

Television in Cameroon: Upshots from Monopoly to Fierce Competition

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ABSTRACT

On Wednesday, March 19, 2025, the Top Management of Cameroon Radio Television (CRTV) – the State broadcaster and first television (then CTV) in Cameroon, invited us as panelists in a symposium to mark 40 years of television in Cameroon (March 1985 - March 2025). Our presentation highlighted that the TV landscape in Cameroon has burgeoned from Cameroon Television's (CTV) monopoly in 1985 to 93 independent channels today. This shift has removed the power of monopoly from the hands of CTV (now CRTV), implying the infusion of diverse opinions and audience interactions with choicest channels and programs. That is not enough – the television industry in Cameroon faces stiff competition from 760 media in the country, in addition to the ever-present and intrusive foreign media with considerable audience followings. Though television and media pluralism and diversity in Cameroon have brought dynamism, existing gaps have widened in news and information production, dissemination, and consumption. The theory of media pluralism is used to reflect on the degree to which the media landscape of Cameroon; particularly television, has soared from monopoly to fierce competition, with varied inferences on viewership patterns and media effects.

Keywords: Television, monopoly, fierce competition, TV/media pluralism, Cameroon.

INTRODUCTION

The coming of television in Cameroon in 1985 ushered in new hopes and aspirations for the media landscape of the country. It was an opportunity for media audiences to be exposed to a new medium at the time - offering a combination of audio and visual contents. TV became an innovation and people remained glued to Cameroon Television (CTV) to get abreast with news, socio-cultural life, and developments in Cameroon and elsewhere. Audiences were treated to popular culture, music, sports, news, entertainment, education, religion, and society. CTV enjoyed this monopoly until the year 2000 following the liberalization of the private audio-visual sector. This was enacted through the passage of Prime Ministerial Text No. 2000/158 of April 3, 2000. But, before then, the 1990 Law on Freedom of Mass Communication (Law No. 90/052 of 19 December 1990) was enacted. It laid the foundations for diversified media ownership in the country. Competition in the television industry became fierce following the liberalization of the private audio-visual sector in April 2000.

Cameroon, situated in Central Africa, can rarely have a complete history if mention is not made of the role of CTV/CRTV in shaping, telling, and contributing to this history. Significant events have been reported by CTV/CRTV; including the Cameroon National Union Congress in Bamenda in March 1985 (beginnings of CTV), the Visit of Pope John Paul II in 1985, the World Cup, Africa Cup of Nations, Olympic games, the first live hearings at the Constitutional Council following the 2018 Presidential Election, and also disastrous moments like coverage of the Lake Nyos disaster. What a moment in the lives of Cameroonians – to hold and behold live events.

CRTV has succeeded to become a culture in Cameroon. At the mention of “Indomitable Lions”, for instance, the image of CRTV readily comes to mind because of the channel’s assistive role in accompanying the national team at continental and international competitions. The channel has also greatly contributed in promoting shared cultural values, peace, unity, fatherland, and national/social cohesion.

One would remember various signature tunes that introduced programs like the 7:30pm news, Monday Show, Cameroon Report – now Cameroon Calling, Délire, Clip Box, Sports Vision, Caton Rouge, Actualités Hebdo, Inside the Presidency, early morning programs like Cameroon Feeling (6am-9am), afternoon programs like Midi Life, and late-night programs. CRTV is upbeat to stay afloat over these 40 years. It is also fighting to assert itself as a public service medium where access to information is equitably distributed for all. The production of contents today is challenging, owing to the fact that audiences are more active (as opposed to passive), and have become more media literate through various media exposures. This is prompted by a diverse and robust television landscape in Cameroon, with elite programs (news, intellectual and political debates) and popular programs (like Pidgin English News and other entertainment shows). Early programs on CTV/CRTV have shaped modern television broadcasting and competition in the country.

When we were growing up in our villages and communities, ownership of a television set was a monopoly. One or two individuals owned TV with very limited channels. Buying a TV set was a luxury. This still obtains in some, especially, rural communities today because of general poverty. The owner determined when and how people would watch TV. We recall, especially during Africa Cup of Nations and World Cup matches, Nigerian films which were also very popular at the time, and favourite TV shows on CRTV, that community members would line up to watch TV, at times with slippers and shoes left at the TV owner’s door steps. Sometimes, entry was subject to the payment of a fee of 100 FCFA (about 0.18 USD) or thereabout for a period of about 2 hours. With TV pluralism and diversity today, this practice has almost faded out, especially, in urban centres. Some traces of the practices are still evident in some rural communities with limited TV access and zero or poor electricity supply. However, many more persons, including rural communities, own TV, though the medium is still a luxury in some homes. Audiences are comparatively more exposed to a plethora of channels and programs.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Beginnings of Television and TV Research

When Wilbur Schramm, one of the founders of the field of communication science, alongside colleagues Jack Lyle and Edwin Parker wrote the classic text, *‘Television in the lives of our children’* (1961), they keenly observed that television is a powerful medium that significantly impacts children’s lives, with the potential to influence their learning, behavior, and

development. They urged television broadcasters to be cautious of the positive and negative effects of television, reflected in the contents of the medium. Today, TV pluralism enhances learning and development, but also exposes audiences to horrific scenes, including television violence.

Bile (2020) affirms that in order to ensure the optimization of television programming in Cameroon, including suitable educational, informative, and entertaining programs that cut across all segments of society, need exists for the economic organization and structuring of the television sector. The author reiterates that it is worrying to see plural television in Cameroon still struggling with modernity. His proposed economic model extends to which channel is able to recruit the most qualified professionals and pay them a good and regular salary. This is imperative because of the correlation often established between economic wellbeing of journalists and the respect or non-respect of professional ethics. Contextually, therefore, the fierce competition amongst the manifold channels in Cameroon today goes beyond the physical offers of TV to technical know-how and the degree to which programs are modern and sophisticated.

