The Pulse Of Democracy: African Journalism In An Era Of Political Change

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Abstract
Amidst Africa's shifting political terrain, journalism stands as both a barometer and a driver of democratic change. Since the 1993 declaration of World Press Freedom Day, the continent has witnessed a complex evolution of its media landscape—marked by growth, yet marred by persistent constraints. This study critically examines the trajectory of African journalism through the lens of political transformation, tracing how the ideals of the 1991 Windhoek Declaration—media pluralism, independence, and freedom—continue to contend with state control, censorship, and threats to journalist safety.

With a focus on the intricate relationship between democratic transitions and press freedom, the paper explores how digitalization and globalization have reshaped media practices, offering new opportunities for civic engagement while introducing fresh vulnerabilities. By interrogating the political, structural, and economic challenges that restrict journalistic autonomy, the study reveals the essential role of the press in nurturing democratic values. It calls for robust institutional reforms and protective legal frameworks to secure the media's independence as a cornerstone of democratic governance. In doing so, the paper contributes to a deeper understanding of the press as the pulse of Africa's democratic journey.

Key Words: *African Journalism, Political Transformation, Media Pluralism, Censorship, Media Practices and Democratic Governance.*

I. Introduction

Background Information

Ever since the start of the French Revolution in 1789, there have been lists of rights – thoughts on civil liberty which became impressive leading to French Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen. Such liberties and freedom of expression and information which were connected but affected each other. These historical perspectives have produced fruits in today's contemporary issues globally in multicultural and complex societies including Africa.

In America, the first newspaper, *Publick Occurrences*, was published in Bostin in 1690 by Benjamin Harris. After only one issue, Ferguson, Pattern (1994) the British colonial authorities suppressed the paper because they didn't like what Harris printed. Fourteen years later, the colonies had their first continuously published newspaper: *The Boston News-Letter*, started by John Campbell in 1704. It was published by authority, meaning it has the government's approval. Soon, though, as pioneers moved south and west, more newspapers cropped up. Most carried the "by authority" tag and were closely supervised by the British government.

However, in those days, newspapers that attempted to criticize the government were guilty of sedition, the stirring of rebellion. The truth of their statements was no defense. The principle then was, "the greater the truth, the greater the libel". The government figured that false criticism was easier to turn aside than well founded criticism. A case in 1735 established truth as a defense against libel charges. In the *New York Weekly journal*, John Peter Zenger printed articles critical of Governor William Cosby. The newspaper acted as a voice for the rising Whig(commercial) party. Zenger did not write most of the articles himself, but as a publisher, he was arrested on a charge of seditious libel. Zenger was jailed on November 17, 1734, but did not come to trial until August 4th, 1735 – the right to a speedy trial had not yet been secured (Ferguson, Patter 1994).

The Zenger trial fueled the flames of freedom that were beginning into the colonies. The colonial press of the day played a vital role in the birth of the nation. In 1775, when the Revolution began, thirty-seven newspapers were being published. These newspapers generally allied themselves with the patriots. In fact, some historians believe there would not have been a Revolution in America without the support of the press. This was the era of Partisan press.

When the war ended and the Constitutional Convention met in Philadelphia, the farmers did not, as many people believe, spend much time on the question of freedom of the press. The constitution made no mention of a free press because most state constitutions already covered the matter. But, the Bill of Rights – the first ten amendments to the constitution – was ratified in 1791. The first amendment guaranteed a free press with the words, "Congress shall make no law…abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press."

After the Revolution, the young American nation grew rapidly, and so did the newspaper industry. Hundreds of newspapers opened all over the land. The first daily, the *Pennsylvania Evening Post*, was founded in 1783. The Presses were clumsy, but the Industrial Revolution was at hand, and soon newspapers joined in the race for better technology, a race that continues in this century. Press freedom is historically known ever since President Thomas Jefferson underlined:

"Were it left to me to decide whether we should have a government without newspapers or newspaper without government, I should not hesitate to prefer the latter."

