

**New Information and Communication Technologies
and Professionals in the Media**

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Introduction

This study was carried out amid dramatic developments in the media, marked by the increasing use of computer-assisted communications systems by the print media. The growth in technologies and services resulting from advances in information technology, microelectronics and telecommunications, along with the urgent need for enterprises to enhance efficiency and productivity, have led to major workplace initiatives designed to increase the use of information technology, particularly in the press.

In Senegal, *Le Politicien* and *Promotion* were precursors of a more credible and professional private press that emerged at the end of the 1970s – a result of the daring and imagination of journalists who chose to reject the State-run system, in which government control and censorship severely hindered journalists' ability to practice their profession.

Overseen by respected professionals with broad experience, this press came to supplement the official media – national radio and television, the daily government newspaper, *Le Soleil*, and Agence de Presse sénégalaise (APS).

This “new” press appeared between 1987 and 1993 and represented a benchmark in Francophone Africa, providing a sharp contrast with the many publications in Africa during this period, which exhibited poor quality of writing and a lack of professionalism.

The struggle for greater freedom of the press – which certain totalitarian regimes were forced to grant as a result of social and political protest movements – was accompanied by the publication of newspapers that conveyed the views of political parties or advocated social positions on behalf of trade unions. In places where governments controlled the print and audiovisual media, their opponents expressed themselves through newspapers that they, themselves, created. This proliferation of newspapers, however, did nothing to ensure professionalism in the press.

Senegal's press served as a model for Africa, particularly in the French-speaking regions of the continent. The Senegalese press is not directly controlled by any political entity or labor union, and nearly all of the major newspapers were established on the basis of private investments from persons with no known political affiliation

This professionalization of journalism led to significant changes in Senegal, where, for more than 30 years (from 1960 to 1992), there had been only one daily newspaper. The establishment of a privately-controlled press was gradual. It began with the appearance of some ten weekly newspapers, most notably *Sud Hebdo*, *Wal Fadjri/L'Aurore*, *Le Témoin* and *Le Cafard libéré*. Between 1992 and 1998, four daily newspapers appeared, all with national circulation. The State-run press, which lost readers to these other newspapers, thus lost its absolute monopoly, which had acted as a major constraint on the development of a democratic society. This new competitive environment compelled the State to grant a degree of freedom to journalists employed by its own daily, while the political change at the top levels of the executive branch, which occurred in March 2000, accelerated the liberalization process.

Currently, newspaper production is between 60,000 and 150,000 copies per day. On average, 10 out of 100 Senegalese read a newspaper on a given day, and while this is far from rates

seen in Northern Europe or the United States, it appears to be excellent by comparison with many African countries.

The advantage that the Senegalese press enjoys over that of many African (and particularly, Francophone) nations lies in its organization and level of training. Organizationally, this means the ability to create enterprises that can manage production in accordance with modern economic standards. The best-run enterprises are those that belong to multimedia groups.

Groupe Sud Communication is the leader in private-sector media. In addition to publishing a daily newspaper (average circulation 20,000), with sales rates ranging from 83% to 96% in the Dakar region and 7% in the rest of the country, [source] it has a radio broadcasting network that includes 7 stations, with the parent station based in Dakar, and five other stations located in the five largest cities in the interior of the country. *Groupe Sud Communication* developed an “international expansion” section, which managed to obtain a radio broadcasting license for Banjul (the Gambian capital). The group has also established an audiovisual production center to produce documentaries and stories in Africa. These productions are sold primarily to European television stations and to image banks.

Wal Fadji/L’Aurore is positioning itself in second place (after *Sud Communication*), operating an FM radio station and producing a high-quality daily newspaper (with circulation of between 10,000 and 15,000), which garnered an international prize in 1998 for its Internet site. Two other emerging groups are *Com 7* and *Le Matin*.

In attempts to modernize media, three national dailies have established Internet presences, publishing daily morning electronic editions. The web sites developed by *Le Soleil*, *Sud Quotidien* and *Wal Fadji/L’Aurore* are on a par with the larger European and American newspapers in terms of content and graphic values.

Online journalism is becoming an increasingly important segment of the print media. There potential audience for this product is considerable, due to the large number of Senegalese emigrants. The Senegalese diaspora, clearly in evidence in Europe and the United States, represents a special target for newspapers. In addition to providing opportunities for increasing readership, these online ventures offer a venue for major advertising and its associated revenues. A newspaper such as *Sud Quotidien* is estimated to have 150,000 potential Internet readers in Europe and more than 50,000 in the United States, with the newspaper’s management anticipating possible subscriptions of 15,000, equivalent to the real rate of daily sales for the newspaper in Senegal. In financial terms, monthly subscriptions of US\$10 each could translate to monthly revenues of US\$150,000. Annual sales of *Sud Quotidien* are 1 billion CFA francs, or US\$1.43 million at current exchange rates, representing approximately 10.49% of annual sales. These figures highlight the importance of the new product and explain the efforts that *Groupe Sud Communication* is making to develop its site and improve and diversify its news.

The government newspaper, *Le Soleil*, which has improved in quality, has also established a serious Internet portal, and this interactive, user-friendly site is a benchmark in the field.

