Edu Rhetor"

Breach of Confidence

Invariably, one cannot enjoy Press Freedom where Public officials hide under breach of Confidence as generally accepted.

This breach of confidence Law in journalism practice is based upon the principle that a person who has obtained information in confidence should not take unfair advantage of it.

The main means used to achieve is the interim injunction- that is, a pre-trial order of the court directing a party to refrain from doing something; in this case or disclosing the confidential information.

Ironically, the Media Should be interested in the Public Interest aspect of the information. Ethically the Media should respect confidentially but the Laws virtually inhibit the practitioner from exhibiting his or her duty in reporting the News in the Public Interest.

Elements of a Breach of Confidence

a. The information must have the necessary quality of confidence;

b. The information must have been reported in circumstances imposing an obligation of Confidence and

c. There must be an unauthorized use of that information to the detriment of the party communicating it (Coco vs. Clark (1969) RPC 41 Act 47)

Sequel to the aforementioned, this aspect of Ethical control has now become so debatable in contemporary Media practice due to the emergence of the New Media i.e. the Social Media.

The rhetorical question is that how can that aspect of the New Media be regulated especially by the Statutory bodies responsible for that without impinging on individuals Freedom of expression and the right to publish.

Individuals who are not trained to practice the Media Profession are now actively involved in the practice: and this aspect has been coined as Citizens journalists.

In other words the rhetorical underpinnings of Media Ethics and Press Freedom has now become so daunting that solutions must be sought in order that Media practitioners should continue to enjoy their freedom to practice their profession without undue harassment by the authorities to suppress freedom of expression.

Another poignant rhetoric is when discussions are centered on journalistic sources. Journalists are always faced with the task of responding to questions by regulators and the laws as to where do you get that story? Sometimes a judge or Media regulatory authorities may ask: but at common law judges have the power to order disclosure of the identity of wrongdoers whenever the person against

whom the disclosure is sought has got 'mixed up' in wrongful conduct that infringes a claimant's legal rights (Norwida Pharmaca l Vs Custom and Excise Commissioners (1974 AC 133). In any case, the

journalist is under obligation to go by the courts directives to disclose the source. But the ethical obligation should also be respected by the journalist.

The consequences not to adhere by such directives are severe hence the obvious should be done.

Hitherto, situation like this has not been recorded in recent times in our courts for one to make any reasonable reference.

However, the dilemma as far as Sierra Leone is concern ; any claimant seeking redress for any Media code breach has the luxury of either going to court and ask for justice to restore his or her reputation or goes to the Independent Media Commission to seek Civil redress.

As it is currently in Sierra Leone, the dilemma or the rhetorical underpinnings of Media Ethics and Press Freedom continue to generate debate and the Media scope widen as by both technological advancement and the upholding of democratic tenets in Sierra Leone.

Media Regulations and Pres Freedom in Sierra Leone

Officially, the Independent Media Commission stands to be the Sole Media Regulators in Sierra Leone by Law.

"The IMC being an act established as an Autonomous body for the regulation of Mass Media Institutions and for other matters connected therewith". This act of parliament clearly defines the sole powers of the IMC to regulate and promote Press Freedom in Sierra Leone currently the IMC has Commissioners representing different specialized Media sectors forming the board and for the purpose of this study, IMC Commissioner

Francis Sowa highlighted the following statistics when asked of Media compliance and challenges faced by the IMC in the discharge of its duties:

Compliance

Compliance and Ethical principles have increased comparatively between 50-60% in the current estimation of the IMC board. "But the trend is different when it comes to compliance with IMC rulings on cases that are brought before us" Commissioner Sowa asserts.

The Media in Sierra Leone is regulated by the IMC Code of practice which is used to measure compliance and ethical principles: IMC Code of practice: 2007.

The Media Code of practice is divided into different segments for both the print and the electronics. The Print Media has 27, the electronics 18 as the case may be.

Generally, Commissioner Sowa said, Newspapers no longer publish pornographic pictures and in the recent mudslide disasters no photograph of any dead was published in Sierra Leone and therefore, there is compliance in that area.

In the area of privacy, he said one must justify intrusion and there is also success in that area, then in the area of publication of names of underage children has yielded some success.

Understanding of Ethical Issues

There has been tremendous success in this area; this is due to the frequent trainings by both the Independent Media Commission and Media Educational Institutions around the country.

Challenges

Generally, compliance rate indeed has increased but a major challenge is that some Media houses find it very difficult to do proper retractions and apologies as required in terms of giving it the necessary prominence, according to Francis Sowa. Practitioners are only forthcoming when it comes to payment of fines and other levies.

Ethically, 70 to 80% of Journalists do breach Ethical cases brought before the IMC, hence a few of them do win cases investigated by the IMC.

Another challenge according IMC is the enforcement of its rulings. According to the IMC Act, they cannot

enforce their rulings as it is in other Sister Commissions like the National revenue authority NRA. For the IMC they can only go to court in order to enforce their rulings.

Political Environment

According to Sowa, the IMC enjoys financial support from government but said the support is not enough if the IMC should be more effective and efficient. Noting that more support is needed especially in the area of monitoring Media houses all over the country.

In the area of interference; the IMC Commissioner said the Commission at present has never

experience political interference from above. In some cases, he said the Commission has found wanting Newspapers close to government including that of a sitting IMC Commissioner.

In conclusion, Media ethics still continue to be a dilemma and the debate on Press Freedom remains unabated hence the draconian laws inhibiting Freedom expression and criminalizing libel still visible in our law books.

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Media in Captivity: A critical Introspective Review of Media Practitioners in Sierra Leone

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Abstract

This ethnographic study assesses some common patterns and trajectory of media development generally and argues that the media in Sierra Leone have refused to grow in the last two decades on account of a multiple of factors but primarily because of the disposition of journalists or media practitioners. The argument is supported by a critical evaluation of existing variables that usually accompany the understanding of media operations in Sierra Leone. I have treated the media as an entity of inquiry that may be subjected to basic standards, as compared to other regulated professions in the country, using some conformist parameters like qualifications, professionalism, regulation and creed.

Thus, the study concludes that the media in this country are not only feared because of the critical role they ought to be playing, but politicians in particular and other regulated professions are genuinely distrustful of the media. Among the reasons are that the media are lacking in ability to be independently critical and are possibly wanting in moral consciousness. The study also notes that the majority of media practitioners are not adequately educated to interpret complex nuances in terms of issues representing the relationship between people and society. In particular the press is characterized by perceptible weaknesses in structure, management and editorial stances. Finally, the study submits that the media are generally either unwilling or are constrained to tell truth to power – which should be their cardinal role in a democracy.

