

Changes in journalism in two post-authoritarian non-Western countries

Levi Obijiofor and Richard Murray

The University of Queensland, Australia

Shailendra B Singh

University of the South Pacific, Fiji

the International

Communication Gazette

0(0) 1–21

© The Author(s) 2016

Reprints and permissions:

sagepub.co.uk/journalsPermissions.nav

DOI: 10.1177/1748048516682147

gaz.sagepub.com



Abstract

There have been significant changes in journalistic practices in various countries over the years. Yet little is known about the nature of changes in journalism in transitional developing countries following military rule. Drawing on email surveys of journalists in Nigeria and Fiji, two countries with recent histories of military dictatorship that are rarely examined in the research literature, this comparative study investigates journalistic practices in the two countries. Results show that in Nigeria, the transition from military rule to democratic system of government in May 1999 and the enactment of the Freedom of Information Act in 2011 have ushered in significant changes in the way journalism is practised. However, there remains an adversarial relationship between the government and journalists. In Fiji, the 2006 coup, the fourth in the country's history, led to a more restrictive environment for journalists, despite democratic elections in 2014. Under pressure, journalists are rethinking their roles, with some now considering 'development journalism' as a legitimate journalistic genre. These findings contribute to our understanding of journalistic practices in non-Western cultures following transition from military rule to democracy.

Keywords

Fiji, journalism practice, Nigeria, non-Western countries, post-authoritarian societies, post-military countries, technological changes, transitional societies

Introduction

Over the past three decades, whenever questions are raised about the factors that drive changes in journalism, a typical response is that technological

Corresponding author:

Levi Obijiofor, School of Communication and Arts, The University of Queensland, St Lucia, Brisbane, QLD 4072, Australia.

Email: l.obijiofor@uq.edu.au

transformations have had the most impact, not only on journalistic practices across cultures but also on business models of journalism. Yet, comparatively little is known about the often profound changes in journalism caused by political developments in post-authoritarian, non-Western cultures with a history of military dictatorship. Some such developments seem to have gone somewhat unnoticed, quite possibly because these developments have been overshadowed by the rapid and ongoing developments in media technology, and the race in academic research to keep up with these transformations. This study aims to understand factors that influence journalistic practices in two non-Western developing countries – Nigeria and Fiji – following transition from military rule to democracy. Changes in journalism in countries with a history of military rule have received little research attention. As Josephi (2010) points out, countries with limited press freedom have been rarely examined in the literature. We seek to understand transformations in professional journalism practice as fully as possible, in terms of where they have come from, how journalists are responding to their new milieu, and how they perceive their role in their society.

Journalism has been described as ‘an Anglo-American invention’ (Chalaby, 1996: 303). Wasserman and De Beer (2009) contest this idea because it excludes non-Western forms of journalism as authentic journalism. The exclusion of some areas of the world (e.g., Africa, Asia) in the way journalism is practised across cultures has diminished scholarly efforts to map global media models and practices. Hafez (2009) argues that journalism scholarship should go beyond the dominant Anglo-American ideal of journalism to present diverse and inclusive views that facilitate greater knowledge and understanding of other cultures, practices, and traditions. The dominance of Western notions of journalism tends to produce a homogenous worldview that rejects or ignores other non-Western experiences. This perhaps explains why much of the literature is still Western-oriented or Euro-centric.

Global conceptions of journalism that overlook some parts of the world such as Africa, Asia, and Latin America have implications for the way journalism is perceived and practised in other cultures. As Wasserman and De Beer (2009: 431) state: ‘The end-result is too often that the Western democratic model of liberal democracy remains the implicit or explicit normative ideal against which journalism in non-Western societies is measured, with media-state relations as a primary determinant of journalistic standards’. The dominant view of journalism is now being contested by research that shows the knowledge gaps that lie between theory and practice. It is against this background that Wasserman and De Beer argue that, ‘Theories about how journalism should be defined, what its relationship with society is, how it should be taught and how it should be practiced ought to be constructed within a globally inclusive, dialogic setting’ (2009: 429).

While technological developments have affected journalism in various ways, and while little attention is paid to developing countries in which technological transformations are less manifest, journalists and citizens in less developed countries

continue to find creative ways to get around their political, cultural, economic, structural, and social circumstances. As Josephi (2007) notes, there are different journalistic practices across cultures, which suggest that the notion of a dominant model of journalism is untenable in the 21st century. She observes that while the American model of objective reporting might have been copied across the world, there are too many drawbacks associated with that model. This would appear to re-echo the views of De Burgh (2005) who contends the ideal model of journalism has since been abandoned owing to dissatisfaction with the Western paradigm.

Research shows that journalists across cultures do not see their roles through one universal lens (Hanitzsch, 2005; Hanitzsch et al., 2011; Mwesige, 2004; Ramaprasad, 2001). Journalists' role perceptions are sometimes affected by the social, political, economic, and cultural environments in which they practise. Therefore, journalists in different societies perceive their roles in different ways. A study of journalists in 14 Arab countries found many of them see themselves as facilitators of social and political change and defenders of their society against foreign intervention (Pintak and Ginges, 2008). However, Tanzanian journalists take a different view, believing their role is to investigate state officials and to provide information, education, and entertainment, even though they also believe it is their role to support the government to achieve socio-economic development (Ramaprasad, 2001). Similarly, Hanitzsch's (2005) study of Indonesian journalists found a majority backed Western values of neutrality and objectivity, while they expressed limited support for the development task. Mwesige's (2004) study of Ugandan journalists found predominant support for Western values of detached reporting and objectivity. While research evidence is mixed in terms of how journalists in different countries perceive their role, Hanitzsch et al.'s (2011) study of 1,800 journalists in 18 countries found that unbiased reporting and the watchdog role appear to be widely adopted by journalists regardless of the political system and culture in which they operate.

Weaver (1998a, 1998b) reported the results of a survey of journalists in 21 countries which showed some similarities in the way journalists perceived their roles. Nevertheless, he also found some distinctive differences in the way journalists perceived their roles. For example, among the journalists he surveyed, there were major differences over how vital it was to present entertainment, to reflect accuracy and neutrality in news reports, and to serve as watchdogs of society (Weaver, 1998b). The journalists also differed on the extent to which they felt it was justifiable to use contentious reporting strategies. The areas on which journalists seemed to agree included the role of journalists in conveying news and information to the public, and in serving as a vehicle for public debate.

