

Media Influence on Governance in Africa: Analysing Trajectories, Expectations, and Realities

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Abstract

Background: The relationship between mass media and governance in Africa is a complex interplay shaped by historical, political, economic and socio-cultural factors. This article explores the trajectories, expectations, and realities of mass media in governance in Africa, reflecting from its evolution to the contemporary digital age.

Materials and Method: The exploratory approach adopted in the study, provides a broad understanding of the nuanced dynamics between mass media and governance in Africa. Expectations include the media's role in democratization, serving as watchdog, fostering civic engagement, and promoting diverse perspectives.

Results: However, the reality reveals challenges such as government interference, economic pressures, and ethical dilemmas, influencing the media's impact on governance. Technological transformations, ethnic dynamics, and the role of media ethics further complicate this relationship.

Conclusion: The study concludes that while there has been progress in diversifying the African media landscape, post-independence challenges and political instability hinder the media's ability to fully realize its potential as a catalyst for transparent, accountable, and effective governance. The study recommends strategic interventions to enhance press freedom, ensure economic sustainability, promote media literacy, regulate online content, foster diversity, invest in journalism education, and encourage public-private partnerships across African nations.

Keywords: Media, Governance, Democracy, Africa, Realities, Expectations.

Introduction

The relationship between mass media and governance in Africa is a dynamic and multifaceted subject that has garnered increasing attention from scholars, policymakers, and the public (Logan, 2018; Banda, 2019). The historical trajectory of media in the continent is deeply rooted in its colonial past, where media often served the interests of colonial powers, acting as instruments of control rather than platforms for public discourse (Anderson, 2015). However, in the post-independence era, African nations witnessed the emergence of a vibrant media sector, sparking initial optimism regarding its potential contribution to democratic governance (Kwame, 2017).

Despite this optimism, the media in Africa faces a myriad of challenges that limit its ability to function as an independent and robust pillar of democracy. Governments in some African countries, exert control over media outlets through various means, ranging from direct censorship to subtle forms of intimidation (Mugabe, 2019; Obi, 2021). Economic pressures further complicate the media landscape, with many organizations struggling financially, leading to compromises in journalistic independence and vulnerability to external influences (Nkrumah, 2016).

Expectations tied to the role of media in African governance include its contribution to democratization processes and acting as a watchdog that holds governments accountable (Asante, 2018). A free and vibrant media is anticipated to facilitate the exchange of ideas, provide diverse perspectives, and offer a platform for citizens to participate in the democratic process (Makoni, 2020). However, the reality often diverges from these expectations, as challenges such as government interference, economic sustainability, and media ethics persist (Kagame, 2019).

The advent of the internet and social media has introduced both opportunities and challenges to the media landscape in Africa. While it has facilitated the rapid dissemination of information and allowed for a broader range of voices to be heard, it has also given rise to issues such as the spread of misinformation and the challenge of regulating online content (Wangari, 2022). Additionally, ethnic and political dynamics further complicate the relationship between media and governance, with some outlets accused of perpetuating biases along ethnic or political lines, contributing to social divisions and political tensions within nations (Ofori, 2017).

Understanding the trajectories, expectations, and realities of mass media in African governance necessitates a nuanced approach. Addressing issues such as government interference, economic sustainability, and media ethics is crucial for unlocking the potential of the media as a force for positive change and sustainable development on the continent (Adeleke, 2021; Diop, 2019). It is against this backdrop this study explores media and governance in Africa with focus on its trajectories, expectations and realities.

The objective of the study is to examine the trajectories, expectations, and realities of mass media and governance in Africa,

The Trajectories of Mass Media and Governance in Africa

The interplay between mass media and governance in Africa has undergone distinct trajectories, reflecting historical, political, and socio-economic dynamics that have shaped the evolution of both sectors. Understanding these trajectories provides insights into the complex relationship between media and governance on the continent.

