

MEDIA INDEPENDENCE AND BUSINESS MODELS: Benin struggles to find its mark

by Gérard Guèdègbé

Commissioned by
KAS Media Programme Subsahara Africa
60 Hume Road
Dunkeld,
2196
Johannesburg,
South Africa



KAS Media Africa



@KasMedia

Media independence and business models: Benin struggles to find its mark

From time to time, ordinary citizens raise concerns about media and journalist independence, given the poor quality of the content published every day and the repeated assaults on professional journalists, either from their governments or peoples holding political or economic power. In its [2020 World Press Index](#), Reporters Without Borders ranked the country 117th, a drop of 17 points compared to the previous year. Commenting on the situation of the freedom of the press in Benin, they wrote: *“Benin’s media landscape is one of the most pluralists in the region and its journalists enjoy a significant degree of freedom of expression. However, the state-owned media have provided little coverage of opposition activities since Patrice Talon became president in 2016, and the media have been subjected to close surveillance. Pro-government reporting “guidelines” are often sent to the media after cabinet meetings”*.

The media is often described as the “fourth power”, a term referring to the watchdog role of the press, one that is essential to a functioning democracy. It highlights the pivotal role media is expected to play in the regulation of powers by publishing information of public interest but also and above all, it underlines the contribution of the media in furthering “citizens’ right to access to knowledge”. Media pluralism is now a barometer, a basis to promote democracy because it gives rise to the emergence of different opinions and point of views and confers a relative legitimacy on the representativeness of the voice of citizens in the public decision-making process. In the aftermath of the 1990s, which represents the starting point of the real process of democratization of most countries in Africa, media pluralism took shape and has seen development over the past three decades. A fundamental question is to know whether this more quantitative pluralism has borne the expected fruits by the quality of its contribution to the democratic process.

There is no doubt that the exercise of the media’s mandate has been severely hampered by factors of various natures, both internal and external. Therefore, the purpose of this article is to examine how much the business model of the media has been a determining factor in preserving or restricting their independence.

The commitment of the “fourth estate” to stand at the gateway to promote democratic values within society constitutes the basis of this mandate, very cleverly illustrated by the image of the “watchdog”. The social

raison d'être of a journalist is to meet the citizen's right to know by providing information of public interest. Today, in the face of the widespread miseries and the development challenges facing the populations, both media practitioners and the public continue to wonder what remains of this watchdog role.

Today more than ever, society finds itself confronted with new [threats and challenges](#) to which the media should adapt to play their role as well as possible. The development of Information and Communication Technologies has given rise to more sophisticated crimes and corruption that continues to weaken the pillars of good governance. Better still, the effects of climate change show us the profile of a nature victim of apocalyptic overwork with, as in Noah's time, deadly heat and torrential rains. Moreover, the usual security threats have been aggravated by the scourge of terrorism which has stained the earth with barbaric and indiscriminate killings, sometimes under the watchful eye of security forces. In addition to AIDS and cancer, emerging diseases like Ebola or the Lassa virus have shown the cracks in our health system and have once again called into question the theories and assumptions of our brave researchers with the current Covid-19 pandemic.

The most worrying pattern is that today, political and monetary powers, as well as groups of influence, have undermined the freedom of the press by deploying their liberticidal arsenal on a massive scale, thus giving credit to the image of the French journalist, Edwy Plénel, who thinks that: "The media are like little fishes in front of big sharks in a polluted sea".

And, therefore, faced with these new contemporary challenges which tend to widen the margins of the privileged to restrict those of the silent majority, victims of social injustice, we should expect to see the "dog" being a more effective guard. But what we are observing instead are citizens worried to see more and more unprofessional journalists in the newsrooms, and a corrupt, manipulated press which maintains intellectual gloom and has turned its back on the public interest in favour of the image and the goodwill of the strongest. In such a context, people are sometimes tempted to believe that media players have forgotten their mandate as public watchdogs. The bigger sharks seem to have swallowed the small fishes that are supposed to carry the voices of the voiceless. It is obvious that, with the severe precariousness of the standard of living, the journalist is strongly exposed to the external shocks of the polluted environment, carefully crafted to bait his freedom, his independence and thus to rout his honesty, his credibility and his ethics. Nonetheless, we cannot

deal with the question of the wage of media practitioners without scanning in depth the profile of a typical media company in Benin and the sub-region.

