

**MEDIA LIBERALIZATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF JOURNALISM IN UGANDA, A CASE
STUDY OF RADIO SIMBA**

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ABSTRACT

The study aimed at investigating the level of independence and freedom of the mass media industry in Uganda. It explored the challenges that media professionals practically go through and face in the process of carrying out media work and practicing their professions in Uganda, and secondly, it identified how both the existing and newly proposed laws impact on the mass media freedom in Uganda while drawing from the domestic, national, regional and international laws. Qualitative methods were used in this research with interviews and content Analysis being central. The findings indicate that the mass media in Uganda is still not free as most respondents concurred with what is in the documented reports by HRW, Amnesty International, UHRC, IFEX, CPJ, and HRNJ about media censorship in Uganda. A critical analysis of the various media laws in Uganda revealed that they have not been aligned to regional and international standards. The study, recommends among other things that the government of Uganda should respect freedom of expression as laid down under the constitution, regional and international laws. Secondly, that the media laws in Uganda should be revisited, to meet the regional and international standard by way of repealing clauses that are hostile and unfriendly to free practice of mass media. A self-regulatory media system should be adopted as a way of ensuring less interference by the government in the regulatory process.

Key words: media liberalization, development and journalism

Background of the study

Liberalization is a broad term that refers to the practice of making laws, systems, or opinions less strict, usually in the sense of removing certain government regulations or restrictions (Polycarp et al., 2023). The term is most often used in relation to economics, where it refers to economic liberalization, the removal or reduction of restrictions placed on (a specific sphere of) economic activity (Mark & Jacob, 2023). However, liberalization can also be used as a synonym for decriminalization or legalization (the act of making something legal after it was illegal), for example when describing the liberalization of drugs. Article 19, HRW, Amnesty International and UHRC recognize that the right to freedom of expression is

not absolute and that international and national law allow for certain restrictions in certain circumstances (Paul & Kazaara, 2023). Similarly, Smith 2010 writes that the restriction of freedom of expression itself should not mean a threat to the right, but it should be prescribed by law (Flavia et al., 2023). He argues that the classification of information as a security interest is at the discretion of a particular state and international treaty bodies can always do little beyond providing a supervisory role over the exercise of state discretion (Christopher et al., 2022). Similar restrictions can be found in the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and the American Convention on Human Rights (ACHR). Likewise, the Ugandan

Received: 04.11.2023

Accepted: 08.11.2023

Published on: 30.11.2023

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Constitution of 2015 recognizes freedom of expression under Article 29, but brings restrictions and limitations under Article 43(2) in line with Article 19(3) of the ICCPR. Smith (2010) concurringly argues that restrictions on media freedom are necessary in certain circumstances and this is pointed out by Article 43 of the Ugandan constitution. It is fair to say that in theory freedom of the mass media in Uganda is recognized by law, but in practice it is lacking (Frank et al., 2023). According to the Uganda Communications Commission (UCC), the number of local FM radio stations increased from 14 in December 2016 to 158 by March 2017 and to date Uganda has over

Statement of the problem

Both national and international legislation states that everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression, including "freedom of the press and other media". Restrictions on the aforementioned human rights can be acceptable and demonstrably justified in a free and democratic society only under certain circumstances, such as risks to public safety or health (Kazaara, Charles, et al., 2023). The absence of media censorship in the country is considered a sign of a free society where people can criticize those in power as well as stimulate debate on issues of national, regional and international importance (Kazaara, Kazaara et al., 2023). Freedom of the media is therefore an "important right" recognized in a democratic society as a mechanism and tool that allows citizens to participate in their own governance by analyzing what the government is doing and holding their leaders accountable for their actions (Joventi et al., 2023). Despite the constitutional guarantee of freedom of expression and the

