MEDIA EDUCATION IN REGULATION OF JOURNALISM PRACTICE

Korir Geoffrey Kiplimo, Ollinga Michael Oruko, Rutto Wallace Cheruiyot

School of Human Resource Development, Department of Communication Studies, Communication and Journalism, Moi University, P.O Box 3900-30100, Eldoret – Kenya

Email: kiplimokorir11@gmail.com, Wallace.rutto@yahoo.com, michollinga@gmail.com

Abstract

Along with the proliferation of media establishments, concerns and issues continue to arise about the responsibility and objectivity of the media in our contemporary society. Unfortunately, media has been accused of sensationalism and manipulation of its audiences, attributes which contravene the ethical values of professional journalism. To understand how imperative media education is, there is need to comprehend how it helps in regulating the media practice in the society. Media education enables an audience to access, analyze and evaluate the content developed by and conveyed via various media. It is vital for educators and media experts to initiate media education so that a media literate audience can challenge and question the media when it fails to objectively execute its main mandates. This paper is an integrative literature review that interrogates what media education entails and posits how media education plays a significant role in shaping and regulating the media practice and how the audience consumes media content.

Key words; Media Education, Media Content, Audience

1. The Paper Study Objectives

This paper has come up with the following two core objectives;

- To probe what media education entails

- To find out how media education can play a significant role in regulating the media practice

2. Statement of the Problem

This paper is a brief integrative literature review which intends to discuss the concept: Media Education among audiences. Massive academic literature suggests that, in this society, individuals are continuously interacting with media messages. We are witnessing a number of media platforms coming up, a trend which creates an opportunity for audiences to select the content that gratifies them. Because of the media's stiff competition for an audience, media establishments have become more competitive in the way they craft and disseminate their content to their diverse consumers. At some point, due to this competition, the media tends to be unique in a way to attract a larger portion of the audience and in the process cross the line by getting into sensationalism of issues to satisfy this demand. In total disregard to the journalistic codes of conduct that include impartiality, fairness, truth and so on, media ceases being objective and responsible in execution of its mandate.

3. Significance of this paper

In actual sense, it would be less important to carry out media education only if the media reflected truth and neutrality in their functionality. But since the media continues to disregard some of the norms and values of journalism, their ineptitude cannot be ignored further. There is an urgent need for the improvement of journalism standards. In short, this paper points out that it is imperative for educators and the media experts to promote, explain, and transfer the

universally accepted values and good journalism to individuals which will surely help in regulating the media practice.

4. Methodology

This is an integrative literature review paper that entailed problem formulation, critical literature search on media education, ethical requirements for effective media practice among other authoritative works done by other scholars in this field of media and communication systems. The data received from these scholars including Aufderheide (1992), Fedorov (2001) among others were evaluated, analysed and finally presented in this paper.

5. Introduction

According to a report done by the National Council of Churches (1993), communication is a key thread in the fabric of life that shape individuals mentally, socially, emotionally and spiritually. Due to this huge influence of the media, media education is imperative for individuals who consume the media content because it promotes the understanding of how the media works, how the media affect their lives and how they can use the media wisely (ibid). It is equally important to note that media is a powerful medium that disseminates content on values, beliefs and behaviors most of which are shaped by economic reasons (Ontario Ministry of Education, 1989)

6. Understanding media education

Media education is vital in ensuring that individuals are better placed in questioning and challenging how the media operates and what is wrong and/or unacceptable by the media. By definition, media education is a process of the development of personality with the help of and on material of the media, geared at the modeling of culture of interaction with media, the advancement of resourceful communication skills, critical thinking, perception, interpretation, analysis and evaluation of media contents. Media literacy is an outcome of this process where an

individual is able to actively use opportunities of the information field provided by various media platforms including the television, radio, film and the internet (Fedorov, 2001).

On her part, Aufderheide (1992) points out that media education is a process geared towards helping an audience to comprehend, to produce and to negotiate meanings from images, sounds and words that are conveyed by the media. She further asserts that any media literate person has the capacity to decode, evaluate and analyze both the print and electronic media. The ultimate objective of media literacy is to have an informed citizenry, social advocacy and an audience competency (ibid). According to the European Commission (2007), media literacy is largely defined as the consumers' ability to access the media, to understand and to keenly evaluate the different media contents.

However, as explained by Tibor Kottay (2011) the importance of media literacy is not only justified by the extent of media exposure to an audience but rather the vital role of information in the development of democracy, cultural participation and active citizenship. According to the European Commission (2007), it is prudent to build up a better understanding of how the media functions and above all to enable the citizens to comprehend the economic and cultural dimensions of the mass media.