It must be said that in recent years, we have witnessed an almost disordered proliferation of new newspaper, most of which are not established as real media companies with suitable structures. Most of them are businesses without a vision, objective or entrepreneurial structure worthy of the name. They are often step up to give shape to the occasional incestuous relationship between the press and the monetary powers, between politicians, the ruling power and its antennas in the administrative apparatus, particularly in state-owned companies. These newspapers, which become tools of influence and propaganda for specific interests, rule the day and, at the time of an election, trample in full awareness the basic rules of ethics and professional deontology they are expected to exercise. Newspapers headlines are filled with insults, slanders, and defamations, and spread in sloppy language fake news with the sole objective of achieving their “mission” of discrediting the political opponents of their financial supporters. With an unstructured advertising market, cramped and strongly tinged with patronage, they would still have to survive well after the electoral windfall. Therefore, journalists find themselves trapped in a cosy servitude which obliges them to privilege the particular interest to the detriment of the public interest. We are now more sensitive to the image of local or state authorities than to the real gain that populations can get from public action. This present paper is proposing to take the example of the development of media in Benin the aftermath of the 1990s to interrogate and explore the underlying reasons for the increasing loss of media independence. To this end, the basis for analysis will be the viability of the economic models of African media, particularly private newspapers.

The new dawn of media pluralism

The acute economic crisis and the political and social tensions that emerged towards the end of the 1980s have precipitated the downfall of military-Marxist regimes, including that of Benin. The slate left by bad governance, the violation of human rights and corruption did not plead in favour of the maintenance of this regime which was ended during the National Conference of Active Forces of the Nation held in Cotonou from February 19 to 28, 1990. These historic meetings, which kicked off democratic processes not only in Benin but everywhere else on the African continent, established freedom of expression and of the press as the principle of choice to promote in the new era that is opening.

The Beninese Constitution of December 11, 1990, came to engrave in the fundamental law this popular desire. Article 8 of the Constitution therefore obliges the state to provide its citizens with equal access to information. Article 23 states that *“everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion, worship, opinion and expression with respect for the public order established by law and regulations”*. All this is clearly reaffirmed in Article 24 of the Constitution which states that: *“Freedom of the press is recognized and guaranteed by the state. It is protected by the High Authority for Audiovisual and Communication under the conditions set by an organic law”*.

The months and weeks that followed witnessed a flowering of newspapers. From a dozen publications in 1989, there were more than 40 newspapers in 1991, giving new life to the newly gained freedom to express themselves on political and socio-economic issues without fear for journalists to find themselves behind bars a few hours after the publication of information criticizing the ruling power. Every morning, the political information dominated the front pages of most private newspapers. Their content, more incisive and critical than that of their colleagues in the state media, was regularly calling into question the governance of the undergoing democratic transition. Political leaders were becoming aware of the catalytic role of this young press in the major socio-political upheavals of the moment. Present during the Franco-African conference in La Baule in France in June 1990, General Mathieu Kérékou, then President of the Republic of Benin, had openly voiced his surprise by the decisive role media had played in the political change that took place in his country a few months earlier: *“Journalists are responsible for the current situation, it is as if they were enraged. We ourselves have not recognized them.”* This admission of powerlessness with regards to the control of the press restored confidence to the citizens who saw in the press an effective counter-power capable of informing them about what their elected rulers are doing on their behalf. Citizens also found it capable of echoing the daily struggles and the hopes of the silent majority with the public authorities. State affairs like economic scandals were dominating the headlines of most newspapers, and contradictory debates on socio-political issues were among the privileged ordinary citizens’ programmes. Golf TV, the first private television channel broadcasting in Cotonou was famous in those days because of its Sunday political show entitled, *“My part of truth”*¹. *“We were all excited on Sundays at 10 am when Golf TV programme “My part of truth” resonated on our screens”*.

¹ Original title: “Ma part de vérité”.

