

## BACKGROUND DOCUMENT AND WORKING DOCUMENT

### Context

Media has revolutionized the sharing of knowledge, impacted the moral, social, cultural fabric of a nation, impacted global, regional and national economies, impacted political systems, the rule of law, democracy, governance, religion and social consciousness.

The various mediums over the ages in which content has been disseminated has influenced mankind's capacity to interact with its various governments, economies, commerce, politics, philosophy and culture.

As the allies of World War 1 and Germany signed the Armistice at Compiegne, France and as the nation of France commemorates Armistice day, it is useful to retrospectively examine the impact that the medium played before the war and during the war in distributing "content" or "propaganda" to shape and unify a nation to act or behave in a certain way.

As States and Businesses recognize the power that the media wields in reaching the masses, they utilize the media to harness its capacity to influence and in some cases control the way their citizens and consumers behave. Over the years, as these mediums have evolved leaving other sectors to equally access these mediums, the nature of content transmitted over the media has also evolved. Today, the private sector and civil society all have varying levels of access to the media.

Media fulfills several roles in society, including the following:

- entertaining and providing an outlet for the imagination;
- educating and informing;
- serving as a public forum for the discussion of important issues; and
- acting as a watchdog for government, business, and other institutions.

Johannes Gutenberg's invention of the printing press in the 15<sup>th</sup> century enabled the mass production of media, which was then industrialized by Friedrich Koenig in the early 1800s. These innovations led to the daily newspaper, which united the urbanized, industrialized populations of the 19th century. In the 1830s, the major daily newspapers faced a new threat from the rise of penny papers, which were low-priced broadsheets that served as a cheaper, more sensational daily news source<sup>1</sup>. They favored news of murder and adventure over the dry political news of the day<sup>2</sup>. While newspapers catered to a wealthier, more educated audience, the penny press attempted to reach a wide swath of readers through cheap prices and entertaining (often scandalous) stories<sup>3</sup>. The penny press<sup>1</sup> can be seen as the forerunner to today's gossip-hungry tabloids<sup>4</sup>. Media theorist Benedict Anderson has argued that newspapers also helped forge a sense of national identity by treating readers across the country as part of one unified community (Anderson, 1991).

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<sup>1</sup> 2016, Understanding Media and Culture: An Introduction to Mass Communication, University of Minnesota Libraries Publishing.

<sup>2</sup> ibid

<sup>3</sup> ibid

<sup>4</sup> ibid

In the 20th century, radio allowed advertisers to reach a mass audience and helped spur the consumerism of the 1920s—and the Great Depression of the 1930s. After World War II, television boomed in the United States and abroad, though its concentration in the hands of three major networks led to accusations of homogenization. The spread of cable and subsequent deregulation in the 1980s and 1990s led to more channels, but not necessarily to more diverse ownership. Gutenberg’s invention helped usher in massive cultural movements such as the European Renaissance and the Protestant Reformation. In 1810, German printer, Friedrich Koenig, pushed media production even further when he hooked the steam engine up to a printing press, enabling the industrialization of printed media. In 1800, a hand operated printing press could produce 480 pages per hour’ Koenig’s machine more than doubled this rate and by the 1930s, many printing presses could publish 3,000 pages an hour. The increased efficiency went hand in hand with the rise of the daily newspaper. Media theorist Benedict Anderson has argued that newspapers also helped forge a sense of national identity by treating readers across the country as part of one unified community (Anderson, 1991).

The 20<sup>th</sup> century saw the first major non-print form of mass media, radio explode in popularity and given that they were less expensive than telephones and widely available by 1920s it allowed for unprecedented huge numbers to listen to events or messages at the same time. This medium clearly had an impact on content as the wide dispersion mechanism saw it fit for people to use the medium to propagate their “content”. This included national leaders, politicians, advertisers and education providers. There were many leaders from across Western Europe and the US whose political messages reached millions of people. In 1924, Calvin Coolidge’s preelection speech reached more than 20 million people<sup>5</sup>. An early advertising consultant claimed that the early days of radio were “a glorious opportunity for the advertising man to spread his sales propaganda” because of “a countless audience, sympathetic, pleasure seeking, enthusiastic, curious, interested, approachable in the privacy of their homes (Briggs & Burke, 2005).” The reach of the radio revolutionized advertising and impacted nation wide consumerism.