The difficult environments in which Nigerian and Fijian journalists operated during military dictatorship have necessitated the need to investigate the factors that influence current journalistic practices. Therefore, we believe it is important to understand the background of military dictatorship under which journalists in Nigeria and Fiji operated before the introduction of democratic rule.

Journalism practice in Nigeria and Fiji during military rule

The relationship between the news media and the government in Nigeria has never been warm. This uneasy relationship dates back to the colonial times (Campbell, 2003). To illustrate the adverse nature of the relationship, a former chairperson of the *Daily Times* newspaper, once regarded as Nigeria's largest and authoritative newspaper, Babatunde Jose, said:

Many African journalists still believe that a good press is one that is in a constant state of war with the government; that a "progressive" journalist is one who writes anti-government articles every day and a leading journalist is one who is in and out of prison for sedition. (Cited in Parker, 1995: 4)

In Nigeria, for example, the emergence of guerrilla-style journalism (i.e., underground journalism) in the 1980s and the 1990s was a direct response by journalists to widespread detentions, assassinations, manhunts, arson attacks on newspaper houses, and arbitrary closure of media organisations by military dictators. Despite this experience, journalists showed incredible resilience in resisting authoritarian military dictators who ruled the country from 31 December 1983 to 28 May 1999. In the prevailing climate of censorship, the media operated underground and practised guerrilla journalism (Olorunyomi, 1998; Olukotun, 2002). Olorunyomi argues that, of all the countries in Africa, Nigerian journalists and media were persecuted and assailed the most. The year 1993 was the worst in the history of journalism in the country because it was the year in which military dictators enacted four press decrees that constrained journalists' freedom. The decrees were numbers 33, 35, 43, and 48 (Olorunyomi, 1998). Decree No. 35 (Offensive Publications Proscription) stipulated the closure of news publications that were regarded as confrontational, including those that published anti-government news. Decree No. 43 (Newspapers Registration Decree) specified strict and rigid registration guidelines for newspapers. Decree No. 48 (Publication Prohibition Decree) banned 17 news publications owned by five press organisations. This decree was tough and retributive but the press owners found new ways of circumventing it – they established new titles that remained critical of the military rulers (*Press and military rule in Nigeria*, 2013). To overcome these restraints, journalists operated mobile newsrooms, meeting in such odd places as sport stadiums, art theatres, gymnasiums, movie halls, hotels, and so on (Olorunyomi, 1998).

Olukotun (2002) believes guerrilla journalism in Nigeria was successful because journalists received widespread support from civil society in various forms such as through 'patriotic buying' of newspapers, citizens providing accommodation and hiding places for journalists who were evading arrest by state security officials, civil society organisations providing funds to journalists, and other sources of funding from the international community and private organisations.

The background of military dictatorship and adversarial journalism that existed in Nigeria prior to democratic rule justifies the decision to examine current

journalistic practices in the country to understand how journalists are adapting to a new environment of relative freedom. The choice of Nigeria is defensible because the country 'has one-fifth of Africa's people, an economy underpinned (and, many believe, misshapen) by immense reserves of oil, and the largest active press community on the continent' (Parker, 1995: 1).

Like Nigeria, the media–government relationship in Fiji has been fraught since colonial times with an emphasis on the watchdog role, which has been grudgingly tolerated, and at times detested by successive ruling powers (Robie, 2014; Singh, 2015). Following a smooth transition to nationhood and parliamentary democracy in 1970, Fiji's media attempted to uphold the British free press traditions, even in the face of four coups between 1987 and 2006 (Singh, 2015). The 1987 coup, the Pacific's first, was staged by Lieutenant Colonel Sitiveni Rabuka who claimed he was protecting indigenous Fijian rights from a perceived threat from Indo-Fijians, descendants of Indian labourers the British shipped to Fiji to develop the colony's sugar industry. The Rabuka coup was the media's first serious brush with censorship, even if the restrictions were short lived. The coup was followed by a protracted democratisation process, with Fiji ending up a new, imposed constitution in 1990, weighted heavily in favor of indigenous Fijians. The 1990 Constitution was replaced by the more equitable 1997 Constitution, and the full restoration of full media rights (Singh, 2015).

Constitutional guarantees coupled with market deregulation and British-style media self-regulation stimulated further competition in an expanding Fiji media market. The media scene in the 1990s has been described as 'saturated, to the point of overflowing', with three dailies, eight commercial radio stations, three monthly business magazines, one commercial TV station, numerous other commercial publications, and a strengthening shift towards the Internet (Digitaki, 2000). These developments led to a somewhat jingoistic media environment, with a bigger, brasher, and bolder journalist corps making new strides into previously uncharted territory, including tabloidisation on the one hand, and some fine examples of investigative journalism, on the other (Usman, 2012). The media's growing confidence and impertinence led to increased frictions with the state. This peaked in 1999 when the Fiji Labour Party leader Mahendra Chaudhry became the country's first prime minister of Indo-Fijian descent. Unsettled by relentless criticisms, Chaudhry threatened a 'swift justice' media tribunal to curb a 'distorting', 'lying', 'racist', and 'seditious' press (Chaudhry, 2000: 6–10). Before he could act, he was ousted in the 2000 nationalist coup, staged by businessman George Speight (Singh, 2015).

Apparently alarmed by the Chaudhry Government's fall, future governments intensified their censorship efforts. The Qarase Government, elected in 2001, sought to exert greater control over the media through the Media Council of Fiji Bill. However, it dropped the idea in the face of opposition (Government of the Republic of the Fiji Islands, 2003). After winning a fresh mandate in 2006, the Qarase Government looked poised to reintroduce the media bill but it was overthrown in a coup in the same year (*Pacific Media Watch*, 2006). Soon after he seized power in 2006, Commodore Frank Bainimarama embarked on the most intense and sustained media crackdown. Initially, government agents intimidated

and maltreated journalists but later resorted to more sophisticated strategies, such as the use of decrees and emergency laws that placed government censors in all the country's major newsrooms (Singh, 2015). While the government in Nigeria touted development journalism, in Fiji the Bainimarama government called for 'journalism of hope' (Radio New Zealand News, 2009).

