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THE MEDIA AND SOCIO-POLITICAL CHANGE: A SNAPSHOT OF NORTH AFRICA AND GHANA'S CASE

Samuel Adu-Gyamfi, Kwasi Amakye-Boateng, Richard Oware
Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology

ABSTRACT

The mass media is a very useful tool to educate, to inform and to entertain. However, recent studies have shown that the media in whatever form has contributed immensely to bring about both social and political change in respective communities across the globe and Africa in particular. The case of Ghana has been presented from the different tangents by different authors. Significantly, this contribution pays attention to the role of the press (media) as well as the digital media in ensuring effective social and political change. In the first instance, this looks at the role of the media from the past to present and juxtaposes that with recent developments in Ghana and other African Countries. Attention is also paid to the role of the media in the respective elections in Ghana.

Keywords: Press, Mass Media, Politics, Democracy, Transitions, Political Development, Social Development

ABSTRAK

Media massa adalah alat yang sangat berguna untuk mendidik, menginformasikan, dan menghibur. Namun, penelitian terbaru menunjukkan bahwa media dalam bentuk apa pun telah berkontribusi besar untuk membawa perubahan sosial dan politik di komunitas masing-masing di seluruh dunia dan Afrika pada khususnya. Kasus Ghana telah disajikan dari berbagai garis singgung oleh penulis yang berbeda. Secara signifikan, kontribusi ini memperhatikan peran pers (media) serta media digital dalam memastikan perubahan sosial dan politik yang efektif. Dalam contoh pertama, ini terlihat pada peran media dari masa lalu hingga sekarang dan menyandingkan bahwa dengan perkembangan terakhir di Ghana dan negara-negara Afrika lainnya. Perhatian juga diberikan pada peran media dalam pemilihan masing-masing di Ghana.

Kata kunci: Pers, Media Massa, Politik, Demokrasi, Transisi, Perkembangan Politik, Pembangunan Sosial

INTRODUCTION

What is the press or mass media? It is the Print media and the electronic media. It connotes news media and agencies collectively, especially newspapers (*Definition of the Press,* 2017). The print media would include the newspapers and magazines among others. The electronic media include: Broadcast or storage media that takes advantage of electronic technology. They may include television, radio, Internet, fax, CD-ROMs, DVD, and any other media that require electricity or digital encoding of information. The term 'electronic media' is often used in contrast with print media (*What is electronic media*, 2017).

What is Social media? Social media refers to the means of interactions among people in which they create, share, and/or exchange information and ideas in virtual communities and networks (What *is Social Media?,* 2017). The platforms that allow such communication or networking to thrive include Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, YouTube and Vimeo accounts.

In his work, "Mass media and National Development: The Role of Information in the Developing Countries", Schramm highlighted as follows: "as economics is to wealth, as political science is to power, so communications are to enlightenment" Schramm also argued among other things that the correlation of the levels of mass media communications with those of economic development is positive and high. He posited that

> The countries starved for information are given a weird, haphazard and scanty diet. When UNESCO decided to set up a minimum and immediate target for sufficiency of mass communication facilities around the world, it prescribed 10 daily newspapers per 100 inhabitants, five radio receivers, two cinema seats and two television receivers.

Politically, the media have been referred to several scholars as the fourth estate of the realm (Akinfeleye, 2003). Akinfeleye (2003) argued that "the relevance of the press in any polity is generally drawn from the fact that information is necessary for effective governance". New perspectives or studies in social change within the late twentieth century and the twenty-first century have made a lot of emphasis on the significance of information age.

The press, however, seems to have served as a conduit to push the ideas of the radical democracy. Concerning "radical democracy", the political theorists Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (1985) discussed it to include perpetual struggles for racial, class, gender and sexual justice in political institutions and civil society; so it is envisaged that countries that practice constitutional democracy in the world- Africa and Ghana in particular where the issue based voting is anticipated; the press would serve a great impetus for it. Same press has been accused for fomenting troubles in Africa and the world at large (Moeler, 1999).

