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**THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL ASPECTS OF MASS COMMUNICATIONS**

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UDC 070.484

**V. Fomenko**

*V. N. Karazin Kharkiv National University*

**The roots and modern causes of the imbalance in the reflection of life in  
Cameroon in the international media**

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**Фоменко В. К. Корені та сучасні причини дисбалансу у висвітленні міжнародними медіа життя Камеруну.** Стаття аналізує, як міжнародні медіа пишуть про проблеми та досягнення Камеруну. Встановлено, що присутні багато неточностей та брехні, хоча колоніальні часи вже пройшли. Нові африканські медіа на сьогодні ще недостатньо потужні для створення постійної хвилі гарних новин. Але в останні 10 років з'явились декілька позитивних трендів.

**Ключові слова:** Камерун, медіа, дисбаланс, колоніальний, відображення.

**Фоменко В. К. Корни и современные проблемы дисбаланса в освещении международными медиа жизни Камеруна.** Стаття аналізує, як міжнародні медіа пишуть про проблеми та досягнення Камеруну. Встановлено, що присутні багато неточностей та лжі, хоча колоніальні часи вже пройшли. Нові африканські медіа на сьогодні ще недостатньо сильні для створення постійної хвилі хороших новостей. Але в останні 10 років з'явились декілька позитивних трендів.

**Ключевые слова:** Камерун, медиа, дисбаланс, колониальный, отражение.

**Fomenko V. The roots and modern causes of the imbalance in the reflection of life in Cameroon in the international media.** The article analyzes how international media write about the problems and achievements of Cameroon. There are many inaccuracies and lies despite the colonial time have gone away. New African media are not strong enough to create the constant wave of good news. However, some positive trends were born in the last 10 years.

**Key words:** Cameroon, media, imbalance, colonial, reflection.

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Mostly scientists of the Western countries investigated the problem of the media's misinforming of life in Africa. It is explained by such circumstances that from the middle of XIXth to last years of XXth centuries only Western media have been the dominate channels of communication between Africa countries and the world. Moreover, now these media save their dominate positions and continue to disinform the world audience. Now media of Africa's countries take part in the communication. Their role became the subject of investigating of such African scientists as Sheikh Abubakar Rajab, Adum Th, An'o-Beavogi Anna, Bojmass Idrissu and the others [1–5]. There are not many such investigations especially about Cameroon. We found scientific works of Ashu Nyenty, Henry Muluh, Ewumbue-Monono Churchill [8; 11; 14].

The main result of the most modern investigations – Cameroon as many other African countries suffered of the lack of truth, objectiveness, professionally write news and articles. Where are the roots of this strongly

painful problem for Cameroon?

We have to glance in the middle of the XIXth for understanding the historical roots. In 1869 three leading colonial countries – Britain, France and Germany – had signed the Agency Alliance Treaty according to which all the world was divided between the information agencies: Reuters, Havas, Wolff. Subsequently, this agreement was called the Ring Combination. Scope of agencies met up economic and political influence of Britain, France and Germany. Each agency works closely together with the political and economic elite of the country location, getting a certain political patronage and providing information valuable for trade and diplomacy [6:55–58].

The cartel of three major world agencies dominated in the international system of gathering and distributing news before the start of the First World War. Then AP sided them. Later – world media. Gradually, the largest media was the main instrument of international trade information. Entire continents – Asia, Africa, Latin America – depended on the export of the above news agencies

and world media [6:62–63].

An imbalance in coverage of life of third world countries, particularly countries in Africa, has become the subject of study of many scientists, which propose to name such phenomenon as cultural imperialism. According to the theory of cultural imperialism, modern society consists of two major parts – the Centre and the Periphery. For our investigation, it is important to show laws of information flows between the Centre and the Periphery, which consists of the dependent territories. These laws proposed by J. Galtung, later were developed by F. Reyes Matta, S. Gunaratne, F. Kaplan and some other scientists. They considered global information flows as vertical communication interaction of developed countries (the countries of the «North») and developing countries (countries of the «South»). The intensity of flows «North-South» significantly exceeds the intensity of flows «South-North», which leads to the dominance of information about developed country [6:73–75].

Therefore, we have weak information flows from Africa. However, this news, before coming to the newspapers, has to overcome special gate according to gatekeeping theory. There are special editors in the Western media, who decide which information will be provided to the media and distributed among the population. As H. Hans has noted the priority given to the spread of sensationalism, various scandals, information about conflicts, violence and disasters in Africa and others continents of the South [12].

How does a western journalist write his/her articles now, from a free African country, not from a colony? Laura Seay initiated the large discussion in western media on this topic. The author notes that «most of the Western media refer to Africa with total disregard; they prefer swollen muddy histories, neglecting even the elementary rules of professional ethics». Most of the materials based on stereotypes that create and support the negative image of Africa and its inhabitants. According to Laura Seay, similar clichés are not passed through editorial out if reported from China or Pakistan.