In June 2010, the Bainimarama government promulgated the Media Industry Development Decree. This punitive law replaced self-regulation with indirect government regulation through the Media Industry Development Authority and introduced stiff fines and jail terms for any breaches. The government justified the tighter laws on the basis that communal harmony and national stability were more important than press freedom (Bainimarama, 2012). In terms of resistance to government pressure, the news media in Nigeria took to guerrilla-style journalism while in Fiji stringent restrictions imposed after the 2006 coup, including the 2010 Media Decree, led to the re-emergence of dissident views in social media platforms in more virulent forms (Hammond-Thrasher, 2007; Walsh, 2010). This indicates the existence of an underground culture or radical media. Any hopes the 2010 Media Decree would be discarded were dashed when the Bainimarama government implemented the 2013 Constitution, Fiji's fourth. The media decree was retained with its punitive measures intact. The decree was afforded special protection in the constitution (Constitution of the Republic of Fiji, 2013: 112–114). Even though the government was returned to power with a solid majority in the 2014 general election, it has ignored calls to scrap the media decree. It is against this background that journalists in Fiji are operating in a much more restrictive environment than before.

Theoretical frameworks: Democracy and journalism

In their analysis of journalism in democratic societies, Christians et al. (2009) examine the philosophical and political principles that underline a normative approach to the complex relationship between journalism and democracy. In their view, changes spawned by technological developments, globalisation, and an interconnected global economy have challenged the nature of journalism and democracy in contemporary world. One of the questions they examine in their book is not only what the role of journalism is in society but also what it ought to be. They use the historic work – *Four Theories of the Press* (Siebert et al., 1956) – as the framework for analysis, drawing out the strengths and weaknesses of the book, and presenting their arguments about what the role of journalism should be in modern society. They identify, as weakness, the Western orientation of *Four Theories* in which the authors of the book 'favored the industrialized Western powers and... the present global order of communication' (Christians et al., 2009: viii). This is consistent with evidence in the literature that shows the dominance of Western traditions of journalism practice and scholarship (see Chalaby, 1996; Curran and Park, 2000; Wasserman and De Beer, 2009). Christians et al.

(2009: 13) note ‘a significant movement in Asia and Latin America to resist Western models and explore alternative ethical and normative bases for public communication. ...’

They outline four different and somewhat interconnected roles of the media, namely monitorial, facilitative, radical, and collaborative. In the monitorial role, the media serve as an attentive informant by collecting and publishing information that is valuable to audiences. This role includes gathering, analysing, and disseminating information ‘about current and recent events’, including warnings about forthcoming events (Christians et al., 2009: 125). The facilitative role positions the media as the transmission channel of public information, a source of free expression that helps to strengthen civil society and promotes healthy debate in a democracy. The press in this role is expected ‘to widen access and promote active citizenship by way of debate and participation’ (Christians et al., 2009: 126). In the radical role, the media provide outlets for critical expression of views against authority. The media offer voice to the voiceless and support clamours for social change and political reforms. However, the collaborative role differs from the radical role of media. The collaborative role is closely related to what is known as development journalism in which the media are expected to collaborate with the government to achieve national socioeconomic development. Christians et al. say that in some situations, the media are required or expected to express support for the government in defence of the existing order or status quo, or against perceived threats to national interests such as terrorism, war, insurgencies, and natural disasters. A number of scholars have discussed development journalism and how it is understood in different societies. Obijiofor and Hanusch (2011) state that development journalism requires journalists to operate as facilitators of social change and development. Romano (2005) identifies five types of development journalism, namely journalists as nation builders, collaborators with the state, instruments for conferment of authority on people, a body that oversees state officials, and as custodians of honesty. See also Waisbord (2009).

Voltmer (2013) develops a broad explanation of the role of the media in transitional democracies. In doing so, she questions the assumption that an expanding and commercialising media will somehow empower ordinary people. Voltmer argues the one-size-fits-all Western liberal model of media and democracy, far from being instrumental in democracy building in the transitional setting, can often be destructive, resulting ‘in more inequality, violent inter-group conflicts and political polarization’ (Voltmer, 2013: 5). In pushing back, she argues that transitional democracies develop models of media that fit local circumstances where ‘the norms and practices of democracy and democratic journalism are reinterpreted in the light of local cultures and experiences and adjusted to the needs and constraints of everyday life’ (Voltmer, 2013: 5). Turner (2016) weaves Voltmer’s argument into a broader critique of the media and media scholarship in challenging the role of globalisation and globalisation narratives in understanding media outside of the Anglophone West. Turner argues that, in a haste to

understand changes in the media, scholars have focused on changing modes of consumption, technology, and applications. Therefore,

it is important we do not lose sight of the need to properly understand the structural conditions within which these changes occur, and the need to properly examine the social, political and cultural implications of these changes in all their diversity. (Turner, 2016: 89–90)

Turner's argument underlines the premise of this Nigeria–Fiji study.

In their discussion, Curran et al. (2011) argue there is an underlying assumption in democracy that citizens have the ability to scrutinise elected officials. However, on a practical platform, holding political officials to account depends on the ability of the media to scrutinise the government, as well as a range of institutional procedures such as conducting free, fair, and regular elections; existence of strong political parties; and an environment in which citizens can freely express themselves. Beyond knowledge of Western media systems, knowledge of media practices in non-Western post-authoritarian societies should broaden our knowledge of other cultures. Indeed, knowledge of media systems and practices in non-Western cultures imply recognition of different socio-cultural contexts in which journalism is practised and how journalists are responding to the challenges that confront them in their environment.

In sum, this research addresses four key questions:

1. What are the major changes that have occurred (and are occurring) in journalistic practices in Nigeria and Fiji post-military dictatorship?
2. How have these changes shaped the way journalists perform their job and the way they perceive their role as the watchdog of society?
3. How are journalists responding to the changes that have occurred in their environment?
4. What are the main sources of pressures on journalists in Nigeria and Fiji?

