

A Search for an Appropriate Communications Model for Media in New Democracies in Africa

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A decade after much of Africa embraced democratic governance, the African *print* media still operates using the old model of communication that is paternalistic and non-inclusive. As the continent develops democratic institutions and a civic culture, the print media needs to adopt a new and democratic communications model in order to serve as a public sphere that promotes public deliberation. Using a case study of a Kenyan print media organization as an example of the paternalistic model, this research identifies three normative media theories and a popular model of civic engagement to sketch out a new communications model — the social-democratic communications model — that is more democratic and rooted in African history and culture. The new model treats information not as a commodity, but as a social product generated in a deliberative public sphere. The article suggests expanding the notion of public sphere to include traditional African public spaces, such as marketplaces, and calls for new and innovative ways of capturing public dialogue.

Introduction

Communications scholar Patrick O'Neil notes in his book, *Communicating Democracy*, that despite the monumental democratic changes that have taken place in Eastern Europe and Africa in the last decade, there appears to be a glaring omission in scholarly literature explaining the role that the media can play in these societies that are in transition (O'Neil, 1998). The time has come, O'Neil says, for scholars in these societies to begin to write, from their own perspectives, explanations of the role that media are playing in these changes. O'Neil implies that these societies have, for a long time, relied on Western scholars to provide the theoretical frameworks, both for their own development efforts and for the role of the media in those efforts. This seems to suggest that each society is unique, and that there is need for situation-specific research. His challenge remains unanswered in the 21st century, and the present research hopes to engage in such an undertaking by looking at ideas which could possibly be synthesized with the African reality to produce an appropriate communications model for the media. This article sketches out a communications model inspired by the culture and history of Africa.

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In the 1990s, nearly three-quarters of African countries experienced upheavals in the form of protests and demands for more open systems of governments that would adequately meet development and societal needs. The demand for change had both external and internal causes. Externally, in early 1990s, the strategic importance of Africa declined in the eyes of the West after the fall of Communism (Monga, 1996; Nzongola-Ntalaja, 1997). The new Eastern European states were now competing for Western aid alongside African states. While, in the past, aid to Africa was largely allocated on the basis of African countries' loyalty to Western allies, donor nations adopted different aid conditions in the 1990s. Arguing that after 30 years of receiving aid, Africa had little to show for it, donors insisted that African governments now had to be transparent and accountable in the management of their political and economic affairs (World Bank, 1989; Ndegwa, 1996). These values, they insisted, could only be achieved in a democratic environment.

The demand for change could be seen internally by the fact that the wave of independence in the Eastern bloc had caught on in various African countries, leading to massive protests and demands for more democratic political systems (Monga, 1996; Siddiqui, 1997). Today, nearly all African countries have given in to these demands and have embarked on a faltering process of democratization. This has often been done by adopting a multi-party political system followed by general elections. Over the years, the emphasis has shifted from elections to building institutions which may support African democracy. One such institution is a free and independent media. Given the fact that the mass protests that led to democratization were inspired by a mass quest for democratic and inclusive governance, the search for an appropriate communications model must look at how well the media is capturing and including the public's voice in stories. A recent article on Africa's faltering democratization (Joseph, 2008) argues that democracy promotion in Africa ran squarely into the sobering reality of devastatingly weak states incapable of providing such basic public goods as health care, education, clean water, electrical power, physical security, and decent transport infrastructure because the institutions required to provide them are constantly being eroded from within. This means that, to bridge the chasm between the people's fundamental aspirations and the enormous institutional debilities, the media must constantly strive to capture and channel the people's voices. While electronic media such as radio and the Internet have incorporated the public voice into their programming in the last decade (Hyden, Leslie, & Ogundimu, 2002), the print media continue to use a paternalistic, top-down approach.

Historical Context of African Media

But first, it is important to sketch out a context of the environment in which the African media has operated, a history that is likely to inform its evolution. The history of African media is closely tied to political events on the continent. Eribo and Ebot (1997) argue that, to properly understand African media, one must examine that media within the continent's historical context, where obstacles and solutions ultimately lie. Under the colonial structure, from 1898 to 1960, the media were used to integrate African economies and peoples into the international market economy for the benefit of the colonial rulers. Under independent African governments between 1960 and 1990, the media were harnessed for the causes of nationalism and nation-building (Heath, 1997). During the clamor for democracy in the 1990s, independent media emerged in the forefront of the campaign for democratic governments. The African

media, therefore, have engaged in contradictory missions since their inception, because their history has always been tied to the political history of the African continent.

With the advent of independence from colonialism in the 1960s, a majority of media houses in Africa fell under the control of African governments, either as parastatals (government-owned corporations) or as departments directly under the ministries of information. At the time, development communication scholars argued that media influence could be a magic multiplier for development through dissemination of new development knowledge (Lerner, 1958; Schramm, 1964; Rogers 1967). According to these scholars, the media's enormous reach, and especially that of radio, would be used to spread information that could be adopted to achieve development. The state would, in turn, play an altruistic role, controlling the media for use in national priorities. Over time, as development projects failed throughout the continent, this scenario did not work out; instead, the media, in the hands of the state, became a powerful instrument to disseminate political propaganda for the ruling élite (Rønning, 1994).

As the post-independence African rulers went about consolidating power, they found a powerful ally in the state-controlled media, which were turned into mouthpieces of the ruling class. Nevertheless, like the introduction of one-party rule in post-independence Africa, the co-option of the media into the political system appears to have begun with good intentions, at least in the initial stages.

The new African leaders inherited states that were divided along ethnic lines and saddled with poor economies (Lamb, 1984). National unity and development became the first priority of African governments, and the new leaders felt that the interests of each nation would be best served under the umbrella organization of one party for the sake of creating cohesive nations. The new leaders determined that radio was the most appropriate medium to take the message of national unity and development to the outlying rural areas most poorly served by infrastructure, where more than 70% of the rural populations lived. Political and development programs were packaged with the sole purpose of achieving national development (Ayittey, 1992).

In Ghana, for example, like in a majority of African states, the government expected the media to play the role of a partner in development, not to engage in traditional (Western-style) journalism. The Minister of Information spelled out the mission: "What we need in Ghana today is a journalist who sees himself as a contributor to national development. This country does not need watchdogs" (ibid.).

