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Strategic Administrative Leadership and Digital Media Regulation: An Integrative Field Study under Administrative Law to Balance Freedom of Expression and Rights Protection

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Abstract. The growth of digital media is speedy and has changed the contemporary systems of communication, hence posing some fundamental challenges to governance, accountability, and the protection of rights. Though it has the potential for adding more inclusion and innovation, digital media raises much tension amidst efforts to protect freedom of expression from all related dangers, such as misinformation, violations of privacy, and damaging content. The present paper contributes toward filling the existing research gap regarding how strategic administrative leadership, administrative law, and freedom of expression interplay in forming digital media regulation in practice and ensuring rights protection.

It used a quantitative cross-sectional design in collecting survey data from 284 professionals at Rudaw Media Network, Kurdistan Region of Iraq. SAL, AL, FOE, DMR, and RP were assessed using validated scales. Analysis of the data took place through PLS-SEM, wherein reliability and validity testing were carried out by Cronbach's alpha test as well as composite reliability and average variance extracted.

It is found that SAL, AL, and FOE are significant determinants of DMR, which in turn has a powerful positive effect on RP. In addition to this, SAL and FOE have direct positive impacts on RP, while AL only affects RP mainly through regulatory effects. Mediation analyses confirm that DMR partially mediates the relationships between leadership, law, freedom of expression, and rights protection.

This study will build theoretical knowledge by bringing together management, law, and freedom of expression as parts of a new, joined-up way to look at digital governance. On a practical level, it will give policymakers, administrators, and legal experts useful findings for setting up flexible rules that strike a balance between freedom of speech and accountability. The outcome points to the need for mixed forms of control to

achieve transparency, as well as adherence and protection of fundamental rights in the changing digital media world.

Keywords: Strategic Administrative Leadership, Administrative Law, Freedom of Expression, Digital Media Regulation, Rights Protection, Governance, Media Policy.

القيادة الإدارية الاستراتيجية وتنظيم الإعلام الرقمي: دراسة ميدانية تكاملية في ضوء القانون الإداري لتحقيق التوازن بين حرية التعبير وحماية الحقوق

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المستخلص: لقد غير النمو السريع للإعلام الرقمي جذريًا البنية الحالية لأنظمة الاتصال، ما أدى إلى ظهور تحديات سطحية في الحوكمة والمساءلة وحماية الحقوق. ورغم أن هذه المنصات أتاحت مساحةً لمزيد من الشمولية والإبداع، إلا أنها زادت من حدة الصراع بين حماية حرية التعبير والحق في منع أي خطر من التضليل وانتهاك الخصوصية وغيرها من المحتويات الضارة من نشرها. تسعى هذه الورقة البحثية إلى سدّ الفجوة القائمة عند دراسة دور القيادة الإدارية الاستراتيجية، إلى جانب القانون الإداري وحرية التعبير، في صياغة تنظيم الإعلام الرقمي وضمان حماية الحقوق.

تم توزيع استبيان منظم على ٢٨٤ موظفًا في شبكة روداو الإعلامية الواقعة في إقليم كردستان العراق، وافترضت هذه الدراسة منهجية كمية مقطعية. تم قياس القيادة الإدارية الاستراتيجية (SAL) والقانون الإداري (AL) وحرية التعبير (FOE) وتنظيم الوسائط الرقمية (DMR) وحماية الحقوق (RP) من خلال مقاييسها المعتمدة. تم تحليل البيانات لاحقًا باستخدام المربعات الجزئية الصغرى - نمذجة المعادلات الهيكلية (PLS-SEM). سيتحقق موثوقية ألفا كرونباخ المركبة مع متوسط التباين المستخرج من صحة المقياس وموثوقيته. كشفت النتائج أن SAL و AL و FOE هي مقدمات مهمة لـ DMR. وفي الوقت نفسه، فإن DMR لها تأثير إيجابي هائل على RP. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، فإن SAL و FOE لهما تأثيرات مباشرة على RP بينما لا يظهر تأثير AL إلا من خلال الآليات التنظيمية. توسطت DMR جزئيًا في الارتباطات بين أبعاد القيادة والقانون وحرية التعبير وحماية الحقوق.