“We were fond of the press with the earnest hope that the people’s concerns would be brought to the ears of rulers, but all this lasted only for the time of a flash in the pan”, Anatole Gbetoessan, a philosophy teacher in the capital city of Porto Novo in the South East of Benin, regrets.

A few springs before the end of the 90s, most observers in the media sector noticed a change in tone in several newspapers. The first sign was the early closure of most of the newspapers that flourished in the 1990s. Only a dozen of publications survived, for the most part, tainted by the various political and economic forces in place. Among the dailies that were able to survive the crisis, one could cite [*Le Matinal*](#) and [*Le Matin*](#), two prominent daily newspapers owned by media professionals who proved to be good managers as well. The young and vigorous press ran out of steam in the face of economic constraints. The high costs of production and a narrow and irregular readership could not meet the media funding needs.

Recognizing in his book *“Market logic and financing of the press in Benin”*² that the media sector is in difficulty, François Awoudo points the finger at the influential weight of political “donors” and the businessmen who now set themselves up as “masters of the game” by dictating the editorial content of the newspapers under their influence. He cites, among the difficulties inherent in this astonishing change in the press, *“the high cost of productions, the lack of control over operational costs, the weakness of newspaper circulation, an unregulated advertising market and a system of taxation unfavourable to the development of the press...”*

As a result of this dramatic situation, we saw a deterioration in the living and working conditions of journalists and other media professionals. Promised to a monthly salary varying between [40 euros and a little less than 200 euros](#) for the lucky ones, a journalist had no other choice but to stick to precarious means of survival including the infamous “per diem”³ or Final Communiqué, which is a brown envelope that has totally withered away the dignity of the professional journalist.

² Original title : *“Logique marchande et financement de la presse au Benin”*.

³ In this context, a *per diem* is a brown envelop collected by a journalist in exchange for the publication of articles favourable to the *per diem* issuer.

The training of journalists in Benin was not structurally cemented until 2009 when the government introduced the creation of the school of journalism at the National University. It was the first academic institution to offer a degree in journalism “Made in Benin”. Before that, those who were lucky enough were able to attend regional schools of journalism such as the [CESTI](#), a journalism and communication training school created in 1995 and attached to the Cheikh Anta Diop University of Dakar with the mission of “training journalists and information technicians capable of operating in Africa and anywhere in the world, of evolving in the world of information and communication and become experts in it.”

Most of the journalists operating in the state-owned media channels were beneficiaries of scholarships offered by The Soviet Union to the People’s Republic of Benin during the 1980s to support their Marxist-Leninist ally. Thus, most of the journalists who showed professionalism and know-how on technical aspects in those days had been shipped into various schools of journalism. Nowadays, with private schools of journalism popping up here and there, it is true that there is a significant improvement in terms of opportunities for access to training, but the main challenge remains that most of the programs offered are theoretical. However, one or two exceptions are worth mentioning. [L’Institut supérieur des Métiers de l’Audiovisuel \(ISMA\)](#) was founded in 2006 around clear “educational values, relevant curriculum, regular technical investments, a high-level teaching staff, quality partnerships for a specific objective: professionalization of students.” ISMA is one the best school of journalism and is owned by Marcellin Zannou, a former customs colonel and university teacher. In his article “[Freedom of the press and media "busyness" in Benin](#)”⁴, the journalist Emmanuel Adjovi concluded that: “*The journalist's collection of the per diems thus violates the public's right to true information: the "perdiémised" journalist tries to see the positive aspects of the events he is attending, and his account of the facts is more a matter of communication than information.*”

It is obvious that one of the main causes of the *perdiémisation* of journalism is the low pay of journalists in Benin, which does not enable journalists to afford the cost of living. In the table below, we can see that journalists generally do not earn enough, which renders them permeable to a whole series of reprehensible practices. In fact, if you work in the private sector of journalism the maximum wage expected is below 200 euros monthly. In the worst case, some journalists sometimes earn nothing at all.

⁴ Original title : “*Liberté de la presse et 'affairisme médiatique au Bénin*”.

