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New Frontiers New Challenges

An Analysis of the Media and ICTs in Africa

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts
in African Studies

By

Rush Perez

2013

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

New Frontiers New Challenges
An Analysis of the Media and ICTs in Africa

by

Rush Perez

Masters of Arts in African Studies

University of California, 2013

Professor William H Worger, Committee Chair

This paper will be concerned with examining the effect of the latest wave of Information Communications Technologies (ICTS) on African journalism. In addition this paper will focus on the literature exploring African media today.

The Thesis of Rush Perez is approved.

Andrew Apter

Edmond Keller

William H. Worger, Committee Chair

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Introduction:

Over the past three decades African journalists have enjoyed incrementally increasing rights and freedoms. The Malawian historian Paul Tiyambe Zeleza characterized the situation thusly:

"The African media in 2004 were more vibrant, diverse, competitive, larger, and freer than they were in 1994 let alone in 1984"¹

Zeleza attributes some of the growth of African media to the Information Technology Communications (ICTs) revolution sweeping across the continent.²

In his article *Journalism and Social Media in the African Context* Chris Patterson argued that from the colonial era up to the present Africa experienced three "waves" of ICTs.³ The first was the radio infrastructure inherited from the colonial authorities. Sadly newly independent African nations, much like their colonial antecedents, utilized radio as a tool for propaganda and elitist control. The second came in the early 1990s with the wave of televisions and accompanying satellite broadcasters that spread across the continent. Many scholars at the time viewed the spread of TVs as well as access to international news channels as a boon for the development of African democracy. However some scholars argued that a lack of locally produced content could lead to

¹ Zeleza, Paul T. "The Media in Social Development in Contemporary Africa." *Media and Identity in Africa*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 2009. pag. 23 Print

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

cultural imperialism. The third, and final wave, came with the embrace of personal communication technologies such as mobile phones and laptops.⁴

I would argue that in addition to these three “waves” there has also emerged a fourth “wave”. The fourth wave of ICTs would perhaps be more accurately referred to as an adaptive stage in technology adoption. What I mean by adaptive is a growing trend across Africa, and more largely the global South, of a meshing of old and new ICTs. Examples of the “fourth” or “adaptive” wave can be seen in countries such as Kenya, Uganda, and Somalia.⁵

This paper will be concerned with exploring how this latest phase of ICTs has affected African journalism. In particular the paper will seek to ascertain how these new tools have been utilized by African journalists to surmount the challenges they face in their countries. In order to accomplish this goal the paper will be divided into several country case studies. The paper will begin with an examination of the “fourth wave” of ICTs mentioned above. I will utilize two case studies from Kenya and Uganda, as both countries provide excellent examples of meshing old technologies with new ones. Following this will be an examination of the impact of ICTs on the oldest form of media, newspapers. This case study will focus on the Nigerian newspaper *The Punch*. The press in Nigeria has a long and rich history, and therefore offers an opportunity to examine how ICTs have affected a more traditional form of media. Following the Nigerian case study

⁴ Ibid..

⁵ Dralega, Caroi A. "Participatory Ethos, Multimedia Experiments, and Disjunctures in Community Media in Uganda." *Ecquid Novi: African Journalism Studies* 30.1 (2009): Web. 25 Mar. 2013.

will be an examination of impact ICTs have had on conflict zones in Africa. Specifically I will examine the conflicts in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Somalia. Both these countries have been plagued with bloody fighting, as well as a highly hostile environment for journalists. Therefore they offer a unique opportunity to examine the utility of these new ICTs on the “front line” so to speak. Following along the theme of utility I will examine how Social Media aided journalists during recent protests in Zimbabwe, Malawi, and Mozambique.

Following these case studies will be a critical examination of the negative aspects of this newest wave of ICTs. I will present two articles both published in the African media journal *Ecquid Novi*. These two articles present two opposing viewpoints on the impact of ICTs on African journalism. The purpose of this portion of the paper will be to give an overview of the opinions on ICTs by media scholars. Professor Akinfemisoye, a Nigerian scholar, analyzes the impact that Social Media and the Internet had upon the Nigerian press. He comes to the conclusion that the benefits are negligible compared to what he refers to as the “deprofessionalization” of the Nigerian press. The second article, written by Marent Jordaan examines how Social Media has aided South African journalists working for two major dailies. Jordaan is far more positive in her estimation of the benefits brought by Social Media.⁶ Thus these two authors represent two opposing viewpoints what the literature has termed “techno positivists” and “techno skeptics”.

⁶ Jordaan, Marent. "Poke Me, I'm an Journalist: The Impact of Facebook and Twitter on Newsroom Routines and Cultures on Two South African Weeklies." *Ecquid Novi: African Journalism Studies* 34.1 (2013): Web. 12 Feb. 2013.

The paper will conclude with an overview of the case studies presented, and some thoughts on the future of ICTs in African journalism..⁷ Finally the paper will conclude with an analysis of the topics and case studies that have been covered.

I. *Blending the Old with the New: Radio and Mobile Telephones in Uganda and Kenya*

A cursory examination of the plethora of reports published by Freedom House on media freedom in Africa make it clear that radio continues to dominate the media landscape.⁸ One reason for radio dominance is due to their low price, radios are by and large far cheaper than television sets. Moreover, radios allow for greater access to a wide

⁷ Mare, Admire. "A Complicated but Symbiotic Affair: The Relationship between Mainstream Media and Social Media in the Coverage of Social Protests in Southern Africa." *Ecquid Novi: African Journalism Studies* 16.31: 83-98. 19 Feb. 2013.

⁸ Freedom House "Kenya", "Uganda", "Nigeria".

variety of information sources at a low cost. Television sets can generally only receive a few channels, and most of these are broadcast stations owned by the government.⁹ In order to access alternative sources of information a satellite connection is usually required. Radios, however, can easily access various broadcast frequencies all free of charge to the user. Nowhere in Africa are radios more popular as a news source than in rural areas, this is due to both price and the high illiteracy rates found in rural areas of Africa.¹⁰ In fact in many areas across the continent radios have often served as the only source of news. The remoteness of rural Africa can be deceiving however, as here too the trend of combining the old with the new has emerged.¹¹

A. Radio Citizen: A Case Study of Mobile Phones and Radio in Kenya:

Kenyan radio is a highly diverse medium, with numerous stations in a wide variety of languages. Radio, as is the case elsewhere in Africa, remains the most popular form of media in Kenya. Within the last decade a new form of communication has meshed with radio, the mobile telephone. Mobile phones have quickly become a fact of life in Kenya, and they have been put to some very interesting uses. Recently, there has emerged a growing trend of text-in or call-in radio programs. The topics of these programs range from gossip to farm advice to political discussions. This case study will

⁹ Dralega, Caroi A. "Participatory Ethos, Multimedia Experiments, and Disjunctures in Community Media in Uganda." *Ecquid Novi: African Journalism Studies* 30.1 (2009): Web. 25 Mar. 2013.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Gathigi & Dralega

examine how these two forms of communication have meshed and the potential these programs have for strengthening the institution of Kenyan media.¹²

Radio broadcasting in Kenya has experienced “three waves”; the first was during the colonial period and began with the establishment of radio stations in 1927. These stations were designed to provide information to European settlers as well as inform African audiences of colonial administration policy. The second wave came with independence in 1964; and was characterized by strong governmental control in the form of the Kenyan Broadcasting Corporation (KBC). KBC was established in 1959 by the British colonial authorities along essentially the same lines as the British Broadcasting Corporation. After independence was granted in 1964 the KBC consolidated its control over both radio and television in Kenya. The KBC was devoted to two primary functions the first was the promotion of social and economic development across Kenya. The second was to consolidate power for the ruling party the Kenyan African National Union, (KANU), as well as attacking all political opponents of the regime. During the second wave broadcasts were produced in only two languages Kiswahili and English.¹³

The third wave of radio in Kenya came in the early 1990s when the Darap A Moi regime decided to liberalize the airwaves. The result was an increase from just two radio stations in 1993 to 110 as of 2008. These stations broadcast in a variety of languages, which allows them to reach new audiences particularly in rural areas of Kenya where

¹² Gathigi, George W., and Duncan H. Brown. "The New Public Sphere: Radio and Democracy in Kenya." *Media and Technology in Emerging African Democracies*. New York: University of America, 2010. N. pag. Print.

