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The Economics of the African Media*

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Abstract

The focus of this chapter is on the economics of sub-Saharan African media. Using the history of sub-Saharan African newspapers as well as historical evidence from Europe and the United States, I study the emergence of market-oriented journalism and of an independent and informative press in sub-Saharan Africa. I document the extent to which sub-Saharan African newspapers have followed the same development steps than newspapers in other countries, moving from living off patronage and government favors to moving more towards mass sales and advertising revenues. I show that the story of the sub-Saharan African media is not a simple story of catching up and convergence. In particular, through the study of the economics of the sub-Saharan African media, I challenge traditional views of the media. I question the long-term sustainability of advertising-dependent media and discuss a new framework to improve the financial sustainability of mass media while preserving the independence of media outlets. I document the pros and cons of ownership concentration and argue in favor of the development of synergies between national and local newspapers as well as of the development of nonprofit media organizations.

Keywords: print media, advertising revenues, nonprofit media organizations, corruption, political participation, government accountability.

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1 Introduction

Building State capacity. Making governments more accountable. Fighting corruption. Improving the provision of public goods. These challenges are central for achieving long-term sustainable and inclusive growth in developing countries, especially in sub-Saharan Africa.[1] A common denominator and a necessary condition for these countries to succeed and to develop democratically[2] – condition that one tends to forget from today's developed countries' perspective – is the power of information. An informative press is indeed a potent check on corruption; it enhances effective and active monitoring of public goods delivery (for example health and education) and is an instrument of public accountability.[3] Moreover, not only a free and informative press is crucial to good governance and democratic development, but it also affects economic development – through its impact on social capital (Olken, 2009) or women empowerment (Jensen and Oster, 2009) – as well as the effective functioning of markets.[4]

Despite this central importance of an informative press for the future of Africa, the literature has overlooked the issue of what makes it viable.[5] The media are businesses and are shaped by many economic factors. The focus of this chapter is on the economics of the sub-Saharan African media.[6] Using the history of sub-Saharan African newspapers as well as historical evidence from Europe and the United States, I study the rise and sometimes the failure of market-oriented journalism and of an independent and informative press in

[1] The geographical coverage of this chapter is partial. Because North African and sub-Saharan African newspapers developed differently at different time periods, and because the current state of the media market differs from one region to the other, analyzing both cases is beyond the goal of this work. The focus of this chapter is on sub-Saharan Africa; this geographical choice is driven both by the need to increase our knowledge of the sub-Saharan African media market – I will come back to this point below but nearly no research in economics has been done on this topic –, and by the lessons that can be learned from this special case for other developing and developed countries.

[2] Of course many countries – China is but one example – have developed, i.e. grow economically, without a free media. But in these countries corruption is still very high and economic growth tends not to be inclusive.

[3] Using the example of Sierra Leone, **?** shows that the quality of information available to voters influences the choices they make in the polling booth and in turn affects the strategies of political parties competing for their support in developing countries. Cagé (2009) finds that increasing the information available to citizens increases the efficiency of official development aid in developing countries. Exploiting a newspaper campaign in Uganda aimed at reducing the capture of public funds by providing schools with systematic information to monitor local officials' handling of a large education grand program, Reinikka and Svensson (2005) show that public access to information can be a powerful deterrent to the capture of funds at the local level and that the reduction in the capture of funds that resulted had a positive effect on school enrollment and learning outcomes.

[4] Using the Market Information Service project in Uganda – that collected data on prices for the main agricultural commodities in major market centers and disseminated the information through local FM radio stations in various districts – (Svensson and Yanagizawa, 2009) show that market information improves farmers' relative bargaining position vis-à-vis local traders.

[5] More generally, the focus of the media economics literature until now has been on developed countries, especially the United States. In my view, one of the main challenges today is to study the media and how it affects the political process in developing countries.

[6] The main focus of this chapter is on print media (newspapers) rather than on television or radio. I come back to this point below.

sub-Saharan Africa. Do sub-Saharan African newspapers have followed the same "steps" of development than newspapers in other countries, moving from living off patronage and government favors to moving more towards mass sales and advertising revenues? And is the story of the sub-Saharan African media a simple story of catching up and convergence?

One may argue that it would be absurd to make too many broad generalizations about media in sub-Saharan Africa. But when it comes to the economics of the media, sub-Saharan African countries share certain features in common. Importantly, through the study of the economics of the sub-Saharan African media, this chapter challenges two traditional views of the media. First, the study of Africa shows that there exist multiple possible long-term paths in media development. In particular, this chapter questions the long-term sustainability of advertising-dependent media systems; it discusses a new framework to improve the financial sustainability of mass media while preserving the independence of media outlets. Second, this chapter questions the view that more media competition is always socially efficient and necessary to ensure diversity. Press freedom and diversity are naturally desirable; but we learn from the history of sub-Saharan Africa media that chaotic proliferation of low-quality media outlets may be bad. In order to analyze the optimal industrial organization of the media sector, it is critical to better understand the economic incentives of the media to deliver news (see e.g. Cagé, 2014).

One may think that an analysis of the economics of the media with a focus on newspapers in developing countries, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, is a misplaced emphasis. Not only radio has the widest population reach in sub-Saharan Africa[7] but, as we will see, newspaper penetration is still very low in a number of African countries compared to developed countries where the newspaper market is of much more importance. The point, however, is that countries in Africa are among the only countries in the world where the reading of newspapers will continue its expansion during the coming decades. While newspaper sales are generally said to be falling, as traditional print media struggle to compete with broadcasting and online media, newspaper circulations are growing in many countries across sub-Saharan Africa: the newspaper market expands as literacy steadily increases, whereas other media like television or the internet require capital that most sub-Saharan Africans do not have. More importantly, newspapers tend to be relatively independent, while in most sub-Saharan African countries, State-controlled radio and television services still command the biggest audiences.[8] On the

[7]Television is less widely available, although it is seen as growing force.

[8]In Angola, the government has a monopoly on all TV and national radio. All terrestrial channels are owned by the state. The state owns and runs the two major radio stations and has a monopoly on television in Botswana. In Cameroon, the state-run Cameroon Radio Television (CRTV) is the only station with a national footprint. Similarly, in Chad, the only radio station with nationwide reach is the government-run Radiodiffusion Nationale du Tchad and the only TV station is the state-run TlTchad. State-run Radio Television Ivoirienne has an official monopoly on free-to-air television broadcasting in Cote d'Ivoire and is tightly controlled by the government. In Ethiopia, nearly all radio and TV stations are owned by the government. While state-owned Ethiopian Radio is the dominant radio player, the state-owned Ethiopian Television retains

whole, private newspapers tend to be more outspoken than radio and television stations.