Methodology

To answer our research questions, we conducted an email survey of journalists in Nigeria and Fiji. We selected the two countries because of the similarities and differences they share. Both countries are considered as partly free media systems (Freedom House, 2015), and both have experienced periods of military dictatorships in the relatively recent past (Robie, 2014; Singh, 2015). At the same time, their journalistic traditions are somewhat similar, with British and American influences being seen as strong (Robie, 2014; Singh, 2015). Nigeria, a leading country in Africa (*The Economist*, 2014), and Fiji, an important country in the South Pacific, make for a good comparative analysis. Both countries are members of the British Commonwealth although with chequered democratic histories. Fiji is

regarded as the hub of the Pacific and a leader in the region in terms of the level of development and the size of its economy and population (Tarte, 2010). Specifically, Fiji is the second largest country in the region in terms of population (Hanusch and Uppal, 2015). These comparative elements are important because, as Dimitrova and Strömbäck (2010: 489) argue, in undertaking comparative research, the selection of cases is critical in order to reflect one of two existing approaches such as ‘the *most similar systems design* and the *most different systems design*’.

The questions we administered to journalists in the two countries were designed to give them space to talk (1) about the changes they have experienced, (2) how the changes have affected journalistic practices and their perceived role in their society, (3) how they have adapted (or are responding) to the changes, and (4) where the pressures that triggered the changes have come from. Questions were sent to the journalists by email through their editors. Each editor was requested to administer the questions to a minimum of four most senior journalists in their organisation. We furnished the editors with detailed information about our research, the purpose of the study, the demographic profile of the senior journalists qualified to participate in the study, and the questions to be administered to their senior journalists. To qualify to participate in the study, a journalist must have served for a minimum of 5 years. This is to ensure they are experienced enough to comment authoritatively on changes that have affected the profession. The journalists who responded to the questions returned their answers directly to us via email. The email survey was conducted between 7 August 2015 and 2 November 2015.

In Nigeria, questions were administered to 16 journalists in four media organisations comprising three independently owned newspapers and a private television channel. Responses were received from 10 journalists (response rate of 62.5%). A majority of the responses came from print journalists and editors. Only one broadcast journalist agreed to participate in the study. The newspapers and television channel are based in Lagos which is regarded as the centre of leading media organisations in the country. In Fiji, 16 senior print and broadcast journalists at the four largest news media organisations were surveyed. Of this number, 14 responded. This represents a considerably higher response rate of 87.5%. The improved response rate in Fiji may be due to the fact that we used a senior academic at the University of the South Pacific to distribute the questions to the editors. The academic had worked as a journalist in Fiji for more than two decades. This approach seemed to have worked well judging by the high response rate.

While the overall number of 24 journalists surveyed in Nigeria and Fiji might appear small, the literature on qualitative studies states that researchers should select the sample size that will provide insights into the key issues being explored. Patton (2002), for example, believes the reliability and value of qualitative research is often enhanced by the information richness of the cases selected rather than by the number of the sample selected. Obijiofor (2015) argues that in qualitative research, it is the purpose of the study that influences the sample size. Therefore, researchers are encouraged to select ‘information-rich’ cases that are relevant to their study. In our case, we were keen to access the views of journalists who were

experienced enough to shed light on the changes that have affected the industry in recent decades. Nigeria and Fiji are in themselves ‘information-rich’ cases and fertile ground for research, as already explained in this section.

There are certain drawbacks associated with email surveys. One of them is the difficulty of drawing probability samples on the basis of email addresses. However, we must stress we did not set out to survey journalists in Nigeria and Fiji through a probability random sample. That would have been a very difficult challenge given the difficulties of acquiring email addresses of all journalists in the two countries. Furthermore, our absence on the ground meant there was no way we could probe journalists’ responses that were unclear or seek clarifications regarding their answers except by sending more email messages that could take time. Wright (2005) notes problems associated with sampling in online research ‘inhibit researchers’ ability to make generalisations about study findings. However, for researchers engaged in qualitative studies in which probability random sampling is not necessary, as in our case, the sampling issues identified by Wright (2005) are not a major concern. Nevertheless, we acknowledge the lack of a probability random sample would limit our ability to generalise our findings.

Results and discussion

Results presented in this section have been arranged into two subsections. In the first subsection, we present and discuss journalists’ views about changes on their job spawned by technology. The results show that journalists’ relationship with technology is not limited to their particular situation or context, as previous studies have identified similar issues (e.g., Hanusch, 2013). In other words, the impact of technology extends beyond journalists in Nigeria and Fiji. In the second subsection, we present and analyse the effects of changing political, social, cultural, economic, and structural conditions on journalism practice. Essentially, this subsection identifies and discusses changes unrelated to technological transformations that Nigerian and Fijian journalists experience on the job.

Relations with technology

Major changes experienced on the job

Technological changes appear to be having major impacts on journalistic practices in Nigeria and Fiji in terms of the processes of collecting, producing, packaging, and reporting news. The impact of social media and digital technologies on journalism was also noted. One journalist said:

News is delivered faster through the online editions. The competition is tougher because big news gets broken on the social media. So there is pressure on newspapers to show class, with stories that are well investigated and delivered with depth...

Another journalist said:

Media organisations have moved from disseminating information from one platform to multimedia platforms . . . the traditional media no longer has exclusive preserve of being gatekeepers of information. The gates have been removed and more than ever before we are competing with the citizens and other non-professionals in disseminating information.

One journalist noted how the Freedom of Information (FoI) Act enacted in 2011 had made the freedom enjoyed by journalists more meaningful. However, it was pointed out that journalists still get attacked in the course of doing their job. One Nigerian journalist felt that while there was less harassment by state officials, major legal challenges have emerged in the forms of invasion of privacy, defamation, and treason and sedition. Journalists being harassed and attacked is a reference to the harsh experiences and treatment of journalists during military dictatorship in Nigeria that led to the practise of guerrilla-style journalism. Fijian journalists also note transformations in news reporting styles brought about by technological developments. The diffusion of digital technologies and the rise in the number of people with technological devices capable of accessing the Internet has compelled media to shift greater focus to online coverage of news events, even before they have been reported in print or broadcast media. One Fiji journalist said:

The role and responsibilities of a journalist is no longer just about gathering information the traditional way. It is adapting to changes in society such as the introduction of new technologies. For the print media and from my experience, we didn't have an online presence. We did not have to worry about multimedia skills or taking pictures when a photographer was not around . . . Nowadays, having some knowledge of multimedia operations is handy for entering the workforce . . .