¹³ "Kenya Profile." *BBC News*. BBC, 05 Sept. 2013. Web. 07 July 2013

neither Kiswahili nor English are understood. The content of these new stations varies wildly from religion to entertainment to political talk shows modeled on such American programs as *Crossfire*. In their study of vernacular radio stations in Kenya George W Gathigi and Duncan Brown highlight *Radio Citizen* a highly popular program in the Kieni West region. *Radio Citizen* provided an opportunity for local citizens to use their mobile phones to ask questions either of the hosts or of a local official that was a guest on the show. Thus, *Radio Citizen* provided a chance for the rural citizenry of Kieni West to force accountability of ruling elite they rarely have any contact with. The program became so dreaded by politicians, that it was shut down by the KANU government in the 1990s. However other stations have followed the model laid out by *Radio Citizen*, continuing the trend of empowerment and education begun by the program through the meshing of old and new technologies.

B. Meshing Old and New: A Case Study in Rural Uganda:

Easily one of the best examples of this new phenomenon can be found at the Community Multimedia Center (CMC) located in eastern rural Uganda. There are several call-in programs at the center. Forty volunteers and four permanent, and paid, staff members insure that the center runs smoothly. The center has a dial up connection to the Internet, a video screening room, radio broadcasting equipment, and playback equipment. The center runs several radio programs, most of which focus on cultural and informative issues rather than the strictly political. For example there is a farming program called *Enhumbi Telimba*, which is hosted by various guest farmers in the area. The program

tackles issues such as crop maintenance, in addition the hosts also answer questions asked via SMS or call in. Every episode is also broadcasted in the local language, as most the residents do not understand English or simply prefer their local language. Perhaps the most interesting programs are the two health and sexual education programs available. These programs sparked a debate amongst the populace about cultural traditions and modernity. For example, the two health programs are run by traditional healers and hospital staff. Therefore, listeners are able to compare and contrast the benefits of modern medicine versus traditional methods of healing. Both of these programs are incredibly popular, indicating that there is space for both science and tradition in this community. Moreover the programs prove that traditional cultural practices and the benefits of modern medicine need not necessarily be in competition with one another. These programs are recorded for later use as well, and visitors to the center can utilize this archive.¹⁴

Through the usage of a internet call-in program, centers like the CMC have created a solution to the issue of low internet penetration in rural Africa. Listeners call in and ask questions to the program hosts on a wide variety of topics. The hosts then utilize the center's dial up connection to answer the question. Often times these callers do not speak English, and therefore can access information on the Internet despite not speaking the language. Therefore the CMC is democratizing the internet, allowing for people who do not speak Western languages to have access to the same information.

¹⁴ Ibid.

Radio programs such as those in Uganda and Kenya are representative of African media professionals adapting new technologies to their context.¹⁵ This approach mitigates some of the less democratic aspects of the Internet Age; such as prohibitive costs and scarce access. As the 21st century progresses it will be crucial that African journalists continue to adapt new technologies to their specific contexts. The next section will examine how one of Nigeria's most venerable newspapers has adapted to the Internet Age.

**II. Nigeria: An Examination of Press Media in Nigeria Through The
Punch:**

¹⁵ Gathelagi & Caroi

Nigeria has a population of 200 million making it the the most populous country in Africa in addition it is Africa's largest oil producer. Its large population coupled with its relatively powerful economy have made Nigeria a regional powerhouse. This role is exemplified in its participation in numerous peacekeeping missions lead by the regional body the Economic Cooperation Organization of West African States (ECOWAS). However, Nigeria has also experienced long periods of political and social turmoil; including military coups, civil war, and the current religious violence in the north.¹⁶ Yet throughout the years the Nigerian press has managed to emerge as one of the most robust in the region.¹⁷ In his text *Press Freedom in Africa* historian Gunilla L Faringer contends that the excellence of Nigerian print media can be traced back to the colonial and nationalist periods.¹⁸

As was the case elsewhere in Africa the press played a crucial role in the struggle for Nigerian independence. The "father" of Nigerian nationalism, Nnamdi Azikiwe, was a journalist himself. Drawing inspiration from the black American journalists he had encountered in the American South during the 1920s, Azikiwe returned to Nigeria to found *The African Morning Post* a paper famous for attacking every aspect of British colonial rule, including Christianity. Azikiwe's aggressive journalism cost him a libel suit and a stint in a Sierra Leonean prison. Nonetheless, when he returned to Nigeria he

¹⁶ "Nigeria" *CIA: Factbook* Web. 06 June 2013

¹⁷ "Nigeria." *Freedom House*. Web. 06 June 2013

¹⁸ Faringer p. 15-40

founded yet another paper *The West African Pilot*. This paper was viewed by historians as being responsible for the resurgence of Nigerian nationalism.¹⁹

Sadly after independence was achieved, the Nigerian media began to face challenges. Two primary problems beset the Nigerian press; low quality news gathering and an inability to generate ad revenue effectively. The poor quality of news gathering by Nigerian journalists was due in large part to the politicization of the press after independence. As was mentioned above many of Nigeria's nationalist leaders were either journalists or editors of popular papers during the colonial period. After independence was achieved these politicians began to utilize their papers to further their own political ends.

However some newspapers managed to avoid being politicized, one such paper was *The Punch*.²⁰ This case study will provide a brief history of *The Punch*, and then examine how this newspaper has utilized new ICTs. *The Punch* was founded in 1970, by two colleagues James Olubunmi Aboderin and Sam Amuka-Pemu. Aboderin was an accountant while Amuka was a well-known and accomplished journalist. Their talents complemented each other well, and allowed them to build a strong foundation for their newspaper. Perhaps their greatest contribution was fostering a sense of community between the employees and employers. This sense of community insured that the staff would weather irregular pay and financial difficulty, both of which were daily realities

¹⁹ Faringer. 15-40. Print.

