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Digital Communication and Techno-Politics: Populist Framing and Hypermedia in West African Context and Beyond

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Abstract

For African politics, the challenge of democratization and its corollary concept of modernization consists of creating economic, political and societal progresses, allowing people to live together peacefully in a social cohesion; and consequently, political communication plays a starring role in this process. However, some scholars observed that the digital era brought about 'miscommunication' in the current society (Wolton, 2020). This theoretical research circumnavigates the new strategy of media communication implemented by African politics [populists] in this era of digital media prevalence. The study not only focuses particularly on West African countries—more specifically on French-speaking-countries like Mali, Ivory Coast and Burkina Faso—and explores the role of digital media, especially hypermedia platforms, in the animation of [un]democratic movements in this part of the continent; but also the investigations go beyond the West African context and examines the state of populism in the continent. Thus, this explorative study surpasses the decisive role of digital media in the rise of awareness in West African society to consider the challenges and the obstacles created by new populists all around the globe.

Keywords: Hypermedia, Digitalization, Populism, Techno-politics, Political Discourse, West Africa

1. Introduction

Before the rise of television from the 1980s, radio and printed newspapers constituted the "absolute leading" mass media for politics all around the world. The main concern of that period was the "political instrumentalization" of media—especially by totalitarian political personalities such as Adolf Hitler, Benito Mussolini and Winston Churchill – to manipulate the minds of the audiences [the people]. Thus, under state control, media information was presented in a distorted way to the public, in accordance with the political interests which it was supposed to satisfy. In doing so, media outlets become vital instruments for making politics accountable for their actions, guaranteeing the correct use of public funds, preserving public security, denouncing demagogic statements and protecting democracy itself, at different levels of the State, against various forms of private and public corruption, embezzlement, nepotism, despotism, etc. This means that besides legislative, judiciary and executive powers, the power of mass media is crucial to control governmental actions, in other words, it constitutes a 'checks and balance' system.

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This exploratory paper discusses the process of digitalization and 'techno-populism' in the specific context of West Africa—and not only—while attempting to comprehend the configuration of West African media landscape. In fact, in African context, especially in French-speaking West African countries, media professionals have been the direct actors in radical breaks of the social and political order. Media (both traditional media and new media) have played a major role in large-scale popular mobilizations of unprecedented events. Concretely, the wave of democratic transitions gave rise to more or less important compromises and adjustments in West African countries such as Ivory Coast, Mali, Burkina Faso, Chad, Guinea, etc.

Hence this theoretical research aims at circumnavigating the new strategy of media communication implemented by African politics [populists] in this era of digital media prevalence. Actually, for African politics, the challenge of democratization and its corollary concept of modernization consists in creating economic, political and societal progresses, allowing people to live together peacefully in a social cohesion; and consequently, political communication should play a starring role in this process. The study not only focuses particularly on West African countries—more specifically on French-speaking-countries like Mali, Ivory Coast and Burkina Faso—and navigates how the digital media, especially hypermedia platforms have animated [un]democratic movements in this part of the continent; but also the investigations go beyond the West African context and explores the state of populism in the continent. Thus, through discourse analysis, this explorative study outstrips the decisive role of digital media in the rise of awareness in African society to consider the challenges and the obstacles created by new populists all around the continent and beyond.

Before discussing the process of digitalization and 'techno-populism' in West Africa, it is appropriate to comprehend the configuration of West African media landscape.

2. West African Media Landscape

Press freedom, free access to information and the plurality of media ecosystem are advancing at several speeds in West African context. According to the 2020 World Press Freedom Index[1], the quality of press freedom has significantly increased particularly in three West African countries: Cabo Verde, Ghana and Burkina Faso. These three countries have achieved similar or better results than many other African countries. They have moved up in the standings and benefit from a multiplicity of media landscape. Elsewhere in West Africa, a new era for freedom of expression finally came to Gambia a year after the departure of President Yahya Jammeh that put an end to 22 years of authoritarian regime. Journalists are no longer executed; new private media channels and new digital media have sprung up, and the government is working on legal reform to ensure freedom of expression and the free access to information. At the bottom of the rankings, Mali, Nigeria and Chad still face difficulties related to the safety of journalists and censorship.

