

Role of the media in political conflict resolution



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An Analysis of the Media's role in Political Conflict Resolution

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CHAPTER THREE III. METHODOLOGY

The study was aimed at analyzing the role that the media can play in efforts to resolve conflicts incited by politicians. It was based on the Libertarian theory of Communication to vary what the media has to do in times when the conflict has risen to try to bring about mutual understanding among the various groups that may not be in good terms at a particular moment.

Studies were conducted that involved people working in the media sector both private as well as public media houses including the actual people affected by such conflicts on the ground.

Theoretical Framework

This research was centered on media houses and personalities role in resolving political conflicts through their various ways that they can play in the process of resolving such conflicts, therefore it will focus on the communication theory of Libertarianism. Media has absolute freedom of expression, media as a watchdog, the press' attacks on government policies are accepted and even encouraged but it is accountable (Roderick Long: philosopher). Other studies have shown how the state abuses the broadcasting sector in Malawi especially the two state broadcasting entities, MBC radios 1, 2 and Television, situations that eventually lead to political confusion as it is the norm among the different parties that have so far run the Malawi government. This development has seen to it that the state broadcaster usually becomes the mouthpiece for the party ruling the country at any particular time. This has been observed through the kinds of

programming and how the content in such programs is perceived by the public. However, private media houses are not exempted in this matter, as far as the state broadcaster has to a larger extent been pro government in terms of programming, there have been others that have been highly anti government and have done their work to address political needs of opposition parties that are either affiliated to such stations or simply because the general public has in mind the fact that even if they may try to approach the public broadcaster for political advertisement, they cannot be treated just the same as private media houses can.

“ The obstacles facing journalism in Malawi are many, but by far the largest problem is that of political interference in the work of the media. Politicians currently control over 90% of Malawi’s media. The sole television station is state-owned and is very much under the control of politicians from the political party in power. Not surprisingly, the news content on TV Malawi is biased towards the ruling party. For example, the station runs a weekly programme called “ Know your Member of Parliament”. Ever since it started last July, only MPs from the party in power have been featured, though the present Malawi Parliament has about the same number of MPs on the ruling side as in the opposition. The national radio station is worse. On it, low key party functionaries from the ruling side are allowed to castigate their opponents and glorify the Head of State. Opposition parties are not allowed a similar chance, thereby denying them the right to reply.” (Kumwenda, 1999) All this should not be part of METHODOLOGY. Find another section appropriate for this information. Am thinking Literature Review.

Type of Design and the Assumptions that underlie it

This study was based on qualitative research design and partly utilized the quantitative method to achieve the results of the case under study. It was the researcher's assumption that since the study was on the role that can be played, it highly involved views of such personalities from different media houses like Zodiak Broadcasting Station's political department, former employees of the Malawi Broadcasting Corporation, and on the other hand were some employees from Blantyre Newspapers Limited. Not only were the views of such personalities utilized but also the views from the public at a selected site in Lilongwe Rural for validation purposes to the expected results. It is in this line that the quantitative research approach found its sole importance in the study as it was used to vary the figures arrived at in the process of coming up with the results through the various interviews that were conducted.

Role of the Researcher

The researcher is a qualified personality as far as conducting of this study was concerned. The main role of the researcher was to find out through this study, the role that the media can play in the process of political conflict resolution in regard to the fact that it is through the media that different political parties voice out their ideas to the public. Hence the media has a better stand when it comes to contact with such people and can be the right choice for intervention on political conflicts or misunderstandings. It should be noted that the researcher conducted this study as a partial fulfillment for obtaining a Bachelor of Arts degree in Mass Communication at the African Bible College. The researcher assumes that the people who were interviewed

or asked to fill prepared questionnaires gave the necessary information since they were believed to be professionals in the field. And also the other group that was questioned from the general public was also expected to give the desired information as they are the ones affected mostly by the issues that arise due to the misunderstandings that the main players in the political arena undertake.