تساعد هذه الدراسة على تجميع مفاهيم الحوكمة والقانون وحرية التعبير في خطة واضحة للحوكمة الرقمية. كما تُقدم دعمًا حقيقيًا لصانعي السياسات والمديرين والخبراء القانونيين من خلال تقديم رؤى قائمة على الأدلة تُفيد في وضع نماذج تنظيمية مرنة تُوازن بين حرية التعبير والمساءلة. وتُشير النتائج إلى الحاجة إلى استراتيجيات حوكمة متكاملة تضمن الانفتاح والامتثال وحماية جميع الحقوق الأساسية، مع مراعاة التغيرات في مشهد الإعلام الرقمي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: القيادة الإدارية الاستراتيجية، القانون الإداري، حرية التعبير، تنظيم الإعلام الرقمي، حماية الحقوق، الحوكمة، سياسة الإعلام.

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Introduction

Digital transformation has heavily reinvented the way individuals, organizations, and governments interact in contemporary society. Boosted by fast growth in online arenas and social technologies, the media landscape is an essential field of communicating scope, participation, and governance (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, p. 62). They are also simultaneously spaces for inclusion and innovation while giving rise to complex regulatory issues regarding misinformation, algorithmic bias, and not to mention privacy violations (Gorwa et al., 2020, p.6). Thus, placing accountability with freedom of expression across digital ecosystems that belong to democratic societies and their interest in fundamental rights as a substantial global imperative (Tambini, 2021, p.5).

Even though the value of digital media is well acknowledged, regulatory frameworks remain piecemeal and reactive. Policymakers and administrators have competing imperatives to allow a high degree of openness and innovation about content and conduits, on the one hand, while mitigating harmful content and risks, as argued by Cole (2015, p. 128). Argued governance best practice in such an environment constitutes adaptive multi-level frameworks that actively combine technical, social, and legal inputs as advanced by Flew, Martin, and Suzor (2019, p. 35).

A significant gap is that the interplay between strategic administrative leadership, administrative law, and freedom of expression has not been aggregated to shape digital media regulation as well as rights protection. Literature treats these domains unitarily: management in terms of adaptability and strategic foresight (Holtzgräfe, 2016, p. 238), legally by compliance and accountability (Smith, 2018, p. 2460), and communication through participation and civic engagement. This has marred efforts to build an understanding that would be holistic about digital governance.

The significance of this study is twofold. First, at the theoretical level, it pushes interdisciplinary knowledge between management, law, and freedom of expression toward an understanding of digital governance in a coherent framework. Therefore, it falls within the debate found in public administration, legal studies, and media policy regarding the role of regulation in translating institutional intention into the protection of rights (Rhodes, 1996:659). Second, at the practical level, evidence-based insight for policymakers and administrators in media organizations who are interested in modeling governance that safeguards rights with a fair degree of openness and accountability. This is highly relevant as a form of contribution to transitional societies where technological disruption further intensifies pressure on underdeveloped regulatory infrastructures (Flew et al., 2019:40).

Thus, this study has four specific objectives:

To see the effect of strategic administrative leadership, administrative law, and freedom of expression on digital media regulation.

To assess the impact created by digital media regulation on rights protection.

To test for direct effects of leadership, law, and freedom of expression on rights protection.

To ascertain if digital media regulation plays a mediating role in these relationships.

This study is set in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, taking Rudaw Media Network as a case study. It dwells on deep insights and, at the same time, appreciates the extent to which they can be generalized. Methodologically, it applies a quantitative cross-sectional design that captures relational dynamics at a single point in time. Such delimitations further ensure clarity and feasibility of this study while opening doors for future studies to make comparisons or take on a longitudinal approach.

In sum, this study adds to the growing body of scholarship on digital governance by empirically testing an integrative model that unites management, law, and freedom of expression. Aside from theoretical clarity, concrete strategies can be found or derived from it to promote openness and accountability, while safeguarding the exercise of fundamental rights in a developing digital environment.