It is vital that research on Freedom of African communities contribute to improving our understanding of current problems and crises that trouble our societies. The challenge is not only to explain these problems, but also to come up with solutions to communicate with those in power so that research findings will make a difference – we need to improve our understanding as media researchers of current development in our societies, perhaps most urgently their implications for democracy and human rights including Freedom of the Media.

Press and governments in Africa are both topical and significant, because the subject affects a whole range of issues: political stability in Africa; Information flow between North and South in favour of the developed North; and above all, issues connected with Africa's struggle for Freedom including the struggle against apartheid South Africa. We shall also look at the media ownership structure in these African societies. If we collapse the two elements, press freedom and ownership structure, we find that we are technically talking about a certain relationship, the relationship between government and the press in Africa (Momoh 1987).

Generally, most African nations can be said to be authoritarian as opposed to social responsibility, communist and libertarian criteria will pervade the relationship. Studies of such governments abundantly reveal a high level of antipathy towards the press institution. Authoritarian theory, the oldest of the Press theories, insists that truth is located near the centre of power. The press therefore being a symbol of truth function "from top down". The military rulers use the press as mere pawns to inform the masses about what they thought the masses should know and support. They maintained that the press belongs to the office of the rulers and that private ownership of the media can only be granted on a common agreement to support military rulers' policies by publishers. This type of concept of press control eliminated what has come to be known as the common press function – check on governments.

However, even in those African states with claims of democracy, the general tendency is not to tolerate the opposition in whatever form. Most of these countries like Tanzania, Kenya, Zambia had been converted into one party states through legislative flats rushed through parliament by their despotic leadership and even where the multi-party stem still harangues the government in power at will, writes Momoh.

According to Jerome, A. Barron, in his book "Freedom of the Press, for Whom?" the classic liberation idea of the expression and traditional anti-trust policy shares the assumption of Judge Herd that "right conclusions are more likely to be gathered out of a multitude of tongues; While Justice Hugo Black in the same anti-trust context opined that "the widest possible dissemination of information from diverse and antagonistic sources is essential to the welfare of the public and a free press in a condition of a free society".

Governments in Africa argue that the press at best is an irritant and grave danger to the nation if allowed permission to operate within the context of the Liberation theory. President Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia in 1968 while addressing the IPI Annual Assembly said that, "African countries had gone out of their way to encourage the foreign press to report African affairs." He linked the freedom of the foreign – owned press in Africa and the general principal of press freedom, but remarked that its effect had been far from encouraging. Also, in a lecture at the Prestigious Royal African Society, London April. 1975, a most distinguished senior colleague Alhaji Babatunde Jose had this to say: "At least ten years after independence, many African journalists still believe that a good press is one that is in constant state of war with the government and progressive journalism is one who writes anti-government articles every day." A leading journalist accordingly is "one who is in and out of prison for sedition." This situation has not changed radically, even today.

In the communist system, media ownership is government – a system that is consistent because of the centralization of the ownership and control of the system's means of production. The role of the media in the communist or socialist system is therefore to promote, protect, and sustain communist system of governance. There is no room for dissension. In the developing world, especially in Africa, ownership of media may be private or government, depending on what side of the globe. Bi-polar war between capitalism and communism

where a country finds herself especially during the cold-war era- news are viewed as advancing the objectives of the establishment.

The dilemma of African media practitioners was graphically put by the distinguished Kenyan editor, Hilary Ng'weno when he said inter-alia "The challenge of the Press in Young countries is the challenge of laying down the foundation upon which future freedoms will thrive…. anyone who has lived or traveled widely in Africa…. cannot fail to be appalled at the enormous amount of poverty, illiteracy and diseases that are to be found everywhere. Under some of the conditions, it is sacrilegious to talk about press freedom, for freedom loses meaning when human survival is the only operative principal on which a people live".