More generally, the media explosion of the late 1980s and the movement for democratic reforms in Africa transformed significantly the West African media landscape (Breton and Proulx, 1996). It ended the monopoly of governments, paving the way for media pluralism. Overnight independent media exploded and newspapers appeared on the streets of African capital cities, breaking de facto the long silence. It is appropriate to remind that at the dawn of African independences [around the 1960s]; most newspapers were owned by private (often European imperialist) capital or, sometimes, linked to national political movements (Helmore, 1995). Hence, in the 1970s, the majority of newsworthy media—print newspapers and radio stations especially—were owned by governments. Any newspaper expressing independent editorial positions was subjected to censorship or prohibition, and media professionals were occasionally persecuted. In a few countries like Gambia, Liberia and Niger for instance, the first daily newspapers appeared during the period of liberalization and the media explosion (Agnes, 2008). For instance, in Liberia, the Liberian journalist Kenneth Best created the first daily newspaper in 1981 and the first Gambian daily newspaper appeared in 1992. This marked the beginning of media explosion in the continent.

Henceforward, in the 1990s, independent media exploded. In 2006, according to a study conducted by the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), West African countries had more than 5,000 professional media including newspapers, radio stations and television channels. Today, this number has been quintupled, given the advent of digital media and hypermedia platforms. More interestingly, the rise of private and independent radio stations as well as Web radios and WebTV has threatened to eclipse public and State-run-media (Mucchielli, 2006). Across the continent, due to the Internet, the advent of online media is adding a new wind to conventional media. This diversified the sources of information both for media consumers and producers. Today, more than 20 years after this media explosion in the

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continent, Eritrea is the only country in sub-Saharan Africa where the government continues to exercise complete control over the media (Freedom House, 2017). Yet, the internationalization of media entailed whirlwind reforms in West African media ecosystem.

3. Media Security, Surveillance and Repression in West Africa

The emergence of private media groups in West Africa has generally met with violent repressions. When media professionals dared to question or reveal the criminal activities or the corruption issues of certain members of high-ranking circles, they were terribly threatened, severely punished, jailed or even murdered (Freedom House, 2017). The assassinations of distinguished journalists in West Africa such as Norbert Zongo (1998) in Burkina Faso, Deyda Heydara (2004) in Gambia, Ghislaine Dupont and Claude Verlon (2013) in Mali, etc. just to name few, illustrate drastically the severity of repression in West Africa. In 1998 for instance, the report of an independent commission on the 'Zongo assassination affair' concluded that:

> Norbert Zongo was assassinated for strictly political reasons, because he practiced committed investigative journalism. He defended a democratic ideal and participated, within the framework of his independent newspaper, in the fight for the respect of human rights and justice against bad governance in public affairs and against impunity.

Some international media associations such as the New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists estimated that around 200 journalists have been killed in Africa over the past 20 years. Most of them have been victims of wars. In addition, repressive laws have severely hampered the rights of journalists in the African continent. Except South Africa where the post-apartheid transition has been accompanied by a complete overhaul of media law, the media pluralism in Africa has prompted only very minor legal and political reforms. A study estimated in 2005 that the legislative and political straitjacket imposed on the media in most African countries was so restrictive that there is "the need for a critical examination and major transformations of the legislative and political framework in which media operate in the continent cannot be overstated" (Ogola, 2015). In consequence, violent attacks and restrictive laws slowed media growth and reduced its effectiveness. Meanwhile, the professional shortcomings and the financial precariousness of the press contributed to diminish its scope.

By contrast, the African Union and regional bodies like the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), as well as the 11 members of the Regional Conference on the Great Lakes have all adopted protocols and declarations in favor of press freedom and freedom of opinion. And while most governments in member countries still do not respect these protocols, civil society groups are mobilizing organizations such as the Office of the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression and Access to Public Information (OSRFEAPI), and the African Commission on Human Rights (ACHR) are still struggling to promote awareness of media rights. Other associations such as the Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA) denounce violations of journalists' rights to the new ECOWAS Regional Court of Community Justice (Freedom House, 2017).

