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Abstract

Recent years have seen a dramatic change in the relationship between online media and the audience, and user generated content is a common feature of news websites in the United States of America. Control over the contents of the media space, once held by traditional news outlets, today is shared by bloggers and other social media participants. Participatory journalism' has been anticipated as a form of journalism in which the audience no longer 'merely' receives news, but, enabled by digital technologies, is involved in its production and dissemination. First, participatory journalism and communication is considered in the context of the historical evolution of public communication. A methodological strategy for systematically analyzing citizen participation opportunities in the media is then proposed and applied. A sample of 16 online newspapers offers preliminary data that suggest news organizations are interpreting online user participation mainly as an opportunity for their readers to debate current events, while other stages of the news production process are closed to citizen involvement or controlled by professional journalists when participation is allowed. However, different strategies exist among the studied sample, and contextual factors should be considered in further research. Because of such pressing factors participatory journalism and communication is marginalized and genuine participation is the missing link in the development of the press process. To avert such trends, the paper calls for professionalism for the development of the press communication, structural change of the organization and holistic approach of development of the press for successful development of the press endeavors.

Keywords: *Participatory Journalism, Communication, Press development of the press, California, USA.*

1.0 Introduction

Newspapers offers fascinating insights into how journalists in Western democracies are thinking about, and dealing with, the inclusion of content produced and published by the public (Schlosser, 2020). Recent years have seen a dramatic change in the relationship between online media and the ‘audience’, and user-generated content is a common feature of news websites. Control over the contents of the media space, once held by traditional news outlets, today is shared by bloggers and other social media participants (Tandoc, Huang, Duffy, Ling & Kim, 2020). Such an environment requires a significant conceptual and practical shift for journalists, who face a rapid and radical decline in their power to oversee the flow of information. The ability to productively incorporate user contributions within traditional media spaces is becoming a vital skill. Until recently, the working routines and values of journalistic culture had remained highly stable for almost a century (Veglis & Kotenidis, 2021), even after being declared in crisis (Blumler & Gurevitch, 2016; Dahlgren, 2016). Traditionally, journalism has been attached to the institution of the media, based on the production of news by dedicated paid labour, the journalists. The term “gatekeeper”, used to describe a main task of journalists, indicates their claim to be the ones who decide what the public needs to know, as well as when and how such information should be provided (Daniels, 2021). The gatekeeper role is maintained and enforced by professional routines and conventions that are said to guarantee the quality and neutrality of institutional journalism.

According to Mihailidis and Gamwell (2020), both distribution and interpretation of news stories in personal networks were thus highly dynamic and dependent on individuals, personal relationships and various external factors. Only rarely did members of different social networks engage in informational interaction, typically through some connecting node such as a messenger or a traveler who spread the news from one village to the other. However, most of the necessary information for the functioning and survival of each social network was contained in the network itself. These same communication principles of unmediated public communication are with us today, not only within small communities but also in many everyday contexts that do not primarily rely on mass media as a means of transporting information (Poepsel, 2020). In complex societies like the United States, we find the same communication principles. However, as the size and level of complexity in societies rise, it becomes more and more difficult for individual community members to perform the necessary functions in the process. The social networks in complex societies contain both stable groups and quickly changing ones. There are dense, clustered network structures and loosely knit ones, as well as central and peripheral nodes. Depending on where something happens or is observed in the network, and where the relevant interest groups for news are, the information still might reach its goal by direct interaction. But the farther the source is away from the goal person, the more likely it will get lost somewhere in the structure of the networks (Popova, 2020).

Participatory journalism’ has been anticipated as a form of journalism in which the audience no longer ‘merely’ receives news, but, enabled by digital technologies, is involved in its production and dissemination (Bowman & Willis, 2013). Viewed from a sociology of professions’ perspective, participatory news environments can be considered places of ‘boundary work’, where the boundaries of conventional journalism are challenged (2021; 2020; Wahl-Jorgensen, 2015). The potential rise of the audience as producer of news challenges journalism to rethink its professional identity, conventional understandings of its function in society and key principles such as objectivity and diversity that are conventionally associated with professional journalistic quality. There is a broad consensus that 20th-century journalism in Western countries has been characterized by a professional model (Schudson & Anderson, 2019) that centered on the idea of a trained professional gathering and disseminating

objectively validated information to the public (McNair, 2019). Over the course of the 20th century, this model became increasingly institutionalized through the forming of professional institutions and codes of practice (Schudson & Anderson, 2019), and the development of the press of a professional ideology, consisting of a set of values to which journalists in all media types, genres and formats refer in the context of their daily work (Deuze, 2005: 445).

