

**HOW ON-LINE PUBLISHING CONTRIBUTES TO DEMOCRACY, PRESS
FREEDOM AND THE PUBLIC SPHERE: A CASE STUDY OF *NYASATIMES*
ONLINE AND *THE DAILY TIMES* NEWSPAPER IN MALAWI.**

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ABSTRACT

Since the demise of the Berlin Wall and communism, many African countries have adopted a Western-model democracy as a system of governance. However, the media has not been liberalised to reflect this new discourse as constraints in many African countries pertaining to press freedom still exist. The internet appears to have the potential to challenge the political power of governments (Tsagarousianou, 1998:167). It has been posited that it has the potential to offer more platforms for information especially in the case of restrictive media environments.

This study set out to investigate the impact of on-line publishing in Malawi. It explored how the emergence of this new form of publishing through the internet has affected the public sphere, democracy and press freedom in Malawi. The main focus was the level of press freedom at on-line newspapers as compared to traditional newspapers. It used the public sphere theory and literature on the internet as a technology of freedom as its theoretical framework.

Using a case study approach by focusing on two newspapers; *Nyasatimes* on-line and *Daily Times*, the study used the coup plot coverage in May 2008 in Malawi by both newspapers as reference for the measurement of the level of press freedom. The study used qualitative content analysis and semi-structured interviews as its research methods.

The research revealed that *Nyasatimes* enjoys more freedom to publish and therefore appears to have more press freedom than its more traditional counterpart. However, *Nyasatimes* also faces some unique challenges. The findings also revealed that press freedom in Malawi is not only affected by government through legislation but other factors and players as well play a central role in determining the level of press freedom for traditional media.

The study therefore concludes that despite the internet's ability to transcend local regimes of authority and censorship pertaining to press freedom, the challenges facing traditional media still need to be addressed as it is the primary source of information for most people in Malawi with on-line newspapers being simply supplementary.

Keywords: on-line newspapers. Internet. press freedom. public sphere. democracy

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

BNL	Blantyre Newspapers Limited
DPP	Democratic Progressive Party
ICT	Internet Communication Technology
ISPs	Internet Service Providers
MACRA	Malawi Communications Regulatory Authority
MCM	Media Council of Malawi
MCP	Malawi Congress Party
MRA	Malawi Revenue Authority
NMB	National Bank of Malawi
TNM	Telekom Networks Malawi
UDF	Untied Democratic Front
WSIS	World Summit on the Information Society

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my parents, Samson and Christine Kakhobwe and my daughter Milika. Thanks for rallying behind me.

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1. Chapter One- Introduction to the Study

1.1 Introduction

This chapter will briefly introduce and place the study within the context of the media, democracy and the public sphere in Malawi. It will also discuss the concept of the public sphere and democracy which underpins the study briefly. The chapter also explores the emergence of the internet in Malawi and discusses how on-line publishing might be the answer to restrictive media regimes. The chapter will also discuss the research problem, the aims of the research and the significance of the study. Finally the chapter will relate the research methods and procedures that were used in the study.

1.1.1 General Background

The study critically investigates how on-line publishing is contributing to democracy and the public sphere in Malawi by focusing on two publications; *Nyasatimes* on-line and *The Daily Times* newspaper. It does this by focusing on how the internet might be affecting press freedom in Malawi through offering a new form of media— on-line publishing. It seeks to illuminate the public sphere and democracy in Malawi and how they are being affected by the internet's ability to offer multiple unfettered information outlets thus transcending normal barriers to publishing and press freedom. The study takes a case study approach by comparing two publications namely *Nyasatimes*, the on-line publication and *The Daily Times*, a traditional publication of long standing in Malawi. It focuses and compares how a media event— the coup plot of 2008 in Malawi— was covered in both publications.

Nyasatimes has emerged on the Malawian media scene as a new form of media; publishing only on-line. From scandals on pornography to the president dating a former first lady of another country, the site has offered many controversial and critical stories that have the government up in arms over its content. The publication has upset the power of state authority through its content and it has been able to do this through the use of the internet. Operating out of Britain, *Nyasatimes* has offered a challenge to the notion of the gate-keeping role of the government. The emergence of *Nyasatimes* in Malawi is the same as in Zimbabwe where new on-line sites have emerged which are challenging the authoritarian control on the media in that country (Moyo, 2007). This has raised questions of the level of press freedom on-line newspapers have compared to traditional media.

On-line newspapers are publications that only offer and publish their news content on-line, on the internet. They are publications that offer digitised news (Scott, 2005:93). On-line newspapers

first came to the fore with traditional media making the move to internet publishing in the 1990s (Scott, 2005:93). However, since then, there has been a proliferation of standalone on-line publications on the internet.

The notion of freedom has been associated with the internet. It has been deemed a technology of freedom as it has the potential to challenge the political power of governments (Tsagarousianou, 1998:167). It should therefore come as no surprise that features of the internet such as on-line newspapers have also been fore-grounded as one of the ways to transcend restrictive press laws. The emergence of on-line media such as on-line newspapers has been championed as one way in which media in restrictive media environments can overcome censorship and a restrained media environment. On-line newspapers have been deemed to offer a digital highway for the dissemination of information in authoritarian regimes where press freedom is absent.

African media have a history of persecution, confiscation and burning of newspapers that carry critical content (Ogbondah, 1994:14). The internet makes the dissemination of information easier. In Morocco, the internet offers content that is different from that of traditional media (Ibahrine, 2007). The praise for on-line newspapers stems from their ability to transcend geographical boundaries thereby also transcending local legislation (Sparks, 2003:114). This enables them to offer content to their audiences while publishing from other locales. On-line newspapers also offer a challenge to governments as censorship policies that impact traditional media do not apply to them. Since most African countries suppress press freedom as a way for maintaining power and control over the citizenry, the internet offers an alternative platform and some degree of freedom through its ability to undermine state control (Oloronnisola, 2000:47; Tettey, 2000:17).

On-line newspapers also have the potential to surmount other challenges faced by traditional media. The censorship policies that have been formulated for traditional media such as radio, television and print media are not applicable to on-line media and regulation in most African countries is yet to be formulated for on-line media (Berger, 2007:6). There is therefore the general view that on-line newspapers have more freedom to publish.

Press freedom is a feature of democratic nations. It is the absence of any form of pre-publication censorship (McQuail, 1992:36). A free press is essential for a democracy. A free press helps inform citizens on the affairs of government; thus acting as a check against abuse of power (Berger, 1999:2). It acts as a watchdog and the fourth branch of government by holding those in power accountable to the people (Lichtenberg, 1990:105). However, in many democratic African

countries, the press is still muzzled (Nyamnjoh, 2005:160). The emergence of on-line newspapers comes as a welcome development not only for journalists operating in countries with restrictive media environments but also democratic nations that are yet to liberate the press.

1.1.2 Theoretical Perspectives

As will be discussed in Chapter Two, this study is informed by the theory of the public sphere of Jurgen Habermas. The public sphere is a place where people can freely meet to discuss matters of public interest (Curran, 2002:3; Eley, 1992:298). The public sphere is one of the tenets of democracy and is a discursive space where the public (society) can come together to discuss matters that affect them. The public sphere provides an ordered structure which allows for democratic discourse and also acts as a forum for information, critical debate and scrutiny (Merrill et al, 2001: xxii). The media in modern times is the public sphere. It offers a structured way for addressing matters of common interest concerning the public. As mentioned above, the media act as a watchdog in society which necessitates the notion of press freedom for the media in democracies. The public sphere has at its core freedom of assembly (Calhoun, 1992:2). This freedom is translated to the media in the form of press freedom. Restrictive media environments are therefore seen as undermining the values of democracy. It is posited that the internet enlarges the public sphere by offering more channels for information (Dahlgren, 2005:152; Sassi, 2001:89). With the emergence of on-line newspapers, there is the view that the public sphere will be enlarged as there would be more publications which are beyond the restrictive clutches of the law in their countries.

1.1.3 Significance of the Study

The study in question is important as *Nyasatimes* is Malawi's first on-line publication which offers an opportunity to investigate the level of press freedom an on-line publication enjoys compared to traditional media in Malawi namely *The Daily Times*, which is a more traditional publication. The comparison of the two publications will help to inform the levels of press freedom the two publications enjoy. It will also establish how the medium of publication affects the type of content published. The study sets out to explore how on-line publications can help contribute to democracy and the public sphere in Malawi.

1.1.4 Aims and Objectives of the Study

Nyasatimes is the first solely on-line publication in Malawi which makes it new and unique. The study therefore seeks to establish the level of press freedom that on-line publications have. The

study does not seek to generate general findings that can be applied to future on-line publications in Malawi but it is an exploratory research in the form of a case study.

Nevertheless, the study hopes to examine what impact on-line publishing has had for democracy and the public sphere in Malawi by looking at two particular publications. The study will seek to answer the following questions:

- How does the medium of publication affect the type of content published?
- What levels of press freedom do the mediums of traditional and on-line publishing enjoy?

The study therefore hopes to establish what role, if any, on-line publishing is playing in expanding the public sphere and deepening democracy in Malawi.

1.2. The Publications in the Study

Nyasatimes, Malawi's first solely on-line newspaper was established in 2006 in Britain and is privately owned and funded (Msowoya, 2008). *Nyasatimes* is widely read in Malawi with a readership of about sixty percent (Msowoya, 2008). It has in the past published controversial stories about the Malawian government thereby offering an alternative source of information from the traditional media outlets inside the country. It was one of the first publications to break the story of an alleged coup plot in 2008 against the government of President Bingu Wa Mutharika (*Nyasatimes*: 8 May, 2008). *Nyasatimes* has been criticised for its political coverage and President Mutharika even approached the British authorities to shut the site down (Chiumia, 2008).

On the other hand, *The Daily Times* newspaper is Malawi's oldest traditional newspaper (Rap21, 2003). It has operated under three regimes in Malawi, from Kamuzu Banda's autocratic rule to Bakili Muluzi, the first democratically elected president and currently under Bingu Wa Mutharika's rule. *The Daily Times* has in the past published several controversial stories that led to the arrests of some of its journalists (see World Press Review, 1999 and 2001). Although *The Daily Times* has an on-line edition, for the purposes of this study, the traditional edition will be used as it is first and foremost a traditional publication. A newspaper in this study is understood to be bundles of different orders of discourse that are designed to appeal to different readers and advertisers (Sparks, 2003:113).

1.3 Methodology

This research employed a comparative case study approach. A case study approach is generally undertaken to provide insight into an issue which is new (Silverman, 2005:126; Yin, 1994:8). Case studies are also used when there is a desire to understand complex social phenomena. The study uses content from *Nyasatimes* on-line and *The Daily Times* traditional newspaper. Using qualitative content analysis, articles from *Nyasatimes* and *The Daily Times* from the week days of April to June 2008 were analysed and compared for aspects such as story coverage and sources as some of the categories for comparison. The significance of these dates was the reporting of the alleged coup plot in May 2008 against the government of President Wa Mutharika (*Nyasatimes*, 8 May, 2008). The other months allowed for monitoring of normal coverage in the two media outlets.

Content analysis is a multi-purpose research method developed specifically for investigating any problem in which the content of communication observes as the basis of inference (Holsti, 1969:2). It provides a systematic method of analysing media output. Qualitative content analysis is used for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through identifying themes or patterns (Zhang and Wildemuth, 2008:1). It is also described as:

an approach of empirical, methodological controlled analysis of texts within their context of communication, following content analytic rules and step by step models, without rash quantification (Mayring, 2000: 2).

The use of qualitative content analysis allowed for a critical and interpretive approach to investigate if the content published depends on the medium as qualitative content analysis goes beyond counting content. It tries to understand the textual elements in the content. Stratified random sampling was employed to allow for a representative sample for the study (Deacon *et al*, 2007:49). Themes were developed for analysis of the content. The appearance and absence of articles was also noted of as it helped inform the study in relation to how the medium of publication affects the type of critical content published.

The research also employed qualitative in-depth semi-structured interviews via e-mail with journalists from both *Nyasatimes* and *The Daily Times*. The interviews were intended to help illuminate trends around press freedom and the impact of the internet on Malawian journalism to provide a deeper understanding. E-mail interviews were used to enable the respondents time to answer in detail (Deacon *et al*, 2007:68). Participants for the semi-structured in-depth interviews were purposively drawn from both organisations using snowballing sampling.

1.4 Structure of the Study

The study is divided into seven parts. **Chapter One** as already indicated introduces the study. It states the research problem while indicating the contextual considerations that informed the study. The chapter also briefly discusses the theoretical foundation of the study and shows the significance of the study. It also relates the research methods employed in the study.

Chapter Two is the literature review and this presents the theoretical framework that informs the study. The ideal of the public sphere is discussed showing its genesis and criticisms. The chapter also presents how the public sphere relates to media and democracy. It relates how the ideal of democracy is entwined with press freedom. The chapter also gives a contextual background for the study by focusing on a brief history of Malawi and the media environment.

Chapter Three presents literature and research related to the internet. It shows how the internet has affected society in different ways by offering a platform for the expression of views by different players in society. The chapter also discusses research related to how the internet has affected media censorship in various regimes and why it might pose a challenge to governments. The chapter also shows the internet's impact on journalism and the media.

Chapter Four discusses the research methods employed in the study focusing on the case study approach, qualitative content analysis and semi-structured interviews. It also offers theoretical considerations for the use of the stated research methods.

Chapter Five systematically presents the data from the study through the use of themes and categories which emerged from the data. **Chapter six** analyses the data from the study and discusses the findings with theoretical underpinning.

Chapter Seven discusses the conclusions derived from the study in answering the research question. It summarises the findings and offers recommendations.

1.5 Conclusion

This chapter has provided the rationale of the study by relating the context of the study. It has also presented the objectives of the study and the methods the study will employ. The chapter has provided the thesis outline. The next chapter addresses the theoretical underpinning this research—the concept of the public sphere in relation to the media and democracy.

2. Chapter Two- Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The two concepts used by this study are Jurgen Habermas' public sphere in relation to media and democracy and the internet and its significance to the public sphere and democracy. This chapter explores the public sphere and democracy. It explores the importance of a public sphere and the relationship between the media and the public sphere and also media and democracy. It traces the roots of the media in Africa and shows that the discourse of censorship that currently dominates the African scene is steeped in its colonial past. The chapter also gives an overview of Malawian society by looking at the discourses that shape it and thus inform the way the media is viewed. It traces the history of Malawi in order to explain why the Malawian media scene is beset by stringent media laws and the persecution of journalists.

2.1.1 The Public Sphere's Historical Context

The public sphere is a concept born out of the Enlightenment period and was developed by Jurgen Habermas. It was developed during the period after the Reformation. The divine authority that the church once possessed had been polarised (Habermas, 2001:102). In the Enlightenment period—human beings were recognised as fully centred individuals with the capabilities of reason, consciousness and action (Baker, 2003:223). People did not need the church to define how to live their lives; instead people could discern for themselves what was good and bad. The ideal of the public sphere emerged out of a reasoning public in the coffee houses of 18th century Europe (Finlayson, 2005:10). There was a move away from Feudalism and Capitalism was emerging. The public sphere was a place where moneyed people discussed trade, labour matters, bargaining on prices and how the market was performing. The ideal of the public sphere rose out of this bourgeoisie space to symbolise a place where people could come freely to discussion matters in a public arena and debate on issues. It was a space where individuals could participate as equals in rational discussion in pursuit of truth for the common good (Finlayson, 2005:10). The public sphere embraced the concept of personal self-development. Participation in this forum was voluntary and independent of the economic and political systems (Finlayson, 2005:10). It was a way for people to participate in the development of society.

The important concepts of the public sphere for Habermas were issues of voluntary association, participation and rational critical argument. The merit of the argument was crucial (Calhoun, 1992:2). We see in the public sphere a place where people could come together of their

own free will to engage in critical debate. It was also a place where private individuals formed a public body that could join in the debate of issues bearing on state authority (Calhoun, 1992:7). This was a space where private interests and opinions could be overcome to discover common interests. A principle of the public sphere was open discussion of all issues of general concern through argumentation to reach a consensus about what the public good was (Kellner, 2001). The public sphere embraced freedom of speech and assembly, a free press, and the right to freely participate in political debate and decision-making. At its core were the ideals of reason, rational thinking, argument and discussion. It was a focus on democratisation (Kellner, 2001). It was a place where public opinion could be formed on issues. The public sphere formalised the understanding of the term 'public' (Dahlgren, 2005:149). It can be said this was the first formation of civil society (Kellner, 2001).

Civil society simply implies an institution in which people are engaged in activities separate from the state such as associations dealing with economic and cultural production (Berger, 2002:25). Civil society impacts on the decisions of the state as it sometimes sets the agenda in areas such as trade through lobbying and discussion with the state. Although discussion was dominated by issues such as prices of various commodities, the coffee houses provided a place where people could discuss issues of general interest to them. The public sphere was more than a group of people engaging in debate; it was a seat of power located in the world between the state and the private sector where private interest could transcend (Carey, 1993:6). The key to civil society is voluntary association and in the concept of the public sphere, people came together voluntarily to discuss matters of common interest such as trade.

In relation to Africa, it can be said that the public sphere on the continent has always been restricted. This is reflected in the fact that during the one-party era in countries like Malawi; the people were not allowed free assembly and thus could not discuss issues of concern to them. Mak'Ochieng (1996:25) notes that most African leaders after independence cultivated politics of suppression and intolerance. This was placed under the ideological banner of unity and nation building but in reality it was a way to stifle civil society and retain control over the masses. Thus a public sphere exist per-se did not as people could only gather for other issues such as political meetings, church attendance and cultural festivals thereby forming other spheres and not necessarily the Habermasian public sphere. The state of the African public sphere continues to be restrictive despite the adoption of democracy as a form of government as many African countries such as Botswana, Namibia, and Malawi restrict opposition political access to the media especially public broadcast media.

2.1.2 Decline of the Public Sphere

Habermas, a follower of the Frankfurt School noted the public sphere declined when the media— newspapers and magazines gradually achieved mass circulation and became linked to capitalist corporations (Curran, 2002:34; Finlayson, 2005:13). The Frankfurt School was critical of the mass media calling it the 'cultural industry' (Storey, 1993:100). They argued the cultural industry— which comprised the products and processes of mass culture produced cultural homogeneity for social control (Storey, 1993:101). Media stripped culture of its aura by turning it into a commodity for mass production and consumption. Powerful corporations could control and manipulate the media through advertising. Advertised products were deemed as helping indoctrinate and manipulate the masses through the use of language and images that reinforced the ideas of the elite (Bennett, 1982:29).

This led to re-feudalization as the media fell under the control of big corporations and politics through advertising (Curran, 2002:33). In this respect the media operated in the private interests of a few individuals. Public opinion lay in the hands of a few elite who could manipulate it to their preference (Kellner, 2001). Individuality was important for the development of individual ideas and thoughts. The public sphere was thus transformed from a space for rational debate to one of manipulative consumption and passivity leading to citizens becoming spectators of media representations (Kellner, 2001).

2.1.3 Critique of the Public Sphere

Although the concept of the public sphere has helped develop a model for public debate and civil society, there are a number of criticisms of the concept. Habermas' public sphere concept embraced some ideals of democracy. It respected freedom of speech and assembly, free participation and rational debate. It however had some shortcomings. Democracy is about participation regardless of class or gender. Fraser (1992:115) and Garnham (1992:360) note that Habermas idealises the bourgeois public sphere. Both authors agree Habermas ignored the other and alternative public spheres that existed such as pubs and various societies and clubs, and focused on the bourgeois public sphere. Habermas ignored plebeian public spheres. Habermas' public sphere was dominated by white, property-owning males (Kellner, 2001). He overlooked the contribution of women to the formation of society through women's clubs and other activities (Fraser, 1992:115). Habermas' concept of the public sphere is inadequate as there can be a range of public spheres where people discuss issues and contribute to democracy. Various public spheres should exist where people can

discuss issues based on their common interests and none of these spheres should enjoy a monopoly. Keane (2000:77) identifies these as the micro, meso and macro public spheres. When related to modern media, these can be community based media, regional media and national or public service media.

It is assumed that because Habermas insisted on terms such as rational reason and critical debate, this was what happened in the coffee houses. Far from the public sphere being about civility and intellectual debate about the state of society and social ills, it was a place where capitalists discussed ways how to make quick profit (Garnham, 1992:360).

It is also pointed out that Habermas criticised the rise of the mass media while ignoring the empowering consequences of the introduction of mass democracy and mass media (Curran, 2002:45). Corporate ownership and advertising in the media led to the enlargement of the public sphere as advertising covered the costs of production for media products— thereby making them affordable to the general population. Habermas failed to realise that the mass media brought information to many people. The media also helped in the creation of modern society by bringing to light malfeasance in society thereby setting standards of what society should be.

Despite the criticisms, the concept of the public sphere cannot be separated from the historical aspects that led to its creation.

The Bourgeois public sphere is typical of an epoch and cannot be abstracted from the unique developmental history of that 'civil society' of the European high Middle Ages; nor can it be transferred, ideal typically generalised, to any number of historical situations that represent similar constellations (Calhoun, 1992:6).

The concept of the public sphere therefore helps elucidate how society developed a space in which rational critical debate could take place. The emergence of the public sphere marked the beginning of the participation by ordinary people in determining the destiny of their societies (Kellner, 2001). Although the public sphere developed out of the need of the bourgeois to discuss issues of trade, it did create a space where people could debate matters and a space for civil society (Calhoun, 1992:7). It was a move towards modern society and democracy. The public sphere thus works as a model in establishing an arena that is inclusive of diverse critical views from a wide range of people. The public sphere as conceived by Habermas might not work for all societies as discursive practices are distinct in different societies. However, the key concepts of public interest, rational debate and tolerance are some of the principles that should be taken into consideration especially in a democratic society.

2.2 The Public Sphere and the Media

The public sphere embraces the concept of debate on issues of public interest. The media fulfils this function by providing the public with information and knowledge for informed critical decisions. The media is an institution that enables the formation of some form of discourse in society for the practice of rational and critical thought (Berger, 2001:35). The media provides a realm where people can express their views and also reach consensus on issues that affect them. During the first wave of democratisation in Africa, the media created a discursive realm where new discourses of nationalism could be discussed (Hyden and Okigbo, 2002:35). The media gave nationalists leaders a platform through which they could discuss the common issue of freedom. It is the active reasoning of the public through information that forms the public sphere (Dahlgren, 1995:8). The media thus provides a public space for the formation of public opinion.

However the media faces various challenges. The political economy of a country affects the media and the quality of information in circulation in the public sphere. The public sphere is not only about open and critical debate, it is about critical information in the public domain (Habermas, 2006:168). Lately, with deregulation, privatisation and globalisation, the media has focused more on 'infotainment' stories in a move to attract larger audiences for circulation and advertising purposes (Berger, 1999:10). Habermas' and the Frankfurt School's critique of the cultural industry is still relevant today. There has been less focus on investigative journalism that exposes societal ills and government corruption (Berger, 1999:11). People are now regarded as audience figures and not citizens. The media has consequently been accused of losing sight of its role of providing citizens with critical information.

2.2.1 The Media and Democracy

The concept of democracy as a form of government goes back to the Greek philosophers (Huntington, 1991:5). Democracy is a system for arriving at collective decisions through the participation of interested parties (Keane, 1991:68). Democracy is built on the liberal tradition of thought; it embraces concepts such as a market place of ideas, the reliance on individual reasoning and natural rights such as freedom of religion, free speech and a free press (Siebert *et al*, 1978:44). The two important roles of the media in a democratic society include shaping public opinion through informing the electorate on who to vote for and being the watch-dog of government or the fourth estate. Information about elections in the media ensures that citizens make responsible and informed choices (Center for Democracy and Governance, 1999:3). The media in Africa has played

a crucial role in the democratic process. The independent media helped accelerate the pace of democratic reforms in many African countries such as in the case of Zambia and Malawi in the 1990's (Kasoma, 1995:543; Tettey, 2001:5). It also helped shape and define democracy in Africa. This was through offering critical information that challenged the authority of autocratic rule.

Democracy embraces the ideals of accountability of authorities, the rule of law and mechanisms for checks against abuse (Berger, 1999:2). The media acts as the public's eyes and ears through actions such as investigative reporting. The media ensures that state power is not abused by keeping a watchful eye over government activities and ensuring that irregularities are exposed. The media ensures that representatives uphold their oaths and carry out their mandates (Center for Democracy and Governance, 1999:3). The media in a democracy therefore facilitates the functioning of society by acting as a two-way channel of communication and influence between government and the governed (Curran, 1991:126).

Democracy furthermore embraces the principle of rational and critical debate (Dahlgren, 1995:4). Habermas (2006:168) notes for public opinion to be formed there is a need for an arena for open debate shaped by the quality, availability and communication of information. The media helps form collective debate in a democracy as it creates space for engagement. The only way to get to the truth is through inclusive debate. The media consequently has to be representative of diverse views, opinions and ethnic groups in a country for it to contribute fully to the functioning of democracy as democracy needs multiple and alternative public spheres (Dahlgren, 2001:39). Media plurality is one way various groups of people in the country are represented. However the media can only pursue democratic values against the background of the social political and economic environment in which they operate (Gurevitch and Blumer, 1990:272). Government policy and regulation is what determines the plurality of the media in a country.