TV has so far grown to offer educational opportunities, a forum for relaxation and entertainment, and a medium for socialization and cultural exchange. The limitations are that too much TV time reduces physical activity (which is detrimental to health), leads to negative behavioral outcomes, could negatively affect academic performance, impacts cognitive development in the line of the messages, and has an overbearing influence on pristine cultures and values. Practical solutions suggest the need for parental guidance and monitoring, need to moderate television viewership, encourage family viewing, and the necessity to limit screen time.

The history of television in the world and Cameroon is connected to the development of the media sector. It all started with the printing press from where newspapers emerged as a powerful force to reckon with. Print media were used by colonial masters to communicate back to their home countries. Africans borrowed from this example and brought in newspapers which represented their aspirations and local realities. An example is '*Mbale*' (The Truth); an indigenous Cameroonian newspaper born in 1929 but fought to death in 1930. It was short-lived because of its critical stance on colonial administration and administrators.

In the 1920s, radio emerged as a powerful tool of mass communication. Walter Lippmann, one of the pioneers in this direction, published "*The World Outside and the Pictures in Our Heads*", to describe the role of radio as a powerful instrument that is capable of creating mental images in our heads and directing us on how we see ourselves, others, and the world. He did this through a book chapter published in his classic text, '*Public Opinion*' (1922).

These were the foundations of television, as the idea of 'images in our heads' came to reality in the late 1920s. Between 1929-1932, the Payne Fund Studies were published by the Payne Fund Foundation in the United States of America. The studies were meant to examine the impact of cinemas on children, with three objectives in view: what was watched, who watched, and effects of the contents watched. The following scientific results obtained from the studies:

1. Movies influence children's attitudes and behavior – these effects are persistent and cumulative over time;

2. Children acquired and retained information they received from the movies;
3. Attitudes concerning ethnic, racial, and social issues were changed by movie viewing;
4. Emotions were stimulated while viewing fear and tension;
5. Some movies disturbed subsequent healthy sleep;
6. Children who regularly attended movies were found to behave poorly in school compared to those who attended less frequently;
7. Children imitated favorable behavior they saw in movies, but movies also appeared to play a direct role in delinquent behavior.

These effects are important to investigate even in contemporary uses of television among children, youth, and persons of all age brackets. Notwithstanding the outstanding results of the Payne Fund Studies at the time, about 63 years later, Lowery and DeFleur (1995) "pointed to their lack of control groups, problems in sampling, shortcomings in measurement, and other difficulties that placed technical limitations on the conclusions" (p.382). The Payne Fund Studies laid the foundations of research on the effects of movies and television as seen today.

Television rose as a popular medium of mass communication in the 1940s and 1950s, with colour television debuting in the 1960s. This new medium at the time radically transformed the global media landscape, audience dependence on the media, reception of television contents, and the popularization of scientific research on the effects of television on media audiences. The invention of the video tape recorder in 1956 allowed for editing, reshooting and rebroadcasting.

Within the context of Cameroon, television was born on March 24, 1985 in Bamenda, during the Cameroon National Union (CNU) Congress. The images were broadcast live, giving Cameroonians new hopes and aspirations about a changing, dynamic, and more robust media landscape. So, TV was introduced 25 years after independence, with the creation of the Cameroon Television (CTV) which today is known as the Cameroon Radio Television (CRTV); a merger of CTV and the radio department in 1987. State monopoly of television ended in 2001, with the introduction of TV Max in Douala and other private television stations. Since then, other local television channels have emerged, as evident today.

The 1990 Law on Freedom of Mass Communication in Cameroon

Forcha and Ngange (2022) contend that:

The liberalisation of the media sector around the world has always given the traditional power structures (government) a hard time controlling the media. Deregulation has placed the media more and more into the hands of big corporate bodies that have monopolised the sector. Africa in general and Cameroon in particular witnessed liberalisation of the media sector in the 1990s. In Cameroon, this was evident with the enactment of Law No. 90/052 of 19 December 1990 relating to Freedom of Mass Communication. With this law, individuals and corporations who met up with the necessary conditions as specified by the law were given authorisation to own and run a media house. Since 1990, the number of print media organs in Cameroon has been on an increase while the audio-visual sector saw a steady increase after 2000, following Prime Ministerial Text No. 2000/158 of 3 April 2000, effectively liberalising the audio-visual sector.

The 1990 Law on Freedom of Mass Communication touched mostly on newspapers, though it was a general law meant for all channels of mass communication in the country. Today, the TV landscape has expanded considerably. With this growth, the country's regulatory body is setting the pace for the respect of ethics and the need for media houses to be professional in their orientations. Clashes, however, occur between the National Communication Council versus journalists, media owners, and media institutions over what is considered ethical or the broader scope of social responsibility. This is so because each channel operates on a set of principles and values (*editorial policy*) which may not go down well at all times with the aspirations of the NCC. But that is where we are – the fruits of pluralism, diversity, and competition in the TV industry.