Although a lot of efforts have been exerted to attain sustainable change in underdeveloped countries, the outcome has not been significant. A large number of development of the press efforts have become ineffective to bring about change (Melkote & Steeves, 2021; Mefalopulos, 2020; Servaes, 2018). Projects' dreams and hopes have failed, for the efforts made so far are insufficient /inadequate. Thus, gaps have been widened between the haves and have-nots. Even if plenty of development of the press endeavors have been made for more than six decades, the living standard between the developed and third world countries has remained large. In other words, the efforts made to alleviate the underdevelopment of the press problems of nations have been inadequate. Especially lack of genuine participation in development of the press process of the local community could be one of the major causes for the failure of development of the press projects in achieving their targets. Therefore, academicians and practitioners seem to have learned from their past failures and they tend to understand the need for the participation of stakeholders in the development of the press process by considering the paramount roles the stakeholders play for the success of the development of the press projects.

Research reports and experiences in various contexts of the third world countries have confirmed that cultural, social and political involvement of a certain community can be enhanced by using participatory development of the press communication to take part in the development of the press process. This approach can mainly be used to be effective in agricultural, economic, health and other community development of the press programs (Chitnis, 2015; Bessette, 2016; Sengupta, 2017; Servaes, 2018). In other words, mainstreaming participatory journalism and communication for sustainable development of the press has become a point of discussion in recent years. Therefore, the focus of this study is to explore the major factors that impede the participatory journalism and communication in development of the press efforts.

On the other hand, research reports and practical experiences confirmed that lack of people's participation could contribute to the failure of development of the press projects since the inception of the international development of the press agendas (Thomas, 2014; White, 2016; Freire 2015, Sreveas, 2018; White 2018). For example, a study by Fraser and Estrada as cited in Servaes (2020) concludes that communication and people's involvement in development of the press process could be two central factors that determine the successes and failures of most development of the press projects across the developing world. Therefore, understanding the factors that hinder the genuine participation of the local community in development of the press efforts could be extremely an important issue.

Concerning such area, I could not find exhaustive information with regard to how, when, and why the different factors affect participation of the local community in development of the press agents in the ANRS. Of course, the target development of the press organization of this study placed community participation as a key implementation strategy of development of the press in its official documents (FCC's third strategic plan, 2009; FCC's fourth strategic plan, 2014) and even has been claimed as participant development of the press agent, community participation is found a missing link in the development of the press efforts.

The researcher thinks that this research is timely and essential due to the dimension of poverty and degree of underdevelopment of the press in the third world countries in general and in the

region in particular; there is still a need to learn how to implement effective and sustainable participatory development of the press projects in different contexts that can transform the lives of the poor and marginalized people. The main objective of this research was to explore factors impeding the practices of participatory development of the press communication in the American context. The development of the press work experience of FCC, one of the leading local development of the press actors in Amhara National Regional State, becomes the focus. The purpose of the study includes to identify major factors hindering the practice of participatory journalism and communication development of the press of press in California, analyzing how the factors affecting the practice of participatory development of the press communication.

The study would help our understanding about participatory development of the press communication perceptions, practices and their implications in the development of the press efforts. By understanding the major factors that affect the practice of participatory journalism and communication in the development of the press endeavors, it is possible to avoid, if not minimize the problems and promote the adoption of genuine participatory approach. The results of the study could also promote the mainstreaming of participatory development of the press communication in development of the press efforts. Especially, the selected organization and NGOs working in similar contexts will benefit a lot since the study could have data showing the importance of making development of the press communication policies that shape our development of the press agendas and perspectives.

1.1 Literature and Theoretical Background

The study was anchored on The Participatory Theory. In the field of development of the press communication, the experiences of the past century development of the press efforts have clearly demonstrated the indispensable role that communication plays. For participatory paradigm, development of the press has been perceived as not something that can be imported from western tradition but it is something that can be emerged out of the indigenous culture. Participatory paradigm rejects the assumptions of modernization paradigm that advocates a universal model of development of the press; and instead advocates culture specific and people-centred holistic development of the press approaches. In other words, development of the press has been understood as a participatory process of social change within a given society. This participatory process needs genuine participation of the local community and the contextualization of development of the press works into local cultures and settings (Rogers, 1976; Serves, 2008; Megalopolis, 2008).