Schramm provided the following ideas that are very useful for a take-off in the present discourse on media and mass media in particular (1) The need for a central planning of mass media development seeking balanced and measured growth. He recommended the need for investment in such a plan by governments and outside aiders; (2) The need for countries to make efforts to bring the media and the educational establishment into close relations; (3) The need to make the requisite efforts to hasten the circulation of news and to strengthen local media whose finances are weak; (4) The need for a systematic and a regular research on the media operations and effects; (5) Finally, the training of information personnel should be fostered.

These ideas to an extent should guide this discourse especially in highlighting knowledge which is better than ignorance and to facilitate more communication which means less or no manipulation by certain individuals and political patrons in particular. In this sense, Schramm argued among other things that the greater and freer the flow of information, the less likely that manipulative information or communication will have

any effects. This notwithstanding, he argues that good communications do not drive out bad ones; if anything, it is the bad and the static ones that drive out the good. Bad communications are defined here among other things as the use of symbols, misinformation, and diversionary signals.

Within the 1960s and 70s, the key question was whether the political control of the mass media that will accompany their development be good or bad? The response within the period and the years that followed after included the argument that communications development can bring about the great of many things, both bad and good.

The above in particular has stimulated the need to look in four thematic areas, the social and political change in Africa which have come about as a result of the development of the media: Print, electronic and social media. In the first instance, we shall discuss social and political change due to the press/media in North Africa within the twentieth century, in the second instance we shall look at the press in Ghana with some shared thoughts on the evolution and the role of the press within the twentieth century. Finally, we shall turn our attention to a succinct analysis and matters arising in the final section.

SOCIAL AND POLITICAL CHANGES DUE TO THE MEDIA IN NORTH AFRICA

The literature is replete with a lot of arguments on what led to the rise of the Arab Spring. In Libya Muammar Gaddafi stayed in power since 1969 through a bloodless coup d'état and was one of the world's longest serving leaders. The president of Tunisia, Ben Ali, had also been in power since 1987 until he was sacked by the peoples protest in 2011. Again, the Egyptian president, Hosni Mubarak also served as the president of Egypt from 1981 to 2011 when he was sacked by what we refer to as the Tahrir Square Peoples Revolution. The political atmosphere in these countries and the style of leadership of-

fered by these leaders among others within the Arab region did not sit well with the governed and the international community at large (*Profile of Muammar Gaddafi*, 2011; *Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali*, 2018).

The above notwithstanding, these countries had existing press houses and different media platforms to serve as a check and to further air the position of the citizenry on matters that pertained to the state including: social, cultural and religious issues. Be it as it may, the mainstream media was largely influenced by the state as exemplified in different African countries because their infrastructure and well-being are contingent upon the support of the existing political patrons in these African states.

The literatures posit that, though these countries have some active press, issues pertaining to descent and the struggle of the masses was largely communicated on the platforms provided by the foreign media like CNN, BBC among others to spread credible information to their supporters through the revolutionary period. The argument is that, through technology, democracy advocates created a freedom meme that took on a life of its own and spread ideas about liberty and revolution to the large numbers of people (Project on Information Technology and political Islam, accessed, 12th September 2017). In Egypt for instance, during the Arab Spring, almost all major political parties published online newspapers which allowed for political discussions especially at a cross-party level. The literature further reports among other things that the social media played a role in shaping the Arab Spring. In Tunisia and Egypt, there were a lot of social media activities: bloggers, websites, Facebook and other social media platforms dealt hefty blow to the Tunisian and Egyptian governments because the mobilizing force of the social media platform seemed unparalleled at the time. At the least opportunity, the governments of these countries looked for a choking point to squeeze; to choke the flow of information between revolutionaries and the mobilizing force of

social media. It is also important to argue that the twitter and Facebook revolution brought about heavy days of political change (Project on Information Technology and political Islam, accessed, 12ᵗʰ September 2017). Again, it is safe to argue that there were waves of political consciousness rather than democratic waves because it takes more than mere months to experience a democratic wave (Project on Information Technology and political Islam, accessed, 12ᵗʰ September, 2017).