Before turning to the analysis, let me finally underline that there is a dearth of publicly available data on the media sector in sub-Saharan Africa, both for historical and current data; future research should aim at filling this knowledge gap. In this chapter, I use data that I collected for previous research I did on sub-Saharan African media, as well as a number of different data sets.[9]

The rest of the chapter is organized as follows. Section 2 provides a very simple conceptual framework to rationalize the relationship between the quality of the media and political well-being. Section 3 discusses the historical development of the African Media. Section 4 provides evidence on the current state of the African media and highlights that the traditional media system models need to be enhanced to understand the complexity of the sub-Saharan African situation and to draw lessons for the future and for the rest of the world. Section 5 presents alternative economic models for the press. Section 6 concludes.

2 A Very Simple Conceptual Framework

What is the relationship between the quality of the media and political well-being? We know at least since Condorcet (1785) that political institutions have a constructive role to play in order to allow for an efficient aggregation of all the socially-useful information that is dispersed among individuals (see e.g. Piketty (1999), who discusses this information-aggregation approach to political institutions). While information pertinent to individual decisions never exists in aggregated form but solely as the dispersed bits of incomplete information, efficient political institutions should allow for an efficient use of these dispersed bits of information.

The so-called "Condorcet Jury Theorem" can be – in its simplest form – stated as follows. First, assume that a population of size N has to choose between two possible policies $P = A$ or B and that all agents have the same state-dependent utility function $U(P/s)$; in other words, if the state of the world s is equal to s_A, they all prefer policy A to policy B: $U(A/s_A) > U(B/s_A)$. Second, assume that all agents have the same initial prior beliefs about the unobservable state of the world $\mu(s_A) = \mu(s_B) = \frac{1}{2}$. Finally, assume that all

its monopoly on domestic-free-to-air TV. In Ghana, the only nationwide radio broadcaster is the state-owned Ghana Broadcasting Corporation and state-owned Ghana TV is the only station that has a national broadcast footprint. Similarly in Guinea, Guinea's state broadcaster Radiodiffusion-Television Guinenne is the country's only nationwide radio and television services. These are but a few examples.

[9] Angola (AMDI), Benin (Afrobarometer), Botswana (AMDI, Afrobarometer); Cameroon (AMDI); Chad (Infoasaid); Cte d'Ivoire (Infoasaid); Democratic Republic of Congo (AMDI, Infoasaid); Ethiopia (AMDI, Infoasaid); Ghana (AMDI, Afrobarometer); Guinea (Infoasaid); Kenya (AMDI, Afrobarometer, Infoasaid); Lesotho (Afrobarometer); Madagascar (Afrobarometer); Malawi (Afrobarometer); Mali (Afrobarometer); Mozambique (AMDI, Afrobarometer, Infoasaid); Namibia (Afrobarometer); Niger (Infoasaid); Nigeria (AMDI, Afrobarometer, mediaReach OMD); Senegal (AMDI, Afrobarometer); Sierra Leone (AMDI); Somalia (AMDI, Infoasaid); South Africa (AMDI, Afrobarometer, mediaReach OMD); South Sudan (Infoasaid); Tanzania (AMDI, Afrobarometer, Ipsos); Uganda (AMDI, Afrobarometer; Ipsos); Zambia (Afrobarometer, AMDI); Zimbabwe (AMDI, Afrobarometer, Infoasaid). AMDI stands for "American Media Development Initiative".

agents receive a signal $\sigma = \sigma_A$ or σ_B drawn from the same conditional distribution, such that $Prob\,(\sigma_A/s = s_A) = Prob\,(\sigma = \sigma_B/s = s_B) = p > \frac{1}{2}$. The Condorcet Jury Theorem states that if majority-rule voting elections are held, the probability that the efficient policy (A in state s_A, B in state s_B) wins a majority of the vote tends to 1 as N goes to $+\infty$. In other words, majority-rule voting allows efficient information aggregation.

The role of the media in this framework is key: the quality of the information framework, i.e. of the signals received by the agents, is indeed central for the efficiency of the political process. To understand why, one has to relax some assumptions of the very simple Condorcet framework. While Condorcet (1785) assumes exogenous signal acquisition, central is to explain why some agents choose to acquire information while others do not. Assume that only a fraction q of the agents acquired a signal and that among the informed agents, the fraction which observes the message $\sigma \in \{\sigma_A, \sigma_B\}$ in state σ is $\rho \in (.5, 1]$ (see e.g. Feddersen and Pesendorfer, 1996; Feddersen and Sandroni, 2006b,a). When ρ is close to .5 the message is a very noisy signal of the true state, while when ρ is close to 1, the message almost perfectly conveys the true state. The media enters this simple conceptual framework in two important ways: first, the share of informed agents q that decide to acquire a signal depends on the cost of information acquisition, i.e. on the cost (through their price or accessibility) of newspapers (if one focuses on print media); second, the quality of the signal ρ is an increasing function of the quality of the newspapers (see e.g. Cagé, 2014). In such a framework, one can show that the information aggregation property of large elections improves as the quality of information increases and also depends on the cost of information acquisition.

The rest of the chapter presents the evolution of the sub-Saharan print media and discusses different business models for an informative press – an accessible high-quality press –, such an informative press being key for the information aggregation property of elections, i.e. for democracy.

3 The Historical Development of the African Media

Do sub-Saharan African newspapers follow the same steps of development than other newspapers?[10] For instance, will a social history of American newspapers such as the one of Schudson (1981) be of any help to understand the history of newspapers in other countries in the world? While we tend to think that newspapers in the West historically developed as a product either of the political world or the market economy[11], the study of the historical development of sub-Saharan African newspapers sheds a new light on the development of media markets.

[10] Part of this section relies on Cagé and Rueda (2013).

[11] According to Hallin and Mancini (2004, p.90), *"the media developed in Southern Europe as an institution of the political and literary worlds more than of the market. In Northern Europe and North America, the commercial bourgeoisie, whose success in a market economy depended on a steady flow of reliable information about trade, navigation, technology, and politics, played a key role in the development of the first newspapers."*

The sub-Saharan African case indeed highlights important aspects of what makes the media industry viable that have been overlooked in the existing literature.