In socialist Tanzania, the government-owned Tanzania Broadcasting Corporation was extremely successful with daily programs on *ujamaa* that touted the virtues of African socialism and created a sense of brotherhood and nationhood. Eribo and Ebot (1997) note that radio and television programs were used to instruct people how to dig boreholes and construct such basic necessities as toilets, as well as to popularize immunization and adult literacy programs, efforts which were all part of the national development agenda. As a culmination of these efforts, the grand vision of a united continent, which had been so gallantly championed by President Kwame Nkrumah under the banner of Pan-Africanism, was further advanced through the creation of a continental news agency. Consequently, in 1964, the Pan-African News Agency (PANA) was formed to depict Africa in a favorable manner for the eyes of the world.

A Legacy of Censorship

When these various development efforts began to fail throughout Africa, the one-party systems or military regimes increasingly turned despotic and further compromised the media as an ally in the march toward tyranny. Ayittey (1992) notes that, in nearly all African countries in the second and third decades of independence (the 1970s and 1980s), news broadcasts often led with stories of the omnipotent head of state. Independent voices in the media were heavily censored, banned, or silenced.

Hatchen (1993) writes that, under such a climate of government control, African media failed to grow and prosper because African governments failed to provide and promote the political and economic climate which would lead to independent, critical, and economically viable media. Similar studies done over time on African media have persistently pointed to the frustrating grip that governments have on the media. Mytton's (1983) analysis of the role of the media, particularly radio and television in Africa, provides a few case studies indicating that, while radio may be capable of speaking directly to large audiences, centralization and political control often led to less freedom to question government policies.

According to the London-based International Press Institute, by the mid-1960s, there were 299 daily newspapers in Africa. By the early 1980s, only about 150 of these dailies were still in circulation. Nine countries had no newspapers at all (Ayittey, 1992). The need and desperation to control the press was best captured in an interview with Nigerian broadcast minister Alex Akinyele which appeared in the London-based *New Internationalist* publication: "I don't censor them. Let them (Nigerian journalists) write what they want to write. But if anybody does anything that is against the national interest that person will have to answer questions. To criticize Nigeria is to criticize God." (New Internationalist, 1989)

In his book, *The Africans* (1984), Lamb offered one of the best accounts of the relationship between media and the states in Africa:

President Banda of Malawi jailed virtually the whole non-governmental press corps in the mid-seventies. President Kenneth Kaunda appoints and fires editors in Zambia; in Uganda and Zaire, journalists shuttle in and out of jail so regularly that their wives don't even ask where they have been when they reappear after an absence of several days. Equatorial Guinea's president Marcias Nguema went a step further: by the time he was overthrown and killed in 1979, all journalists of note had been executed or were in exile. (p. 246)

Throughout Africa, the pattern of censorship was repeated as different regimes moved to silence dissenting voices and criticism. By 1988, the then-director of the Pan-African News Agency, Auguste Mpassi-Muba, was vehemently speaking out against the rampant state censorship in Africa:

It is high time the official, controlled, censored, muzzled or partisan news agency gives way in Africa to news based on the diversity of opinions and ideas with free access to

the various sources of official and unofficial information. The one party states always want to control information. (World Development Forum, January 1988, p. 3)

In Ghana in 1989, the government revoked the registration of all newspapers and magazines and required them to apply anew for licenses, complete with the details of publishers' and editors' names, addresses, and sources of funding, all in an attempt to consolidate power by controlling the press.

In Mozambique in 1990, Jose Catorze, the director general of Mozambique's *Official Noticias*, was summarily dismissed on the grounds that he had published distorted views of the transformations taking place in Eastern Europe (Hussein, 1990). The government, which funded the paper, accused him of playing up the role of demonstrators in bringing down regimes in Eastern Europe.

Gradually, the unwritten media rule became one of toeing the government line or engaging in self-censorship. Those who refused suffered the consequences. In Uganda, for instance, when three journalists asked visiting Zambian President Kenneth Kaunda questions that the ruling government of President Museveni considered embarrassing, the Ugandan President retaliated by having the journalists arrested and charged with defaming a foreign dignitary. In Cameroon, President Paul Biya's government, under severe criticism by the press, drew up a hit list in 1992 that included Pius Njawe, one of Cameroon's top journalists and publisher of *Le Messenger* newspaper (*Africa Report*, May-June 1993, p. 60).

Kenya, too, like the other African countries, wasn't treating its best writers well. In 1978, novelist Ngugi wa Thiong'o was indefinitely detained for his literary works, which were seen as advocating socialism. He spent one year behind bars. In Cameroon, writer Mongo Beti, returning after 18 years in France, was subjected to public humiliation and ridicule through the media after making unflattering remarks against the government of Paul Biya (Monga, 1996). The President of Cameroon let it be known that Beti was not a real man, in the traditional sense, since he did not have his own house in Cameroon.

Price of Censorship on Africa's Development

Such censorship of the press and literary personnel exacted a heavy price on African countries and their national development. First, it meant that there were fewer voices discussing homegrown solutions to local and national problems. Second, it led to an over-reliance on foreign or external prescriptions for internal woes, such as the application of Western paradigms, which were not always in line with Africa's internal structures and heritage. Third, it meant that African countries relied more and more on expatriates who were heavily compensated for services that locals could comfortably provide. By 1992, African countries were spending \$4 billion annually from donor funds to pay the expatriates. It is perhaps not a coincidence that Botswana, which has allowed a relatively free press to operate since it gained independence, enjoys a prosperous economy with a growth rate that has averaged 8.8% annually (Ayittey, 1992).

But there is an even heavier price that African countries have paid as a result of the lack of freedom of expression and their preference for expatriates. For four decades, Africa has continued to experience a heavy brain drain of its best and brightest, who leave for greener pastures in the West.

Attracted by higher wages, better working conditions, and a more accommodating environment, many of them have left, never to return, while African institutions, such as universities and industries, decay from a lack of qualified manpower. According to the World Bank, by 1991, about 100,000 highly educated Africans had left Africa for the United States and Europe (World Bank, 1991).