Technological changes that have spawned 24-hour news channels and rapid transmission of news have created a sense that journalists have to be at the cutting edge of information dissemination in order to beat the competition. Compared to the previous era in which news reports were localised, Nigerian journalists believe they are now seen as global players in the new technological environment in which their work is being read and appreciated across the world. This implies that technological transformations have helped journalists to report news across cultures, not restricted to operating within their local setting. One journalist said:

Our role as journalists has become more critical to be the lead watchdog of the society and to publish based on the ethics of the profession. I am also very conscious of the fierce competition from bloggers and other non-professionals who are providing alternative to our content.

Another journalist said: 'The most significant change that I have experienced is that there is less "physical" work done by reporters. Internet and of course social

media are now playing a huge role in everyday lives of a journalist'. Another journalist noted how digital technologies have made reporters to be reliant on social networking sites for their news ideas. This implies that technology has fostered laziness, with heavier reliance on the Internet as a major source of news. He said: 'Fair enough, social networks and technology now play an important role in the way we gather information, but it doesn't necessarily mean we forget the basics of gathering information'. This suggests that technology may have improved efficiency and cut costs but it has not necessarily improved the quality of journalism in some respects.

Technological transformations have also had negative impacts on business models of journalism, which in turn has affected the journalist's role. The changes leading to revenue loss, decreasing expenditure by media, and shutting down of media organisations, have resulted in laying off of journalists as media organisations struggle to survive in the competitive environment. Nigerian journalists say journalists are struggling to assert themselves in the face of reader apathy and rise of social media/citizen journalism in which everyone is seen as an expert.

Overall, there was a broad consensus among Nigerian journalists that technology has radically transformed the way news is collected, processed, and transmitted. Journalists are able to monitor what is happening in real time thousands of kilometres away and report them as they unfold. Furthermore, journalists can source many news stories through Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, as many public officials and their aides use these platforms to make major announcements. However, as noted above, reliance on social media carries consequences, particularly if the news reported on social media is not verified. This is another example of how technological change does not always make things easier or translate into improved news quality. There is no doubt that technology is forcing multi-tasking by journalists and improving skills. It is opening up multi-platform news delivery channels by media organisations intended to serve consumers who access news through various outlets.

In Fiji, journalists said technological transformations have compelled them to lift the standard of reporting as the audience is now more sophisticated, more intelligent, and more discerning. At another level, technological changes have opened up more fronts for journalists to broadcast news and information. As one journalist said, 'today's journalist is everywhere and anywhere and that's both a blessing and a curse'. Social media pose their own challenges. Fiji journalists have to keep a close eye on breaking news reported on social media and in blogs and carefully verify the information to avoid being penalised under the Media Decree.

In general, we found Nigerian and Fijian journalists are experiencing similar changes and challenges. There is a major shift to online media discernible in both countries, with journalists facing greater pressure to start multi-skilling and breaking stories online. Workloads and deadline pressures have increased for journalists in both countries due to pressure from social media and citizen journalism. This may have impacted adversely on the quality of journalism. These experiences

are consistent with findings of studies of journalists in other cultures (e.g., Foster, 2008; Hanusch, 2013; Obijiofor and Hanusch, 2011).

Changes to professional practice spawned by different political and social environments

Nigerian journalists said the changes they experienced on the job (unrelated to technological developments) include the return of democracy in May 1999 and the ratification of the FoI Act in 2011 both of which have created a climate for greater freedom of communication, as well as the death of specialisation as reporters move from one beat to another. For journalists in Fiji, the changes include increased state censorship following the 2006 coup, evolving from direct to more indirect censorship methods; reporters being 'encouraged' to report news from a 'national development' or 'peace journalism' perspective (perceived as portrayal of what government has done to help improve the lives of Fijians); and alleged use of government advertising revenue to compel media to report favourably on the state. Specifically, Fijian journalists talked about their experiences with and the impact of two media legislations on journalistic practices.

Media censorship in Fiji was implemented through the introduction of the Public Emergency Regulation (PER) in April 2009 and was followed a year later by the promulgation of the Media Industry Development Decree in June 2010 (referred to as the Media Decree). These laws targeted journalists, editors, and media owners. The heavy penalties stipulated in these legislations accelerated the resignation of senior and experienced journalists, who opted for communication and public relations jobs in government, non-government, and the corporate sectors, while other journalists migrated overseas in greater numbers than before. Even after the lifting of the PER in 2012, Fijian journalists said they were compelled to self-censor to avoid the hefty penalties stipulated in the Media Decree, which were retained, even after the 2014 general elections. The only major change that came with the lifting of the PER was the mode of censorship. Following the introduction of the Media Decree, self-censorship gradually replaced pre-publication censorship at the hands of government censors, the norm under the PER, whereby government information officers stationed in all newsrooms functioned as official censors.

Overall, Fijian journalists said the freedom they enjoyed prior to the coup of 2006 no longer existed in the same form. Even after democratic elections in 2014, the journalists said they still operated with some fear. Still, some journalists felt the lifting of the PER and the removal of newsroom censors were an improvement of sorts. In other words, self-censorship was considered a lesser evil than state-controlled pre-publication censorship. This restricted atmosphere led to the practice of 'Development Journalism', a genre of journalism in which journalists are compelled to work in partnership with the government in the name of national development, as per the government's vision and policies. This involved shifting focus from what government sees as negative and divisive reporting to reporting on

issues that are believed to promote peace and development. Rather than the detached style of reporting that focused on official misappropriation of funds in a particular area (e.g., health), journalists shifted to report on safe topics such as road works, installation of pipe-borne water systems, as well as sea walls and bridges.

In the new democratic era, the Fijian government appears to be using the 'carrot-and-stick' approach to get journalists to fall into line, so to say, and compel journalists to self-censor in the interest of national development. For example, in 2015, the Fijian government removed fines and jail terms imposed on journalists for violating the Media Decree. However, the punishments for editors and publishers were retained. This suggested the government wanted to force media owners to toe the line and to rein in journalists seen as confrontational. It was a more sophisticated and less obvious way of controlling journalists through publishers and editors. As one journalist said:

Only recently, government removed the clause that held journalists liable for prosecution, limiting it only to the publisher. That is little comfort. Government legislation should not regulate the media... but the media should feel free to report and complaints against the media should be dealt with by an independent organisation that appoints individuals from the community to hold the media accountable, like the now defunct Fiji Media Council.