201 FM stations, while private television stations have increased from four to 45 including cable channels in the same period (Mercy et al., 2023). As far as freedom of expression goes, it seems to be very good for the industry. However, since 2012, the same ruling National Resistance Movement (NRM) government has started censoring the media industry by creating conditions that make it difficult for the media to function. This was achieved by allowing very little freedom of expression and diversity of opinion and imposing strong and strict domestic laws against the media (Davids et al., 2023).

enactment of national legislation that expands this right, restrictions and censorship of the media still exist (Damasus et al., 2023). The Criminal Code Act, for example, links material published by journalists to sedition, the Anti-Terrorism Act prohibits the promotion of terrorist acts by publication, and other laws discussed in the fourth chapter of this work. Based on the aforementioned national laws, more than 30 journalists have pending court cases, yet their trials are regularly postponed (HRNJ-U, 2011:5). Notably, good laws are dysfunctional and, depending on the circumstances, existing domestic media laws suppress media freedom (Lugalambi 2010:29, 30). Similarly, state security continues to attack, intimidate and destroy their facilities (HRNJ-U, 2011:5). Security forces continue to raid media premises under the guise of searching for subversive materials, which subsequently leads to the temporary closure of media outlets. This study therefore seeks to assess the impact of

Received: 04.11.2023**Accepted: 08.11.2023****Published on: 30.11.2023**

Corresponding: Author: research.miu.ac.ug/publications

liberalization on the development of journalism in (Shakilah & Kazaara, 2023).

Uganda using the case study of Radio Simba

Objectives of the Study

1. To find out the challenges that media professionals (journalists) practically face in the process of performing their work and practicing their professions in Uganda.
2. To assess the effect of media regulations / laws on the development of journalism/ media in Uganda.
3. To analyze the effect of media liberalization on the development of journalism in Uganda

Methodology

This study adopted a correlation research design (Saris and Revilla, 2015). A correlation research design refers to a quantitative research design involves two or more quantitative variables from a similar group of subjects and it tries to establish the relationship between the two variables as to whether they have anything in common (Sekaran, 2013). Theoretically, any 2 quantitative variables can be correlated (Amin, 2015). A correlation research design was used in this study to enable the researcher to find out the relationship between the study variables (Sekaran, 2013). In addition, the study used a triangulation approach that included both qualitative and quantitative approaches. The study population consisted of 70 respondents (Radio Simba human resource manual, 2013). These consisted of administrative staff, journalists, and media regulators. The administrators were chosen because they had the responsibility of overseeing the implementation of the media regulations in the media house. The lower media house officials were chosen because they were aware of what was taking place in the media house and the impact of the media regulation on the performance. To determine the sample that was used in this study, the Morgan and Krejcie (2010, as cited in Amin, 2015) sampling tables was used and the sample determination was done as reflected in table 1 below:

Table 1: Sample Size of Respondents and Sampling Technique

Category of Population	Population Size	Sample Size	Sampling Technique
Managerial staff	10	9	Purpose sampling
Operational staffs	10	9	Purposive sampling
Journalists	30	26	Simple Random sampling
Media regulators	20	15	Purposive sampling
Total	70	59	

Source: Radio Simba, Human Resource office

In sampling, the study involved purposive and simple random sampling techniques. Purposive sampling was used to select the managerial staff and the operational staff and media regulators as they were key figures in relation to their knowledge of the matter that was being studied (Sekaran, 2013). Simple random sampling was