7. Levels of media education in brief

Looking at the above definitions, Tibor Kottay (2011) explains that there are various levels of understanding media education. The first level is where an audience is comfortable with the existing forms of media and has the capacity to use the various forms of the media actively. As pointed out by Kottay (ibid), the audience uses the media actively either by interacting with television content, using the search engines on the internet, participating in virtual communities and understanding the media's potential. In addition, media education ensures that an audience

has the ability of understanding whether the existing media entertains them, whether it promotes culture by creating a platform for intercultural dialogue and finally whether the media through its content manages to educate an audience. Media education also enables an audience to critically engage the media through the content it conveys in verifying their qualities and accuracies. Essentially, this is made possible by the audience being able to assess the media contents, understanding the commercial aspects of the media and of course using the internet search engines prudently (ibid).

Since most of the media establishments endeavor to make profits, we cannot run away from the fact that media is business oriented. Many media establishments are set up with a specific purpose of creating profits and/or changing viewpoints (Namle-Core principles, 2009). Many media platforms use advertisements and marketing to bring in advertisers and this is tied to the content they convey to an audience. In delving further into this issue of advertising, the Association for Media Literacy-Canada (2008) point out that advertising takes many forms including the placement of products in the media where advertisers seek to boost their business. It is however important when analyzing media content that an audience questions who created the content and the reason behind the creation. It is also prudent to establish what the content offers and benefits an audience and finding out the party likely to be disadvantaged. Media education thus enlightens an audience on the business side of the media and gives them the capacity to draw a clear distinction between media ownership and media multiplicity (Kottay, 2011).

On their part, Gutierrez Martin and Hottmann (2006) assert that media education's sole objective is to heighten an audience's media comprehension and gratification along with how it is organized and produces meanings. Media education is equally important because it makes an

audience to construct the reality from the media's content while keeping in mind how the media contents are generated (ibid).

According to Elizabeth Thoman and Tessa Jolls (2003), it is important for an audience to understand the multi-media world and the media's many layers of contents. The process of taking apart media content whether from electronic or print media may be referred to; analysis, deconstruction or decoding. Media education is therefore vital because an audience can then interpret and observe these contents besides deepening their understanding and appreciation. Given that media may go astray in executing their mandate, media education plugs the gap by triggering an audience to challenge any stereotype and both the misrepresentations and/or under-representations by the various forms of the media. A media literate audience can then be in a position to streamline the media practice by revealing any forms of bias and point of view projected by the media (ibid). Media education is pivotal in equipping the media consumers with competencies in their critical judgment of all forms of media content by not letting what they see or hear to control them negatively. It is however imperative to note that media education is on memorizing the media statistics and facts but it is being able to raise the right and critical questions about the media contents (ibid)

Media education is important for all media audiences who consume the media content knowingly or unknowingly given that the presence of the media has become so tremendous more so with the advent of technology. Because of this, Kottay (2011) advocates for the inception of media education in lower primary schools, secondary schools and tertiary institutions. This should happen with speed only if we want to experience a regulated media that follows the ethical requirements.

8. Expectations of the Media

It is however important for this paper to subtly scratch the surface of the media's codes of conduct. Andrew Puddephatt (2011) comports that while various codes have some differences, media shares common elements universally that includes accuracy, objectivity, impartiality, objectivity, fairness and truthfulness. These codes lay emphasis on the public's right to truth, the right to fair comment and criticism as well. Journalists and all the media practitioners in general are expected to use acceptable methods in obtaining information, readiness to rectify mistakes and upholding anonymity of their sources. These tenets are vital in safeguarding the professional media practice besides serving their essential purpose of an independent monitor of power and verification of facts from sources. It is highly expected that these codes should enable the media to make their contents significant, interesting, relevant, comprehensive and proportional. Unfortunately, with these codes in place, the media has been blamed for not adhering to them. Therefore media education where an audience can challenge the media content becomes an alternative option of questioning and challenging the media. It is hoped that a media literate audience should take the media to task and ensure that all forms of media take responsibility of the contents they convey.

Media education in this age of social and political environment plays a key role in conveying the wide range of social and political effects of the media. Drastic changes in the family life, how individuals use the free and leisure time and the results from programmes on political debates are some of such instances. Since media is a powerful tool, it has a responsibility of shaping the values, norms and attitudes in the society. With this in mind, the media should inform its audience on myriad of issues and global events that may range from terrorism to civil rights (The association for Media Literacy-Canada, 2008). Media will therefore fail in taking advantage of

its audience since media education enables an audience to understand how media filters their perceptions, forms the popular culture and influence the personal choices. It should be noted that media education gives individuals the capacity of solving problems and making them better citizens and media consumers who can produce the media content as well. An audience should be educated in order to fundamentally identify, avoid and/or challenge the undesirable, offensive and harmful media content (Namle-Core Principles, 2009)