Liberalization of the Private Audio-Visual Sector

Prime Ministerial Text No. 2000/158 of April 3, 2000 liberalized the private audio-visual media sector in Cameroon. With this, competition began. It is fierce today, given competing factors like the desire to attract, capture and retain audiences, the need to be the first to broadcast, and necessity to gain relevance in the media space. Equinoxe TV, My Media Prime TV, Canal 2 International, Spectrum TV, Vision 4, Dash TV, LTM, HiTV, Cam 10 TV, Divine Mercy TV, Vox Africa, amongst others, make the competition tougher. Interested persons and groups wishing to set up an audiovisual medium do so through an application studied by a technical committee, chaired by the Minister of Communication. The Committee then forwards its report to the National Communication Council, which in turn gives its opinion to the Minister in charge of Communication. The Minister has a period of six months to review the application and notify the applicant of the decision. Part III (2) of the 1990 Law notes that “the setting up and operation of a private radio broadcasting or television company shall be subject to the obtention of a license”. TV stations are issued renewable licences of 10 years.

Controversial Role of TV in Promoting Violence

Earlier studies on the effects of television focused on violence. The cultivation analysis, prescribed by Annenberg Professor George Gerbner and colleagues (Larry Gross, Michael Morgan, & Nancy Signorielli), argues that as “a centralized system of storytelling” (p.18), people cultivate certain habits from television. They categorized TV viewers into two: Heavy viewers (4 or more hours a day watching TV) and light viewers (<2hrs a day). A contrast is made between these two categories based on certain demographic variables like age, level of education, marital status, nature of program, availability of medium, access to information, and the choice of channel. The analysis considers that the more hours spent on TV, the more audiences see the world as mean, resulting to the mean world syndrome. Hence, television helps to mainstream people's ideas by blurring, blending, and bending their perceptions and daily realities. It tunes audiences towards a certain direction with certain magnitudes. Heavy exposure to TV causes audiences to align with messages portrayed on screens. It is a cultural theory that touches on audience perceptions, beliefs, attitudes, values, knowledge, and behavior. It has a cumulative and long-term effect on media audiences. The display of erotic scenes on certain programs and channels also calls for parental monitoring, guidance, and supervision on the types of contents that audiences are exposed to.

Empirical Research on TV Consumption in Cameroon

In a study titled, “*Determinants of local and foreign TV channels viewership amongst TV audience in the Buea municipality, South West Region, Cameroon*”, Epey, Ngange, Moki, Ndode, and Yenshu

(2022) sought to identify audience preferences and the determinants that affect their choice to watch local or foreign television. A quantitative research design was used, with survey as specific method. Some 326 respondents were surveyed in ten (10) core neighborhoods in Buea Municipality where cable television consumption is widespread. Findings showed that 24.5% (80) of respondents view foreign television always, as opposed to 11% (36) who indicated that they view local television channels always. In this value (always) category therefore, there is a 13.5% gap (in favor of foreign television) in viewership preference between foreign television and local television on a weekly basis. An ANOVA test produced a statistically significant difference at $p < .000$ level in audience weekly foreign TV exposure and high-quality content as a determinant of international over local TV viewership with $F(4, 321) = 8.457, p < .000$. The findings affirm that high quality productions, exciting/entertaining programs, and provision of 24 hours TV programs were factors that determined high dependence on foreign over local television channels. By implication, local content producers need to focus on these concerns and strive to meet up such audience needs to be able to stand this rife competition from foreign television. In the end, the study proposed an empirical model on determinants of international/foreign TV viewership over local TV viewership and remedies. This study suggests that competition is not only for national vs national television channels, but also national vs foreign television. Nnode (2020) also discussed an excellent model in journalism training which is expected to better equip professionals, including those in the TV industry, to adapt to current trends and the path ahead.

The Concept of Immediacy

At the center of fierce competition in the television industry is the concept of immediacy. It promotes the good, the bad and the ugly of what people consume in real time. At best, it connects people to live events (like the annual Mount Cameroon Race of Hope in Buea and other major events covered on television), live streaming, and also increases audience engagements, especially in breaking news situations. At worst, accuracy, a serious ethical concern, can be compromised. Immediacy helps journalists report issues as they happen, and creates a sense of urgency for viewers. In addition, journalists use social media handles to connect more with audiences online during live broadcasts. The challenge of immediacy is misinformation. Technology has made live coverages possible. Hence, journalists need to strive to balance immediacy with thoroughness. In struggling with immediacy, at times, ethics and deontology are sacrificed. In the process, Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel, in their book, *"The Elements of Journalism: What News People Should Know and the Public Should Expect"*, note that journalism of verification is non-existent. This can be seen in the May 5, 2007 Kenya Airways Boeing 737-800 (Flight KQ 507) plane crash in Mbanga Pongo, Douala III sub division, after taking off from the Douala International Airport. The crash resulted in the death of all 114 passengers on board, including passengers and crew members. It is reported and memorable in Cameroon that as CRTV got to the site of the incident and were struggling to assemble the rushes for professional treatment and dissemination to audiences, some private television stations in Douala were already broadcasting the rushes (raw and unedited footages). To them, they wanted to satisfy audience increasing anxiety to know what was going on. Meanwhile, CRTV was trying to stay professional not to broadcast corpses, intestines, hands, legs. Audiences went about that they saw images on private stations. So, the question is, *what did they see?* It is intestines, hands, legs, chests, heads, and body parts scattered all over the place. This is what we continue to see on television over the years. This makes competition unhealthy for public consumption.

Ownership Patterns

Forcha and Ngange (2022:1) also found out in a media ownership pattern study carried out in Cameroon that:

Beyond private and public media ownership, other salient media ownership patterns exist, such as horizontal ownership (Newspaper 29.3%, Radio 27.9%, TV 11.1%), conglomerate ownership (8.9%) cross-ownership (8.1%), sole proprietor ownership (4.3%), vertical ownership (3.3%), religious ownership (2.4%), community ownership (1.4%), regional line ownership (1.1%), political line ownership (0.5%) and co-ownership (0.3%). With this diversified ownership pattern, Cameroon portrays a unique ownership trend similar to those of many African countries but very different from ownership trends in the USA, Europe and other parts of the world where media concentration lies in the hands of one family or a few individuals.