Class of personnel	Category	Wages CFA	in Wages Euros
EXECUTING AGENTS	1	28 000	<u>42,68</u>
	2	30 000	45,73
	3	35 000	53,35
	4	40 000	60,97
FOREMEN	1	60 000	91,46
	2	65 000	99,08
	3	75 000	114,32
Experts	1	88 000	134,14
	2	98 000	149,39
	3	112 000	170,73
	4	120 000	<u>182,92</u>

Salary scale applicable to press personnel in Benin from 03/20/2008

Source: [Collective agreement applicable to press personnel in the Republic of Benin](#)

This situation of acute precarity in the media sector has not helped its practitioners to work to safeguard the role of the press in responding with honesty and credibility to the citizen’s right to knowledge. This will precipitate the latter into an abysmal abyss where it will fall prey to chapels and political regimes now assured of taming the watchdog to make it a lap dog. In this context, the word chapel refers to political parties or business interests with political ramifications as in the case of the late newspaper, “*Les Echos du Jour*”, created in 1997 by Maurice Chabi, the former editor of the state-owned *Ehuzu* newspaper. This newspaper, which was a credible information source for many readers, would manage to spare its main ‘partner’, the business oil dealer and political leader Sefou Fagbohoun, from criticism.

Chapels and political regimes at the helm!

During the decade 1996-2005, corresponding to the two terms of President Kérékou, the Beninese press, despite its difficulties to survive and its shaky economic model which transformed its actors into communication giants for political parties and economic interests, was able to secure a space for the diversity

of tones and opinions without major hampering by the political leaders of the time. This was the case of President Kérékou who never missed an occasion to declare his wish to «never prosecute» a journalist for defamation. This guarantee further unlocked freedom of expression to the point that some practitioners abused it by undermining the basic rules of ethics and the journalistic code of conduct. This wind of freedom resulted in the country's phenomenal leaps in the world rankings of [Reporters Without Borders](#), which awarded it the first place in 2002 in Africa and 21st in the world. Although most newspapers enjoyed only circumstantial independence from their political or business supporters, information of public interest was present in the newspapers because a young squad of journalists and some old "soldiers" of the profession stood guard. They were fond of major news reports, investigations into social issues and corruption that plagued the public administration or the governance of state corporations. A perfect illustration of this watchdog journalism is the masterpiece: "*Benin: A democracy trapped in corruption*"⁵, published in 2007 by Wilfried Hervé Adoun and François K. Awoudo, two journalists of great intellectual and professional reputation who managed to get out from the shadows the impressive corruption files that have punctuated the regimes of Presidents Mathieu Kérékou and Nicéphore Soglo from 1990 to 2006. We could read from the pen of these two authors: "*over the last fifteen years, corruption cases have not stopped crowding the aisles of power. The financial scandals that hit the headlines in this West African country follow one another and all resemble each other in impunity and audacity*".

2006 and after, the change of pace!

In the first hours of his rise to power in 2006, President Boni Yayi showed his ambition to maintain a privileged, if not exclusive, relationship with the media. Government has signed contracts with most of the private press to render communication services which consists in showcasing actions of the new ruling team without leaving too much room for critical analysis from other segments of the political arena. The national television closed its microphones and turned off its cameras on the leaders of the opposition parties who now had recourse only to private media, some of which managed to preserve some part of their freedom to play a game of balance and allow dissenting voices to be heard. Some were subjected to tax harassment and other forms of intimidation as punishment. Those who did not agree with the government in place lived in cohabitation with the opposition parties although the "manna" did not have the same magnitude. State affairs

⁵ Original title : "*Bénin: Une démocratie prisonnière de la corruption*".

such as the so-called “poisoning and *coup d'état*” affair and major financial scandals were the cabbage of the press, some of whom played the blackmailers of those accused by engaging in a mediatic war.