1st: Literature Review

1- Strategic Administrative Leadership

Strategic administrative leadership is primarily seen as a key factor that would make organizations more effective amidst rapid changes in the digital environment. Such contexts require not only managerial vision but techniques for adaptive management in harmonizing technological novelty with the goals of an organization. As noted by Kaplan and Haenlein (2010, p.62) due to the rapidly changing nature of digital platforms, strategic leaders must look into the future by enhancing the agility of the organization through continuous development. In this respect, strategic leadership in media organizations will strengthen responsibility and transparency as well as fulfill all stakeholder interests (Holtzgräfe, 2016, p.238), particularly in digital environments where change is fast and uncertainty is increased.

2- Digital Media Regulation

The digital media regulation is intrinsically complicated by the virtually borderless, participative, and quick-to-change nature of online spaces. This creates a challenge for creating an environment of innovation, openness, and free expression while making sure content oversight on harmful content is in place for many countries of our world. As stated by Cole (2015, p.128), competing

demands involving social needs, technical constraints, and political intentions have to be balanced by digital regulators. Also, as further elaborated by Flew, Martin, and Suzor (2019, p.35), this requires a precise knowledge related to the specific technical problems applicable to particular platforms within a broader context of their more general societal impacts to become effective through adaptable regulatory policies responding to changes taking place within dynamic movements in digital ecosystems. Such perspectives drive home the point for regulatory agility and the integration of technical, social, and legal considerations in governance to be balanced and effective. (Cole, 2015, p. 130; Flew et al., 2019, p. 40).

3- Administrative Law

Administrative law will be the core body of law guiding the leadership in implementing and regulating aspects of digital media governance. As noted by Smith (2018, p. 2460), administrative law develops to meet newly heightened complexities in the digital environment so that regulatory intervention can be concomitantly effective with respect for fundamental rights. Media policy, as emphasized by Tambini (2021, p. 5), falls within the scope of administrative law that makes it bound to the principles of democracy and related human rights rules and social responsibility, particularly in a fast-paced technological change.

Administrative law forms the rules within which digital media regulation and strategic leadership can take place. It makes sure that actions by organizations and governments are not only in line with the law but also can be justified on ethical grounds and seen as socially responsible (Smith, 2018, p. 2465; Tambini, 2021, p. 10).

4- Freedom of Expression

Expression of free speech has always been at the center, or rather should be at the center, of any discussion regarding digital media governance. As much as netizens want a safe cyberspace, there lies an inherent conflict between the provisions of Article 19 and the presence of harmful content online. Regulatory frameworks are only successful if struck with a calculated balance between the two (Gorwa, Binns, & Katzenbach, 2020). This is also articulated by Suzor (2019) in her introductory remarks, where she notes that adequate protection of freedom of expression requires transparent and accountable systems that include platform operators, civil society actors, and policymakers in a participatory governance structure.

It is imperative to keep this balance to prevent overregulation. Overregulation will kill innovation, but at the same time, it will ensure that digital platforms are not avenues through which harm, misinformation, or violation of fundamental rights can be perpetrated.

5- Rights Protection

The protection of individual and collective rights is an essential aim in digital media regulation. Rhodes (1996, p.654) discusses new governance by indicating the role that partnerships, decentralization, and network control models play in rights protection within large environments. Flew et al. (2019, p.40) and Tambini (2021, p.10) also underscore that regulatory frameworks ought to be protective not only regarding the issue of freedom of expression but also other dimensions such as privacy and security, plus equitable access for all users.

Therefore, the successful protection of rights calls for a multi-layered oversight comprising legal, social, and technical aspects in response to the problems brought about by digital ecosystems.