This is the complex political and economic situation that most African countries find themselves in and this has a direct effect on the media output in these countries because “he who pays the piper dictates the tune.” So, media ownership has an influence on the output and professional aptitude of journalists. The varied ownership patterns of television in Cameroon promotes different ideological presentations of media operations and productions, as well as the cultural contexts within which the messages are consumed.

Methods

This is a reflective article, with materials drawn mostly from secondary data, especially the Media Directory published by the National Communication Council (NCC) of Cameroon (2024), and data from DataReportal (2025). The study also relies on authors’ historical knowledge of the Cameroon media landscape and observations for the derivation and substantiation of the arguments and analyses made in this research.

FINDINGS

Demographic Analysis

In discussing the fierce competition in the Cameroon TV and media space today, it is important to analyze major demographic variables evident in the population. Statistics from *DataReportal*, an online data management platform which helps people and organizations all over the world find the data, insights, and trends they need to make informed decisions (<https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2025-cameroon>) show that as of March 3, 2025, the Cameroonian society is made up of the following key demographics:

- Population is 29.5 million (increase of 2.6%, that is, 752.000 people from previous year).
- 50.2% [14.809.000] female and 49.8% [14.691.000] male
- 60.2% [17.759.000] urban and 39.8% [11.741.000] rural
- Age brackets: 15.1% [4.454.500] (0-4yrs); 21.3% [6.283.500] (5-12yrs); 11.4% [3.363.000] (13-17yrs); 13.2% [3.894.000] (18-24yrs); 14.6% [4.307.000] (25-34yrs); 10.8% [3.186.000] (35-44yrs); 6.9% [2.035.500] (45-54yrs); 3.9% [1.150.500] (55-64yrs); and 2.8% [826.000] (65+).
- 12.4 million internet users (41.9% internet penetration rate)
- 5.45 million social media users (18.5% of the population).

These demographics provide grounds for media strategy and fierce competition. The rivalry is mostly for audiences; end users of media contents. The population is increasing. The World Bank estimates that by 2050, Cameroon's population will exceed 51 million. This signals that as years go by and media expand, audience numbers increase too. Audiences will keep finding relevance in media contents based on their needs, wants, and interests. Another interesting data point is the 12.4 million internet and 5.45 million social media users. Since the internet provides useful space for online audiences and competition, TV channels in Cameroon today create pages on Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, amongst others, to engage audiences and make contents more interactive.

Television Density in Cameroon

The current situation of television density across the ten regions of Cameroon is reflected in the media map presented by the National Communication Council in 2024.

Table 1: Television Density in Cameroon

S/N	Region	No. of TV Channels	%
1	Adamawa	2	2.2
2	Centre	19	20.4
3	East	1	1.1
4	Far North	1	1.1
5	Littoral	32	34.4
6	North	2	2.2
7	North West	2	2.2
8	West	8	8.5
9	South	3	3.2
10	South West	23	24.7
	Total	93	100

Source: NCC Media Map Cameroon, 2024

The media landscape of Cameroon today is burgeoning and diversified. This reflection is true and contributes to varied opinions on matters of public life in the country. Statistics show that most TV stations are found in the Littoral region – the economic capital of Cameroon (32). These include popular channels like Equinoxe TV, Canal 2 International, Canal 2 English, CRTV, Canal Mbanga, Le Television Monde (LTM), Dash TV, Dash Sport and Entertainment, Spectrum Television (STV), My Media Prime TV, ABK TV, Afrique Media, Ajeri TV, Balafon TV, Boom TV, Canal 10 de Loum, Dan Broadcasting Service (DBS), Dominion TV, For You TV, God is Able TV, Haousa7, Home TV, L+TV, OVTV, Pyramide Web TV, School Africa TV, SIKKA TV, Solution TV, SUN TV, Température Web TV, MSI TV, and Veritas TV. The next region in terms of TV density is the Centre – the political capital of Cameroon. This is where the state broadcaster – Cameroon Radio Television (CRTV), with its variants – CRTV main channel, CRTV News, CRTV Sports and Entertainment - are located. Other channels include Vision 4, Presidency of the Republic of Cameroon TV (PRC TV), 7 News, Cam 10 TV, Canal 24, Canal Haoussa, Divine TV, Glory Christ Channel, Golden House, Horizon 3 TV, Info TV, Muslim TV, RTA, Satellite 24 TV, Vox Africa, and BNews1.

The third in ranking is the South West Region with 23 channels. These include Anointing Television, Ark of God Television, Cam 1 Television Network, CMTV (C-Media Television),

Divine Mercy Television, Elohim Television, Faith Television, HI-TV, Kumba City Broadcasting Service (KCBS), Legacy Development Communication, Life Transformers Ministries Network, Life Television, Life Transforming TV, Mercyland TV, New Jerusalem TV, Overcomers Broadcasting Initiative Television, Premium Enterprise for Software Configuration of Manual Systems Television Network, Prophetic World Television, Reference Television, Restoration TV, Transfiguration Television, Treasure Television, Zoe Television.

The West region is fourth in ranking with eight channels: Business and Career Television (BCTV), Canal MÔM TV, Haut-Nkam TV, MOM'MIKE TV, NIS 19 TV, Univers Social TV, VINO TV, and Zingu TV. Meanwhile, the distribution across the other regions is as follows: South region 3 (CRTV Wave, CRTV South, and Kribi Radiovision), Adamawa region 2 (FTV and La Distinction), North region 2 (Galaxie TV and TV7), North West region 2 (Rock Television and Star Television), East region 1 (Abong-Mbang TV), and Far North region 1 (Maroua TV).