More than any other factor, economic considerations threaten the survival of media pluralism in West African context. With the exception of independent media groups such as *'Notre Voie'* and *'Soir Info'* in Ivory Coast, *'L'Observateur Paalga'* and *'Le pays'* in Burkina Faso, *'Info-Matin'* and *'Le Républicain'* in Mali, the *'Multimedia Group'* in Ghana, etc. most private independent news organizations are small and fragile enterprises, often threatened with downsizing and even bankruptcy. With the growing economic dependence of private media groups, their independence is increasingly threatened. Hence, dominant companies and corrupted bosses are trying to impose their hegemony on the private media organizations. Hitherto, the advent of hypermedia and Citizen Journalism began to play a starring role in West African media landscape.

West African countries are on the move and seek to take their place in the technological, political and social revolution represented by the emergence of hypermedia in this digital age; despite the difficulties and the cost of access to the Internet connexion, and despite the political reluctance of repressive authorities who take a dim view on independent news companies. In his academic book entitled '*We, The Media*', Dan Gillmor (2004) describes how, in the context of an industrialized country like the United States, technology enabled participatory and democratized media, a sort of 'trustworthy information ecosystem'.

In the West African context, press freedom and the process of democratization remain a utopia in several countries. Talking about the issue of citizen journalism, Guy (2019) claimed that "we want our journalists to become citizens, and

not only, but also our citizens to become journalists as it is generally understood.''[2] The message from Professor Guy Berger, master of ceremonies of Highway Africa[3], was clear:

> Too many African countries treat their people as subjects, not as citizens. Too many African countries are still subject to dictatorships. Too many African countries are still living in the dark age of official reporting. Africans, like others, have a right to media that support and enable the affirmation of citizenship, which allows them to be both journalists and citizens. Journalists are citizens; they are two sides of the same coin (Berger, 2019).

Despite the difficult conditions, West Africa is indeed on the eve of an explosion of new media, the premises of which can be perceived everywhere, with the appearance of bloggers and web-activist such as Théophile Kouamouo, a blogger in Ivory Coast and Bassératou Kindo, a feminist blogger in Burkina Faso, or even Kemi Seba, a French-Beninese —known as a Pan-Africanist—activist living in France.

As everywhere else, the advent of the Internet and social media platforms have shaken up the West African media landscape and independent media news companies. However, the digital media has grown slowly, in a regional context where, in June 2019, just 6.2% of the population had access to the Internet connexion (Clement, 2020). The computer park remains limited and the electrical network is often non-existent or deficient. Hence, the implementation of electrification projects as well as the transfer of technologies and network availability becomes ineluctable for the democratization of information in this era of digital media predominance.

4. The Process of Digitalization and 'Techno-Populism' in West Africa

The concept 'techno-populism' concerns the relationship between digital technologies and populism. This can be considered as the convergence between psycho-power, techno-politics and digital media reflected in populism. Even though in West African context, we are still experiencing the dawn of digitalization and hypermedia, it is perceptible that African 'neopopulist' leaders such as the political opponent Soro Kigbafori Guillaume in Ivory Coast, the new auto-proclaimed president Paul-Henri Sandaogo Damiba in Burkina Faso and the Prime Minister of Mali, Choguel Kokalla Maiga, etc. rely exclusively on hypermedia platforms to propagate their political discourses. In effect, populism [observed globally] got more strength with digital media tools which allowed ''all citizens to have the right of access to all types of content'' (Balle, 1998). However, due to the manipulative and disinformation [or misinformation] side of social media, techno-politics—or should we call it 'techno-populism'—turns out to become a political propaganda tool (Wolley and Howard, 2019). In so doing, populist leaders create their own political identity through new technologies.

Moreover, in most of African countries ruled by populist leaders, state media are decried to be partial in the news manufacturing. For instance, in Cameroon where the members of the Presidential Circles rely on the "Pro-Bia" state-run-media channels as their primary source of information, new media platforms turn out to be more representative of the *Vox Populi* [the voice of the people]. These alternative media platforms constitute a strong counter-populism in several countries. If in Gabon and Cameroon the respective presidents Ali Bongo and Paul Bia put emphasis on the over-control and full surveillance of traditional media landscape, limiting de fact press freedom, some populist leaders prefer using excessively the alternative media platforms to disseminate their populist discourses.