During the Arab Spring in 2011, it was found out that in Egypt, Facebook and Western news media were the fulcrum for online political discourse. It is reported that in May 2011, Western social media and news outlets were at the centre of the online Egyptian political network.

Howard and Hussain have captured the Tunisian case under Doug McAdams argument on "cognitive liberation". Howard and Hussain report that by the second half of December 2010, it was through blogs and text messaging that the Tunisians experienced cognitive liberation (Howard and Hussain, 2011). There was also the role of hackers that went around the state's firewall (Howard and Hussain, 2011). There were bloggers, journalists and citizen-journalists who got involved; musicians also did YouTube videos. When all these were happening, the state-run media did very little in terms of coverage about the events in Tunisia. In Egypt, access to mobile telephony has the second largest internet using population in the region (Howard and Hussain, 2011). Significantly, liberal and civil society voices were amplified through the various media. In Egypt for example, efforts were made by state engineers to choke the flow of internet, but they were slow at it. The citizens had found means of using back-up satellite phones. Essentially, digital media played a role in ensuring a successful social mobilization against the strong men of Tunisia and Egypt (Howard and Hussain, 2011).

REPORTING THE GHANAIAN CASE

In Ghana, the colonial press served as a driving force that instigated social and political change. This is akin to radical democratic change. The roles of the African press in the Gold Coast: The Royal Gold Coast Gazzette (1822), Accra Herald (1885), Gold Coast Times of 1874-1885, the Gold Coast Methodist News Paper among others; operated with a certain thrust to initiate social change. The 1900s to 1939 masterminded a nationalist drive against colonialism. The following media: The Gold Coast Leader (1902) with the lead editor, J. E Casely Hayford, The Gold Coast Nation (1912) served a useful purpose for social change. Dr J.B Danquah also wrote extensively through his news paper "The West African Times" which later became "Times of West Africa". Astute women like Mabel Dove as well as other erudite scholars prepared the grounds for others within the West Africa sub-region. A noticeable example is "African Morning Post" which was edited by a Nigerian, Nnamdi Azikiwe. "The Gold Coast Leader" and the "Gold Coast Spectator" were very vocal in their activism against the colonial government.

In 1939, the Asante pioneer was established. Also, in 1935, a small wireless station known as Zoy was established by the Colonial Administration at the Gold Coast to transmit BBC programs to some 300 colonial residents and privileged native elites. Prior to independence, Kwame Nkrumah also established "The Evening News" to fight against British imperialism. The press was "politically active" during the first half of the twentieth century. Their activities benefited the indigenes especially those who needed change from the hegemonic control of Europe on Africa and the Gold Coast in particular. It is certain that the activities of military coups and control in Africa and Ghana in particular did not prove favorable for the expansion of the press. The media licensing law (PNDC Law 211) in Ghana for instance made the work of journalist very difficult.

In spite of the successes of the Press during the colonial period, the late twenti-

eth century continued with some dissenting views on the activities of the press. Ghanaian authors, Anokwa (1997), Asante (1996), Ansah (1991) shared the view that various governments have tended to excessively control the media and used them largely to propagate their political agenda. In contrast, in Ghana, the 1990s saw a transition from a military rule to a constitutional democratic arrangement. This arrangement delivered a 1992 constitution that allowed for elections. The 1992 election was won by the National Democratic Congress (NDC). Same period saw the increase of press houses: electronic and print media. Urban areas like Accra and Kumasi have over hundred private radio stations. Urban areas like Sunyani, Tamale, Wa, Bolgatanga, Kofridua, Sekondi-Takoradi, Ho and Cape Coast have increasing number of radio stations. This has also come with increasing number of television stations owned by private citizens. The growing number of press houses has increased reportage of issues that concerns the ordinary citizens of the country. Citizens' reportage and the social media have also been very active within the country. The question that remains unanswered is whether these press houses remain balanced in their reportage especially during elections?