In 1991, in response to the intellectual and institutional decay afflicting Africa, the World Bank, The United Nations Development Program (UNDP), and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) embarked on a \$240 million program for intellectual capacity-building in Africa. Its purpose was to rehabilitate Africa's universities and other institutions of higher learning. It was, however, beyond the scope of the project to assure these institutions of the freedom of expression so necessary in intellectual pursuits (Ayittey, 1992).

Democratization and the Media

By the early 1990s, the winds of political change began to blow across the African continent. Faced with underperforming economies, a declining standard of living, and repressive regimes that curtailed basic freedoms, Africans in various countries held massive protests and demanded more democratic governments (Bratton & de Walle, 1997). Predictably, the state-controlled and independent media were sharply divided by these events. On the one hand, the state-controlled media lashed out at the demonstrators and multi-party advocates as *agent provocateurs* who were being used by foreign powers to cause trouble in their own countries. The independent media, on the other hand, emerged in the forefront of the campaign for democracy. In Nigeria, for instance, periodic underground publications developed a pattern of publishing with no fixed abode. Whenever a new issue hit the streets, they would move their base to a new town hundreds of miles away, operating from there for a while before moving on again.

In 1991, Media practitioners from across Africa met in Windhoek, Namibia, to discuss the changes toward democracy. They adopted what became known as the Windhoek Declaration, which supported an independent and pluralistic press in African countries. It stated that, consistent with article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the fostering of an independent, pluralistic press in Africa was essential to the development of democracy and economic development on the continent (Nkamba, 1993). The enthusiasm that accompanied the wave of democratization in the early 1990s, along with financial support from donors, saw the creation of more than 200 newspapers, magazines, and other publications in African countries, some of which died off quickly. Many of these, though, took advantage of the expanding freedom of expression to become the first independent media in their countries (Ayittey, 1992).

More than a decade later, the media's role in the democratization process is still evolving. There seems to be a pattern of allowing the existence of a relatively free and privately-owned independent press while retaining government ownership of radio and television. But what is needed is public-service broadcasting, not merely the creation of private radio stations (Kasoma, 2000). Such public service broadcasting appears to be taking shape in Namibia and South Africa, which offer the best examples in Africa of countries that have taken steps toward institutionalizing independent broadcasting (Davidson,

2004). Namibian law guarantees the independence of the Namibian Broadcasting Corporation, and new laws permit the creation of private radio and television stations. In South Africa, the Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA) is in charge of licensing radio stations. One of its notable missions is to bring the media closer to the people by licensing community radio stations.

Apart from the two promising examples in Namibia and South Africa, the scenario for an independent media, especially broadcast media, is gloomy in most African countries. While the brazen propaganda broadcasts of yesteryear may have been blunted slightly, African governments have attempted to manipulate media (mainly through ownership and advertising) to control the transition process. Barkan and Gordon (1998) suggest that there has been both an unnecessary emphasis on the development of political parties as the way to democracy, and a lack of emphasis on the development of institutions to support democracy, such as civic organizations and a free and independent media.

Radio remains the main medium through which people in African countries receive information. UNESCO reports that average radio usage throughout Africa is 145 transmitters per 1,000 people. Among the advantages of the radio medium is that literacy is not a requirement, as it is for newspaper consumption. Rønnig (1994) notes that radio is a very democratic medium when used in a decentralized manner, because it gives local people and communities an opportunity to express their grievances in representative discussions. But such an argument, however, presupposes the establishment of decentralized structures and the establishment of local and community radio stations, as well as an absence of the intrusive presence of government in the broadcasting sector.

Community radio stations are just beginning to crop up in a few African countries, such as Uganda and South Africa, but their potential in nurturing democracy is worth noting. Radio, with its massive outreach, still remains largely in the hands of African governments. In most countries where private stations have been allowed, these have tended to largely become music and entertainment channels with no civic education programs, either for their own self-preservation, or due to licensing restrictions. The spread of television has faced greater obstacles than other mediums in Africa, due to the prohibitive startup and subscription costs.

Writing in the journal *Index on Censorship*, media scholar Paul Ansah (1991), who has written widely on African media, identifies three major crises facing African media today: the crisis of power, the crisis of ownership, and the crisis of resources. He argues that the crisis of power is two sided; the weakness of the state is related to the weakness of the media themselves. First, weak states are suspicious of the media as agents of dissent. Thus, states attempt to control media through censorship, economic rewards for media owners toeing the line, and reprisals against those who don't. Second, he argues that African states are characterized by low legitimacy. The state apparatus is dependent on various forms of clientelism upholding social cohesion. This contrasts with democracies where political cohesion is upheld through institutions and a consensus-building process in which the media play a central role in mediating between views and opinions. In weak states, the media are often directly linked to the state apparatus, because state officials constantly appear in media stories.

Ansah adds that, apart from radio, the rest of the media are weak in their relationship to the state, due to low penetration of society (they reach only a small proportion of the population). They also serve a small market due to economic reasons: The majority cannot afford to be regular media users due to illiteracy, underdeveloped infrastructures, and poor distribution systems. Also, professional media organizations are weak and ineffective after years of operating in environments that were restrictive.

Referring to the crisis of ownership, Ansah argues that most African media are owned or economically controlled by the state. In certain cases, independent media are owned by international conglomerates with national and regional interests, such as Lonrho. If indigenously owned, they are undercapitalized and dependent on state decisions, such as access to foreign currency for machinery, spare parts, and paper. Their weak economic base makes them unable to withstand legal or economic onslaughts. Some are dependent on donor funding, which makes them vulnerable to donor agendas and takes away the incentive for them to be economically independent.

The third crisis that Ansah identifies is inadequate resources. In particular, he focuses on inadequate education and training when compared to international standards, as well as a shortage of materials. Together, these shortcomings hamper media development and curtail the media's ability to produce products that can compete internationally. Such a lack of resources also makes them vulnerable to state machinations.

Such constraints on the media must be taken into consideration when studying the role of the African media in democratization efforts. Along these lines, media scholar Helge Rønning (1994) argues that too much emphasis has been placed on the state and its negative influences on the media. According to Rønning, the solution has invariably been seen as privatization and a complete opening-up to market forces. He notes that the problematic role of the market in relation to the media has been underplayed, and thus, little attention has been given to media and citizen's rights. This is an important point to the present research, which seeks to find a viable model for the media to serve as a public sphere that provides citizens with the opportunity to both deliberate on important issues, and be heard by policy makers.