To a certain extent, such poor coverage of the life of the continent can be explained by the extremely small number of its own correspondents from leading Western media, which deal with African topics. On the other hand, perhaps because many Western reporters still approach Africa with a mixed sense of excitement at being somewhere so «unique» and fear of the Heart of Darkness.

Jina Moor sure, that western journalists continue a storytelling tradition that hasn't fundamentally changed since Joseph Conrad

slapped Congo with «the heart of darkness» label. They understand that their articles are harmful for continent. However, journalists are depended of the editors which ground their business on the idea that any story can be sold easily if set in a «war-torn country». In addition, they demand to use clichéd shorthand, such as «Arab north versus Christian and animist south» (Sudan), or boilerplate background, such as «the 1994 genocide, in which 800,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus were killed» (Rwanda) [16].

Jina Moor thinks that the responsibility to change Western image of Africa doesn't lie solely with the few journalists feeding the beast. It also lies with media consumers – readers and listeners and viewers – patronizing media institutions with money or attention or clicks.

The destruction of Africa's heritage of colonialism, independence, and found in these countries own media might lead to significant changes in the distribution of information of world flows to new relationships in the media space between the developed countries of the world (countries «of the North») and developing countries (countries of the «South»). What do we really have? Such African scientists as An'o-Idrissu Anna, Sheikh Abubakar Rajab, Adum Okran, Samuel Sydney and others in their researches of the media fields in modern countries of East and Central Africa make the similar conclusions. They reject the problems, which do not let new African media have the strong positions in the world information flows and successfully support positive image of their regions. Cameroon is one of these countries.

Above-mentioned scientists noted that despite laws declaring the freedom of speech and of the press, there are serious barriers to the realization of the rights of citizens to information and its use. The ruling elite, in the belief that the ultimate goal of accelerating national development will inevitably restrict civil and political rights, has embarked on a policy of repression, creates a monolithic political establishment, puts pressure on the opposition. The press and Government are here in tensions, accusing each other of violations, misrepresentation, and organization of social unrest. Sometimes to criticize and expose the error of statesmen are still dangerous. Any attempt to criticize Government policy was seen as a statement against the nation. Consequently, the mass media have become a management tool, accessible only to a narrow circle of the Executive [3].

Cameroon now has several daily newspapers, some of which have foreign readers. One of them

is «Cameroon Tribune», official newspaper of the Republic of Cameroon, founded in 1974. Articles are published in French and English – official languages of the country. This media has correspondents in Congo, Nigeria, and other Africa countries. The main private-owned media are «Mutation», «Journal le jour», «The Herald», «Cameroon Tribune», «Le Messager».

There are also 11 cyber-papers and many magazines online. Some of these include *Le Patriote*, *Afrik'Netpress*, a bilingual daily, *La Nouvelle Expression*, for investigation and analysis, *Tam Tam*, and *The Cameroon Tribune*, a French-English paper *Sujet Tabou* (Taboo Subject).

International sites such as the BBC, L'équipe.fr, CNN, and Le Monde have the largest Cameroonian readership.

Important, that none of these media is based on the indigenous languages. In Cameroon, the official languages, French and English, dictate the standard for all education-related jobs, government employment, the media, and education. As a result, people, who know only one of the indigenous languages, can't use media [7].

Modern Cameroon has many problems that may be decided with media support. The main of these problems are the stability of the Government, lack of national qualified staff in political management and industry, ecology problems, pandemic HIV/AIDS, malaria, poaching that reached the international level. Are media quite professional for providing such support?

A compelling test of professionalism of media in Cameroon may be an example of the reaction to the blood event in July, 2014 in Kolofata where the Nigerian Islamist group Boko Haram killed 14 people and kidnapped 17 others. The wife of Cameroon's powerful Vice Prime Minister, Ahmadou Ali was among them. Reuters informed the world about this awful crime after only a few hours despite the circumstance that correspondent of this agency lives in Dakar. It looks strange but the state Cameroon Radio Television (CRTV) based in Maroua, which is a mere 80 km from Kolofata, has kept silent. Only until three days after the incident, CRTV finally broadcast the first images from Kolofata. Cameroon's private-owned media also remained silent about the attack. They place this outbreaking news only after a press conference by Cameroonian Communication Minister Issa Tchiroma who confirm that the attack had indeed occurred [9].

Another example – how media helps to the nation in her struggle against HIV/AIDS. Henry Muluh studied the role of the mass media in the

campaign against the HIV/AIDS pandemic in Cameroon. He came to the opinion that Cameroon media has not done much in the prevention of the spread of the pandemic: «Most of the awareness campaigns on the national media are unattractive. The media must make use of attractive forms of mass communication if they are to succeed in leading to behavioral change. Media campaigns in Cameroon must not only aim at awareness but must go a step further to empower people to make better choices about their personal health» [14].