The 93 TV channels in Cameroon cut across all themes; from politics, to economy, society, culture, and religion. They broadcast news, organize debates, and other information, education, and entertainment contents. The channels also provide a veritable opportunity for dynamism and competition in advertising and the promotion of the common good. Grassroots participation has also witnessed transformation as a result of the multiplicity of channels. The TV public space has been expended to account for many convergent and divergent voices in the Cameroonian society.

Implications of the Competition between TV and other media

In dealing with the concept of fierce competition in the TV industry, it is also important to scrutinize TV in relation to other media: newspapers, radio, television, online/social media. The competition rages here also, as media seek to position themselves to grab audience attention. The NCC Media Directory shows that as of 30 November 2024, Cameroon has 760 legally approved media, including 232 print media organs published on a regular basis. The country has 93 television stations, 129 commercial radio stations, 169 community radio stations, 72 online media outlets, and 65 cable distribution companies. The media industry is therefore large, varied, and prompts diversification in opinion and information circulated in the public sphere. The distribution of all types of media in Cameroon is presented as follows:

Table 2: Distribution of TV and other media in Cameroon

S/N	Regions	TV Channels	Commercial Radio	Community Radio	Newspapers	Online media	Cable distributors
1	Adamawa	2	4	12	2	3	1
2	Centre	19	39	14	90	19	13
3	East	1	2	22	3	3	3
4	Far North	1	6	17	4	7	2
5	Littoral	32	24	13	56	8	14
6	North	2	3	17	5	4	2
7	North West	2	8	20	17	8	3
8	West	8	23	23	37	10	13
9	South	3	8	12	4	7	3

10	South West	23	12	19	14	3	11
Total		93	129	169	232	72	65
Grand Total = 760							

Source: NCC Media Map Cameroon, 2024

Globalization has brought in more diversity and pluralism in the media landscape. Marshall McLuhan is credited for spearheading the concept of 'global village' (1964), which supposes that as a result of the interconnected nature of the world today, we are each other's neighbor. This idea is more evident with the introduction of the internet and world wide web, with several institutions and corporations, including the media, taking advantage of this global movement (Ngange, Nnode, & Elonge, 2019). Thus, so as not to be left behind, conventional media like television are fusing their productions and broadcasts into the online media space. This is meant to reach more audiences. Media workers are increasingly aware that audiences are fragmented, diversified, and have specific preferences for certain media.

DISCUSSION

Representative Pluralism and Deliberative Pluralism in Perspective

The 93 television channels operating in Cameroon today have given a wide range of voices and opinions to individuals and groups in and out of the country. While representative pluralism insists that all voices in society are heard (the marketplace of ideas), deliberative pluralism focuses on the need for all those voices to build a consensus and consolidate societal progress. These two points, however, are difficult to come by because of arguments pointing towards freedoms. There are arguments that people should be allowed to express themselves, no matter how divergent their opinions are. Such individuals are against any form of opinion that "cages" freedoms. Notwithstanding, it is difficult for progress to be made when voices do not build a consensus, become consistent, and move towards positive change and development. That is why institutions like the National Communication Council and other government ministries ensure that opinions are fully monitored so as to prevent chaos. We affirm that the balancing of voices, across television channels in Cameroon in this case, is crucial for substantive democracy and socio-cultural, economic, and political progress.

Modern TV Debates in Cameroon

As Siebert, Peterson, and Schramm (1956) rightly reflected in their classic, *Four Theories of the Press*, "Mass media do not operate in a vacuum; the press always takes on the form and coloration of the social and political structures within which it operates" (p.52). Cameroon is culturally, linguistically, politically, economically, and socially diverse (>250 ethnic groups). Strong ethical reporting along these diverse lines will build trust between media and audiences, while guaranteeing for quality and diverse information.

The political and media systems in Cameroon share a symbiotic relationship. When Cameroon achieved independence in 1960, the media, especially newspapers, were at the center of issues. Cameroon went back to the one-party system in 1966 and media were closely monitored and censored. The draconian press law was passed. In 1990, the media landscape was liberalized. On Sunday afternoons, for instance, television audiences are served with diversified debate programs on various channels. Examples of such heated programs include: *Press Hour* on CRTV; *Club d'Elites* on Vision 4; *Driot de Reponse* on Equinoxe; *Canal Presse* on Canal 2 International;

House of Commons on My Media Prime, amongst others. On Sunday, March 16, 2025 for instance, the debate program on Press Hour was on the regulation of churches by the Ministry of Territorial Administration; Club d'Elites focused on Freedom of Expression: Do the Law and Morality guarantee limits? while House of Commons focused its debate program on '*What can the next President of Cameroon do to fight corruption and ensure transparency*'. These debates appeal to different audience interests and have fragmented viewers in terms of ideology, media literacy, and needs/wants. The topics are changed regularly to match current talking points in the country.

These programs give plurality to discussions on several issues affecting the Cameroonian society. They also give audiences the opportunity to be exposed to several contents and viewpoints live on television. This is how far the media landscape of Cameroon has expanded, with several channels competing fiercely today for space and audience attention. The problematic is on how some of these programs are moderated, as well as the kinds of contributions that come therefrom and filter into the public sphere. Some are exceedingly good and edifying, while others are an outburst of certain emotions, like anger, bitterness, and frustration, thereby inviting the regulator to step in frequently. Some of the debates are unhealthy for democracy, values of social cohesion, unity, and progress. The quality of panelists also invited on set is another issue surrounding the debates.