In Ivory Coast for instance, we have the famous example of Guillaume Kigbafori SORO who created his own YouTube Channel called *GKS TV* to propagate his official populist discourses against his political opponent Alassane Dramane Ouattara, re-elected president of the republic after contested elections. Likewise, in Mali, the case of the military President Assimi Goita and his Prime Minister Choguel Kokalla Maiga with their limitless whirlwind Tweets constitute another relevant example. More interestingly, they took the decision to ban the French "*imperialistic*" global broadcasting radio and television—RFI and France 24—in March 2022[4].

Similarly, in Cote d'Ivoire [Ivory Coast] we have the example of the former president Laurent Koudou Gbagbo who succeeded to create the proximity with the electors through the savvy use of media outlets. Another example is Paul-

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[2]   Guy Berger is the head of the faculty of journalism at Rhodes University and "guru" of Highway Africa.

[3]   Highway Africa is a multiyear collaborative research and teaching project that explores the past, present, and future of the trans-African highway system.

[4]   The informational war between Mali and France started after a bloody terrorist attack of Mourah between March 23 to 30, 2022 —locality situated in Central Mali—in which the government of Choguel Kokalla Maiga and Assimi Goita stated that French imperialist media fueled [or intensified the terror] the crisis by disseminating fabricated information. While the official information released by the government mentioned 203 terrorists killed by the armed forces during the attack, RFI and France 24 talked about civilians arbitrarily executed. Hence, the government could not tolerate what they considered as *bad intentioned misinformation* constructed by French authorities because they are against the support of Russian forces to the national armed forces in their battles to eradicate terrorism in Mali.

Henri Sandaogo Damiba in Burkina Faso with his multiple press conferences, TV programs, interviews and press releases that lead some political critics and media analysts to call him the "media boss".

Talking about the relationship between digital media and populism, it is not a secret that new media technologies have the potential to be 'interactive', 'participatory', and '[un]democratic'. The most interesting example in West African context is the French-Beninese so-called "Pan-Africanist political leader" Kemi Seba—considered by many observers as the most prominent anti-colonialist figure—who fuels the web day by day with his very animated YouTube Channel, Twitter and Facebook accounts, and many other social networks. In short, all the aforementioned populist leaders represent a sort of shrewd political performers who speak efficiently in the name of 'the people' for their political achievements. Yet, these kinds of populist discourses are not spotless.

5. The Stain of Populist Discourse in West African Context

Globally observed all around the world, extreme right wing populism brings about a political communication which is colored by hate, racism, xenophobia, and islamophobia; and this is a threat to liberal democracy. For instance, former president of Burkina Faso Roch Marc Christian Kabore's drawbacks of 'bad crisis communication' symbolize an abuse of power. Indeed, according to the scholar Moffit (2016), "contemporary populism can be defined as a political style that characterizes an appeal to 'the people' as opposed to 'the elite', 'bad manners' and the performance of crisis, breakdown or threat" (Moffit, 2016). He distinguishes the *technocratic political style*—which has an appeal to expertise, good manners, stability and progress—from the *populist political style* which entails the confrontation of the 'people' against the 'elites', performance of crisis, bad manners, breakdown between citizens and their representatives, and threat. Seen from this perspective, former president Roch Marc Christian Kabore can be considered as performing populist political style when it comes to addressing the issue of security characterized by terrorist upheaval.

Some populist leaders also target specific groups—such as immigrants, Muslims, asylum seekers, or some minority groups—as enemies of the "real people". The most outstanding example is 'the metaphor of the landlord' portrayed by the first Ivorian President Felix Houphouet Boigny—considered as the founder of the Republic of Cote d'Ivoire [Ivory Coast]—in the following terms: "The land belongs to those who can make it valuable". This metaphor was a response to those [the extreme Rightists] who deliberately stated that foreigners took out autochthone's lands and are making profit to the detriment of the country's "real" citizens. Hence, Felix Houphouet Boigny deliberately targeted the issue of immigration which, in his political view, represents a capability for the socioeconomic development of the country.