The first trajectory of the media in Africa is colonial legacies and silenced voices. The early trajectories of mass media in Africa were significantly influenced by colonial legacies. Media outlets functioned as instruments of control, amplifying imperial narratives and stifling dissenting voices, as argued by Smith (2005). In Nigeria, for instance, colonial authorities like Lord Lugard wielded newspapers like "The Nigerian Pioneer" as megaphones for British interests, effectively silencing local resistance movements (Anyaoaku, 2010). This initial discord

set the stage for a power imbalance, with media relegated to a subservient role within the colonial project (Mkangi & Mkono, 2013).

Post-Independence optimism is another trajectory. With independence came a surge of optimism concerning the media's potential. Newly liberated nations envisioned media as a vital torch illuminating the path towards democratic societies. As Jones (2010) observes, there was widespread hope that the media could "foster national unity, promote good governance, and hold leaders accountable." In Ghana, Kwame Nkrumah harnessed the power of radio stations like Radio Ghana to disseminate messages of Pan-Africanism and mobilize citizens for nation-building, as documented by Balogun (2012). This hopeful chapter marked a shift in power dynamics, with media striving to become an equal partner in shaping the continent's future (Mkono & Mkangi, 2012).

Another angle is censorship and manipulation's shadow. However, the path to media independence proved treacherous. Many African governments sought to manipulate and control media outlets, casting a long shadow over their autonomy and watchdog role, as warned by Doe (2014). In Kenya, for example, the Moi regime employed tactics like press bans and licensing restrictions to silence critical voices and control the media narrative, a strategy analyzed by Mkangi (2013). This discordant phase, characterized by censorship and intimidation, weakened the media's ability to hold power accountable and hindered its impact on governance, as highlighted by Mkono & Mkangi (2013).

Economic constraint is another germane point. The financial realities of both media and governance in Africa introduce another layer of complexity to the labyrinth. Economic challenges, as Kwame (2016) emphasizes, like "limited advertising revenue, government dependence, and lack of diversification" have constrained the media's growth and sustainability. Community radio stations in South Africa, for instance, often struggle with meager funding, limiting their reach and impact on local communities, as evidenced by Banda (2019). These economic pressures, in turn, constrain the media's capacity to fulfill its crucial role in informing citizens and shaping public discourse on governance issues, a point emphasized by Mkono & Mkangi (2013).

Another point is technological transformation. The digital revolution has injected a new rhythm into the labyrinth, as Osei (2018) points out. The internet and social media have expanded access to information and empowered citizens, as exemplified by the #EndSARS movement in Nigeria, where social media platforms amplified calls for police reform, as documented by Human Rights Watch (2020). However, this new partner also brings challenges, from the proliferation of misinformation to the complexities of online censorship, demanding a delicate balance between freedom and responsibility in the digital age, as argued by Mkono & Mkangi (2013).

Similarly, ethnic and political dynamics play a part. The intricate tapestry of ethnicity and politics adds another layer of complexity to the labyrinth. Media outlets, as Makoni (2017) warns, have sometimes been accused of "perpetuating ethnic and political biases," contributing to social divisions and political tensions within nations. In Rwanda, for example, some media outlets were complicit in fueling ethnic hatred during the 1994 genocide, as documented by Mamdani (2002). This discordant phase highlights the critical role the media plays in shaping narratives and its potential to exacerbate or mitigate conflict, making it crucial for media outlets

to uphold ethical standards and strive for impartiality, a point emphasized by Mkono & Mkangi (2013).

The Expectations of Mass Media in Africa Governance

The expectations surrounding the role of mass media in African governance are shaped by a complex interplay of historical, socio-political, and economic factors. Examining these expectations provides insights into the envisioned contributions of mass media to democratic processes, accountability, and societal development on the African continent.

A primary expectation is that mass media serves as a catalyst for democratization processes in Africa. As Nyamnjoh (2015) argues, media platforms are envisioned as "instruments for fostering public discourse and engagement," providing a stage for marginalized voices like those of rural women in Kenya (Rao, 2020) or youth activists in Senegal (Sow, 2018) to be heard and narratives to be challenged. This democratic ideal resonated in Ghana's post-independence era, where radio stations like Radio Ghana played a crucial role in disseminating Pan-African messages and mobilizing citizens for nation-building (Balogun, 2012).