The above concept of democracy is typical of Western nations. In Africa however, only certain features of democracy have been adopted such as multiparty politics and elections. However other characteristics that play a critical role in the democratic process tend to be ignored. Aspects such as access to public media for all political parties, freedom of assembly and free and fair elections are at times ignored in countries like Botswana and Malawi. Bratton *et al* (2005:65) note that in many African countries, democracy is interpreted to mean the democratisation of economic opportunities. This raises the question as to whether a new definition should be developed for the African model of democracy as liberal democracy does not apply to it.

2.2.2 Press Freedom and Democracy

Press freedom in Africa is a concept that many leaders have failed or refused to grasp. African leaders were used to the media's role as a tool for development agendas and nationalism (Faringer, 1991: x; Ogbondah, 1994:7). In Malawi, the media was mostly used for disseminating good agricultural practices during the rule of Dr. Hastings Kamuzu Banda. However, democratic principles based on the theory of utilitarianism view state censorship as contrary to the principle of the maximising the happiness of the governed (Keane, 1991:5). The media have to be independent from due influence from any quarter whether economic or political in a democracy (Ogbondah, 1994:10). Although African countries such as Kenya, Zambia and Malawi have embraced democracy, they have not wholly embraced all its principles such as press freedom. Various sections in the legislation of these countries exist that infringe on press freedom. For example in Botswana, Zimbabwe and Uganda journalists have to register with government in order to practice journalism (Mwesige 1994: 83; Ocitti, 1999:27); a practice contrary to the ideals of democracy.

Press freedom is an important pre-condition in democracy for the media to be a watch-dog of government. Press freedom is the absence of prior government censorship and the freedom to cover and report whatever the majority of people want to know (Weaver in Ogbondah, 1994:12). Press freedom contributes to the process of democratisation as it allows for unrestricted access to information therefore enabling people to analyse society. Tettey (2002:9) notes that the 2000 Elections in Ghana were partly a success due to the large number of private radio stations in the country which contributed to transparency in the whole political process. Restrictive media environments can therefore lead to the manipulation of public opinion.

Press freedom is also associated with editorial independence. The 1991 Windhoek Declaration, a statement on press freedom developed by African journalists states that the media should enjoy editorial independence (Minnie, 1999:12). Editorial independence is the freedom of the media to decide what constitutes news. It ensures that the media reports issues to the fullest. The Windhoek Declaration also describes an independent press as one free from governmental, political or economic control. A restricted press indicates the state of democracy in a country as the state of the media in a democracy is often seen as the reflection of a society (Curran, 1991:119). Thus a country with a restricted press cannot be said to be fully democratic as the media is prevented from reporting on various issues. However, most countries in Africa such as Botswana, Malawi, Uganda and Zambia despite restrictions in the way in which the media operate are still termed 'democracies' as they have embraced the notion of popular sovereignty and elections. However, as

democracy is entwined with the values of citizenship, it is important that there is a free flow of relevant information and ideas for the formation of a public sphere (Dahlgren, 2001:33).

2.2.3 Constraints to Press Freedom

The current state of the media in most African countries is a legacy of the colonial period. The media in most African countries was introduced during the colonial period by colonising countries such as Britain and France. The press in Africa was mostly owned or operated by officials of the colonial government (Wilcox, 1975:1). It was mainly a vehicle for the preservation of the political status quo of the colonisers. It was used to inform the settlers of news and propaganda that emphasised the positive aspects of colonial rule and African welfare (Wilcox, 1975:2; Nyamnjoh, 2005:40). As such, the African 'native' was not included in the initial press category. Restrictive laws based on adaptations of obsolete eighteenth-century laws of the press in England were passed in many British colonies such as in the case of Malawi (Wilcox, 1975:6). These included the requirement that newspapers be registered or licensed as a precondition to their lawful publication (Martin, 1998:64).

When the winds of nationalism blew across the African continent in the 1960's, most nationalist movements in Africa such as the Malawi Congress Party (MCP) in Malawi started their own publications to help in the fight for independence. During this time the press played an important role in ideological mobilisation and advocacy for national unity and development (Faringer, 1991: x). Such publications were mostly frowned upon by the colonial government. The political environment during colonialism did not encourage democracy (Eribo and Jong-Ebot, 1997: xii). Colonialism, by its nature was the antithesis of democracy (Martin, 1998:63). The colonial administrators thought a press of any kind was dangerous in the hands of 'barbaric' Africans and a critical nationalist press was particularly dangerous (Nyamnjoh, 2005:40; Wilcox, 1975:5). Colonisers were reluctant to allow freedom of expression among the colonised for fear they would use that freedom to be critical of colonialism (Martin, 1998:63).

This attitude towards the media by the colonialists shaped and still continues to shape the perceptions of most African leaders. After independence, the new nationalist leaders inherited the structures left by the colonial governments with no overhaul of the system taking place (Wilcox, 1975:12). Martin (1998:66) notes when nationalist leaders took over from the colonial state—African self-government was in essence colonial administration by Africans. It was no surprise African rulers practised the dictatorship of their colonial masters and not democracy (Eribo and Jong-Ebot, 1997: xiii). All individuals were expected to support the government and its efforts for

the building of the 'new independent states'. As such alternative views were suppressed with no vibrant public sphere. In Malawi, only one radio station existed which was solely under the authority of government. The same was true for the print media, owned by Banda's publishing company. Free expression was viewed as a deterrent to the demands of development (Martin, 1998:69).

However it has been shown that free expression is vital for the formation of civil society and public opinion in a democracy (O'Neil, 1998:1). The media should have free expression in terms of press freedom. Press freedom is essential for fair participation in democracy. However, one of the greatest threats to media freedom is the failure by governments to liberalise press laws (Berger, 1999:16; Ogbondah, 2002:55). Robust and critical media is frowned upon in Africa. The independent media in most African countries that adopted democracy has played a primary role in the probing of government policies and behaviour (Hyden and Leslie 2002:12). In Kenya in 2001, the media questioned proposed legislature which sought to ban broadcasting in indigenous languages by private radio stations (Tettey, 2002:13). Most African democracies do not feel the need to explain themselves to the electorate nor have their decisions questioned, this being a hangover from the one party era. It is for this reason that most African governments abhor press freedom. Most African governments are thus reluctant to pass legislation suitable for a free press. They instead choose to hold on to colonial legislation that protects the offices of those in power as way to maintain power and control over the citizenry (Nyamnjoh, 2005:160; Tettey, 2000:17).

Some of the laws that infringe on press freedom in Africa deal with access to information, libel, insult, obscenity and security laws (Ogbondah, 1994:10; Tettey, 2002:18). There are other ways in which governments infringe on press freedom. From a political economy perspective—government as the biggest advertiser in many African countries usually rewards less critical media with advertising while withholding advertising from critical media such as in the case of *The Namibian* being sidelined by the Namibian government in 2001 (Tettey, 2002:17). This practice leads to self-censorship in the media. However, government is not the only player that affects editorial independence—donors, owners as well as corporations and big business all affect editorial independence (Berger, 1999:18).

Besides legislation, African media has to contend with various forms of suppression of information. Some of the methods commonly used in many African countries include physical harassment of journalists, seizure of newspapers and equipment, closure of and suspension of media houses and detention of journalists (Ogbondah, 1994:13; Tettey, 2001:11). Government is not the

only player sceptical of press freedom but it is the most critical actor as it enacts legislation and sets the operational climate for the media.

However Blake (1997 in Nyamnjoh 2005:269) offers a solution to ensure Africa's media plays its watchdog role in society. Blake notes the formulation of legislation should not be left to government alone as it tends to favour its agendas in drawing up press laws. He calls for the participation of all sectors of society such as universities, the church, the private media and civil society in the formulation of media policies that encompass press freedom. Such an approach towards policy would ensure the media is self-regulated; embracing democratic principles. It would also encourage the emergence of alternative media in the form of community media which would lead to participation by people at grassroots levels. It is yet to be seen if governments can accept such a principle. It is against this backdrop of restrictive media environments that it is proposed that the internet could lead to the media in Africa overcoming some of these constraints therefore leading to more press freedom.

2.3 A Brief History of Politics and the Media in Malawi

Malawi is a landlocked country which borders Zambia to the west, Mozambique to the south and part east and Tanzania to the east (Mapulanga, 2008:2). Malawi, then known as Nyasaland was part of the Federation with Rhodesia under British rule. The federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland was dissolved in 1963— Malawi changed its name from Nyasaland to Malawi in 1964 after attaining self-rule under Kamuzu Banda (Chimombo and Chimombo, 1996:1). Malawi was declared a republic in 1966 (Crosby, 1993: xxxiv). Following the repressive example set by the former British colonisers, Dr. Banda declared Malawi a one-party state in 1966 under the Malawi Congress Party (MCP), banning multi-party politics (Chimombo and Chimombo, 1996:1). Dr. Banda established autocratic rule and became the undisputed leader of Malawi. He introduced a new constitution with all powers vested in him in 1966 (Meinhardt and Patel, 2003:3). Dr. Banda declared himself life president in 1970 under what he termed democratic dictatorship (Forster, 2001:275). Against this background of dictatorial tendencies and disregard for human rights, it should come as no surprise that Malawi had strong relations with South Africa. Malawi was the only black-ruled African country that had ties with the apartheid regime in South Africa¹ (Meinhardt and Patel, 2003:5).

¹ Malawi borrowed money South Africa for the construction of the new capital, Lilongwe (the capital had previously been Zomba). The master plan was drawn up by South African architects (Short, 1974: 305). Malawians were also

2.3.1 The Press under Dr. Banda

The first newspaper in Malawi— *Central African Planter* was founded in 1895 by a Scottish settler (Barton, 1979:154). *Central African Planter* was aimed at a white readership with a focus on growing tea and news about Britain (Barton, 1979:154). The *Central African Planter* was an English-language daily and the only newspaper to appear in Malawi until the early 1940's (Rap 21, 2003). *Central African Planter* later changed its name to *The Central African Times* then to *Nyasaland Times*. In 1962, Roy Thomson bought *Nyasaland Times* and ran it for 10 years as a bi-weekly (Barton, 1979:155). In 1972 *Nyasaland Times* was sold to Banda and changed its name to *The Daily Times* (Barton: 1979:155). It was the only daily newspaper in Malawi. It was a tabloid size newspaper and carried mostly foreign and scattered articles on Malawi.

With *The Daily Times* under his control, Banda also brought the party newspaper of the ruling Malawi Congress Party (MCP), *Malawi News* under his newly formed company— Blantyre Print and Packaging. *Malawi News* had started as a weekly protest newspaper by Aleke Banda of MCP in the run up to independence in 1959 (Muluzi *et al*, 1999:125). *Malawi News* had served as a platform for the struggle against colonialism. It was turned into a weekend newspaper (Barton, 1979:156).

Despite owning two newspapers, Banda did not trust journalists. He usually made speeches in which he called journalists third-class and fourth-class citizens (Barton, 1979:165). Banda kept the newspapers under close scrutiny. Every word that went in the paper was checked and cross checked with authority (Barton, 1979:165). Malawian newspapers carried very little information on current events in Malawi even less so of troubled countries (Chimombo and Chimombo, 1996:25). The newspapers were heavily censored. News of upheavals in other parts of Africa was taboo (Barton, 1979:165). The newspapers were used for party propaganda through the replication of the president's speeches, sometimes in their entirety in case he was misquoted. Under Banda, no journalism and writing courses were offered outside of the University of Malawi— Chancellor College² (Chimombo and Chimombo, 1996:182).

allowed to go and work in South African gold mines. A number of Afrikaner civil servants helped organise a number of Malawi ministries (Barton, 1979: 158).

² Non-fiction writing was viewed suspiciously by the Dr. Banda regime as it was believed to be a disguise for free-lance journalism (Chimombo and Chimombo, 1996:182).

Banda passed various laws and enacted legislation that would lead to the arrest of journalists for publishing misleading information (Barton, 1979:164). Legislation that would allow for detention without trial was passed in 1964 (Short, 1974:255). This allowed for the arrest of people who were thought to be disturbing the peace and stability of Malawi. This legislation could be applied to anyone, journalists included if they printed material deemed to be offensive. Censorship laws were also enacted after the setting up of the Censorship Board in 1968 by an act of parliament (Chimombo and Chimombo, 1996:1). The board had the right to monitor all literary material including publications such as newspapers. In only the first seven and a half years of its existence from 1968-1974, the censorship board banned over 840 books and more than 100 periodicals (Mapulanga, 2008:1). The list expanded yearly. Reporting of false and damaging information about Malawi was a criminal offence which was punishable with lifetime imprisonment (Meinhardt and Patel, 2003:6). This was covered in the Prohibited Publications Act of 1974 (Mapulanga, 2008:3). The Act allowed government to ban any publication that published information it considered false, distorted or critical of Malawi. Journalists who failed to comply with the rules were imprisoned in Mikuyu Maximum Security Detention Centre after sometimes being tried in kangaroo courts. Others simply disappeared—rumoured to have been fed to the crocodiles in the Shire River. Apart from the Mikuyu, there was also Dzaleka detention center which was a reformation camp (Short, 1974:255). Journalism was a dangerous profession in Malawi. As such, newspapers stuck to film schedules, radio programmes, crossword puzzles with short editorials and international and local sports news (Mapulanga, 2008:2).

2.3.2 Dawn of Democracy and the Rise of the Free Press

A wave of democratisation is a group of transitions from non-democratic to democratic regimes that occur within a specified period of time (Huntington, 1993:6). According to Huntington's definition, there have been two waves of democratisation in some African countries while other African countries have experienced three. The first wave of democratisation in Africa occurred when nationalists were fighting for independence from colonial rule (Hyden and Okigbo, 2002: 31). In the 1990's, the second wave of democracy swept many African countries. This second wave was a reaction to the betrayal many Africans felt of the nationalist leaders who instead of democratic rule had turned their governments in to authoritarian regimes (Martin, 1998:71). The second wave was due to the fall of communism with the fall of the Berlin wall in Germany, the disintegration of The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and the end of the Cold war. The third wave of democracy took place when liberalisation occurred in authoritarian regimes and when movements promoting democracy gained strength and legitimacy (Huntington, 1993:21). The third

democratic wave in Africa is occurring now in some countries. Although most African countries adopted democratic forms of government during the second wave of democratisation, promises of democratic rule were ignored and governments were unaccountable. Countries like Malawi and Zambia have seen the relinquishing of power by the first democratic rulers namely Bakili Muluzi and Frederick Chiluba with people calling for a new breed of leaders to uphold democratic values.

The church played a crucial role in the transition to democracy in Malawi and the pastoral letter of 1992, *Living our faith* marked a turning point in the country (van Donge, 1995:230). The letter was read out in all Catholic churches across the country on 8 March, 1992 (Meinhardt and Patel, 2003: 9). The Lenten letter called for the right to basic freedom for all Malawians (Muluzi *et al*, 1999:137). The letter marked a starting point in the movement towards a democratic system of government as it questioned Banda's authority, something which no one had ever dared to do before. News of the message soon spread across the country leading to violent protests in Blantyre and Lilongwe as people started to question the authority of Banda. Various reforms were implemented in Malawi after this.

The first of these was the introduction of a free press on 20 August, 1992 after twenty-eight years of muzzling, detention and murder of journalists (Chimombo and Chimombo, 1996:25). At the time there were less than a handful independently owned newspapers in the country and irregular papers (Chimombo and Chimombo, 1996:26). After the announcement on free press, more than twenty newspapers were registered. These newspapers called for regime change. Kasoma (1995:543) notes that such newspapers formed the opposition press as they challenged the status quo and called for democratic reforms. These newspapers also brought a breath of fresh air to Malawian journalism. They included content such as cartoons and satirical columns, a thing that had been missing during the Banda dictatorship era (Manda, 2006:249). The first democratic elections were held on 17 May, 1994, with Bakili Muluzi of the United Democratic Front (UDF) taking over the reins of power from Banda, marking a peaceful transition to democracy.

2.3.3 Problems Faced By the Independent Press

The independent press in Malawi however still faced various press freedom related challenges in the new democratic climate. Problems of harassment and detention of journalists practised under Banda continued under Muluzi. New tactics were employed to suppress the independent media in the era of democratic dispensation. These included the physical confiscation of newspapers, assault and intimidation of journalists. In August 2001, during the SADC heads of

summit in Blantyre, copies of *The Chronicle* newspaper were confiscated as they were deemed to have critical articles about government (World Press Review, 2001).

Journalists also had to live with the reality of violence against them if it was felt their reports were critical. The authorities let it be known in no uncertain terms that self-censorship was to be practised or one had to face the consequences. In 2002, when a journalist from *The Chronicle* newspaper was attacked by members of the youth arm of the ruling United Democratic Front (UDF), the Young Democrats for an article critical of Muluzi, the then information minister, Clement Stambuli went on national television and encouraged journalists to ask themselves why such incidents happened to them (Englund, 2002:14). This was a clear warning to journalists to be ready to face the consequences of their actions.

2.3.4 Legal Constraints

Legal challenges still confront the press in Malawi despite the new Constitution of 1994 that embraces press freedom. Section 36 of the constitution states that ‘the press shall have the right to report and publish freely, within Malawi and abroad, and to be accorded the fullest possible facilities for access to public information’ (Constitution of the Republic of Malawi, 2002:4). Despite this provision in the constitution, contradictions exist on press freedom. Section 37 of the constitution provides for parliament to determine what information is accessible. Section 45(3) (a) permits the right to freedom of expression to be derogated from during a state of emergency declared by the President of Malawi (KAS, 2003:12).

Not all Acts in the new constitution have been amended to reflect the new democratic discourse. Acts such as the Official Secrets and Emblems Act 1913, which protects official state secrets against disclosure; the Printed Publications Act, 1947 which provides for the registration of newspapers with the Government Archives and the Censorship and Control of Entertainments Act, 1968 which provides for the pre-approval of content distributed to the public, are still part of media regulation. These acts contravene press freedom through the clauses found in them. The acts can also be abused as they are not clearly defined and leave room for interpretation according to the convenience of those in authority.

All these factors have played a role in restricting the public sphere in Malawi, it is therefore hoped the internet will help surmount some factors and lead to an expansion of the Malawian public sphere. It is hoped that with the internet becoming widely accessible, the press can operate with a

degree of freedom. This is because the legal framework that exists does not cater for on-line media and legal provisions are yet to be drawn up that cover on-line publishing.

2.4 Conclusion

This chapter discussed the concept of the public sphere. It traced its genesis and showed how the media forms the public sphere in modern society. The chapter also explored the relation of the public sphere to democracy and press freedom while tracing the history of Africa at large and Malawi in particular to show the discourses that shape it. It has also shown the various ways in which press freedom is suppressed. The next chapter explores the possibilities the internet has to offer for press freedom.

3. Chapter Three- The Internet and Its Possibilities

3.1 Introduction

This chapter analyses literature and research relating to the internet and its relation to the public sphere and democracy. It traces some of the arguments related to the internet. It tackles the aspect of on-line newspapers and their contribution to democracy the public sphere. The section also looks at internet censorship policies and how on-line newspapers are circumventing constraints that impact on press freedom for traditional media. The chapter also briefly outlines the current state of internet connectivity in Malawi.

3.1.1 Internet Myths

There are many debates around the role of the internet in Africa's development. There are the cyber optimists who see the positive attributes of the internet for Africa and the cyber pessimists who point out its negative effects. The internet is an electronic network of networks that links computers and other digital devices allowing for people to people communication and information retrieval (DiMaggio *et al*, 2001:307). For the cyber optimists, the internet has the potential to enable Africa to leapfrog its development. This belief is based on the premise of technological determinism in the modernisation discourse (Berger, 2005:2). It is posited that the internet will help in the development of Africa as information is crucial for the growth process of capitalist societies (Valdes, 1987:202). By having a knowledge society based on the availability and easy access of information, Africa can develop. The availability of information will help close the gaps that exist between Africa and the developed countries as information in areas such as education, medicine, agriculture and good governance will be readily available on-line (Alzouma, 2005:341; Lesame, 2005:208). This can be seen in the case of the South African website; SANGONeT which provides information on almost all sectors of society such as policy documents and thus enabling transparency of both government and non-governmental bodies' operations (Leslie, 2002:111).

However, information itself does not automatically spell development. This is because the rate of production of information on the internet is faster than the rate of consumption (Ekecrantz, 1987:82). As such, more information does not necessarily translate into knowledge as some information never gets to human recipients or is irrelevant. It is what people do with information that matters (Papacharissi, 2002:383). It is also posited that developed countries that have their own agendas in encouraging the use of internet technologies in Africa as it provides a new market for them to access (Valdes, 1987:200). Developing countries are at the receiving end of the new

technology thus leading to fears of a new form of cultural and media imperialism as was the case in the 1960s (Slevin, 2000:199).

3.1.2 Difficulties of the Internet

Despite the positive attributes of the internet, technology pessimists point out some key elements which might pose a challenge in Africa's bid to adopt the new technology. Some of these factors according to Nulens *et al* (2001) and Sonaike (2004) include the cost as African countries import almost everything—from the technology to the expertise and the infrastructure in Africa is not developed to support internet technology. Essential features such as electricity, skills and telephone cables are inadequate for poor countries such as Malawi (Leslie, 2002:113). All these factors have led to access problems making internet connectivity in Africa available mostly only in urban areas. In 2004, Africa had only 22 million internet users for an internet penetration of just three percent (ITU, 2005). Finally, the content on the internet is mainly in world lingua Francas like English, French and Chinese while indigenous Africans speak a variety of languages.

The above factors are part of the digital divide—the gap between those advantaged by the internet and those disadvantaged by it (Norris, 2004:273; Rogers, 2001:96). It has three dimensions to it; the global divide among industrialised and developing countries, the social divide between information-rich and information-poor in a country, and the democratic divide among those who use the internet to participate in public life (Norris, 2004:273). The following data from the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) portrays the complexity of the digital divide:

- In 2004, less than 3 out of every 100 Africans used the Internet, compared with an average of 1 out of every 2 inhabitants in Canada, France and Germany.
- There are more than eight times as many Internet users in the United States of America (with a population of 300m) than on the entire African continent (home to a almost 900m people).
- Egypt has 17 times the fixed line penetration of Nigeria (ITU, 2005).

There are some however, who argue that it is not a digital divide. The divide between the haves and have not has always existed as can be seen in the unequal distribution of wealth between Africa and the West (Panos, 2005:2). The only way the digital divide can be bridged is through dealing with the underlying problems that currently affect Africa such as poverty. As long as Africa's underlying problems persist, the internet's impact on the continent will be negligible.

3.2 The Internet, Public Sphere and Democracy

The emergence of the internet in the 1990s coincided with the second wave of democratisation in Africa leading to hopes of further democratisation for the continent (Leslie, 2002:107; Papacharissi, 2002:379). The internet as a network of computers is seen as being able to bring about greater participation for the development of democracy in Africa. This is due to its features of being public and open. As seen in Chapter Two, it is important that an arena exists where people can come together to freely discuss matters relating to governance. The presence of critical and rational debate has been posited as one of the tenants of democracy. Most recently the internet has been championed as renewing the public sphere as it allows for new ways of participation for democratic nations (Marien, 2006:47).

The internet has been recognised as an arena for citizen activity because of its ability to enable people's participation (Sassi, 2001:89). Through this, the internet has enlarged the public sphere by offering alternative public spheres which contribute to the larger public sphere (Dahlgren, 2005:152). The internet has also allowed people to create a virtual space for themselves in which like minds come together to debate various issues on forums and listserves. It has made it possible for people to meet as equals in a status free zone (Schules, 2005:5). As such the internet helps enhance debate in democracies through the freedom of assembly, association and freedom of expression. This formation of virtual on-line communities has led to "glocalisation" - the connection of people with the same interests with other people in different geographical settings (Bowman and Willis, 2003:18).

The internet has also offered community groups new ways of participation and networking of people in affairs that concern them (Lie, 2005:121). This in some instances has led to development of groups such as women's organisations, indigenous and ethnic people amongst others. Therefore it can be seen that the internet also permits a new arena of grassroots politics and space for meaningful participation leading to a diversity of voices (Dahlgren, 2005:152; Sassi, 2001:90). Virtual communities have been formed where people with common interests converge to discuss issues such as the Eritrean online site; www.dehai.org and the Sierra Leonean site; Leonenet (Bernal, 2005; Tynes 2007). On www.dehai.org, Eritreans in the Diaspora come together to forge the way forward for their war torn country and deal with issues of nationalism and identity (Bernal, 2005:660). On the other hand, the Zambia-list is used by Zambians living abroad for political discussions and news exchange (Spitulnik 2002: 187). Malawian sites such as Malawiana.Net and MalawiTalk have served as meeting points for people to discuss various social aspects of Malawian

life. The existence of alternative public spheres where people can express themselves freely is a welcome development for democracy. However on a cautionary note, the internet might actually breakdown communities and sociability instead of fostering community relations as people spend most of their time on-line (Rice and Haythornthwaite, 2006:101).