Furthermore, Benjamin Moffit's idea of "Political Style" goes hand in hand with the notion of "Charisma" which occupied a privileged position in the literature of populist leadership. In fact, the notion of "Charisma" was initially conceptualized by the theorist Max Weber as "a certain personal quality of an individual by virtue of which he/she is considered extraordinary and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities" (Weber, 1978). In the West African context, the revolutionary president of Burkina Faso, Thomas Sankara, is a relevant example of charisma; and so was the former Ghanaian President John Jerry Rawlings. Nonetheless, in populism the perception of charisma is actually dependent on the perception of the audience; since populist leaders portray three distinct images in the public sphere: the real image, the constructed image (through media) and the perceived image (by the public).

6. Media Framing and Political Discourse

The concept 'framing' was initially coined by the British anthropologist Bateson (1955) to describe how media select some aspects of apparent reality and mark them as more prominent in a specific communicative style. Framing can be highlighted as the ways of considering whether a glass is 'half full' or 'half empty'; depending on which aspect of the spectrum newsmakers [most often influenced by populists] decide to put forwards (Entman, 1993). That is why Robert Entnam stated that framing is the way of "elevating information in salience" (*ibid.*, pp. 53). There are two different types of framings in media coverage: episodic coverage and thematic coverage. More specifically, episodic coverage tracks a specific event in a straight line; whereas thematic coverage usually befalls later, several times after the event happened (Kimberly, 2008).

Framing has huge impacts on how the audience comprehends, understands or thinks about societal or political issues. Thus, media coverages have always been framed throughout different angles of treatment and perspectives; leading the audience to interpret the information according to the news construction [or fabrication]. That is why mass-media is politically considered as distributors of ideology. Basically, this means that the so-called ideologies are constructed, manufactured and disseminated mainly via framings or specific angles of treatment (the story focus).

Furthermore, a handful of modern scholars like Valkenburg (2000), Scheufele (1999), and Gamson (1993), define media framing as a process whereby professionals of communication, intentionally or unintentionally, act to manufacture a point of view that underlines facts concerning a given situation; allowing people to interpret it in a particular manner. As a reminder, the current study emphasizes how media frames the issue of political communication in West African context, especially in a context of hypermedia, marked by the social media proliferation and the use of traditional media symbolism.

Yet, framing can be considered as a form of agenda-setting, a process of political communication which consists in directing the public's attention to a specific issue (Kurt, 1940). In doing so, the framing concept in this study is related to the indexing theory (Bennet *et al.*, 1990). In 1974, the American sociologist Erving Goffman deeply discussed this concept and termed it as "schemata of interpretation" (Goffman, 1974). According to him, "schemata of interpretation" allow people to distinguish, perceive, identify and interpret events, manufacturing de facto specific meanings.

Moreover, since framing is defined as a way of structuring or presenting an issue, the consideration of the audience is the core question. In fact, it involves explanations and descriptions of the issue in a specific context; retaining the attention and, most importantly, the support of the audience. This means that the way the issue is framed always reflects the main concerns and engagements of the targeted audience. Arguing alongside, handful of scholars claimed that the quintessence of framing process is to provide a compact and tangible platform for examining how [populist] discourses are orchestrated in media ecosystem (Kimberly, 2008). Therefore, the deliberate purpose of framing is to redirect people's concerns towards particular political subjects.

In visual communication, framing consists of presenting visually symbolic elements especially in relation to the subject through a strategic arrangement in such a way to give a specific connotation (*ibid.*, 2008). Robert Entman claims that "the words and images that make up the frame can be distinguished from the rest of the news by their capacity of stimulating positively or negatively, objectively or subjectively, different sides in a political conflict" (Entman, 2003). Thus, it consists in keeping the audience's focus on the framed topic. That is why Entman conceptualized it as 'dominant frames'; that is to say, the frames which dictate the outlines of the discussions. For him, certain frames turn out to become more dominant than others via three distinct variables: the motivations, the power and strategy, and the cultural congruence (*ibid.*).

As a result, the framing theory explores the manipulation of audiences by media through the way of presenting them only one side of the news. The audiences must, therefore, be more vigilant and exercise their critical thinking abilities in order to deal with such mediated political information. Likewise, in populist discourses, what the media present us is just pieces of "frames", emphasizing certain aspects of the reality. Thus, this theory is crucial for the analysis of the current topic related to techno-politics because it allows comprehending the choices of the media experts in the treatment of information in line with populism in West African context.