The results show that Fiji journalists devised new ways to do their job regardless of pressure from external and internal forces and censorship laws. Comparatively, there were both parallels and variances between Nigeria and Fiji during the period of this study. As far as censorship and media freedoms are concerned, Fiji and Nigeria seem to be moving in somewhat opposite directions. Fiji, which enjoyed a freer media environment between independence in 1970 and the first coup in 1987, has experienced greater and sustained restrictions since the 2006 coup. Nigeria, with a longer history of state media repression than Fiji, and a more serious coup culture, is taking halting steps towards a freer media framework. In addition, Nigeria has an FoI law in place while Fiji still lacks such a law, although the application and efficacy of Nigeria's FoI law is still contested.

One area where not much seems to have changed in both countries is journalist satisfaction with pay. Poor remuneration highlighted by Nigerian journalists was echoed by Fijian journalists. One Fiji journalist said, for example: 'In some instances journalists are just not paid well at all. This is mainly because they do not have qualifications or degrees and the media organisations then pay them a low rate'. The poor salaries received by journalists in Nigeria and Fiji should not be attributed solely to low academic qualifications. In Nigeria, for example, many journalists possess postgraduate qualifications and yet their salaries are not commensurate with what their peers earn in other industries. Fiji journalists' dissatisfaction with salary is consistent with the findings of a study by Singh (2015) that

reported the same. Singh linked journalist feelings or poor remuneration to a high rate of journalist attrition, a ‘major structural weakness in the Fiji media landscape’ (Singh, 2015: 170).

How journalists perform in their new environment

Nigerian journalists said they enjoyed greater freedom following the return to democracy in 1999 and the enactment of the FoI Act that gave them greater access to information that was previously suppressed during military dictatorship on the pretext of national security. However, some journalists said the FoI Act had not been tested sufficiently or used effectively to advance professional practice. They said many government ministries, departments, and agencies still operate in secrecy, with journalists regularly denied access to information that ought to be available in the public domain. One journalist said:

I am not too sure about the impact of the FoI law on the improvements we have seen in journalism practice in Nigeria because most government agencies still hoard information about their operations and can hardly avail the media such information on request as to enable media practitioners do their job.

Another journalist said:

The FoI is yet to have the revolutionary impact that many expected. Journalists have not stretched the possibilities that it offers. However, the few organisations that have tried to use it to prise information from government have run into formidable bureaucratic roadblocks.

One of the constraints Nigerian journalists face relates to the political environment in which they operate, that is, the tendency of politicians to see journalists as enemies, particularly when stories cast politicians in negative light. Nevertheless, some journalists say legislative interventions in media operations in the current environment have disappeared compared to the tough times journalists experienced during military dictatorship. In Fiji, journalists say changes in the profession have affected their morale and integrity, both of which carry implications for the way they do their work. Despite the stiff penalties outlined in the Media Decree, some journalists said they couldn’t totally turn a blind eye to claims of government inefficiency and corruption. One journalist said the punitive Media Decree helped him to adopt an innovative reporting technique intended to allow him to make a difference, to remain in professional practice, and to avoid having factual and truthful stories censored by officials. He said:

It took a while before I decided that if the status quo was to continue then I had to find a way to make a difference with my reporting. I turned to business reporting from

a hard-hitting political journalist and started reporting on untold stories of success at the grassroots level to empower and entice Fijians into business.

Another journalist reflected on how the Media Decree has affected news reporting and production styles. He said:

The introduction of media censorship... have us working within the boundaries of what the legislation states. No longer can we cite "confidential sources" because we can no longer protect their identity if provisions in the Decree are executed in the "nation's best interest". We steer clear of controversial stories that question the finances of the Prime Minister or the Attorney-General.

Prior to the introduction of the Media Decree, Fijian journalists adhered to the Media Council of Fiji's code of ethics, which served as essential text for members of the profession. However, following political changes in the country, journalists found themselves confronted by the punitive Media Decree. One journalist lamented how the Media Decree constrained his ability to report news in a professional way.

Personally, I was threatened by the decree at first. I didn't have thousands of dollars to spare if I broke a rule unintentionally, and I didn't want to go to prison for unintentionally inciting civil unrest as a result of my stories. I wouldn't say I started to self-censor myself, but I started to exercise responsibility in the way I gathered information, in the way I presented information and edited stories by reporters.

The lifting of fines and jail terms for journalists only offered partial relief since these penalties were retained for publishers and editors. Notwithstanding the negativity associated with the Media Decree, some journalists see some positive outcomes, such as the opportunity to refocus on professional values and ethics that existed before the introduction of the Decree.

Journalists' perceptions of their role

Nigerian journalists believe the changes in professional practice have strengthened their confidence in their professional role, although competition from social media and bloggers has reinforced the need to observe ethical and professional values in order to raise standards of practice, as rumours and facts struggle for space in the existing environment. They also mentioned the difficulty of dealing with newspaper proprietors who owe journalists months of unpaid salaries (some journalists have no option but to help themselves through unethical practices) and the poor working conditions under which journalists practise. This has resulted in exodus of experienced and talented journalists. As one journalist put it: 'You won't find too many people in today's Nigerian

media who are looking to build lifelong careers there; many would bolt at the prospect of a better pay check elsewhere’.

In Fiji, the changes have produced a breed of journalists who are more cagey while conscious of their social obligations to their society. There is greater practice of ‘development journalism’ to avoid the risk of penalties. Beyond seeing their role as detached reporters, Fijian journalists believe they have an obligation to engage in professional practise that helps to develop the country and offers hope to the people. At the same time, the journalists feel they must continue to serve their society by questioning people in authority. Some journalists say they have lost the confidence of the people because the media are now seen as propaganda tools of the government. This has led many people to patronise social media.

Sources of pressure on journalists

The sources of pressure on Nigerian journalists are similar to sources of pressure on Fijian journalists. These are marketplace, aggressive competition, advertisers, media owners, politicians, the government, and poor remuneration that has put pressure on journalists to find better paying jobs in the private sector. According to one Nigerian journalist:

The media has had to innovate in many ways to shore up their revenue, including devoting a lot of space to supplements and other special advertising spots. This commercial drive has also tended to sometimes blur the line between what is permissible professional conduct and what is evident pursuit of profit.