The internet has made it possible for anyone to publish their views on-line. There are various on-line tools such as weblogs and forums which form part of on-line participatory journalism that informs people. Weblogs (blogs) are on-line diaries by ordinary people on issues and news which provide an alternative news source for people. They are threatening the very existence of traditional media. The development of blogs is known as 'we-media' and has led to the provision of content as broad as society (Bowman and Willis, 2003; Moore, 1999:43). The internet has enabled people to cover news that was previously ignored by traditional media thereby setting the agenda for traditional media in some instances. We-media's contribution to society and its impact can be seen in events such as the Asian Tsunami and the terrorist attacks on the US on 11 September, 2001 which received a lot of coverage from on-line amateur journalists (see Bowman and Willis, 2003). Most traditional credible media also obtained most of their content from on-line amateur journalists. The gate-keeper function of the media has been threatened as people go on-line to define what news is. The internet's ability to allow people publish enables the ordinary people to produce counter information as compared to that produced by the mainstream media (Haas, 2004:116; Leslie, 2002:180). The internet has therefore turned consumers and audiences in to active producers and citizens. It has enabled people to participate— a feature of the public sphere. Dahlgren (2005:149) notes people consuming media in their homes is not an expansion of the public sphere as they are media audience. It is only when people get involved that the public sphere materialises.

As seen above, the internet contributes to the public sphere by offering more channels and sources of information. In this way, the internet has increasingly posed a challenge to governments the world over as it makes it difficult to hide information (Merrill *et al*, 2001: xvii). The normal methods of censoring information such as banning, burning and censoring publications do not apply on-line. Governments and various organisations have also had to respond to the internet by publishing reports and policy online. This has made the availability of information easily accessible to the majority of the population. The availability of information has led to a degree of transparency as citizens are informed on matters of governance. The availability of a wide range of information is said to recreate the perfect information arena and therefore, possibly the agora of ancient Greece (Coleman, 2001:118). The internet in places such as Europe has also enabled the interaction of

citizens with government officials through government websites. However Feber *et al* (2005) found that for interaction between government and citizens to occur, it is important that such websites support interactive features.

From the above, it can be seen that the internet provides a platform for alternative media. Alternative media in this study is media that offers alternative views compared to the mainstream media in a country (Atton, 2002:7). It is media that positions itself in opposition to the mainstream media by challenging the dominant discourse or content that it produces (Moyo, 2007:87). As such alternative media provides an alternative public sphere for the expression of alternative views. Due to the internet, many websites that offer alternative views and challenge the dominant discourse have emerged in Africa. In Cameroon, alternative media on the internet has been used to spread rumour as a way to counter the rigid controls that exist in the country regarding access to information thereby challenging the authority of government (Nyamnjoh, 2005:210). Such sites fall under the alternative media category as they cover topics that are not normally highlighted by the mainstream media. This has in turn led to the decentralisation of information as the rumours are neither confirmed nor denied by government. The use of rumour is in line with alternative media as they use unconventional methods to disseminate information such as satire and cartoons to expose malfeasance in society (Nyamnjoh, 2005:223). Despite all the positive attributes of the internet, there are also some negative aspects discussed in the section below.

3.2.1 Negative Attributes of the Internet

Although the internet offers alternative public spheres, it also fragments the public sphere. The various public spheres that exist can at times be in conflict with one another. This can be seen in the case of groups that promote racial hatred and terrorism, issues that defeat the central thesis of the public sphere ideal. Radical sites such as Stormfront.org, an American hate web site founded by neo-Nazis are a case in point as they promote white supremacy, black inferiority and Nazism (Levin, 2002:958). In Africa, sites such as <http://www.radiokatwe.com/news.htm> in Uganda propagate hate speech against the government of Uganda. The internet thus promotes and reinforces group identity (Dahlberg, 2007:828). Such groups do not see themselves as part of the nation and instead, live in the spaces they have created for themselves, thereby defeating the purpose of having alternative public spheres that feed into a larger whole, which is supposed to in turn create more understanding, greater openness and democracy. These spheres contribute to the negative view of other groups and cultures as compared to fostering understanding and corporation amongst various groups (Dahlgren, 2005:152).

The public sphere relates to the discussion of issues that have a bearing on the state and its development. However various groups exist on-line whose focus has no bearing on civic matters. There is therefore the danger that the internet could weaken the legitimacy of the governing process by encouraging the spread of small special interest communities who pursue their own narrow agenda (Rice and Haythornthwaite, 2006:96; Papacharissi, 2002:383).

There are also questions about whether the public sphere and democracy are enhanced by the internet due to the nature of some on-line discussions. As the internet enables people to take on various identities, in some instances it is the same individuals who make contributions on forums and engage in 'flaming' (Papacharissi, 2002:385). On-line debates also dissipate energy from the political process by focusing people's attention on trivial issues. It is therefore important to be clear on what democracy means for the internet to contribute to enhancing it (Barber, 2006:198).

Whilst the internet offers new possibilities for decentralised participation, democracy and citizenship, it also supports extreme centralisation of power (Malina, 1999:24). In the age of the internet, the state has more power over people. This is due to power being concentrated in the hands of government and corporations who control the means of delivering the internet. The internet is viewed as a Panopticon— an area where everything is visible, as it allows for the monitoring of the activities of individuals without their knowledge thereby giving the state new surveillance methods (Lyon, 2001:183; Robins and Webster, 1999:92). Data mining tools can and have been used for profiling, while internet protocol (IP) addresses can be used to locate a user (Digital.life, 2006:126). This is dangerous for citizens in authoritarian states as the internet can enhance government crackdowns on activists.

3.3 The Rise of On-line Newspapers

There are many reasons why on-line publishing seems to be taking over from traditional media. On-line newspapers in this study are newspapers that have been developed specifically to disseminate content for the internet and not traditional media which have a web presence. Sparks (2003:113) describes newspapers as bundles of different orders of discourse that are designed to appeal to different readers and advertisers. He notes that the same definition can be applied to on-line newspapers with differences in line with the characteristics of the internet.

On-line newspapers came to the fore during the 1990s (Bowman and Willis, 2003; Scott, 2005). The introduction of the first commercial web browsers— Netscape and Microsoft's Internet Explorer played a crucial role in on-line journalism as they enabled the digitisation of text-based

content (Scott, 2005:93). It was not long before most news outlets both print and broadcast had a web presence in the developed countries. On-line journalism soon became more than just news outlets having a web presence as other players such as bloggers also established websites that offered news.

News sites on the internet have been classified into four different classes (Deuze, 2003). There are the news sites of mainstream media. These include websites for media such newspapers and broadcast stations of The New York Times, CNN and BBC. Sites of marketing research firms and search engines portal sites such as Yahoo form the second category of news website called index and category websites as they offer links to existing news sites and aggregated content. The third type of news site is the media watchdog sites such as Poynter and MediaChannel which comment on the state of journalism. The final category of news sites features forums and weblogs by ordinary people on their experiences. The focus of this research is on on-line newspapers which have been created specifically to produce on-line news content (similar to The Daily Beast and the Huffington Post).

3.3.1 Online Newspapers in Africa

Most African countries have been challenged when it comes to online newspapers due to problems stated in section 3.1.2. Online presence by news organisations has been more prominent in North Africa as by 1999, all countries in the region except for Libya had connectivity (Houissa, 2000: 57). However some African countries have made strides by establishing online newspapers. Some of these online sites have been set up by Africans in the Diaspora as a way to inform others on home events. *The Post* in Cameroon has been sponsored by Cameroonians abroad to facilitate online publishing (Ndangam, 2008:591). This trend of publishing from abroad for an African audience both at home and in the Diaspora has spread across Africa. More recently, there has been the emergence of many websites addressing the problems in Zimbabwe developed by Zimbabweans in the Diaspora. Sites such as Zimonline.co.za, Zimdaily.com, Zimbabwejournalists.com have emerged creating debate about the crisis in Zimbabwe (Moyo, 2007:84). Sites such as Allafrica.com have also been developed to aggregate content from various African news sites thereby providing African content for the continent (Ndangam, 2006: 251). Online newspapers have been effectively used for publishing news in that government would rather not be in the public domain. Online newspapers such as *The Post* in Zambia have pioneered the online newspaper phenomenon in Africa. *The Post* was one of the first online newspapers in Africa to experience Internet censorship in February 1996 due to its coverage of the then Zambia administration (Burnheim, 1999:8).

3.3.2 Why On-line Newspapers?

Some reasons behind the emergence of on-line newspapers and their popularity include:

- The barriers to entry on-line are minimal compared to traditional media.
- The ability to publish many stories on a particular site due to hyper-textuality which allows for linkages between stories and archives.
- Most of the sites are free.
- On-line newspapers have a twenty-four-news cycle; news is updated instantly and all the time.
- The ability of the internet as an interactive platform allows the interaction of readers with journalists and with themselves through web-boards and chat rooms.
- Readers can also customise the main page of the news site to individual tastes (Deuze, 2003; Scott, 2005 and Sparks: 2003).

3.3.3 The Internet and Censorship

Many authors are of the view that the internet can help transcend censorship regimes that constrain traditional media. The internet has the ability to undermine state control (Oloronnisola, 2000:2). It has the potential to challenge the current power hold of not only political entities such as government but also conglomerates that have monopoly over the media (Tsagarousianou, 1998:167). Berger (2007:6) on the other hand observes that the internet helps undercut local laws relating to press freedom. In countries such as Zambia and Liberia, there have been instances where newspapers have published on-line despite government bans on their print publications (Ott and Rosser 2000:139). In the Asian countries of Malaysia and Singapore, the internet is one way in which the media is circumventing the restrictive media laws that infringe press freedom (George 2003). The case of *Ohmynews* in Korea illustrates how on-line media has been able to challenge conservative media by offering a vibrant new form of journalism that involves people and thereby making them agents of democracy (Young-Cheol, 2007).

The internet allows some degree of freedom in countries that otherwise have restrictive press freedom laws. It allows for the setting up of alternative news sources which are able to report on issues freely. The internet also undermines hierarchical control of social knowledge through bypassing established mediating agencies and distributing prohibited or restricted information (Curran, 2002:55; Poster, 2001:77). This is especially true of many African countries where the media, especially radio and television, have been under the central control of government (Hyden

and Leslie, 2002:16). In countries such as Morocco and Egypt, on-line publishing has enabled a new form of political activism— e-mail lists have played an important role in disseminating information and alternative viewpoints (Ibahrine, 2005). With the internet, the relationships of power and control have been reorganised. Players with an interest in disseminating information have multiplied and the information arena has widened (Marien, 2006:42).

There are many reasons why governments are unable to control on-line newspapers. The internet has given more people the ability to participate and own media entities. Moreover, the internet does not require the normal bureaucratic red-tape of registration with the authorities of a media or information outlet as is normally the case with traditional media in African countries. Starting up a media enterprise on the internet such as a blog or on-line newspaper is not as capital intensive as compared to a media venture such as a traditional newspaper or radio or television station. The radical change is that traditional forms of production have been altered by low costs in the use of information and communication technologies— enabling anyone with a computer to disseminate information (Opoku-Mensah, 2001:176). By making the means of formulating media and owning media more easily accessible, the internet has made it hard for government to monitor and censor sites such as blogs and on-line newspapers.

The internet also facilitates many-to-many communication through channels that transcend structures of geo-political power and control (Curran, 2002:53; Stein and Sinha, 2006:423). The internet also makes it hard for censorship as the amount of information on it is voluminous. There is increased speed and scale of publishing on-line (Hacker and van Dijk, 2000:4). Information is forever changing and becomes readily available once published. Non-governmental organisations and corporations which are not normally considered media outlets also publish on-line country assessment reports and economic updates. This has consequently increased the number of players affected by press freedom laws (Berger, 2007:6). Governments have to allow these organizations to publish information they deem fit for transparency thus affecting the restrictions on communication. In the internet era, governments as well have to make information that relates to various aspects of development for donor purposes available on-line. Governments have to weigh the consequences of censoring of the internet with so many players involved apart from the local media. However in Burma this conundrum has been surmounted by allowing limited internet access to selected government officials and foreigners (George, 2003:255).

Government is also less capable of imposing prior restrictions or encouraging self-censorship in on-line news sites compared to traditional media where such controls are tailored

specifically for the media for this purpose (George, 2003). In many African countries such as Malawi, internet policies have also not been drawn up as it is a new field whose implications are just being discovered. Most African governments lack the expertise to deal with this new technology. It also raises challenges for many governments on how to categorise it when formulating regulation as it is forever changing (George, 2003:254). Grey areas exist with legislation for the internet such as sites not hosted in the home country. On the other hand it is posited that African governments are not formulating internet policies as a method for censoring the internet. What are in place instead are policies and regulations that limit the introduction of information technology (Panos, 2005:1). High license fees, customs duties and other factors that undermine access to information are all an attempt towards censorship.

Another reason for the lax approach to internet censorship by African governments is that access rates in Africa are low— making internet access a luxury affordable by the elite (Berger, 2007:7). Internet access is available mostly only in the urban areas. This is the state of affairs in Malawi. It is regarded as one of the least urbanised countries in Africa. The majority of the population, about 86 percent live in rural areas with 14 percent of the population in the urban areas (Malawi ICT Policy Draft, 2003:12). As such government might be of the view that the impact of on-line media is negligible when compared to traditional media which has higher dissemination levels. Traditional media in most African countries is the most extensive vehicle for journalism. As such, more stringent measures are employed against it in terms of press freedom (Berger 2007:6).

Despite these positive aspects of the internet for restrictive media environments, Hague and Loader (1999:3) sound a warning by noting that technology can only work within the parameters of a particular society. The discourse that exists in a particular country— cultural, economic and social around areas such as freedom of expression will have an impact on the technology (Berger, 2007:10). As such it will be reflected in the use of the technology. In some instances new technology might actually augment existing practice rather than change it (Hague and Loader 1999:6). This is the case in China where the government has developed new regimes of control for on-line content using its famous great firewall which blocks access to information considered harmful (Neumann, 2001:5). This is another form of censorship. Freedom on the internet depends on a government's commitment to democratic principles and the framework that exists in a society for the internet to be fully utilised by people as a tool for democratic participation.

3.4 Information Society in Malawi

Malawi agreed to the 2005 World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) view that governments need to bridge the digital divide. The Malawi Information and Communications Technology (ICT) Policy Draft was formulated in 2003. One of the main goals of the policy is help accelerate Malawi's development process and transform Malawi into a middle income, information-rich, knowledge-based and technology driven economy and society by pursuing an ICT-led development policy (Malawi ICT Policy Draft, 2003:18).

The Malawi ICT policy is yet to be passed into law. The internet is currently governed by the Malawi Communications and Regulation Authority (MACRA) whose mandate is to register Internet Service Providers (ISPs) and manage frequencies. The laid-back approach towards the internet has in some ways stifled connectivity, with only 0.4 per 100 people of the population having access to the internet (World Bank, 2006). The average cost for connectivity in 2006 was about \$22. 5; which is relatively expensive for a population where absolute poverty affects 62 percent and close to 42.1 percent of the population live below the poverty line of less than US \$ 1 a day (Malawi ICT Policy Draft, 2003: 18). It is against this background that government might view on-line content as not a threat to its authority.

3.4.1 *Nyasatimes*: A Case Study

Nyasatimes is Malawi's first and only on-line, foreign based newspaper. It was established in 2006 in Britain and is privately funded (Msowoya, 2008). It currently has five fulltime and 13 citizen journalists who report on various issues in the country. According to the proprietor—Edgar Msowoya, *Nyasatimes* is widely read in Malawi and by Malawians in the Diaspora. On average it publishes 10 or more news articles a day. The site uses an internal coding system which calculates the number of hits per article, with the most popular stories displayed in a table on the site.

Nyasatimes has been able to differentiate itself from the other news sites on Malawi by reporting on news as it breaks and happens. Unlike the websites of the two biggest dailies in Malawi—*The Daily Times* and *The Nation* newspapers, the *Nyasatimes* website is updated as new developments emerge. *Nyasatimes* has also made use of web 2.0 features and allows people to comment and share news articles on sites such as Digg, Del.icio.us and e-mail them thereby making the site interactive. Most of the content from *Nyasatimes* is reproduced on Malawian forums and other sites such as Malawiana on yahoo groups, MalawiTalk and Kwacha Fm. *Nyasatimes* has been

criticised by government for its political coverage with President Mutharika approaching British authorities to shut down the site (Chiumia, 2008).

3.5 Conclusion

This chapter discussed some of the debates surrounding the internet by showing both arguments from information optimists and pessimists. It articulated why it has been deemed a technology that could lead to Africa's development. It has also detailed why this might not be the case by highlighting some of the challenges around the adaption of the technology in Africa.

The chapter also discussed how the internet has affected the public sphere, democracy and its impact on journalism. The chapter furthermore traced the genesis of on-line newspapers and underscored some features of on-line journalism. It showed why on-line publishing could enjoy more freedom by discussing the challenges faced by governments in relation to internet legislation, regulation and censorship. The next chapter discusses the research methods employed in the study and the justification for their use.

4. Chapter Four- Research Methodology and Data Analysis Procedures

4.1 Introduction

This chapter describes and discusses the research design and procedures followed in the study. The chapter highlights the use of the case study design. It also presents the methods of data collection while focusing on the goals, sample selection, sampling procedures and data analysis and processing.

4.1.1 Research Design and Procedure

4.1.2 Goals of the Research

This study seeks to gain an understanding of how the internet has affected the public sphere, democracy and the media and thus press freedom in Malawi. The internet offers more channels for providing information to the general public (Sassi 2001:89). This study therefore hopes to establish how the internet is helping transcend barriers that exist in countries with respect to press freedom. It will do this through comparing the content of *Nyasatimes* on-line and *The Daily Times*, a more traditional newspaper.

4.1.3 Theoretical Sampling

Theoretical sampling was used to identify the units of study. Theoretical sampling is simply the selection of groups or categories of study on the basis of their relevance to the research questions, the theoretical position and most importantly the explanation or account which one is developing (Mason in Silverman, 2004:130). *Nyasatimes* is Malawi's first solely on-line newspaper hosted and operated in Britain. It has reported on stories such as President Bingu Wa Mutharika dating former the First Lady of Zambia, Vera Chiluba (*Nyasatimes*, 11 July, 2008). On the other hand, *The Daily Times* is Malawi's oldest traditional newspaper (Rap21, 2003).

The choice of *Nyasatimes* and *The Daily Times* is defined by difference between the two publications—one is an on-line newspaper and the other traditional media. The use of the two newspapers allows for theorising on press freedom in on-line newspapers to traditional newspapers. The choice of the period under study; April—June, 2008 is defined by the alleged coup plot in May, 2008 which was extensively covered by both publications. The other months allow for monitoring of normal coverage in the two newspapers. The study therefore focuses on *Nyasatimes* and *The Daily Times* newspapers as a comparative case study.

4.2 The Case Study Approach

A case study is undertaken to provide insight into an issue or phenomenon in its context that is new (Silverman, 2005:126; Wimmer and Dominick, 1987:155). Case studies are used when there is a need to understand contemporary complex social phenomena. The case study approach helps establish a sociological description of the organization, programme, event or process under study (Hamel *et al*, 1993:1). It is preferred in examining contemporary events when the relevant behaviour cannot be manipulated as in an experiment (Yin, 1994:8). In this instance, this case study will be used to explain how on-line publishing has affected press freedom in Malawi.

4.2.1 Advantages and Disadvantages of the Case Study Approach

The case study's strength is the ability to deal with a full variety of evidence (Yin, 1994:8). It allows for a number of research techniques to be used in the same study. As such, it allows for the combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods in a study. The case study approach also has the ability to deal with a wide spectrum of evidence such as documents and interviews (Wimmer and Dominick, 1987:156). It also helps in the gathering of descriptive and explanatory data. However with the case study approach, the findings cannot be generalised (Wimmer and Dominick, 1987:156). The findings only apply to the case under study but it does not mean the results are always unique to that particular case. Yin (1984:10) observes case studies— like experiments, are generalisable to theoretical propositions and not to populations or universes.

This is an exploratory research as it offers more than a description by trying to find out how the internet through on-line publishing has affected press freedom in a particular African country at a specific moment in modern history. A case study is a methodological approach— a research strategy that needs methods for data gathering for empirical inquiry (Hamel *et al*, 1993:1). The methods employed in this study are that of qualitative content analysis and semi-structured interviews.

4.2.2 Reasons for the use of Combined Methods

This study made use of combined research methods in the form of qualitative content analysis and semi-structured interviews for data collection. There are various debates about the use of either quantitative or qualitative methods for research with each camp positing that its approach is superior. Most of these debates are based on the different epistemological and ontological assumptions of quantitative and qualitative research (Bryman, 1984:71).

Quantitative research is steeped in the positivist tradition which supports the idea that social science should emulate the methodology or logic of the natural sciences (Babbie and Mouton, 1989:20). It is preoccupied with recording relevant facts in terms of quantities or number that can be processed using statistics (Deacon *et al*, 2007:3). Quantitative research is useful for formulating scientific laws and applying them to a wider population as it makes use of surveys and experiments. On the other hand, qualitative research stems from the interpretive approach which is concerned with understanding the way human beings make sense of their world (Deacon *et al*, 2007:6). Human beings are studied through engagement with them by the researcher in their natural settings through methods such as ethnography and participant observation. It is concerned with establishing regularity of laws about human behaviour (Babbie and Mouton, 1989:272).

However the two methods are not radically different and can be used together in research. The two methods share some common ground regardless of the ontological and epistemological assumptions they represent (Hammersley, 1992 in Spicer, 2004:295). There is an element of each during the research process. Quantitative research has elements of qualitative research through the use of brief transcripts of respondents in the survey (Bryman, 1984:80). Qualitative research through its use of quasi-quantitative terms in its reports falls in the same trap. Quantitative research offers generalisations in research through figures while qualitative research provides the context and understanding in research. Therefore using the two methods in research in a combined methods approach has advantages. Through the use of a combined methods approach; the researcher can answer several questions in research (Mason in Silverman, 2005:121). The weakness of one method is addressed by the other method leading to a rigorous approach to research. The use of combined methods also helps to improve the reliability of the data (Silverman, 2005:121). Therefore the research will dictate whether a researcher should use the two methods together (Spicer, 2004:302).

4.3 Data Gathering Techniques

4.3.1 Quantitative Content Analysis

There is not much difference between quantitative and qualitative content analysis apart from the way the two measure content. Content analysis is a research technique for the objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication (Berelson, 1952:18; Wimmer and Dominick, 1987:166). It is a research method for investigating problems in the content of communication (Hansen *et al*, 1998:91; Holsti, 1969:2). Content analysis is useful in media research as it permits the study of processes occurring over a long period of time (Babbie, 1989:309). It allows for the mapping of changing cultural and socio-political trends in the media. It

is a method which does not affect the subject under study as it studies content that has already been published while taking into consideration the context. Krippendorff, (1980:21) notes it is a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from data to their context.

The advantages of using content analysis include its objectivity as the rules for the classification of variables are explicit. A clear set of criteria and procedures are established that fully explain the sampling and categorisation methods (Wimmer and Dominick, 1987:166). It allows for the scientific analysis of content. Content analysis is also economical as it allows for a sample examination of data in situations where the volume of material for analysis is a lot such as with print newspapers (Holsti, 1969:17). It is also context sensitive and able to process symbolic forms (Krippendorff, 1980:30). As such the data is related to social reality unlike in an experiment where the settings are artificial. However content analysis only focuses on an examination of recorded communication and other aspects might be missed. The findings of a particular content analysis are limited to the framework of the categories and definitions used in that analysis (Wimmer and Dominick, 1987:170).

4.3.2 Qualitative Content Analysis

The study employed qualitative content analysis to analyse content from *Nyasatimes* and *The Daily Times* newspaper from the week days of April to June 2008. Qualitative content analysis is used for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through identifying themes or patterns (Zhang and Wildemuth, 2008:1). It is an approach of empirical, methodological controlled analysis of texts within their context of communication following content analytic rules and step by step models, without rash quantification (Mayring, 2000:2). Qualitative content analysis also follows the same rigour and procedures as quantitative content analysis but differs with its thematic approach to content. Holsti, (1969:11) notes that content analysis must use both methods of qualitative and quantitative methods to supplement each other as this helps give a holistic feel to the research. Qualitative content analysis preserves the essence of quantitative content analysis but is enhanced by the interpretative steps of analysis (Mayring, 2000:1). It maintains rules such as objectivity and being systematic by ensuring that steps in the research process are carried out on the basis of formulated rules and procedures.