One of the disturbing aspects of modern TV debates is the echoing of voices and opinions which align with those of certain individuals and media houses, and sometimes refute opposing views (echo chambers). An echo chamber is an environment where a person only encounters information or opinions that reflect and reinforce their own. Each house has a policy and works hard to bring guests and participants in the direction of its editorial line. Critical voices are sometimes welcome, though not given the same degree of attention as the stance of the media house on the issue. This further helps to fragment media and audiences. Echo chambers limit exposure to diverse perspectives, as well as push for social and political polarization and extremism. Echo chambers take two stages: *seeding* (inserting misinformation in the public sphere – TV in this case) and *echoing* (circulating the information as part of the belief and identity). This also results to the concept of *neo-tribalism*, where TV and other media 'create tribes' and 'administer to them', instead of administering to the mass audience. This is seen in television dynamics today.

Television debates in Cameroon took a new twist following the publication, by the president of the Republic, of the much-anticipated date for the 2025 presidential election in the country. The announcement was made on Friday, July 11, 2025 and it set Sunday, October 12, 2025 as the date for the elections. It is the most contested election in Cameroon, given that the incumbent, Paul Biya, 92 years old and 43 years in power, is seeking re-election for the 8th consecutive term. This has sparked mixed reactions on television debates and in the media as a whole. Another point of reflection in debate programs is the number of candidates who submitted files to be president - eighty-three (83); a remarkable record in the history of the country. Television programs were divided on the presentation of the elections and aspirants, with popular frames echoed such as "comedy show" (70 candidates were disqualified by the elections managing body, Elections Cameroon - ELECAM, 13 retained on Saturday, July 26, 2025; and 12 finally listed); a phrase also featuring across newspapers, radio, social media, and online media.

Still in regard to the announced elections, diplomatic missions and independent groups have also taken interest, with some of their thematic reflections forming the core of TV debates in Cameroon. On July 12, 2025 for instance, a day after the official announcement of the date of the elections, the United States Embassy in Yaounde wrote through their official website:

“The United States Embassy in Yaoundé welcomes the official announcement of the date for Cameroon’s presidential elections on October 12, 2025. As a longstanding partner and friend of Cameroon, the United States underscores the importance of free, fair, peaceful, and inclusive elections as a cornerstone of democratic governance and stability in Cameroon and Central Africa...We urge everyone concerned to engage in the electoral process in a manner that promotes peace, respects the rule of law, and upholds democratic norms and the rights of all citizens to participate freely and to vote their consciences without fear of repercussions...It is critical that the Cameroonian people have full confidence in their democratic institutions—not only on election day, but throughout the entire electoral period...”

The thematic reflections in the message are part of the broad bases on which TV debate programs were hosted. Between the 21 July deadline for candidates to submit files and the 13 August deadline for the Constitutional Council to publish the final list of retained candidates, TV debates were inundated with different aspects on the thematic of the 2025 presidential elections in Cameroon, including roles of major actors like the media, civil society, the electoral body (Elections Cameroon – ELECAM), and individual voters. The manner in which the programs were organized and panel members’ expression showed a degree of freedom and expansion of the TV landscape in Cameroon, a point echoed at the start of this conceptual paper.

Modern Television and Audience Engagements

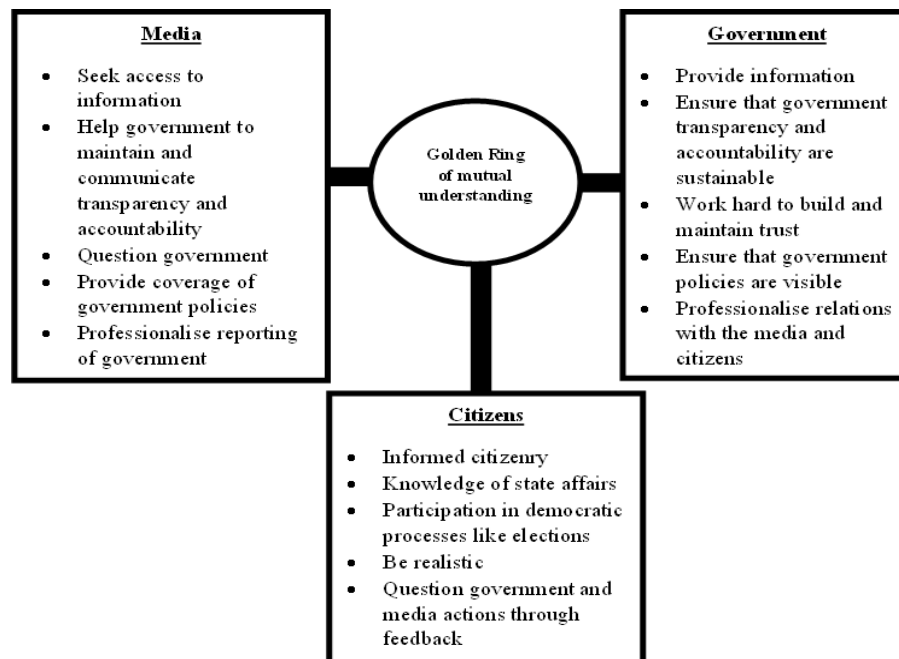
During the panel discussion in Yaounde to mark 40 years of TV in Cameroon, a member of audience questioned us about the dimensions that audience engagements have taken today. Our immediate response was that modern television has taken advantage of the internet and globalization to engage more audiences. To provide evidences, we cited the Mount Cameroon Race of Hope in Buea on February 22, 2025 (the Race of Hope is an annual event organized in Buea, South West Regional Capital by the Cameroon Athletics Federation and the Ministry of Sports and Physical Education. National and international athletes compete in the race).