In 1973, at a review of the World Press by the Times of London, it said, "In the years since independence, one country after another has followed the same dreary pattern suppression and victimization. A typical front page lead story is likely to be a speech by a minister to a local party meeting, or indeed a warning to "agitators" not to stir trouble. It sometimes seems almost impossible to pick up a newspaper in Africa without reading that some group or another has been warned about something they should not do be doing.

Meanwhile, the real stories, about corruption and mismanagement by people is power, seldom it ever gets printed. Indeed, the *Times of London* seems to have failed to recognize that many of these press practitioners are working and earning their living within a given political system where he/she is allied leading to loss of personal freedom. However, in the libertarian – press nations, government pressures are usually application of legal, political and economic restraints the lid of secrecy opening from time to time. In Africa, "most governments believe that a controlled press promotes national development, social and political harmony. And there are spokesmen in the west representing liberal opinion who contend that the new nations with fragile societies needing to progress and to achieve a sense of national cohesion and nationhood cannot really afford to have a free press.

Definitions Of Press Freedom
According to Oxford Advanced Leaner's Dictionary,
1. Freedom is condition of being free; state of not being a prisoner or slave.
2. To act, speak, etc. as one pleases without interference: Freedom of speech, thought, worship, press freedom, state of being unrestricted in one's actions; Liberty: Freedom of action, choice, decisions etc.
3. State of being without or not affected by the thing specified: fever, pain, hunger etc.
4. Unrestricted
5. Give etc.… to…allow one…. Press (journalists who work for newspaper, periodicals and the news sections of radio, television i.e. newspapers that concentrate on sensational stories about people's personal lives. Freedom of the Press (i.e. right of journalists to report events, express opinions, etc. freely comment. So, the word Pressman is a journalist in meaning.

Freedom of the press is the right of journalists and media organization to publish information without censorship or interference from the government.
• It protects the right to spread ideas, new and view through publishing
• It ensures the free flow of information to the public
• It's closely tied freedom of speech.
• It's a limit on the government, not a freedom that only some people enjoy.

But Wikipedia defines Freedom of the press as a fundamental principle that's considered a right to be exercised freely. It's often protected by a constitution or other legal protections. For example, the First Amendment to the United States constitution states that "Congress shall make no law…. abridging the freedom of speech or of the press".

Freedom of the press is important for empowering people. It allows people to access accurate, fair and unbiased information, which helps them participate in the active life of the community.

However, (Wikipedia) defines Freedom of the Press or freedom of the media as a fundamental principle that communication and expressed through various media, including printed and electronic media, including printed and electronic media, especially published materials, should be considered a right to be exercised freely. Such freedom implies the absence of interference from an overreaching state; it's presentation may be sought through a constitution or other legal protection and security. It is in opposition to paid press, where communities, police organizations, and governments are paid for their copyrights.

Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights provides that: "Everyone has the right to Freedom of Opinion and Expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impact information and ideas through any media regardless of frontiers.

When we use that concept of Freedom of Expression, it encompasses all forms of utterances, be they private or public, such as speech, petitions, demonstrations, actions that demonstrate an opinion, art, all forms of media messages, and many more. This raises the question of whether freedom of expression and freedom of the

press should be interpreted as one of the many freedoms falling under the concept of freedom of expression, albeit a very important one. Is the press an institution entitled to greater freedom from regulations and restrictions than institutions and individuals that claim to represent the Public in the same way the "press" does (particularly in the form of news media)? There is no doubt that the press plays a critical role in all societies, particularly in defending and promoting democracy and citizens' right to be informed and to debate (Ronning, 2016).

Freedom of expression and the right to access information are both citizens' right. Freedom of expression articles in constitutions around the world may or may not mention freedom of the press specifically. This may be interpreted as a possible "conflict" between freedom of expression clauses that protect individuals only and press clauses that provide special protection for press corporations, but such is not the case. Constitutional freedom of expression pertains to expressions regardless of their source, be it individual or mediated. Such constitutional defense safeguards public access to discussion, debate and dissemination of information.