The press in sub-Saharan Africa is relatively young when compared to the rest of the world. While the first newspapers in the West appeared in the 17th century[12] in France for example, the first newspaper was created in 1631 and the first daily in 1777 (Daubert, 2009); and the first "corantos", the forerunners of the modern newspaper, came out in the urban centers as early as 1607 in Amsterdam (Hallin and Mancini, 2004) – the first newspapers in sub-Saharan Africa did not appear before the beginning of the 19th century. The *Cape Town Gazette* appeared in South Africa in 1800 and the *Royal Gazette* in Sierra Leone a year later. The first truly indigenous press the black Africa's press was founded in Liberia in 1826 with the monthly *Liberia Herald* of Charles Force (Mytton, 1983), in Ghana in 1857 (the *West African Herald* – the first newspaper of an African from Africa) and in Nigeria in 1859 (*Iwe Irohin* – "The Newspaper").

Why is the press in sub-Saharan Africa so young? First and foremost because in order to produce newspapers, one needs economic and technological development, and in particular the printing press technology. In sub-Saharan Africa, Protestant missionaries – because they needed to print Bibles and educational material in order to spread their religious beliefs[13] – were the first both to import the printing press technology and to allow the indigenous population to use it (Woodberry, 2012; Cagé and Rueda, 2013). This early availability of the printing technology enabled the local development of a culture of writing and information diffusion. Thanks to early access to the printing press, local newspapers developed first in certain African regions and not in others.

Because Protestant missionaries made printing presses available to the native population, most of the first indigenous newspapers were printed and sponsored by mission centers.[14] The first newspaper intended for black readers, the *Umshumayeli Wendaba* ("Publishers of the News"), written in Xhosa, was published as an irregular quarterly in 1837 and printed at the Wesleyan Missionary Society in Cape Colony. The London Missionary Society and Methodist missions also produced the earliest journals aimed at the Tswana Christian community from their stations at Kuruman and Thaba'Nchu. *Mokaeri Oa Becuana, Le Muleri Oa Mahuku* ("The Teacher of the Bechuana, the Announcer of the News"), which started in

[12] There is an open debate in the literature on whether newspapers appeared in the non-Western world in the first place. While some researchers point out that in China for example, the Pekin Gazette dates back to the 8th century, others argue that such a publication cannot be considered as a newspaper and that newspapers did not exist in East Asian countries before they opened to the West.

[13] According to the principle of the Sola Scriptura central to the Protestant doctrine, every Protestant should be able to read the Bible.

[14] The study of a possible agenda of these newspapers is well beyond the scope of this chapter. However, it is important to highlight that these newspapers often provided spaces for intellectuals to discuss reform ideas; criticisms of colonization and statements in favor of slavery abolitions were part of these newspapers that may be viewed as the seeds for nationalist movements (see e.g. Woodberry, 2004).

1857, is regarded as the oldest newspaper in the Tswana language (Switzer, 1984). *Isigidimi samaXhosa* ("The Xhosa Messenger"), the first African newspaper edited by Africans, was first released in 1876 and printed at the Lovedale Mission Press. Eight years later, in 1884, the English/Xhosa weekly *Imvo Zabantsundu* ("The African Opinion") was published. It was the first black-owned and controlled newspaper in South Africa (Switzer and Switzer, 1979).

The role played by Protestant missions in the introduction of the first newspapers is thereby key; strikingly, in regions where Protestant missions were less active, the first newspapers appeared only at the beginning of the 20th century and no indigenous newspapers were created before World War I. While by the end of the 19th century, about thirty-four newspapers had appeared in Sierra Leone, nineteen in the Gold Coast, nine in Nigeria[15] and one in the Gambia (Mytton, 1983), before the war, the printing presses were still mostly owned by the colonial powers in former French colonies. In these colonies, the only publications were religious or official publications; newspapers were made by and intended for Europeans (Daubert, 2009).[16] The first paper in Cote d'Ivoire to be owned and edited by an African, the *Eclaireur de la Cote d'Ivoire*, only appeared in 1935 (Mytton, 1983).[17] More importantly, this lag of more than one century in the timing of creation of the first indigenous newspapers appears as one the determinants of the differences in the current state of the newspaper industry in different sub-Saharan African countries. Newspapers take time to consolidate. At the time of independence, 88% of the former English colonies had a private press, against only 27% of the former French colonies (including Madagascar and Maurice) (Daubert, 2009).[18] Moreover, in most sub-Saharan African countries, the newly-established government tried to take control of the press after independence. These nationalizations did not succeed in countries where newspapers were well established, stable and independent before colonization (see e.g. Faye, 2008). In Nigeria, for instance, despite the coup d'état, the ensuing military regime and the development of a state-owned press, independent newspapers managed to survive. Similarly, even during Apartheid in South Africa, the black press and anti-Apartheid white-owned presses continued to exist. The *Daily Dispatch*, the *SASO Newsletter* or *The World* regularly diffused their anti-Apartheid stances. This was not the case in former French colonies.

Figure 1 (from Cagé and Rueda, 2013) shows the cross-country correlation between the

[15] Between 1859 and 1937, a little more than four dozen newspapers were established in Nigeria (Omu, 1978).

[16] The situation is similar in former Portuguese colonies. In these colonies, the printing press was introduced only in 1854. In May 1854, was published the *Boletin do governo de Provincia de Moçambique*, an official newspaper. The first private newspaper, *O Progresso*, appeared in 1868 but was banned after the first issue, and one has to wait until 1870 to see published a new newspaper, *A Impresa* (Tudesq, 1995).

[17] The French discouraged the establishment of indigenous African publishing. All the early newspapers – such as *Le Réveil du Sngalais* launched in 1886 and L'Union Africaine in 1896 – were published by Frenchmen (Mytton, 1983).