We explained that the state broadcaster, Cameroon Radio Television and other channels streamed the event live on their web and social media pages, thereby causing viewers who could not be present on-site nor close to a TV set to follow the race online. This is an isolated example among many that could be cited, prompted by the dynamism of the modern TV landscape in the country. We also explained that other forms of media like pictures about the event were quickly shared online, with audiences using some of the pictures to share by posting on their social media handles (WhatsApp status, TikTok, Instagram, Telegram, Facebook, Snapchat among others). This is exemplary in the many ways that television channels in Cameroon engage audiences today. They have taken advantage of the internet, knowing that audiences are connected. Another good example with television and audience engagements is what My Media Prime, a private television station in Cameroon’s economic capital, Douala, does. Like other exemplary TV channels, the medium has rebranded itself recently by reporting

breaking news and human-interest stories in Cameroon. It also reports international news that has some bearing on local audiences in Cameroon. This motivates them to remain attached to the channel and also follow developments online. The fact that television channels are rebranding themselves through innovative and interactive programs makes engagement a reality.

Consequences of Pluralism on Media-Governments Relations

Ngange and Ndode (2024) examined relations between media and governments around the world through, “*Media and Governments at War: An Exploration of the Ferocious Struggle for Dominance in the Marketplace of Ideas, Influence and Power*”. The book highlights the struggles between the two structures within the context of the media being viewed as the 4th Estate; placed alongside with, and even considered more powerful in certain instances, to the Executive, Judiciary, and Legislative Arms of Government. The scholars were worried of the escalating tensions between media - prompted by pluralism (including television) and governments around the world, and proposed a model for Media-Governments relations as follows:



Source: Ngange & Ndode (2024, p.219)

The plurality of television in Cameroon today fits within this model because of conflicting interests from media that seek to provide coverage of the national territory, as well as regulators and government that argues for media's role to be more of development-oriented. The model adopts a three-pillar trajectory to illustrate considerations of an ideal media-governments relationship. It shows that media and government relationship has a significant impact on citizens who are a crucial entity in the media-government equation.

This is particularly relevant in this context because a significant number of television debates focus on what government should or ought to do in certain situations, events and interventions. By so doing, and in trying to point out those roles, relations between media and governments

strain. This is crucial because per the model, the way media and governments coordinate themselves would determine the degree of citizens' engagement. The scholars, therefore, developed a "golden ring of mutual understanding" where media, governments, and citizens meet and concert. The model suggests a symbiosis between media and governments for the benefit of the citizenry. Popular television debates can enhance audience understanding and participation in national life.

In addition to the model, Ngange and Nnode (p.221) also developed the 10 commandments of media-governments relations, which could form a solid bedrock and orientations of the competition between media and the political contexts within which they operate. These commandments are as follows:

1. Thou shall not treat each other as enemies;
2. Thou shall work together for the progress and development of society;
3. Thou shall bear in mind that you are both mandated to serve citizens and they have the right to know what you are doing for their interest;
4. Thou shall resolve disagreements through the golden ring of mutual understanding;
5. Thou shall maintain professionalism in working with each other and with the rest of society;
6. Thou shall not be involved in activities and actions that degrade the work of each other;
7. No party shall manipulate or intimidate the other;
8. Thou shall maintain trust, transparency, and accountability in all collaborative efforts;
9. Thou should know that the marketplace of ideas is for the common good, and so, you have a responsibility to sustain it positively;
10. Thou should know that a breach of any of the commandments will mean dishonesty and unfit to perform your duties to the people.

Theoretical Reflections

The *theory of media pluralism* is analyzed. Kowalski (2020) suggests that pluralism is diversity and closeness to all ideas of competition, rivalry, and freedom. Parcu (2020) discusses four categories of media pluralism which are important to highlight within this discourse: *Representative pluralism* (media as mirrors of society and marketplaces of idea); *Deliberative pluralism* (media as public forums playing an active role in discursive formation and the creation of public opinion); *Internal or content-diversity pluralism* (variety of content, viewpoints, analyses, social representations and experiences that are provided by a single media outlet); and *External pluralism* (structure of the media market, plurality of print, radio, TV, and digital media, as well as the diversity of media ownership and streams of funding). All of these categorizations contribute to the fierce competition evident in the media environment today. Even more importantly, media pluralism is paramount for a functioning democracy and for a free and open society. Access to a plurality of editorial lines and analyses is essential for citizens to be able to confront ideas, to make their own informed choices and to conduct their lives freely. Balancing of voices is important for democracy.

The fierce aspect of pluralism we witness today is seen at the level an echo chamber effect; a situation whereby in news media and social media ecosystems, individuals encounter and move (polarization) towards beliefs that amplify or reinforce their pre-existing beliefs. They stay with those beliefs to gain balance and fight off any incidents resulting to cognitive dissonance,

including counter information. This reinforces ideological divisions and impedes constructive dialogue.

So, one would have imagined that because plural media give people multiple voices, that could be used as a strength to better coordinate themselves to achieve goals together. Rather, the channels further fragment audiences through the uses and gratifications they derive from the media, as well as by how much they depend on the media for their daily information and other needs, and cause them to live in worlds and paradigms crafted for them by those independent media. That is where the force of moving together becomes an uphill task.