Wilfried Léandre Houngbédji, journalist and writer, made the same observation in his book “*Freedom and the Duty of Truth*”,⁶ published in April 2008, when he wrote: “*Since April 2006, we have come a long way, but undoubtedly in the direction of regression. While in President Kérékou's time, the press was infantilized, with the advent of Boni Yayi to power, it seems that it was, for the most part, put to order with banknotes.*”

In 2016, the regime known as the Rupture of President Patrice Talon maintained an almost identical regime of economic servitude which constrained most media houses to see the actions of the tenant of the Marina, the presidential palace in Cotonou, only under the angle of exploits never equalled. President Talon’s government briefly suspended the current contracts with the former regime, but a few weeks later, these “contracts” returned. Every morning, some newspapers display almost similar titles, chanting the government’s “successes”. Commenting on the state of freedom of expression in Benin in 2018, Franck Kpocheme, then president of the Union of Media Professionals in Benin, said: “*If we are truly newspaper companies, it’s not just the government advertising contracts that will help us thrive. Resources should be sought elsewhere. We should be independent from government. ... It's up to us to say no.*”

“You cannot expect a tiger to become vegetarian by throwing a piece of meat at it every morning”

While it is easy to see that the press is not playing its watchdog role efficiently, it is just as paradoxical to see with what intellectual hypocrisy our authorities, civil society actors and public opinion come to bring the press to trial without seeking to define the sources, the motives and the collective and individual responsibilities of each. It is obvious that the financial, normative and regulatory precariousness in which the media languishes today is a necessary condition and a favourable situation for the confiscation of its freedom and independence. It is equally easy to understand that a well-trained media, regulated according to precise standards and principles, and enjoying financial independence, will be able to escape the clutches of the manipulators. The comatose and bumpy state of the press is still the best guarantee for those who wish to negotiate media independence in exchange for banknotes.

⁶Original title : “*Liberté et Devoir de Vérité*”.

In today's context, the situation is getting worse because most of the newspapers are created with no business plans nor sound revenue models. Most owners of these new-born papers are journalists who left their former media houses to embark in the media business. They secure some funding from political leaders or business owners to buy computers and equipment in order to print their first issues. Some will not have to pay for rent as the newspaper is located in the sponsor's house, who also pays for running water and electricity.

The business model of the newspaper business today

James Madison (1809-1817), who served as the fourth president of the United States from 1809 to 1817, wrote on August 4, 1822: *“A popular government without popular information or without the means to acquire it is only a prologue to a farce or a tragedy.... Knowledge will always rule ignorance; a people who want to govern themselves must arm themselves with the power conferred by knowledge.”*

Madison's reflection brings back the thorny question of the cost of quality information, a guarantee of the independence required to enable the media to fulfil its mission in a democratic process. The level of independence of the media will depend on the revenue format adopted, and this is precisely the *raison d'être* of the business model in the development of an independent press today.

The economic model of media, whether audiovisual, printed or online, can be defined as all the products and services implemented by it and which reflects its profitability model. In other words, it is a system of “income generation” which allows a newspaper company to “survive”. In traditional media which are mono-format platforms, the business model is one-sided. Taking the example of the newspapers, the sources of income are either single-issue sales, sales by subscription or through distribution networks such as kiosks, auction sales, etc., or through advertising. Although figures for Benin are not available, it is easy to take the example of a neighbouring country like Côte d'Ivoire to analyse and identify the regional trend in the economic model of the newspapers. In a statement delivered on the occasion of the multi-actor dialogue on digital cooperation and citizens' trust in the media, organized by the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung's Political Dialogue in West Africa Program, Mr Samba Koné, President of the National Press Authority painted a grim picture of the state of income in the Ivorian press. He noted that *“the turnover of the national daily press has fallen from over 7,6 million euros in 2005 to less than 3 million euros in 2019, which represents a drop of 65% in fifteen years”*. *“Some newspapers, among these 20 dailies sell barely 10% of their printing circulation or 500 copies per day*

...” Mr Koné laments, before concluding that “... *below 30% of sales, a newspaper is not profitable and must disappear from the market*”. This drastic drop in revenues from the written press, which logically reflects a certain lack of interest on the part of the readership in the content offered, is explained, according to him, by observations such as the politically oriented nature of the information published, too excessive biases, breaches of privacy, publications of inaccurate and truncated information and advertisement disguised as news articles. The example in Cote d’Ivoire is by no doubt similar to Benin and merges perfectly with the current situation in the local press. Apart from about twenty newspapers, the majority of which are daily only in name because struck by the syndrome of irregularity of publication, the newspapers appear and disappear at the same rate after a few streams of publications.