Selection and Description of the Study Sites and Participants

The researcher intends to conduct structured interviews, at the highest level of the interviewees were several media house personalities in a bid to collect the necessary data for the study. The other level of interviews will be in a form of Questionnaires that will be prepared to collect data from groups with varying ages at Church level at Kaning'a CCAP in area 47. This is the way most of the data was collected through people's participation in their responses to the questionnaires. The age groups were structured in terms of youths and adults and their gender inclusive, in order to determine the impact that the work of Journalists, media houses and the main players the politicians themselves that they have incited which has led to conflicts.

Data Collection Strategies

The interviews were conducted with different media house personalities ranging from those with Radio and Television work experience with private and state run stations to print media personalities to share their experiences in their work. Such data together with the data that was collected through the questionnaires that were produced and handed out to different age groups at Kaning'a CCAP Church formed the largest part of the data for this

research. The data collected from the people at the church was treated as first hand information from the public itself hence not only getting the facts from the media itself but also those people on whom all those actions determined by politicians and the media falls on, that is those that get affected by the decisions made by those with the power to speak out in whatever way they can through the media, be it through the Radio, Television and also the print media and in this case the newspaper in particular.

Data Analysis Strategies

To analyze the data that was collected, SPSS statistical software will be utilized, in addition to that, Microsoft Excel will also be used to assess the findings. Basing on the outcomes of the findings, the researcher dwelt much on analyzing and eventually interpreting the data as collected from the respondents both at the highest and the second level of interviews. It is from the analysis of the collected data that conclusions will be made about the opinions and facts as heard from the respondents through the interviews and questionnaires that were prepared in the course of conducting this study.

Methods of Achieving Validity

To prove the validity of the data collected in this study, the statistical software used in this research (SPSS), (Microsoft Excel) will be fed with the data. After feeding the computer software with the information, it will therefore with its capability prove whether the collected data will be valid or not, be it in terms of its collection or the approaches used to arrive at the desired data in this process. Sort out your margin for this section

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CHAPTER FIVE V. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Discussion

In this section, the researcher's emphasis is on the incorporation of what other writers have written about in their books and papers as recorded by the researcher in the literature review section of this study with the information that was found and decisions arrived at in the process of data collection for this study. From the responses given both by the general public as well as the people from the different media houses with regard to the guiding question that the researcher had in mind when conducting this study; which was: What role can the media in Lilongwe play in times of political conflict to help resolve matters ?. It has been the researcher's observation from the responses that yes there is a role that the media can play in trying to resolve conflicts among politicians and also help to avoid inciting conflicts. The general public touched on areas like being biased and not reporting fairly as some of the issues roaming around the media circle which brings about misunderstandings and confusion among the general public but the people themselves hoped that things can change for the better if the media practitioners can conduct themselves in a proper manner and also through fair means of reporting whatever they may be expected to report. Looking at what the media practitioners themselves commented when they were given a chance to speak about this topic, most of them indicated that indeed there are several roles that the media is expected to

play in times when conflicts among politicians arise and they further talked about what they can even do to avoid such issues from emanating within the society because of their influence. Most of the respondents that participated were people with Radio, Television, and Print experience, these were media practitioners from the Malawi Broadcasting Corporation, Zodiak Broadcasting Station, Nkhoma Radio Station and Blantyre Print and Packaging Limited. The practitioners were mostly in agreement with each other in terms of their comments, for example the issue of reporting without taking sides and regardless of any political affiliation. This is in line with what others have written before as indicated in the literature review as Puddephatt (2006) in his *Voices of War : Conflict and the role of the media* book writes “ in addition to the representation of the groups they are reporting on – in this case parties to the conflict – journalists also present their own views and interests”, from that it has to be noted that media practitioners as human beings also have their say on whatever issues they may come across with but they need to be professional in these issues and that implies reporting matters just the way they are as they happen and keep their opinions to themselves. One interesting side that the media practitioners touched on that was related to what is in the literature reviewed by the researcher was about consulting the media ethics and code of conduct first which is a challenge for most journalists practicing their services in a country where politicians own some of the media houses. Nymnjoh (2005) in his book, *Africa's Media, Democracy and the Politics of Belonging* added that in Southern Africa it is particularly true of Malawi, where most of the so-called independent papers that were established before the 1994 elections ‘ are privately owned by opposition parties, the state, government ministers or