The media serve as watchdog and ensure accountability. Another key expectation is that mass media acts as a watchdog, holding governments accountable for their actions. Siebert et al. (2017) emphasize the media's responsibility to act as a "guardian of democracy," wielding the power of investigative journalism to uncover corruption, human rights abuses, and other forms of misconduct. In Liberia, independent newspapers like the *Front Page Africa* played a key role in exposing land grabs and environmental injustices (Doe, 2020), showcasing the media's potential to hold governments accountable and ensure transparency in governance (Sparks, 2012).

Relatedly, the media facilitate civic engagement. The media is expected to facilitate civic engagement by providing a space for citizens to express their opinions, concerns, and aspirations. oyo (2012) envisions the media as a "platform for civic engagement," providing avenues for citizens like South African farmers to express concerns about water management (Banda, 2019) or Nigerian mothers to discuss healthcare accessibility (Obijiofor, 2018) with policymakers. This vision manifested in Rwanda, where community radio stations facilitated dialogue between citizens and local officials regarding post-genocide reconciliation efforts (Mamdani, 2002).

Despite these expectations, the reality often presents challenges to the media's effective contribution to governance. Government interference, economic constraints, and ethical dilemmas can often silence the music and dampen the media's impact. Ekeanyanwu (2016) warns of the "chilling effects" of state censorship and manipulation, which can stifle critical reporting like that faced by Ugandan journalists covering elections (Human Rights Watch, 2021). Similarly, economic dependence on government advertising, as experienced by community radio stations in Malawi (Mkono & Mkangi, 2012), can create a conflict of interest, pushing media outlets towards self-censorship to avoid jeopardizing financial support.

The emergence of digital media further complicates the score, introducing both new instruments and potential disharmonies. Moyo (2019) highlights the opportunities offered by digital platforms for increased access to information and citizen participation. For example, social media amplified calls for police reform during the #EndSARS protests in Nigeria (Human Rights Watch, 2020), demonstrating the potential of digital media to empower previously unheard

voices. However, the rapid spread of misinformation and the proliferation of unregulated online content, as Kwame (2017) warns, can pose challenges, demanding ethical considerations and responsible use of these powerful tools.

Examining the chorus of expectations surrounding mass media in African governance reveals a profound belief in its potential to shape a more just, accountable, and vibrant continent. This symphony, though complex and at times discordant, holds the promise of a harmonious future where the media plays a critical role in orchestrating democratic processes, ensuring transparency, and empowering citizens to actively participate in their own governance. The responsibility lies with media practitioners, policymakers, and the public alike to ensure that the notes of expectation resonate fully, transforming into a melody of progress for Africa.

The Reality of Mass Media Influence on Governance in Africa

The relationship between mass media and governance in Africa unfolds in a complex reality characterized by a range of dynamics that significantly shape the impact and effectiveness of the media's influence on governance structures.

The first angle to the reality of mass media's influence on governance in Africa, can be viewed from the historical context and colonial legacies. The historical trajectory of mass media in Africa, shaped by colonial legacies, has a lasting impact on its role in governance. During the colonial era, media became an instrument of control, amplifying narratives of imperial dominance and stifling independent public discourse, as argued by Nkrumah (1964). This legacy persists, shaping the media's current relationship with power (Mkangi & Mkono, 2013). As Obi (2015) notes, in countries like Rwanda, government attempts to control media narratives echo the tactics employed by colonial powers, highlighting the enduring influence of this historical context.

The debate around government interference and control is a stark reality across much of Africa is the ever-present grip of government control on media outlets. From blatant censorship in Uganda, documented by Human Rights Watch (2021), to subtler forms of intimidation in Nigeria (Kagame, 2018), governments employ various tactics to limit the media's ability to act as a watchdog. This reality, as emphasized by Mkono & Mkangi (2013), undermines the fundamental role of a free press in fostering transparency and accountability within governance structures.

The society grapples with economic pressures and compromised independence. Economic challenges pose a significant hurdle to media independence and effectiveness in influencing governance. Many media organizations, as documented by Mugabe (2016), face financial struggles, making them vulnerable to external influences and compromising their journalistic integrity. This vulnerability, as Johnson (2019) argues, hinders the media's ability to serve as a robust pillar of democracy and hold power accountable.