Indeed many factors are affecting the level of professionalism in journalism. In Greek for instance, commercialization and speedy deregulation are among the reasons affecting journalism practice. For instance, there has been a paradigm shift away from the hard news (Demertzis and Armenakis, 1999) foreign news, culture and investigative pieces that usually play a watchdog role. Further, the media there has adopted a tabloid agenda and features or soft stories focus more on the problems of everyday life (Papathanassopoulos, 1997). As stated earlier in this paper, media has been accused of being partisan and impartial. In Greek the same situation takes place where majority of the media establishments are partisan, sensational and political (Zaharopoulos and Paraschos, 1993). It is regrettable that the print media is also partisan and considered incompatible with fairness (Zaharopoulos and Paraschos, 1993)

It is therefore imperative to note that media influences how an audience views many things. Subtle and not subtle content with symbols, sounds and metaphor push the society towards a market driven, violence prone and self centred style that corrupts the good values of the society. This is a dangerous trend therefore there is an urgent need for media education. This enlightenment will ensure that an audience can properly understand the media symbols, images and language from a desired perspective. In consistence with the society's desired values, a

media literate audience should then challenge the media to portray in a balanced fashion, the views, opinions and cultures of a diverse audience (National Council of churches, 1993).

Media literate audience should therefore check the media which has been blamed for displaying gratuitous sex, depicting violence and insufficient programming for all segments of the society, sameness in entertainment programming, superficial coverage of news, inadequate attention to religious issues and the trivialization of news and information. These complex issues need an audience to make its relevant perspective (ibid).

9. Conclusions and Recommendations

In view of this problem, it is apparent that media self-regulation may not streamline the media practice by itself. There is a need to have a media literate audience that can be influential in critiquing and changing the wrongs permeated by the media establishments. Media literacy centers should be setup immediately probably in churches, schools, and universities. As elucidated by the Centre for International Media Assistance (2008), by developing the public's media literacy, an audience will be better placed in distinguishing good quality media from bad, objectivity from partisanship and views from slander. Governments, international organizations and the media themselves have a sole responsibility of initiating and supporting public debates on the norms, standards and media expectations, building awareness and shared standards on freedom and finally content and social responsibility (ibid).

References

Aufderheide, Patricia. (1992). *Media Literacy. A Report of the National Leadership Conference on Media Literacy.* Washington, DC: Aspen Institute.

Demertzis, N. and A. Armenakis (1999). *The Parliament in the Press and on Television.* Athens: University of Athens Research Institute of Applied Communication/Department of Communication and Mass Media (in Greek).

European Commission. (2007). *A European approach to media literacy in the digital Environment URL (referred November 2014): http://ec.europa.eu/avpolicy/media_literacy/docs/com/en.pdf.*

Fedorov, A. (2001). *Media Education: History, Theory and Methods. .* Rostov: CVVR.

Gutiérrez Martín, A.G., Hottmann, A. (2006). *Media Education across the Curriculum. URL (referred November 2014): http://www.mediaeducation.net/resource/pdf/downloadMEACbooklet.pdf.* Kulturring in Berlin.

Koltay, T. (2011). *The Media and the literacies: media literacy, information literacy, digital literacy. .* Published in Media Culture & Society; : Sage Publications.

NAMLE-Core Principles. (2009). *Core Principles of Media Literacy education in the United States (Electronic Version), http://www.amlainfo.org/uploads/r4/cEZukacxNYaFFxlMONdQ/NAMLECPMLE-w-questions.pdf.*

National Council of Churches. (1993). *The Churches' Roles in Media Education and Communication Advocacy. A policy Statement Approved by the General Board November 11, 1993.*

Ontario Ministry of Education. (1989). *Media Literacy.* Ontario, Canada: Ministry of Education Ontario.

Papathanassopoulos, S. (2001). *Media Commercialization and Journalism in Greece, European Journal of Communication 16 (4).* London, Thousand Oaks, CA and New Delhi: SAGE Publications.

Puddephat Andrew. (2011). *The Importance of Self-Regulation of the Media in Upholding Freedom of Expression; Communication and Information.* Unesco: Brasilia Office.

The Association for Media Literacy-Canada. (2008). *What Is Media Literacy? Retrieved from http://www.aml.ca/whatis.*

Thoman Elizabeth and Tessa Jolls. (2003). Literacy for the 21st Century; an Overview & Orientation Guide to Media Literacy Education; Center for Media Literacy.

Zaharopoulos, T. and E.M Paraschos. (1993). *Mass Media in Greece, Power Politics and Privatization.* . Westport, CT: Praeger.

About the Authors:

Korir Geoffrey Kiplimo, **Ollinga Michael Oruko** and **Rutto Wallace Cheruiyot** are currently postgraduate students in the School of Human Resource Development, Department of Communication Studies, Communication and Journalism at Moi University, Eldoret – Kenya. The authors have jointly presented two papers at the Moi University's 10th Annual International Conference. The papers were entitled;

- ROLE OF PRIVATELY-OWNED MEDIA IN ENHANCING ACCOUNTABILITY AND TRANSPARENCY IN DEMOCRATIC STATES

- THE ROLE OF MEDIA IN IMPLEMENTATION OF MASS CAMPAIGN MESSAGES

IJOART