The loss of income due to lack of entrepreneurial project supporting most media houses has resulted in the logical and transversal deterioration of the living and working conditions of journalists. In the newsrooms, infrastructures are either outdated or in poor working condition. Logistical means to produce and disseminate information are lacking. Journalists often lack transportation fees to go and do field reports. In the private press especially, journalists accumulating arrears of wages on a series of monthly payments are commonplace. They do not have the adequate means to do the job with professionalism and autonomy, which forces them to accept the proposals for favours that some put forward to influence the content of their article. Analysing the difficulties of the African press in his article entitled “*The African journalist facing his status*”, Perret (2001: 157) alludes to the following factors: “[...] *lack of material resources, shortage of trained and experienced personnel, subjugation to a local reality still marked by authoritarianism, weak structuring of the political game or absence of clear codification of relations*”.

In his article entitled “[Freedom of the Press and Media "Busyness" in Benin](#)”, Emmanuel Adjovi highlights the unorthodox practices that have developed and that undermine the credibility and independence of journalists. He talks about journalists he calls blackmailers: “*Some journalists and press bosses don't wait for corrupters to come to them, they specialize in blackmailing politicians and business people. They let the latter know that they have such explosive information about them and that it is up to them, and especially their bet, that the information is not published. Naturally, many people give in to the pressure and untie their purse strings to buy their “silence”. This is notably the case for this deputy who spent 500,000 CFA francs to buy*

the silence of a journalist who had a file with evidence on embezzlement he had committed when he was director of a state-owned company" (Adjovi, 2003: 163).

The absence of a plan for the continuous training of operational staff in the editorial staff is another no less important negative factor on the credibility of the media. Journalists fail to update their knowledge or strengthen their skills on emerging subjects such as data journalism, fact-checking, investigative journalism, digital security, etc. Better yet, in the absence of solid foundations on ethical and professional standards, journalists are vulnerable to corruption and other acts of intimidation from predators of press freedom.

Internet: An opportunity and threat

Soulé Issiaka, one of the pioneers of the Beninese and African press, warned media managers a few years ago about the revolutionary transformations that the industry and its key players, journalists, will undergo with the irreversible digital push. For him: “... *the journalist of the future is the one who is able to speedily provide information in text, sound, image, video to an audience that no longer has time to sit down to read a newspaper, listen to the radio or watch television*”. With the development of digital platforms as more and more privileged channels for the dissemination of information, we have witnessed the increased participation of citizens in the production and dissemination of information, the quality of which has clearly deteriorated with the fake news phenomenon. But the Internet has undoubtedly confiscated a significant part of the revenues of traditional media, which have had no choice but to adapt to digital so as not to disappear.

Technology at the heart of the business model

Founded in 2008, Mediapart, the French news site specializing in journalistic investigations, is positioned as the most successful model of Pure Players in the French-speaking world with more than 150,000 subscribers and over 3 million unique visitors each month. A paid site model is a good illustration of the motto of this online journal: “**Only our readers can ‘buy’ us**”. Its president and founder, Edwy Planel, argues that “*the paid model is essential to produce quality information by professionals and to support a profession whose contribution to informing citizens and to the vitality of democracy remains undeniable.*”

For the moment, in Africa, and particularly in Benin, the time to savour an exploit like Mediapart is still far away, but there are enriching experiences underway that deserve our attention. This is the case of the [Banouto](#)

Online Journal, a benchmark in journalistic investigations in Benin, founded in 2007 by ambitious young promoters and directed by Leonce Gamaï who previously served as a journalist for a reputable local daily.

Mr Gamaï will explain that his newspaper has a mixed economic model that combines the paid and free formula. Non-subscribed readers can read information relating to current events published on the website while in-depth reports and investigative papers published by the newspaper are reserved for subscribers who subscribe to a minimum contract of 1500 CFA or 2.30 Euros per month. This formula is complemented by other sources of revenue that rely on online advertising, infomercials but also publication partnerships with institutions that aim to promote quality journalism. Thus, thanks to an international NGO operating in Cotonou, the newspaper received technical and financial support to carry out in-depth field investigation on subjects of public interest. The journal is also developing other institutional partnerships in the sub-region to equip itself with effective management bodies and a digital strategy to better face the double challenge of profitability and credibility.

There is still room for hope!