Asia has some of the largest, most dynamic, diversified, and complex media industries in the world (McKinsey & Company, 2015). Asia’s rapid economic and political developments are further energizing local and global media growth<sup>6</sup> in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (Liu, Sandvik & Mortenson 2017). This has been subject to both general discussion (e.g. Keane, 2006; Thussu, 2006) and country-specific discussion concerning, for example, Korea (Kim, 2013), Japan (Iwabuchi, 2004), and China (Sun, 2009). As a reflection of the increasing importance of Asian players in global communication industry, Keane (2006: 839-840) describes how “Asianness is colonizing international communications markets,” influencing the production of hardware (e.g. East Asian technology), content (e.g. Japanese manga, anime, and TV formats as well as South Korean popular culture), and the cross-over of directors and actors from Asia to Hollywood and the rest of the world. Yet, a lack of timely understanding of media and communication in a rapidly changing Asia is hindering not only our interpretation of the significance of media in Asian social transformations but also efforts to de-westernize (e.g. Park & Curran, 2000; Wang, 2010) or internationalize communication studies (Lee, 2014).

80% of Latin American digital consumers report visiting or updating a social media website daily

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<sup>5</sup> ibid

<sup>6</sup> Media and Communication in Asia in early 21<sup>st</sup> Century Changes, Continuities, and Challenges, Journal of Media and Communication Research, ISSN 1901-9726

on a computer as compared with 65% of digital consumers in other parts of the world<sup>7</sup>.

During Nicaragua's current unrest<sup>8</sup>, the President, Daniel Ortega failed in his attempt to use University students to suppress protests in Managua as the University students had seen demonstration videos where the Police were beating demonstrators (The Economist, 2018). This resistance was reported on independent news websites, which inspired more resistance<sup>9</sup>. After the 2006 elections in Nicaragua, Mr Ortega sold half of the state broadcasting channels and put his children in charge of the other half whilst putting his wife as Vice President who would appear on national television for 20 minutes each day sparking increasing proliferation of various social media pages covering the protests while the more established outlets like 100% Noticias, a TV news channel stopped censoring itself. Carlos Fernando Chamorro the owner of Confidencial, an independent newspaper said, "People are no longer interested in news provided by the regime<sup>10</sup>."

Transitions from one technology to another have greatly affected the media industry, although it is difficult to say whether technology caused a cultural shift or resulted from it. The ability to make technology small and affordable enough to fit into the home is an important aspect of the popularization of new technologies.

### **Threats and Challenges that the Media Encounters**

Globally, there are many problems that the media faces. In almost every region, journalists and media outlets encounter some combination of physical attacks and killings, imprisonment and censorship. In 2017, there were fifty journalists reported as murdered worldwide<sup>11</sup>. Within the first six months of 2018, the International Press Institute reports that there have been 49 journalists killed.

A Report by the Committee to Protect Journalists reported that in December 2017 there were 262 journalists imprisoned as of Dec. 1 represented a slight increase from the 259 recorded last year, according to Elana Beiser, the author of the report<sup>12</sup>. After Turkey, with 73 jailed journalists, China, with 41, and Egypt, with 20, the countries with the most journalists in prison were Eritrea (15), Vietnam and Azerbaijan (10 each), Uganda (8), Saudi Arabia and Syria (7 each), Bahrain (6) and the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Iran and Russia (5 each).<sup>13</sup>

### **Animosity Against Independent Media**

On February 22 this year, police found the bodies of Ján Kuciak, a reporter with the news website Aktuality.sk, and his girlfriend at his home in Slovakia. Kuciak had been investigating corruption in government; his reporting exposing links between an Italian crime mafia and some members of the Slovak government was published after his death. The killing led to the resignation of Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico. Slovak authorities are still continuing to

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<sup>7</sup> Evans, M. 2017. 3 Things You Need to Know About Latin American Digital Consumers.

<sup>8</sup> Latin America's New Media Are Growing Up, The Economist, 14 July 2018

<sup>9</sup> Ibid

<sup>10</sup> Ibid

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.statista.com/statistics/266229/number-of-journalists-killed-since-1995/>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/13/world/europe/journalists-jailed-committee-to-protect-journalists.html>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/13/world/europe/journalists-jailed-committee-to-protect-journalists.html>

investigate the case. Just this month, the European Commission highlighted the murder of Bulgarian journalist Viktoria Marinova and commented that there is no democracy without a free press (European Commission 2018).