[18] In French West Africa (Afrique Occidentale Franaise – AOF) at the time of the independences, among the 132 "newspapers" registered in 1958, nearly half is made of handouts (trade-union, political or confessional bulletins) of random existence. Only a dozen can be considered as real newspapers sold on a regular basis and written by a permanent team (Perret, 2005).

number of newspapers that have existed and the average distance to the closest historical mission settlement with a printing press. The figure displays a negative correlation between the average distance to the printing press and the total number of newspapers recorded. Figure 2 shows the correlation between the date of publication of the first newspaper and the average distance to the closest historical Protestant mission station with a printing press. There is a positive correlation between the distance to the printing press and the publication date of the first newspaper: the closer a location is to a historically attested printing press, the sooner the first newspaper is recorded. In other words, thanks to early access to the printing press, newspapers emerged earlier around mission stations and this concentration pattern persists over time. In a very careful analysis of the historical determinants of newspaper readership in sub-Saharan Africa, Cagé and Rueda (2013) find that proximity to a historical missionary settlement endowed with a printing press significantly increases newspaper readership today within regions located close to historical mission settlements.

[FIGURES 1 & 2 HERE]

What lessons can we draw from this brief overview of the history of sub-Saharan African newspapers? First, that there is a lot of persistence in reading habits. In the sub-Saharan African case, high circulation newspapers[19] may have developed in some countries while in other they do not because in some countries individuals became used to read newspapers before getting access to the radio, while in others in which a private newspaper industry appeared after the radio they do not. In the later, one may say that sub-Saharan African media have skipped the print newspapers phase of media development, the countries having gone straight from nothing to radio.

4 The Current State of the African Media

The economics of a newspaper may be studied from different perspectives. In order to discuss the sub-Saharan African situation, this chapter relies on – and challenges – the different media system models developed by Hallin and Mancini (2004) in their path-breaking comparative study of news systems.[20]

Hallin and Mancini (2004), focusing on the Western world, distinguish three media system models:

[19] I cannot use the terminology "mass circulation newspapers" in the sub-Saharan African case; I come back to this point below.

[20] Nor in Hallin and Mancini (2004) which consider eighteen advanced capitalist democracies in Western Europe and North America neither in their follow-up book focusing of the non-Western world (Hallin and Mancini, 2012) – to the exception of a chapter on South Africa –, the sub-Saharan African case is used to build insights on the economics of the media all around the world.

1. The "Liberal Model", which prevails across the Britain, Ireland and North America and is characterized by a relative dominance of market mechanisms and of commercial media.

2. The "Democratic Corporatist Model", which prevails across northern continental Europe (Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, and Switzerland) is characterized by a historical coexistence of commercial media and media tied to organized social and political groups, and by a relatively active but legally limited role of the state.

3. The "Polarized Pluralist Model", which prevails in the Mediterranean countries of southern Europe (France, Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain) and is characterized by integration of the media into party politics, weaker historical development of commercial media, and a strong role of the state.

Their classification relies on four dimensions according to which media systems can usefully be compared in their view:

1. The development of media markets, with particular emphasis on the strong or weak development of a mass circulation press.

2. Political parallelism, that is, the degree and nature of the links between the media and political parties or, more broadly, the extent to which the media system reflects the major political divisions in society.

3. The development of journalistic professionalism.

4. The degree and nature of state intervention in the media system.

This chapter highlights that these dimensions – despite their general relevance – are not enough to understand the complexity of the sub-Saharan African situation as well as of other countries. In particular, one has also to take into account (i) the business model of the newspapers, and in particular their reliance on advertising revenues versus revenues from sales or from other sources; and (ii) the issue of the access to the media – that one tends to forget in developed countries but that is still a key issue in developing countries, as will appear clearly below.

A mass circulation press? As it appeared clearly above, the state of the press varies from countries to countries in sub-Saharan Africa – and some of these differences come from differences in the historical development of the media in these countries. Nonetheless, it is hard to argue that any of the sub-Saharan African countries have ever had a mass circulation press. There are two ways to approach this question. First, by looking at the aggregate

newspaper readership at the country level. Second, by analyzing the number of newspapers and studying the readership of each newspaper.

Before moving further, it is important to have some basic orders of magnitude in mind about what mass newspaper readership means historically in Western democracies. Both in Europe and in Northern America, the rise of modern democracy and universal suffrage has come together with a state of affairs where at least half of the electorate and usually as much as two thirds or three quarters reads a newspaper on a daily basis. For instance, in France, the circulation – i.e. the number of daily copies sold of local daily newspapers has been of the order of 20-25% of the electorate throughout the 1950-2010 period (and even more if one also takes into account national daily newspapers). The average number of readers per copy seems to have been relatively stable around 3, so this corresponds to a readership rate around 60-75% (Cagé, 2014). In the United States, existing historical evidence suggests similar magnitudes, and newspaper penetration tends to be even higher in Northern Europe.[21]

As compared to this standard, African newspaper readership at the aggregate country level varies from country to country but is everywhere very far from mass circulation.[22] According to the 2005 Afrobarometer surveys[23], on average only 33% of the individuals surveyed read a newspaper at least once a month (while 86% listen news on radio and 45% watch news on TV) in sub-Saharan Africa. A recent survey made by the Lumina Foundation in southern and middle-belt Nigeria finds that 13% of the individuals read a national newspaper every day (Fraser, 2008). The order of magnitude is the same for Ethiopia: 13% of the respondents to the ERIS Audience Survey Ethiopia 2011 said that they receive information from newspapers. In the sub-Saharan African country with the highest newspaper penetration, South Africa, 40% of the population read a newspaper at least once a week.[24] In Nigeria, depending on the surveys, newspapers achieved 20 to 40% penetration among the adult population.

The number of newspapers also varies widely from country to country, but a high number of newspapers does not always reflect a good state of the industry. In the Democratic Republic of Congo for instance, while there were close to 700 registered publications in 2012, fewer than 250 appeared on a regular basis. And all these publications tend to have a very low

[21] According to the World Association of Newspapers (World Press Trends), newspaper reach as a percentage of all adults is 76% in Sweden, 73% in Finland and 68% in Norway in 2012.

[22] This low readership level may be due in part to low literacy rates. If more than half of the population is illiterate (which is the case for example in Ethiopia), then one can hardly expect to observe a readership rate above 50%. I come back below to the issue of the access to the media.

[23] There are 17 sub-Saharan countries in these surveys: Benin, Botswana, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Surveys are based on interviews conducted in the local languages from a random sample of either 1,200 or 2,400 individuals of voting age in each country. Overall, they cover approximately 21,000 individuals sampled to constitute representative groups at the national level.