²⁰ Ibid. 17-40 Print.

for *The Punch* throughout the early 1970s. *The Punch* founders also proved adept at finding innovative ways in which to increase revenue. These included entertainment pieces such as the famous **Page 3 Girl**, an homage to the Page Six girl popular in the British newspaper *The Sun*. These entertainment pieces allowed the paper to maintain financial solvency even during trying economic times. These pieces also provided the paper with the funds needed to engage in more meaningful journalistic work. However even *The Punch* was unable to avoid all of the financial troubles facing Nigeria during the late 1970s and 1980s. In addition to these financial woes, there was an internal squabble between the two original founders that put further stress on the young newspaper.²¹

Due to the problems which beset *The Punch* during this period the decision was made by the board of directors to find new management. Heading up the new management was Chief Ajibola Ogunshola a former head of *Niger Insurance*. Chief Ajibola decided to apply the administration style known as “scientific management”, a system of management that is still utilized at *The Punch* today. A strict code of ethics was formulated, this code was then reinforced by an appraisal system. In addition a strong emphasis was placed on talent, which meant that promotions being based on performance not seniority. Finally the paper utilized market research to dictate the reportage of its journalists. This business minded approach insured that *The Punch* was

²¹ Jinadu, L. A., Rasheed Akinyemi, and Musa Abutudu. *THE PUNCH: THE POLITICAL MEDIA & THE PUBLIC INTEREST*. 2009 Web.

able to survive the liberalization of the Nigerian economy encouraged by the Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) of the 1980s. In fact the paper managed to turn the situation to its advantage, through the publication of human interest pieces focusing on the changes these programs had wrought upon Nigerian society.²²

The three authors of *The Punch: The Political Media & The Public Interest* lay out three factors that led to the success of *The Punch*. These were: professionalism in recruitment and training, staff welfare, reward and retributions, and innovation and investment. I will explore how ICTs have been incorporated into these “ingredients of success”, in order to assess the impact that of ICTs upon one of Nigeria’s premiere newspapers.

The Punch is notorious for its high standards with regards to recruitment of journalists. Generally speaking recruitment begins early with top university students applying for internships. Should these students perform well during their internships they are then offered a position. Training is a top priority at *The Punch*, there is a zero tolerance policy for any incidences of corruption or unethical practices. Journalists are expected to write in the most professional manner possible. There is a unit within *The Punch* dedicated to insuring that the quality of writing is always exemplary. Finally, journalists are supplied with the latest in ICTs, including laptops and mobile phones. These tools assist in the professionalization of the staff at *The Punch*. Thus ICTs play a role in the training and professionalism of journalists at *The Punch* as it provides them

²² Ibid.

with the tools to do their jobs effectively. The high level of professionalism present at *The Punch* in turns means that the newspaper has little trouble generating ad revenue. In fact ad space must be booked months ahead of time.

The Punch's commitment to staff welfare is very commendable, especially given the relative low priority other Nigerian newspapers have for their employees' well-being.²³ At *The Punch* the employer takes care to insure that staff are paid in a timely fashion, and that pay increases should the employee prove herself an asset to the company. In addition, *The Punch* employees receive health insurance benefits, a unheard of luxury at other Nigerian newspapers. All of this means that *The Punch* employees expect nothing but the very best from their journalists. *The Punch's* commitment to staff welfare insures that her journalists do not have to engage in "brown envelope journalism" in order to make ends meet. Therefore, journalists at *The Punch* are able to fulfill their democratic role as a "gate-keeper". In the case of staff welfare. ICTs have not had a huge impact. However the Internet has provided opportunities for online training courses for journalists at *The Punch*. Therefore the Internet has provided *The Punch* with yet another tool to insure top quality talent at their paper.²⁴

However, ICT has played a vital role in the third and final factor explaining *The Punch's* success; innovation and investment. *The Punch* has utilized ICTs to create both a mobile phone site as well as a website for their publication. The mobile phone site

²³ Yusha'u, Muhammed J. "Investigative Journalism and Scandal Reporting in the Nigerian Press." *Ecquid Novi: African Journalism Studies* 30.2 (2009) Web.

²⁴ Ibid.

is targeted primarily at the local Nigerian readership. The site has allowed for the public to give the newspaper input as to which stories they prefer above others. The website, while certainly utilized within Nigeria is targeted towards the Nigerian diaspora; because of this the website is only accessible if the user has a subscription. Thus, through an innovative use of ICTs *The Punch* has managed to generate more revenue and can supply its loyal public readers with news as it breaks.²⁵

The causes for *The Punch's* success occurred long before the modern ICT revolution; and therefore ICTs cannot be said to have led to the newspaper's rise as one of the premier news sources in Nigeria. However, it can be said that ICTs have augmented practices already present such as innovation and professionalism. The purchase of laptops and mobile phones for its employees has meant that they can maintain the level of journalism expected from *The Punch* reporters in a shifting media world. While, the usage of a mobile and web site version of the paper has allowed for alternative sources of revenue and faster access to breaking news for their readership.²⁶

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

III. ICTs on the Front Line: Examining the Utility of the Internet in Somalia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

A. Addressing Poor Journalistic Practices and Challenges in the Democratic Republic of the Congo:

The DRC's press was an impressive institution just prior to independence despite the better efforts of the Belgian Colonial authorities. Sadly press freedoms were quickly curtailed after Mobutu Seseko came to power in the 1960s. Mobutu ruled the DRC for nearly thirty years, during which time he enjoyed Washington's backing as a bulwark against Communism on the African continent. However once the Berlin wall fell Mobutu came under pressure from the Bush administration to democratize. Thus by the early 1990s the Congolese media began to expand quickly, this was a trend that only grew after Mobutu's ouster in 1998. By 2008 there were over 683 newspapers 378 radio

stations and 82 TV stations.²⁷ Sadly Mobutu's successors, Laurent Kabila and his son Joseph, proved to be just as intolerant of media freedom as he was.²⁸

Due in large part to the fact that the Congolese lack any real purchasing power media outlets, especially the press, have operated at a severe loss for the past decade. The salaries of journalists are exceedingly low to the point that professionalism suffers greatly. In addition the media is further undermined by the government's refusal to fund journalism schools in the country. Therefore, young Congolese journalists enter into the profession with very little training or even a basic conception of acceptable journalistic practice. The lack of training coupled with the financial challenges facing Congolese journalism has created a situation ripe for corruption. The government has not ignored this opportunity and numerous politicians have many journalists in their "employ". The lack of training and corresponding poor ethical conduct of Congolese journalists is easily the two biggest challenges facing members of the media in this country. The following section will explore the a-ethical practices present within Congolese journalism and the impacts these practices have had.²⁹

The most common manifestation of "a-ethical" journalistic practices in the DRC can be seen a system termed *coupage*. *Coupage* in the Congolese context can refer to any type of corruption. *Coupage* is a daily facet of Congolese life nearly every transaction

²⁷ Lukulunga, Vicky E. "The Challenges of Journalism Ethics in the Democratic Republic of Congo." *Ecquid Novi: African Journalism Studies* 33.3 (2012) Web.

²⁸ Prunier, Gérard. "Slouching Towards Bethlehem: The Transition Slowly Turns to Reality." *Africa's World War: Congo, the Rwandan Genocide, and the Making of a Continental Catastrophe*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2009. 303-20. Print.

²⁹ Ibid.

requires a form of *courage*. The media is no exception, sadly this creates a media that is motivated by survival, and not a desire to inform the public.³⁰ The damage caused by these low ethical standards within the Congolese press can be best seen by examining the conduct of some Congolese journalists during the Congo Wars. During both of these wars journalists were easily co-opted by various sides in the conflict and utilized as propagandists, fomenting ethnic violence and hatreds. The first Congo War began in 1996, and was in large part caused by the fallout of the Rwandan Genocide of 1994. The horrific ethnic cleansing which characterized both these events were in encouraged by various media outlets. Among the most infamous of these was the Radio Mille-Collines, Rwandan radio station responsible for broadcasting anti-Tutsi hate speech throughout the genocide. When refugees began to flow across the border into the eastern Congo, the Congolese press began to echo these anti-Tutsi sentiments as well.³¹ This racist form of journalism did not abate after the First Congo War ended. The problem became so great that the Rwandan allies of Laurent Kabila, the man that ousted Mobutu in the First Congo War, began to grow uneasy. By 1998, the year the Second Congo War began, anti-Tutsi rhetoric had become a facet of the press culture in Kinshasa.³² The repercussions of what has been termed "hatred media" were particularly damaging as many of those either listening or reading the media had no access to other sources to information and therefore

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Prunier, Gérard. "Rwanda's Mixed Season of Hope: July 1994-April 1995." *Africa's World War: Congo, the Rwandan Genocide, and the Making of a Continental Catastrophe*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2009. 1-29. Print.