Qualitative content analysis was employed as the aim of the research was to go beyond mere counting. Unlike quantitative content analysis which is concerned with the frequency of particular themes, qualitative content analysis is concerned with the absence or presence of particular themes. Qualitative content analysis enables the researcher to uncover patterns and categories of social

reality through the use of thematic analysis. The aim of the study was to establish and examine themes and patterns in the Malawian media landscape pertaining to press freedom through the content from both *Nyasatimes* and *The Daily Times* newspapers.

4.4 Research Procedure and Sampling

4.4.1 Thematic Analysis

Qualitative content analysis was used in an interpretive and subjective way to identify recurrent themes in both the *Nyasatimes* and *The Daily Times* newspapers. According to Wimmer and Dominick (1987:166) a systematic procedure has to be devised to examine the content of recorded information. Content has to be treated the same way using systematic measurement with the same instrument on a given sample of data for reliability (Holsti, 1969:135). Themes were developed to help analyse the data from the publications in the study. Themes are a single assertion about a subject (Holsti, 1969:116). The researcher developed the themes from the texts. Theme analysis does not rely on the use of specific words as basic content elements, but relies upon the coder to recognise certain themes or ideas in the text, and then to allocate these to predetermined categories (Deacon *et al*, 2007:121). After examining the data, issues were identified which were broken down further to identify the themes present in the content. Theme categories are used to classify texts according to issues that have been identified (Hansen *et al*, 1998:112). The themes were used for developing the criteria for analysis. The main players and themes in the articles were also identified. These included Muluzi, Mutharika, Peace Talks, and Parliament- government vs. Opposition in Parliament, Corruption and Treason / Coup plot amongst some of the main themes.

The presence and/or absence of certain themes, issues and subjects in the texts were interpreted as having a particular meaning. Deacon *et al* (1999:119) note that content analysis helps to quantify salient and manifest features of a text and make inferences about the processes and politics of representation. It was therefore also important to categorise the sources in the content. The analysis of who is portrayed as saying and doing what to whom and in what is essential to an understanding of media roles in social representation and power relations in society (Hansel *et al*, 1998:108). . As such, this section was further developed to identify sources that included government, the Opposition, the Clergy, non-governmental organisations and other civil society organisations. This helped inform the level of access to information by looking at the main sources that both *Daily Times* and *Nyasatimes* used for the news articles. The study also used pluralism as a measure of democracy. In a study by Woods (2007) on democracy and pluralism in the international

media, press freedom measurement was achieved through ensuring the instrument developed measured what it is intended to measure. This was done by analysing the diverse and competing views in the news content. Therefore the right elements had to be coded to answer the research question.

4.4.2 Sampling Procedures

The research employed stratified random sampling to systematically sample copies of *Nyasatimes* and *The Daily Times* newspapers to identify data for the study. Stratified random sampling is used in media research to permit dissimilar subclasses of a larger class of sources to be treated differently (Holsti, 1969:130). The sampling frame consisted of a total of 130 copies drawn from both *Nyasatimes* and *The Daily Times* from April to June 2008, (65 copies for each publication). The research used the period of April to June 2008 as this was the time the country was abuzz with news of the alleged coup plot against the government (*Nyasatimes*, 2008). The actual reporting of the coup plot was in May 2008. According to Krippendorff (1980), it is important to set limits of the context of a content analysis as it has implications on the analysis. The other months were added for monitoring purposes of the change in coverage in times of political tension and times of relative stability.

The newspaper copies were divided into strata according to months, thereby providing three distinct non-overlapping strata. Only copies of the weekdays were collected. Each stratum consisted of 22 and 21 issues of *Nyasatimes* and *The Daily Times* newspaper depending on the number of week days in a month. Thirty copies of each publication (for a total of 60) were selected and were considered sufficient for the purposes of the study. These were selected using systematic sampling. The total sampling frame of 65 for each publication was divided by 30 giving an interval of 2. This was used as the starting point for the systematic random selection of the first element of the sample. It was used as the sampling interval with every second issue of *Nyasatimes* and *The Daily Times* newspapers selected for a total of 30 for each publication. This resulted in two constructed weeks for each month in the study.

Particular attention was given to the front page main story for *The Daily Times* and the top story on *Nyasatimes* for analysis. Attention was also given to political stories as it was deemed this is where plurality of sources such as government and opposition could be analysed. However in some instances the top stories on *Nyasatimes* were not political. On other days the same topical stories selected from *The Daily Times* were compared to stories from *Nyasatimes* for analysis.

4.5 Semi-structured Interviews

The research also used qualitative in-depth interviews with journalists from both the *Nyasatimes* and *The Daily Times* newspapers. Interviews are a useful research tool as they enable the researcher to explore areas that would not be possible through the use of a questionnaire (Deacon *et al*, 2007:66). They have a structured approach. Semi-structured interviews also have the ability to solicit more information from respondents as they direct them to express their views around a theme leaving the respondent to decide on what is vital for inclusion. In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted via e-mail. E-mail interviews also allowed for the respondents to answer in their own time and in more detail (Deacon *et al*, 2007:68).

The on-line interviews helped provide a source of thick data for the research as this is what qualitative research aims to achieve. The interviews helped illuminate the impact of the internet, media and press freedom in Malawi. Krippendorff (1980:23) notes that validation of the results of content analysis to something that is observable in principle is important to help conceptualise reality in relation to the analysed text. The interviews were as such, also used to corroborate the results of the qualitative content analysis.

The respondents to the semi-structured in-depth interviews were purposively drawn from both organisations using snowballing sampling. Snowballing sampling was employed as journalists identified other journalists to participate in the study. The researcher requested respondents' permission to participate in the research by properly introducing and stating the purpose of the research. The researcher also assured respondents of confidentiality in the research. Themes were also developed for the purpose on interpreting the data from the semi-structured interviews. They included access to information, comments on factors affecting press freedom in Malawi, advertisers' and corporate influence, comments on internet publishing in Malawi, on-line press freedom and laws and policies that protect the media.

4.5.1 Data Processing and Analysis

As indicated above, the study used qualitative content analysis through the use of themes to analyse data. This involved a process of using the themes developed on all the content under study. The study drew on Halliday's functional model which is used for examining connections between language and social values (Fowler, 1991:68). Halliday notes that language performs three functions which he categorises as "ideational", "interpersonal" and "textual". The "ideational"

function serves the representational role or cognitive meaning of language and in this instance of the text. With the “interpersonal” function, it is the expression of attitudes, moods and evaluations. The third function, “textual” is the relation of the sentences to each other and the situation in which they are made (Fowler, 1991:68).

Using the functional model and the theme sheet developed for the study, news headlines were first analysed to understand what the story was about, then the lead of the story and the body were looked at for further thematic classification. This mode of analysis was followed because the thematic structure of a story consists of its topics and their organisation; what has been called the news schemata of the story (Bell, 1991:163). Analysis of the macro-structure of the news helped to yield the theme category of the story. The second part of the analysis involved identifying the sources in the story— who they were and what they said was also noted. What was manifest (overt) and what was latent (covert) in a story was also noted. Directional categories were also used to determine whether a story was also was objective, supportive or critical towards government.

After the thematic content analysis was performed on all the data, the theme sheets were compiled for tabulation to synthesise the results. The results from both newspapers were compared to establish how the medium of publication affected the type of media content. This was done while taking into account the data from the on-line interviews which helped provide background and contextual aspects not captured by the qualitative content analysis. The researcher used Microsoft Excel to help tabulate the data for analysis and presentation. Themes were also developed for the responses from the semi-structured interviews. This helped in the interpretation of the data from the interviews.

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter presented the research methodology employed in the study. It presented the procedures and techniques followed in the research and presented the goals of the study. It also established the reasons for using the case study approach in the study. It explained the use of qualitative content analysis as a procedure for data analysis. The chapter also mapped out the use of thematic analysis on the data while using pluralism as a form of measurement for press freedom.

The chapter also indicated the sampling procedures employed in the study. The chapter conveyed the importance of on-line semi-structured interviews used in the study. It also showed

how the semi-structured interviews were important for the interpretation of the results from the content analysis. The next chapter presents the data from the study.

5. Chapter Five- Data Presentation

5.1 Introduction

The objective of this study was to understand how on-line publishing is affecting the public sphere, democracy and press freedom in Malawi. The study attempted to explore if *Nyasatimes* had more freedom to publish by virtue of being an on-line newspaper based and hosted in Britain as opposed to *The Daily Times*; a traditional newspaper based in Malawi. The study therefore hoped to illuminate how the internet was helping newspapers transcend barriers to press freedom in Malawi. The study compared the content of the two newspapers through the use of qualitative content analysis by developing themes for analysis. The study also employed semi-structured interviews via e-mail with journalists from the two newspapers for a contextual understanding of the current media environment in Malawi. This chapter presents the findings from the data that was collected from both newspapers; *The Daily Times* and *Nyasatimes*. It also presents the data from the on-line interviews conducted with journalists from both newspapers.

5.1.1 Qualitative Content Analysis Findings

As indicated in the Chapter Four, thematic analysis was undertaken as part of qualitative content analysis to tease out the themes found in the newspapers. A total of 60 copies of both newspapers were coded and analysed. Five readings occurred in the analysis stage. The first was for the development of themes for qualitative content analysis. The other readings consisted of confirming the themes, the actual analysis, cross checking and the final analysis as the data was being prepared for presentation.

The following categories assess press freedom against the mode of publication. As indicated in the methodology chapter (Chapter Four), plurality was assessed to understand if the medium of publication affects the type of content published. Plurality here means plurality of sources (whether government or other voices) and views (supportive, critical or objective towards government). This is the data from the analysis that was undertaken.

5.1.2 Sources for News Articles for *The Daily Times*

News is mostly what someone says either as witness to facts or as a news actor (Bell, 1991:191). It is what an authoritative source tells a journalist. It was therefore important to analyse the sources the two newspapers used for their stories in order to establish who had access to the media. This helped inform the study as to how independent the media are. As indicated in Chapter Two, in many African societies, the media simply reproduces what government says (Ocitti,

1999:18). Analysing the sources therefore helped show if there is freedom to publish views from other sources.

The sources for the news articles in *The Daily Times* were balanced and representative. Both government and the opposition had access to the media. As indicated in Table 1 below, government sources in the period under study were used for 14 days out of the 30-day period. This translated into 47 percent of sources for articles in *The Daily Times* were from government. The reporting of the coup plot also had authoritative sources, who, despite being ignorant of developments, were accessible to journalists. These included sources such as the Malawi Defence Force spokesperson (*The Daily Times*, May 16, 2008).

Other sectors of society had representation as well as 16 days of the 30-day period under study had articles from sources other than government. This translated into 53 percent of the articles in *The Daily Times* having sources other than government. It was not unusual to see sources such as heads of non-governmental organisations, the opposition, and traditional chiefs and in some instances even ordinary people giving their opinion. It should however, be noted that most of the sources were from the elite section of Malawian society or those in a position of authority as it's generally understood.

Month	Source					Total
	Government	Opposition	Clergy	NGOs	Other	
April	4	4		2		10
May	5	3			2	10
June	5		1	1	3	10
Total	14	7	1	3	5	30

Table 1: Source List for *Daily Times*

5.1.3 Sources for News Articles for *Nyasatimes*

Nyasatimes tended to use mostly other sources for their stories other than government sources. In the 30-day period under study, for 23 days *Nyasatimes* used other sources such as the opposition, non-governmental organisations and other sources for their articles as shown in Table 2. This translated into 77 percent of the sources being non-government sources. However, most of the sources in the *Nyasatimes* were also not identified. There were no concrete sources that could be identified and pinpointed. The *Nyasatimes* at times wrote stories based on observations of events. In

most instances it was the use of anonymous terms such as ‘government insiders’ or ‘police sources’ (*Nyasatimes*, 16 May, 2008). The sources that were identified were mostly from opposition. Some stories were published under the blanket title ‘by *Nyasatimes* reporter’. On the other hand, articles which contained government sources in the 30-day period had coverage for seven days, translating into 23percent of the sources for articles being from government.

Month	Source					Total
	Government	Opposition	Clergy	NGOs	Other	
April	3	2		1	4	10
May	3	2		2	3	10
June	1		1	3	5	10
Total	7	4	1	6	12	30

Table 2: Source List for *Nyasatimes*

5.2 Slant of Story

The way the content of a particular publication is presented can help inform its bias as news is always reported from a particular angle (Fowler, 1991:10). This category was developed to help gauge the stance of a particular publication towards government. It was necessary to develop directional categories such as critical, supportive or objective and other towards government. In any form of communication it is important to determine the direction category as a story can be for, against or neutral towards a particular stance (Berelson, 1952: 150). Stories that were deemed critical towards government were taken note of as a measure of how free the media is. In determining the slant of the story, the main content of the story and comments from the sources were analysed. For example, if a story described poor prison conditions, it was deemed critical towards government as it showed government failure in some respect. On the other hand, a supportive story for government included the release of donor Aid as it signified development and trust from donors. The objective category was stories that consisted of both critical and supportive content in the story. The other category consisted of stories that had nothing to do with government or were not clear on their stance.

All the months under study had the content analysed for the slant of the story. Thirteen themes were developed for qualitative content analysis. Most of the themes were inter-related as it transpired that during the period under study, the main event that seemed to set the coup plot story

in motion was the budget seating taking place. The overarching theme that emerged was that of government versus opposition in the Section 65 saga³. I combined all the themes that gave the element of government versus opposition and compared them against other themes.

5.2.1 Story Slant from *The Daily Times*

Most of the stories from *The Daily Times* were objective in their presentation on the face of it. Critical aspects towards government were embedded in the text. In total, 18 days had objective coverage towards government with three days of supportive coverage and nine days of critical coverage towards government⁴. When tabulated and analysed, the results from *The Daily Times* consisted of the break down below.

Month	Story slant for <i>The Daily Times</i>			Total
	Critical	Supportive	Objective	
April	1	2	7	10
May	3	1	6	10
June	5	0	5	10
Total	9	3	18	30

Table 3: Story Slant for *The Daily Times*

The coverage results are also captured in the chart below.

³ Most of the government members of parliament including President Bingu Wa Mutharika were elected to parliament on the United Democratic Front (UDF) ticket. Soon after assuming office, Mutharika resigned from the UDF accusing it of corruption. He formed his own party; Democratic Progressive Party (DPP). Several members of parliament from both the UDF and Malawi congress Party (MCP) and other parties crossed the floor to join DPP which became the new government side. Section 65 of the Constitution requires the seats of members of parliament who cross the floor to have their seats declared vacant. In the period under study, parliament was waiting for the speaker to declare the seats of the MPs who had crossed the floor vacant.

⁴ The researcher is aware that in different contexts the use of the words objective, supportive and critical is different and subjective at times. However for the purposes of this study, objective means neutral, supportive means positive and critical means negative coverage towards government.

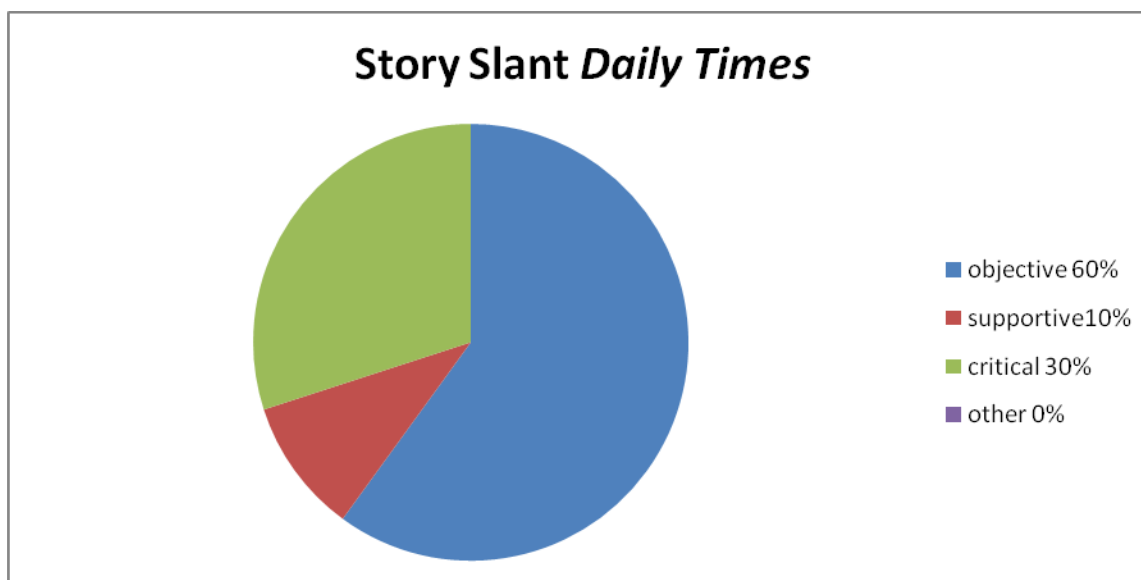


Figure 1: Story Slant in *The Daily Times*

5.2.2 Story Slant from *Nyasatimes*

In analysing the content from *Nyasatimes*, what was prominent was the blatant negativity in its coverage of government. As with *The Daily Times*, all the stories under analysis from *Nyasatimes* were evaluated for the slant of the story as to whether it was supportive, critical or objective towards government in its presentation. Below are the results from *Nyasatimes* regarding the story slant for the months under study.

Month	Story slant for <i>Nyasatimes</i>				Total
	Critical	Supportive	Objective	Other	
April	6	0	2	2	10
May	8	0	2	0	10
June	6	1	1	2	10
Total	20	1	5	4	30

Table 4: Story Slant for *Nyasatimes*

From the above table, it can be seen that in the period under study which consisted of thirty days, *Nyasatimes*' coverage of government was critical for 20 days. Government had supportive coverage once while for five days the coverage was objective. For the other days, its stand was not clear. The slant coverage results are captured in the chart below.

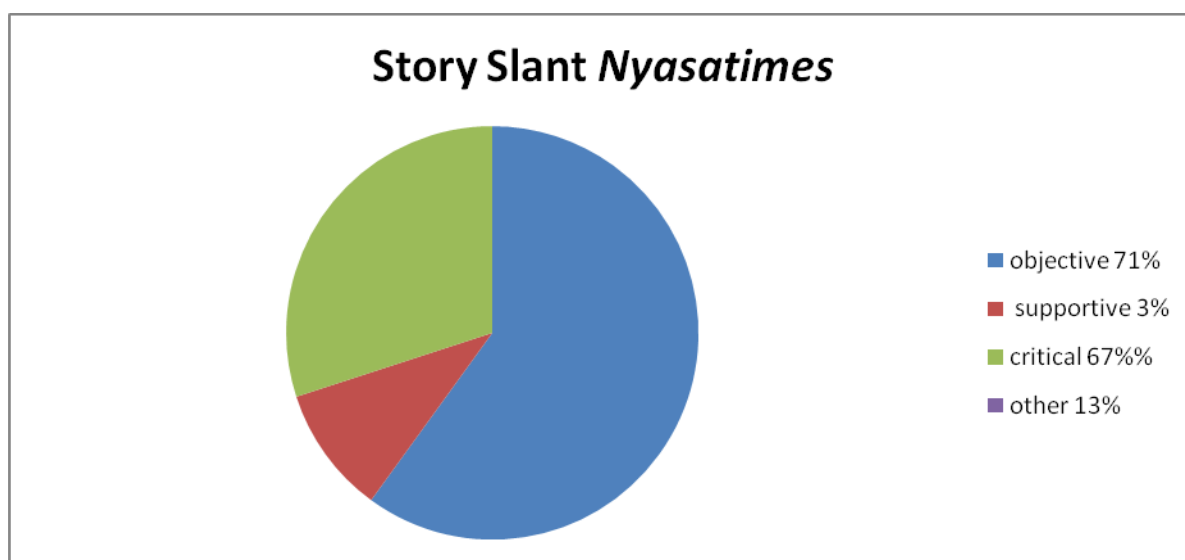


Figure 2: Story Slant in *Nyasatimes*

5.3 Thematic Analysis of the Coup Plot Coverage

The main focus of the study was to analyse how the coup plot was covered in both newspapers. Stories about the coup plot and those relating to the coup plot such as threats and pending arrests were all taken as part of the coup plot coverage in both newspapers. *Nyasatimes* had coverage of the coup plot for seven days while *The Daily Times* had coverage for six days. The results below show the attention the two newspapers accorded the coup plot.

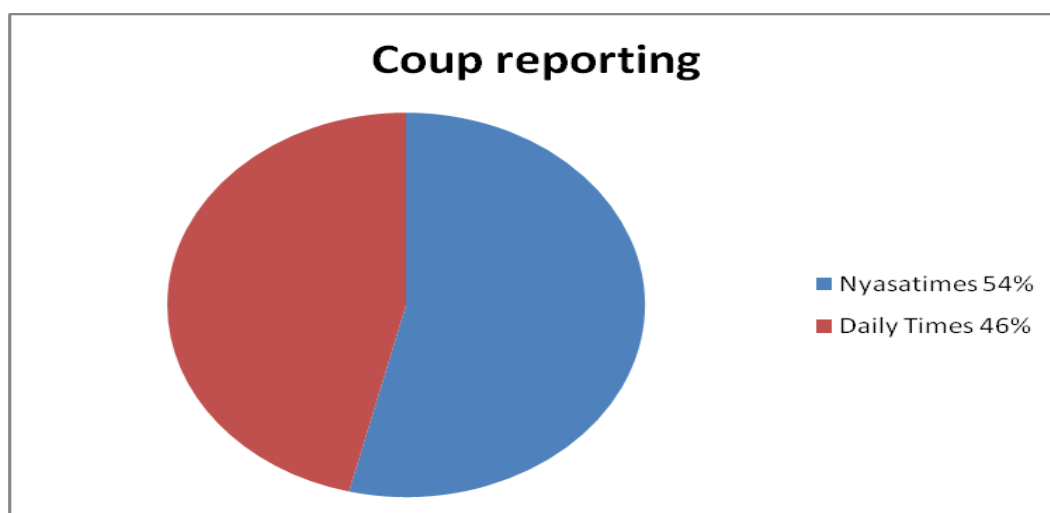


Figure 3: Coup plot coverage in the two newspapers

5.3.1 Coup Plot Coverage in *The Daily Times*

As stated in Chapter Four, the study focused on content from the front page of *The Daily Times* and the main stories from *Nyasatimes*. The coup plot coverage in *The Daily Times* started on May 12, 2008. *The Daily Times* carried **Muluzi risks treason charges**. The article contained accusations the President, Bingu Wa Mutharika made against the former president, Bakili Muluzi, regarding his plot to overthrow the government on his return from the United Kingdom. Mutharika accused the opposition of treason in his speech. The comments of the opposition in *The Daily Times* termed the president's remarks "nasty" and contrary to the spirit of dialogue:

...We have always said the President needs to use diplomacy when talking about these issues.

The article also related the impending arrest of Muluzi on treason charges to that of the vice-president under house arrest noting:

...If Muluzi is charged with treason, he would be the second under Mutharika's regime after Vice-President Cassim Chilumpha who is accused of hiring assassins to kill the president.

On May 14, 2008, *The Daily Times* carried **Coup Plot: Chimbayo, Aironi, 5 others netted**. The article covered the arrest of the coup plot suspects which included a former inspector general of Police, several police, and army personnel and opposition party members. *The Daily Times* conducted its own investigations and also interviewed the minister of Home Affairs who noted:

...I would like to tell the nation that government has uncovered a plot by a certain group who were plotting to overthrow the government by unlawful means.

The Daily Times made the following observation:

...The arrest of the 11 high profile people comes barely two days after Mutharika said former president Bakili Muluzi was plotting to overthrow his government on May 16.

The Daily Times also sourced information from the opposition:

...The treason allegations levelled against the said UDF officials are trumped up and a product of a 'cooked up intelligence'. These allegations are typical of a regime fearing the oncoming elections having assumed state power through fraudulent means.

Further coverage on the coup plot was presented on May 16, 2008, with **State presents Evidence**, in which *The Daily Times* reported the suspects had spent 48 hours in police detention. However it transpired that the evidence presented by the state in court as reason for their detention in court was:

... illegible as some words or letters were missing in some places and the photocopies not signed as to true copies of the original.

The army was interviewed on 22 May, 2008 by *The Daily Times* in **Army will not try brigadiers**. The Malawi Defence Force spokesperson indicated the army would not be involved in the matter. The courts would make judgement on the issue. *The Daily Times* later covered the arrest of Muluzi on May 26, 2008 with **Muluzi under House arrest**.

Former president Bakili Muluzi was yesterday arrested for treason at Kamuzu International Airport (KIA) in Lilongwe upon his arrival from the United Kingdom (UK) and whisked away by a military plane for a search at his BCA Hill residence in Blantyre.

The Daily Times noted the significance of the arrest:

His arrest comes barely a week after several UDF officials, serving and retired police and army officers were released on bail after being arrested a week earlier on plotting to stage a coup to overthrow President Bingu Wa Mutharika.

The Daily Times reported that Muluzi was arrested without a warrant of arrest. The rest of the story gave a description of the events that took place as “heavily armed police in combat gear” arrested Muluzi. The airport was described as having “heavy security” and all road joints “blocked” by police.

