

Since its inception the
print media has never
served

[Politics](#)



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

It is important from the outset to mention that it is not entirely true to say that the print media has never served the interests of the common people. At the same time the owners certainly have their own interests to fulfill. It also depends on the ownership structure to determine whether the print media serves or does not serve the interests of the common people. There are also a number of theories around the issue of the print media serving the interests of the common people. An example is the Social Responsibility Theory.

According to McQuail (1994), the theory emphasizes that the media have obligations to society. The news media should be truthful, accurate, fair and objective to the extent that objectivity is attainable. In this discussion I will dwell upon the above theory and the Authoritarian Theory. The government has the right to intervene in the public interest under some circumstances. Nevertheless, the social responsibility model encourages the press to be critical towards its government.

The most significant tension between the two models is perhaps their view of the role-division between the press and the government. While libertarianism champions distinct roles between the two institutions, with the press serving primarily through its watchdog functions towards the government, the social responsibility model is not foreign to the idea that both the press and the government have a nation-building function, thus cooperation between the two institutions is sometimes desirable and necessary. Philosophically, the social responsibility theory has a less optimistic view of human behaviour.

Social responsibility ethics assume that the human being is a composition of its particular cultural background and preferences, and the human free will does not guarantee ultimate good for everyone. The liberty concept in social responsibility is rooted in society, not only in the autonomous human being. According to Siebert, the authoritarian system requires direct governmental control of the mass media. This system is especially easy to recognize in pre-democratic societies, where the government consists of a very limited and small ruling-class.

The media in an authoritarian system are not allowed to print or broadcast anything which could undermine the established authority, and any offence to the existing political values is avoided. The authoritarian government may go to the step of punishing anyone who questions the state's ideology. The fundamental assumption of the authoritarian system is that the government is infallible. Media professionals are therefore not allowed to have any independence within the media organisation. Also foreign media are subordinate to the established authority, in that all imported media products are controlled by the state.

Having looked at the two theories one has to get a clear understanding of how each of the two theories either helps the media serve the interests of the common people or suppress their interests. One may argue that the authoritarian model helps irresponsible media organizations from publishing content that may bring about despondency to the common people. However, the other side of the coin is that the so-called "irresponsible" media outlet

will be playing its watchdog role over corruption occurring within the government.

That role certainly serves the interests of the common people as they are taxpayers and thus have a right to know what is taking place in government. With the authoritarian set up, it is difficult for the private and independent media to serve the interests of the common people. This may be attributed to laws enacted by the government, for example in Zimbabwe there are quite a number of laws that inhibit media organizations from publishing articles deemed unsuitable for public consumption.

There is the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA), Public Order and Security Act (POSA) to mention just a few. Quite a number of other factors have to be taken in consideration when looking at whether the print media serve interests of the common people, for instance, the question of ownership. Most private and independent print media organizations are there to first and foremost serve their interests. They are in the business to make profits. Very few media organization in this category rarely put the common person first.

When it now comes to the so-called public media, theoretically, interests of the common people are clearly outlined but seldom stuck to. For instance when we consider The Herald newspaper (government controlled), clearly serves the interests of the ruling Zanu PF government. Again on very few occasions, if any, do we read about exposure of corruption by senior government officials. Considering the economic situation prevailing in

Zimbabwe, there has to be something going wrong within the government and its officials.

But then the government print media blames the opposition for the chaos happening. The public is made to believe that it is the opposition to blame for all the current economic crisis. Going back again to the topic, one cannot totally assert that since its inception the print media has never served the interests of the common people. The situation on the ground, as one may argue, is that the print media has played its part in serving the common people's interests and at the same time, those that own or control the print media also serve their interests.

There has to be a balance between the two. In Zimbabwe, for example, Press freedom was been dealt a mortal blow with the forced closure and confiscation of equipment of the country's only independent daily newspaper. The Daily News was forced to shut down September 12, 2003 - just a day after it lost a Supreme Court challenge to a repressive law that requires media organizations and journalists to register with a government-appointed body According to Nyathi (2003), " the Act is seen as part of the government's arsenal meant to control the country's small but vibrant independent media".

In particular, he mentions that AIPPA is under attack for restricting access to information held by public bodies and establishing a government controlled Media and Information Commission, which regulates the independent media. Since its founding in 1999, The Daily News gave voice to civic society as well as the then fledgling opposition at the commencement of Zimbabwe's

<https://assignbuster.com/since-its-inception-the-print-media-has-never-served/>

decline, which coincided with increasing repression in the run-up to the parliamentary elections of 2000. As a result, the paper has been a thorn in the side of a government long used to a monopoly of opinion.

It has had to contend with open hostility and intimidation from the government. The above scenario has virtually denied the common people of Zimbabwe to hear the other side of the story and subsequently make informed decisions as to what steps to take. It has to be clear that it is not the print media that decides on whether they serve the interests of the common people but the rules and regulations or laws that are imposed in a country's media system that eventually decide on the interests of the public. The role of the media should be a simple guideline as to what interests the common people.

People need to be educated, informed on current and prevailing issues of concern and entertained. This has certainly not been a problem. Most of the print media in Zimbabwe has played its part in fulfilling this role. But then there are issues of corruption in government that the common people need to be informed about. The government-controlled media cannot, for obvious reasons, publish such issues much to the anger of the concerned official(s). In the worst circumstances the editor of the paper concerned may be instantly fired.

At the end one has to have a clear definition of what interests of the common people are. Usually people want to read what they want from the print media, they want to benefit in which ever way they can and above all they want to make informed decision regarding the governance of the their

<https://assignbuster.com/since-its-inception-the-print-media-has-never-served/>

country. When the time to vote comes they want to make the right choice. They can only do this when they have a thorough knowledge of the candidate concerned. But then when there is only one national daily that is pro-government, that is not possible.

On the other hand, the government in Zimbabwe has all the necessary media at their disposal to communicate to the masses their interests and not what the common people need and must to read. The assumption that there is a fundamental public interest in communication has been the major point of departure in debates on media policy making. The idea that the media is a public good, given its power to shape societal influences, is usually seen as the basis of determining how it should be structured, or at least the limit to which it should be allowed to enjoy its freedom.