Received: 04.11.2023

Accepted: 08.11.2023

Published on: 30.11.2023

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allowed equal representation of other respondents to be part of the study as suggested by Mugenda and Mugenda (2013) and these included the journalists. The study respondents were divided up into categories as described in table 1 above. Data was collected from primary sources. Qualitative and quantitative methods were used in the collection of data. Primary data was collected using self-administered questionnaires and interviews. According to Amin (2015) a questionnaire survey in research is a method that considers a series of questions that aim at acquisition of information from respondents. The questionnaire survey method was employed to gather primary data from lower media house officials through a semi-structured questionnaire. The respondents had an obligation of selecting responses in the tool basing on their choices as per their experience with the statements (Amin, 2015). Data analyses involved arranging, sorting and organizing data and later attach meaning to create a sensible meaning that reflects the findings Patton (2017). This study involved both quantitative and qualitative data and each was analysed in its form as shown below: In analyzing quantitative data, the data was sorted as per its allocated codes and entered into a statistical package known as Statistical Package for Social Scientists (SPSS) to generate both descriptive and inferential statistics that created the mean, mode and median; the variance, standard deviation, frequencies and percentages (Nelson et al., 2022). These were arranged in tables and later explained by the researcher on what they meant as per the set objectives and their implications in the study (Oso & Onen, 2018). Through use of content and thematic analysis, qualitative data was analysed and the findings were related to the study objectives and findings. The verbatim captions were tabulated in shorter sentences and pulling out key words that explained a certain phenomenon (Sekaran, 2013). These key words were used by the researcher to explain the occurrences that the study found out to answer the concerns that were raised in form of study objectives and answering the research questions.

RESULTS

Challenges faced by the media professionals in Uganda

Table 2. Showing the Challenges faced by the media professionals in Uganda

Challenges	Response											
	Strongly agree		Agree		Not sure		Disagree		Strongly disagree		Total	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
The working conditions in the media industry are very poor coupled with poor payments / remuneration, facilitation and protection such as lack of insurance	44	75	15	25	-	-	-	-	-	-	59	100
Media practitioners in Uganda continually face brutality from the security forces of this country and their tormentors do it with impunity	47	80	12	20	-	-	-	-	-	-	59	100
Low quality training and resources for example	53	90	6	10	-	-	-	-	-	-	59	100

Received: 04.11.2023

Accepted: 08.11.2023

Published on: 30.11.2023

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scarcity of qualified instructors, books and modern Equipments is a major challenge in Uganda's media sector												
Little research, owing to the absence of graduate studies in communication in Eastern Africa, the research function is not well developed. Most of the communication research in the region has been undertaken under the auspices of donors and non-profits, s	56	95	3	5	-	-	-	-	-	-	59	100
Local adoption of the journalism curricular is still very poor because there is still a latent core curriculum showing a distinctive western structure almost everywhere	44	75	15	25	-	-	-	-	-	-	59	100
Demarcation between journalism and public relations because it is generally more lucrative for students to be employed in the PR business than in the journalism profession. There are probably more jobs in public relations than in the news media, especially if one includes both government and NGO or independent PR	47	80	12	20	-	-	-	-	-	-	59	100

Source: primary data 2022

Table 2 shows that 44 (75%) of the respondents strongly agreed to the fact that the working conditions in the media industry are very poor coupled with poor payments / remuneration, facilitation and protection such as lack of insurance, while 15 (25%) agreed that the working conditions in the media industry are very poor coupled with poor payments / remuneration, facilitation and protection such as lack of insurance. None of the respondents disagreed and none were not sure. It implies that indeed, the working conditions in the media industry are very poor coupled with poor payments / remuneration, facilitation and protection such as lack of insurance (Sub-county et al., 2023)

47 (80%) strongly agreed that Media practitioners in Uganda continually face brutality from the security forces of this country and their tormentors do it with impunity and 12 (20%) of the respondents agreed and no one disagreed while all the respondents were sure of their respondents. This implies that indeed Media practitioners in Uganda continually face brutality from the security forces of this country and their tormentors do it with impunity (Moses et al., 2022)

53 (90%) of the respondents strongly agreed that Low quality training and resources for example scarcity of qualified instructors, books and modern Equipments is a major challenge in Uganda's media sector, while 6 (10%) of the respondents agreed that Low quality training and resources for example scarcity of qualified instructors, books and modern equipments is a major challenge in Uganda's media sector; implying that indeed