Contrary to the modernization paradigm that considers the developing culture as a bottleneck for development of the press and that the economic dimension of development of the press is emphasized, this participatory approach acknowledges the role of culture for development of the press and focuses the human dimension of development of the press. Thus, participatory paradigm widens the horizon of development of the press concepts by including the non-material notions of development of the press such as social equality, freedom and justice through which grassroots level of participation can be maintained in the development of the press process.

Different from the top down and one-way communication approach of the modernization and dependency paradigms in the process of development of the press, the participatory approaches acknowledge dialogical and horizontal nature of communication for achieving development of the press. This alternative paradigm presumes the indispensable role of two-way communication for empowerment of the poor and marginalized sections of the developing

nations and rejects the old assumption that mere transmission of information could not be enough for achieving development of the press (Melkote & Steeves, 2001).

Therefore, this research mainly used participatory journalism and communication as a theoretical framework, because for one thing the very nature of the research questions and the approaches of the study appear suitable for the theoretical foundation of participatory journalism and communication for development of the press. The basic tenets of dialogical participatory journalism and communication such as empowerment, dialogical, problematisation, endogenous, action and reflection, acquiring skills, increasing self-confidence, control over oneself and one's environment, achieving quality of life, freedom, understanding one's ability and limitations are used as theoretical framework to analyses the data (Melkote & Steeves, 2001; Freire, 2005).

Theoretically, the potential of participatory journalism and communication for sustainable development of the press has been acknowledged. Participation is a buzzword in the development of the press discourse and is preached as the hopeful and legitimate path for sustainable development of the press. However, when it comes to practical level, its potential is challenged by a number of factors. This section discusses different challenges that limit the adoption of participatory journalism and communication for development of the press. Waisbord's (2008) institutional perspective on challenges of participatory journalism and communication enlightens us the bureaucratic factors that hinder the application of participatory communication. The institutional dynamics denigrate the potential of participatory journalism and communication in three ways. These are bureaucratic requirements for messaging, making communication as a subsidiary discipline, and seeking technical solutions to political problems.

3.0 Methods

This research was a qualitative study, refereeing to exploring issues, understanding phenomena, and answering questions to gain deep insight about social phenomena or about people's reality (Creswell, 2002; Newman, 2007). It sought to understand people's interpretations as it stresses the need to see through the eyes of one's subjects and understand social behavior in its social context. In this approach, the data are experiences and perceptions of the people in the environment. In the case for the present study, the experiences and perceptions of change agents and the local community towards factors that affect participatory journalism and communication are used for data source. Since qualitative approach enables to understand the inside view and to secure an in-depth understanding of the phenomena in question, data were qualitatively gathered. Using qualitative case study as a research design, this research used in-depth interview, FGD, document analysis and observation as data gathering instrument.

4.0 Results and Discussion

The potential of participatory journalism and communication for sustainable development of the press has been praised at the theoretical level. Participation is a buzzword in the development of the press discourse and is preached as the hopeful and legitimate path for sustainable development of the press. But when it comes to the actual practice, it seems not to be less reflected. In FCC, participatory journalism and communication is the missing link in the development of the press process. A number of factors could hinder the implementation of genuine participation. The major factors that affect the practice of participatory development of the press communication could be listed as follows: the economic perceptions of development of the press, the top down development of the press approach, short time span of the development of the press projects and the dollar driven nature of projects, the

perceptions of participation as labor and material contributions, the dependency syndrome, the perceptions of development of the press communication as information transmission, lack of professionalism of communication, lack of adequate man power, the organization's structural problem, lack of adequate budget, the absence of communication policy, political interference and lack of democratic culture.

Many development of the press workers share such economic notion of development of the press. The above quotation could highlight us that FCC as an organization perceives development of the press as economic growth of the local community. That is, the economic conception of development of the press outweighs the other dimensions of development of the press. This is a perspective drawn on the modernization and the dependency paradigm despite their convection on the idea of participation. Moreover, understanding FCC's conceptions of development of the press, examining its four strategic plans was a must. In all the first strategic plans (1997-2003) FCC's priority areas are identified: natural resource protection, agricultural development of the press, rural water supply and access, road construction and emergency food aid (FCC second strategic plan, 2004; FCC third strategic plan, 2009; FCC fourth strategic plan, 2014).