Key words: *media development, journalists, media practitioners, regulated professions, public perceptions*

Introduction

The media in Sierra Leone appear to have refused to grow in the last two decades on account of a multiple of factors but I look at the extent to which the disposition of media practitioners has been a factor. With all things being equal, I attempt to critically review some major attributes of the media profession and compare them to other regulated careers, using the same environment and same opportunities and challenges available to all of them. Against that milieu I propose that it is journalists or media practitioners, themselves, who have placed the Sierra Leone media in captivity, preventing the profession from being regulated and allow practitioners' growth to be determined by standards

- *professionalism, educational qualification, capacity, experience, morality and ethics* - that apply to other regulated professions. Therefore, there are seemingly no commonly accepted standards against which media practitioners' *'competence qualifications'* may be critically assessed without attracting claims of prejudices. According to the Finnish National Board of Education (2013) competence qualifications are practically-based and, to establish skill and proficiency, are assessed in the workplace across a range of tasks. Similarly, enforcing self-regulations to the letter by the Independent Media Commission, the statutory media regulator, and the Sierra Leone

Association of Journalists has conjured some invariably strong but often socially discriminatory sentiments from a set of practitioners who may not

be able to practice based on functional literacy17 or are indifferent to compete for growth in the profession while observing basic journalistic mores.

This situation, that seems to have created an insular media landscape in the small West African nation, was apparently occasioned by some hubris or inertia in pursuit of excellence, qualifications and professionalism. This is typified by a weird sense of arrogance that is largely a result of ignorance amongst a large number of journalists. It is based on a warped notion that seems to suggest that journalism, being a right-based profession, without recourse to responsibility, is an endangered venture that should be feared, respected and protected. Such is the level of obliviousness that may have been engendered and sustained by a general laziness, a lack of education that is borne out of limited exposure, multidimensional poverty and or a seeming incorrigibility on the part of practitioners. As a consequence -and despite remarkable reform efforts and some sector-based workforce improvements in the last fifteen years – a majority of journalists has demonstrated limited capacity to interpret society beyond events that obtrude themselves. This could well be a bane in the effort at niche reporting, specialization, in-depth expert media analyses, intellectualism and advocacy journalism.

My proposition on the media's denial to grow resonates with a widely held public perception about the nature and place of the media in Sierra Leone, in addition to them being among the few powerful substructures that primarily influence, shape and create a balanced society. Other substructures include the law profession, regulated by the Legal Practitioners Act of 2000 and enforced by the General Legal Council and the medical and nursing profession, regulated by the Medical Practitioners and Dental Surgeons Act of 2008 as amended and enforced by the Medical and Dental Council. Unlike the media, with the other two examples, practitioners are certified as professionals after qualification, are regulated by law or codes, are accredited or licensed to operate, without which they cannot practice.

Therefore, while it might be true that the media in this country are powerful (Jalloh, 2014), they are not necessarily feared because of the critical role they ought to be playing in a liberal society. Politicians in particular and practitioners in the other regulated professions mentioned above are genuinely distrustful of the media. Some of the reasons are that the media practitioners, also referred to as journalists, are lacking in the ability to be independently critical. Their moral consciousness has been called into question several times over the years, with some observers blaming that on the fact that media practitioners may not be educated enough to interpret society and its people. Nyamnjoh (2000) observes that some African governments would rather trust foreign journalists and media with important decisions concerning their countries than honour their own local media with scoops. "This explanation notwithstanding, journalism that has little or no respect for evidence, fairness and accuracy cannot be termed professional, no matter its appeal or its popularity with the disaffected" (ibid, 2000:42).

Theoretical foundation

I have employed social responsibility, one of four theories of the press, and development theory in the context of globalization, to broaden the foundation of my argument on what the media ought to do both in their efforts to grow and develop as well as how they conduct themselves in society and account for their stewardship in the realm of globalization. Globalization is a development theory. Reyes (2001) claimed there are two major meanings of the word 'Globalisation'. "One deals with the word as an event when a sense of interdependence occurs throughout different countries of the world in different aspects of communication, trade, and finance. The other meaning that has been applied to the concept of Globalisation considers it as a theory of economic development with the supposition of widespread unification among different countries" (ibid, p.2) in Shareia (2015).

The media have responsibilities and one of them is to empower themselves, grow, develop and compete on a global platform. Where that is absent,

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17 A term initially defined for UNESCO by William S. Gray (The Teaching of Reading and Writing, 1956, p. 21) as the training of adults to 'meet independently the reading and writing demands placed on them'.

practitioners may be held responsible. The theory holds that the press has a moral obligation to society when making 'journalistic decisions'. Part of those decisions, I believe, should affect practitioner's willingness and ability to acquire knowledge and be qualified to 'produce the greatest good'. According to Wikipedia (2017) "though there had been journalism 'codes of ethic' for decades, the Commission's [Hutchins Commission] report was considered landmark by some scholars; they believed it was a pivotal reassertion of modern media's role in a democratic society". Therefore, the social responsibility theory entails, among other things, that the media accepts certain responsibilities towards society, fulfils responsibilities (meeting professional standards), is responsible and able to be representative of society (Fourie, 2005) in Spuy (n.d.).

Who is a journalist?

Jullian Harriss and his colleagues have said it best (in M'bayo, 2015): "Journalists are writers who deal chiefly in current events. As contrasted with some other types of writers who employ imagination in their quest for reader appeal, reporters must deal with facts. The chief role is to record what has happened and sometimes to analyze or interpret what has happened or will happen. Occasionally, reporters give their own opinions on events they have reported, but opinion traditionally is not included in news stories. Opinions are expressed on the editorial pages (or on radio and television commentaries)."

M'bayo adds that your passion for facts and your ability to write well, will set you as good journalist, apart from incompetent ones.

"There's no getting away from it, you'll need qualifications to fulfil your ambition – it's almost impossible to become a working journalist without them...To become a real journalist you'll need to demonstrate enthusiasm for your chosen career by getting some work experience in your chosen field even before you apply for a job, or a place at university or college", according to The Chartered Institute of Journalists (The CLoJ), United Kingdom cited in Media Reform Coordinating Group's 2017 draft report on accreditation, ethics and professionalism titled: *'Sierra Leone: Towards An Accreditation Regime for Editors And Station Managers'*.