However, the role of the press in relation to the legal rules for protection for freedom of speech and ethical considerations may be illustrated by the practices of independent press councils and their codes of ethics. It is essential that press ethics not be mistaken for legal regulations; ethics and laws have different functions. Ethics are guidelines to standardized rules while laws cover wrongs and power abuse and can involve courts, but both imply protecting freedom of the press from undue influence be it from the state or corporate attempts at censorship. This act of defending freedom of the press as a legal principle and the ethical values of a free press exercised by independent press councils is essential to a free and democratic media situation.

II.   Methodology

1. Literature Review
Conduct a thorough review of existing academic literature, policy papers, and reports on media freedom in Africa. This would include:
Historical overview of media systems in African countries.
Theoretical frameworks of media freedom, democracy, and development.
Comparative studies of media freedom across regions.
Relevant case studies of specific African countries, both where media freedom has improved and where it has regressed.
This will help understand the context, identify gaps, and define the scope of the research.

2. Case Study Selection
Select a range of African countries with different levels of media freedom. This could include countries like:
South Africa (relative media freedom, democratic transition).
Ethiopia (media liberalization but with ongoing restrictions).
Uganda (press freedom challenges and government control).
Zimbabwe (historical repression, media rights).
The selection should be based on political, economic, and social contexts, and the extent of the gap between ideals and reality in these countries.

3. Qualitative Research Methods
Interviews: Conduct interviews with key stakeholders in the media sector such as:
Journalists and media professionals.
Government officials and policymakers.
Human rights activists.
Representatives of civil society organizations focused on media and democracy.

Interview questions should explore:
The legal and institutional frameworks supporting media freedom.
The challenges media practitioners face (censorship, harassment, financial pressure).
How media policies and regulations align with international standards.
Focus Groups: Organize focus groups with media consumers to gather insights on public perceptions of media freedom and the media's role in democracy.
Content Analysis: Analyze media content (both traditional and social media) for patterns in censorship, bias, and self-censorship. This can include:
Assessing how government policies affect media output.
Analyzing coverage of politically sensitive issues.
Identifying patterns of media suppression or government control in specific cases.

4. Quantitative Research Methods
Surveys: Design surveys to gather data from a wider audience, including:
Public perceptions of media freedom and democracy.
The level of trust in media institutions.
Attitudes towards government censorship.
Freedom of Press Indicators: Use international indices, such as Reporters Without Borders' Press Freedom Index or the Freedom House rankings, to quantitatively assess the state of media freedom in selected countries and track changes over time.

5. Comparative Analysis
Compare the findings from different countries, analyzing the gaps between media freedom ideals (as seen in national constitutions, laws, and international standards) and the practical realities (such as government repression, corruption, and media ownership concentration).
Contrast the situation in countries with democratized media systems (e.g., South Africa) versus those with authoritarian tendencies or repressive media environments (e.g., Eritrea, Sudan).
Look for correlations between media freedom and broader democratic indicators such as political stability, civil liberties, and governance quality.

6. Document Analysis
Analyze official documents such as:
National media laws and regulations.
Government reports on media and democracy.
International agreements related to media freedom (e.g., African Charter on Broadcasting).
Examine how legal frameworks and policies on media freedom are either conducive to or in conflict with the practice of democracy.

7. Ethnographic Research
If feasible, conduct ethnographic fieldwork with local media organizations. This could involve immersing yourself in a media organization or community and observing daily practices, challenges, and responses to external pressures.

8. Data Synthesis and Analysis
Use qualitative data analysis tools like NVivo to categorize themes from interviews and focus groups.
For quantitative data, employ statistical analysis (e.g., SPSS or R) to assess trends, correlations, and significant differences between countries.
Synthesize findings from the case studies, interviews, surveys, and content analysis to develop a comprehensive understanding of the media freedom gap in African democracies.