Received: 04.11.2023

Accepted: 08.11.2023

Published on: 30.11.2023

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Low quality training and resources for example scarcity of qualified instructors, books and modern equipments is a major challenge in Uganda's media sector (Emmanuel et al., 2023)

56 (95%) of the respondents strongly agreed that little research, Owing to the absence of graduate studies in communication in Eastern Africa, the research function is not well developed. Most of the communication research in the region has been undertaken under the auspices of donors and non-profits, s, while 3 (5%) of the respondents agreed that indeed little research, owing to the absence of graduate studies in communication in Eastern Africa, the research function is not well developed. Most of the communication research in the region has been undertaken under the auspices of donors and non-profits.

Further still, 44 (75%) of the respondents strongly agreed to the fact that these young mothers go through many physical changes: from adolescent physical adjustment to having to adapt to the ever changing shape of her body through the pregnancy and her postpartum figure, while 15 (25%) agreed that local adoption of the journalism curricular is still very poor because there is still a latent core curriculum showing a distinctive western structure almost everywhere; None of the respondents disagreed and none was not sure. It implies that indeed local adoption of the journalism curricular is still very poor because there is still a latent core curriculum showing a distinctive western structure almost everywhere

47 (80%) strongly agreed that demarcation between journalism and public relations because it is generally more lucrative for students to be employed in the PR business than in the journalism profession. There are probably more jobs in public relations than in the news media, especially especially if one includes both government and NGO or independent PR, 15 (20%) of the respondents agreed and no one disagreed while all the respondents were sure of their respondents. This implies that demarcation between journalism and public relations because it is generally more lucrative for students to be employed in the PR business than in the journalism profession. There are probably more jobs in public relations than in the news media, especially if one includes both government and NGO or independent PR

Effect of media regulations / laws on the development of journalism in Uganda.

Table 3 showing the effect of media regulations on the development of journalism in Uganda

Effect of media regulations / laws on the development of journalism in Uganda	Response											
	Strongly agree		Agree		Not sure		Disagree		Strongly disagree		Total	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Media regulation has led to increased brutality of journalists by security officers in the guise of implementing the regulations. This has left many journalists heavily injured and others dead	30	50	11	20	9	15	9	15	-	-	59	100
Media regulation has narrowed the media space	36	62	21	33	3	5	-	-	-	-	59	100

Received: 04.11.2023

Accepted: 08.11.2023

Published on: 30.11.2023

Corresponding: Author: research.miu.ac.ug/publications

whereby one to practice journalism in Uganda needs to comply with a lot of requirements and this has left many journalisms graduates unable to practice their profession												
Media regulations in Uganda have limited information access by the journalists and the public and therefore both journalists and the public do not have the opportunity to always know the truth	44	75	12	20	-	-	3	5	-	-	59	100
Some arbitrary and unconstitutional regulations have been challenged in court and there continues to be litigations between government and journalists	41	70	12	20	-	-	6	10	-	-	59	100
Media regulation has weakened the media sector and has seen several graduates shun the profession for other work since government is not giving them any breathing space	30	50	23	40	-	-	6	10	-	-	59	100

Source: Primary data 2022

From the table 3 above, it can be observed that 30 (50%) of the respondents strongly agreed to the fact that Media regulation has led to increased brutality of journalists by security officers in the guise of implementing the regulations. This has left many journalists heavily injured and others dead 12 (20%) agreed, 9 (15%) were not sure and 9 (15%) disagreed. It therefore implies that Media regulation has led to increased brutality of journalists by security officers in the guise of implementing the regulations. This has left many journalists heavily injured and others dead

36 (62%) strongly agreed to the assertion that media regulation has narrowed the media space whereby one to practice journalism in Uganda needs to comply with a lot of requirements and this has left many journalisms graduates unable to practice their profession, 21 (33%) agreed; while 3 (5%) were not sure. This therefore implies that media regulation has narrowed the media space whereby one to practice journalism in Uganda needs to comply with a lot of requirements and this has left many journalisms graduates unable to practice their profession

It can also be observed that 44 (75%) of the sample strongly agreed that media regulations in Uganda have limited information access by the journalists and the public and therefore both journalists and the public do not have the opportunity to always know the truth, 12 (20%) agreed to the assertion and 3 (5%) disagreed. This implies that indeed media regulations in Uganda have limited information access by the journalists and the public and therefore both journalists and the public do not have the opportunity to always know the truth since the majority agreed to the assertion.