A glory that Lives in the Past

Even on the basis of its glorious trajectory alone media developments in Sierra Leone could not be said to have been proportionate, in terms of growth, to the number of years of the trade and its practitioners in the country and on the continent. If the current media landscapes in the country were to be compared to their former selves, you would see that since the end of the nineteenth century the media went into decline due to several factors – (i) colonialism and independence, (ii) political crises and constitutional developments, (iii) military coups and the civil war of 1991-2002, (iv) lack of investment and weak infrastructure, (v) poor media management and lack of training and empowerment. However, it is safe to say that the slow pace at which the media have grown especially in the last 20 years, even with the advent of technological advancement, opportunities for journalism education and the universal call for professionalism, could largely be blamed on the refusal of media practitioners to flow with the trend. This factor, a taboo-like- phenomenon, has been completely overlooked or even ignored by media researchers who have written around the political economy of the media with reference to extant causes for the underdevelopment of a media in a 21 century world.

Wikipedia (2017) states that the media in Sierra Leone began when the first modern printing press in Africa arrived at the start of the 19th century. In the 1860s the country became a journalist hub for Africa with professionals travelling to the country from across the continent. Radio was introduced in the 1930s and became the primary communication media. Print media is [still] not widely read in Sierra Leone, especially outside Freetown, partially due to the low levels of literacy in the country (ibid, 2017). According to the United Nations (2015) the country's literacy rate is 41%, up by only 7% since 2004. Unfortunately, the problem of low level literacy has not improved over years, underscoring the argument that the media too could only be slightly more educated. As noted by McQuail (2005) in Spuy (n.d): 'there can be little doubt that the media, whether moulders or mirrors of society, are the main messengers about society'.

Testimony of a Journalist and
Possible Scenarios

Therefore, to all young journalists and those wishing to join the profession in Sierra Leone I advise that your passion for journalism and the enthusiasm to become a journalist must be supported by your ability, capacity and willingness to learn, write and grow. These considerations may be measured and assessed using the theory of development of basic stages in general growth processes and in terms of journalists being able to improve on their depth, reasoning and judgment in the first three to five years of their practice.

The assumption that the media in Sierra Leone may be in 'captivity' is particularly based on ethnographic enquiries and participant observations but also premised on solid related findings and arguments about the many failures of the Serra Leone media (see M'bayo, 2015). Thus, without strict adherence to those considerations, which hold true for general growth processes, most of you risk having your passion, enthusiasm and even your career dissipate as diminishing in return sets in relative to your energy. When this happens the flagging practitioners consequently become desperate, bad, an extortionist, a con, pliable, corrupt and less respected in the eyes of the public.

Conclusions: The journalist being literate
versus being educated

I have been a media, communications and journalism educator at the Mass Communications Department of Fourah Bay College, University of Sierra Leone for the last four years. Before that I was a trainer, newspaper editor, newsroom manager and a journalist for many years before I enrolled for my university degree in mass communications. In between the last sixteen years as a media practitioner, I have undertaken some academic studies. Besides, I have provided several consultancies around marketing, public relations, development and strategic communications for corporations and individuals in business, politics and social justice campaigns. Currently, I write on business and economy and lead a media platform – *OpenTax Initiative* – that uses research and advocacy journalism to call for open, transparent and accountable tax systems.

I also associate with advocacy efforts around mining and extractives and promote anything 'social entrepreneurship'. Forget about the self-indulgence in this short portrait about me and try to relate to the trajectory of growth in the journalist of today and the Sierra Leonean practitioner in the near future. While you envisage the model journalist, you would see two human elements that come to play.

First, it is what I call *'the informal element in journalistic growth'* and the second one being *'the formal element in journalistic growth'*. These elements are modeled on the considerations I have explained earlier.

Let me explain the two scenarios to give a more general context to my propositions. The first instance speaks to the perception which holds that the typical Sierra Leonean journalist is apparently literate just enough to become a reporter in the first place. Therefore what 'the informal element in journalistic growth' analogy seeks to contextualize - judging from the generally laidback attitude of a majority of journalists - is a belief, which I share, that being literate might qualify you to become reporters but it takes education to qualify, grow, diversify and specialize. Literacy, by every stretch of generally acceptable definitions, is limited in interpretation. Esoterically, it simply would be confined to refer to the journalist's ability to read and write. This is not education which, on the other hand, journalists need and must get to grow, diversify and specialize.

I must emphasize that even the informal element of journalistic growth presupposes that education, which is explained in the second scenario, is possible with journalists who make deliberate effort, on their own, to gain knowledge, broaden their horizon and attempt to interpret intricate issues, take independently thorough editorial decision when faced with ethical considerations and deal with the complexities associated with advanced reporting.

In the second scenario, which talks about 'the formal element in journalistic growth', I argue that formal education, whether acquired through a standardized training over a specified period of time to qualify and be certified as professional journalists or gained by reading widely to amass a wealth of knowledge, is a *sine qua non.* They need it to be able to effectively interpret society and analyze complex policies so as to provide a platform on which the public could base their decisions and judge their leaders.

Media Laws and Regulations:
A call for the Repeal of Criminal Libel Laws in Sierra Leone

By
By Francis Sowa (PhD. Candidate) and
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Abstract

This article examines the laws that are still being used to regulate the media in Sierra Leone with specific reference to criminal libel law provisions that hinder press freedom and the growth of the media industry in the country. The paper adopts an archival search and analytical review of the key strides taken in 2016, which were mainly in the form of major consultations and campaigns for the repeal of criminal libel laws in line with democratic best practices. The paper interrogates the normative theories of the press, specifically the libertarian theory, to argue that the continuous use of the criminal libel law, violates the principles of freedom of expression, and affects the democratic credentials of the country. The study found out that despite the various campaigns and efforts, little or no tangible steps were taken by the government of Sierra Leone to repeal the criminal libel provisions in Part V of the Public Order Act of 1965.

Keywords

Criminal libel, seditious libel, normative theories, freedom of expression, media freedom

Introduction

Freedom of expression and freedom of opinion have been cornerstones of liberal democracies for centuries. Starting with the 1689 English Bill of Rights to the 1948 United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights [UDHR], they have been enshrined and extended in constitutional and international law (Kamara, 2016, p.1).

The "grund norm" of recognition of the right to freedom of expression and opinion is anchored in the current Constitution of Sierra Leone, Act. 6 of 1991. This Constitution is significant in that it re-established a multi-party system and recognized certain Fundamental Human Rights in favor of the individual. Particularly, Section 25 provides in no uncertain terms the right to freedom of expression [and the press] (Kamara, 2016, pp.4-5).

Section 25 (1) of the Constitution of Sierra Leone, Act. No 6 of 1991 which grants freedom of expression and the press, limits the same enjoyment of the same freedom in Section 25 (2) in the interest of defence, public safety, public order, public morality or public health; or for the purpose of protecting the reputations, rights and freedoms of other persons, preventing the disclosure of information received in confidence among others.