³² Ibid.

were completely reliant upon racist propaganda. Moreover, those journalists that wished to serve the public with accurate information had little to no access to information coming out of the war zones in the Congo. Instead, these journalists had to rely upon international news sources to acquire information about the conditions in the Bukavus for example. However, the introduction of ICTs to Congolese journalism has allowed Congolese journalists to circumvent some of these issues.³³

Unfortunately, ICTs has also allowed some Congolese journalists to continue to spread "hatred media" to an even larger audience. Hate speech as defined by the United Nations is "any advocacy of national, racial, or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility, or violence shall be prohibited by law".³⁴ Vicky Lukulunga argues in her article *The Challenges of Journalism Ethics in the Democratic Republic of Congo* that Congolese journalists have engaged in what she terms "hatred media".³⁵ "Hate media" as defined by Lukulunga is a type of journalism where-in journalists publicly perpetuate ethnic or racial stereotypes of a specific group. The most extreme types of "hate media" advocate violence against these groups.³⁶ Examples of "hate media" include the radio programs in Srebrenica and Rwanda during the genocides

³³ Frere, Marie-Soleil. "News Media Use of ICTs amidst War, Violence, and Political Turmoil in the Central African Great Lakes." *African Media and the Public Sphere*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009. Print.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Lukulunga, Vicky E. "The Challenges of Journalism Ethics in the Democratic Republic of Congo." *Ecquid Novi: African Journalism Studies* 33.3 (2012): Web.

³⁶ Ibid.

that were conducted in both those countries in the early 1990s.³⁷ The following section will examine the positive and negative impact of ICTs within the Congolese context.

According to Marie-Solei Frere ICTs have brought six benefits to Congolese journalists; news-gathering, producing, distributing, archiving, and journalist and protection. For Congolese journalists access to both the Internet and mobile phones has allowed them to view an unprecedented amount of data and information. For example in 2004 Congolese journalists gained access to the UN Experts Panel on the Illegal Exploitation of Natural Resources in the DRC.³⁸ Therefore, Congolese journalists could compare what local heads of state had promised in the report and compare it to their actual policies. However Frerer fails to mention the harsh repercussions should these journalists then wish to challenge these officials, they would most likely face stiff prison sentences. Nonetheless, it is clear that Congolese journalists now have far more access to crucial information than they did ten years ago. The proliferation of mobile phones amongst Congolese journalists, some have as many as three, has also aided in news gathering. Journalists can now communicate with one another easily and at a low cost allowing them to source different stories amongst themselves. A final benefit to news gathering brought on by ICTs is that it grants access to international news sources. Congolese journalists are thus able to view the war through a different perspective³⁹

However, access to these sources of information, and willingness to use it are two very

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Frere 235 Print.

³⁹ Sommerville, Keith. "Violence, Hate Speech and Inflammatory Broadcasting in Kenya: The Problems of Definition and Identification." *Ecquid Novi* 32.1 (2011): 82-101. Web

different things. Those Congolese journalists with low ethical standards will abuse the increased access to information as an opportunity for plagiarism. However editors can just as easily utilize these same tool to weed out these would be plagiarists. Moreover the Internet has also provided opportunities for digital archiving and online training programs. Both of these tools it can lead to a marked improvement in professionalism and ethical conduct of Congolese journalists.⁴⁰

The arrival of ICT has also allowed for an improved archiving system for many Congolese news outlets. Both Congolese press and radio media struggled with maintaining a robust archive largely due to costs. However, archiving online is relatively inexpensive and easy to accomplish.⁴¹ What sort of effect does improved archiving have upon Congolese journalism ethics? First it forces Congolese journalists to maintain a better level of consistency and honesty lest the public examines their archives and discover duplicitous or false journalistic practices. The fear of exposure, thanks to these new digital archives, has led to the creation of self-regulating media body; the Monitoring Center of Congolese Press.⁴² While the efficacy of this regulatory body is debatable its presence indicates that Congolese journalists are beginning to build a more professional environment in which they can operate.⁴³

ICT has allowed for access to better training for journalists; as they can now access online training courses or purchase CD-Roms that contain journalism training

⁴⁰ Frere. 236-239 Print.

⁴¹ Frere 240 Print.

⁴² Frere 242 Print.

⁴³ Frere, 223-228 Print.

materials. Moreover, several NGOs have begun utilizing ICTs to further the professionalization of Congolese journalists. One particularly effective example is the French NGO the Panos Institute. Panos began as a regional program in 2002 that brought together journalists from the DRC, Burundi, and Rwanda during the Second Congo War for online training sessions.⁴⁴ The training sessions have not only improved the professionalism of Congolese journalists but have also led to regional cooperation amongst Central African journalists. One particularly good example has been the creation of *Regards Croises* a radio program produced by a Congolese Burundian and Rwandese broadcast station to cover issues related to the cessation of hostilities.⁴⁵

Clearly ICTs have provided Congolese journalists with numerous opportunities to professionalize their practice. However, ICTs have also provided numerous opportunities for “a-ethical journalism” to flourish as well. The proliferation of the internet across the DRC has allowed for easy plagiarism. There have been numerous instances of Congolese journalists "Cutting and Pasting" news stories from the internet and claiming them as their own. Those journalists that still practice "hatred media" or are bought by politicians can now reach a wider audience. Moreover, hatred from the diaspora can now be accessed in the Congo such as websites denying the Rwandese genocide or calling for violence against specific ethnic groups or communities.⁴⁶ The regulatory bodies mentioned above have taken some efforts to curb these practices.

⁴⁴ Frere 223 Print.

⁴⁵ Frere 223-228 Print.

⁴⁶ Frere 224 Print.

However these regulatory bodies, while an encouraging trend, are still hamstrung by a lack of funds and bureaucratic red tape.⁴⁷

Thus in the Congolese context ICTs are a double edged sword. On the one hand it has led to new efforts to promote a high level of ethical conduct amongst Congolese journalists.⁴⁸ On the other it has allowed those Congolese journalist practices 'hatred media' 'survival journalism' access to wider audiences and opportunities for plagiarism and copy-right infringement. On the whole I would argue that the presence of self-regulatory bodies and connections between regional journalists will ultimately allow Congolese journalism to professionalize effectively.⁴⁹

B. *ICTs on the Front Line: Somali Journalists and the Internet:*

Since 1991 Somalia has not had a centralized government and has been in a near constant state of conflict. Most recently there has been the intense fighting between the Transitional Government, African Union troops, and the Islamic group Al-Shabab. The fighting has been intense, and due to Al Shabab's supposed links to Al Qaeda, the insurgency has garnered the attention of the United States and its global "war on terror". The insurgency, combined with a corrupt and faulty transitional government, has led to one of the worst environments for journalists in the world. Nonetheless, Somali journalists continue to report upon those issues which affect their communities the most without fear. From 2007-2010 21 Somali journalists were killed, most were killed while