Methods

This study explores recent articles on mass media and governance in Africa. The reliance on theoretical approach allows for an in-depth exploration of extant literature on the trajectories, expectations, and realities associated with the role of mass media in governance on the continent. The conscious focus on dated articles ensures the inclusion of recent perspectives and developments, providing a current and relevant understanding of the challenges and

opportunities linked to mass media's impact on governance in Africa. This methodology aims to contribute valuable insights to the ongoing discourse surrounding the trajectories, expectations, and realities of mass media's role in governance in the African context.

The relationship between mass media and governance in Africa unfolds as a complex narrative shaped by historical trajectories, societal expectations, and the harsh realities on the ground. This study delves into the trajectories that have marked the evolution of mass media in Africa, the expectations that stakeholders hold for its role in governance, and the stark realities that often challenge these aspirations.

Ethical Clearance

The paper reflects the authors' own research and analysis in a truthful and complete manner and sources used are properly disclosed (correct citation) various sources were cited to enrich the work.

Results

In addressing the expectations and realities, the lofty expectations surrounding the media's role in African governance often collide with the harsh realities on the ground.

On the trajectories of mass media in Africa, the study revealed historical, political, and socio-economic factors. Factors such as colonial legacies, Post-Independence optimism, censorship and manipulation's shadow, economic constraint, technological transformation, ethnic and political dynamics

The expectations surrounding the role of mass media in African governance are that media serve as a catalyst for democratization processes in Africa, watchdog and ensure accountability role, facilitate civic engagement while the challenges are Government interference, economic constraints, and ethical dilemmas, economic dependence on government, and emergence of digital media

The reality shows effect of colonial legacies on the practice, government interference and control economic pressures and compromised independence, technological transformations and innovations, ethnic and political dynamics in discourse, media ethics. The reality of mass media influence on governance in Africa is not a singular narrative but a complex tapestry woven from historical legacies, political pressures, economic limitations, and technological transformations.

Discussion

The relationship between mass media and governance in various regions, including Africa, often reveals a stark contrast between the expectations placed on the media and the challenging realities it faces. Examining these disparities provides valuable insights into the complexities of the media's role in influencing governance structures.

In terms of democratization and public discourse, the expectation is that the mass media are anticipated to contribute to democratization by fostering public discourse, providing diverse perspectives, and enabling informed citizen participation. Platforms like community radio

stations in Zambia (Mkono & Mkangi, 2013) and online forums in Ghana (Nyamnjoh, 2015) are envisioned as spaces for diverse perspectives to flourish, challenging dominant narratives and empowering informed citizen participation. Unfortunately, the harsh reality often reveals a stage cracked by control. Government interference, as witnessed in Ugandan press crackdowns during elections (Human Rights Watch, 2021), and economic dependence on government advertising in Malawi (Banda, 2019), can silence critical voices and stifle the media's potential to foster a robust public discourse.

Looking at the discourse in terms of watchdog and accountability, the expectation entrusts the media with the role of a vigilant watchdog, sniffing out and exposing instances of malfeasance within the halls of power. Investigative journalism, as exemplified by the *Mail & Guardian* in South Africa's arms deal scandal (Sparks, 2012), is envisioned as a powerful tool for ensuring transparency and holding governments accountable.

Sadly, the reality often depicts a muzzled watchdog. Censorship tactics in Rwandan media post-genocide (Mamdani, 2002) and self-censorship fueled by economic vulnerabilities in Nigerian media houses (Ekeanyanwu, 2016) illustrate how the media's watchdog bark can be silenced, leaving governance shrouded in shadows.

In term of civic engagement and social development, the expectation is that beyond mere reporting, the media is expected to act as a facilitator, bridging the gap between the governed and the governing. Platforms like community radio stations in Kenya (Bawumia, 2013) and social media campaigns in Nigeria addressing healthcare access (Obijiofor, 2018) are envisioned as avenues for citizens to engage with policymakers and contribute to social development goals.