All the issues raised above support the contention that the media in Africa are relatively constrained by structural, state, and economic factors. As a consequence, the media's ability to play a bigger role in the democratization process is limited. But the print media operate under less censorship, and they would be relatively free to open up their pages as public spaces. It is therefore important to examine whether there are any attempts by the print media to do so, and to find out if any such attempt has anything to do with how well media practitioners have been trained and prepared to facilitate the changes.

Media Training and Assistance

The emerging independent media in Africa received support from the International Program for the Development of Communication (IPDC), which launched a \$10 million project in 1990. The goal of

IPDC, which was an inter-governmental project involving several Western governments, was to provide desktop publishing facilities, journalism training, and start-up capital to 120 newspapers in 46 Sub-Saharan African countries. Unfortunately, by 1991, it had been riddled with poor administration, and some of the donors had yet to honor their pledges (Richard, 1992).

This project and its potential have a powerful parallel in history. At the height of the struggle to end communism in Poland, the publishers of *Le Monde* in France donated their old printing equipment to dissident Lech Walesa's Solidarity movement. This soon turned out to be one of the most significant acts of Western assistance (Monga, 1996). It enabled the movement to counter the propaganda of government-owned media, propagate its ideas, and mobilize support. The private press in Africa could no doubt benefit greatly from similar donations. IPDC continues to support the growth of independent and community media in Africa.

In recent years, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) has emerged as the key player in media support and training programs in African countries, including Kenya, Uganda, and Zambia. Over the last decade, USAID has, through its democratic governance project, organized training seminars throughout Africa aimed at increasing the professional skills of journalists. USAID has also been instrumental in helping establish a legal and policy framework to nurture independent media. Although some scholars, such as Friedman (1995), have questioned the strategy and wisdom of engineering the growth of civil society, USAID's efforts are worth noting because they illustrate the best-coordinated training effort replicated in a number of countries. But as noted earlier, this training is in traditional journalism practices and skills that are not necessarily geared toward tapping into community voices.

African Media in the Age of Democratization

The period since the Windhoek Declaration has been followed by greater liberalization of the media landscape. A recent World Bank study assessing the status of the media in Africa found that the sector was undergoing significant reforms due to democratization, globalization, and the availability of new technologies, but that the sector needs policy reforms that can align the changes to the aspirations of these societies (BBC World Service Trust, 2006). The study found that radio was still the most widely used medium, with government controlled radio services commanding the biggest audiences, followed by commercial and community stations, respectively. Newspapers and television stations are still largely confined to urban areas. There has also been a spectacular adoption of mobile telephony that far exceeds the uptake of the Internet. But the study found that, while the new technologies have the potential to significantly alter the media landscape in Africa, policy reforms lack a strategic perspective, and they have not created a link between the technology and efforts to improve governance. A similar study asserts that the era of democratization in Africa has come to be defined by the emergence of five trends (Boafo, 2001). These are: (1) a growing awareness about the links between freedom of speech, free press, and democracy; (2) reinforcement of independent and pluralistic newspapers; (3) liberalization of the airwaves; (4) development and reinforcement of regional organizations of media professionals; and (5) training and human resources development. A majority of African countries now allow for private ownership of electronic media, which has resulted in a proliferation of national, regional, and community-

based FM stations. While concentrating heavily on music, sports, and religion, these outlets also sponsor independent news analysis and interactive forums for discussing public affairs (Hyden, Leslie, & Ogundimu, 2002). The same period has witnessed a rapid increase in the number of independent and privately-owned newspapers and magazines, even in countries where these were not previously allowed. Organizations such as UNESCO, the European Union, the Ford Foundation, the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, and the International Organization of la Francophonie have funded many of these initiatives and encouraged the growth of professionalism in media houses. But while all these studies note the growing interactivity in the electronic media programming, they are silent on the appropriate communication model suitable for newspapers in the new age. Therein lies the crux of the matter that is at the heart of this research. The print media industry appears to have focused on skills and professional training, retaining a traditional and paternalistic approach to communication that is non-inclusive and lets editors define the agenda for the rest of the population.

The Search for a Suitable Communications Model

Given the history of African media and the fact that African democracy was inspired by economic and political concerns, it follows that a suitable communications model must be located at the intersection of media, development, and democracy. It must be a model that is capable of capturing and articulating aspirations and expectations at the grassroots level, a model that maps a horizontally-dispersed media that is accessible at the grassroots level, and that serves as a public sphere for public deliberation. In an effort to develop an appropriate communications model that will best serve young African democracies, this paper interrogates three promising normative theories and one relevant model to see what they have to offer in terms of providing a framework for African media. These are the social responsibility theory, the democratic-participant theory, the theory of the public sphere, and the integrated model of communication for social change (IMCSR).

The social responsibility theory grew out of the 1947 report of the Hutchins Commission on the Freedom of the Press. It was an attempt to get the media to elevate their standards and provide citizens with the information needed to effectively participate in the American democracy (Hutchins, 1947). The commission argued that the media had a sacred duty to report the truth, no matter how unpalatable it was to media owners. The media, according to the commission, should both serve as a forum for the exchange of ideas for the common good and present a representative picture of the constituent groups of society. The media should also serve an educational purpose, which is to clarify ideals to which society should aspire. Additionally, the media should provide as much access as possible to the day's intelligence without censorship.

The social responsibility theory appears to offer an excellent guideline for the African media as they begin to function in a nascent democratic environment. The theory determines that the media have a responsibility, setting that responsibility as, first and foremost, to the society. The theory, however, has severe limitations in the African environment, because it assumes the existence of a fully democratic system and a fair playing-ground that allows the media to operate relatively uninhibited by the

government. It also assumes that media owners support the democratic process, and that they are, or can be, objective observers, which is not necessarily the case in new democracies. But despite these shortcomings, some of the theory's main principles could inform a working theory for African media.