7. The Nexus Between Politics, Media And Propaganda

From its Latin root "*propagare*", which means literally "to spread or to propagate", the word "propaganda" is a concept designating a set of persuasion techniques implemented in order to propagate with all available means an idea, an opinion, an ideology or a doctrine and to stimulate the adoption of specific behaviors within a targeted audience. These techniques are exercized on populations in order to influence them, even to indoctrinate them, as did Adolf Hitler with the "Nazi Party" in 1933, suavely orchestrated by his "propaganda ministry" Joseph Goebbels[5]. This is similar to the portrayal of Orwell's *"ministry of truth"* in 1984.

In *Rethinking Media Theory (*1992)*,* Mattelart thinks that there is a sort of "legitimation of the system of communication" for political and economic purposes (Mattelart, 1992). Notwithstanding, the liberal theory reminds us that mass media are supposed to operate as a fourth power, holding elites to account (Wheeler, 1997). McCombs and Shaw (1972) observed that media set political agenda debates in the public sphere by shaping opinions through content framings. Articulated in a similar context, Lippmann (1922) talked about the *"manufacture of consents",* referring to the way mass media reconstruct reality. To be more specific, talking about information and politics, the political reality comprises three distinct categories (Kaid *et al.*, 1991): an objective reality, a subjective reality and a constructed reality (perceived through media).

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[5]   See Allen (1930). The Nazi Seizure of Power. *Chicago Quadrance Books.* According to Hitler and his propaganda ministry, "*The aim of propaganda is not to regulate the rights of the various parties; but to underline exclusively that of the party which we represent. Neither does it have to objectively seek the truth, but to pursue only what is favorable to us*". The book chapter is available online at the following link : *http://www.public.asu.edu/~acichope Allen,%20The%20Nazi%20Seizure%20of% 20Power%20Chap%203%20and%2011.pdf.*

Tchakhotin (1992), quoted by Balle (2011) in *Media and Societies*, provides the keys to understanding how political power, in democracy as in dictatorship, can guide and orient public opinion. He enumerates, in details, many sources of political propaganda: intimidation by symbols, framing, slogans, music, huge gatherings and symbolic gestures, etc. Seen from this perspective, political propaganda can be understood as a 'collective communication technique aimed at sharing opinions against opposing propaganda (real or virtual) in order to acquire power' (Tchakhotin, 1992). This, therefore, takes place through the combination of various techniques: media or human resources mobilized because of their supposed effectiveness in responding to a specific intentionality. It is also a question of effective communication.

For Brigitte Nacos (2005) defines the combination between propaganda and political communication in the following terms:

Political communication is, therefore, the means by which people express both their unity and their differences. Through communication, we express our demands, assert our interests, rally to our cause those who adhere to our ideas and castigate those who do not share our vision of the world (Nacos, 2005).

Hence, this communication is collective, insofar as the propaganda is directed to communities; or to individuals as members of those communities. Propaganda (if it works) strengthens an ideology and earns it supporters or partisans; it weakens the opposite forces. In doing so, one of the vertices of the political communication triangle—Politics, Media and Audience—is the media. Today, with the advent of hypermedia generated by the convergence of media, the role of media in covering populist discourses is crucial.

8. The Convergence of Media and Political Communication

Media convergence or technological convergence refers to the amalgamation of previously separated technologies and media platforms through digitalization and computer networking. The Internet has also enabled the development of new forms of journalism inspired by classic media practices. These are online magazines, web radios and web televisions, mobile journalism, etc. Thereafter, even traditional media become accessible on digital platforms via their Facebook pages, official websites, Twitter accounts, YouTube channels, etc. Consequently, with media convergence, politics-related news reaches more people, more audiences. Likewise, media consumers can get access to multiple media contents for free and speedily.

In addition, media convergence widens, accelerates and facilitates the distribution of political discourses. Thereby, digitalized populist messages become accessible from a multitude of devices. This facilitates a large production and distribution of fabricated contents. Undeniably, this makes "media prosumers" very active because, in addition to being able to react spontaneously to the contents, they have the possibility of creating and distributing their own contents online; contributing to the construction [or the fabrication] of both informative and entertaining digital contents. In doing so, traditional media news workers—newspapers, radio and TV journalists—and digital citizens such as YouTubers, bloggers, and even web activists are mutually influencing each other—rushing to be the first to disseminate populists' messages through theirs various platforms.