Notwithstanding the purport of those limitations or restrictions, media practitioners and other organisations believe that the country's criminal libel law provisions do not conform to any democratically accepted limitations to freedom of expression and of the press. Massaquoi (2014) described the 1965 Public Order Act of Sierra Leone (POA) as a legislation designed to regulate those behaviors of the citizens of Sierra Leone and other residents assumed to be counterproductive to the stability of the state and comfort of others.

Theoretical framework

Although systems of media regulation had existed, Siebert et al (1963) provided the theoretical postulations for the normative theories of the press. They are authoritarianism, libertarianism, social responsibility and socialist/communist theories.
The libertarian theory is used in this article because the quest for freedom of expression and the press is

predicated on the theory. The libertarian theory was developed out of the writings of Milton, Locke, Mill and the general philosophy of rationalization and natural rights. Freedom of expression and the press has its root in the libertarian theory. The theory notes that anyone with economic means has right to use the media, but that the media should be controlled by self- writing process of the truth in the free market place of ideas. It advocates freedom of the media, to enable the media serve as an instrument for checking on government and meeting other needs of society (Dominick, 2000; Siebert, Peterson and Scramn, 1965).

This theory was a direct opposite of authoritarianism. If authoritarianism puts the press into total subjection, libertarianism was to literally take the press out of that subjection, in other words to free the press. But libertarianism itself has evolved over the years from its inception to what it is today.
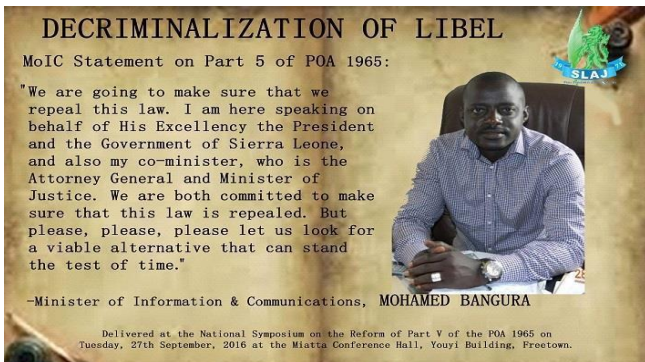
Folarin (n.d) posits that in the development of liberalism, the 16th Century provided the experiences; the 17th Century saw the philosophical principles flourished and the 18th Century put the principles into practice. He continues that the transfer of the press from Authoritarian to Libertarian principles was greatly influenced by the philosophical thinking of John Milton in the 17th Century, John Erskine and Thomas Jefferson in the
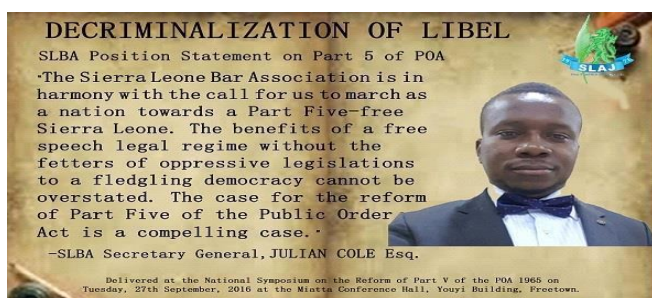
18th Century and John Stuart Mill in the 19th Century. Unfortunately after three centuries countries like Sierra Leone have failed to fully actualise Folarin's proposition on putting into practice the principles of freedom of expression.

However, even the degree of freedom to be exercised by the press varies among libertarians.

The 18th Century libertarians sometimes differed on minor points but agreed on fundamentals. For example, the Libertarian theory was somewhat narrowed by Justice Wendell Holmes of the United States Supreme Court (1902 to 1932). He opines that some limits must be set to the free expression guaranteed in the American Bill of Rights, the name by which the first ten amendments to the United States Constitution are known, having been introduced by James Madison to the First United States Congress in 1789. Determining just where the limits should be drawn, Holmes thought, involves a fine balancing of the right of the individual and protection of society.

For John Stuart Mill, an English scholar, in his work *'On Liberty'* (1869), free expression should not be justified on the basis of natural rights, but on the grounds of utility. He emphasized that the government, the traditional enemy of liberty was not the sole threat to individual liberty; that the majority might tyrannise the minority, the majority might stifle the minority's thought. For Mill, liberty is the right of the matured individual to think and act as he pleases so long as he harms no one in doing so. In other words, people's freedom to swing their fist ends where the face of others begins.

The Libertarian theory promotes the idea of a free press, a press that is free from all forms of control. The school of thought that believes in this theory, holds the view that the media should be free from control by government or other powerful interests, sufficient to allow them to report and express freely and independently and to meet the needs of their audiences. The libertarian system allows the media editorial autonomy in an open competitive atmosphere.

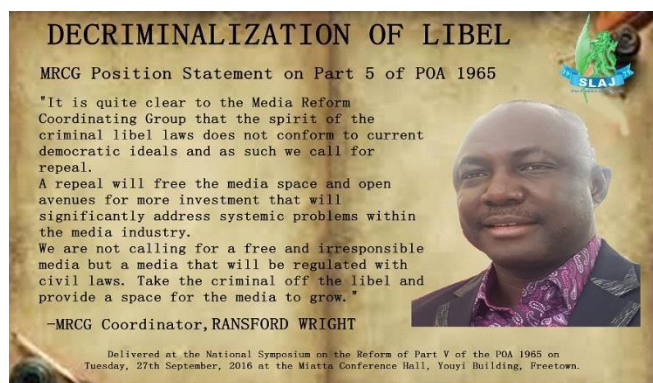### Freedom of Expression and of the Press

Milton for example, defines freedom of the press as the will of God, while 18th Century libertarians justified it as an inherent right of man. He also sees

press freedom as simply freedom from licensing but other libertarians saw it as an absence of government's interference in virtually every form.

Thomas Jefferson the third President of the United States of America (March 4, 1801 – March 4, 1809) during his time shared his views on the enjoyment and limitation to the right of freedom of expression and of the press. He asserted in a January 28, 1786 letter to James Currie a Virginia physician that "our liberty depends on the freedom of the press, and that cannot be limited without being lost." Jefferson said this about press freedom and access to the media in a conversation with Edward Carrington in 1787.

> "Were it left to me to decide whether we should have a government without newspapers or newspapers without a government, I should not hesitate a moment to prefer the latter. But I should mean that every man should receive those papers and be capable of reading them."

The freedom of expression and the press which the libertarian theory advocates has been greeted with mixed feelings. While some say the media should be free from any form of control, others argue that freedom of the press is not absolute. The argument is both at international and national fronts, looking at international conventions and treaties and domestic laws.