[24] According to AMPS 2013 BA (July 2012 July 2013), 29.4% of all adults aged 15 and over were reached by the average issue of all 22 daily newspapers monitored by the survey, 31.8% by the for weeklies, and 47.7% when consider all the AMPS newspapers. When also taking into account the magazines, this share increases to 63.6%.

circulation. The largest circulation newspaper – the private weekly newspaper *Le Soft* – has a circulation of only 2,500 copies. Even the largest dailies in Kinshasa such as *Le Phare*, *L'Avenir* and *Le Potentiel*, only print about 2,000 copies. In the same order of magnitude, Chad's only daily newspaper, *Le Progrès*, print 3,000 copies a day, and Chad's weekly and twice-weekly newspapers never sell more than 4,000 copies per edition. In Côte d'Ivoire, the government daily *Fraternité Matin* has the largest circulation with 13,000 to 16,000 copies sold per day in 2010, but most newspapers sell only between 2,000 and 10,000 copies per day. Ethiopia's biggest daily newspaper, the government daily *AddisZemen* has a print run of fewer than 13,000 copies. The privately owned weekly *Addis Admas* has an average print run of 21,000 to 25,000 copies; however, most titles in Ethiopia have small print runs of only about 3,000 copies. On the contrary, South Africa has "only" 43 daily, weekly and bi-weekly commercial newspapers but the *Daily Sun*, the South African daily newspaper with the largest circulation, has a circulation of nearly 300,000 copies a day and an estimated readership of 5,500,000 individuals.

It is hard to determine the minimum number of copies sold necessary for a newspaper to be profitable, in particular because it depends on the reliance of the newspaper on revenues from sales (versus revenues from advertising – which themselves are a function of the number and types of readers – or other sources), as well as on the production and distribution costs of the newspaper. Key for the analysis is the understanding of the business model of the newspaper industry.

The business model of newspapers Newspapers are businesses and are shaped by many economic factors. From the developed countries' perspective, newspapers rely mainly on revenues from sales and revenues from advertising, sometimes also on government subsidies. As it will appear clearly below, this has not always been the case papers were not run as businesses in the United States before the end of the 19th century and relied strongly at that time on political parties and corruption and everywhere in the world, including in developed countries, we still observe strong ties between newspapers and political parties or the government. This section highlights the extent of newspaper reliance on corruption in sub-Saharan Africa, which does not mean that this is an African characteristic; but the lack of advertising resources make corruption in the broader sense central for the survival of many sub-Saharan African newspapers. In the majority of the sub-Saharan African countries, the advertising market is indeed very tight and newspapers are thus unable to rely on advertising revenues. In Angola for example, advertising is scarce and there are few advertising agencies. Moreover, only long-established newspapers with a high-enough circulation and a constant identifiable readership can capture the few advertising resources.

Only in a few countries, the advertising market is growing. This is the case for example in

Nigeria. According to mediaReach OMD Nigeria, the total money spent on advertising (for all media sectors combined) rose by more than 50% between 2000 and 2004 (from US$63.076 million to US$117.537 million). In Senegal, even if more slowly, the advertising market is also expanding rapidly because of the development of the private sector, with the creation of small businesses and bigger brands which need visibility. Similarly with South Africa's consumer boom, advertising has increased and newspapers have been able to charge higher advertising rates. Total advertising spending on newspapers increased by 44% between 2002 and 2005 (Nielsen Media Research cited in OMD, 2005). And the main newspapers are profitable in South Africa.

In the vast majority of the other sub-Saharan African countries, newspapers however tend not to be profitable, or at least not profitable in a classic way, when looking at revenues from sales and from advertising. The Vietnamese example is particularly relevant and may apply to a number of countries in sub-Saharan Africa: *"A thriving local newspaper sector in such countries might seem to reflect strong communities and emerging democracy but not necessarily. (...) Extortion business, digging the dirt on local politicians and businesspeople, and asking to be paid not to publish it."* (Hallin and Mancini, 2012, p.201). In other words, many newspapers do not operate as conventional businesses. First, many newspapers – this is the case for example in Chad and in the Democratic Republic of Congo – survive on the generosity of politicians who dictate the publication schedule. Newspaper owners use their publications to gain social and political influence and tend to subsidize their newspapers from other sources of income. Second, many newspapers survive thanks to extortion and coupage: *"in the Democratic Republic of Congo, coupage journalism (literally, "taking a cut") is so institutionalized that there are standard rates. For example, $20-30 will buy a story from a radio journalist"* (Susman-Pena, 2012). Evidence of coupage exists in many other countries, for instance in Côte d'Ivoire (Waliyu, 2007). This practice is institutionalized not only from the point of view of the coupage rates, but also from the one of media owners. A large number of owners hire journalists without a contract, do not pay them a regular salary and expect them to earn a living by publishing news reports – journalists receiving cash payments for writing promotional pieces – or not (coupage) in exchange for money.

Paid journalism is also used in some countries by governments as a more subtle way than censorship to limit criticism. On the one hand, governments tend to withdraw public sector advertising from critical newspapers and inversely to reward publications which support the official line with advertising.[25] On the other hand, governments – this is the case for example in Mozambique – invite journalists to accompany officials on trips. Not only in these cases the government pays for the journalists' travel costs and accommodation but it also provides

[25]This is far from being specific to sub-Saharan African countries. In the case of Argentina between 1998 and 2007, DiTella and Franceschelli (2011) find for example that the more monthly government advertising, the less coverage of the government's corruption scandals in the four main newspapers.

them with a per diem that is sometimes more than their monthly salary.

Hence many papers are not run as businesses. With low circulation figures and little advertising to support them, they do not make money. Or more precisely they make money with very little by way of conventional sales or advertising revenue. Again, reliance on "corruption", e.g. through disguised forms of advertisement, is not a sub-Saharan African specificity and sub-Saharan African newspapers do not intrinsically lack ethical standards and make the voluntary choice of corruption; but the extent of this phenomena is particularly important in sub-Saharan Africa because of the lack of other sources of revenues. The exchange in "My Fair Lady" among Henry Higgins, Colonel Pickering, and Alfie Doolittle, a Cockney dustman, quoted in Jones (2010, p.104), provides an interesting light on this issue:

"Have you no morals, man?" says Pickering.