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Frere 245-253 Print.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

covering the various conflict areas. Perhaps due to the extremely hostile environment they face, Somali journalists have organized themselves extremely well. There is now a Somali journalist union which, compared to others on the continent is highly effective. They are aided in their efforts by the Somali diaspora, a community that hosts a very impressive population of bloggers and journalists as well. Radio, as is true across the continent, is the most popular form of media in Somalia. There is a print media presence, however the publication of these papers is inconsistent and most are highly politicized. Television is a relatively new media in Somalia having only been introduced in 1983. There are a fair number of local FM stations as well as international stations such as BBC and the Voice of America.⁵⁰

Despite being the last Sub-Saharan African country to gain access to the internet today the internet is accessible in most heavily populated areas. In addition Somalis are among the top users of mobile phones in Africa. The high mobile phone usage is due to a need to communicate with the diaspora which has spread across Europe, North America and elsewhere. As mentioned before, Somali journalists operate in one of the deadliest environments in the world. In addition to the physical danger they face, Somali journalists also face chronically poor wages. Due to the relative abundance of journalists in the country, it is highly difficult for Somali journalists to demand better working conditions without fear of simply being replaced. As a result of these low wages many journalists are forced to find additional sources of income. These sources of income

⁵⁰ Somalia (2012). Freedom of the Press 2013, Freedom House

include blackmail and corruption, both of which severely undercut a journalists' ability to maintain their status as watchdogs.

Clearly Somali journalists operate within a unique environment, and as a result often utilize alternative journalistic practices to meet their challenges. Among these practices is a form of journalism that media scholars have termed "Peace Journalism". "Peace journalism" is defined by scholars to be a type of journalism that attempts to break away from the sensationalist reportage of mainstream journalism when it comes to conflicts. Advocates of the practice, argue that the mainstream media does little to inform the public about conflicts and in many instances can serve exacerbate the conflict. They point out that when covering conflicts mainstream journalists are motivated by immediacy, drama, simplicity, and ethnocentrism. Immediacy is evidenced by the lack of contextualization and explanation of long term causes of a conflict. The desire to showcase drama means that conflict reportage is often sensationalist, with little to no real information about the complexities of the issue. Simplicity refers to the tendency to oversimplify incredibly complex conflicts, in order to quickly sell news stories. Finally journalists are often ethnocentric when covering conflicts as they are inevitably outsiders looking in. Peace journalism seeks to address these issues in a variety of ways. First it is designed to report on and give a voice to the most marginalized group of any conflict, the citizenry. Peace journalism advocates believe that objectivity is impossible and should not even be attempted. Rather journalists should side with the weak and attempt to give

them a voice. The dismissal of objectivity has made peace journalism particularly appealing to African journalism scholars.⁵¹

As has been the case elsewhere there have emerged several popular call-in radio stations in Somalia. One of the most popular and professionally run is *HornAfrik*. In addition to an FM station *HornAfrik* also has a TV channel and a website. However the radio component of *HornAfrik*, is by far the most popular and most widely consumed portion of the media organization.

HornAfrik was founded in 1999, and since then has established itself as a terrific alternative to the more propagandistic radio stations. The organization has also established strong ties with international media groups and local NGOs. Among its most popular programs are the call-in shows which cover everything from sports to clan disputes. Thus as was the case in Kenya and Uganda, there has emerged a meshing of old and new ICTs within Somalia. In the case of Somalia radio stations, such as *HornAfrik*, have allowed for a dialogue between fighting groups, as well as an alternative news source to the TFG radio stations or Al-Shabab controlled radio shows.⁵²

Under the auspices of the Transitional Federal Charter there are guarantees of both freedom of speech and freedom of the press. However, these freedoms are difficult to maintain due to the high level of violence that has wracked the country. The fighting between Al Shabab and the TFG, along with its AU allies, has had a massive impact on

⁵¹ Skjerdal, Terje S. (2011) "The Somali Media and their Peace-Building Potential," *Bildhaan: An International Journal of Somali Studies*: Vol. 11, Article 9.

⁵² Ibid.

the media environment of the country. In effect that has emerged something of a war of radio-waves throughout the country as both the TFG and Al Shabab have struggled to push their agendas via various radio stations. Individual politicians, whose wealth is sufficient, have been known to purchase various radio stations in an effort to boost their individual careers or bolster a specific political agenda.

IV. The Other “Spring”: An Examination of the Role of Social Media in Movements across Southern Africa:

The Arab Spring of 2011 sparked a spirited debate amongst academics concerning the role of social media in these popular uprisings. However, while much attention was paid to the revolutions occurring across northern Africa, very little was said about similar

protests occurring south of the Sahara. Nonetheless several Africanist scholars began to examine the role that social media played in these popular revolts as well.⁵³

Sub-Saharan Africa does not have the same level of internet penetration as Northern Africa, this is especially apparent outside of urban centers. However, numerous mobile phone service providers offer affordable package deals that generally include some access to social media on their phones. Therefore despite a low level of internet penetration the proliferation of mobile phones across Africa has allowed to access to social media. As is the case across the world, social media has slowly made its way into African newsrooms. Unsurprisingly there has emerged a vigorous debate about the utility of social media for African journalists. This section will examine two academic studies that focus upon the impact of Social .⁵⁴

The first study examines the how Social Media was utilized by traditional mainstream media by focusing on three studies in southern Africa; Malawi, Zimbabwe, and Mozambique. In each of these countries there was a mass popular uprising similar to those of the Arab Spring. The author, Admire Mare, guides his study through the usage of two research questions. The first examined the extent to which Social Media was able to

⁵³ Mare, Admire. "A Complicated but Symbiotic Affair: The Relationship between Mainstream Media and Social Media in the Coverage of Social Protests in Southern Africa." *Ecquid Novi: African Journalism Studies* 16.31 (n.d.): 83-98. 19 Feb. 2013. Web.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

lead or stay ahead of mainstream media and vice versa. The second investigated the role social media platforms played in the coverage of the protests.⁵⁵

A. Case Study: Malawi

On paper Malawi possesses strong guarantees of media freedom, although an amendment created in 2011 has led to some setbacks. The amendment enhanced the powers of the Minister of Information, allowing the minister to ban certain publications deemed to be “contrary to the public interest”. While no publications were banned under this new amendment, it has led to a rise in self-censorship by Malawian journalists. As is the case in several other African countries, there is a constitutional mandate allowing for free access to information. However in practice Malawian journalists face enormous difficulties whenever they attempt to access information deemed sensitive by governmental officials. Libel is a criminal offense that can bring with it a two year long jail sentence. Thus, it is yet another tool utilized by Malawian officials wishing to silence or curb a certain journalist’s investigative efforts. All broadcast media in Malawi must register with the Malawi Communications Regulatory Authority (MACRA).

The MACRA is entirely funded by the government, meaning that the registration process is highly politicized. During 2010 eight broadcast stations were shut-down, and when anti-government protests erupted in the summer of 2011 two stations were ordered to cease coverage of the protests. In addition MACRA implemented the Consolidated ICT Regulatory Management System in an effort to more effectively monitor mobile

⁵⁵ Ibid.

phone users. Malawian journalists protested the move, viewing it as detrimental to their efforts to maintain confidentiality with their sources. Luckily the system was blocked by the courts and is still awaiting a ruling.⁵⁶

There are roughly 10 independent newspapers in Malawi as well as several private broadcast stations each of which holds a wide variety of political opinions. Most private print media in Malawi struggle constantly to maintain fiscal solvency through advertisements. Their efforts are further hampered by periodic governmental bans on advertisement. The government also establishes of “phony” private papers designed to siphon precious advertisement monies from other papers. Broadcast stations, both TV and radio, are still largely government-owned. No private radio or television station has the national reach of the state-owned broadcast stations, nor do they enjoy the same level of funding. These state -run broadcast stations are, unsurprisingly, very pro-government. When the July 20th protests began these stations circulated rumors that the protests were in fact pro-gay demonstrations. Internet access, however, remains free as of 2011 Freedom House reported that the Malawian government had not attempted to control access or content. While an encouraging sign, it should also be pointed out that only 3 % of the population has regular access to the internet. On the whole Malawi enjoys a relatively high level of media freedom, compared to the rest of Southern Africa. However as has been shown here, 2011 saw a sharp increase in harassment of journalists and governmental efforts to control the media. The decrease in media freedoms was

⁵⁶ Malawi (2012). Freedom of the Press 2013, Freedom House

largely due to the July 20th protest movement.⁵⁷ Now we will examine the role that social media played in the coverage of these protest movements.