Actually, media influence can be located at three different levels. It is possible to clarify it following the enumeration below:

- *The journalists' questions:* The questions of the journalists are directed in such a specific way to get particular information from the interviewers. In a political discourse for example, the journalists will absolutely try to get the viewpoint of some experts through interviews. Thus, media professionals redirect the experts with typical questions so that they end up by commenting the subject under a specific angle. This will obviously influence how the audiences think about the issue in question.

- *The Storytelling:* As it sounds, the story-telling is the fact of (re)telling a story or narrating a story. In the domain of media studies, however, the storytelling focuses on the protagonists (or antagonists) of an event by questioning, interpreting, commenting it in the way they want the audience to think about the issue. Lugmayr *et al*. (2017) subdivided the storytelling method in four different components: the narrative, the perspective, the interactivity and the medium.

- *The Editorial Line:* This represents the set of choices and decisions on the processing of information by a medium: TV, radio, print newspaper or digital medium. Each medium has in principle an editorial line. In the traditional media, it is generally guaranteed by Chief Editors, in collaboration with the media managers who decide on what aspect the information should be emphasized. The editorial line, therefore, traces the conduct to be taken for any journalist working for the media institution. This gives to the medium a specific colouring which makes it different compared to the other media. The editorial line also categorizes the media as being positioned on the left or right side, respectively

labelled as oppositional, centrist or governmental media. Decided by an editorial committee, the editorial line makes it possible to choose the informational subjects to be dealt with, to be prioritized. It gives a guideline to all the contents and induces a specific angle for processing information.

The finality is all about how the audience attaches particular importance to a news story and perceives the context in which a problem is framed. Ultimately, if the media fail to tell the audiences how to think, they still succeed in imposing on them what to discuss about. This is of great importance because it allows showing the starring role that media give to populist discourses. Therefore, populists eventually imposed themselves on the media agenda and public discussions. Ultimately, the social responsibility of Journalists should play a primordial role in this process.

9. Conclusion

The current theoretical study encompasses concrete illustrations of populist practices in West African context and beyond. This type of research is crucial because today we live in a sort of 'information society' hijacked by populist leaders all around the globe. However, in this information society, innovations in communication strategies and new technologies of information—which give birth to hypermedia platforms—play a fundamental role, empowering profound social changes. Hereafter, media messages, very well elaborated, are asymmetric and circulate horizontally because people are no longer passive contents consumers. Indeed, the public can interact with media contents, reinterpreting them in the light of their own cultural backgrounds. On the other side of the spectrum, populist also can easily polish and disseminate their political discourses. Throughout this paper, I have demonstrated how contemporary politics—especially West African political leaders—use both traditional media and hypermedia platforms to sharpen their messages.

In fact, the democratization and personalization of information marks profoundly our current society. Henceforth, due to the proliferation of hypermedia today, digital information circulates much faster and in a variety of ways. Consequently, it is quite difficult to evaluate its impact in the current social context. Yet, our attitudes vis-à-vis information is therefore modified and shaped by media ecosystem. Seen from the political communication perspective, populists tend to control how media frame political debates because it changes public opinion and may impact electioneering (McNair, 1999). The German thinker Han (2017) claims that modern media such as cinema, radio and TV assemble human beings while in contemporary society, digital media [hypermedia currently] isolates individuals. The evolution and diversification of information and communication outlets—with the advent of digital media platforms—are 'normally' supposed to bring about a wind of democracy in the public sphere. Notwithstanding, digital media platforms marked by hypermedia constantly raise more questions than answers.

As a result, in such a context, it is appropriate to elaborate some questions for further researches on media. First, is digital culture a step towards a post-truth or, better, a post-human society? To be more specific, should we consider virtual individualized life, characterized specifically by social media nowadays, as a sort of technological stepping stone for the creation of a post-human society or even a trans-human world? Finally, in the next coming decades the world will inevitably undergo important, even radical, technological changes in terms of Artificial Intelligences. Thus, taking into account the issues of personal data exploitation, surveillance capitalism, and spear phishing [cyber criminality]; should we consider these upcoming changes as providing more advantages or more inconvenient for the future generations?

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