The final front page story on the coup plot saga was May 28, 2008 with **Police stop UDF March**. *The Daily Times* noted:

Heavily armed police yesterday stopped a march by United Democratic Front (UDF) supporters ‘to express solidarity’ with their national chairman Bakili Muluzi who has been under house arrest since Sunday.

The Daily Times rehashed Muluzi’s arrest and his transfer to Blantyre from Lilongwe on a military plane.

5.3.2 Coup Plot Coverage *Nyasatimes*

The first warning the nation had of impending arrests in Malawi from *Nyasatimes* was 16 April, 2008 in **Mutharika threatens to silence Muluzi, Tembo**.

...President Bingu Mutharika under strain pressure from the opposition since 2004, has today vowed to use state apparatus at his disposal to fight and silence the former head of state Dr Bakili Muluzi and opposition leader John Tembo claiming that they were frustrating his efforts to serve the people of Malawi better.

On May 8, 2008, *Nyasatimes* published **Talks flop as Bingu threatens arrests**, which indicated that peace talks between government and the opposition had gone sour. In the article, the opposition revealed they were aware of impending arrests:

...“We met them in the morning and all started well but things got sour when Mutharika started shouting insults and threats upon us. He was saying he could get all of us in opposition arrested,” said Ntafu in an interview with *Nyasa Times*.

“We hit back saying that we are aware that he has drawn up a list of senior political and civil society leaders that he wants to arrest [and even kill]. He finally calmed down but there was a deadlock,” said the UDF leader in the House.

In **Police raid Muluzi’s BCA**, on 14 May, 2008, *Nyasatimes* reported:

...Armed to the teeth Malawi Police Mobile Force Wednesday raided the residence of former president Dr Bakili Muluzi, at BCA in Blantyre to search in the wake of wave of arrest over coup claims by President Bingu Mutharika.

The raid on Muluzi’s home occurred while he was in Britain with the police claiming “they wanted to withdraw all weapons that presidential guards at BCA have”. The article compared the events in Malawi during this time to the rule of the first president of Malawi, Kamuzu Banda:

...Muluzi who in the interview was heard laughing said whatever is happening to him and the family; he already faced the same when he was contesting for presidency in 1994 to oust Dictator Kamuzu Banda.

Nyasatimes also reported on the arrest of the alleged coup plotters:

...The former president bemoaned the tendency of government in dragging innocent civil servants into politics. He was making a sharp reference to serving military soldiers who have been arrested and charged of treason.

Mutharika voiced his coup fears at a political rally on Sunday that Muluzi was planning to overthrow government on May 16 upon his return from the United Kingdom.

Arrest warrant for Muluzi has since been issued in what many view as politically motivated charges.

On 14 May, 2008 in **Malawi ex-spy master held, Atupele house searched**, another person was arrested while his home was “searched by heavily armed security forces”. *Nyasatimes* noted:

...Meanwhile, as government continues to harass Malawi's former Head of State, Dr. Bakili Muluzi and his family members, a truckload of heavily armed policemen on Friday morning also stormed the house of Machinga East Parliamentarian, Atupele Muluzi in Blantyre in their endless "search for arms".

The search was carried out to find arms “after failing to get some arms at Dr. Muluzi’s BCA Hill residence”. However the police search failed to yield any evidence. *Nyasatimes* had an insider in government who was the source of the story as it claimed:

...The source said the search is an effort to establish enough grounds to arrest Muluzi on the alleged treason charges.

On May 16, 2008 in **Download the State evidence on Malawi coup plot**, *Nyasatimes* reported:

Malawi government has presented to High Court two doggy documents as part of its evidence in the coup allegations which Nyasa Times has sourced and hereby is circulated.

The story was about the state presenting evidence in the coup plot affair in court in which:

...in one document, the letter purportedly written by UDF secretary general Kennedy Makwangwala has not author's imprint while the hand written document has some text missing and 'funny' enough talks about a meeting which was held in June 2008, a date not yet come.

It further related the evidence was “not signed and is in vernacular”. All this was termed ‘discrepancies in the documents which have been revealed to be "cooked up intelligence" implicating the suspects from a “false” dossier’. *Nyasatimes* claimed to have information that “the scheme was authored sometime back and in fact; was a template ...” It offered readers a chance to view the evidence by posting a link for the download of the coup plot court evidence documents.

On 20 May, 2008, *Nyasatimes* presented a story on the abuse of the rights of the coup plot suspects in **Malawi’s deliberate rights abuse in treason case reported**.

...Malawi police operating under directives from their Inspector General Oliver Kumbambe over the weekend abused rights of the alleged coup plot's suspects by pushing them into a second interrogation.

However, Nyasa Times has learnt that despite the verbal assaults the suspects vehemently refused to be interrogated in the absence of their lawyers as they await with anxiety the outcome of their bail ruling on Tuesday.

The coup plot saga took a new twist on 22 May, 2008, in **Govt renames Muluzi Barracks**. *Nyasatimes* reported that the president renamed “Muluzi Barracks in Zomba to Chungalume Barracks allegedly to remove confusion over the soldiers' allegiance”. The move was linked to the coup plot saga:

...The move comes barely few days after a group of serving and retired senior police and army officers along side senior UDF officials were granted bail by the Lilongwe Magistrate Court on charges of plotting to overthrow the government of President Mutharika.

An update on the treason case was presented in **Malawi coup: Police probe Muluzi, no charge yet** on 26 May, 2008 by *Nyasatimes*. The author of the article was anonymous.

Malawi Police on Monday took ten minutes for an interrogation with former president Dr Bakili Muluzi in connection with President Bingu Mutharika's coup fantasy, his lawyer Ralph Kasambara told *Nyasa Times*.

The story claimed Muluzi had not been charged despite the continuous house searches which yielded nothing.

The final report on the coup plot affected *Nyasatimes*. On 28 May, 2008, *Nyasatimes* published **Desperate Mutharika seeks British intervention on Nyasa Times**.

...Irrked with revelations on the cooked up dossier for the coup fantasy which *Nyasa Times* exposed, President Bingu Mutharika is seeking the intervention of the British government to deal with editorial directors of the internet publication, Britain has confirmed.

Mutharika, according to State House sources, instructed the people mentioned in *Nyasa Times* articles to have cooked up the coup dossier, to seek guidance from British High Commission in Lilongwe on what to do with editorial directors of *Nyasa Times* based in the UK.

The article further noted the arrest of several people on treason charges under Mutharika's four year regime alleging:

...On January 2, 2005, President Mutharika ordered the arrest of UDF National Executive Committee member, Harry Thomson, Parliamentarians Alfred Mwechumu, deputy minister Roy Comsy, and Mangochi District Governor, Jordan Kanyerere.

In April 2006, on the eve of Zimbabwe's President Mugabe's State Visit to Malawi, President Mutharika ordered the arrest of top UDF officials on treason allegations, who included Deputy Secretary General Hophmally Makande and Director of Research, Humphrey Mvula....

All these suspects were released unconditionally after spending six days in different police cells.

In the same year, Vice President Dr. Cassim Chilumpha was arrested alongside UDF executive members Yusuf Matumula and Rashid Nembo, for allegedly plotting to assassinate President Mutharika. The state has deliberately stalled the case by not bringing forth evidence and witnesses.

Nyasatimes again offered readers a chance to view the coup plot evidence and the judge's ruling on bail in the case by posting a link to the documents. This concluded the coup plot coverage in *Nyasatimes*.

5.4 Responses from the Semi-structured Interviews

There were only six responses to the semi-structured interviews requests that the researcher sent to the two newspapers. Eight people were identified for interviews at *The Daily Times*. From *Nyasatimes*, five people including the editor were identified. There were four responses from *The Daily Times* and two from *Nyasatimes*. The interviews were conducted during the 2009 election period, when journalists are typically busy, which could have affected the response rate. However, the initial time of three weeks for feedback was extended by two weeks in recognition of this. This did not change the response rate. Reminders to the journalists to respond proved futile. As such I proceeded with the interpretation of the data I had. From the response rate it would seem like Malawi is still a closed society and people still do not feel free to give their opinions on certain issues.

In interpreting the responses to the interviews themes were developed for better interpretation of the results. For identification purposes the respondents were given numbers such as respondent 1 with the e-mail correspondence date indicated. Some respondents from *The Daily Times* indicated they work for Blantyre Newspapers Limited; they were however identified as *The Daily Times* respondents as Blantyre Newspapers Limited are publishers of *The Daily Times*.

5.4.1 Comments on the Media Environment in Malawi

From the responses of journalists from both publications, there was a general consensus that there is press freedom in Malawi. A respondent from *The Daily Times* noted that:

From 2004 to now, the press has enjoyed maximum freedom. The environment however was risky between 1994 to 2003 because of youth militias that pounced on the media each time there was contrary opinion against the powers that be then (respondent 2, *The Daily Times*, 14 May, 2009).

There was recognition of the importance of ethical journalism with a respondent from *The Daily Times* noting “as long as the articles are fair, balanced and accurate” (respondent 4, *The Daily Times*, 23 May, 2009). It however transpired that publications regardless of being regarded as an “independent press” are politically affiliated.

If critically looked at, one would see that the media in the country is politically affiliated and this means if one is affiliated say to government that organization for sure will not be able to bring out the ills government is practicing and the same with media houses affiliated to the opposition. However, there are a few that have come out to face the challenge of intimidation and are trying their best to defy the odds (respondent 5, *Nyasatimes*, 18 May, 2009).

The respondents also understood the role of the media in a democracy and pointed out some of the ways the media has contributed to democracy.

Primarily, the Malawi media serve to inform, educate and entertain. However, going by the three sub-roles and in relation to democracy, the Malawi media have played a major role in shaping up the political landscape by communicating what could be termed the truth about issues.

....Succinctly, the Malawi media have assisted in explaining democracy by linking those seeking elected office and the electorate.

...Further, the Malawi media have also acted as watchdogs, checking ills those in office commit. To this effect, the Malawi media have exposed corrupt practices involving office bearers, and to this effect, most of the successes in government's fight against corruption started with the media carrying stories on the practices.

..The media have also helped in promoting rule of law by exposing various constitutional violations involving those in power (respondent 1, *The Daily Times*, 14 May, 2009).

5.4.2 Factors Affecting Press Freedom in Malawi

I inquired about the constraints that are currently at play in the Malawian media landscape which might encroach on press freedom. Several factors manifested which are outlined below.

5.4.3 Ownership Patterns and Political Intimidation/Interference

Most publications in Malawi are politically affiliated. This affects the level of freedom to report on particular stories. Most respondents shared this sentiment.

Yes, at *The Daily*, for example, political stories tend to favour the ruling DPP because one of *The Daily* director is a DPP guru so stories are written to avoid offending both the employer and the DPP⁵ (respondent 2, *The Daily Times*, 15 May, 2009).

Our paper is owned by the family of late Dr. Kamuzu Banda, who was known for political excesses when he was president of Malawi. Time and again we receive information, well-researched and documented about the ills of Dr Banda but we are unable to publish it. For instance, at the height of the fight for borders between Livingstonia and Nkhoma Synods, one 'theological historian' documented how Nkhoma had systematically encroached into the borders of Livingstonia with the tacit blessings of Dr. Banda whose patronage the synod largely enjoyed by virtue of his coming from the Central Region where Nkhoma Synod operates. The information was explosive and sensational. At least two other persons corroborated the information but we were impotent to publish the information⁶ (respondent 3, *The Daily Times*, 17 May, 2009).

Other respondents cited political intimidation and interference as affecting the quality of their work.

...Politicians have been another source of pressure on the journalist – pressure that takes freedom away from them. When you do a story that is perceived pro-opposition, government would be on

⁵ DPP–Democratic Progressive Party is the current ruling party in Malawi.

⁶ The above incident was an argument between two churches over land ownership.

you saying “how much have they given you?” The same applies when you write something that is perceived pro-government. This leads to self-censorship (respondent 1, *The Daily Times*, 14 May, 2009).

5.4.4 Sources for Stories

Respondents from both newspapers cited problems with access to sources. Sources were at times hard to access. Without proper verification of facts, most stories were not pursued. In light of this, a respondent from *The Daily Times* noted:

...the absence of the access to information bill creates a very tough environment for journalists seeking information to balance their stories. As such, most of the corrupt practices covered only concern those issues whose information is handy. Journalists prefer other social ills like child abuse etc to corruption, which – if badly handled – attracts defamation charges (respondent 1, *The Daily Times*, 14 May, 2009).

Nyasatimes journalists experienced the same problem.

It has never been easy to report on corruption cases and other social ills in Malawi as these are taken as more sensitive issues which ‘cannot’ be taken to the public, therefore it is hard to get sources that would willingly give you the right information, and above all let you go ahead to publish the story, especially if it involves politicians and/or top officials from both the government and private sector, in addition to the civil society and other key sectors of society (respondent 5, *Nyasatimes*, 18 May, 2009).

The respondent from *Nyasatimes* also indicated that as the publication is viewed as oppositional to government, access to information is hard.

The most obvious one is being a *Nyasatimes* reporter – I am deemed as an opposition (affiliated to the UDF party) and it’s hard to access information related to government and other sources that support President Mutharika’s administration and his DPP. Note that other sources might not be pro-government and DPP or anti-opposition, but the fact that *Nyasatimes* is regarded as a Government of Malawi and its leadership’s critic, they would not want to talk to you fearing they would be branded anti-Mutharika and his administration (respondent 5, *Nyasatimes*, 18 May, 2009).

5.4.5 Advertisers and Corporate Influence

Respondents expressed concern about the number of stories on social issues in their publications as they were mostly affected by the influence of advertisers⁷.

⁷ In 2007, a senior reporter working with Blantyre Newspapers Limited (BNL), publishers of *The Daily Times* newspaper, was fired from her job and the general manager suspended for a story that implicated a priest and a bank manager. The bank manager is a banker for BNL. The story was about an affair with a married woman (Sentala, 2008).

I see more self-censorship in issues that affect corporate companies and personalities more than any other areas. I feel the company does not want to disappoint them as they are large advertisers and advertising is the largest source of income (respondent 4, *The Daily Times*, 23 May, 2009).

...Firstly, the Malawi media is controlled by advertisers, who are major sources of income for the media. In this case, advertisers have committed ills in society, and the media have been aware of such ills. However, they cannot tackle such ills basically under the fear that they would shut the income taps for these media. I remember a colleague saying that after seeking a response from a businessman who had apparently committed an ill, the latter retorted: “Do you know that I am a major advertiser for your company?” (respondent 1, *The Daily Times*, 14 May, 2009).

...Advertisers like Zain, TNM and some banks like NBM⁸ - where our company gets loans often, and Malawi revenue authority (MRA) where we have a huge debt on unpaid tax to the effect that they once impounded our cars---the stories are either spiked or slanted to please them or satisfy the advertisers. Most scandals in these advertisers are never reported to avoid cutting the finger that feeds you because in Malawi media advertisers call the shots (respondent 2, *The Daily Times* 15 May, 2009).

It can be seen from the above comments that some of the factors affecting press freedom are associated with other institutions in society apart from government.

5.5 Comments on Internet Publishing In Malawi

There was a general view from the respondents of the potential for internet publishing to revolutionise Malawian media. The main factors affecting exploration of this new venture for most publications was the lack of access and of adequate resources.

The potential is there but the resources are at a premium. By this I mean that not many news organisations in the country have adequate resources (human as well as material) with which to take a bite at the new media. Further, internet connectivity remains a hindrance to publishing in the country. The costs are still way too high, such that internet largely remains a luxury for both publisher and readers and the computers don't come in for cheap. But the young generation has taken to the internet like flies to carrion such that the potential for internet publishing remains promising (respondent 3, *The Daily Times*, 17 May, 2009).

What also emerged from the responses was the lack of understanding of the potential of the internet to generate additional revenue from online content.

...Because of technological hiccups, it isn't a priority. The media haven't devised a mechanism where people can subscribe on-line and pay for every access to the articles published (respondent 1, *The Daily Times*, 14 May, 2009).

⁸Zain (formerly Cetel) and TNM (Telekom Networks Malawi) are the main cell-phone service providers in Malawi. NBM (National Bank of Malawi) is one of the country's largest indigenous banks. These corporations are among the biggest advertisers in the country from billboards to radio, television and print advertising.

We are still a long way to go. Most of the newspaper companies have websites but they basically paste the print version of their stories. The most vibrant site (Nyasatimes) is done by people outside the country but their objectivity is highly questionable. There seems to be little progress in internet publishing because so far publishers do not realise any direct economic benefits. Again, issues of access and infrastructure capacity hinder development (respondent 4, *The Daily Times*, 23 May, 2009).

5.5.1 On-line Press Freedom

As the study was concerned with exploring how the internet has affected the media landscape in Malawi, it was essential to canvass journalists' views. Most of the respondents expressed the view that on-line publishing offers more opportunities for press freedom. When asked to compare the level of press freedom for *The Daily Times* and *Nyasatimes*, a respondent from *The Daily Times* observed:

...It must be understood that the two publications operate in two mediums and environments and by different controls. *The Daily Times* is guided by media ethics of Malawi such that there are precautions before any article is published.

.....as an on-line publication, *Nyasatimes* is not subject to the same restrictive (or regulatory) controls as *The Daily Times* (respondent 3, *The Daily Times*, 17 May, 2009).

Respondents noted that since *Nyasatimes* is based in Britain, it was hard to advance defamation cases against the publication. Respondents therefore generally accepted that on-line publishing offers the promise of more press freedom as the laws of the country do not currently legislate on-line publishing.

5.6 Coup Plot Coverage

As indicated in Chapter Four, the study singled out the 2008 coup plot as the focus for the comparison of press freedom in the medium of on-line and traditional publishing. In analysing the coverage of the coup plot, I hypothesised that *Nyasatimes* had more freedom in the way it reported the event. The reasons for this included the fact that it is an on-line newspaper, based hosted in Britain, and whose managing editor is based there as well.

The main observations from the respondents on the coup plot coverage affected the tone that *Nyasatimes* used in its coverage of the coup plot. From the interviews, respondents indicated that *Nyasatimes* had more freedom in its coverage of the coup plot as it is an on-line newspaper. Reservations were however expressed on the tone *Nyasatimes* used in its coverage. The respondents felt *Nyasatimes'* approach lacked professionalism.

The Daily Times covered the event (the coup) with a measured tone, sometimes even doubting the veracity of the plot itself but never committing itself to taking sides. However, much as it may have expressed subtle misgivings, the paper desisted from being outright judgemental. *Nyasatimes*, however, went flat out authoritatively, attacking the government for cooking up the plot and generally it acted like the counsel for the accused (respondent 3, *The Daily Times*, 17 May, 2009).

The Daily Times tried to cover it professionally by looking for truths in whatever transpired. However, *Nyasatimes* aligned itself with the coup plotters. This is because of the involvement of some opposition sympathisers in the matter. The fact that contributors to *Nyasatimes* are mostly those against government explains why the publication grossly took the role of sympathisers for the alleged coup plotters (respondent 1, *The Daily Times*, 14 May, 2009).

Daily Times was professional in its coverage because it followed principles of reporting i.e. fairness, balance, completeness and accuracy---this was often not followed by *Nyasatimes*. Secondly, *Daily Times* displayed some fear in terms of commentaries to avoid sub judice (contempt of court). *Nyasatimes*, however, said anything because they felt, I think, no one would take them to task as its publication is UK-based and that most of its reporters/editors are not known (use of pen names is the order of the day at *Nyasatimes*), (respondent 2, *The Daily Times*, 15 May, 2009).

5.7 Ways to Enhance Press Freedom

Suggestions were proposed by the respondents on how the media environment and journalism can be improved in Malawi.

5.7.1 Laws and Policies that Protect the Media

In recognition of the challenges facing the media regarding information and sources, most respondents cited the importance of a law on access to information. The respondents noted that the existence of such a law would ensure that journalists were free to publish stories from all sectors of society.

The absence of the access to information bill creates a very tough environment for journalists seeking information to balance their stories. As such, most of the corrupt practices covered only concern those issues whose information is handy. Journalists prefer other social ills like child abuse etc to corruption, which – if badly handled – attracts defamation charges (respondent 1, *The Daily Times*, 14 May, 2009).

By improving access to information; the country needs a clear law so that journalists are empowered to approach public officers and get necessary data. There is also need for improved ethical conduct among journalist so that authorities do not have excuses to limit media freedom (respondent 4, *The Daily Times*, 23 May, 2009).

There was also a call by the respondents for the clarification of laws on defamation and libel for the safe practice of journalism. It was felt this affects the level of freedom to publish as the laws of defamation and libel made it difficult to determine what would get them in trouble.

...Defamation is another genesis of trouble for the Malawi media. Most lawyers have taken advantage of ambiguity in the laws and find a case in any story that comes out. This results in self censorship (respondent 1, *The Daily Times*, 14 May, 2009).

Respondents also expressed the importance of publications to be independent of advertisers' influence for editorial independence.

....As for advertisers, I feel organisations should redefine the role played by advertisers and how they could be handled if they found themselves in the wrong (respondent 1, *The Daily Times*, 14 May, 2009).

Respondents suggested that clear policies should exist around advertisers, media ownership, media law and sources for protection of journalists and media organisations.

Laws of defamation should be clarified. Again, there should be preparedness by the editors to take political pressure head on. As for advertisers, I feel organisations should redefine the role played by advertisers and how they could be handled if they found themselves in the wrong (respondent 1, *The Daily Times*, 14 May, 2009).

A respondent from *The Daily Times* offered the following suggestions as a solution for publications to attain press freedom.

- a. If ownership moved from ownership of politicians to private hands
- b. If public official were fully appreciative of the need to have a vibrant, free press
- c. Advertisers in one way or the other influence editorial content, hence compromise the media's work. But that's mainly because most media houses are not 'independent' from corporate advertisers because the circulation of most papers cannot sustain the costs of production (respondent 3, *The Daily Times*, 17 May, 2009).

5.7.2 Cooperation among Stakeholders

There was a call by the respondents from both publications for tolerance by all stake-holders whether government or corporate in understanding the role of the media in society and working with it and not against it for the improvement of press freedom.

There are a number of ways that press freedom can be improved in Malawi and the most important one is the acceptance of different stakeholders, especially government accepting that the media is not an enemy but part of the government as it is said "the media is the fourth arm of government" (respondent 5, *Nyasatimes*, 18 May, 2009).

Respondents also expressed reservations over the ownership patterns of media in Malawi noting that ownership should not be political and media should be non-partisan. Finally the respondents also expressed concerns over salaries and training for journalists to be dedicated to their jobs, understand and appreciate their role in society.

5.8 Conclusion

This chapter presented the data from the qualitative content analysis that was conducted on the two publications in the study; *The Daily Times* and *Nyasatimes*. It showed that *The Daily Times* was objective in its coverage of government. However there was plurality of sources and coverage and balanced content. On the other hand, *Nyasatimes*' coverage was critical towards government, lacked sources and was biased. In its defence, *Nyasatimes* pointed out that it is seen as an opposition publication and therefore has difficulties in gaining access to sources.

On the coup plot coverage, *Nyasatimes* had more main stories concerning the event. It covered different stories surrounding the event bringing different aspects at play in society. *Nyasatimes* however was not professional in its coverage of the coup plot. Its content was emotional and not critical in its presentation. It therefore did not make adequate use of its ability to publish online without censorship to cover the event professionally. *The Daily Times*' coverage on the other hand was professional, ethical and balanced.

From the results from the interviews, respondents from *The Daily Times* indicated that although they enjoy some sense of press freedom, other factors come into leading to self-censorship. Some of these factors were political intimidation, ownership influence, advertisers' influence and access to information.

The respondents also indicated that despite the potential of the internet to allow for more freedom to publish; internet publishing in Malawi is not a priority because of factors such as access and resources for most publications. However the respondents offered several solutions that could improve the level of press freedom in Malawi for traditional media.

The next chapter is the data analysis chapter. The chapter will discuss the findings with the research question in mind.

6. Chapter Six- Data Analysis and Discussion

6.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the findings from Chapter Five and analyses the meaning of the data taking in to account the socio-political context of the media landscape in Malawi. The interpretation is from both the qualitative content analysis and the semi-structured interviews conducted via e-mail with journalists from *The Daily Times* and *Nyasatimes*. The interpretation of the data is based on the facet of press freedom as a factor in democratic societies. The chapter also explores how the internet has affected publishing in Malawi by analysing whether it has expanded the public sphere and helped transcend impediments to press freedom. However theoretical reflections on the public sphere and its significance in this study will occur in Chapter Seven.

6.2 A Restricted Public Sphere

This section will evaluate the current state of the public sphere in Malawi by analysing the results from the qualitative content analysis and the semi-structured interviews. The ideal of the public sphere in modern society in the form of a free unfettered press is a feature of most democratic nations (Dahlgren, 1995:2). It entails the unrestricted flow of information through the media for critical debate and informed decision making. Press freedom is therefore important for the media to fulfil its role as a watchdog in society. Several factors became evident in the study which affects the public sphere in Malawi. These are outlined below.