In the summer of 2011, rising fuel and food prices coupled with intense political repression boiled over in Malawi leading to massive protests across the country. The government responded to these protests with deployments of troops throughout the country. Malawian journalists began to depend upon Social Media, for instantaneous warnings about various police and military crackdowns on protests throughout the country. The journalists would generally use their mobile phones to send SMS messages, in order to warn the Malawian citizenry about these crackdowns. MACRA repeatedly shut down radio and television stations that attempted to report on the uprisings. However, journalists were able to circumvent these media crackdowns through Facebook and Twitter. Thus, the government's efforts to hamper media freedoms merely lead to citizens and journalists going online. The protests quickly began to 'trend' on Twitter *South Africa*. Most mainstream media began to utilize online sources for their coverage of the protests. In addition, online newspapers, such as *NyasaTimes.com* and *Face of Malawi*, quickly began to move ahead of the mainstream media when it came to the protests. Ordinary Malawian citizens also participated in the coverage of these uprisings. A common tactic was to Tweet directly at BBC or CNN in order to bring international attention to bear upon their government. Thus in Malawi's case, the mainstream media

⁵⁷ "Malawi." *Freedom House*. N.p., n.d. Web. 06 June 2013.

trailed behind Social Media in terms of breaking hard news. However the mainstream media was able to incorporate Social Media into an effective warning system.⁵⁸

B. Case Study: Zimbabwe

Of the three nations presented Zimbabwe has the most stringent media laws, providing an interesting case study of the usage of social media in an authoritarian environment. While technically the constitution of Zimbabwe provides for freedom of the press, Zimbabwean journalists face harassment on a daily basis. The harassment faced by journalists is due in large part to harsh media and secrecy laws, such as The Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act of 2002 (AIPPA). This particular law, required that all journalists and media organizations register with the government. Those journalists who refused to register could face up to two years in prison. The AIPPA has made it far easier for Zimbabwean officials to prosecute and imprison those journalists publishing critical content. Subsequent laws have led to further media control, allowing government officials to detain or sue journalists for a wide variety of supposed crimes.⁵⁹

The government has also managed to maintain a tight control over press, radio, and broadcast media. Through the Mass Media Trust company, the government controls the two largest dailies in the country the *Herald* and the *Chronicle*. ZANU-PF also

⁵⁸ Mare.

⁵⁹ Zimbabwe (2012). Freedom of the Press 2013, Freedom House

maintains control over the airwaves through the Zimbabwean Broadcast Company (ZBC). The ZBC is highly politicized, in 2009 numerous ex-intelligence and military officials were appointed to its board by President Robert Mugabe. The presence of these officials has meant that the ZBC is very biased towards ZANU-PF, particularly during election season. In addition these officials have frequently jammed foreign radio and TV signals. Their jamming technologies were recently augmented by Chinese aid. Finally, Internet penetration, while low at only 16%, is still relatively high for the continent. Having laid out the basic media environment of Zimbabwe we will now examine a case study of the role of social media in the 2008 Presidential elections.⁶⁰

Mare found the usage of the Internet and Social Media allowed the Zimbabwean press to circumvent the Mugabe's regime's anti-media laws. Social Media websites, in particular Facebook, allowed both journalists and the general citizenry to criticize the regime in ways that simply were not possible through mainstream media outlets. Twitter also played a substantial role, as it allowed journalists to keep the citizenry abreast of protests and police actions. Most Zimbabwean citizens do not have regular access to the Internet, except within certain urban areas such as Harare. However a large portion of Zimbabweans do have mobile phones, which often have Social Media package deals. In the case of Zimbabwe *Twitter South Africa*, a regional version of the famous Social Media site, is easily accessible via mobile phone. Most Zimbabwean journalists utilized *Twitter South Africa* during the 2008 Presidential elections. Through the site they were

⁶⁰ Mare.

able to criticize Mugabe and the flawed elections in a way that became impossible for the authorities to properly police.⁶¹ One Zimbabwean journalist framed the relationship between Social Media and the traditional media in Zimbabwe thusly :

“Although Social Media sites are increasingly making news for breaking news in Zimbabwe, traditional news outlets still have a key role to play in providing investigation and context into issues. The relationship between social and mainstream media is like that of fish and water.”⁶²

Thus in the case of Zimbabwe, it is clear that the media has managed to successfully incorporate Social Media into its journalistic processes. Finally, the usage of Social Media sites such as Twitter South Africa has aided Zimbabwean journalists in overcoming the challenges of operating in an authoritarian environment⁶³

C. Case Study: Mozambique

East of Zimbabwe lies Mozambique; a country that fought and won its independence from the aging Portuguese Empire in 1975. Like Zimbabwe’s ZANU-PF the Mozambique Liberation Front (FRELIMO), the organization which battled the Portuguese for independence, has not relinquished power since its first election victory. However, the FRELIMO-led government has proven to be somewhat more tolerant of media freedoms than its counterpart in Harare. As of 2012 Freedom House rated

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid 10.

⁶³ Ibid.

Mozambique as “partly free” versus the “not free” rating given to Zimbabwe. After the 2004 rewrite of its constitution press freedom was vastly improved, although the government retained various mechanisms for harassing journalists. Nonetheless, Mozambican journalists operate in an environment relatively free of physical violence if not the threat of violence. Print media does not do well in Mozambique, due to a high illiteracy rate combined with relatively expensive distribution costs. Finally almost all newspapers in Mozambique are published in Portuguese, a language that is spoken by only 11% of the population. The state controls the primary media outlets, for example the government-run TV station *TV Mozambique* is the only station with national reach. Radio is easily the most widely consumed media in the country, as a result there are numerous private FM stations. However, the government has a high degree of control of this media sector as well. *Radio Mozambique* is easily the most popular radio broadcaster in the country, and the most widely heard. Internet access and content in Mozambique is completely unrestricted in Mozambique. However, internet penetration in Mozambique is very low at only 4 %.⁶⁴

In September of 2010 prices for food, fuel, and other essentials began to climb steadily throughout Mozambique. The government’s refusal, or inability, to offer subsidies for these items eventually lead to a large grassroots movement demanding a lower cost of living. As was the case in Malawi and Zimbabwe, Mozambican journalists

⁶⁴ Mozambique (2012). Freedom of the Press 2013, Freedom House

relied on Social Media to disseminate information to the citizenry about various government acts of suppression.⁶⁵ According to a Mozambican journalist:

“Social media became the eyes and ears of mainstream media....I remember the day I was going to work and I saw rioters blocking roads leading to Maputo with huge boulders, stones, and burning tyres. I only had my cellphone so I decided to use it to capture the demonstrations. I also contacted the editor to dispatch journalists to the event in other parts of Matola and Maputo where demonstrations were taking place.”⁶⁶

Thus, in addition to allowing journalists to stay ahead of breaking news social media has also allowed for the growth in “citizen journalists”. Thanks to Social Media local citizens now have the ability to engage directly in the news making process. Mare views this as a positive step forward for African media; noting that it has led to a more democratic press and a new relationship between the audience and the journalists.