The right to freedom of expression is guaranteed and restricted/limited under international law and human rights instruments, notably the Universal Declaration of Human Rights UDHR, (1948), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966), the European Convention on Human Rights, the American Convention on Human Rights (1969), and the African Charter on Human and Peoples Right (1987).

Baran (2006) posited that "The Media are not necessarily fully free and government control is sometimes allowed" (p. 448). Cole (1995) addressed the issue on the limitation of press freedom this way:

> "...Nowhere in the world is there a totally free press. Even Britain, which is widely regarded as a model of Western democracy, has laid down restrictions on freedom of expression to protect the rights of individuals and for reasons of 'state security'." p. 5)

Binneh- Kamara (2007, p.6) noted that the right to freedom of expression is not absolute. It is limited. In fact there is nothing like absolute right. The right of every citizen is subject to the right of the other.

Perspectives on Criminal Libel Law in 2016

Jamiru (2016) noted that Sections 26, 27, and 33 of the Public Order Act No. 46 of 1965 are instructive statutory regimes relating to criminal libel. Whilst Sections 26 and 27 criminalize what is defamatory libel; Section 33 seeks to penalize defamation with a seditious intent. He noted that "journalists have been greatly caught up in shark-infested waters due to the unforgiving take by state authorities and private persons alike." There has been an avalanche of suits against newspaper proprietors, publishers, editors or any person responsible for publication of a newspaper.

Robinson (2016) who worked at Awoko newspaper as an intern in an article stated that the "300-year-old laws were introduced to Sierra Leone by the British, but they've long since been repealed in Britain." But in Sierra Leone, the criminal libel laws, especially laws regarding "seditious libel," seem specifically designed to shield government officials from harm, while making it very risky for journalists to say anything that would displease them."

Emmanuel Saffa Abdulai at the launch of SDI's 2016 State of the Media Report titled: "The Independence of the Media Enhances Democracy and Good Governance: A call for the repeal of the Criminal and Seditious Libel laws in the 1965 Public Order Act" said "We believe that a journalist should not go to jail for writing and publishing stories.... The practice of journalism could only be enhanced through a civil libel law...."

In his speech on World Press Freedom Day, 3 May 2016, SLAJ President, Kevin Lewis in Sierra Leone the continued presence and use of the Criminal Libel laws is a constant threat of the right to media freedom, which is a fundamental human right.

"Today two journalists will not be with us because they are due in court to answer charges under the Criminal Libel Laws." From 2007 to now (2016) over 25 journalist have been arrested interrogated, detained and/or jailed and two have been convicted of Criminal Libel"

SLAJ reiterated its call to President Koroma, to make do his 8 -year-old election promise, to repeal the Criminal Libel Laws. "We continue to maintain that there are enough provisions in the Civil Laws to address any redress sought from those aggrieved by our work...."

Charter for Freedom of Expression and the Press in Sierra Leone

In its Triennial Meeting in 2016, the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists adopted the 'Charter for Freedom Of Expression and the Press in Sierra Leone.' The document provides that "No people or society can be free without freedom of expression and of the press. The exercise of this freedom is not something authorities grant; it is an inalienable right of the people."

According to the Charter "Freedom of expression and of the press can be severely limited by draconian laws, murder, terrorism, kidnapping, intimidation/threats, the destruction of facilities and property, violence of any kind and impunity for perpetrators. Such acts must be investigated promptly and dealt with according to the law."

"The mere existence of the threat of criminal prosecution and the possibility of a prison sentence serve to discourage people from speaking out. Therefore, no criminal prosecution shall be instituted against any proprietor, publisher, editor or any person responsible for any publication", the Charter states.

National Symposium on the Reform of Part V of the Public Order Act (POA), 1965

In September, 2016 various stakeholders converged at the Miatta Conference Hall, Youyi Building in Freetown to discuss the reform of Part V of the Public Order Act (POA) of 1965. At that conference all the stakeholder unanimously agreed that criminal libel laws should be repealed and replaced with alternatives that will guarantee and protect the rights and reputations of citizens.

Timbo Esq.(2016) who presented Law Reform Commission in one of its presentations in 2016 noted that "Seditious libel is an outdated offence: the only countries that still retain it in their statute books are Sierra Leone and Canada. The more general offence of sedition is still effective/current in several countries, but several have abolished it." As short term measure, Timbo (2016) suggested that the Attorney-General and Minister of Justice is requested to draft a law repealing Part V in its entirety through the amendment of the Public Order Act, 1965 and to factor media-related matters into the constitutional review process, and to make detailed provision for it in the revised Constitution. On medium/long term measures, he highlighted the development of a Defamation Act, a Sedition Act, a Privacy Act and laws on hate speech, blackmail, hacking and use of the internet/social media and the review the Independent Media Commission Act, 2000 to increase its powers to be more Independent and robust in its operation.

Ngegba Esq. (2016) from the Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone stated that the reasons why criminal libel should be repealed are that it is a precondition for the enjoyment of other rights, a therapy for growth, and potential for misuse that leads to violation of other rights. He recommended that conversion of criminal libel to civil wrong; gislate effective alternative remedies like Mediation, Retraction and Apology and Reform the Independent Media Commission (IMC) with emphasis on reviewed criteria for Commissioners, quasi-judicial powers and allocation of resources – financial and technical.

Munu (2016), the Inspector General of Police, stated that "As we always put the interest of the state above all else we have also taken a fundamental rethinking and have come to the conclusion that a repeal of the said Part V(five) of the Public Order act No. 46 of

1965 might best serve the interest of the state and we welcome it. We see that government is determined to let it go and the media has been yearning for it, we cannot stand in the way of reform." He added that "We however believe that adequate safeguards are necessary to ensure the rights of all citizens against any potential abuse. The president of Sierra Leone Association of Journalist (SLAJ) Mr. Kelvin Lewis assured members of the Police Executive Management Board of self regulation of the media, while we believe in the good intention of the SLAJ president, there is little evidence that some of them would amenable to regulation as even the Independent Media Commission (IMC) had been finding it difficult to regulate them

Looking Ahead

Jamiru (2016) had suggested the following as the way forward to ensure the repeal of criminal libel laws.

• Firstly, we continue holding president Koroma to his promise of abolishing criminal libel laws and to treat that pledge as firm and irrevocable- reminding him that he made it on a sacred political platform, and that people relied on that promise to vote him into office at a time when he was like a thunderbolt rock star wowing the voters.