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other politicians in their personal capacities', with the sole aim of smearing political rivals. This development may be a good one but very tricky for someone working with such media houses owned by politicians because the people in politics may indeed in some instances influence their workers in this case journalists inclusive to write or broadcast that which is of interest to them hence promoting hate journalism. In situations as such it is very crucial for an individual working in such kind of media to stick to the codes of ethics and conduct but the issue seems to be very different with regard to Malawi where most of the times others have just given in to the needs of their bosses. The researcher was of the view that this may be so sometimes simply due to the fact that not all of the media personalities may be well trained in these issues, but as a professionally trained journalist, the researcher believes that a journalist without knowledge of the media code of ethics and conduct may not be viewed as a well-trained practitioner and one who is ready to go into that field. On the other hand, the researcher was of the view that of course they may have undergone such training, but since it is a job and one tries to be submissive to his or her bosses and that is why it is easy to give in and simply do as the boss wishes yet knowing from deep down their hearts that what they are doing is not right. However the researcher thinks that that can also be another topic of study on its own if the readers can view it well and deeply think about it.

Almost all of the media practitioners that participated in this research took the view of fair reporting, reporting issues just the way they are, without exaggerating and not putting words in people's mouths but just to let the respondents answer the way they want and not to judge things on their own

but to leave it up to the audience to come up with conclusions on what they have heard through the media.

Conclusion

This study was conducted in order to find out the role that the media can play in times when there is already a conflict in the political arena in the city of Lilongwe and what they can do to help resolve such disputes, and specifically it was aimed at getting the views from the members of Kaning'a CCAP church and also various media practitioners from different media houses with a varied range of media experience. The results according to the responses given to the researcher through the questionnaires that were prepared showed that indeed there are several roles that are there that the media can play in trying to resolve conflicts among politicians in Lilongwe. Not only did the general public confirm that the media really stands a better chance to bring about solutions in political conflicts, but the main players, the media practitioners themselves also agreed that indeed to a greater extent there are bigger roles that people in the media can play looking at them as the bridge between the politicians and the general public. This according to the researcher proved to be a success in itself in that what the researcher was looking for through conducting this study as guided by the main research question came to light through the responses that the people themselves gave. The correlation of the responses from the general public with those from the people practicing their services in the media showed that really there is a lot that the media is expected to work on

Recommendations

Having conducted the study, collecting the necessary data, analyzing the data and coming up with conclusions basing on the findings in this paper, the researcher however has several recommendations to the various media practitioners and the different media houses in Lilongwe. In as much as everybody has his or her own view in a particular story or event as it may occur, there is a greater need for the people in the media to weigh the issue at hand and present it in a manner that will be appropriate to the audience regardless of their gender, race, occupation and even political affiliation. This will help to prevent cases of violence and not only that but also the media practitioner him or herself may also end up tarnishing their own image in the industry and being someone famous this can also ruin one's career as people will definitely associate that particular individual with such kind of behavior. It should hereby be understood that the role of a journalist is to get information as quick as possible to help boost the station's popularity, but one thing that has to be put into consideration is the fact that putting words in people's mouths is as costly as killing someone, it has to be noted here that should one report something not factual, if the people involved in that story end up not receiving the issue well, then your own words would surely come back to you and be dealt with accordingly. It is therefore of significance to be professional in the conduct of duties as media personalities. Working in the media should never be taken as an act of simply working in order to please one's boss but to work with an aim of serving the needs and aspirations of the intended audience at large. Media bodies that watch the actions of media houses and personalities in general need not to look upon such kind of practitioners and houses that practice

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their work in manners that are not professional as they are expected. A good example is what the Malawi Communications Regulatory Authority (MACRA) is currently doing as the country is drawing closer to this year's tripartite elections, calling upon the general public to report to the body if they suspect that any media house's conduct seems to be leaning towards the interest of specific political parties, that development is a good one since the media would thereby be held accountable for their actions as in accordance with the stipulations of the communication Act.

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