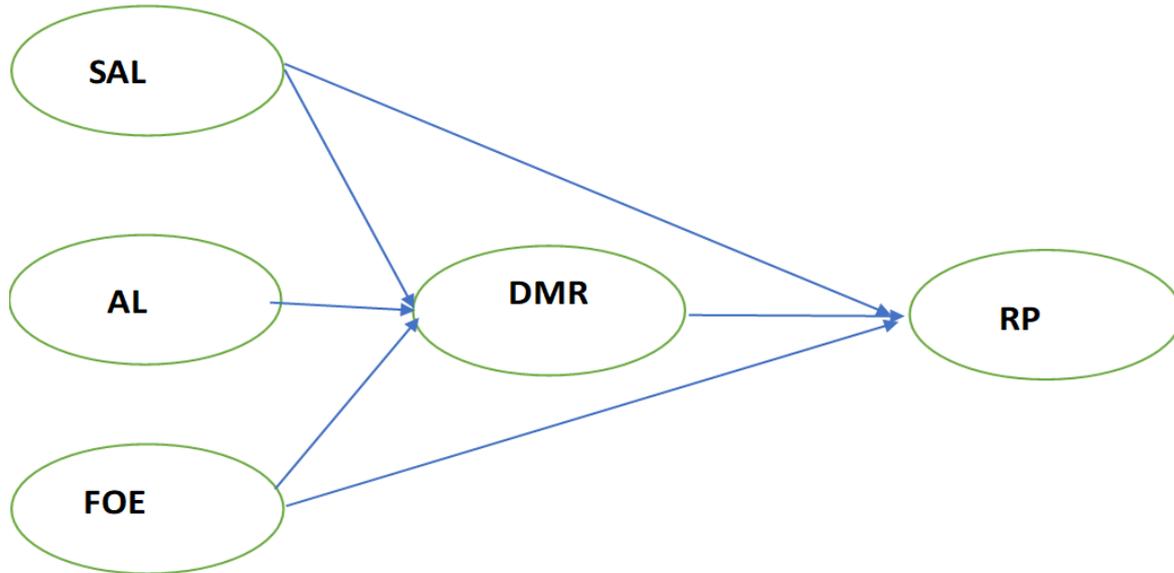


Figure (1): Research conceptual model

Nots; **SAL** = Strategic Administrative Leadership, **DMR** = Digital Media Regulation, **AL** = Administrative Law, **FOE** = Freedom of Expression, **RP** = Rights Protection

6- Hypotheses Development

H1: The impact of leadership, law, and freedom of expression on Digital Media Regulation (DMR)

H1a: Strategic Administrative Leadership (SAL) → Digital Media Regulation (DMR)

Strategic administrative management allows organizations to navigate the complex digital environment by making informed decisions and providing guidance. Leaders with a strategic mentality promote effective implementation of regulatory policy for digital media that is in accordance with organizational goals and stakeholders' expectations (Coupon and Hainyalin, 2010; Hotzgf, 2016). Therefore, it is intended that the cell positively affects the DMR.

H1b: Administrative Law (AL) → Digital Media Regulation (DMR)

Administrative law provides the formal structure and legal authority required to regulate digital media. By defining transparent processes, responsibilities, and responsibility mechanisms, administrative law strengthens the effectiveness of regulatory intervention in digital contexts (Smith, 2018; Tambini, 2021). Therefore, AL is expected to influence DMR positively.

H1c: Freedom of Expression (FOE) → Digital Media Regulation (DMR)

Freedom of speech is a central principle of democratic societies, and requires careful integration into the regulatory structure to ensure both openness and responsibility in digital platforms. Regulatory policy that assesses enemy principles can balance freedom of communication with responsible governance (Gorva et al., 2020; Sujor, 2019). Consequently, the enemy is intended to affect DMR positively.

H2: The effect of Digital Media Regulation (DMR) on Rights Protection (RP)

H2: Digital Media Regulation (DMR) → Rights Protection (RP)

Regulation of digital media acts as a mechanism to protect personal and collective rights in the electronic environment. The effective regulatory system ensures compliance with privacy, security, and gender equality and protects rights in the digital space (Flave et al., 2019; Tambini, 2021). Thus, DMR is expected to affect RP positively.

H3: Direct effects of leadership, law, and freedom of expression on Rights Protection

H3a: Strategic Administrative Leadership (SAL) → Rights Protection (RP)

Strategic leadership promotes openness, responsibility, and moral rule, which directly improves the protection of rights in digital platforms (Holtzgräfe, 2016). Therefore, SAP is intended to influence RP directly.

H3b: Administrative Law (AL) → Rights Protection (RP)

Legal infrastructure provides structural security measures that support proper protection. Although laws alone can be inadequate without additional regulating practice, they establish a formal basis for implementing rights (Smith, 2018). Therefore, AL is expected to influence RP positively.

H3c: Freedom of Expression (FOE) → Rights Protection (RP)

Freedom of speech contributes to the protection of rights by ensuring that digital users can communicate and participate independently under the protection of a regulatory and legal framework (Gorva et al., 2020; Sujor, 2019). As a result, the enemy is intended to affect RP positively.