• Secondly, unlike the office of Attorney General and Minister of Justice which again the President in his pre-2007 election campaign hinted he would separate (albeit an entrenched clause) the criminal libel laws are not entrenched. I would therefore urge SLAJ to immediately set up a coalition on Criminal Libel repeal, give it a short catch phrase; such coalition to include a select caucus of Parliamentarians to determine the final trajectory towards abolition.

• Thirdly, tied to the coalition maybe the immediate need to launch an online or offline petition calling for a repeal to be signed up to by about 5% of the voting population and calling for a prompt parliamentary action.

• Fourthly, let it be made abundantly clear to our governors that criminal libel constitutes an illegitimate abridgment of the freedom of expression as enshrined in Section 25 of the Constitution of Sierra Leone Act No. 6 of 1991. The

Constitutional Review Committee should therefore ensure that the new Constitution must have no place for any exception that abridges free speech.

Jamiru (2016) summed it up this way "It is time for criminal libel to be expunged. It is inhibitive, obsolete, and down-right discordant with the core freedom of expression. SLAJ must now broaden the existing pillars of its coalition, and make the final case for repeal."

On the question of protection the reputation of people if the law is repealed, SLAJ in its revised Code of Ethics of 2016, noted on the issue of defamation that "Journalists shall regard defamation, blackmail, libel and false and groundless accusations as grave professional offences." On freedom and responsibility, the Codes provides that " Journalists shall at all times strive to uphold and defend the right of freedom of expression and information, the principle of media freedom and responsibility, and the right of the public to be informed. Journalist shall strive to employ open, honest and ethical means in the gathering and dissemination of information."

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How Free is the Press In Sierra Leone: Press Freedom Index Report

By

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How free is the press in Sierra Leone? The verdict is unflattering, according to three major international agencies that monitor media activities around the world – Committee for the Protection of Journalists, Reporters without Borders (RSF), and Index to Freedom (IFX).

Although not immediately apparent, media practitioners in Sierra Leone operate in a climate of fear in an environment embedded with stringent media laws that authorities can and have used in dealing with media practitioners for perceived excesses or for alleged violations of these laws. The 1965 Public Order Act, which criminalizes libel and defamation, remains a key lightening rod in the practice of journalism in Sierra Leone.

Mindful of its implication, media practitioners quite often engage in self-censorship. "During the 2014-2016 state of emergency resulting from the Ebola epidemic," according to CPJ, "the threat of defamation charges was widely used to gag the media, forcing journalists to censor themselves or in some cases even go into hiding."

"Violations of the freedom to inform are less and less

the prerogative of authoritarian regimes and dictatorships," according to the recent World Press Freedom Index. "Once taken for granted, media freedom is proving to be increasingly fragile in democracies as well. In sickening statements, draconian laws, conflicts of interest, and even the use of physical violence, democratic governments are trampling on a freedom that should, in principle, be one of their leading performance indicators."

Comparing Sierra Leone, Guinea and Liberia

Interestingly, when compared to its Manor River Union neighbors, Sierra Leone exceeds Guinea and Liberia in terms of the degree of press freedom for the last six years 2010 – 2016, except for 2010, the only year that Liberia showed a higher degree of press freedom than the other two countries.

In table 1, the numbers in parenthesis represent the country ranking; the other figures are the scores. Note that the LOWER THE RANKING the HIGHER THE DEGREE of press freedom. Tables 2 and 3 are to be interpreted similarly. For Sierra Leone, as Table 4 shows, the degree of press freedom was highest in 2015; decreased in 2016, and lowest in 2

"Although not immediately apparent, media practitioners in Sierra Leone operate in a climate of fear in an environment embedded with stringent media laws that authorities can and have used in dealing with media practitioners for perceived excesses or for alleged violations of these laws."

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Sierra Leone	(091) 24.25	n/a	(072) 28.23	(061) 26.35	(072) 28.23	(079) 28.47	(083) 29.94
Guinea	(113) 33.50	n/a	(086) 30.00	(086) 28.49	(102) 31.67	(102) 32.56	(108) 33.08
Liberia	(084) 22.50	n/a	(110) 40.50	(097) 29.89	(089) 30.65	(089) 30.78	(093) 30.71

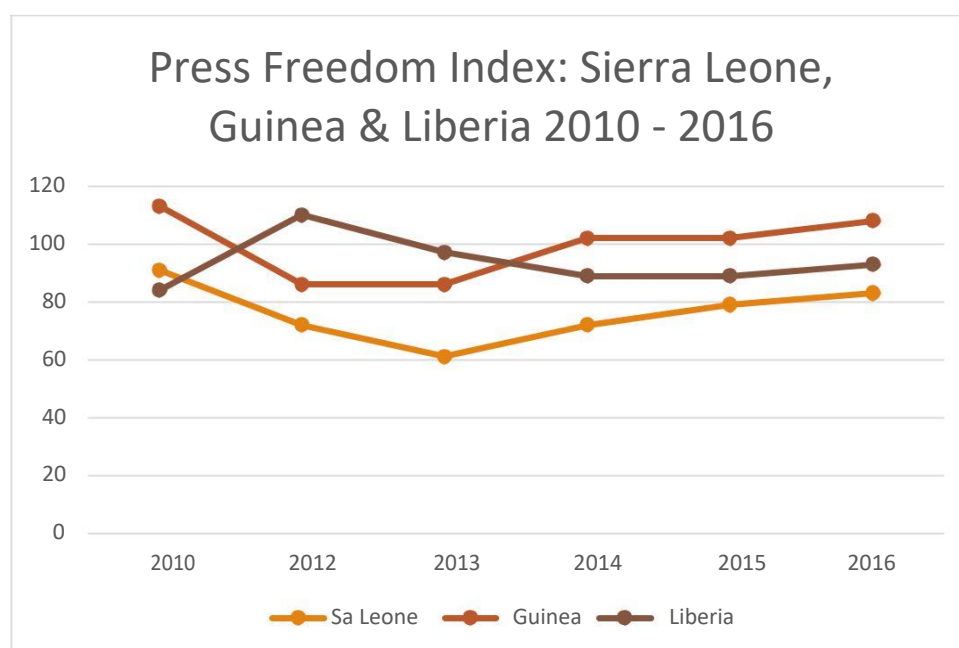**Table 1: Press Freedom Index: Sierra Leone, Guinea and Liberia**