Similarly, in India, investigations are pending in the murders of four journalists in different parts of the country. These journalists, according to their media organizations, were engaged in investigating cases of corruption. In the case of Syed Shujaat Bukhari, editor-in-chief of Rising Kashmir, who was killed on June 14 outside his office, suspects have been identified but not yet brought to justice. Journalist killings in India, Brazil, Guatemala, The Philippines, Afghanistan, El Salvador and Pakistan also await further investigation.

## **Media Censorship and Manipulation**

Media censorship is also a challenge in several countries around the world.

Saudi Arabia's government was reported to have suppressed all media freedom domestically and co-opt foreign media outlets in order to project a positive image internationally (Reporters Without Borders 2015). Reporters without Borders<sup>14</sup> were able to do this because WikiLeaks published the "Saudi Cables".

The 2010 Media Industry Development Decree has literally stifled media freedoms in Fiji where over time, a climate of self-censorship has prevailed. A Study<sup>15</sup> sponsored by the Thomas Reuters Foundation showed that self-censorship in Fiji's media remained a problem despite the return to democratic rule in 2014 following, a military coup d'etat in 2006 (Morris 2017).

Julian Assange (2017) highlighted that the CIA Director them demonstrated a lack of irony when he suggested that Wikileaks focus on autocratic regimes in the world that actually suppress free speech and dissent whilst they themselves were seeking to shut down Wikileaks and prosecute Assange<sup>16</sup>. Assange pointed out that Pompeo finds himself in the unsavoury company of Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey (257,934 documents published by WikiLeaks); Bashar al-Assad of Syria (2.3 million documents); and the dictatorship in Saudi Arabia (122,609 documents), to name just a few who have tried and failed to censor WikiLeaks.

## **Has the Media become an Appendage of Established Power?**

John Pilger in the movement to free Wikileaks' Julian Assange said that Assange refused to be a member of the "club" because he had more scoops than many journalists have had in their lifetime. Pilger (2018) said that Assange shown a light on how the media had become an appendage of established power<sup>2</sup> and how that was unforgivable. Assange was arbitrarily

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<sup>14</sup> 2015. RSF, How Saudi Arabia manipulates foreign media outlets.

<sup>15</sup> Morris, R. 2017. Watching Our Words: Perceptions of Self-Censorship and Media Freedom in Fiji, Thomas Reuters Foundation.

<sup>16</sup> [https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/julian-assange-the-cia-director-is-waging-war-on-truth-tellers-like-wikileaks/2017/04/25/b8aa5cfc-29c7-11e7-a616-d7c8a68c1a66\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.c5cb57e1cf72](https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/julian-assange-the-cia-director-is-waging-war-on-truth-tellers-like-wikileaks/2017/04/25/b8aa5cfc-29c7-11e7-a616-d7c8a68c1a66_story.html?utm_term=.c5cb57e1cf72)

detained since 19 June 2012. On 5 February 2016, the United Nations Human Rights Office of the Commissioner's Working Group on Arbitrary Detention deemed<sup>17</sup> the deprivation of liberty<sup>18</sup> as Arbitrary (OHCHR 2016) which was supported by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights Advisory Opinion.<sup>19</sup> CIA Director then Mike Pompeo (now US Secretary of State) had stated that Julian Assange has no First Amendment Rights and described WikiLeaks as a non-state hostile intelligence agency.

According to Assange<sup>20</sup>, the media has a long history of speaking truth to power with purloined or leaked material such as Jack Anderson's reporting of the CIA's enlistment of the Mafia to kill Fidel Castro; the Providence Journal-Bulletin's release of President Richard Nixon's stolen tax returns; the New York Times publication of the stolen "Pentagon Papers", and the Post's tenacious reporting of the Watergate leaks.

### **What do Communist Regimes and Capitalist Regimes have in common in relation to exceptions in the right to free press and free speech?**

Julian Assange blew apart the myth of western liberty<sup>21</sup> and said that WikiLeaks opened our eyes to the illusion of freedom (Zizek 2014).