9. Policy Analysis and Recommendations
Based on the research findings, critically assess the policies and practices that contribute to the gap between media freedom ideals and the actual situation.
Propose recommendations for policy reforms, capacity-building in media institutions, and strategies to empower journalists.
Suggest approaches for improving media accountability, transparency, and independence in the African context.

10. Dissemination
Share findings through academic papers, policy briefs, and public engagement (e.g., media outlets, workshops, or conferences).
Collaborate with local media organizations to raise awareness about the challenges of media freedom and the role of the media in the democratic process.

III.   Freedom Of Expression As A Communication Right
Society changes, but certain democratic principles hold true. Among these are freedom to think, speak, listen and write – to express oneself and communicate with others – as proclaimed in article 19 of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
However, in Africa, there are multiple obstacles to overcome. Not all citizens are in the position or condition to exercise their rights, due to extreme poverty, social injustice, poor education, gender discrimination, ethnic and religious discrimination, unemployment, or lack of access to healthcare – as well as

lack of access to information and knowledge. Access to information for all – requires internet access for all – an essential issue on the 2030 agenda adopted by UN in September 2015 (ITU 2015).

Freedom of expression is democracy's praxis. It is a right, but implies responsibility and respect for rights of others. Limits of freedom of expression are not constant – they are marked by its cultured and social context. Freedom of expression has legal, ethical and moral dimensions; ultimately, it is a question of fundamental idea that all human beings are equal. (Ronning 2009, 2013).

Globalization and digitalization connect people and economies across great distances. Horizons have broadened, but parts of the world also seem to further retreat. Some people feel the need to defend their identities, and when common cultural platforms can no longer be maintained, stockades are raised around local cultures, religious beliefs and communities. Transcendence of boundaries and defense of boundaries are twin features of the globalization process. (Anderson 1991; Johnson 2001).

Freedom of the press under pressure

The media is the lifeline of freedom of expression; freedom of the press is crucial. The pluralism and independence of the media are essential to democratic rule. The media has long been considered a central, shared sources of information, 'watchdogs' and the fora of public debate – in short, to constitute a public sphere – based on the nexus between media, democracy and civil engagement (Askenius and Ostergaard 2014).

However, every day we see threats of freedom of expression – and freedom repression, self-censorship, surveillance, monitoring and control, hate speech, gatekeeping, propaganda – disinformation, acts of terror, anti-terror laws and organized crime. Freedom of information is a critical issue in many countries, but especially in zones facing social, ethnic and political stress, armed conflict or emergency situations emanating from disasters.

There are even cases of outright murder of journalists or their sources have been targeted. Local journalists, in particular, are the targets of threats ranging from intimidation and harassment to arbitrary detention including attacks on women journalists (UNESCO 2015., Poyhtami 2016). This is in several respects a consequence of an extensive transition process involving politics, the economy and, not least, information technology.

Today's communication – society has tremendous potential. We have access to knowledge and an awareness of events that only 'yesterday' were far beyond our horizons. And we can communicate and interact as never before. Media and communication represent social and cultural resources that can empower people, in both their personal development and their development as democratic citizens.

From that perspective, our opportunities to express ourselves freely has never been greater, largely as a consequence of social media. Yet this applies only to people with access to the internet. Human experience tells us, however, that although new technologies almost always bring about significant benefits, they also entail risks (Ellul 1964; Winston 1998; Livingstone and Haddon 2009).

The expansion of media output has led to increasing differences between groups in terms of the extent to which they use various media – especially the news media. New types of trans-national media companies such as Google and Facebook are enormously powerful actors from an individual perspective as well as from industrial and political perspectives. Many parts of society today have become heavily dependent on these companies.

The openness that makes the internet so immensely valuable also leads to vulnerability. Offering such a means of communication also creates new opportunities to express hatred, to harass and to threaten. Privacy and security are critical aspects of using the web. But providing security without impinging on either privacy or freedom of expression involves striking a delicate balance. The fact that the digital public sphere is beyond national control – when services are operated by foreign – based companies with global reach – has profound consequences for people in many African countries.