The situation with of HIV/AIDS in Cameroon is so dangerous that the media campaign has to provide hope in order to reverse HIV/AIDS. The media should draw attention of policy makers to take decisive action; it should raise the awareness of the public about HIV/AIDS and dispel myths about it. The greatest dangers to the spread of HIV/AIDS are ignorance, pretense, silence, denial and a combination of these. Such a negative assessment puts Cameroon researcher to the role of media in this painful issue for the nation.

After regarding these two examples, we can see that the potential and real possibility of the Cameroon media are not enough strong for markable change of the information flows both outside and inside the country. Cameroon scientist Henry Muluh makes sure that there is also an additional ground problem, especially in his own country – the media are handicapped by a shortage of human resources. The newsrooms are understaffed for many reasons. Members of the staff are not well paid and often go for months with salaries unpaid. Under these conditions, the media houses cannot hire professionally acceptable staff.

A few Cameroon private-owned media found the way of compensation this shortage of staff. They began to use a crowd sourcing. Well know how to take the advantage of crowd sourcing; these media could get as much material even with fewer salaried staff. We may see here the two examples from *Le Jour* and *L'oeil du Sahel*.

In May 2013, *Le Jour* used a crowd-sourced material to uncover a serious problem of bad governance at the Yaoundé University Teaching Hospital. The workers had gone on strike to protest against over nine months of unpaid allowances and the situation which placed the patients at risk of poor treatment. Some of the affected workers called the newspaper using the telephone numbers that the paper had advertised on its masthead. The paper used this information as a starting point to investigate further: to go to the scene, meet other sources and to get quotable comments and to improve the story. The result was a thorough investigation bringing to light bad governance in a

strategic medical institution [8:12].

The tabloid *L'oeil du Sahel* also publishes telephone numbers and email addresses that allow readers to contact them with specific information. Through such contacts on 12 November 2012 the paper was able to reveal an alleged scandal insinuating that Frank Biya, the son of the President of Cameroon, had defrauded the state of 100 billion francs. It was very important to light up this fraud because of a heavy corruption in Cameroon for years. The tabloid cited sources and published facsimiles of documents [8:15].

Therefore, we see a new positive trend in the local media. Other newspapers in Cameroon have operated along similar lines, using crowd sourcing to collect information from people, especially on sensitive issues.

Another positive trend in reflecting Cameroon in the media is connected with new economic strategy of the country. Cameroon has started an effective cooperation with China and Japan. This influenced the global information flows, as one of the most powerful and influential world vendor's news agency Xinhua announcement highlights the economic cooperation of China and Africa objectively, accurately, and with respect to the partners.

Here we might compare the news about the visit of the Chinese State Councilor Liu Yandong to Cameroon. Xinhua writes: «Cameroon Prime Minister Philemon Yang said that Cameroon would like to work together with China to further cement their cooperative partnership guided by the principle of equality, mutual respect and mutual benefit. China would make joint efforts with African nations to promote their new strategic relations of partnership on the basis of political trust and equality, economic cooperation and cultural exchanges», – said Liu [16].

In another news, Xinhua uses the opinion of Meyo Akoulouze Maryse, an officer of the Cameroon Investment Promotion Agency. He told: «I am fairly certain that trading with China is better than with Western countries, since China is now rising so quickly. China knows how to develop an economy rapidly» [17]. Another example of the respectful attitude of the leading world media to the countries in Africa.

We have to pay attention to the role of the

international projects with online resources which defend the nature, healthiness of people, human rights. They also began to influence on the situation with Cameroon in the world media field.

When in Bubandzida National Park in the North of Cameroon poachers for one and a half month have killed more than 400 elephants, International Fund for Animal Welfare said that this case of poaching has become unprecedented in the scale of killing animals. Many global media wrote about this tragedy in the country. Even Ukrainian media was not left on the sidelines [18].

But when another nature fund WWF abused the tribe Baka in southeast Cameroon in the name of «conservation», Survival International, the global movement for tribal peoples' rights, stand up for the defense of Baka. Survival International uncovered that wildlife officers and soldiers pursue Baka, who hunts only to feed their families [9]. Many online media such as <http://allafrica.com> supported the rights of the Baka tribe.

Conclusions. The problem of the misperception of Cameroon as other African countries in the world media field stays to be harmful. The cultural imperialism is alive yet, despite the independence of African countries. The national media of Cameroon aren't enough strong for defending the interests of the nation.

A few positive trends have appeared:

1. Cameroon media started using the crowdsourcing as an innovative tool in journalistic reporting that enables traditional media to report on issues they were unable to before.

2. New economic cooperation with such powerful partners as China and Japan has brought a lot of positive news about Cameroon in the international press.

3. Cameroon receives the information support from many global projects that care the conservation of wild nature or human rights.

These trends have born the hope for real and sensible changes. It will be actually to research a situation in future.

*The author is grateful for the inspiration in work on this article to Balla Priska Mekongo, his student, graduated as bakalavre at Karazin Kharkiv National University, and wishes her great family happiness in Cameroon.*

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