In 2014, Zizek compared two regimes, one where limitations of freedoms were clear to everyone, and the other where whilst formal freedoms were guaranteed to the extent that most individuals experience their lives as free but are not aware of the extent to which they are controlled by state mechanisms. This is what he had to say:

*"In a country such as [China](#) the limitations of freedom are clear to everyone, with no illusions about it. In the US, however, formal freedoms are guaranteed, so that most individuals experience their lives as free and are not even aware of the extent to which they are controlled by state mechanisms.<sup>3</sup> Whistleblowers do something much more important than stating the obvious by way of denouncing the openly oppressive regimes: they render public the unfreedom that underlies the very situation in which we experience ourselves as free. Zizek said that it is not enough to see WikiLeaks as an anti-American phenomenon. States such as China and Russia are much more oppressive than the US. Just imagine what would have happened to someone like [Chelsea Manning](#) in a Chinese court. In all probability, there would be no public trial; she would just disappear.*

*The US doesn't treat prisoners as brutally – because of its technological priority, it simply does not need the openly brutal approach (which it is more than ready to apply when needed). But this is why the US is an even more dangerous threat to our freedom than China: its measures of control are not perceived as such, while Chinese brutality is openly displayed.*

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<sup>17</sup> Working Group's Opinion on Julian Assange's case (No. 54/2015) in <http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Detention/A.HRC.WGAD.2015.docx>

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=17012&LangID=E>

<sup>19</sup> [http://www.corteidh.or.cr/docs/opiniones/seriea\\_25\\_esp.pdf](http://www.corteidh.or.cr/docs/opiniones/seriea_25_esp.pdf)

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/julian-assange-wikileaks-has-the-same-mission-as-the-post-and-the-times/2017/04/11/23f03dd8-1d4d-11e7-a0a7->

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<sup>3</sup> I disagree with this statement to the extent that in addition to state mechanisms, there are corporate overlords (non-state actors) who control media and manipulate the press. These non-state actors and corporate entities has little or no allegiance to government authorities—only to ideologies and the constant

8b2a45e3dc84\_story.html?noredirect=on&utm\_term=.9f2878d88e49

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/jun/19/hypocrisy-freedom-julian-assange-wikileaks>

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Since the ruthless crackdown on pro-democracy demonstrations in Tiananmen Square on 4 June 1989, it was reported<sup>22</sup> that China’s prisons currently hold more than 100 journalists, citizen journalists and bloggers including a Nobel peace laureate and three winners of the Reporters Without Borders (RSF)-TV5 Monde Press Freedom Prize (Reporters Without Borders 2017).

*“The constitution of the People’s Republic of China clearly states that its citizens enjoy freedom of speech and freedom of the press, that every citizen has the right to criticize Party officials and to expose their misdeeds, and that no one has the right to suppress this kind of information,”* said Cédric Alviani, the director of RSF’s newly opened East Asia bureau in Taipei.

The Constitution of the People’s Republic of China and the US Constitution clearly states that its citizens enjoy freedom of speech and freedom of press so it makes one wonder how different the US and China is when it comes to their reactions to the media. In 2017, it was reported that two journalists were arrested in the southeastern France<sup>23</sup> as they did a story on migrant immigrants entering from Italy (Reporters Without Borders 2017).

In 2017, WikiLeaks exposed a vast portion of the CIA’s computer hacking arsenal Tuesday by the anti-secrecy organization WikiLeaks, which posted thousands of files revealing secret cyber-tools used by the agency to convert cellphones, televisions and other ordinary devices into implements of espionage<sup>24</sup> (Miller, Nakashima 2017). The trove appeared to lay bare the design and capabilities of some of the U.S. intelligence community’s most closely guarded cyberweapons, a breach that was believed to have caused immediate damage to the CIA’s efforts to gather intelligence overseas and place new strain on the U.S. government’s relationship with Silicon Valley giants including Apple and Google (Miller, Nakashima 2017). Whilst the Snowden files revealed massive surveillance programs that gathered data on millions of Americans, the CIA documents posted by WikiLeaks unmask the hacking methods (Miller, Nakashima 2017). The exposure without a doubt

## **Fake News**

In the US, Congress and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) are investigating the role played by Russian spy agencies in creating fabricated news stories about candidate Clinton during the 2016 US presidential campaign - false stories believed by many to have affected the

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<sup>22</sup> <https://rsf.org/en/news/china-still-worlds-biggest-prison-journalists-and-citizen-journalists>

<sup>23</sup> <https://rsf.org/en/news/two-journalists-arrested-france-while-doing-story-migrants>