Doolittle shakes his head self-pityingly and replies, *"Can't afford them, governor. Neither could you if you was as poor as me."*

With low sales levels and a tight advertising market, newspapers have in a way no other choice that to rely on corruption to survive. Moreover, another key obstacle to the development of viable newspapers is the size of the operating costs: in nearly all sub-Saharan African countries, paper is expensive, operating budgets are high, there are scarce printing facilities and there is nearly no official government subsidies to newspapers. A necessary condition for newspapers to avoid extraction is thus economic growth and increase in consumption, which will lead to an increase in advertising revenues.[26] A second necessary condition is an increase in the access to newspapers.

Access to the media While the literature tends to focus on media freedom, access to the media is also of key importance. A free press that it is not accessible to citizens cannot be of great help in making governments more accountable. Yet in many sub-Saharan African countries the press is very urban because distribution outside the capital and the big cities is too costly for newspapers and there is a flagrant lack of transport facilities.[27]

In Benin and in Togo for instance, there is no modern newspaper distribution corporation. According to Faye (2008), Beninese and Togolese journalists, in order to sell their newspapers in rural areas, have to go early in the morning to bus stations and request from the so-called "bush taxi drivers" to deliver the copies to rural resellers. The risk born by newspapers in

[26] *"Ethics codes began when commercial success made them, as Doolittle would say, affordable. In the 19th and early 20th centuries, journalists typically took money to write favorable stories, and the concept of a conflict of interest was laughable. Reporters were usually paid badly, had little education, and were looked on as a raffish and unscrupulous brotherhood. Journalists worked in an atmosphere of dog-eat-dog competition, and bribing sources to get the jump on sensational scoops was a part of the game. But as newspapers became more prosperous, they also became more respectable."* (Jones, 2010)

[27] The question of media access is also relevant when considering radio and television. In many countries, people do not have access to television because they do not have electricity.

this improvised system is too high and tends to deter them to sell outside the big cities. On the contrary in Senegal, where there is a newspaper distribution corporation – l'Agence de Distribution de la Presse (ADP) – newspaper penetration in rural areas is higher, but the distribution network is still very sparse.

The weakness of the distribution system may be viewed as an inheritance of the colonial area. In many Francophone countries, a French company – Presstalis, the French media distribution company – has had for years a monopoly on the distribution network. Analyzing the extent to which the distribution network aims at protecting French interests is far beyond the goal of this chapter, but it is important to stress that many have argued that this network is often used as a form of censorship – not distributing a newspaper amounts to be the same thing that censoring its content.

Another important impediment to media access is linguistic diversity – this chapter abstracts from the literacy question which has already been considered extensively in the existing literature. People do not have access to newspapers because newspapers are written in a language they do not spoke. In Côte d'Ivoire, nearly all newspapers are written in French while more than 60 African languages are spoken. In Chad, the official languages are French and Standard Arabic, but very few people speak either of these as a first language. Nevertheless, French is the language of most of the print media. Similarly in Mozambique, while only 40% of the population speaks Portuguese, the main newspapers are published in this language.

Moreover, access to the media is limited by the prohibitively high price of the newspapers. In Côte d'Ivoire for instance, given the relatively high cover price of the main newspapers (around US$0.44, that has to be compared to an average daily per capita GDP lower than US$3), only affluent Ivoirians can afford to buy one on a regular basis, especially in the interior where purchasing power is lower. Similarly, in Chad or in the Democratic Republic of Congo – where newspapers cost at least US$1 each, i.e. half of the average daily per capita income – most people cannot afford to buy a newspaper. *Le Soft* in the Democratic Republic of Congo, the private weekly newspaper with the largest circulation, costs US$7 and thus only prints 2,500 copies a day. On the contrary, the success of the people press in Senegal may be due to its low price (US$0.20) which makes it more affordable. Moreover, this prohibitively high price of newspapers may explain why according to sub-Saharan African surveys the ratio between newspaper readership and circulation varies between 10 and 20, while in other countries like France or the United States, the average number of readers per newspaper issue is lower than 3.

These limits to media access have to be taken into account in an analysis of a viable model for the press.

5 Toward a New Model of the Economics of the Media

It appears clearly from the previous section that with high levels of illiteracy, underdeveloped consumer markets – low sales and advertising revenues –, an inadequate technology infrastructure and high input prices, newspapers have no choice but to rely on corruption and extraction. The problem is that corruption prevents newspapers to play their role of potent check on corruption and to increase government accountability. Hence one has to think of different economic foundations of the media. In this section, I first discuss what I call the "advertising illusion", the idea that given that advertising has been the way out of corruption in the United States it should be the case in any other countries of the world. I then present alternative economic models for the press.

5.1 The Advertising Illusion

It has been widely documented – for example by Hamilton (2004) – that nonpartisan reporting and an independent press emerged as a commercial product in the 1870's in the United States. At that time, advertising became an important way for companies with nationally and locally distributed brands to raise awareness of their products. Papers with larger audiences attracted more attention from advertisers. This incentivized newspapers to increase readership, drop overt political bias and proclaim their independence in uncovering news. In other words, advertising revenues created an independent press (see e.g. Gentzkow, Glaeser, and Goldin, 2006; Petrova, 2011).

One may argue that the fact that the commercial advertising market is reportedly underdeveloped in most sub-Saharan African countries demonstrates that sub-Saharan African newspapers are still in their infancy, and that with the future growth of consumption and the advertising market, sub-Saharan African newspapers will follow the path of their North American predecessors. However this might not be the case, for at least two reasons. First because advertising funding sources for newspapers are shrinking all around the world. And second because this decline is not new. It is often improperly associated to the introduction of the Internet or the recent financial crisis, but advertising revenues in newspapers have decreased since the 1950's both for instance in the United States (Schiffrin, 2010) and in France (Martin, 2005). Advertisers opted for television well before the apparition of the Internet. In the United States, the share of advertising in newspapers in total media advertising has decreased from 26% in 1990 to 10% in 2009. In other words, as highlighted by McChesney and Nichols (2010), *"the economic downturn did not cause the crisis in journalism; nor did the Internet."*

Moreover, print advertising does not longer account for the lion's share of newspaper revenues, even in the United States where it now represents less than half of the total revenues

(Newspaper Association of America). The share of advertising in the total revenues of national daily newspapers in France has similarly been decreasing since 2000, from nearly 60% of the total revenues to less than 40% today (Cagé, 2014).[28] Even in the few sub-Saharan African countries which have a growing advertising market and where advertising revenues are important today for the profitability of newspapers – Nigeria and South Africa – we observe a decreasing trend. In South Africa, there has been a dramatic decline in print revenues between 1997 and 2012, from 40 to 29% of the total advertising expenditures, in favor of both television and the Internet. Similarly, despite the increase in advertising expenditures in Nigeria, advertising expenditures in the press began to decrease in 2011; both the share of the press in total advertising expenditures and the amount of print advertising decreased.