Like the Banouto newspaper, some digital-based experiences are still embryonic and try to emancipate themselves in an environment almost entirely held hostage, particularly by political interests.

The National Council of Press and Audiovisual Patronage of Benin (**CNPA-BENIN**) has taken the issue of income seriously, as it could ensure the survival of the local media industry. In recent months, workshops and round tables have been organized to explore the possibilities of profitability of news media in the digital age. According to Basile Tchibozo, former president of CNPA-Benin, traditional media must be resilient to the new order imposed by the rapid expansion of digital technology. Mr Tchibozo believes that digital technology should be seen as an opportunity to increase media revenues and not as a threat.

It is obvious that the media landscape has great potential for growth in such a fast-developing environment. But to tap into this potential, a key question needs to be addressed. It seems necessary to know which options may be best suited to the Beninese context and the socio-economic and political environment in which the media operate, and to explore the opportunities that the choices made can offer to the key actors in terms of earning income.

It is important to note that the current digital revolution has significantly altered the way that media consumers, industries, and businesses operate. New communication tools have given users the chance to receive some online content free of charge. Moreover, newspapers publication, on which most traditional media relied to secure advertisement revenues, escaped their control because of the Internet. They have to deal with the fragmentation of their share of advertisement revenue, part of which is found online. According to a recent survey by www.journaldunet.com, social media has become the second most popular source of information for the public, with 13% of searches conducted related to online media. Thus, it appears that developing an online business model can be a sure investment for traditional media. Among other business options, online subscription or advertising, online transaction and partnerships are worth mentioning. The transactional model is based on e-commerce. With this model, newspapers can increase their income by facilitating transactions between readers and charging commissions on sales. A newspaper could then serve as a portal to "commercially sponsored electronic platforms".

The cluster or partnership model is one where online journals establish “partnerships with other publishing entities to earn more income” (Mings & White 1997: 30).

In view of the example of Benin studied here and in the light of the development of the modern press in Africa, it should be noted that the viable economic model of the African media will remain subject to technological innovation and the development of innovative managerial structures to ensure its independence and guarantee quality information that will allow citizens to know best in order to act freely. It is possible to reach all this if careful attention is paid to the following: the training and mentoring of media managers on business models and sound management of a press company can play a vital role in achieving this objective as most of those holding managerial positions in media companies only have a journalistic background and cannot successfully design and implement a revenue plan for their media company. The second thing that needs to be done is to apply a preferential fiscal regime to media companies. They can be granted tax relief on certain equipment. It's important to note that producing quality information cost money and that media houses are often unable to afford that cost. As information becomes a public consumption good, taxpayer money could be used to partially sponsor its production. Thus, credible and well-structured media companies should be eligible for public investment in the form of subsidies granted to support the production of quality information. Media companies can also be encouraged to move from a small, single entity to clusters of companies that are more

attractive to potential investors. Finally, journalistic ethics need to be largely promoted in the media houses and in journalism schools in order to help young media practitioners understand that taking brown envelopes, for example, is empowering the predators of media independence and eroding the power of the media as the fourth estate of the democracy.

Bibliography:

Adjovi, E.V. 2003. Liberté de la presse et «Affairisme» médiatique au Bénin. *Politique africaine*, (4): 157-172.

Awoudo, F. K. 2010. *Logique Marchande et Financement de la Presse au Bénin*. Editions COPEF: Cotonou.

Houngbédji, W. L.. 2004. *Liberté et devoir de vérité*. Annace Presse: Cotonou.

Mings, S. and White, P.B., 1997. *Making Money from the Web?: Business Models for Online News*. La Trobe University Online Media Program.

Pansier, T. 2013. *Comment les Réseaux Sociaux ont envahi le Web 2.0*. Internet: <https://www.journaldunet.com/ebusiness/crm-marketing/1106887-comment-les-reseaux-sociaux-ont-envahi-le-web-2-0/> [Accessed: 17 Novembre 2020].

Perret, T., 2001. Le journaliste africain face à son statut. *Cahiers du Journalisme*, (9): 154-169.

Reporters Without Borders. (2018). 2018 World Press Freedom Index. Internet: https://rsf.org/en/ranking_table [Accessed: 17 Novembre 2020].