Another important element in the discussion on media pluralism and media competitions in today's dynamic media environments is in the area of investigative journalism. This is crucial because there can be no substantial discussion on media pluralism if the core of journalism – investigation – is not safeguarded. Investigative journalism brings to the fore a variety and diverse array of information which mostly seem obscure to public understanding or deliberately hidden by certain individuals and institutions. Journalists, thus, have a mandate to investigate, sort, and analyze those facts and bring them to public attention.

So, considering that investigative journalism is an important facet of freedom of expression and information, as well as media pluralism, media institutions, media regulators, and state authorities need to ensure the protection of this area, including measures like the protection of confidential sources, protection of journalists' workplaces and equipment, protection of news and information gathering processes, and the guarantee of editorial independence. This is how positive competition in the media can be nurtured.

Strengths of Television Pluralism and Diversity in Cameroon

1. The television industry in Cameroon is burgeoning, providing employment, producing services needed for national development and culture, and feeding related industries. This is increasingly felt in the daily television agenda in the country and how news is framed about individuals, state authorities, opposition figures, the church, non-governmental organizations, and other powerful social institutions. The channels have succeeded to carve their niche by developing connections between television and society. The diversification of TV channels and programs gives audiences multiple viewership options.
2. Television industry in Cameroon, and by extension the general scope of the Cameroon media, have become a significant source of power. They control society through the agenda they set and the types of frames they portray, and are in turn coordinated, controlled, and regulated by institutions like the Ministry of Communication and the National Communication Council (NCC), all mandated by the state to ensure sanity in the Cameroon media space.
3. The plurality of television in Cameroon today has ushered in a wave of innovations in the sector and given audiences the opportunity to consume diversified news and information. Innovations are seen in the character with which programs are conceived, delivered, and consumed. Through popular talk shows and debates, participation is also guaranteed. This enlarges the base of freedom of expression and puts television at the center of attraction in Cameroon. Hence, television offers the opportunity wherein

increasingly, matters of public life (nationally and internationally) are discussed and debated. With this, citizens' participation in public life is guaranteed.

4. Even more interestingly, television in Cameroon is at the centre of the development of the Cameroonian culture and the Cameroonian way of life. The idea of Cameroon as a 'continent' has been shaped significantly by the media, including television. This has sparked public debates and caused persistent interests and questions on why we are referred to as a continent; answers which can only be found in media and television portrayals.
5. Media pluralism within the CRTV, pioneer of TV in Cameroon, as seen today, is a plus to the institution. In terms of programming, certain innovations are evident through the institution of new programs and the revival of existing ones. The broadcast teams are dynamic. CRTV is represented in all ten regions of the country. Its radio platforms are a strong force of communication and national development. The introduction of the web channels (CRTV Web) and engagements with social media handles like Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), all add to the diversity and attempts to increase its reach. This also enhances audience participation as opposed to the earlier years when the channel was introduced. This can be seen in manifestations of the slogan, '*CRTV, at the heart of the nation*'.
6. Finally, television in Cameroon has, today, become a dominant source of definitions and images of social reality for individuals, groups, collectivities, and society. This comes to reality through news and other programs, including entertainment. The representations of these persons in television shows shapes public discourse as well as the manner in which the public perceives those individuals, groups, and the institutions they represent. As George Gerbner and colleagues highlighted in the 1960s and 70s through the cultivation analysis, it can be affirmed that television today still has the power to blur, blend, and bend audiences towards a certain direction with certain degrees of magnitude. Thus, television increasingly leads discussions on what flows in the public sphere as the 'mainstream' conversation.

Limitations of Television Pluralism and Diversity in Cameroon

1. The desire to be the first to publish remains a significant ghost haunting media performance in Cameroon and elsewhere. The television sector is not spared.
2. Audience demands have put journalists and media professionals under unbearable pressure. What the audience wants is their narrative and view/reality of the world. If you fail to present that view, you are unprofessional, corrupt, and compromised. What the audience needs is defined by norms of professionalism, where we make conscious decisions not only on what is right or wrong, but equally the short, medium, and long-term implications of the information.
3. Internal wrangling (amongst media) is another disturbing phenomenon in the pluralism discourse. It makes competition fiercer. Imagine, for instance, the number of associations and unions of journalism in Cameroon. These groupings are good in themselves, but for the fact that internal divisions split them further; causing divides amongst media, and in Cameroon, the private versus public media debacle. Plural media ownership also has a bearing on media performance and the professional aptitude of journalists.

CONCLUSION

The media landscape of Cameroon has expanded following from the passage of the laws on freedom of mass communication in the country and the text liberalizing the private audio-visual sector. It is a moment of stocktaking: the beginnings, current state, and future. The production of contents, recruitment of quality manpower, availability of technological and physical infrastructures, and need to get more audiences exposed to and reliant on the TV industry are future prospects that require exploitation. Also, empirical research on audience needs and expectations of TV should be taken seriously! This is how TV will continue position itself and thrive in the midst of a fiercely competitive media landscape in Cameroon, Africa, and the world. Information across channels in Cameroon should be treated as a public good where all citizens benefit. This article has provided rich data for reference and future television research in Cameroon.

Focusing on the strengths of TV pluralism in Cameroon will increase audience engagements with national life and participation in democratic exercises like elections. This is even more crucial in 2025, given high stakes in the country's presidential election scheduled for October 12. Information made available to audiences should be void of propaganda and manipulation of public opinion. Audiences should see the need to trust public and private TV channels in the country, as this will also contribute to more home consumption in an era where cable television provides a multiplicity of channels and social media are available in the palms and doorsteps of media audiences. The rivalry is getting tougher by the day, and television channels need to perpetually reassert themselves in the national and global marketplace to survive the fierce competition.

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