⁶⁵ Mare.

⁶⁶ Ibid. 13.

Conclusions:

The case studies presented above paint a very positive picture of the impact Social Media. However, it is necessary to investigate the reasons why the impact was positive in order to better contextualize the author's findings. To begin with we can examine the type of mobile technologies available in this region. The package deals advertised by the South African media conglomerate MTA have already been mentioned. In addition it is worth noting that Sub-Saharan Africa is one of the fastest growing markets for mobile phones on the continent. All of the countries studied by Mare had the benefit of being relatively close to South Africa. South Africa possesses the most well-developed ICT sector on the continent, and has released its own versions of social media sites including

Twitter and Facebook. The proximity of Malawi, Mozambique, and Zimbabwe to South Africa meant that journalists in these countries were able to access Social Media at a faster rate than their neighbors north. Finally, it is important to remember that these Social Media sites were useful for journalists, but did not have a huge impact upon the protests themselves. Rather Social Media allowed journalists to inform the rest of their country and the outside world about the protests.

VI. *The Dangers of Fetishization of Technology: An Examination of the Drawbacks of ICTs in African Journalism:*

The purpose of this paper is to prove that the latest ICT revolution has been positive for African journalism. However it would be irresponsible to claim that there are not dangers and problems with the ICT revolution. The “hate media” cited in the Congolese case study exemplified some of these dangers. The following section seeks to identify other problems within this new wave of ICTs. I will begin with a critique of Professor Akinfemisoye’s article in the journal *Ecquid Novi*. Finally, I will examine another article on the role Social Media played in the South African press media, in order to highlight the problematic nature of internet access within societies as economically divided as South Africa.

A. *A Critique of Social Media’s Impact On the Nigerian Press:*

Professor Akinfemisoye's piece in *Ecquid Novi* examines the impact of Social Media upon Nigerian print journalism. He focuses his study around the coverage of the # Occupy Nigeria protests. The # Occupy Nigeria protests were sparked by the decision to remove the fuel subsidy in January of 2012. The result was a 120% increase in the price of fuel at the pump, which triggered protests across several Nigerian cities.⁶⁷ President Goodluck Jonathan justified his actions by citing reports made by the Central Bank of Nigeria claiming that the oil subsidy was "unsustainable".⁶⁸ The protests began to trend on Twitter and Facebook, both within the country and in the diaspora. Akinfemisoye seeks to analyze the extent to which these websites allowed people on the street to challenge dominant discourses about the # Occupy Nigeria movement. The Professor also wishes to examine the possible negative impacts of Social Media on the Nigerian press corps.

The print media in Nigeria has a long history that dates back to the 1850s with the Yoruba paper *Iwe Irohin fun awon ara Egba ati Yoruba*. Throughout its existence the press in Nigeria has generally taken a critical view against the government, and managed to maintain its role as a democratic institution. In the early 1990s, as was the case across the continent, the media in Nigeria underwent a period of deregulation and enhanced rights for journalists. However throughout the decade, journalists faced relentless

⁶⁷ Ohoucha, "Chijioke Nigeria fuels protest turn violent, two killed". reuters.com Retrieved 9 June 2013.

⁶⁸ Nigeria bank boss Sanusi fuel subsidy removal. BBC News. Retrieved 13 June 2013.

harassment from the various military regimes which dominated Nigerian politics in the 1990s.⁶⁹

Nigeria has the most mobile phone users in Africa at 93 million, and 28% of its population or roughly 45 million Nigerians are connected to the Internet. Both of these trends are expected to continue in the coming decade, as the continent's most populous country continues to develop economically and politically. As has been the case elsewhere, these two growing trends have had a massive impact upon the practice of journalism within Nigeria. Akinfemisoye believes that these trends in ICTs have caused an identity crisis amongst the journalism community in Nigeria. He believes that the over-usage of social media and the Internet, has led to a less “professional” journalistic culture. In conjunction with this belief is a criticism of the rise of the “citizen” journalist. Akinfemisoye asserts that this trend will lead to the Nigerian population creating their own realities, and only access news which suits their individual preferences. Finally, the Nigerian scholar is of the belief that the Internet and social media could lead to further commercialization of the Nigerian press. He cites instances of editors utilizing Social Media to cherry pick popular stories in order to sell more copy. All of these points have validity, especially concerns for the professionalism of Nigerian journalism given the high level of professionalism many Nigerian journalists have possessed in the past. The study ultimately concludes that the general optimism

⁶⁹ Akinfemisoye, Motilola. "Challenging Hegemonic Media Practices: Of 'alternative' Media and Nigeria's Democracy." *Ecquid Novi: African Journalism Studies* 34.1 (2013): n. pag. Web. 26 Mar. 2013.

surrounding social media and its positive effect upon mainstream media in Africa may be premature. Akinfemisoye is right to be concerned about the temptations for sensationalism, and further commercialization of newspapers due to social media. All too often the discourse surrounding the discussion ICTs, smacks of “technological determinism”. Akinfemisoye brings up some excellent points; and it would be naïve in the extreme to make the claim that African journalists can “Tweet” their countries to democracy.⁷⁰ In fact these new ICTs can create yet another layer of disparity between Africa’s rich and poor.⁷¹ Certainly laptops and mobile phones have slowly decreased in price across the continent. Nonetheless, these items still remain out of reach for the majority of the African population.⁷² The next case study, which focuses on South Africa, provides an example of the disparity in information access which can develop due to the internet.

B. Social Media in South Africa: Who Benefits?

Of the countries analyzed in this paper South Africa has most well developed technology sector, and the most pro-media freedom laws. Since 1994 the country has reversed decades of censorship, brought on by draconian attempts to control any and all attacks upon Apartheid. Throughout the Apartheid era there were several alternative papers which to some degree or another managed to continually challenge the National

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Essa, Azad. "Measuring China's Motivations in Africa." Editorial. *Aljazeera*. 01 July 2013. Web. 2 July 2013.

Party. However the mainstream media was entirely dominated by National Party aparatchiks. Nearly every mainstream news service reported only on what the National Party deemed to be acceptable reportage. When, and if, these journalists reported on township unrest or anti-apartheid activities there was almost always a pro-government stance to the coverage. The South African Broadcasting Company (SABC), for example, consistently toed the party line. In addition, there existed several Afrikaans language newspapers that were almost all entirely pro-apartheid. Finally even the supposedly liberal English newspapers were paternalistic towards black South Africans, and generally shied away from any sort of real criticism of the regime.⁷³

The country's first democratic elections in 1994, led to several fundamental political, social, and cultural changes. Among these changes were new laws designed to insure freedom of the press, and to protect South African journalists. Although there have been some disturbing trends, such as the recent passage of the Protection of Information Bill which was heavily protested by various media freedom groups. In addition, a slew of court cases have been brought against various journalists and media organizations for 'slander' against government officials. Despite these issues South African journalists are able to report on a wide variety of issues, and voice criticism of the government without fear of retribution. Print media is mainly concentrated among wealthy South Africans, and is still dominated by four private companies. Like most

