

chapter 1

CONCEPTUALIZING MEDIA AND DEVELOPMENT

Samuel W. Kiiru

Introduction

Mass media is a term used to denote a section of the media specifically envisioned and designed to reach a very large audience such as the population of a nation state. It was coined in the 1920s with the advent of nationwide radio networks, mass-circulation newspapers and magazines, although mass media was present centuries before the term became common. The term public media has a similar meaning: It is the sum of the public mass distributors of news and entertainment across such media as newspapers, television, radio, broadcasting, which may require union membership further by the large markets such as Newspaper Guild, the American Federation of Television and Radio Artists (AFTRA) and text publishers. The concept of mass media is

complicated further by the emergence of ICT and convergence such that internet media is available to individuals as a means of potential exposure on a scale incomparable to what was previously restricted to select a group of mass media producers.

The communications audience has been viewed by some commentators as forming a mass society with special characteristics, notably atomization or lack of social connections, which render it especially susceptible to the influence of modern mass-media techniques such as advertising and propaganda. The term "MSM" or "mainstream media" has been widely used in the discussion of the mass media and media bias. Mass media can be used for various purposes. One way is advocacy, both for business and social concerns. This can include advertising, marketing, propaganda, public relations and political communication. The other way in which the media can be used is for enrichment and education. Thirdly, the media can be used for entertainment, traditionally through performances or acting, music and sports, along with light reading. The mass media is also used for public service announcements. While the above amount to some of the positive ways in which the media can be used, it is also said to be 'central', which implies: (i) Inability to transmit tacit knowledge; (ii) The manipulation of large groups of people through media outlets, for the benefit of a particular political party and/or group of people; (iii) Sometimes the media becomes the message; (iv) Being biased, political or otherwise, towards favoring a certain individual, outcome or resolution of an event; and (v) The corporate media is not a watchdog protecting the public from the powerful, but rather a lapdog begging for scraps.

Journalism is the discipline of collecting, analyzing, verifying and presenting information regarding current events, trends, issues and people. News-oriented journalism is sometimes described as the "first rough draft of history" (attributed to Phil Graham), because journalists often record important events, producing news articles

on short deadlines. While under pressure to be first with their stories, news media organizations usually edit and proofread their reports prior to publication, adhering to each organization's standards of accuracy, quality and style.

Many news organizations claim proud traditions of holding government officials and institutions accountable to the public, while media critics have raised questions about holding the press itself accountable.

Over the last two decades or so, there has been a growing interest in the mass media and communication in Africa. Most of such interests have been directed on media freedom and democracy. The growth in democracy witnessed in most countries of Sub-Saharan Africa since the early 1990s has also been a watershed in the growth of media houses and training institutions in the region. This has explicitly been made possible by the liberalization of the “air waves”. In short, the media, as a sector, has been liberalized, with the government increasingly taking a backseat position in the affairs of managing information in the region. In other words, liberalization in the media has, in turn, triggered the growth of both actors and trainers in the sector to tap into the fortunes of a growing sector. The result of the high rates of growth in the number of actors and training institutions has shifted concern from one of freedom and democracy to one of responsible and professional journalism.

It is with this in mind that the School of Journalism and Mass Communication of the University of Nairobi organised and held a stakeholders workshop on “Excellence in Communication, Media Training and Practice in East Africa” between the 9th and 11th of April 2008.