6.2.1 Access to Information

As seen in Chapter Five, most of the news sources for the stories in *The Daily Times* were balanced. Government sources consisted of 47 percent of the articles while 53 percent of the articles had other sources in the period under study. There was a plurality of sources from both government and the opposition. The diversity of sources in the content from *The Daily Times* indicates that journalists are able to approach anyone who is newsworthy. This is different from the time when the press could only publish the views of the government (Chimombo and Chimombo, 1996:25). Journalists strived to find relevant sources for their stories despite various challenges. However, the lack of an Access to Information Act is hindering the media's ability to access some sources. This in turn has affected the pursuit of some stories. The lack of an Access to Information Act which gives journalists the right not only to question public officials but also access to official documents in the public interest is currently an impediment to press freedom in Malawi.

This is reflected in *Nyasatimes*' coverage. *Nyasatimes* had more stories sourced from sources other than government for its stories as only 23 percent of its stories had government as the main source and the remaining 77 percent of the articles had sources other than government.

Criticism towards government was normally embedded in the text of the articles from *The Daily Times*. Labels are provided to different groups, which is a way of allocating power to different players in society (Fowler, 1991:20). In most instances, sources were quoted saying critical things about government. In so doing the publication cast the role of "opposition" on the person whom it quoted (Fowler, 1991:41). The implication of embedding criticism in the text and using sources to articulate that criticism speaks to fear on the part of journalists and the publication, of being critical towards government. Publications that are openly critical of government are usually branded as unpatriotic, disrespectful of elderly statespersons and working at cross purposes with the broader national interest in most African countries (Mukundu, 2008:4). The use of sources for critical views against government can also be interpreted as a self-defence mechanism to protect the journalists. *The Daily Times* therefore chooses to safeguard itself by not being openly critical of government.

6.2.2 Political/Ownership Influences

Political influence and ownership patterns were other factors that affected freedom to publish particular stories. Respondents from *The Daily Times* (see Chapter Five), indicated that some of the board members of the publication are politically affiliated to the ruling party.

Yes, at *The Daily Times*, for example, political stories tend to favour the ruling DPP because one of *The Daily Times* directors is a DPP guru so stories are written to avoid offending both the employer and the DPP⁹ (respondent 2, *The Daily Times*, 15 May, 2009).

This made it is hard to write stories critical of government. Media in Malawi are owned privately by various political parties, either directly or through influential office bearers of the political parties (Jamieson, 2001:41). Very few independent media houses therefore exist in Malawi. This led to intimidation a factor confirmed by the respondents. The respondents indicated they suffered intimidation at the hands of politicians because of working on stories deemed to be critical of government. This leads to self-censorship as journalists play a gate-keeping role on information, affecting the quality information in the public sphere.

⁹ DPP–Democratic Progressive Party is the current ruling party in Malawi.

6.2.3 Advertisers' Influence

It is not only physical political intimidation to journalists that is a threat to press freedom in Malawi. The threat of losing advertising revenue or financial intimidation of publications critical of government is another factor. Economic dynamics play a central role in defining the stance of a publication (Murdock and Golding, 2005:63). In most African countries government is the biggest advertiser and Malawi is no exception. *The Daily Times* is less critical in its coverage of stories on government as a survival mechanism¹⁰. This is for fear of losing advertising revenue from government. This is a form of soft censorship (Podesta, 2009). It is censorship through commercial means by with-holding advertising from publications that seem to oppose the government thereby jeopardising their very existence. Government influences news coverage by applying financial pressure on media companies that are seen as critical of government or its policies and rewarding media outlets and individual journalists who are seen as friendly to the government (Podesta, 2009:4). Although other advertisers exist who might fill the gap, in most instances they do not want to be associated with a publication that is deemed critical of government. The reliance on government advertising is affecting the level of critical discourse found in *The Daily Times*.

However from the results from the e-mail responses with journalists from the two publications show that it is not only government that publications have to be weary of when it comes to critical content affecting advertising revenue. The corporate world in Malawi is determining what can be published in the media as noted by respondents from *The Daily Times*:

...I shun issues that would get the media house into conflict with advertisers... (respondent 1, *The Daily Times*, 14 May, 2009).

...Advertisers like Zain, TNM and some banks like NBM¹¹ - where our company gets loans often, and Malawi revenue authority (MRA) where we have a huge debt on unpaid tax to the effect that they once impounded our cars---the stories are either spiked or slanted to please them or satisfy the advertisers. Most scandals in these advertisers are never reported to avoid cutting the finger that feeds you because in Malawi media advertisers call the shots (respondent 2, *The Daily Times* 15 May, 2009).

¹⁰ *The Independent* lost adverting revenue from government and other advertisers during the Muluzi administration due to their negative coverage of it (Nyamnjoh, 2005:77).

¹¹ Zain (formerly Cetel) and TNM (Telekom Networks Malawi) are the main cell-phone service providers in Malawi. NBM (National Bank of Malawi) is one of the country's largest indigenous banks. These corporations are among the biggest advertisers in the country from billboards to radio, television and print advertising.

We see in this a restriction of the public sphere to reflect what an elite few consider worth public consumption. The use of advertising is one way in which government and other elites such as corporations are maintaining hegemony in Malawi. They build consent through ensuring that only certain issues and topics are discussed in a 'restricted public sphere' and not through debate. The role of the media to report freely and without fear is therefore being undermined by both government and corporate advertisers. This is in line with Habermas' reflections on the refeudalization of the public sphere when the media relies on advertising as means of subsidising the cost of production (Thompson, 1995:71). Reliance on advertising for revenue in Malawi is affecting the media's ability to report freely on malfeasance in society.

6.3 *Nyasatimes* - An Alternative Public Sphere?

This section will look at how on-line publishing is helping *Nyasatimes* transcend some of the problems *The Daily Times* faces in respect to press freedom. It will show how *Nyasatimes* is helping enlarge the public sphere and its short comings in this respect. There are factors that speak to *Nyasatimes* having more freedom to publish on-line. The main factor is the critical coverage government received from *Nyasatimes*. It published more than 20 critical stories about government in the period under study compared to *The Daily Times*' 9 stories (see Table 4, Chapter Five). The results from *Nyasatimes* indicate a degree of press freedom. It is able to publish more critical stories on government.

A factor for the critical aspect of *Nyasatimes* is that it does not depend on government advertising as indicated by the managing editor:

Nyasa Times is funded by myself ...and is funded by myself. We have not sought any help from any equity finance companies, donors and well-wishers.

Nyasa Times monetizes its traffic by way of advertisements...as you can see...mostly from overseas traders based in Japan... the money they pay helps to fund salaries and other running costs. We also run Google Ad sense ads based on Pay per Click (PPC). These revenues are helping in bringing the gap between funding (e-mail correspondence with Edgar Msowoya, owner and Managing editor of *Nyasatimes*, 17 June, 2009)

Atton in Waltz (2005:20) notes that alternative media includes all forms of media that is non-commercial, grassroots and highly personal; it is predicted on citizen participation and contributes to creating debate. *Nyasatimes* is therefore free to be critical of government and bring to light various issues as it does not rely on government advertising. *Nyasatimes* is providing alternative views compared to *The Daily Times* making it a form of alternative media by providing alternative views from the mainstream media. As indicated in Chapter Three, alternative media challenges the

dominant discourse or content of the mainstream media (Moyo, 2007:87). Alternative media allows for an alternative public sphere for the expression of different and sometimes unconventional views. Although it operates in an alternative sphere, the views expressed here are relevant as they contribute to the creation of debate thus challenging the dominant discourse; as the small publics feed in to the main sphere. The public sphere is comprised of any and all locations, physical or virtual where ideas and feelings relevant to politics are transmitted or exchanged openly (Bennett and Entman, 2001:3).

The internet has helped *Nyasatimes* to publish stories that would not get coverage in the Malawian mainstream media. In this respect it manages to offer counter ideological views from those offered by the mainstream media. *Nyasatimes* therefore has an opportunity to enhance the debate in Malawi through bringing different aspects. It must however be noted that exposing critical and negative stories about government does not entail becoming the opposition press (Kasoma, 2000). It involves publishing pertinent stories that enable citizens the ability to critically scrutinise the events in their society. *Nyasatimes* has managed to broaden the public sphere by not only providing an alternative platform for information through the use of the internet but also offering alternative information from different sectors of society. In some instances, *Nyasatimes* has also set the agenda for publications like *The Daily Times* as it is always the first with breaking news due to its ability to update stories online as they happen. However the question of whether some stories will be covered by depends on the sensitivity of the stories.

It is not only through the stories that *Nyasatimes* offers an alternative public sphere but also its ability for the interaction of readers with the publication's contents. Robust debate on common affairs and free expression of views are factors that come in to play in the Habermasian public sphere (Poster, 2001:105). *Nyasatimes* allows its readers to comment on the various stories it publishes through on-line comments (similar to the letters pages in a print publication). These comments follow after every story. The public sphere has at its core the exchange of ideas like the ancient Greek agora (Poster, 2001:101).

The biggest difference is the interactivity that we are able to bring in our readers to blog the conversation or you may say join the conversation. *The Nation* and *The Daily Times* do not offer such facilities...ability to use Web2.0 features for sharing the stories with the World Wide Web by way of Digg, and Del.icio.us and email to a friend (e-mail correspondence with Edgar Msowoya, owner and Managing editor of *Nyasatimes*, 18 March, 2009).

Nyasatimes through its interactive features— the ability to let people comment on every story allows for debate on the issues. This allows for the engagement of people and giving them a sense of citizenship. By virtue of offering this forum *Nyasatimes* also enables people's opinions a public platform. This is unlike *The Daily Times* where comment is limited to a letters to the editor column, where the selection of the comments is itself a form of censorship or gate-keeping. The presence of the forum on *Nyasatimes* also allows for the gauging of views of people on a particular issue. In this way *Nyasatimes* helps engage citizens in debate and participate in contributing to democratic discourse.

Nyasatimes enjoys more press freedom as the current Malawian legislation does not address internet publishing. As noted from the interviews conducted with journalists, *Nyasatimes* can publish freely without fear of litigation through defamation and libel cases.

...It must be understood that the two publications operate in two mediums and environments and by different controls. *The Daily Times* is guided by media ethics of Malawi such that there are precautions before any article is published. On the other hand, sourcing for *Nyasatimes* is suspect; most of its reporters use pseudonyms (which guarantees them far much more freedom than *The Daily Times* whose reporters have to be identified by name); besides, as an on-line publication, *Nyasatimes* is not subject to the same restrictive (or regulatory) controls as *The Daily Times* (respondent 3, *The Daily Times*, 17 May, 2009).

As *Nyasatimes* uses the internet for publication, it is also able to publish stories as they break.

The website is updated as soon as there is news to post...e.g. in case of breaking news it will be as soon as it has happened or as it is happening ...refer to the way we covered the Malawi political parties conventions during the election of presidential candidates...it was done the way TV or Radio would do. ...call it live blogging or reporting! (E-mail correspondence with Edgar Msowoya, owner and Managing editor of *Nyasatimes*, 18 March, 2009).

This helps give people information thereby keeping them updated on events as they happen.

6.3.1 How *Nyasatimes* Falls Short Of the Public Sphere

The public sphere is not only about providing information. It is about providing accurate, credible information to help people make informed decisions. The quality of information that is in the public arena matters (Habermas, 2006:168). This becomes even more crucial when publishing on-line. A lot of hoaxes and rumours occur on the internet. It is thus vital for an on-line newspaper to establish itself as a credible source of news by following the standards of professional journalism. There were problems with *Nyasatimes* which undermine its credibility and affect its contribution to the public sphere and democracy. This section discusses some of these problems.

6.3.2 Grammatical Errors

Newspapers are the mirror of society. They have to be correct in not only the information they give but its presentation as well. Therefore occurrences such as spelling mistakes and grammatical errors raise the question of the credibility of the gate-keeper. There were a lot of grammatical errors in *Nyasatimes* which point to gaps in the checks and balances and the newsroom structure. The newsroom structure affects the content of a publication. The mistakes found in *Nyasatimes* speak to gaps in the structure of the newsroom. In a newsroom, news copy goes through a process before it is published and made available to the public. Copy written by one news worker is always edited by another person to enable for the identification of gaps and mistakes that might exist in a story (Bell: 1991:75). This is all part of the gate-keeping process; ensuring the quality of content. Some of the examples of the errors that raised questions of credibility in *Nyasatimes* are below.

...Chilumpha stopped from attending Parliament (*Nyasatimes*, 28 April, 2008). Senior Police officers in Lilongwe this morning stormed the residence of Vice President Dr Cassim Chilumpha to order not to attend the state opening of parliament by President Bingu Mutharika.

...Talks flop as Bingu threatens arrests, (*Nyasatimes*, 8 May, 2008). Chimango has found it tough going in handing business,

...Download the State evidence on Malawi coup plot (*Nyasatimes*, 16 May, 2008). in another evidence

Wilson (1996:52) notes accuracy in journalism should not be an editorial issue. Accuracy is not only about truth but also includes the lack of grammatical errors. Accuracy is one of the attributes of ethical and professional journalism (Kadhi, 1999 in Nyamnjoh, 2005:82). It is possible for a publication to make mistakes but in journalism they are not condoned. The mistakes lead to questions of quality, prestige and the credibility of a publication (Onadipe, 1998 in Nyamnjoh, 2005:94).

The cause of these mistakes is due to the approach to work by the *Nyasatimes* editor. He indicated there is no work schedule journalists adhere to:

No schedule...every journalist knows what to do. No pressure but of course we want to see performance from each one (e-mail correspondence with Edgar Msowoya, owner and Managing editor of *Nyasatimes*, 17 June, 2009).

This speaks to a lack of professionalism as there are no deadlines to adhere to. As journalists are able to submit copy at any time with no indication of deadlines it leads to copy not being adequately edited before publication.

6.3.3 Use of Anonymous Sources and Lack of By-lines

A publication may sometimes make use of anonymous sources as the information might be sensitive (Wilson, 1996:86). However anonymous sources should be used as a tip and credible sources should be found for publication. Singer (2007:46) notes the gate-keeping role of the media has been eroded by the emergence of the openness of the internet and the ability for anyone to publish. As such it is critical for on-line newspapers to ensure the information they give is correct. It is vital for an on-line publication to ensure it has credible sources. *Nyasatimes* tended to use anonymous sources generously as indicated below:

...Malawi ex-spy master held, Atupele house searched (*Nyasatimes*, 16 May, 2008), Government insiders, According to a police officer who confided to the Nyasa Times Acclaimed Human Rights campaigner, who declined to be named , The source said the search, wondered the activist.

...Bingu's referendum call trashed (*Nyasatimes*, 12 May, 2008), Another political scientist at Chancellor College, a constituent college of the University of Malawi, who refused to be named, described Mutharika's threats for a referendum as a " clear sign of confusion".

When a publication regularly uses phrases such as “highly placed sources”, “government sources”, “insiders” and “anonymous sources”, it erodes credibility. Readers speculate about the sources— are they real, made up or speculation and rumour. It also defeats the ideal of the public sphere and democracy as people do not know whose view is being expressed. The role of the media in a democracy is to create a public sphere by publishing the views of different stakeholders (Silverstone, 1999:147). Stakeholders need to be identified. However in circumstances where people express themselves or give information anonymously, it becomes hard for citizens to gauge the views of various stakeholders. The following observations made about Malawian media in 1994 apply to *Nyasatimes*.

Most stories are fictitious in nature, attributable sources are non-existent. In most cases where publications attempt to tell the truth, the sources usually wish to remain anonymous. The result is that a new media language has emerged that cites, for example, “a source within the organisation”, “information gathered”, or a source who “demands anonymity” (Jamieson, 2001:126).

When *Nyasatimes* fails to ensure it has concrete identifiable sources, it places *Nyasatimes* on par with on-line hack publications. The owner of the internet muckraker— the Drudge Report site, Matt Drudge acknowledged that only about 80 percent of the information he posted had verifiable

facts while the rest were rumour and gossip (Friend, 2007:19). The Drugde Report site case points to how the internet can be abused by news providers. People should trust an on-line news site as a credible source of information. Journalists have to help citizens make sense of information that is available and this means giving the right information to becoming sense makers. Journalists therefore have to regulate the quality of information that enters the public discourse. They have to help citizens determine what is not truthful, valuable and meaningful (Singer, 2007:46). Therefore by using anonymous sources *Nyasatimes* restricts the quality of debate and discourse on issues.

The other concern was the lack of by-lines for some stories. What emerged from *Nyasatimes* was the persistent use of the by-line “by Nyasatimes reporter” to mask the identity of the reporter. See **Malawi group wants House suspended, implement Section 65** (*Nyasatimes*, 2 May, 2008), **Malawi coup: Police probe Muluzi, no charge yet** (*Nyasatimes*, 26 May, 2008) and **Britain urges Malawi to hold free, fair polls** (*Nyasatimes*, 19 June, 2008).

Keeping in mind the Malawian socio-context, there might be several reasons for this. As indicated by *Nyasatimes* journalists, since they are seen as the opposition press, they mask their identities when approaching government sources for fear of reprisals and intimidation. The use of pseudonyms points to an element of fear as journalists are unable to reveal themselves to the public. It is also possible *Nyasatimes* might consist of less people than portrayed who make use of pseudonyms. There might be inadequate personnel. Thus there might be some mainstream journalists moonlighting for *Nyasatimes* who choose to be anonymous and the same journalists using several pseudonyms for stories. The political affiliations of Malawian newspapers are the genesis for this practice. The Malawi Media Council Media Monitoring Project in 2001 observed that:

...To escape being found out and to perpetuate an unethical approach to reporting, many publishers have allowed their publications to be used by “stringers” who use pseudonyms and embark on a campaign to “mudslings” and castigate opposition players (Jamieson, 2001:129).

This practice in turn affects the quality of information presented to the public. Currently only one journalist from *Nyasatimes* has had his stories accompanied with a by-line accompanied and a picture.

It is important for readers to put a face to the name. *Nyasatimes* can do this is through ensuring that the journalists have pictures with their stories. Moyo (2007:97) commenting on emerging Zimbabwean news websites noted that the lack of by-lines and use pseudonyms of led to

unprofessional journalism in some instances. It leads to the writing of unbalanced, unsubstantiated and often highly opinionated stories that are passed as journalistic writing.

6.2.4 Use of Opinions and Speculation

The internet has led to the return of a point-of-view style of news writing (Friend, 2007:13). In other instances *Nyasatimes* tended to speculate and use opinionated writing. An example is presented below:

Download the State evidence on Malawi coup plot (*Nyasatimes*, 16 May, 2008). Mtumodzi is a son of a retired police officer Mr BB Mtumodzi widely believed to have killed so many political activists outside Malawi during the Kamuzu Banda era.

Speculation and opinionated writing stems from the ownership patterns of the media in Malawi. Most publications in Malawi are politically affiliated and therefore allow themselves to be used as pawns by political parties. It becomes necessary to place in the public arena ideological views through opinionated writing blended into news articles. It is a cause for concern when a publication presents speculation as fact¹². *Nyasatimes* came across as affiliated to the former ruling now opposition party United Democratic Front (UDF). This led to *Nyasatimes* at times falling in the trap of opposition press.

The use of opinionated sensationalised emotional pieces more than reasoned writing has been identified as one of the failures of the independent press in Africa after the second wave of democracy (Kasoma, 2000:46). However *Nyasatimes* is aware of its perception by the public. Journalists from *Nyasatimes* shared the sentiment of being viewed as the opposition when asked how easy it was to approach sources:

The most obvious one is being a *Nyasatimes* reporter – I am deemed as an opposition (affiliated to the UDF party) and it's hard to access information related to government and other sources that support President Mutharika's administration and his DPP. Note that other sources might not be pro-government and DPP or anti-opposition, but the fact that *Nyasatimes* is regarded as a Government of Malawi and its leadership's critic, they would not want to talk to you fearing they would be branded anti-Mutharika and his administration (respondent 5, *Nyasatimes*, 18 May, 2009).

Another cause for opinionated writing could be due to the fact that *Nyasatimes* is edited by the owner. From this perspective, the editor has a personal stake in what goes out on the website. The agenda lies with the reasons why the news site was setup in the first place. All the mistakes

¹² There are many people who are alleged to have committed various atrocities during the Banda era. A commission of inquiry was never set up and it is only speculations that exist on the acts and involvement of various individuals.

from *Nyasatimes* are best summed up by the Malawi Media Council Media Monitoring Project's observation on the media in Malawi:

...Because of the nature of some editorial policies in some of these newspapers that in earnest seek to vindicate their political ideals and simultaneously launch misinformation campaigns, they have chosen to hide their identifies as reflected by authors using pseudonyms. It is a known fact that some journalists work for other newspapers but write for other newspapers under false names. There is a clear misinformation campaign, some sensational reporting and strong biases in some publications mostly in favour of political masters" (Jamieson, 2001: 129).

All the above factors raised in this statement and in the content of *Nyasatimes* speak to the issue of ethics. Ethics here is defined as an ability to make sound moral decisions in journalism performance (Ukpabi, 2001:13). Ethics is simply what is good and bad, as well as moral duty and obligation (Singer and Friend, 2007: xv). *Nyasatimes* has to understand its role in democracy as more than informing the public but also being ethical itself. *Nyasatimes* therefore falls short of its role as a tool for broadening the public sphere and offering an alternative space for discussion of critical issues as the above factors play a central role.

6.4 Coup Plot Story Coverage

It was important for the study to illuminate the elements that manifest themselves in the coverage of the coup plot. This is the event the research focused on to gauge the level of press freedom in Malawi for both traditional media and on-line publishing. In analysing the coverage of the coup plot story in *The Daily Times* and *Nyasatimes*, key elements appear which will be discussed and interpreted in this section.

6.4.1 The Daily Times Coup Plot Coverage

Malawi was under authoritarian rule for a period of more than thirty years and only adopted democratic system of government in 1994. As indicated in Chapter Two, the media environment during the one party rule was restrictive. Every word in newspapers was cross-checked with authority (Barton, 1979:165). Malawi was a closed society with secrecy as the order of the day. The word "coup" did not exist in the Malawian journalists' vocabulary and the use of such words was not encouraged (Chimombo and Chimombo, 1996:25). Questioning of authority simply did not happen. There are key features which manifest themselves in the content of *The Daily Times* which when analysed against this background speak to a degree of press freedom existing.

Representation in the news is a constructive practice as events are not communicated neutrally (Fowler, 1991:25). As indicated, most of the stories in *The Daily Times* were objective

towards government with criticism embedded in the text. Although the stories appeared objective, they had some critical elements. The same can be seen with *The Daily Times*' coverage of the coup plot. The key event that started the chain of events as indicated in Chapter Five is **Muluzi risks treason charges** (*The Daily Times*: 1, May 12, 2008). "Treason" is a word that in any circumstance would cause alarm. It implies an enemy of the state therefore making this a serious story for the reader and to be treated as such by a journalist. What emerged in the presentation in this story and the coup plot coverage was the continuation of the tug-of-war between government and the opposition. It was the president now using the state to deal with a threat that had escalated beyond control. This article prepared the nation for the events that were to soon follow. With this story criticism was in the form of the comments that come from other sources on the president's remarks:

..."We have always said the President needs to use diplomacy when talking about these issues".

Language is one way that the media choose to communicate the importance of a story and its implications to the reader (Bell, 1991:3). *The Daily Times* chose to use a quote in which the president was being accused of a lack of diplomacy in his conduct. Fowler (1991:124) notes newspapers can say one thing while subliminally implying the other. The carrying of comments on the president's remarks speaks to a degree of press freedom as authority in Malawi was never questioned. The ability of the journalists to seek alternative sources brings the element of questioning the president's remarks and allegations and thus indicates a degree of press freedom. The journalists through seeking comments on the president's remarks could be interpreted in some societies and indeed in Malawi under the Banda regime as questioning the president's authority-subversion. The critical approach found in the story can also be interpreted as a lack of fear on the journalists' part as the story could have ended with only the president's remarks. This is especially so as the comments that follow are explosive. They describe the president's threats as "nasty". In this way *The Daily Times* constructed this story as an attempt by the president to silence his critics. This therefore helped allay panic in the public when the actual arrests of people occurred.

The Daily Times in **Muluzi risks treason charges** (May 12, 2008), did not parrot the president's comments. Instead it also related the impending arrests to other events in the past. It tied in for the reader the genesis of the impending arrests. *The Daily Times* related the looming arrests to the rule of law under president Mutharika through the use of:

...If Muluzi is charged with treason, he would be the second under Mutharika's regime after Vice-President Cassim Chilumpha who is accused of hiring assassins to kill the president.

The newspaper through linking of past events and relating them to current events speaks to a particular ideology the newspaper has. In this instance it might signal to society to question the rule of law in the country as the public was pointed in that direction.