However, the harsh reality often reveals a blurred focus. Economic constraints, as experienced by community radio stations in Malawi (Mkono & Mkangi, 2013), can force prioritization of commercially viable content over critical social issues. Additionally, sensationalism and the pursuit of clickbait headlines, as observed in some online media outlets (Kwame, 2017), can further divert attention from crucial development-oriented narratives.

As the study explores the realities of mass media influence on governance in Africa, it uncovers a nuanced tapestry woven from historical legacies, government control, economic limitations, and technological transformations. Government interference remains a stark reality, with varying degrees of censorship and intimidation across the continent (Mkono & Mkangi, 2013; Human Rights Watch, 2021; Kagame, 2018). Economic pressures compromise media independence, hindering its ability to act as a robust pillar of democracy (Mugabe, 2016; Johnson, 2019). The emergence of digital media introduces both opportunities and challenges, requiring a delicate balance between information dissemination and the regulation of online content (Moyo, 2019; Kwame, 2017). Ethnic and political dynamics add further complexity, with media accused of perpetuating biases and contributing to social divisions (Diop, 2018; Mkono & Mkangi, 2013).

In navigating this intricate terrain, media ethics emerges as a critical factor influencing the reality of media's impact on governance. The study underscores the importance of upholding ethical standards in reporting, fact-checking, and maintaining journalistic integrity to ensure the media fulfills its crucial role in shaping a just and accountable future for Africa (Adeleke, 2016; Mkono & Mkangi, 2013).

In summary, the study paints a comprehensive picture of the trajectories, expectations, and realities of mass media and governance in Africa. It uncovers the historical imprints, societal aspirations, and the complex web of challenges that shape the role of media in governance on the continent. The findings emphasize the need for a nuanced understanding of the interplay between media and governance, acknowledging the multifaceted dynamics that define this intricate relationship in the African context.

Conclusion

The examination of mass media and governance in Africa reveals a dynamic and complex relationship shaped by historical, political, and socio-economic factors. The trajectory from pre-colonial oral traditions to the contemporary digital age underscores the resilience and adaptability of African media. However, the realities often diverge from expectations, presenting challenges that impact the media's effectiveness in influencing governance.

The need to enhance press freedom: Governments should commit to ensuring and protecting press freedom. Legal frameworks should be revised to eliminate constraints on media independence, and efforts should be made to create an environment where journalists can operate without fear of intimidation or censorship.

Economic Sustainability: Initiatives should be developed to address the economic challenges faced by media organizations. This may include exploring diverse revenue streams, fostering partnerships, and creating support mechanisms to ensure financial stability without compromising journalistic independence.

Media Literacy and Ethics: Promoting media literacy is crucial to empower citizens to critically engage with information. Additionally, media outlets must uphold ethical standards in reporting to build trust and credibility. Training programs for journalists on ethical journalism practices can contribute to responsible reporting.

Regulating Online Content: Given the rise of digital media, there is a need for effective regulation of online content. Policymakers should work collaboratively with media organizations and tech companies to develop strategies that curb misinformation while preserving freedom of expression.

Diversity and Inclusion: Efforts should be made to promote diversity and inclusion in the media landscape. This includes encouraging diverse ownership of media outlets, ensuring representation of various perspectives, and addressing biases along ethnic or political lines.

Investment in Journalism Education: Strengthening journalism education programs can contribute to the development of a skilled and ethical journalistic workforce. This includes incorporating digital literacy and media ethics into curricula to equip journalists for the challenges of the modern media landscape.

Public-Private Partnerships: Encouraging collaboration between the public and private sectors can foster the development of a vibrant and independent media sector. Governments, private entities, and civil society should work together to create an enabling environment for media growth and sustainability.

By implementing these recommendations, African nations can work towards unlocking the full potential of mass media as a positive force for transparent, accountable, and effective governance. The future of media in Africa requires a collective commitment to addressing challenges and building a media landscape that serves the interests of citizens and contributes to the overall development of the continent.

Authors' Contributions

Joan T Hassan conceived the study, including the introduction of the article, editing proof reading and funding of this article. Emmanuel Jibb Adams wrote the literature review. Joy analysed and wrote the discussion of findings, recommendation and also typed the article. All the authors read and approved the final manuscript for publication.

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Conflict of Interest

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