In Fiji, the main sources of pressure on journalists are the government, information officers who used to serve as official censors in newsrooms, the strict Media Decree, advertisers who threaten to pull out big money in advertising if their events are not given preferential treatment and prominence over their competitors’ events, profit orientation of media owners and shareholders, pressure to meet newspapers’ financial imperative owing to decline in circulation, and pressure from the private sector that offers higher pay to journalists. One journalist commented: ‘If you reported negative stories you were labelled “not having Fiji at heart”’.

The results in both Nigeria and Fiji show multiple sources of pressure and various types of impacts on journalists’ morale, professionalism, and orientation. The clear indication is that political transition and technological change are a time of great stress for journalists and media in both countries. A marked observation is that in Nigeria, the move towards greater democracy has meant greater freedom for the media. In Fiji, the 2006 coup, the fourth in the country’s history, led to a more restrictive environment for journalists, despite democratic elections in 2014. Under pressure, journalists are also rethinking their roles, with some, schooled under the watchdog doctrine, now considering ‘development journalism’ as a legitimate journalistic practice in its own way.

Conclusion

This research shows the media sector in both Nigeria and Fiji is in the midst of great change. In Nigeria, the transition from military rule to democratic system of government has ushered in significant changes in the way journalism is practised. However, there remains an adversarial relationship between the government and journalists that goes beyond the normal detached reporting and objectivity. This raises questions about the view in the literature that suggests that journalism and democracy have an interdependent relationship (Carey, 1999; Strömbäck, 2005). For example, in Fiji, the restrictive 2010 Media Decree still holds sway despite democratic elections in 2014. The decree has altered radically the way journalists gather and report news, including the nature of the relationship between media owners/editors and the government. Although the transition to democracy in Nigeria has given journalists a freer environment to operate than used to be the case during decades of military dictatorship, there are still threats to journalists' freedom posed by laws such as sedition, treason, libel, and defamation which are used by state officials to arbitrarily arrest and detain journalists and citizens. This violation of the constitutional freedom granted to citizens to express themselves continues regardless of whether the country is under a military dictatorship or an elected government.

While the responses suggest that Nigeria and Fiji share common elements in journalistic practice, both countries differ in some aspects owing to different legal environments, different cultural practices, and political conditions which can be seen in a previous section that analysed journalistic practices in Nigeria and Fiji during military rule. This supports the view by Siebert et al. (1956: 1) in their classic book – *Four Theories of the Press* – that 'the press always takes on the form and coloration of the social and political structures within which it operates'. Siebert et al. point out that an understanding of these elements is fundamental to understanding the nature and role of the press in various societies. This sheds light on the underlying differences and similarities in journalistic practices in Nigeria and Fiji. In Fiji, the objective of the Media Decree seems to be to create a media system that is socially responsible to society; that is, a media that unifies rather than divides the country. While national unity may be desirable, it is important that news should not be imposed on the people either by the media or the state.

Journalists in Nigeria and Fiji believe the transition to democratic government and the introduction of new technologies have had a major impact on their job and will continue to do so in the coming years. Social media are seen as the vehicle for the dissemination of breaking news as well as a channel for spreading rumour and unverified information.

What is obvious from this study of changes in journalistic practices in Nigeria and Fiji is that, in spite of the much-heralded technological advancements, the reality is that the balance of power has not changed all that much. Power is still weighted in favour of government, with journalists in both countries operating under environments in which they are not wholly free to report

on issues, particularly issues that might offend or irritate political leaders. It is encouraging that moves by Nigeria and Fiji towards greater democracy have resulted in somewhat greater freedom for journalists; however, some restrictions remain. This is a stark reminder that democracy is a process rather than an event, such as an election. This is a reality that media has to adapt to and live with.

Declaration of conflicting interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

References

- Bainimarama VF (2012) Address on the removal of Public Emergency Regulations by Fijian PM Commodore Bainimarama. Available at: <http://www.foreignaffairs.gov.fj/media-resources/media-release/186-address-on-the-removal-of-public-emergency-regulations-by-fijian-pm-commodore-bainimarama> (accessed 18 July 2013).
- Campbell WJ (2003) African cultures and newspapers. In: Martin SE and Copeland DA (eds) *The Function of Newspapers in Society*. Westport, CT: Praeger, pp. 31–46.
- Carey JW (1999) In defense of public journalism. In: Glasser TL (ed.) *The Idea of Public Journalism*. New York, NY: Guilford Press, pp. 49–66.
- Chalaby JK (1996) Journalism as an Anglo-American invention: A comparison of the development of French and Anglo-American journalism, 1830s–1920s. *European Journal of Communication* 11(3): 303–326.
- Chaudhry M (2000) Fiji news media faces crisis of ethics? *Pacific Journalism Review* 6(1): 134–146.
- Christians CG, Glasser TL, McQuail D, et al. (2009) *Normative Theories of the Media: Journalism in Democratic Societies*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Constitution of the Republic of Fiji (Promulgation) Decree 2013 (Decree No. 24 of 2013).
- Curran J, Iyengar S, Lund AB, et al. (2011) Media system, public knowledge and democracy: A comparative study. In: Curran J (ed.) *Media and Democracy*. Oxford; New York, NY: Routledge, pp. 47–60.
- Curran J and Park M-J (2000) Beyond globalization theory. In: Curran J and Park M-J (eds) *De-Westernizing Media Studies*. London: Routledge, pp. 1–18.
- De Burgh H (ed.) (2005) *Making journalists: Diverse models, global issues*. London and New York, NY: Routledge.
- Digitaki T (2000) Reading between the lines. Pacific Media Watch. Available at: <http://www.asiapac.org.fj/cafeapacific/resources/aspac/fiji2673.html> (accessed 28 April 2012).
- Dimitrova DV and Strömbäck J (2010) Exploring semi-structural differences in television news between the United States and Sweden. *International Communication Gazette* 72(6): 487–502.
- Foster S (2008) Journalism in the new age of participation: Meeting the challenge in Fiji newsrooms. *Fijian Studies* 6(1/2): 112–129.