Today, radio – the most egalitarian communications medium – represents the only real mass media in Senegal. The emergence of private radio stations has been late in coming, but currently the movement is occurring on a fairly broad scale. Radio stations represent the major form of innovation within the nation’s media environment. Their diverse and

widespread use of new information and communication technologies (NICTs) in production and reporting have had a broad impact on society. The most notable instance of this, to date, was their use in covering the presidential election of February-March 2000.

Despite these developments in the media – advances that include a higher quality of product and greater professionalism – journalism and freedom of the press exist in the context of laws and regulations which, in both spirit and specific content, sometimes work against the principle of freedom.¹

In the law of March 22, 1979 – modeled, in part, on the French law of July 29, 1881, the Munich Declaration, dealing with the rights and duties of journalists of the former CCE, and the African Charter of the Rights of Man and Peoples – the repressiveness of the old provisions was softened. The new legislation broadened the field of social communication to include the audiovisual sector, and took account of issues of ethics and deontology (rights and obligations of journalists with regard to the conscience clause). The law is also innovative in a number of areas: free access to information sources; guarantees of professional confidentiality for journalists and those involved in technical aspects of social communication; freedom to establish newspapers (including the ability to have a professional journalist as editor and to have an editorial team, two-thirds of which is made up of information professionals); eligibility to receive press subsidies, based on regularity of publication, circulation and the composition of the editorial team; and strengthening of enforcement measures (notably, the ability to sanction a newspaper's editor).

Prior to the liberalization of the air waves, the seizure of the audiovisual sector by the Socialist Party (in power from 1960 to March 19, 2000) prevented radio and television from being effective tools for bringing pluralism to the electronic media. The Union of Information and Communication Professionals of Senegal (SYNPICS), political bodies, other unions and human rights activists have denounced this situation as unacceptable, particularly as these media, financed with public funds, did not reflect the diversity of points of view to be found across the nation. Beginning in the 1990s, the political establishment promulgated a series of laws designed to set limits on the liberalization of the press, while ensuring a sort of “tempered monopoly”² of the press.

The issue of freedom of the press is affected by factors both within and outside the political, sociocultural and economic arena. For four decades, the free press system served to benefit only the dominant party. Periods of relative liberalization coincided with the establishment of governments under the so-called expanded presidential majority.³ Moreover, the Haut Conseil de la Radio Télévision, which was created by decree on May 25, 1991, and became the Haut Conseil de l'Audiovisuel in 1998, was granted only limited authority and lacked autonomy, with its chair and members appointed by the President of the Republic.

¹ These developments are inspired by the work of the Commission Nationale de réflexion sur la Réforme de l'Audiovisuel.

² The laws in question are Law 79-44 on the print media, and Law 92-02 of January 6, 1992, establishing Radio Télévision du Sénégal (RTS) and amending Law 73-51 of December 4, 1973, which, in turn, deals with the establishment of the Office of Radio and Television of Senegal (ORTS).

³ This political formula sanctions the participation of most of the opposition parties in public governance – participation that was not preceded by signing on to a common government plan.

The repressiveness of the system is accentuated by provisions in the Code of Criminal Procedure, which criminalizes acts of defamation, slander, offenses against the head of State and government representatives, dissemination of false information, ethics violations, etc. These laws were often considered by Senegalese journalists and their union organizations (SYNPICS and its predecessor, the National Association of Senegalese Journalists, in the 1970s) to be “junk law,” intended to muzzle the press and impede its ability to investigate the disfunctionality of public institutions and report clear cases of corruption (Institut Panos 1993: 34-35).

Like all former French colonies, Senegal is plagued by government secrecy. The right to information is viewed by the government⁴ as an unacceptable form of protest, rather than as a fundamental right, viz., the public’s right to information within the limits imposed by law (limits applicable in particular to “State secrets” or to sensitive files related to national defense, patents, etc.).

The West African Journalists’ Union (UJAO) correctly notes that “the one constant one can discern, after surveying the different laws (scattered as they are) is the affirmation by all states (...) of their commitment to pluralism and to freedom of information. However, a deeper inquiry into their legal corpus shows that these laws are replete with highly restrictive provisions, though some progress can be seen – connected, no doubt, to a change in the prevailing situation.” (UJAO 1995: 6).

This progress is tenuous, given that the State, the government, civil society and the opposition have poorly defined notions of freedom of the press and plurality of expression – concepts that should be linked, to the extent possible, to the law and to the law’s central place in the lives of the people. In order to be just, the legislation must be balanced and impartial, and must respect cultural values.⁵ As elsewhere in Africa, one difficult question continues to arise in Senegal: Should the monopoly inherited from colonial France be maintained or should a system of free audiovisual communication be established? Certain states chose a free system; others, such as Senegal, maintained a monopoly, while establishing various exemptions.

⁴ In a booklet entitled *Pouvoir Judiciaire et Liberté de Presse en Afrique de l’Ouest* (March 1995), UJAO notes that this aversion to liberalizing access to information is based on the notion that “everything related to the government is, or is presumed to be, confidential.” This, according to the authors, explains the fact that access to information is perceived “as a favor

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