⁷³ South Africa (2012). Freedom of the Press 2013, Freedom House

African countries, radio and television remain the most popular forms of media. While there is a high amount of private radio stations in urban areas, for the most part both radio and television is dominated by (SABC). Unfortunately SABC has proven to have a tendency to practice in self-censorship, and has come under fire for being too pro-government, although the two private TV stations e.tv and MNET have both seen a growth in national popularity. Internet access in South Africa is among the highest on the continent, with roughly 21% of the population enjoying access to the web.⁷⁴

Clearly when it comes to new media South Africa is in the front of the pack on the African continent. In a recent study conducted by Marenet Jordaan two of South Africa's most prominent dailies were examined, *Mail and Guardian* and the *Rapport*, in order to investigate how Social Media has affected the journalistic processes and cultures in South Africa.⁷⁵ Her research methods included informal and formal interviews of staff, as well as general observations made while in newsrooms. Jordaan agrees with Mare's conclusion that social media has allowed for a further democratization of the journalistic process.⁷⁶

Despite a very well reasoned argument, there are aspects of Jordaan's essay that I find problematic.. The fact that most of the South African population cannot utilize this

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Jordaan, Marenet. "Poke Me, I'm an Journalist: The Impact of Facebook and Twitter on Newsroom Routines and Cultures on Two South African Weeklies." *Ecquid Novi: African Journalism Studies* 34.1 (2013): n. pag. Web. 12 Feb. 2013.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

new tool for greater audience and news-maker interaction is troubling.⁷⁷ Certainly the usage of social media by these two papers to more effectively stay ahead of breaking news and interact with their audiences is a positive sign. However Jordaan's analysis fails to take into account the harsh economic disparity present in South Africa. Access to Social Media and the Internet is, of course, dependent on one's income level. Given the extreme disparity between the wealthy and the poor within South Africa this means that the flow of information has become further monopolized by the wealthy elite. That is not to say that the poor majority cannot access these new technologies. The cell phone package deals described in the Zimbabwean case study indicate that they can and do. Nonetheless the danger of the internet and Social Media becoming just another way to determine who is or is not wealthy is still very present especially in societies such as South Africa. Arguments like Jordaan's risk falling into the trap of promoting a narrative of technological determinism. What I mean by technological determinism is a belief that technologies will instantly democratize a country. This narrative fails to take into account the more negative aspects of the ICT revolution. However it is not my intention to argue that because of these problems the ICT revolution should be condemned out of hand. Rather, that it would benefit scholars, on either side of the debate, to approach the subject with a more nuanced approach.

C. Akinfemisoye vs Jordaan:

⁷⁷ Ibid.

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Based upon their characterization of the impact Social Media and the Internet had upon journalists in southern Africa, it would be fair to conclude that Jordaan and Mare are both “tech positivists”. However there exists a difference between the two authors, Jordaan’s article fits into the narrative of technological determinism. Jordaan’s while certainly positive about Social Media, does not champion it to the same degree.⁷⁸ Rather he makes the point that Social Media is simply one of many tools available to African journalists. Despite this difference these two authors both present a viewpoint that is diametrically opposed to those of Akinfemisoye. Professor Akinfemisoye offers the most sober analysis of the impact of ICTs on African journalism presented in this paper. Other analyses presented have exposed the nastier implications of the latest ICT wave to hit African journalism. However even these authors have argued that utilized correctly the Internet and other new technologies could be extremely beneficial to African journalism. Akinfemisoye, on the other hand, believes that ICTs harms the quality of African, specifically Nigerian, journalism.⁷⁹

In particular Akinfemisoye takes issue with the trend of “citizen journalists”, a trend that is largely thanks to the proliferation of the Internet across Nigeria. He believes that the amateurish nature of their reportage has lead to the decline of the quality of Nigeria’s press. While reading Akinfemisoye’s article it becomes clear he has a deep respect for the Nigerian Press Corps. Given his admiration of the “top quality”

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Akinfemisoye

journalism that the Nigerian press is known for it is not surprising that he would be highly critical of any trend that may undermine its professionalism. To a degree Akinfemisoye has a point, amateur citizen journalism can easily lead to a dip in quality of any media institution. Firstly citizen journalists lack the training of professional journalists and therefore can inadvertently create false or misleading reports. Secondly, when citizen journalists lead stories there can emerge a trend of focusing on “trivial” stories. Although, as vaunted as the Nigerian Press is there certainly does exist an aspect of it that would qualify as tabloid and it has existed for decades prior to the introduction of the internet. What concerns Akinfemisoye the most is the idea that “citizen journalists” aided by Twitter and Facebook could surmount the Nigerian Press establishment and begin to actually dictate reportage. Whereas other scholars and analysts view this “audience empowerment” as a positive step Akinfemisoye sees it as a direct threat to the quality of Nigerian journalism.⁸⁰ On the whole, while I understand his concern, I believe that Akinfemisoye is presenting something of an elitist argument here. Certainly there are drawbacks to “citizen journalism” and increased audience interaction can lead to the press placating the lowest common denominator. However there is no reason to assume that these trends are inherently negative, rather they are merely new opportunities that can hinder or help Nigerian journalism. Whether these trends are a boom or a bust to Nigerian journalism will depend largely on how Nigerian journalists utilize the new technologies available to them. Oddly enough for all the pride that

⁸⁰ Ibid..

Akinfemisoye has for the Nigerian Press he seems to doubt the institution's ability to adapt to the new challenges that are presented by "citizen journalism" and Social Media generally.

If the good professor was to examine *The Punch* he might revise some of his critiques of the impact Social Media has had on the Nigerian Press. The ways in which the paper managed to successfully incorporate ICTs into its already successful news model serves to undercut Akinfemisoye's arguments.⁸¹

Despite these shortcomings Akinfemisoye's article does bring up some valid points. In particular he notes, as have other scholars, that the Internet can easily serve to further bifurcate society. Internet penetration is undeniably increasing across the African continent, but the cost of connecting is still prohibitive for most of the population. Thus the Internet has served as yet another marker of economic disparity in Africa. Unfortunately many scholars, such as Jordaan, tend to understate or in some cases ignore the inequalities that this trend will engender. Akinfemisoye is right, therefore, to point out the negative aspects of the tech boom in Africa

Conclusions:

⁸¹ Ibid.

The case studies which were presented in this paper were intended to highlight the utility of ICTs in the context of African journalism. In addition I wished to indicate why ICTs were successfully integrated into African journalistic practices, as well as the challenges the new wave of ICTs has caused. On the whole I believe the evidence presented proves that the impact of the Internet age on African journalism is a positive one. However it should be noted that the opportunities provided by these new ICTs are tools only. Therefore they can easily be utilized by journalists with poor ethic and professionalism as was indicated by the DRC case study. Moreover access to these new technologies can be cost prohibitive for many Africans. Thus there is a very real danger that this latest tech wave could add yet another layer of disparity on the continent. Therefore, while flawed, Professor Akinfemisoye's critique of "technology fetishism" must be acknowledged. He, and other scholars like him, provide a bulwark against those scholars and analysts who view the Internet as a sort of "silver bullet" cure-all. Rather these technologies are most useful when they are catered specifically to meet an audience's needs. Every successful usage of ICTs presented in this paper were largely due to the journalists following the above formula.

However authoritarian leaders all across the continent have also begun to devise new methods to control press freedom in their countries.⁸² If the encouraging trend of successful technology adoption is to continue, African journalists must remain adaptable.

⁸² Freedom House: Annual Freedom Report

After writing this paper I have no doubt that the journalists of this incredible continent are more than up to the task.

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