- Freedom House (2015) *Nigeria: Freedom of the Press 2015*. Available at: <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2015/nigeria> (accessed 12 June 2016).
- Government of the Republic of the Fiji Islands (2003) *Fiji Media Council of Fiji Bill 2003*. Suva, Fiji: Government of the Republic of the Fiji Islands.
- Hafez K (2009) Let's improve 'global journalism'! *Journalism: Theory, Practice and Criticism* 10(3): 329–331.
- Hammond-Thrasher C (2007) Blogs, the laws of the USA, and why Fiji is really crying. Available at: <http://dfiji.blogspot.com.au/search?q=heady+mix+uttering+> (accessed 28 August 2012).
- Hanitzsch T (2005) Journalists in Indonesia: Educated but timid watchdogs. *Journalism Studies* 6(4): 493–508.
- Hanitzsch T, Hanusch F, Mellado Ruiz C, et al. (2011) Mapping journalism cultures across nations: A comparative study of 18 countries. *Journalism Studies* 12(3): 273–293.
- Hanusch F (2013) Journalists in times of change: Evidence from a new survey of Australia's journalistic workforce. *Australian Journalism Review* 35(1): 29–41.
- Hanusch F and Uppal C (2015) Combining detached watchdog journalism with development ideals: An exploration of Fijian journalism culture. *International Communication Gazette* 77(6): 557–576.
- Joseph B (2007) Internationalizing the journalistic professional model: Imperatives and impediments. *Global Media and Communication* 3(3): 300–306.
- Joseph BU (ed) (2010) *Journalism Education in Countries with Limited Media Freedom*. New York, NY: Peter Lang.
- Mwesige PG (2004) Disseminators, advocates and watchdogs: A profile of Ugandan journalists in the new millennium. *Journalism* 5(1): 69–96.
- Obijiofor L (2015) *New Technologies in Developing Societies. From Theory to Practice*. Basingstoke, London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Obijiofor L and Hanusch F (2011) *Journalism Across Cultures: An Introduction*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Olorunyomi D (1998) Defiant publishing in Nigeria. In: Woodhull NJ and Snyder RW (eds) *Journalists in Peril*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, pp. 57–63.
- Olukotun A (2002) Authoritarian state, crisis of democratization and the underground media in Nigeria. *African Affairs* 101: 317–342.
- Pacific Media Watch* (2006) Don't blame media, says journalism academic. Available at: <http://kauri.aut.ac.nz:8080/dspace/handle/123456789/1173> (accessed 14 August 2013).
- Parker R (1995) Introduction. In: Adeyemi A (ed.) *The Nigerian Press Under the Military: Persecution, Resilience and Political Crisis (1983–1993)*. Cambridge, MA: Joan Shorenstein Center, Harvard University, John F. Kennedy School of Government, p. 1.
- Patton MQ (2002) *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods*, 3rd ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Pintak L and Ginges J (2008) The mission of Arab journalism: Creating change in a time of turmoil. *The International Journal of Press/Politics* 13(3): 193–227.
- Press and military rule in Nigeria* (2013) Available at: <http://www.doublelist.com/press-military-rule-nigeria/> (accessed 21 June 2016).
- Radio New Zealand News (2009) Media in Fiji told to adopt 'journalism of hope'. Available at: <http://www.radionz.co.nz/news/world/6375/media-in-fiji-told-to-adopt-'journalism-of-hope> (accessed 29 August 2012).

- Ramaprasad J (2001) A profile of journalists in post-independence Tanzania. *Gazette* 63(6): 539–556.
- Robie D (2014) *Don't Spoil My Beautiful Face: Media, Mayhem and Human Rights in the Pacific*. Auckland: Little Island Press.
- Romano A (2005) Asian journalism: News, development and the tides of liberation and technology. In: Romano A and Bromley M (eds) *Journalism and Democracy in Asia*. London: Routledge, pp. 1–14.
- Siebert FS, Peterson T and Schramm W (1956) *Four Theories of the Press (The Authoritarian, Libertarian, Social Responsibility, and Soviet Communist Concepts of What the Press Should Be and Do)*. Champaign: University of Illinois Press.
- Singh SB (2015) *Rethinking journalism for supporting social cohesion and democracy: Case study of media performance in Fiji*. Unpublished PhD thesis, The University of Queensland. Available at: <http://espace.library.uq.edu.au/view/UQ:365724> (accessed 7 September 2015).
- Strömbäck J (2005) In search of a standard: Four models of democracy and their normative implications for journalism. *Journalism Studies* 6(3): 331–345.
- Tarte S (2010) Fiji Islands' security challenges and defense policy issues. In: *Asia Pacific Countries' Security Outlook and Its Implications for the Defense Sector*. NIDS Joint Research Series No. 5. Tokyo: The National Institute for Defense Studies, Japan, pp. 67–84. Available at: http://www.nids.go.jp/english/publication/joint_research/series5/pdf/5-5.pdf (accessed 11 June 2016).
- #*The Economist* (2014) Nigeria's economy is bigger than everyone thought. Baobab blog, 7 April. <http://www.economist.com/blogs/baobab/2014/04/nigerias-economy-bigger-everyone-thought> (accessed 12 June 2016).
- Turner G (2016) *Re-inventing the Media*. London; New York, NY: Routledge.
- Usman S (2012) *Invisibility in the media: A comparative analysis of the coverage given to female election candidates in the 1999 and 2006 elections by the Fiji Times and Fiji Sun*. Unpublished MA dissertation, University of the South Pacific, Suva, Fiji.
- Voltmer K (2013) *The Media in Transitional Democracies*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Waisbord S (2009) Rethinking 'development' Journalism. In: Allen S (ed.) *The Routledge Companion to News and Journalism*. New York: Routledge, pp. 148–158.
- Walsh C (2010) Political blogs on Fiji: A 'cybernet democracy' case study. *Pacific Journalism Review* 16(1): 154–177.
- Wasserman H and de Beer AS (2009) Towards de-Westernizing journalism studies. In: Wahl-Jorgensen K and Hanitzsch T (eds) *The Handbook of Journalism Studies*. New York, NY: Routledge, pp. 428–438.
- Weaver DH (ed) (1998a) *The Global Journalist: News People Around the World*. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.
- Weaver DH (1998b) Journalists around the world: Commonalities and differences. In: Weaver DH (ed.) *The Global Journalist: News People Around the World*. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, pp. 455–480.
- Wright KB (2005) Researching Internet-based populations: Advantages and disadvantages of online survey research, online questionnaire authoring software packages, and web survey services. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 10(3). Available at: <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/enhanced/doi/10.1111/j.1083-6101.2005.tb00259.x> (accessed 25 June 2016).