A second relevant theory, the democratic-participant theory, attempts to establish a level playing-field in a democracy. Initially proposed by French philosopher Jacques Rousseau two centuries ago, this political theory was applied to media studies in the 1970s as a reaction to the dominant paradigm communication theory that had espoused the power of the media and its multiplier effect in the development process of the Third World (Enzensberger, 1970). The democratic-participant theory, therefore, sought to correct the dominant paradigm approach associated with scholars such as Schramm and his development media theory (Schramm, 1964). Instead of the top-down approach, the democratic-participant theory favors a grassroots media that expresses the needs of citizens. The theory argues that citizens have a right to relevant local information, a right to answer back, and a right to use the means of communication for interaction and social action in small-scale settings (Pateman, 1979). It argues that the state-controlled media should be replaced by a committed, privately-owned media that links senders to receivers and favors horizontal patterns of interaction. The democratic-participant theory incorporates varied practical media, such as community radio stations, an alternative press, civic journalism, micro-media in rural settings, and media for women and ethnic minorities. The theory rejects the market as a suitable institutional form because, the theory contends, the market is likely to subvert a free press; instead, the democratic-participant theory relies on participation and interaction as its key concepts.

The democratic-participant theory is important in the African context, especially because of its emphasis on community media. But it has two troublesome drawbacks. The reality in Africa today is that the media industry is largely urban-based. Attempts by such organizations as UNESCO to establish a rural press in Africa in the 60s and 70s floundered, mainly due to lack of capital. The urban-based media, on the other hand, have poor penetration in the rural areas. A rural-based media would form what Pateman (1979) calls the social sphere, where democratic training takes place parallel to the political sphere. But unless new attempts are made to revive the rural press, the democratic-participant theory is likely to remain inapplicable in Africa. And even if this is done, the question of participation of the people in such a process remains one of contention among development communication scholars who argue that effective participation is often predetermined by power distribution in society.

The integrated model of communication for social change (IMCFSC) provides another critical framework in the present study's attempt to craft a suitable model for the African situation. This model was developed in 1997 by a group of leading communication scholars, professionals, community organizers, and social change activists at the behest of the Rockefeller Foundation. The group wanted to examine the connections between social change and communications in the 21st century, and to explore the possibilities of new communication strategies for social change (Rockefeller Foundation, 2002). Inspired by an examination of development communication theories and practices, the model describes social change as a dynamic, iterative process that starts with a catalyst or stimulus that can be either external or internal to the community. This catalyst leads to a dialogue within the community, which is then likely to lead to collective action and resolution of a common problem. The model, which is both prescriptive and descriptive, lays out in detail the 10 steps that need to happen for development or social

change to take place. The authors argue that the process starts with a community's recognition of a problem. This is often spurred by a catalyst, such as a media story pointing to a particular problem, which leads to a community's process of questioning what can be done to solve it.

The second step involves the identification and involvement of leaders and stakeholders who, through a process of sequential networking or meetings, identify resource persons who can help in solving the problem. The third step in the model advocates clarification of perceptions to try to find a consensus, which is necessary before a group can embrace a certain course of action. The fourth step focuses on the expression of individual and shared needs. Individuals in the group setting may be affected differently by the problem, or may have different ways of resolving it. The model proposes that it is in this stage that the majority can convince a reluctant minority to go along.

The fifth stage involves envisioning the future. The common vision, according to the model, envisions both the changes that will occur and the expected benefits. An assessment of the current situation then follows, in which the problem is thoroughly assessed. This allows for the community to set goals and objectives through which future progress might be measured. The act of first comparing one's current status with one's desired status, and then setting realistic goals, is the source of group motivation. The community then embarks on an examination of options for action. This might include an assessment of available material and human resources in the community for addressing the problem. The ninth step is about reaching a consensus on action. This consensus, according to the model, is important in creating a sense of ownership of the process among the community members. The final stage involves creating an action plan with a specific timetable that moves the community toward the solution of the problem.

While this model appears to be problem-or project-specific, it does have certain important elements that can be borrowed and refined to inform the new, continent-scale model proposed by this research. The positive elements of the model include sharing information at the grassroots level through community dialogue or deliberation, aggregating a community's capacity to solve its own problem, and deciding on a course of action. But the model is limited in several ways. It ignores relationships of power distribution in a community, a reality which may affect the process of participation in community decision making. The model also relegates the role of media to the periphery, and the media are therefore not part of a public space for deliberation. This appears to restrict the application of the model to small geographical locations. Where a national dialogue needs to take place, this model might need to be refined further. But perhaps its greatest shortcoming is that it ignores the enabling environment that makes it possible for deliberation to take place. In countries where there is no freedom of expression or association and where a culture of public talk has not evolved, the model might be irrelevant. In this case, then, it is important to turn to the theory of the public sphere and evaluate its potential as a working framework for African media in the new environment.

Initially outlined by Habermas (1989) in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, this theory argues that the development of competitive market capitalism provided the conditions for the development of both the theory and practice of liberal democracy in Britain. Such development was made through making available to the political class and the bourgeoisie the material resources to create a network of institutions in society, such as newspaper publishing enterprises, libraries, and universities,

within which a new political force, specifically public opinion, could exist. The dynamics of market capitalism made it possible for more and more people to access this public sphere because the market lowered the cost of entry, which, in turn, gave the public sphere a universalistic characteristic. Habermas makes the important argument that, with time, the public sphere came to obey the rules of rational discourse and thus was not open to power play, but to arguments based on evidence. Its concern was the public good, not private interests. Thus, the public sphere was a place distinct from the state and the economy. But Habermas goes on to argue that the very forces which had led to the creation of the public sphere also led to its destruction. The development of a capitalist economy, according to Habermas, took on a monopolistic culture, thus leading to an increase in the entry costs to the public sphere. This marked the beginning of the state and private control of public information that served a narrow agenda, he contends.

Several notable criticisms have been directed against Habermas's public sphere (Calhoun, 1992; Curran, 1991; Fraser, 1992; Garnham, 1992; Schudson, 1989). Calhoun accuses Habermas of conforming too closely to liberal bourgeois ideals, as well as of ignoring the role of social movements in reorienting the agenda of public discourse and introducing new issues to the discourse. Fraser (1992) highlights the exclusion of 18th-century women from the public sphere and argues that Habermas's theory is masculinistic and bourgeois-oriented because the same press subordinated workers, people of color, gays, and lesbians.

