

African Studies Quarterly

Volume 8, Issue 2
Spring 2005

Journalism and Mass Communication in Africa: Cameroon. Festus Eribo and Enoch Tanjong, eds. New York: Lexington Books, 2002. 168 pp.

Journalism and Mass Communication in Africa edited by Festus Eribo and Enoch Tanjong, locates its analysis of mass communication in Cameroon within a historical framework. It provides a “one-stop volume on mass communication in Cameroon” (vii) and its main objective is to explore the historical development of the mass communication in Cameroon from the colonial to post-colonial period. The book explicates the development of print and electronic media, the relationship between journalists and the empowerment of the people, the growth of public relations, advertising, publishing industry and communication research.

The book consists of two parts, totaling twelve chapters. Part one addresses issues concerning journalism and mass communication in Cameroon while part two focuses on communication research and its application to a developing country like Cameroon. Chapter one examines the origin and development of the media in Cameroon, as well as the role played by the elites in the development of the media. The main themes that emerge from this study are that print media is the oldest media in Cameroon and this is true with other African countries. The government in Cameroon has been dragging its feet to develop and modernize the audiovisual sector and this led to the proliferation of video clubs. In chapter two, Tanjong and Angwa conduct an empirical study of media audiences and their perceptions of journalists through surveys, which reveal that the majority of participants give Cameroonian journalists high ratings and also that these journalists do not enjoy press freedom.

The third chapter, on communication and the empowerment of people, explores the relationship between systematic and strategic application of communication systems and empowerment of people. The chapter concludes that the use of appropriate technology, communication is vital for people-centered development. This study tears apart the dominant paradigm for development and espouses a participatory model for empowering people. In chapter four, Bisong Divine Epey explores the aesthetic traits of broadcasting, both audio and visual in Cameroon. The creation of competition among media outlets, especially between public and private has resulted in the adoption of a high level of aesthetics during production to enhance programs.

Chapter five looks at the notion of effective public communication and its significance in Cameroon. Central to this chapter is message construction through human communication and variables such as location, timing, scheduling, structural patterns and means of delivery, all of which are examined in detail. Funge, Cheo, Henry and Tita examine the rapidly expanding field of public relations in Cameroon. The study looks at the way public relations is being utilized in public and private sectors. Chapter seven follows closely on themes from chapter six by looking at the history and development of advertising in Cameroon. Citing particular national campaigns, the author is able evaluate the effectiveness and weaknesses of advertizing in Cameroon. Chapter eight, the last chapter in part one, looks at the publishing industry in Cameroon, probing the

problems confronting the industry, authors, and readers. The chapter also traces the historical evolution of the publishing industry in Cameroon, paying particular attention to government policy on publishing.

In part two, Adidi Uyo in chapter nine examines communication research, steps involved, and methods and techniques of data analysis. In chapter ten, Enoch Tanjong explores the use of survey research in Cameroon and examined some of the cultural taboos that may affect researchers especially during the sampling stage. Matt Moge kwu focuses on content analysis, emphasizing its significance and problems within an African context. The last chapter, by Okigbo, Kizito, Kyayonka and Eribo empirically analyze media contents across the continent, drawing examples from West and East Africa. What is interesting to note about these four chapters is they relate communication research with an African context and raised some of the cultural taboos that researchers, especially foreign researchers, should be aware of to avoid stonewalling by the locals during fieldwork.

An evaluation of this book depicts common patterns involving development of mass communication in Africa in general and the way governments in Africa, be they colonial or postcolonial, have been hostile to private mass media and at the same time use the public mass media to advance their hegemony. What makes this book unique is that it precisely focuses on Cameroon and in the process raises some socio-cultural, economic and political conditions that distinguish the development of mass communication in Cameroon from the rest of Africa. By focusing on Cameroon alone (this is one of the rare media and mass communication books that do not focus on the dominant sites of study in Africa -- Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya or South Africa), the authors give a refreshing and unique study about the development of mass communication in Africa.

The other strength of this book is its clearly well laid research methods and theoretical framework. Authors relied heavily on qualitative research methods with the exception of a few that utilized survey research and a combination of qualitative critical analysis and quantitative content analysis to analyze selected newspapers and magazines from Nigeria and Kenya. The research designs in these different chapters are clearly explained. While the book is a compilation of twelve different chapters, the dominant and visible theoretical framework that guides this book and threads across the different chapters is the historical evolution of mass communication in Cameroon from colonial to post-colonial Cameroon. All the chapters in this book are developed within this theoretical framework.

This book is useful especially to those interested in an insider's perspective concerning the evolution of mass communication in Cameroon. The book is up-to-date and fills an important scholarly void in mass communication studies in Africa and has significant value to students, scholars and policymakers of journalism and mass communication.

However, it also important to note that even for a work of this broad magnitude, the book has its shortcomings. The glaring shortcoming of this work is its peripheral treatment of mass communication policy environment in Cameroon. None of the chapters dwell convincingly on regulation of journalism and mass communication in Cameroon yet it is the regulation that shapes the way in which institution of mass communications functions. Policy is always an instrument of the state and shapes the environment of mass communication in any society. Also, the book does not address adequately how globalization has affected or not affected journalism and mass communication in Cameroon and how the corridors of power in Cameroon have responded to the phenomenon of globalization of the media.

Upon all the shortcomings outlined above, *Journalism and Mass Communication in Africa: Cameroon* is a well-written and compelling work on journalism and the evolution and development of mass communication in Cameroon.

Wenceslous Kaswoswe
Ohio University