The thread of critically presenting and questioning information can be seen throughout the coverage of the coup plot in *The Daily Times*. Other occurrences include instances such as on May 14, 2008, with **Coup Plot: Chimbayo, Aironi, 5 others netted, Muluzi under House arrest**. This highlighted the arrest of the coup plotters while noting that it came “barely two days after Mutharika said former president Bakili Muluzi was plotting to overthrow his government on May 16”. The practice of referring to past events in newspapers is a way to contextualise events for the reader (Hall *et al*, 1978:54). It is one of the ways in which events are assigned meaning by the media. In the same article *The Daily Times* noted that the treason allegations were a product of “cooked up intelligence”.

In **State presents Evidence**, on May 16, 2008, *The Daily Times* reported the proceedings at the court house as they developed. It reported the evidence presented by the state in court as reason for their detention in court was:

... illegible as some words or letters were missing in some places and the photocopies not signed as to true copies of the original.

The Daily Times unlike *Nyasatimes* was objective in its presentation of the court proceedings. The same objective trend emerged throughout the coup coverage in *The Daily Times* in articles such as **Army will not try brigadiers** (*The Daily Times*, 22 May, 2008), **Muluzi under House arrest** (*The Daily Times*, 26 May, 2008) and **Police stop UDF March** (*The Daily Times*, 28 May, 2008).

Access to information in the coup plot coverage in *The Daily Times* was balanced as journalists were present during the arrests or had information about the arrests. It was not through rumours that people learnt of the arrests of people but confirmed authoritative figures such as police sources. *The Daily Times* was professional in its coverage which is a crucial aspect in such an event. On the other hand, the coup plot was a big story for government to censor the media on. Government needed the media to inform the people as to reasons for the events. Although *The Daily Times* enjoyed press freedom in terms of the coup plot coverage, it was also a case of the media being used for the convenience of government’s agenda.

6.4.2 *Nyasatimes* Coup Plot Coverage

Nyasatimes had the advantage of publishing on-line and therefore more freedom to present the coup plot story critically. However it was unable to fulfil this role. While *The Daily Times* was professional in its approach to the coup plot by giving facts for the maintenance of public order, *Nyasatimes*' coverage was striving for the opposite effect. The coup plot coverage *Nyasatimes* was biased. The language used in the reporting of the coup plot in *Nyasatimes* informs the stand of the publication on the event. The words used in the first story about arrests in *Nyasatimes* were aimed at causing panic, alarm and instilling sympathy in the public at the persecution of 'innocent people'. This is demonstrated in **Police raid Muluzi's BCA**, (*Nyasatimes*, 14 May, 2008).

Armed to the teeth Malawi Police Mobile Force Wednesday raided the residence of former president Dr Bakili Muluzi, at BCA in Blantyre to search in the wake of wave of arrest over coup claims by President Bingu Mutharika.

Labels and words in the media convey a particular meaning to the reader (Hall *et al*, 1978). Words such as "armed to the teeth" "raided" and "wave of arrests" are severe. The use of such words can cause panic. Most independent media in Africa frighten rather than reassure their readers (Nyamnjoh, 2005:59). The media has a responsibility in society to ensure that it reports responsibly. *Nyasatimes* went further to note the "raid" came "in the wake of waves of arrests over coup claims by President Bingu Mutharika".

The word coup in itself invokes a sense of panic in people. However *Nyasatimes* tended to downplay the severity of the event. In **Download the State evidence on Malawi coup plot**, (16 May, 2008), *Nyasatimes* claimed that the "Malawi government has presented to High Court two doggy documents as part of its evidence in the coup allegations..." The publication further offered the evidence for download. Part of this evidence was termed:

" the hand written document has some text missing and 'funny' enough talks about a meeting which was held in June 2008, a date not yet come....."

Nyasatimes' presentation of the coup plot was emotional, opinionated, and sensational. In **Malawi ex-spy master held, Atupele house searched** (16 May, 2008) *Nyasatimes* presented:

... as government continues to harass Malawi's former Head of State, Dr. Bakili Muluzi and his family members, a truckload of heavily armed policemen on Friday morning also stormed the house of Machinga East Parliamentarian, Atupele Muluzi in Blantyre in their endless "search for arms".

The story continued with no identifiable sources:

Government insiders told Nyasa Times that several houses of senior UDF officials will be searched in the course of the week.

The source said the search is an effort to establish enough grounds to arrest Muluzi on the alleged treason charges.

Acclaimed Human Rights campaigner, who declined to be named, described this development as a ploy to harass the family of the former head of state by the Mutharika administration.

Although the story might have contained some truth, the lack of identifiable sources especially on the issue of the impending house searches and the statement on harassment undermined its credibility. The issue of media being partisan and politically affiliated despite being independent was reflected in *Nyasatimes*' coverage of the coup plot. A *Nyasatimes* journalist admitted it was exaggerated.

...*Nyasatimes*, provided readers the true picture of the whole episode, though at some point they were some few exaggerations (*Nyasatimes* journalist).

The coverage of the coup plot by *Nyasatimes* was a ridicule of the event. This is reflected in **Desperate Mutharika seeks British intervention on Nyasa Times** (28 May, 2008):

Irked with revelations on the cooked up dossier for the coup fantasy which Nyasa Times exposed, President Bingu Mutharika is seeking the intervention of the British government to deal with editorial directors of the internet publication, Britain has confirmed.

Mutharika, according to State House sources, instructed the people mentioned in Nyasa Times articles to have cooked up the coup dossier, to seek guidance from British High Commission in Lilongwe on what to do with editorial directors of Nyasa Times based in the UK.

As indicated, most of *Nyasatimes* coverage of government was critical. Keeping this in mind, the reporting of the coup plot was in line with the schema associated with this publication. A schema is a chunk of unconscious knowledge, shared with in a group of people and drawn upon in the process of making sense of the world (Fowler, 1991:43). Therefore people reading content from *Nyasatimes* would be aware of this and might also expect this in the coup plot coverage.

6.4.3 Conclusion

In assessing the coup plot coverage, *The Daily Times* was a more credible source than *Nyasatimes*. If one read of a coup story from the internet (*Nyasatimes*), one would be weary of repeating it to another person. This is especially true where evidence cannot be provided with an

on-line newspaper lest the individual be arrested as the instigator of the coup¹³. With traditional newspapers however, one is assured that most people have seen the story as a newspaper is easily and immediately accessible.

Another reason for the trust in *The Daily Times* is that it is a publication of long standing. Silverstone (1999:120) notes that media are abstract systems which we learn to trust. Trust is based on the vicissitudes of history and circumstance. *The Daily Times* by virtue of being a newspaper that has more than 100 years in publishing history in Malawi has more credibility despite some constraints (Rap 21, 2003). People tend to believe a publication that has a history and is long established in a country. On the other hand *Nyasatimes* is a new publication operating in a new medium which people are only learning to trust. The lack of trust in on-line newspapers is reflected in an American research on the credibility of on-line news sites. Payne *et al* (2001) found that people believe traditional news more than internet news. This was the case even for trusted publications such as the *Wall Street Journal*, *The New York Times*, and *The Los Angeles Times* on-line versions. The new media's invitation for trust already presents a problem as it is unfamiliar territory (Silverstone, 1999:123). We are used to believing something we can touch physically like a newspaper. It is not as abstract as the internet. *Nyasatimes* by virtue of publishing on-line, a medium that is new to most people does not enjoy the same credibility as *The Daily Times*. *Nyasatimes* therefore needs to consolidate its image¹⁴.

From the results it can be seen that *Nyasatimes'* political affiliations and ethical shortcomings only serve to undermine its credibility further. Although *Nyasatimes* enjoys more press freedom by virtue of publishing on-line as compared to *The Daily Times*, *Nyasatimes* has to build its image to gain the level of trust and credibility *The Daily Times* enjoys.

This chapter discussed the findings from the study and their implications on press freedom. The next chapter presents the conclusion with theoretical reflections in the study. It will also attempt to show how the results relate to literature regarding the public sphere, press freedom and democracy.

¹³ The *Nyasatimes* website has been modified several times since its inception. Every time it is redesigned, its archives are lost therefore making it hard to prove the existence of particular stories.

¹⁴ Many people do not want to be associated with reading *Nyasatimes* in Malawi as it is seen as the opposition press; reading of this publication is automatically interpreted as being a supporter of the opposition.

7. Chapter- Seven Conclusion

7.1 Introduction

This research conducted an exploratory investigation to establish the impact the internet has had on the public sphere, press freedom and democracy in Malawi. It used a case study approach by focusing on *The Daily Times* (a traditional publication) and *Nyasatimes* (an on-line publication) through analysing the level of press freedom in the coverage of the 2008 coup plot in Malawi.

Chapter One of the study introduced the research. It presented why it was necessary for the area of internet publishing in Malawi in relation to the public sphere, democracy and press freedom should be studied. The chapter also outlined the research problem, the aims and the significance of the study. The methods that the study was going to use to address the research problem were also presented.

Chapter Two of the research introduced and discussed literature related to the study. It showed how the public sphere was an important concept in the study and its relation to the media and democracy. The chapter also briefly outlined the history of Malawi with focus on the political-social environment for an understanding of the discourse that has shaped the Malawian media. Related to this was the history of *The Daily Times*, one of the publications this research focused on.

Chapter Three of the study explored literature related to the internet, in terms of both its promises and pessimistic outlook. The chapter attempted to show how the internet has affected the public sphere and democracy and its impact on journalism. The chapter also discussed on-line newspapers and regimes of censorship on-line and why on-line publishing could overcome some impediments to press freedom. The chapter also outlined the information society in Malawi and the background of *Nyasatimes* the other publication in the study.

Chapter Four, the research methods and procedures chapter presented the methods that were employed in the research. The chapter outlined the theoretical underpinning for the use of combined methods in the form of qualitative content analysis and semi-structured interviews in the study. The chapter also showed how the use of these methods helped address the research problem and goals of the study.

Chapter Five presented the research data with a focus on the two newspapers in the study; *The Daily Times* and *Nyasatimes*. The results were presented using themes that emerged from the

qualitative content analysis and the semi-structured interviews conducted via e-mail. The chapter also focused on the coverage of the coup plot by both newspapers to analyse the level of press freedom.

Chapter Six discussed the findings with focus on the research problem. The results from both the qualitative content analysis and semi-structured interviews with journalists were used for informed discussions and interpretations for the study. The chapter also discussed some of the trends in Malawian media that emerged from the study.

7.2 Theoretical Reflections

The public sphere is essential for the maintenance of democracy (Lichtenberg, 1990:102). In modern democratic societies, the public sphere is mediated by the media through conveying the views of various players in society. In this way it allows for the solicitation and formation of public opinion on various issues. The internet has been posited as an enabling tool that can help the media transcend the challenges the media faces in terms of press freedom by challenging the authority of institutions of power (Livingstone, 2005:16). From the study, it can be seen that *Nyasatimes* as on-line publication enjoys more press freedom than *The Daily Times* as reflected in the coup plot coverage. The internet has affected the Malawian media landscape through offering ways to transcend traditional barriers to press freedom.

Dahlgren (1995:128) notes democracy requires the active participation of citizens. People have to contribute to debates on their society. *Nyasatimes* offers its readers the opportunity to comment on the stories it carries thereby enabling citizens to engage in debate. The forum serves as communicative space where citizens can discuss various issues thereby participate in some form in a democratic nation. This opportunity to comment on various issues in society through the *Nyasatimes* website is a welcome development for the Malawian public sphere as it was restricted for so long. The availability of such venues for self expression can lead to a culture of free expression, openness and tolerance and thus entrench democratic values in the country.

Although *Nyasatimes* was associated with the opposition (see Chapter Six); it can not be discarded as insignificant as it offers alternative views. Keane (1991:86) argues democracy requires various types of public spheres to exist. The existence of *Nyasatimes* acts as a compliment to *The Daily Times*. It serves to help people determine what they think the truth is as it contributes to the marketplace of information.

It can therefore be said that *Nyasatimes* has provided space for 'digital democracy'. Hacker and van Dijk (2000:1) describe digital democracy as collective attempts to practise democracy without the limits of space, time and other conditions using information and communication technology (ICT). Such vibrant discourse can only lead to enhancing and enriching democratic values as different players learn to respect each other's viewpoints which are out in the open. It can also allay voter apathy as with various views published, people have access to information and know what is going on in their country. This can instil a sense of civic engagement among people in the events that happening in their country as compared to a scenario where information the public should consume is predetermined by factors such as self-censorship or political and financial intimidation through advertising revenue freezes. Thus we can see that *Nyasatimes* through its use of the internet is contributing to press freedom in Malawi as it allows for unrestricted publication of views.

For the public sphere to play its role in a democracy, the criticisms and debates must be recognised by government (Sparks, 2001 in Dahlgren, 2005:152). The public sphere must be linked to the centres of decision making. From the results, it was established that journalists from *Nyasatimes* have problems gaining access to government sources and the newspaper is viewed as an opposition mouthpiece. If government is ignoring the contributions by *Nyasatimes*, it defeats its contribution to the public sphere and democracy. A public sphere per-se is not a guarantee of democracy if it is not recognised. Although *Nyasatimes* enjoys more freedom to publish, as has been shown in the study, it needs to gain credibility. *Nyasatimes'* political affiliations undermine its credibility and ability to reach all aspects of society. Other factors also affecting *Nyasatimes'* credibility included its inability to practice ethical and professional journalism through identifying credible sources and identifying its reporters.

However the other factors that exist that undermine *Nyasatimes'* ability to contribute to an expansion of the Malawian public space fall in to the digital divide category (Rogers, 2001). They include factors such as access in terms of computers, skills and electricity. As indicated in Chapter Two, only 0.4 percent per 100 people in Malawi has access to the internet Therefore it can be said that although *Nyasatimes* offers an alternative public sphere, it is an elitist sphere as it marginalises people with no access to information technology in Malawi, which is the majority of the population. It however has been argued that in Africa connectivity to the internet only takes an individual acting as a node for other people to be connected (Nyamnjoh, 2005:205). However the results from

Chapter Six have shown that one would be wary of repeating the content found on the *Nyasatimes* website for personal safety.

7.3 Recommendations

Traditional publications such as *The Daily Times* should perhaps not be written off yet because of the constraints they currently face. Many people rely on traditional media in Malawi. Despite its failure to reach all parts of the country, old copies of newspapers still manage to circulate in the rural areas albeit late, through travelling people, if they can read. Traditional media are also better at expanding awareness of issues than on-line publications as they direct their readers to the important stories through the paper (de Waal, 2008:5).

As such it is imperative that both areas of on-line and traditional press freedom should be addressed as one entity. New media should not be seen in isolation of old media, neither should press freedom be seen in dualistic terms (Berger, 2007:11). The lack of press freedom in traditional media can affect on-line publications as it speaks to a particular discourse. It should not be taken for granted that the internet cannot be censored as governments are finding new ways of controlling what is accessible to people on-line every day¹⁵. As such it is vital to focus not only on ways to enhance access to on-line publications but also to ensure that traditional publications enjoy as much press freedom as *Nyasatimes* does at the moment. This section therefore offers some recommendations to this effect.

7.3.1 Professionalism- a Factor in Press Freedom

As seen from the results, *Nyasatimes* tended to be politically affiliated to the opposition. However a recommendation that publications should not be politically affiliated is unrealistic as most publications tend to support one ideology or another. It is therefore realistic to recommend that publications declare their allegiance so people are aware of their affiliations. Another way is for publications to practice professionalism by maintaining objectivity and ethical coverage for credibility.

¹⁵ During my vacation in December 2008, it was impossible to access the *Nyasatimes* on any given day in Malawi, as error pages were the only result. When I returned to South Africa, the site loaded with no problems at all. A colleague of mine currently in China also indicated that the site is blocked there. It would seem that government is working in the background to limit access to the site through Internet Service Providers and diplomatic partners.

7.3.2 Legislation and Media Self-Regulation for Press Freedom

The sentiment expressed by the journalists in the study of the need for an Access to Information Bill needs to be addressed. The Access to Information bill draft was drawn up in 2003 by Media Institute of Southern Africa in conjunction with other civil society organisations (Sentala, 2008:2). However government has been reluctant to table the bill in parliament. Such a law if passed would provide for the right of access to information thereby ensuring transparency and accountability among public authorities. Such a law would ensure that journalists can approach anyone in public office and indeed corporate organisations for information in the public interest.

Nevertheless the enactment of legislation alone is not a guarantee for press freedom. As seen although the Malawian Constitution guarantees press freedom, it is not reflected practice. Commitment from government for democratic values and procedures is the main factor that determines the level of press freedom in any country. Dahlgren (2000:337) notes that democracy cannot function if virtues such as tolerance and willingness to follow democratic principles and procedures do not have grounding in everyday life. As such other measures have to be formulated to ensure press freedom.

One solution to the problem of press freedom is for media self-regulation (Ogbondah, 2002:76). This is in line with Blake's observation (1997 in Nyamnjoh 2005:269) that the media should be engaged with government and other bodies in the formulation of legislation pertaining to press freedom. This can be done through the formation of a media council. Such organisations work better when formulated by journalists as to being imposed by government. A media council can adjudicate disputes between media representatives over ethical issues (Ogbondah, 2002). It also leads to professionalism in journalism as standards and principles are established which all media bodies agree to. The existence of a media self-monitoring body also offers not only government but the community a channel through which to address grievances about the press. For the media, it offers them a chance to work as one entity to address the challenges they face on matters of legislation and other issues.

In Malawi, the Media Council of Malawi (MCM) was established in 1996 (MCM, 2008). It however disintegrated and was resuscitated in February 2007. The aim of MCM is to maintain and promote the status of journalism as a profession in Malawi. It is hoped the resuscitation of MCM will lead to a change in the media landscape in Malawi as it will address issues dealing with unethical journalism and media legislation.

7.4 Areas for Further Research

This study as indicated was a case study. It hoped to understand new phenomenon in an exploratory way. It wanted to investigate the level of press freedom on-line compared to traditional media through the use of the coup plot. However, *Nyasatimes* is the first exclusively on-line publication in Malawi. As such it needs to be studied further for insight on the sustenance of such media projects in Africa. As the study found that *Nyasatimes* was viewed as oppositional to government due to its political affiliations, it would be necessary to conduct a study to determine its impact and perception in Malawian society. Such a study would seek to investigate:

- If people view *Nyasatimes* as a credible news source.
- The readership of the publication.
- The newsroom structure of *Nyasatimes* and how coordination between the editor in Britain and Malawi is managed for news content and the effects of this on the publication.
- What comments people make on the *Nyasatimes* forum.
- The interactive nature of *Nyasatimes* and investigate if the comments are critical and rational or fall into the category of flaming as has been stated of most on-line forums in America (Papacharissi, 2004: 269).

7.5 Conclusion

This study set out to investigate if the internet is helping Malawian media transcend traditional barriers to press freedom and in turn enhancing democracy through the expansion of the public sphere. The study also set out to find out the impact of the internet on the Malawian media landscape. From the results of the study, it can be seen that press freedom in Malawi exists and can only be enhanced by the presence of on-line newspapers such as *Nyasatimes*. The presence of more sources of information is desirable for a vibrant democracy. However the existence of alternative public spheres is important but only if they are tied in to the democratic structures present.

However the internet can only amplify cultural trends present in a society and not magically transform it (Hagen, 2000:65). As such the socio-political environment has to be underpinned in democratic values for the internet's use as a technology of freedom.

APPENDIX 1

E-mail Correspondence with Edgar Msowoya, Owner and Managing Editor of *Nyasatimes*. 18 March, 2009

Good day,
my apologies for taking so long to get in touch with you again. I have some questions for you for now for some information I need about the paper. They are below

How many journalists that is both professional and citizen journalists if you have any do you currently employ.

We have 5 fulltime journalists and about 13 citizen journalists.

Roughly how widespread is your readership.

widely read in Malawi accounting to over 60% and the Diaspora in UK, USA
RSA, and other countries like Botswana, Mozambique, Kenya, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Nigeria,
Norway, Sweden.

How many hits do you get a day for the site/ articles?

On a monthly basis we average 8 million hits and a daily hit-rate of about 300,000. Weekends are fairly down as you will understand the majority of the people do not have access at home.

Popular stories are a work of our internal coding which we have tweaked in the system that it calculates the hits per each article.

How have you differentiated your product from Nation and The Daily Times?

The biggest difference is the interactivity that we are able to bring in our readers to blog the conversation or you may say join the conversation. Nation and DT do not offer such facilities...ability to use Web2.0 features for sharing the stories with the world wide web by way of Digg, and Del.icio.us and email to a friend.

Readers were able to vote for NT as the best news website in Malawi during the 2008 Malawi Web Awards because they feel being part of the news writing process.

What is your recruitment and training scheme for journalists like?

Journalists recruited are given a crash course and materials on online journalism. Most of the materials have been sources from BBC Online, and Reuters. We however, intend to start sponsoring journalists on various training programmes continentally and overseas.

What term do you use for your journalists (I came across some site in Korea where they had their own term, hence the question).

Correspondents is the preferred term to us.

How many articles on average per day do you publish?

Averages 10 articles per day but can be more and less over a weekend.

How many times is the site updated?

The website is updated as soon as there is news to post...eg in case of breaking news it will be as soon as it has happened or as it is happening ...refer to the way we covered the Malawi political

parties conventions during the election of presidential candidates...it was done the way TV or Radio would do. ...call it Live blogging or reporting!

What are the rules of engagement on the comments on the stories? What system do you have in place?

As a newspaper that incorporates convectional journalism and citizen journalism we tend to limit less on blocking readers comments...otherwise the more we did this ...we would not be different from Nation or DT and others. The Comments Management System has bad words filters built in such that we collect any bad language and put them in the system such that if any word has been used...a comment can be either blocked or it will be shown with *****. For example words like galu or chitsiru will be flagged. Comments can either be switched on for admin approval or straight entry posting.

How many sites (and if you can name them) are you aware of that reproduce your content (I know of Malawiana and Malawitalk), any other you are aware of.

Well NyasaNet which is same as malawiTalk they do that on a daily basis....but there are far too many sites that caputre content from our website ...a quick search for Nyasatimes would be able to give you a big number of them.

Kind regards,

**E-mail Correspondence with Edgar Msowoya, Owner and Managing Editor of Nyasatimes.
17 June, 2009**

Good day

I see you have updated the website, I was just wondering why as the old design was not bad at all.

The reason for updating the website is to allow freshness and implement other interactive tools. We do not like the idea of our readers being used to or memorising the design.

I also wanted to find out if you have offices in Malawi where the journalists submit their offices. Our journalists in malawi work from home. We do not have an official office only operate a virtual office in the Trade Fair Grounds. This was due to the fact that the State was not happy with our reportage and journalists or staff could be a target of intimidation and oppression even jailments.

also as you are the editor and not physically available in Malawi, how are assignments distributed, how do you liaise with your journalists to know what is lined up for the day.

I am not necessarily the editor but Managing Editor/ Owner and CEO and truly am based in the United Kingdom. Assignments are distributed via emails, sms, and telephone. most of our journalists have understood our ethos and values hence it is so easy for them to find their own areas to pursue. As regards, to lineup, we operate differently, as we only have virtual newsroom which is a big contract from the traditional media houses.

Letely, we are have developed a proper virtual newsroom where we meet if need be to update each other on critical areas to pursue. It is still being developed to meet all our need like abilities to route messages to mobile phones.

What is the typical day schedule at Nyasatimes?

No schedule..every journalist knows what to do. No pressure but of course we want to see performance from each.

Also how are you funded? private, wellwishers.

Nyasa Times is funded by myself ...and is funded by myself. We have not sought any help from any equity finance companies, donors and wellwishers.

How do you keep up your revenue stream for the running of the website and salaries?

Nyasa Times monetizes its traffic by way of advertisements ..as you can see...mostly from overseas traders based in Japan... the money they pay helps to fund salaries and other running costs. We also run Google Adsense ads based on Pay Per Click (PPC). These revenues are helping in brigging the gap between funding.

Do you have offices in the UK?

Yes, we have an office in UK based in Leeds. But cant tell you exactly where.

APPENDIX 2

Theme Sheet for Newspapers- National /Front Page News

P.K 2009

Newspaper

Date.....