41 (70%) of the sample strongly agreed that some arbitrary and unconstitutional regulations have been challenged in court and there continues to be litigations between government and journalists, 12 (20%) agreed to

Received: 04.11.2023

Accepted: 08.11.2023

Published on: 30.11.2023

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the assertion and 6 (10%) disagreed to the assertion. It can conclusively be stated that some arbitrary and unconstitutional regulations have been challenged in court and there continues to be litigations between government and journalists.

30 (50%) strongly agreed that Media regulation has weakened the media sector and has seen several graduates shun the profession for other work since government is not giving them any breathing space 24 (40%), 6 (10%) were not sure and 5 (8%) disagreed. It can therefore imply that Media regulation has weakened the media sector and has seen several graduates shun the profession for other work since government is not giving them any breathing space.

Effect of media liberalization on the development of journalism in Uganda

Table 4 showing the effect of media liberalization on the development of journalism in Uganda

Media liberalization on the development of journalism	Strongly Disagree		Agree		Not Sure		Disagree		Strongly Disagree		Total	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
In modern societies, free mass media are an external factor in fighting ills in the society	41	70	12	20	3	5	3	5	-	-	59	100
As watchdogs, the media hold political decision makers accountable for their actions	41	70	12	20	3	5	3	5	-	-	59	100
Mass media strengthen checks and balances between equally powerful actors	41	70	12	20	3	5	3	5	-	-	59	100

From the table 4 above, it can be observed that 41 (70%) of the respondents strongly agreed to the fact that In modern societies, free mass media are an external factor in fighting ills in the society, 12 (20%) agreed, 3 (5%) were not sure and 3 (5%) disagreed. It implies that indeed in modern societies, free mass media are an external factor in fighting ills in the society. 41 (70%) of the respondents strongly agreed to the fact that as watchdogs, the media hold political decision makers accountable for their actions, 12 (20%) agreed, 3 (5%) were not sure and 3 (5%) disagreed. It implies that as watchdogs, the media hold political decision makers accountable for their actions. Finally, it can also be observed that 41 (70%) of the respondents strongly agreed to the fact that Mass media strengthen checks and balances between equally powerful actors, 12 (20%) agreed, 3 (5%) were not sure and 3 (5%) disagreed. It implies that mass media strengthen checks and balances between equally powerful since the majority agreed to the assertion.

Conclusions

This study analyzed the level of freedom of expression in Uganda; it looked at the hindrance to free practice of media among the Media outlets in Uganda; and how the both domestic and international legislations impacted on the level of freedom of expression within Ugandan Context. The communication theory remains central in guiding this study with the concept of power and mass media being analyzed in the literature review. Besides

this, the international and national legislations and their clauses were reviewed from the contents of various legislations and it provided a basis for the analysis, discussions and recommendations of this study.

Recommendations

The 2010 Press and Journalist Amendment Bill should not only be revised, but should be repealed and withdrawn in its totality because it gives more threat to the freedom of expression in Uganda. The overwhelming powers given to the Minister to appoint members of the regulatory bodies of the media should be reduced with self-regulatory system taking a central role as far as the regulatory mechanism is concerned. Individual clauses for the laws should be directed to the media industry rather than to individual journalists who are employees only in their capacity. The appointments of members of the Media Council should be done in an open and transparent manner involving all the stakeholders in the media industries.

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Received: 04.11.2023

Accepted: 08.11.2023

Published on: 30.11.2023

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