Garnham (1992) argues that the concept of public sphere embodies an ideal type against which existing social arrangements can be judged, and that Habermas's earlier concept must be judged within the existing historical circumstances. Garnham aptly summarizes the scholarly reactions to Habermas's original formulations this way:

Criticism leveled at Habermas's model of the public sphere are all cogent and serve as a necessary basis for the development and refinement of Habermas's original approach. However they do not detract from the continuing virtues of the central thrust of that approach. (Garnham, 1992)

Responding to this criticism, Habermas stresses the importance of the political public sphere to the democratic theory and praxis, which he argues is encapsulated in the concept of deliberative democracy. According to Habermas, it is a democracy centered on the interplay between a constitutionally-instituted formation of the political will and the spontaneous flow of communication, unsubverted by power, in a public sphere, and it is geared toward discovery and problem-solving, rather than decision-making. He adds that, for this sphere to realize its purpose today, it must be based on a rational reorganization of social and political power under the mutual control of organizations committed to the public sphere both in their internal structures, and in their relations with the state and each other. In other words, Habermas's argument seems to be that the public sphere cannot be entrusted to market forces, because they have a history of subverting such trust to serve narrow interests. Control must be entrusted to institutions that are committed to the welfare of the public. He raises the requirements even higher by arguing that, "for this sphere to function properly it also requires the supportive spirit of cultural

traditions and patterns of socialization, of the political culture, of a populace accustomed to freedom" (Habermas, 1992, p. 453).

Habermas's concept of the public sphere and the aforementioned reactions to it provide an important framework for the conceptualization of a new communication model for African media. Based on the literature, such a framework must recognize that while the media is a central part of the public sphere, the sphere must also include other modern and traditional public places where deliberation can take place. And since market forces tend to subvert such a sphere, it is important that the framework and the structural conception of the public sphere in Africa be community-owned or obliged to provide an avenue for public deliberation. The emerging public sphere in Africa must also nurture the emergence of a civic culture. Such necessary conditions are only beginning to emerge in Africa, but it is important to note that the notion of the public sphere in Habermas's conceptualization does represent an ideal type of media and, therefore, a higher calling to which African media could aspire in a new theoretical setting.

A Social-Democratic Communications Model

This research suggests that a synthesis of the three aforementioned theories and the IMCSC might yield a social-democratic communications model for Africa. The study further argues that the changed environment in which the African media are operating calls for a new communications model. To answer that call, the study proposes that such a model can be developed by synthesizing some elements from the foregoing theories and some elements from the prevailing situation in Africa. It would be a social-democratic communications model. First, the proposed model must treat information not as a commodity, but as a social product generated in a deliberative public sphere. Thus, information will not be just a product for sale, but one generated by the public and for the public good.

Second, while Habermas's theory dwells on the media as a public sphere, this study suggests that the media is only one part – albeit a central part – of such a sphere. In other words, the model must take into account the other spheres where public discussion takes place in Africa, such as churches, shopping centers, and marketplaces. The model suggests that an inventory of such public spheres is necessary, and that such an inventory would provide the media with a better idea of where to go to capture public voices.

Third, this model further suggests that the media must reorient themselves to be able to tap into this flow of public deliberation and bring it into the mainstream through news sources. This is critical because the African people have always held public deliberations on public issues from time immemorial. And while the place for such talk may have changed over time, public deliberation is still a way of life in African societies. Given the long history of public deliberation in Africa, it would appear that the ideas of civic journalism are merely restating an obvious fact of life in Africa. The proposed social-democratic model of communication suggests that the civic journalism theories offer a perfect framework for the media in Africa to tap into the ongoing public talk that it has, heretofore, tended to overlook.

Fourth, the media's entry into this arena must serve the dual purposes of both socializing the population to a democratic culture and promoting public deliberations on issues of public concern. But the public sphere must be evenly dispersed and accessible to the people. This means that the African media must find ways of penetrating rural areas, even when market forces dictate otherwise. One way of doing this is to establish partnerships with like-minded non-profit organizations. The model further suggests that the adoption of deliberative practices is the best way for the media to overcome the challenge of trying to be inclusive in a continent with high illiteracy. That is to say, participation in public deliberations does not depend on literacy as does, say, writing an opinion piece for a newspaper. Therefore, public deliberation is an effective way to capture various voices.