<sup>24</sup> [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/wikileaks-says-it-has-obtained-trove-of-cia-hacking-tools/2017/03/07/c8c50c5c-0345-11e7-b1e9a05d3c21f7cf\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.d333934c36b9](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/wikileaks-says-it-has-obtained-trove-of-cia-hacking-tools/2017/03/07/c8c50c5c-0345-11e7-b1e9a05d3c21f7cf_story.html?utm_term=.d333934c36b9)

election results. In France, then-presidential candidate (now French President) Emmanuel Macron was the victim of social media stories falsely charging that he maintained a secret offshore bank account. In Germany, Angela Merkel's government has approved a draft law that, if passed, will compel large social media companies, such as Facebook and Twitter, to rapidly remove false news accounts from their platforms or face stiff fines of up to €50m.<sup>4</sup> The US President frequently tweets that mainstream news stories critical of him and his administration are nothing more than 'fake news'.

## **Media And Content In Africa**

The advent of digital media has turned the media landscape upside down in Africa. The news cycle moves at lightning speed, thanks to live tweeting, blogging and citizen journalism, all unknown just a few years ago.

To remain accessible, conventional media practitioners in Africa are adapting to a new media world that is time-sensitive and more interactive. Advocacy journalism is growing exponentially, bloggers and citizen journalists are mobilizing for various causes, including good governance.

In Africa, the media plays an even more critical role, that of deepening and institutionalizing democracy. Citizens need to be informed as nations take on new responsibilities in a globalized world

Digital media were welcomed across the continent, but technological adaptation to new media technology continues to pose a major challenge in many media houses. Unreliable Internet connectivity and outdated equipment mean that journalists have no access to the critical tools of their trade.

As the digital media world expands, new challenges have emerged. Without editorial oversight, information is unchecked and rumours gain credence over truth expanding disinformation, fake news, hate online speech.

By the way, the most crucial survival strategy for Africa's media is to migrate to cell phones and the Internet, and to generate content in local languages so it is accessible to a majority of citizens. Except for a few media outlets in North Africa that publish in Arabic and a few around East Africa that publish in Swahili, most media in Africa use English, French, Spanish or Portuguese, all European languages. This means news content may not easily be accessible to the majority of citizens, who are not literate in these languages.<sup>5</sup>

## **Controlling the narrative**

The digital space has altered communication patterns with social media becoming the preeminent arena for public communication and culture. It has also become fertile ground for social and political organisation.

Historically, African governments have exercised inordinate power over the media, particularly the "independent media", in a bid to stifle dissent. They have done this by force, and by direct and indirect means. Governments, in Ethiopia and Uganda have shut down media houses. In Kenya and Nigeria they have controlled media through proxies, and withheld advertising revenues.

The power of social media is that it's less reliant on state structures and can therefore evade control. This makes it harder for governments to control the social and political narrative.

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<sup>4</sup> It is not just about Trump. Fake news extends to reporting about other events around the world in a manner that manipulates public awareness and discourse.

Social media enables conversations to happen that many governments find uncomfortable. Users can forge alliances and challenge the state's version of events. They can also use social media platforms to organise and mobilise people. This has been particularly evident in Uganda recently.

### **Subtle containment**

As social media has become more ubiquitous, it's become harder for governments to simply shut down traditional media outlets. The political backlash has been swift and brutal where governments have tried to do this, like they have in Kenya and Uganda.

As a result, governments have been forced to use subtler forms of containment or control. These include taxation and legislation.<sup>6</sup> Governments have proffered various reasons for introducing these new measures. In Uganda, the government argued that the social media tax was intended to raise government revenue for public services, while in Zambia the tax was allegedly meant to protect the telecoms sector and local jobs. In Kenya social media legislation has been premised on the need to discipline or eliminate rogue online voices, particularly those peddling hate speech.

But it's clear that the real targets of these new taxes and laws are the vocal government critics in Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania. The measures seem intent on neutering dissent, and ultimately reclaiming control of communication platforms and practices.

The successful fightback in Benin against the social media tax will therefore provide some comfort to those worried about the clampdown on digital platforms on the continent. However, the ingenuity and brazenness of governments should be a cause for concern. Africa's democracy can only be poorer without a free and vibrant social media.

Source

<https://www.un.org/africarenewal/magazine/august-2016/new-era-african-media>  
<https://www.un.org/africarenewal/magazine/august-2016/new-era-african-media>