Table 2a: Press Freedom Index; Sierra Leone, Guinea and Liberia 2010 – 2016
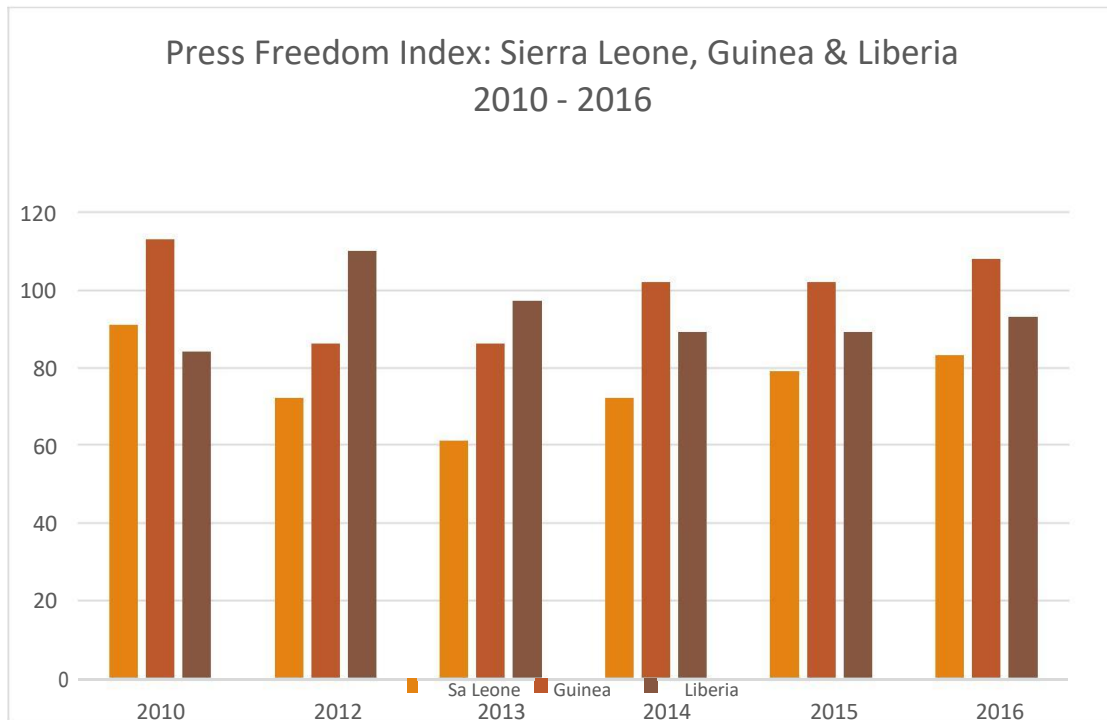
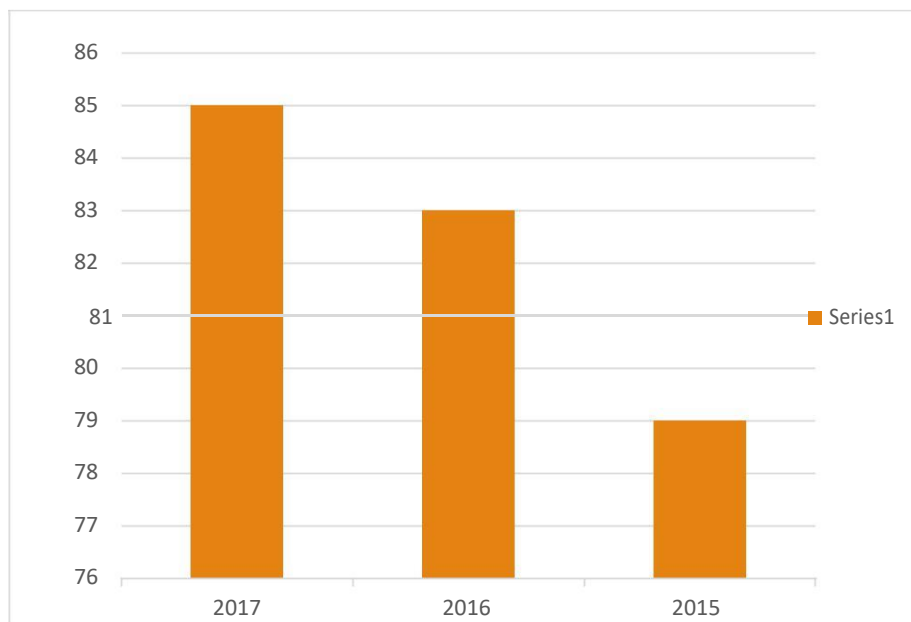Table 2b: Press Freedom Index; Sierra Leone, Guinea and Liberia 2010 – 2016

Table 3: Press Freedom Index for Sierra Leone 2015- 2017

The Need for Fair Distribution of the Available Radio Frequencies in Sierra Leone

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Abstract

This article examines the debate on how radio frequencies are allocated by NATCOM and the need for democratic practice cognizant of the fact that the right to the broadcast sphere is enshrined in the 1991 Constitution under Section 25 (1). However, many concerns have been put forward by media practitioners, media owners, civil society, politicians about the need for transparent allocation and fair distribution of radio frequency in Sierra Leone.

The problem of registering and operating radio stations in Sierra Leone is getting out of hands. Even though there are legal provisions empowering and guiding the statutory regulating bodies- the Independent Media Commission(IMC) and the National Telecommunication Commission(NATCOM), complaints have been levied by several actors concerning the non-response of NATCOM to applications or refusal to the applications for license to operate radio stations either by private individuals, legally registered organizations, or institutions. The IMC Act 2000 provides in clauses 15, 16, 17 and 18 the qualification for radio and television broadcasting license, the procedure of application, verification and approval or conditions refusal of granting licence by the Commission. The Act provides that a citizen or a body corporate established by an Act of Parliament or registered under the companies Act Cap.249 a, partnership registration under the Business Registration Act, Act No. 13 of 1983 etc. Furthermore, the Telecommunication Act 2006 also provides for the management of the Frequency Spectrum, Geo-stationary Orbit and Radio Transmission. Hence

Clause 64(1) and (2) (3) (4) and (5) is very clear about the application procedure and the necessary conditions for the approval to allocate radio frequency in line with international standards. Other stakeholders have observed political interference as another crucial issue.

Interview questions

1. What is your impression/view about the distribution and allocation of Radio frequency in Sierra Leone?

2. How democratic and transparent is the process of allocating licence base on what NATCOM is doing?

3. What are the key issues observed so far?

4. What may be responsible for these issues?

5. What are the implications of the current situation from your point of view?

6. How to get a transparent distribution of radio frequencies?

Situation Analysis

There is already some signal interference between radio stations because stations sometimes don't comply with assigned megawatt allocations. Some radio stations boost their output and overlap with other stations[18].