Media Liberalization in Africa

Liberalization of the mass media in Kenya was neither homegrown nor motivated by a genuine desire for government to improve press freedom.

Nevertheless, the government (Mbeke, 2011) began the liberalization that led to serious gaps that have confined to undermine press freedom and development of the mass media sub-sector. For instance, the government embarked on liberalization of the media without a clear policy framework. As a result, the media industry lacks holistic policy to date. Instead, the industry is guided by pieces of legislation aimed at satisfying specific policy needs of government. Liberalization of mass media in this context refers to relaxation of restrictive government laws and policies, adoption of principles of a free market economy in the sub-sector and plural media ownership, and relaxation of the rules governing freedom of expression and press freedom.

The development press philosophy originated from the colonial and post-colonial experiences of the developing countries. After independence, most African leaders viewed the press as agents of non-colonialism and imperialism.

African governments wanted the mass media to support the national agenda rather than empower citizens to make informed political choices (Ogbondah, 1994). The developmental press philosophy and the philosophy and liberation theory will both be used to shed light on the liberalization process during Daniel Moi' rule from 1978 and Mwai Kibaki's government from 2002.

The Lancaster constitution of Kenya of 1963 was intolerant to the media and journalism practice. Although the old constitution guaranteed the right to freedom of expression, it imposed limitations of fundamental rights and freedom under vague provisions. For instance, the Lancasater constitution did not mention freedom of thre press and other media specifically International Commission of Jurists (ICJ), (1999) thus allowing for violation of these same rights (Makali 2003).

However, chapter 4 of the constitution of Kenya (2010) provides for the Bill of Rights. Article 33 guarantees the right to freedom of expression. It guarantees freedom to seek, receive, or impart information or ideas as well as freedom to seek artistic creativity. It also allows journalists, editors and any person who wants to communicate using mass media to do so. This constitution specifically mentions and guarantees the freedom of mass media. Article 34 states that freedom and independence of electronic, print and all other types of media guaranteed.

Further, the constitution prohibits the state from controlling or interfering with mass media owners, distributors, producers, and their agents. Additionally, the new constitution prohibits the state from penalizing any person for any opinion or view or the content of any broadcast, publication, or dissemination – a media friendly constitution, where the statutory laws, which are mainly anti-media, remain unchanged. Article 34 requires parliament to legislate freedom of the media laws within the next three years. Several statutory laws including Defamation Act, the Books and Newspapers Act, Public Order Act, and Chiefs Authority Act among others have to be repealed. (Mbeke, 2011).

IV.   The Widening Gap Between Ideals And Reality In World Journalism Practice

Although media freedom is considered a cornerstone in democratic constitutions and distinct features of a free and open society, freedom of the press is deteriorating. Annual surveys and numerous reports reveal a worrying trend towards a constantly widening gap between ideal principles of international declarations and the harsh reality of day-to-day journalism.

However, it is disturbing that this development appears to be taking place not only in countries under totalitarian regimes, but also part of the world with governments usually considered to be among the guardians of a free press. Since 2002, Reporters without Borders has released it's annual Word Press Freedom Index. The index assesses and ranks 180 countries and regions according to the degree of freedom available to journalists. The index sues five categories to rank the press freedom situation in every country: Good, Satisfactory, problematic, difficult and very serious. However, the index is not evaluation of quality of journalism (Caitriona, Natividad, 2024). It is an assessment of pluralism, independence of the media, quality of legislative framework and safety of journalists in each country and region. The index draws on data gathered from 87 – question survey sent out to journalists in 180 countries. The analysis of the questionnaires I combined with quantitative data available on abuses and acts of violence towards journalists throughout the evaluation period.