Democratic transitions in Ghana from NDC to the New Patriotic Party (NPP) in 2000 and from the NPP to NDC in 2008 also saw an increasing population in eclectic communities in Accra and Kumasi. In "an urban twist to politics in Ghana" Obeng Odoom (2010) questions, the preparedness of Ghanaian politicians was on the 2010 population explosion in Ghana. Drivers of urbanization are beautification of cities, housing and infrastructure among others but the problematic issues of land, poverty and inequality have not received the necessary attention (Obeng-Odoom, 2010). Obeng-Odoom (2010) highlighted the fact that "the limits to urban policies suggests that there are severe limits to the effectiveness of urban policies as a means of meeting social needs and redressing urban inequalities".

The real issues that pertain to bread and butter, housing, electricity, water, road among others are discussed on "morning shows" in Ghana. Specially tailored programming in *Twi* language is done by several press houses: radio and television to ensure that such issues are best understood by the citizenry. The election results in the year 2000 that saw a transition from NDC to NPP showed the following results for a highly eclectic region, Greater Accra region: NPP- 53.10% (580,163), NDC 42.09% - 459,884; the runoff produced NPP 60.44%-616,729; NDC 39.56% - 403,725. In the year 2008, when there was a transition from the NPP to NDC, the results showed: NDC 52.11% - 870,011; NPP 46.03- 768,465. This election also went into a runoff; NDC 54.46% – 952,599; NPP 45.54% - 796,541 (*Election Result in Ghana 2000 and 2008*). It can be inferred that urban dwellers like those in Accra are fed daily and nightly with hefty doses of political programming that has made the citizenry in urban and eclectic area like Greater Accra, active participants in determining a game change in elections in Ghana.

Temin and Smith (2002) referred to Nana Konadu Agyeman Rawlings, the first lady of Ghana from 1981 to 2000 and the current flag bearer of the National Democratic Party (NDP) in Ghana that "the state-owned media are supposed to support the government, because they are paid from government resources. Kofi Anan, the then the Secretary General of the United Nations also pointed out that "for an election to be truly fair, different parties and candidates should have equal access to the media. Neither state power nor the power of money should determine that one party gets a hearing while another is denied it. The media must actively seek out the truth on the public's behalf, and be free to tell as they see it" (Temin and Smith, 2002). Temin and Smith (2002) argued that "the electoral process in Ghana certainly would not have proceeded so smoothly or successfully without the lively contribution of the media. It is no coincidence that one of Africa's most democrat-

ic countries is also home to some of the most vibrant and outspoken media outlets on the continent" (Temin and Smith, 2002).

The 7th December, 2016 election in Ghana was fiercely contested by the de-facto of two political parties New Patriotic Party (NPP) and the National Democratic Congress (NDC) and the other smaller parties. Prior to the Election Day, Ghanaians had been presented with launch of various party manifestos by political parties tabling what was considered as issues/policy proposals that were very pertinent to the development of the country. The vociferous media as usual took to reporting and highlighting the key issues in these manifestos. To a greater extent, just as it did in 2000 and 2008 elections; there was a rising chorus for democracy and politics that would deal with the corruption issues and also fix the depleting economy of Ghana which had sent it back to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for a bailout from its degrading economy. The active media played a role in helping the ordinary masses to observe whether the government genuinely or better still, truly responded to the shock of corruption, and fiscal misappropriation that had griped the country and its citizenry with doubt and confusion. The outcome of the 7th December 2016 Polls was a resounding victory for the NPP. It was an attestation to a burgeoning democracy that will come of age very soon. However, if it shall be catalyzed, it will need the media: traditional and social media as catalyst to hasten this positive democratic reaction. Significantly, McCombs and Shaw (1972) have argued among other things that, the press is successful in telling its readers what to think about. It is also hypothesized that the mass media set the agenda for each political campaign, influencing the silence of attitudes towards the political issues (McCombs and Shaw, 1972).

MATTERS ARISING

From what has saturated the above discourse, we concur with earlier writers like McLeod et al (1999) that the function of information dissemination through the media among others may mobilize individuals to local political participation. McLeod et al have argued that while community integration provides the infrastructure for participating, media and interpersonal communication provide the knowledge or incentives to use the opportunities for participation that are provided. They also argue that if social ties and community networks fail to provide sufficient incentives or opportunities for participation, various forms of communication, including civic journalism could renew the links between individuals and their community or reveal alternative forms of participation.