In addition, note that the very large growth in advertising at the end of the 19th century in the United States was not only due to a growth in consumer spending, but to the development of what has been called "monopoly capital" (Baran, 1969). This type of capitalism, typified by large corporations competing in oligopolistic markets, is best exemplified by the United States. On average in the United States, advertising have accounted for over 2% of GDP in the 20th century. But there is no evidence pointing in the direction of a similar increase in sub-Saharan African in the forthcoming decades. Moreover, even in the United States, advertising is becoming a smaller portion of the sales effort while non-advertising marketing expenses – in particular direct marketing – are growing (McChesney et al., 2000). Hence not only the share of the press in total advertising is declining, but explicit media advertising may decline in the future.

This is a key point: in the long run, one needs to find a new business model for newspapers that does not depend so much on advertising revenues.[29] While one century and a half of American newspapers relying mainly on advertising leads us to think that it may be the Grail of the freedom of the press, not only it is no longer the case, but it might never be the case for newspapers in sub-Saharan African. If and when the growth of mass consumption and hence of advertising expenses finally takes place in Africa, it is very likely that it will only be to the benefit of television and the internet. From this point of view, sub-Saharan African newspapers have skipped the reliance on advertising revenues business model period of newspapers.

[28] Advertising revenues similarly represent less than 40% of the total revenues of French local daily newspapers.

[29] Another potential advantage – that I won't discuss here – of having media system relying less on advertising revenues would be that it may lead media to favor news over entertainment. A number of studies have indeed found – both theoretically and empirically – that media tends to produce more entertainment when they rely more on advertising.

5.2 Perspectives for a New Business Model

In this last section, using the evidence from the economics of the sub-Saharan African media, I discuss perspectives for a new business model. This includes the following issues: (i) the pros and cons of ownership concentration; (ii) the development of synergies between national and local newspapers; and finally (iii) the development of nonprofit media organization.

Ownership concentration Advocating for higher ownership concentration in the media sector may seem to be highly controversial. Media competition is indeed often viewed – with good reasons – as a guarantee for press freedom and diversity and de facto media monopoly is never a solution and raises the issue of media capture. However, chaotic proliferation of low-quality media outlets – as it has often happened in sub-Saharan African countries in the last decades, with very short-lived outlets – may be bad. Under certain conditions, an increase in media competition can lead to a decrease in both the quantity and quality of news provided – and so a decrease in government accountability (Cagé, 2014). With tight advertising markets and low consumer purchasing power as in many sub-Saharan African countries, a market can only support a limited number of media outlets, due to both the endogenous and exogenous fixed costs of news production.

If we further examine the example of South Africa, one of the reasons of the recent success – and growth – of the print media sector may come from concentration in ownership. Publishers have indeed been able to keep their costs down by sharing resources and editorial copy. The majority of South African newspapers are indeed owned by only four companies (Naspers Ltd, Johnnic Communications Ltd, Caxton and CTP Publishers and Printers Ltd, and Independent News & Media South Africa). Similarly in Guinea, though in a very different media environment with low circulation and few advertising revenues, the oldest and most respected independent weeklies, *Le Lynx* (7,000 copies a week) and *La Lance* (6,000 copies per week) are owned by the same publishing house. The Lynx-Lance group owns its own printing press and employs 54 people. The only large privately owned multi-media group in Mozambique, the Sociedade Independente de Comunicaces (SOICO), runs a TV station, a radio station, Mozambique's largest independent daily newspaper, *O País*[30], and a monthly magazine, *Fama*. A team of about 20 journalists provides news for SOICO's media outlets. This may seem a small newsroom from the point of view of Western newspapers, but in fact it is a large one compared to the average number of journalists working in sub-Saharan African newspapers. *O País* can rely on such a newsroom – and provides relatively high-quality news – thanks to the economies of scale enabled by several media outlets owned by the same media company and thus sharing the same newsroom. Moreover the group has provincial offices with correspondents who provide news coverage for both the television and *O País* from cities in

[30] Which prints 30,000 copies per day.

the interior.

Developing synergies between national and local newspapers Another way to take advantage of the increasing returns to scale that characterize the newspaper industry and moreover at the same time to increase media access, will be to develop synergies between national and local newspapers, between mass and small-scale media. As of today in sub-Saharan African countries, only community-based radio stations communicate in local languages in order to reach marginalized groups.[31] Newspapers also have to develop local content and languages. By doing so they will facilitate media access of an important share of the population which is, as I underlined above, de facto excluded from newspapers because of a language barrier, and increase their readership. But given the economies of scale involved in news production, local content should be developed by national newspapers publishing several local editions in local languages editions distributed in rural areas , rather than by a variety of very small local newspapers which cannot be viable from an economic view point (except of course if they chose to rely on extraction and corruption, which cannot be considered as a good business model for newspapers).

This business model of newspapers sharing their newsroom whether they are owned by the same media company or not may moreover be an interesting model for the future of the news industry beyond sub-Saharan Africa. In the United States for instance, the American Newspaper Preservation Act (NPA) (1970) – a broad antitrust exemption – permits qualifying newspaper competitors to enter into a joint operating agreement and to combine business operations (printing, delivery and advertising employees and expenses), thereby reducing costs and boosting profits (Greenberg, 2012). Ohio's eight largest newspapers[32], forming the "Ohio News Organization", share that way state, business, sports, arts, and entertainment news reporting, as well as various kinds of features, editorials, photographs, and graphics (Downie and Schudson, 2009). Similarly in France, daily local newspapers from the news company "EBRA" decided in 2013 to pool their national and international information pages through an agency based in Paris (Cagé, 2014).

Nonprofit media organizations Finally, there is an ongoing debate in particular in Western countries – on the efficiency of direct government subsidies for the press, in particular because there is always a risk that subsidies may jeopardize newspapers' independence.[33] Given the weakness of many governments in sub-Saharan African countries, the issue of corruption

[31] Television stations also tend increasingly to do so.