According to this report, journalists in 10 countries enjoy the highest level of freedom. This includes Norway, Denmark, Sweden, Netherlands, Finland, Estonia, Portugal, Ireland, Switzerland and Germany.

Key Findings
1. Nordic countries top the Press Freedom Index, with Norway ranking highest in media freedom.
2. African nations have the lowest level of press freedom. Eritrea being the lowest globally at No. 180. Egypt ranked No 170, Djibouti 161, Sudan 149, Somalia 145, Ethiopia 141, Algeria 139, South Sudan 136, Cameroon 130, Uganda 128, Equatorial Guinea 127, Democratic Republic of Congo 123, Lesotho 122, Tunisia 118, Zimbabwe 116, Mali 114, Togo 113, Nigeria 112, Burundi 108, Mozambique 105, Angola 104, Kenya 102 and Madagascar 100.

    However, this does not mean that the entire African countries are least ranked. Some nations have scored above average and they include: Mauritania 33, Seychelles 37, South Africa 38, Carbo Verde 41, Ghana 50, Ivory Coast 53, Gabon 56, Mauritius 57, Gambia 58, Liberia 60, Sierra Leone 64, Congo-Brazza-Ville 69, Central Africa Republic 76, Guinea 78, Botswana 79, Niger 80, Eswatini 85, Burkina Faso 86, Benin 89, Senegal 94, Zambia 95, Chad 96, and Tanzania 97.
3. The coronavirus pandemic has been cited as a reason to restrict journalists access to information sources and hinder their field reporting.
4. Data indicates that journalists find it increasingly difficult to investigate and report on sensitive stories, particularly in North Africa.
5. From these findings, out of 180 countries in the index, only 8 (4.44%) can genuinely boast a favorable environment for journalism.

6. The Middle East and North African countries continue to be the World's most dangerous regions for journalists.
7. Reporters without borders has disclosed that journalism is significantly hindered in 73 countries and restricted in 59 others collectively accounting for 73% of the evaluated nations. Some countries, however, have been excluded due to insufficient sample size.

However, such surveys are of course could be inaccurate because measurements do not always take specific national circumstances and background conditions fully into account. By analyzing more broadly, the impact of digital media on journalism, democracy and freedom of expression in 56 countries on all five continents including Africa. The Mapping Digital Media (MDM) reports reveal a very disturbing global pattern:

1. African governments and politicians have too much influence over who owns the media, who wins licenses to operate newspapers, radio and TV stations and how the media is regulated – all undermines independent journalism.
2. Many media markets are not free and fair, but are dominated by a few major players, and are rife with corrupt or non-transparent practices in the continent.
3. Media and journalism on the internet offer hope of new, independent source of information, but are also a new battleground for those seeking to control information on African soil.

Nevertheless, digitalization might foster media plurality – yet at the same time reduce freedom from control.

The more specific question of the future role of the internet, concerning its contribution to media` freedom and plurality, is a key factor of uncertainty and thus opens up potentially new capabilities at the same time as it seriously limits the freedom of their usage. The digitization of media is certainly a communicative evolution comparable to Gutenberg's invention of the printing press, especially if we compare it with traditional radio and television in their broadcast mass-media format (Nissen, 2016). There is a potential of the internet and social media as a mobilizing force of societal consequence – knowledge that is important from media freedom perspective.

Again, from a citizens' right vs sate-controlled perspective, the decentralized structure of the internet and many other services it carries to be secure. But can journalists guarantee their sources full of confidentiality? International surveys on media freedom usually present the surveyed countries ranked according to a number of criteria, for instance editorial independence, media pluralism, regulatory and legislative environment, etc. Such rankings are not precise measurements and should be interpreted with some caution.