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[18] http://awoko.org/2017/09/12/sierra-leone-news-no-radio-spectrum-space-in-warea-natcom/

Other concerns observed by Isaac Massaquoi, a private media practitioner and lecturer include unfair allocation of frequencies, double allocations of frequencies to the same individuals or organisations, the issues of inactive radio stations and NATCOM's poor monitoring of radio stations. To have a better understanding of the FM Broadcasting Band the NATCOM Spectrum Manager further states as follow:

- The FM band is allocated in the VHF band due to its propagation characteristics which is ideal for short distance terrestrial communication.
- To prevent interference and allow efficient use of the FM band there is a band plan which dictates how it is to be used to avoid interference.

Valentina Thompson the Spectrum Manager again presented to the participants in a workshop organized by the MRCG further presents the FM Band Plan as follows:

- This band is divided into finite broadcasting channels of 200 kHz.
- A frequency deviation of ±75 kHz is applied.
- 99% of the signal power must be contained in a 150-kHz bandwidth.
- Two FM broadcasting stations in the same region must be at least 400KHz apart. This is to minimize what is described as adjacent channel interference.
- Cavity filter minimizes the occurrence of intermodulation and limit frequency deviation.

She concluded her presentation with FM broadcasting Frequency assignments in the country, which is the basis of this article.
- There are presently ninety-seven (97) frequency assignments for FM broadcasting in the country.
- Western Area (including Lungi, Water and the Peninsular) – 41 assignments.
- Northern Province – 22 assignments.
- Southern Province – 17 assignments.
  Eastern Province –17 assignments

Also, Alhaji K Tarawally from LICSAL Business College lamented that their College had applied to IMC for licence, but they were disappointed by NATCOM. No reason or justification was given by

NATCOM and to their surprise that no formal response was done in writing to the College. These criticisms are some of the justifications for NATCOM to demonstrate transparency and fairness in allocating radio frequencies. On this note NATCOM should publish the number of inactive radio stations and possibly withhold those inactive frequencies to ensure fair distribution.

"The withholding of frequencies by inactive stations has limited the work of media practitioners who solely depend on the operation of media for their survival. One possible solution is for NATCOM to embark on the sharing of frequencies among similar institutions like churches and Islamic missions,"

Isaac Massaquoi said.

Also, Allieu Kanu, IMC Chair, said the Commission's technical committee only review applications for the operation of radio stations and make recommendations to NATCOM. IMC does not allocate spectrums.

Literature Review

The 1991 Constitution of Sierra Leone is not silence about the right to broadcast sphere as a human and fundamental right. This God given right is enshrined in the nation's Constitution to ensure indiscriminate access to mass media and the right to own and operate them. Thus section 25 (1) that guarantees free speech and opinions provides thus:

"Except with his own consent, no person shall be hindered in the enjoyment of his freedom of expression, and for this section the said freedom includes the freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart ideas and information without interference, freedom from interference with his correspondence, freedom to own establish and operate any medium for the dissemination of information, ideas and opinions, and academic freedom in institutions of learning…"

The simply means individuals, organizations or institutions have the right to own and operate newspapers, radio and other forms of mass media without hindrance or discrimination. The laws of

Sierra Leone further support the right to own and operate radio stations in the IMC Act 2000. Clause 15 of the IMC Act 2000 provides as follows:

> "A radio and television broadcasting licence shall be granted only to-
>
> (a) a citizen of Sierra Leone
>
> (b) a body corporate established by Act of Parliament or registered under the Companies Act Cap 249, Act No. 13 of 1983
>
> (c) a partnership registered under the Business Registration Act. "

Notwithstanding the provisions above, there are complaints from individuals, organizations, associations and even institutions of learning that have applied to the IMC for licence to register and operate radio stations and uncertain occasions have been denied or refused to enjoy the said right. Even wherein the Telecommunication Act 2006 has also affirms that this right should not be tampered with or denied, the very NATCOM has refused to approve some applications from the public. For clear understanding of this matter, under the management of spectrum which is Clause 64 subsection 2 reads:

> "(2) For the purposes of subsection (1), the Commission shall have the power to-
>
> license any person or organisation to use specific radio frequencies for specific purposes, on such conditions and in consideration of such payments as it thinks appropriate, but the Commission shall reserve certain bands of radio frequencies for the exclusive use of the generality of the public, for various communications and other nonbusiness appliances of a purely private nature working within a short range not exceeding 458 metres between terminal yards, without the need for a specific licence;"

In view of the above provision the for fair allocation of frequencies State ggovernments play key role in ensuring fair and democratic allocation of radio frequencies as part of the global procedures. It is the management of interference that primarily calls for government oversight of spectrum's use. In addition to managing interference, government may also manage radio spectrum through economic regulation, ensuring that supply meets demand and the resource is put to its most effective use[19]. The main priorities of the ITU's regulation of radio spectrum are:

- to protect against harmful interference;

- to allocate radio services to the various radio frequency bands in the radio spectrum (including globally harmonized allocations for systems used in international air and sea travel), taking account of sharing and compatibility studies[20];

Valentina Thompson, the Manager of Spectrum NATCOM informs a gathering in a workshop organized by the MRCG on the issue of fair allocation of radio frequency in Sierra Leone. Valentina states in her presentation that radio frequency spectrum is the part of the electromagnetic spectrum that ranges from 3Hz to 3000GHz. FM Broadcasting Frequency Allocation is universally guided by the ITU. The bullet points below capture the ITU major considerations:

- The different parts of the radio spectrum are allocated by the ITU for different radio transmission technologies and applications.

- The generation and transmission of the radio wave is regulated by national laws and coordinated by ITU. The ITU set out what radio services can use which frequency band and under what conditions.

- To prevent interference and allow the efficient use of the radio spectrum, similar services are allocated in bands. There are 40 radio communication services defined by ITU's Radio Regulations. For examples the FM broadcasting band.

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[19] https://www.itu.int/ITU-D/treg/projects/itu-ec/Ghana/modules/FinalDocuments/Spectru

[20] https://www.itu.int/ITU-D/treg/projects/itu-ec/Ghana/modules/FinalDocuments/Spectru

- FM broadcasting is a radio communication service in which sound transmissions are

- intended for direct reception by the general public.

- The FM broadcasting frequency is within the VHF band in the ITU Frequency Allocated Table

- The FM broadcasting frequency band is a section of the radio frequency spectrum

- which ranges from 88MHz to 108MHz frequency. A modulation technique known as Frequency Modulation (FM) is used in this band. This band of radio spectrum is used for no other purpose but FM radio broadcast.

(3) in allocating frequencies under subsection (1), the Commission shall take into account

Radio Frequency Spectrum