Again, as seen in the Arab Spring in 2011, this contribution confirms the position of Vedlitz and Veblen (1980) when they argued that it is possible regardless of government structure that negative orientations and disenchantment with government may result in certain kinds of unconventional political activity. Again, television and newspapers have made reciprocal contributions in creating political awareness in countries in Africa and Ghana in particular. For instance, studies by Becker and Whitney (1980) have argued among other things that print media provide greater depth and insight and complexities of politics. Different studies have teased out issues from the thesis; the greater the use of mass media, the greater the interpersonal discussions of issues.

This contribution further supports the propositions of political and communication theorists that the future of communications across lines of political difference lies in technologies that transcend geographical space (Mutz and Martin, 2001). Similarly, in 1988, Calhoun argued that "in modern societies, most of the information we have about people different from ourselves comes not through any direct relationships, even the casual ones formed constantly in urban streets and shops. Rather it comes through print and electronic media".

Again, this study confirms the argument that people selectively expose them-

selves to like-minded media content. The persistent approach to keenly glean information from the social and foreign media platforms in Egypt, Tunisia, Libya and elsewhere in North Africa by the masses in protests against their government did same because they were similarly and severally disgusted by the social, economic and political miseries their despotic and sometimes benign dictators had exposed them to. In Ghana, for example the political change in the year 2001, 2008, 2016 came about as a result of the rising chorus for change which came about in each instance by the public interest seen in a media that exposed what was unacceptable in the existing government: it emphasized the actions and inactions of the government that did not inure to the general and greater good of the public sphere in Ghana. This notwithstanding, Mutz and Martin (2001) have argued that though there is evidence of the selective exposure in interpersonal relations is incontrovertible, but it is less clear with respect to the news media. They further hypothesized that "people are more likely to expose themselves to dissonant opinions through mediated rather than interpersonal communication, largely because of the lack of selective exposure involved" Mutz and Martin, 2001). However, it cannot be gainsaid that the mainstream media expose people to more political disagreement, regardless of partisanship or the extremity of their views. Additionally, the role of the mass media in making governments responsive to the plight of citizens or needs of citizens can also not be gainsaid.

In addition to the above explanation, this contribution confirms the World Bank Development Report in 2000 which emphasizes the need for responsive government (*World Bank*, 2000). In the 2016 elections in particular, the mass media played a crucial role by informing voters about the actions of incumbents which they might otherwise be unaware of.

Also, concerning Ghana, the activities of the media has necessitated pluralism. Mutz and Martin (2001) have argued that pluralism requires that a society may be able to endure ongoing political and moral disagreement. This is because, as argued by several political theorists; the expression of opposing political views is integral to the democratic process. The media itself would have also become a tool for political awareness to drive home diverse political perspectives and also ensure national political integration (Mutz and Martin, 2001). We can infer from the 7th December, 2016 elections in Ghana and the role of the media that the active media in Ghana helped several individuals in the country to observe whether the government of the National Democratic Congress (NDC) responded to the shock of corruption and financial malfeasance within the government. This contribution, however, confirms the earlier research of Besley and Burgress when they argued that "… any individual who experiences a shock observes whether or not the government responds. However, only with active media do they observe whether the government has heeded to their demands or responded to their needs and challenges.

CONCLUSION
Referring to the words of Howard and Hussain (2011), digital media help to turn individualized and community-specific dissent into a structured movement with a collective consciousness about both shared plight and opportunities for action. The Middle East and North Africa is a case in point. Again, the case of Ghana has also shown that the contributions of the print and electronic media including social media have served as an agency for political change and even determining the cause and outcome of elections. When the media sneeze's the larger society seem to catch cold. The growing and vociferous media in North and Africa south of the Sahara could have the tendency or the proclivity to bring democratic change and development in the region. If the political patrons of the land will allow the fourth estate in the realm to thrive, it shall serve as a useful check on the executive and the existing institutions in its quest to provide information and stimulate the thought of

the citizens towards the politics of development.

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