The FCC's economic focused conception of development of the press seems to become different from the definition of participatory development of the press which focuses on holistic development of the press including the economic, social, cultural and political dimensions of a given society. The emphasis of the organization on economic issues usually marginalizes the dimension of human development of the press contrary to the principles of participatory development of the press.

This conception and approach largely determine the practice of participatory development of the press on the ground. That is, the economic perspective of development of the press closes, if not narrows down, the room for employing holistic development of the press. This in turn impedes the human dimension of development of the press which is the major concern of participatory development of the press. As a result, the conception of development of the press by itself shapes the development of the press practice on ground and limits the opportunities for practicing participatory development of the press.

The short duration of most of the development of the press projects affects the practice of participatory development of the press where considerable length of time, more than the standard duration of three to five years of development of the press projects, will be needed. Even the international donors want tangible and timely report for their fund, not the process of participation which takes long time to use it effectively. In the international development of the press context the usual duration of development of the press projects is between three to five years. Such short time duration obliged the development of the press organizations to rush to deadlines and reports, rather than to work on participation and empowerment of the local community. The research participants state that people's participation consumes time and costs resources and they usually prefer using the top-down approach. In short, donors set their fixed time and this affects the implementation of participatory development of the press in FCC. The organization, of course, should rush for performing the development of the press works based on the donors' schedule. This in turn directs the attention of the organization to prepare reports and to keep deadlines rather than consider local demands and build consensuses. The short duration of projects' life span is also mentioned as an impediment of participatory development of the press by scholars.

The other major factor that affects the practice of development of the press communication, in general and participatory journalism and communication in particular, is lack of

professionalism in the communication department of the organization. When we see the profile of the communication staff, there is only one expert who has graduated in the field of communication. Others are not from the field of communication. In all the project offices of the research sites there is no one assigned based on his /her profession, communication. Because of this gap, participatory journalism and communication could not be practiced professionally, and its role for development of the press may not be understood well. In other words, the lack of skills to handle participatory journalism and communication is the result of such professional gaps. The data shows that the poor handling of community conversation (CC) affects the communication with the local community not to be dialogical in ways that empower the local community. Generally, lack of knowledge and skills on how to communicate in the development of the press context are among the gaps that hinder the communication works of the organization. Critical reflection on the marginalization of participatory communication. He contends that when other disciplines determine the status of communication, professionalism will suffer a lot. Other privileged professions in development of the press may need communication to disseminate information in order to achieve their pre-determined objectives.

5.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the above discussion, the major factors that affect participatory development of the press communication could be categorized into three themes. These are the individual factors, the institutional or organizational factors and the environmental factors. The individual factors consist of the perceptions and practices focusing on the individual development of the press workers or experts in FCC. These factors include the view, perceptions and beliefs of development of the press workers about development of the press as economic growth, participatory development of the press communication as information sharing and persuasion, and participation as labor and material contributions. Besides, the perception towards the local community as beneficiaries, not as stakeholders, and the existing low level of professionalism in communication could be part of the individual factors hindering the practice of development of the press communication of the organization.

The institutional factors refer to features that affect participatory development of the press communication and have organizational dimension. These are factors beyond the scope of individual experts or development of the press workers. These factors include the top down development of the press approach, organization's structural problem, lack of adequate man power as well as absence of communication policy and strategy. The environmental factors, on the other hand, refer to factors associated with the wider development of the press context beyond the immediate control of the organization. These include the wider political history and socio-cultural contexts of the region or the country, dependency syndrome, short time span of the development of the press projects and the impact of donors and government interventions. Some of the factors thematically categorized above, however, are interlinked and sometimes they overlap each other and they are difficult to be categorized at specific levels. For instance, professionalism might have both individual and institutional dimensions. The durations of development of the press projects might have both institutional and environmental dimensions.

Freedom of speech and press by the media can conflict with a citizen's right not to be subject to false statements in the media that would defame a person's character. That is, the media do not have a general right under the principle of protected free press or speech to commit slander (to speak false information with an intent to harm a person) or libel (the printing of false information with intent to harm a person or entity). The media have only a limited right to publish material the government says is classified. If a newspaper or media outlet obtains classified material, or if a journalist is witness to information that is classified, the government may request certain material be redacted or removed from the article. The line between the

people's right to know and national security is not always clear. In 1971, the Supreme Court heard the Pentagon Papers case, in which the U.S. government sued the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* to stop the release of information from a classified study of the Vietnam War.

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