[32] *The Plain Dealer* in Cleveland, *The Akron Beacon Journal*, *The* (Canton) *Repository*, *The Columbus Dispatch*, *The* (Cincinnati) *Enquirer*, the *Dayton Daily News*, *The* (Toledo) *Blade*, and *The* (Youngstown) *Vindicator*.

[33] Even if there are various direct government subsidies in many European countries and these subsidies do not seem to have had a noticeably chilling effect on newspapers' willingness to print criticism of those governments.

and government accountability and the low level of public good provision, such subsidies may in any case not be relevant. However, an alternative to subsidies could be "philanthropy". Schizer (2011) proposes to provide a subsidy through the charitable deduction. Greenberg (2012) similarly defends the idea of indirect support via tax benefits by facilitating newspaper conversion to nonprofit status. Making independent nonprofit media as the centerpiece of the press system – possibly in some sub-Saharan African countries with the support of the international community – may indeed be an important step toward a viable business model of independent newspapers which will fully play their role of watchdogs.[34] Given the decline of advertising revenues and the high cost of producing high-quality news, profit margins will never be high again in the newspaper industry, neither in the Western world nor in sub-Saharan Africa. A nonprofit model – with a commitment to journalism – has this advantage that a reduction of the editorial budgets won't be used as a systematic answer – as it is unfortunately too often the case today – to a decrease in profit margins. In my view, countries should also develop nonprofit news agencies that should be subsidized by the government.[35] Subsidizing nonprofit news agencies would be a way for government funding to apply uniformly across the newspaper industry.[36]

6 Conclusion

"[Newspapers] may have a mission, but they are also business, with all that implies." (Jones, 2010).

Newspapers are businesses and are shaped by many economic factors. These factors have to be taken into account when analyzing the economics of the newspapers.

But newspapers are particular businesses. They cannot be considered just as any firms. Information is a public good, but one that cannot be delivered by the government, an informative press being a check on government accountability. Hence a good business model for newspapers is one that guarantees both newspaper viability and independence, as well as access to newspapers.[37] One of the crucial lessons of this chapter is that advertising-dependent

[34]There is a long tradition of nonprofit journalism in the United States, from the creation of the Associated Press – which is cooperatively owned by the thousands of newspapers and broadcasting stations it serves – to newspapers such as the *Christian Science Monitor*, the *St. Peterburg Times* or the *Delaware State News*.

[35]The three largest news agencies in the world are Associated Press, Reuters and "Agence France-Presse" (AFP). In France, government subscriptions to AFP are a way to subsidize news production by the agency.

[36]An important caveat that one has to keep in mind is nevertheless that such a nonprofit model of the media may not work in those sub-Saharan African countries that are "weak states". As stressed by Monga (2009), it is far from easy in weak states to *"disentangle pro-democratic activities by civil society groups from routine power struggle by political entrepreneurs who hide behind civic or charitable organizations to pursue an often unethical agenda"*. In such weak states, the move towards a nonprofit model of the media would perhaps have to be done more progressively, beginning first by a decrease in the tax barriers to media entry that exist today.

[37]The solution cannot be to have very costly newspapers reserved to an elite. Because an informative press useful to monitor public good delivery must be a mass-circulation one.

media systems may not be sustainable in the long run; and may never be a solution for many sub-Saharan African countries. Advertising revenues have historically been the principal source of income for daily newspapers, but they are declining everywhere.

It is thus necessary to think about a new business model. This chapter presents some perspectives for such a new model. It discusses the pros and cons of ownership concentration and argues in favor of the development of synergies between national and local newspapers as well as of the development of nonprofit media organizations. I hope it will provide food for thought for future research. There is an increasing demand for news content but the economic base of the newspapers – particularly so in sub-Saharan Africa but also all around the world – are fragile; we have to find a sustainable way to satisfy this demand.

African media did not follow the same development pattern as other parts of the world and is not in a satisfactory state – to say the least. At the present time, this is a liability for African democratic and economic development. But this can become an asset if Africa – probably the only continent with sustained population growth in the century under way – uses this opportunity to invent a novel model for offering information to new generations of readers, viewers and citizens.

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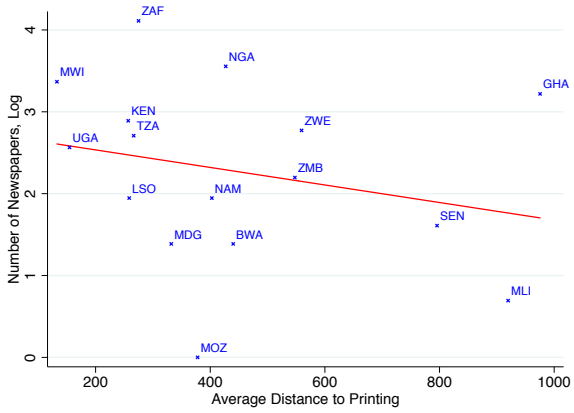
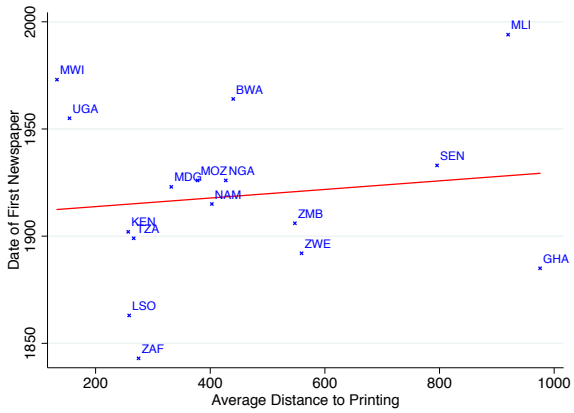


Notes: The x-axis represents the country average distance of Afrobarometer to the closest mission with printing press. The y-axis represents the country total number of newspapers in the dataset. The Figure is from Cagé and Rueda (2013).

Figure 1: Distance to the Printing Press and Number of Newspapers



Notes: The x-axis represents the country average distance of the villages in the Afrobarometer to the closest mission with a printing press. The y-axis represents the publication date of the first newspaper in the country. The Figure is from Cagé and Rueda (2013).

Figure 2: Distance to the Printing Press and Publication Date of the First Newspaper