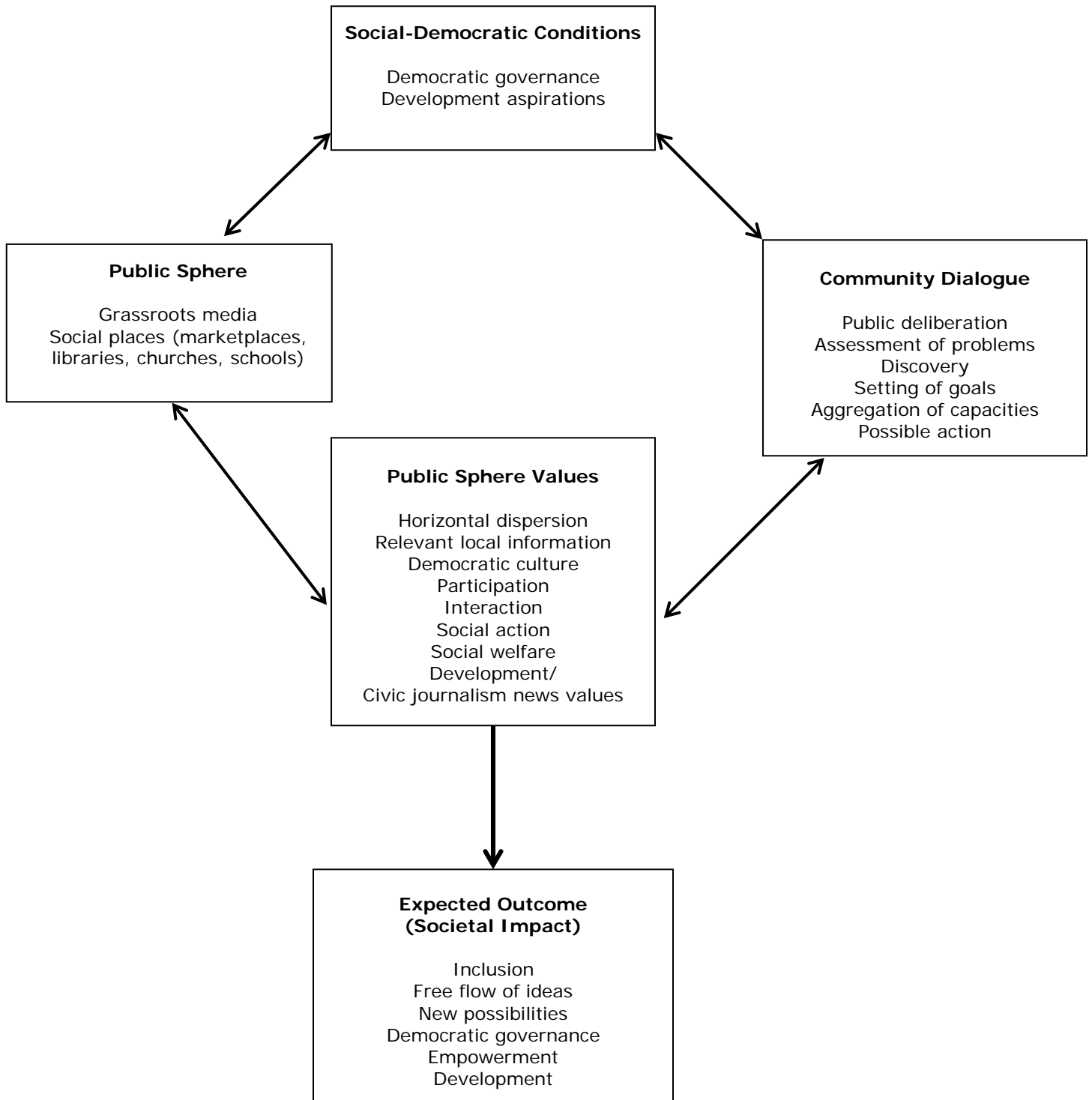
More importantly, the model proposes a new way of training journalists. Covering public forums and public deliberations requires specialized listening and reporting skills — skills different from those needed to cover a political rally, for instance. For the last decade, training programs organized by entities such as the USAID appear to have been modeled along traditional journalism practices, which are not adequate under the proposed model. Journalists' training must be restructured to include training on democratic theory and practices to help journalists gain a better understanding of the democratic process and their role in it. For years now, the emphasis in journalism training schools has been on skills training. This model suggests that such training does not equip journalists with the knowledge and understanding of the challenges facing the continent necessary to improve the function of the African media.

Under this model, such restructured training would place an emphasis on developing stories in four proposed areas: developing enterprise stories to focus attention on community problems; providing information on alternative solutions; participating in ongoing public forums to discover key issues; and polling the public, both to capture their voices, and to determine which are the most pressing issues.

Clearly, such training must extend to newsrooms and target media managers who are important in making any long-term changes. Such training will help the media industry to not only recognize their social responsibility to their communities, but to share in the vision of a different way of doing their job.

Another important element of the social-democratic communications model is that it allows citizens to name and frame issues in their own terms. As the literature has indicated, the formulation of development issues in Africa has tended to be the prerogative of African governments and the non-profit sector. But the events of the early 1990s indicate that the ordinary person has a clear grasp of the reasons why he or she continues to wallow in poverty, as well as of what needs to be done. But such ordinary voices are rarely heard in the media. This model, then, empowers such voices by giving them the opportunity to tell their own story. For this to happen, the model must take into account some disparities on the ground in most African societies. These include gender, power, and age disparities, which must be taken into account to ensure adequate representation of all the voices that need to be heard.

Table 1. Social-Democratic Communications Model.



Explaining the Model

The social-democratic communications model requires an enabling environment that supports freedoms of speech and association, as well as the exchange of information. It is therefore ideally suited for a democratic environment because it places equal emphasis on democratic values and development.

The model emphasizes the importance of grassroots media that are accessible by ordinary people, and it can serve as a forum for deliberation on issues of public concern. The model also recognizes other traditional public spheres where public dialogue takes place, such as marketplaces and churches.

But for such a sphere to function as intended, it must embody certain values: It must be horizontally dispersed and accessible to all, it must embody a democratic culture, and it must provide relevant local information.

The model envisions public deliberation as a process through which citizens name their own priorities and concerns, and then consider possible action. A recognizable and accessible public sphere enables such deliberation to take place.

The process embodied in the social-democratic model would have discernable societal impact. It would allow a free flow of ideas, enable the inclusion of various voices in media stories and decision-making, and enhance the democratic culture. It would also provide a framework for the empowerment and development of communities. It is important to mention that the various components of the model feed on each other; therefore, they are integrated in a two-way relationship.

Case Study of a Kenyan Print Media Organization

To help contextualize the literature and theoretical aspirations of this article, the research examined a representative case study of a Kenyan print media institution and its communication model. The primary research questions were:

- (1) What model of communication is used among African print media: one that treats information as a private commodity for the market (Western model), or one that treats information as a social product generated in a public sphere (social-democratic model)?
- (2) Who are the main actors quoted in stories on democracy? This research expects such actors to be prominent figures (politicians, bureaucrats, and business people) instead of the voices of ordinary citizens.

This research analyzed the *Nation* newspaper in Kenya over a three month period from October to December 2008 (the data used is part of a larger and regional, on-going multi-year study on media and civic engagement). The *Nation* newspaper in Kenya is the largest newspaper in East and Central Africa, with a daily circulation of 220,000 and growing. Established in 1960, it is jointly owned by local and

foreign investors. It has often been cited as an example of excellence in journalism for its commitment to "fearless and objective reporting" (Kiai, 1997). The newspaper was chosen because it owns other newspapers and electronic media in other East African countries, and because it has also set about launching a pan-African news agency. More importantly, it sponsors training programs for its subsidiary media organizations and sells its print stories to other media organizations in Africa. It is therefore an excellent unit of analysis because it has exported its journalistic style throughout Africa, both by way of the media organizations it owns and through its syndicated content. The research looked at all the daily issues of the paper over the period of study. Entire stories were examined through content analysis to identify the main actors, the story placement, the nature of the story, and the model of communication that the story embodied. Content analysis is "a research technique for the objective, systematic, and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication" (Berelson, 1952, p. 18). According to Wimmer and Dominick (1997), content analysis is ideal for a descriptive study – such as the present one – which seeks to describe communication content in issue-oriented stories.