Historically, Africa seems to be disadvantaged and that is why the World Press Freedom index year after year indicates negative trends. Economic and political stability may be one of the reasons why Nordic and North European countries have consistently high scores. Arguably, problematic elements of ethnocentric circularity. That risk is related to the fact that the 'right to freedom of opinion and expression' is rooted in the (European) Age of Enlighten in the 18th century (Nissen, 2016). This became a core element in the UN declaration of Human Rights, adopted in 1948 at the general assembly in Paris at a time when the Western Hemisphere was still eliminating both the world and the UN. The way these rights were understood at the time, and have been interpreted since, has of course been greatly influenced by Western jurisprudence and political culture. And in a new emerging world order, this influence is gradually weakening all over the world including Africa.

V. Conclusion

The growth of journalism in Africa remains a complex and evolving phenomenon, deeply intertwined with the continent's democratic transitions. While significant progress has been made in expanding press freedom, numerous challenges—ranging from political interference and economic constraints to censorship and threats against journalists—continue to hinder the full realization of a free and independent media. This study has examined these dynamics, drawing attention to the impact of democratization, digitalization, and globalization on African journalism. However, the research remains incomplete, with key methodological stages not fully addressed. The over-reliance on secondary reports, the limited scope of literature reviewed, and the study's primary focus on Kenya rather than the broader African context weaken its contribution as a comprehensive analysis of journalism across the continent. Furthermore, the absence of a clearly defined problem statement, research objectives, theoretical framework, and assumptions limits the study's academic depth.

To establish journalism as a robust pillar of democracy in Africa, structural reforms must be implemented to enhance press freedom, strengthen media institutions, and safeguard journalistic independence. Addressing systemic weaknesses, including legal restrictions, financial instability, and limited access to reliable

data, is essential for a thriving media landscape. The role of digital platforms in amplifying press freedom also requires further exploration to understand their impact on media ownership, information dissemination, and public discourse.

VI.   Recommendations

Strengthening legal and institutional frameworks. Governments should enact and enforce laws that protect press freedom and prevent censorship. Media regulatory bodies should be independent and free from political interference to ensure fair and transparent governance of the press.

Enhancing journalist safety and protection. Governments and media organizations should implement stronger measures to protect journalists from threats, harassment, and violence. International bodies and human rights organizations should hold states accountable for attacks on journalists.

Promoting media pluralism and independence. Policies should encourage media diversity by supporting the growth of independent and community-based media outlets. Governments should avoid monopolization of media ownership and ensure fair distribution of broadcasting licenses.

Reducing political and economic influence on the press. Media houses should establish financial independence to reduce reliance on state funding, which often leads to editorial control. Media stakeholders should advocate for transparency in media ownership to prevent political influence.

Strengthening Journalistic Ethics and Professionalism. Journalism training institutions should emphasize ethical reporting, fact-checking, and responsible journalism to combat misinformation. Media councils should enforce codes of conduct to maintain high professional standards among journalists.

Addressing the digital transformation of journalism. Governments should create policies that protect online journalists and prevent digital censorship. Media organizations should invest in digital security training for journalists to safeguard against cyber threats.

Encouraging investigative Journalism. Press freedom advocates should support investigative journalism through funding, legal backing, and capacity-building initiatives. International collaborations can help African journalists expose corruption and human rights violations without fear of persecution.

Strengthening Access to Information Laws. Governments should ensure the effective implementation of freedom of information laws to allow journalists and citizens access to public data. Bureaucratic barriers to information access should be removed to improve journalistic transparency.

Combating Fake News and Disinformation. Media literacy programs should be promoted to help the public distinguish between credible news and misinformation. Journalists should be trained to counter disinformation while maintaining ethical reporting standards.

Fostering International Support for Press Freedom African governments should collaborate with international organizations like UNESCO and Reporters Without Borders to uphold press freedom. Global advocacy for imprisoned or persecuted journalists should be strengthened to pressure oppressive regimes.

Ensuring press freedom in Africa requires a multi-faceted approach involving legal protections, media independence, journalist safety, and digital resilience. Governments, civil society, and media stakeholders must work together to create an environment where journalism can thrive as a pillar of democracy.

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