Number of sources:

Main source: (a) Government (b) Opposition (c) Clergy (d) NGOs (e) other body

Other sources: (a) Government (b) Opposition (c) Clergy (d) NGOs (e) other body

Slant: (a) Critical towards government (b) Supportive towards government (c) Objective

Themes

a) **Muluzi**

1. Faces treason over remarks on Section 65
2. His workers evicted
3. Under house arrest
4. Fails to settle Metro bill
5. Police raid home
6. Police harassment

b) **Mutharika**

1. His government is ordained by God
2. Attacks Muluzi/ opposition
3. Calls for dialogue with opposition
4. Under fire from Namisa (National institute of journalists on Malawi)
5. Refuses discussion of Section 65 in parliament
6. His Calls for a referendum on Section 65 squashed
7. Refuses to discuss questions on his health
8. Receives petition over Malawi's help in Zimbabwe arms clearing
9. Seeks to shut down Nyasatimes
10. Renames Army Barracks
11. Threatens arrests of opposition

c) Peace Talks

1. SADC discussions on Malawi Parliament impasse
2. NGOs discussion on Malawi Parliament impasse dissatisfaction with Mutharika
3. Tembo from opposition wants to hold talks with Mutharika
4. Commentators want all political party leaders to meet for discussion
5. Peace talks flop

d) Parliament- government vs Opposition in Parliament

1. Cancellation due to Section 65 saga
2. Declaration of vacant seats due to Section 65
3. No passing of budget due to Section 65
4. Debate over quorum in house
5. Conflict in laws
6. Speaker to clear the air on Section 65
7. Walkout of parliament by opposition
8. Opposition boycott budget opening
9. Government in court over Section 65
10. Chilumpha stopped from going to parliament

e) Non-governmental organisations

1. Concern over local polls
2. Concern over state of impasse between government and opposition in parliament
3. Unhappy with Mutharika over parliament agenda
4. Want section 65 implemented
5. Concern over media freedom. Call for media freedom/ freedom of speech
6. Concern over Malawi human rights record- rule of law
7. Concern over Malawi prison conditions
8. Call for fair elections
9. Approve Aid funding
10. Comments on Constitutional matters- Presidential term limits

f) Corruption

1. Resurgence of Muluzi's involvement in Fieldyork case and Aleke Banda (used as an attack on opposition)
2. Government shielding its own people
3. Police cover up involvement in armed robbery

g) Treason/ Coup

1. Arrests of Army suspects
2. Army requests release of suspects
3. State presents evidence
4. No court martial by army
5. Evidence available to public

h) Voter Registration/ MEC

1. Warning over voter apathy due to false campaign promises

i) Hunger

1. Government denies the existence of hunger in the country
2. Call for minister to resign over denial of hunger in the country

j) United Democratic Front Party

1. Stopped from holding protest march

k) Clergy

1. Want parliament to adjourn
2. Meet Muluzi for peace talks suggestions

l) Human interest

1. Trade fair
2. International award received for Malawi/Malawian for achievement
3. Health care- Malawians shunning government hospitals because of service

r) Other themes

1. Financial Aid from China
2. Malawi Parliament criticised by British MPs
3. Malawi embassy probes attacks on Malawians in South Africa
4. Sports

APPENDIX 3

E-mail Responses from Semi-Structured Interviews with Journalists

Respondent 1 *The Daily Times*

14 May, 2009

Interview guide for Journalists in Malawi.

2009.P.K

Dear Sir/Madam,

My name is Penelope Kakhobwe, a Rhodes University student.

I am undertaking research on press freedom in Malawi, with a focus on *Nyasatimes* and *The Daily Times*.

By copy of this letter I am requesting you to be one of my respondents. I would kindly request you to answer the questions regarding media freedom in Malawi as truthfully and as completely as you can.

Your participation in this interview is completely voluntary, and you can pull out at any time. If you wish to take part, your identity will be confidential with the findings only used for research purposes only.

Thank you.

1. Please indicate publication you work for.

Blantyre Newspapers Limited. I write for all the three papers, namely *The Daily Times*, Malawi News and The Sunday Times; however, my focus is The Sunday Times first, and the rest later.

2. What has been the role of the media in Malawi since democracy?

Primarily, the Malawi media serve to inform, educate and entertain. However, going by the three sub-roles and in relation to democracy, the Malawi media have played a major role in shaping up the political landscape by communicating what could be termed the truth about issues.

For instance, the media have informed the populace about the good and bad things about various political systems during which process they assist the masses in making informed decisions during an election.

Succinctly, the Malawi media have assisted in explaining democracy by linking those seeking elected office and the electorate. In this case, the media carry what those seeking office promise to the voters and the wishes of the voters to the politician, mainly through the letters to the editor.

The media have further brought information to the voters of those seeking public office by profiling them. This has helped voters to know those seeking office.

Further, the Malawi media have also acted as watchdogs, checking ills those in office commit. To this effect, the Malawi media have exposed corrupt practices involving office bearers, and to this effect, most of the successes in government's fight against corruption started with the media carrying stories on the practices.

The media have also helped in promoting rule of law by exposing various constitutional violations involving those in power.

3. Do you think the press is free to publish?

No. There is a lot of influence from outside forces.

Firstly, the Malawi media is controlled by advertisers, who are major sources of income for the media. In this case, advertisers have committed ills in society, and the media have been aware of such ills. However, they cannot tackle such ills basically under the fear that they would shut the income taps for these media. I remember a colleague saying that after seeking a response from a businessman who had apparently committed an ill, the latter retorted: “Do you know that I am a major advertiser for your company?”

Secondly, politicians have been another source of pressure on the journalist – pressure that takes freedom away from them. When you do a story that is perceived pro-opposition, government would be on you saying “how much have they given you?” The same applies when you write something that is perceived pro-government. This leads to self-censorship.

Again, there is a practical example on this. Recently, a cabinet minister abandoned her official vehicle at a police station and said she would only get it back after closure of a police unit under the station where she ‘dumped’ her car. This was after police arrested two of her supporters who pulled down posters for a rival aspirant.

When the issue was brought to the deputy editor for one of the newspaper, he said he cannot go ahead publishing the story because “even when you get her side of the story, she will go on air bashing us the following day.”

Thirdly, defamation is another genesis of trouble for the Malawi media. Most lawyers have taken advantage of ambiguity in the laws and find a case in any story that comes out. This results in self censorship.

4. What is your view of Internet publishing in Malawi?

There is an attempt to advance it. However, because of technological hiccups, it isn’t a priority. The media haven’t devised a mechanism where people can subscribe online and pay for every access to the articles published.

5. Between *Nyasatimes* and *The Daily Times*, which publication do you think has more freedom to publish and why?

Nyasa Times. The media house is based outside the country and there is no direct contact whatsoever to the media body, apart from the editors contact. This gives them freedom to publish, even false stories, and get away with whatever they publish.

Again, it is very difficult to advance defamation cases against the media house because the laws do not cover such means of publication.

That is different from *The Daily Times* where the practitioners can be harassed and even sued because defamation laws are clear on the mode of publication taken by *The Daily Times*.

6. How do you think *The Daily Times* and *Nyasatimes* covered the alleged coup plot in 2008?

The *The Daily Times* tried to cover it professionally by looking for truths in whatever transpired. However, Nyasa Times aligned itself with the coup plotters. This is because of the involvement of some opposition sympathisers in the matter. The fact that contributors to Nyasa Times are mostly those against government explains why the publication grossly took the role of sympathisers for the alleged coup plotters.

7. In practice, are you able to freely report on corruption and other social ills in Malawi?

Other social ills, yes but not necessarily on corruption. The absence of the access to information bill creates a very tough environment for journalists seeking information to balance their stories. As such, most of the corrupt practices covered only concern those issues whose information is handy. Journalists prefer other social ills like child abuse etc to corruption, which – if badly handled – attracts defamation charges.

8. Do you practice some self-censorship at your publication? Please elaborate.

Yes. I shun issues that would get the media house into conflict with its advertisers as well as those that would attract libel suits.

9. What constraints have you encountered as a journalist in Malawi?

The major constraints are financial. This ranges from low salaries which grossly take away the motivation to the investment the media organisation puts to smoothen my job. Besides, the absence of the access to information law means I can get some information but not all. Again, often violent youth supporters of political parties tend to stand in my works and those of others. However, the situation is better off under Mutharika's government.

10. How do you think press freedom can be improved in Malawi?

Laws of defamation should be clarified. Again, there should be preparedness by the editors to take political pressure head on. As for advertisers, I feel organisations should redefine the role played by advertisers and how they could be handled if they found themselves in the wrong.

11. Do you have any other thoughts on the current state of the media and internet publishing in Malawi?

There is gross room for improvement.

Interview guide for Journalists in Malawi .

2009.P.K

Dear Sir/Madam,

My name is Penelope Kakhobwe, a Rhodes University student.

I am undertaking research on press freedom in Malawi , with a focus on *Nyasatimes* and *The Daily Times*.

By copy of this letter I am requesting you to be one of my respondents. I would kindly request you to answer the questions regarding media freedom in Malawi as truthfully and as completely as you can.

Your participation in this interview is completely voluntary, and you can pull out at any time. If you wish to take part, your identity will be confidential with the findings only used for research purposes only.

Thank you.

1. Please indicate publication you work for.

Answer: *The Daily Times*

2. What has been the role of the media in Malawi since democracy?

Answer: educating, entertaining and informing (classical role). The media has also been analysing and interpreting various soci-cultural, political and economic issues as part of social integration (sociolisation)

3. Do you think the press is free to publish?

Answer: from 2004 to now, the press has enjoyed maximum freedom. The environment however was risky between 1994 to 2003 because of youth militias that pounced on the media each time there was contrary opinion against the powers that be then.

4. What is your view of Internet publishing in Malawi ?

Answer: not vibrant. In fact there is none known so far except for nysatimes which is uk-based but with focus largely on malawi soil

5. Between *Nyasatimes* and *The Daily Times*, which publication do you think has more freedom to publish and why?

Answer: nysatimes

6. How do you think *The Daily Times* and *Nyasatimes* covered the alleged coup plot in 2008?

Answer: dtimes was professional in its coverage because it followed principles of reporting i.e. fairness, balance, completeness and accuracy---this was often not followed by nysatimes.

Secondly, dtimes displayed some fear in terms of commentaries to avoid sub judice (contempt of court). Nyasatime, however, said anything because they felt, i think, noone would take them to task as it's publication is uk-based and that most of its reporters/editors are not known (use of pennames is the order of the day at nysatimes).

7. In practice, are you able to freely report on corruption and other social ills in Malawi ?

Answer: very free, no obstruction from the state or within the media circles.

8. Do you practice some self-censorship at your publication? Please elaborate.

Answer: yes, at times, for example, political stories tend to favour the ruling dpp because one of the dpp's directors is a dpp guru so stories are written to avoid offending both the employer and the dpp.

Then advertisers like zain, tmn and some banks like nbm ---where our company gets loans often, and malawi revenue authority (mra) where we have a huge debt on unpaid tax to the effect that they once impounded our cars---the stories are either spiked or slanted to please them or satisfy the advertisers. Most scandals in these advertisers are never reported to avoid cutting the finger that feeds you because in malawi media advertisers call the shots.

9. What constraints have you encountered as a journalist in Malawi ?

Answer: resources i.e. office equipment and tools such as computers, cameras and transport (reporters/editors actually have no cars of their own let alone enough company cars). Also poor salaries and lack of motivators like staff loans, in-service training and promotions.

10. How do you think press freedom can be improved in Malawi ?

Answer: access to information law should be there. Independence on advertising should be enhanced to avoid fearing advertisers for lack of adverts. Resources and training on journalists should be a must to empower journalists of their critical role even in the face of intimidation and suppression.

11. Do you have any other thoughts on the current state of the media and internet publishing in Malawi ?

Answer: the media growth is promising; it is growing at a faster rate knowing that it is only 15 years after attaining democracy in 1994. We have not done much on internet publishing but efforts are being made as shown by the coming of nyasatimes.

What is needed more is finance the industry with resources and practitioners training. There can be no meaningful progress without training.

Interview guide for Journalists in Malawi.

2009.P.K

Dear Sir/Madam,

My name is Penelope Kakhobwe, a Rhodes University student. I am undertaking research on press freedom in Malawi, with my focus on *Nyasatimes* and *The Daily Times*.

With this letter I wish to request you to be one of my respondents by answering the questions below concerning media freedom in Malawi as truthfully and as completely as you can.

Your participation is greatly appreciated and your identity will remain anonymous, should you so wish it.

Thank you.

Please indicate Publication you work for: *Blantyre Newspapers*

1. What has been the role of the media in Malawi since democracy?

The media has done a tremendous job in holding public officers and politicians accountable for their actions.

2. Do you think the press is free to publish?

Yes

3. How do you view the internet in regards to publishing in Malawi?

The potential is there but the resources are at a premium. By this I mean that not many news organisations in the country have adequate resources (human as well as material) with which to take a bite at the new media. Further, internet connectivity remains a hindrance to publishing in the country. The costs are still way too high, such that internet largely remains a luxury for both publisher and readers and the computers don't come in for cheap. But the young generation has taken to the internet like flies to carrion such that the potential for internet publishing remains promising.

4. Between *Nyasatimes* and *The Daily Times*, which publication do you think has more freedom to publish and why.

I would say *nyasatimes* but it must be understood that the two publications operate in two mediums and environments and by different controls. The *The Daily Times* is guided by media ethics of Malawi such that there are precautions before any article is published. On the other hand, sourcing for *nyasatimes* is suspect; most of its reporters use pseudonyms (which guarantees them far much more freedom than the *The Daily Times* whose reporters have to be identified by name); besides, as an online publication, *nyasatimes* is not subject to the same restrictive (or regulatory) controls as *The Daily Times*.

5. Please refer to 2008's alleged coup plot. How do you think *The Daily Times* and *Nyasatimes* covered that event?

The *The Daily Times* covered the event with a measured tone, sometimes even doubting the veracity of the plot itself but never committing itself to taking sides. However, much as it may have expressed subtle misgivings, the paper desisted from being outright judgemental. *Nyasatimes*, however, went flat out authoritatively, attacking the government for cooking up the plot and generally it acted like the counsel for the accused.

6. In practice, are you able to freely report on corruption and other social ills in Malawi?

Yes, we are but sources are hard to come by.

7. Do you practice some self-censorship at your publication? Please elaborate if yes

Yes. Our paper is owned by the family of late Dr. Kamuzu Banda, who was known for political excesses when he was president of Malawi. Time and again we receive information, well-researched and documented about the ills of Dr Banda but we are unable to publish it. For instance, at the height of the fight for borders between Livingstonia and Nkhoma Synods, one 'theological historian' documented how Nkhoma had systematically encroached into the borders of Livingstonia with the tacit blessings of Dr. Banda whose patronage the synod largely enjoyed by virtue of his coming from the Central Region where Nkhoma Synod operates. The information was explosive and sensational. At least two other persons corroborated the information but we were impotent to publish the information.

8. What constraints have you encountered as a journalist in Malawi?

Intimidation, mostly from political party operatives, Interference from advertisers as well as political figures, Lack of resources with which to out the job, Inadequate training among journalists

9. How do you think press freedom can be improved in Malawi?

- a. If ownership moved from ownership of politicians to private hands
- b. If public official were fully appreciative of the need to have a vibrant, free press
- c. Advertisers in one way or the other influence editorial content, hence compromise the media's work. But that's mainly because most media houses are not 'independent' from corporate advertisers because the circulation of most papers cannot sustain the costs of production.

10. Please note any other thoughts you might have on the current state of the media in Malawi and internet publishing.

Interview guide for Journalists in Malawi.

2009.P.K

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Your participation in this interview is completely voluntary, and you can pull out at any time. If you wish to take part, your identity will be confidential with the findings only used for research purposes only.

Thank you.

1. Please indicate publication you work for.

Blantyre Newspapers Limited

2. What has been the role of the media in Malawi since democracy?

The media has helped a lot in civic education, fostering transparency and accountability by checking public officers.

3. Do you think the press is free to publish?

Generally there is freedom to publish as long as the articles are fair, balanced and accurate. To some extent there is self-censorship especially when writing about powerful political leaders such as those in government.

4. What is your view of Internet publishing in Malawi?

We are still a long way to go. Most of the newspaper companies have websites but they basically paste the print version of their stories. The most vibrant site (*Nyasatimes*) is done by people outside the country but their objectivity is highly questionable. There seems to be little progress in internet publishing because so far publishers do not realise any direct economic benefits. Again, issues of access and infrastructure capacity hinder development.

5. Between *Nyasatimes* and *The Daily Times*, which publication do you think has more freedom to publish and why?

Both have equal freedom. Currently there is no direct legislation on both print and internet publishing so it is difficult to say one has more or less freedom than the other.

6. How do you think *The Daily Times* and *Nyasatimes* covered the alleged coup plot in 2008?

This requires recall memory and I do not think I can do that fairly.

7. In practice, are you able to freely report on corruption and other social ills in Malawi?

I am free.

8. Do you practice some self-censorship at your publication? Please elaborate.

I see more self-censorship in issues that affect corporate companies and personalities more than any other areas. I feel the company does not want to disappoint them as they are large advertisers and advertising is the largest source of income. But I believe there is no need for such since the media are also offering them a service. Malawi has two stable newspaper companies; can a good adviser do away without any of those?

9. What constraints have you encountered as a journalist in Malawi?

Limited resources and personnel forcing an individual to have limited time and ability to file comprehensive reports. Lack of resources has also contributed to a laxity in ethical conduct with most reporters relying on sources to provide transport and allowances, which also breeds room for some sort of corruption.

10. How do you think press freedom can be improved in Malawi?

By improving access to information; the country needs a clear law so that journalists are empowered to approach public officers and get necessary data. There is also need for improved ethical conduct among journalist so that authorities do not have excuses to limit media freedom.

11. Do you have any other thoughts on the current state of the media and internet publishing in Malawi?

There is need for publishers to find ways of realising ways of maximising benefits from internet publishing.

Interview guide for Journalists in Malawi.

2009.P.K

Dear Sir/Madam,

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Your participation in this interview is completely voluntary, and you can pull out at any time. If you wish to take part, your identity will be confidential with the findings only used for research purposes only.

Thank you.

1. Please indicate publication you work for.

Nyasa Times

2. What has been the role of the media in Malawi since democracy?

The media has played a very crucial role since democracy as it has been machinery that has helped Malawians comprehend what democracy really means and the role of the people in consolidating social equality in terms of good governance and human rights, among others

3. Do you think the press is free to publish?

We might say the press in Malawi is free and at the same time not free to publish. If critically looked at, one would see that the media in the country is politically affiliated and this means if one is affiliated say to government that organization for sure will not be able to bring out the ills government is practicing and the same with media houses affiliated to the opposition. However, there are a few that have come out to face the challenge of intimidation and are trying their best to defy the odds.

4. What is your view of Internet publishing in Malawi?

There are few internet publishers in Malawi but I would say the few are gradually making strides. On the other hand, the problem in the country is most Malawians have no access to the internet, which means the readership is minimal. However, it has been observed that despite having few internet publications and minimal readership, the internet is becoming the most reliable source to getting the most non-censored but accurate news, a good example being the Nyasa Times, which has become the most popular Malawian online newspaper, both at national and international levels.

5. Between *Nyasatimes* and *The Daily Times*, which publication do you think has more freedom to publish and why?

I would say Nyasa Times has more freedom to publish than *The Daily Times*. However, the argument might be due to the fact that the former is deemed to be an opposition [UDF] publication, it is facing the challenges of intimidation from government and its 'ruling' DPP, which translates to no freedom to publish. Another reason why we might say Nyasa Time is freer is because it is an online newspaper and above that its management and structures are based abroad, which means chances of interference are very rare, though it has been reported on a number of occasions that President Mutharika's government has ineffectively tried to meddle with the publication.

6. How do you think *The Daily Times* and *Nyasatimes* covered the alleged coup plot in 2008?

Both tried to cover the story to their level best, but we might say Nyasa Times might have gone a step further to divulge more information because of the reasons given in question 6.

7. In practice, are you able to freely report on corruption and other social ills in Malawi?

It has never been easy to report on corruption cases and other social ills in Malawi as these are taken as more sensitive issues which 'cannot' be taken to the public, therefore it is hard to get sources that would willingly give you the right information, and above all let you go ahead to publish the story, especially if it involves politicians and/or top officials from both the government and private sector, in addition to the civil society and other key sectors of society.

8. Do you practice some self-censorship at your publication? Please elaborate.

As previously indicated, our publication (Nyasa Times) is considered to be an opposition publication, and people would say we practice self-censorship but as an employee, I might not be in a position to say anything regarding that. However, as an individual (reporter), I make sure that all news stories are more accurate and well balanced, to make it short, I report based on facts on the ground and am sure my colleagues do the same.

9. What constraints have you encountered as a journalist in Malawi?

There are a number of constraints that I have encountered working as a journalist in Malawi and I know the same restrictions are what my fellow practicing members of the press are facing. The most obvious one is being a Nyasa Times reporter – I am deemed as an opposition (affiliated to the UDF party) and it's hard to access information related to government and other sources that support President Mutharika's administration and his DPP. Note that other sources might not be pro-government and DPP or anti-opposition, but the fact that Nyasa Times is regarded as a Government of Malawi and its leadership's critic, they would not want to talk to you fearing they would be branded anti-Mutharika and his administration. Generally, another restriction is that Journalism in Malawi is not well-paying and this leaves most journalists vulnerable to bribery and as a result, there is no accurate coverage and reporting of news, which is a threat to the media industry.

10. How do you think press freedom can be improved in Malawi?

There are a number of ways that press freedom can be improved in Malawi and the most important one is the acceptance of different stakeholders, especially government accepting that the media is not an enemy but part of the government as it is said "the media is the fourth arm of government". The media should also cease to be partisan and also media houses must revise

salaries of their reporters as all these will lead to accurate and well balanced news, which are the most important considerations in news coverage, investigating and reporting. In addition, which is also vital, the access to information bill in the country, which still awaits Parliament's approval, needs to be passed because without the guiding laws, the media in Malawi will not be free to access important information and therefore the developing industry will not grow as it is in other African and world countries.

11. Do you have any other thoughts on the current state of the media and internet publishing in Malawi?

As already said there is need for more tolerance between government, other stakeholders and the media. On the other hand, as members of the press we must not forget that the general public depends on us for information and our duty is to inform, educate and entertain the people. The media can build or destroy the country; therefore we need to play our cards well for the better development of Malawi. Malawi needs more online publications as this is the only source of Malawian information not only to Malawians in Diaspora but also to the country's development partners and all other interested parties, including tourists; the internet is the only immediate source of informing people on what is happening here or selling Malawi to the outside community. Within, there is need for government and different stakeholders to help Malawians especially on the grassroots to have access to the internet, which is gradually proving not to be a luxury anymore but a necessity.

Dear Sir/Madam,

My name is Penelope Kakhobwe, a Rhodes University student.

I am undertaking research on press freedom in Malawi, with a focus on *Nyasatimes* and *The Daily Times*.

By copy of this letter I am requesting you to be one of my respondents. I would kindly request you to answer the questions regarding media freedom in Malawi as truthfully and as completely as you can.

Your participation in this interview is completely voluntary, and you can pull out at any time. If you wish to take part, your identity will be confidential with the findings only used for research purposes only.

Thank you.

Please indicate publication you work for.

Nyasa Times Online

What has been the role of the media in Malawi since democracy?

It has tried to provide checks and balances, a development that has resulted into the conviction of some big people in the society.

Do you think the press is free to publish?

Not entirely free. There have been several incidences where journalists have been locked up for writing stories which authorities felt were alarming/false.

What is your view of Internet publishing in Malawi?

It is picking up but still very behind as compared to our neighbouring countries. The problem is that government has not done its part well to promote internet. Again, internet publishing is new and it will take a bit of time before it is fully recognized.

Between Nyasa Times and *The Daily Times*, which publication do you think has more freedom to publish and why?

Nyasa Times has excessive freedom. I think it's because of the courageousness of the editors behind. You talk of Thom Chiumia, a journalist-cum-politician-cum-journalist who made headlines during the last years of UDF reign. It could also be because they are not in Malawi and fear nothing.

How do you think *The Daily Times* and Nyasa Times covered the alleged coup plot in 2008?

The Daily Times gave readers raw deal. It totally failed to expose the reality. Nyasa Times, provided

readers the true picture of the whole episode, though at some point they were some few exaggerations.

In practice, are you able to freely report on corruption and other social ills in Malawi?

Since we (Nyasa Times) fear nothing, I do report freely though there are some limits when it comes to get information and you cant rely on speculation. And it becomes much more difficult when it involves government or ruling party officials because there are so many blockers.

Do you practice some self-censorship at your publication? Please elaborate.

Yes I do. The reason is that people have always associated our publication with propaganda for the opposition so sometimes I try as much as possible to remove some stuff to make it as balanced as possible.

What constraints have you encountered as a journalist in Malawi?

Resources is the major problem. You know with the coming of modern technology a journalist's work is incomplete without a laptop, recorder, wireless internet, professional digital camera and of course a vehicle considering the current speed of news. But not everyone can have these but its something employers should ensure looking at. The other constraint is govt. and other sources who matter in the society refusing to give out information. The moment you introduce yourself as a Nyasa Times reporter you are either insulted or refused info and described as agent of opposition or you will be told "you write rubbish," before cutting the line.

How do you think press freedom can be improved in Malawi?

Parliament has to pass the Access to Information Bill because without it, really nothing will change the current status quo.

Do you have any other thoughts on the current state of the media and internet publishing in Malawi?

The media is growing, taking a very positive line but there is still a long way to go. They say we live in a global village which means on a spur of the moment, a Malawian living at Erukweni in Mzimba can know what has happened in, say Finland, in few minutes. But look at The Nation Newspaper for instance. It is said to be the major newspaper in Malawi but when it comes to online publishing, it leaves a lot to be desired.

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