Measures and Coding Rules

To answer the two research questions, four categories were coded and analyzed: model of communication in stories, main actors in stories, types of stories, and placement of stories.

Type of story was coded to indicate whether it was news, a feature, opinion, letter, an editorial, or a paid advertisement, all in which issues of democracy and development appeared. Letters to the editor were coded as opinion pieces. The term "story" was used to refer to published articles, including editorials and opinions.

The placement of a story (i.e., its location in a newspaper) was considered a likely indicator of its importance and was therefore coded. The codes developed for placement of a story were front page, news pages, editorial pages, and feature pages.

Main actors in stories were coded as organized civil society members, government officials, pro-establishment politicians, opposition politicians, experts, ordinary citizens, donors, and diplomats. Multiple coding was applied in identifying some main actors in stories, as some of them carried more than one designation. For example, it was possible for one to be a member of an organized civil society, such as a non-governmental organization, and also to be an expert in a certain field.

The model of communication used in stories was analyzed to find out whether the media are acting as public spheres (as previously defined in the literature) or are using the traditional paternalistic model of communication. This category was coded as either a market model or a social-democratic model. For a story to be coded under "social-democratic model," it had to meet one of the following criteria: (1) be an enterprise story focusing attention on community problems; (2) provide information on alternative solutions to public issues; (3) be framed to advance public involvement in discourse; (4) involve conducting town meetings to discover key issues in communities; or (5) be based on polling the public to determine which are most pressing issues.

Intercoder reliability was calculated using Scott's pi index, and it yielded an agreement of 0.85.

For a story to be coded as related to democracy, it had to feature one or more themes identified in the literature review as commonly associated with democracy in Africa, such as themes on political parties, ethnicity and tribalism, development, quality of leadership, political rights, civil liberties, institutional checks, gender, or corruption.

Results and Discussion

A total of 139 stories where issues related to democracy appeared were coded for the entire period. A majority of the stories tended to appear on the opinion pages, as well as on the news pages. The study found 56 news stories, 69 opinion pieces, and 14 editorials that discussed issues related to democracy. But while this research rightly expected that opinion pages would most likely be the ideal place for a social-democratic model of communication that would offer a place for various voices in society, the stories that appeared on the opinion pages were mainly the opinions of newspaper columnists and occasional guests or editorials. Opinion pieces made no effort to include voices from the street, mainly featuring the reactions of journalists to news events. More importantly, the overwhelming number of actors in stories (89%) were politicians (both pro-establishment and opposition). The study found that the stories overwhelmingly used a paternalistic (market) model of communication that treated information as a private commodity, rather than as a social product generated in a public sphere. This study had argued that the media could best serve as a sphere for public discourse on matters of public interest if it treated information as a social product generated in a sphere accessible to all. It had defined stories modeled along these lines as those that would have certain distinct qualities to them: enterprise stories that focused attention on community problems, stories that provided information on alternative solutions to public issues, stories framed to advance public involvement in discourse, stories that involved conducting town meetings to discover key issues in communities, or stories based on polling the public to determine the most pressing issues.

The literature suggests that the media in Africa have faced several challenges that impinge on their work. While some of these challenges still remain, the constrictive political climate has changed dramatically over the last 10 years, so that it is now possible for the media in Kenya to tap into forums, poll audiences, and open their pages to a wider segment of society — all to better serve as a public sphere. Granted, there are now more non-journalist columnists than there were 10 years ago, but these tend to be more prominent people, and the ordinary person has to send in a letter if he wants to be heard. Such an emphasis on traditional news values becomes a major problem in Africa because the media, as literature has suggested, are urban-based and have poor penetration in the rural areas where the majority of the people live. This means that they may not be capturing or articulating the issues important to these populations.

The agenda-setting function of the media that has come to define the media in the developing countries also appears ill-suited under the circumstances. This is because, with the agenda-setting model, the media take an issue and run with it. But the proposed social-democratic model of communication suggests the involvement of citizens in the naming and framing of that agenda. To be able to do so, the

media must not only be where the people are, but also must be willing to provide them with an accessible platform for the articulation of their ideas.

An overwhelming majority of stories (n=83) coded for this study appeared on the editorial pages of the *Nation* newspaper either as opinion pieces from journalists and guest columnists, or as editorial pieces in the newspaper. By their very nature, editorials and columns have no room for interactivity between the various actors in stories; rather, they state one writer's position on an issue. Thus, the editorials generally adopted a one-way method of communication that did not encourage dialogue. News stories on democracy followed the same pattern, mostly featuring politicians who tended to frame the agenda for the rest of the country. Editorials would then react to what the politicians were doing or saying. Therefore, any dialogue that took place on an issue tended to be between the newspaper and the politicians; although in most cases, the journalists were merely reacting to the politicians' agenda. The only way that ordinary readers were able to comment on matters of public interest was through occasional letters to the editors.

Conclusion

This research sought to develop a theoretical model of communication using well-established social science models as an inspiration. The article argued that societies in transition must develop new ways of communication that mirror the expanding political space in order to capture and channel public dialogue. The article noted the new interactive communication trends that have cropped up in African countries, and that are widely utilized by radio and internet media. But the article also noted that a similar trend has not been adopted by the print media. The research audited one such newspaper, and the findings validated the existing literature. But more importantly, this article sought to point out that the interactive communication that it advocates needs to be guided by a deeper understanding and reformulation of media as a public sphere in democratizing societies. The social-democratic model proposed here provides such a theoretical roadmap. For a start, the print media might want to rethink their overwhelming focus on personality-driven stories. The focus on politicians as the main actors in stories appears to be a marketing gimmick that has served them well. There is need to treat information as a social product generated in a public sphere, and not just a commodity for sale.

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