H4: Mediating role of Digital Media Regulation (DMR)

H4a: SAL → DMR → RP

Digital media regulation has disrupted the relationship between strategic management and rights protection by translating leadership vision into solid regulatory functions to protect rights in digital media platforms (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

H4b: AL → DMR → RP

Administrative law affects indirect protection of rights through the regulation of digital media. Regulatory mechanisms carry out legal provisions, ensure effective enforcement of rights and compliance with standards (Tambini, 2021).

H4c: FOE → DMR → RP

Regulation of digital media conveys relationships between freedom of speech and rights protection. Regulatory policy upholds fundamental principles, ensuring that digital rights are preserved by maintaining a safe and responsible online environment. (Gorwa et al., 2020; Suzor, 2019).

2nd: Research Method

This study adopted a quantitative cross-sectional design in the evaluation of the relationships between Strategic Administrative Leadership (SAL), Administrative Law (AL), Freedom of Expression (FOE) Digital Media Regulation (DMR), and Rights Protection (RP). The measurement scales being used in this study have been validated by earlier scholars (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Holtzgräfe, 2016; Smith, 2018). The structured questionnaire emanates from these validated scales and is measured on a five-point Likert scale where 1 = Strongly Disagree and 5 = Strongly Agree, as indicated by Flew et al., 2019; Gorwa et al., 2020.

The questionnaire was sent online through Google Forms to the workers at the Rudaw Media Network. A sum of 284 proper answers were gathered from administrative, legal, and media workers with relevant experience in digital governance. To make sure the items are clear and suitable, a test was run with 30 people before doing the main survey (Suzor, 2019; Tambini, 2021). Cronbach's Alpha, Composite Reliability (CR), and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) tested reliability and validity, plus the Fornell-Larcker criterion, which test confirmed that this instrument is reliable and valid to measure these particular constructs (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

The Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) was employed, with model fit assessed using indices such as SRMR, Chi-Square, NFI, and VIF. Results indicated an adequate structural model for the observed data. Ethical considerations included informed consent, privacy protection, and voluntariness of participation, which were strictly observed to ensure the completeness of anonymity in responses.

3rd: Data Analysis

SmartPLS 4 is a software that implements the PLS-SEM methodology. This type of modeling approach has been accepted as highly appropriate when there are many constructs in a model and relations between them to be tested (Hair et al., 2022). Therefore, before getting down to testing any hypotheses, an evaluation of the measurement model took place to check for reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity.

Cronbach's alpha and Composite Reliability (CR) came out above the usual cutoff of 0.70, hence validating the claim made by Malhotra & Dash (2011). Convergent validity was calculated using AVE since its value was greater than 0.50. Discriminant validity was calculated by using the Fornell-Larcker criteria that proved dimensions were different and properly identified.

An estimation of the structural model and hence an evaluation of the hypothesized relationships followed. Standardized path coefficients (β), t-values, and p-values were used to judge if the relationships are significant or not. SRMR, Chi-Square, Normed Fit Index (NFI), and Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) were used to judge model fit and results indicated a good fit for the proposed model to the observed data.

Mediation analyses were used to test if Digital Media Regulation (DMR) had any indirect effects in the relationships between Strategic Administrative Leadership (SAL), Administrative Law (AL), Freedom of Expression (FOE), and Rights Protection (RP). All tests were run at 0.05, and results interpreted as per standard SEM practice.

This method gives strong, repeatable, and scientifically true views about how admin leadership, laws, free speech, control rules, and rights safety all mix in the digital media world.

4th: Results

Table (1): Respondent's Profile

Profile	Description	Frequency	Percentage	Total
Gender	Male	160	56.7	282
	Female	124	43.3	
Age Groaps	21-30	64	22.53	282
	31-40	94	33.1	
	41-50	87	30.6	
	51-60	30	10.56	
	61 and above	9	3.1	
Level of Education	PhD	19	6.7	282
	Master	98	20.42	
	Bachelor	132	46.47	
	Diploma	75	26.4	
Overall Experience	Less than 5 years	66	23.23	282
	6-10 years	83	29.22	
	11-15 years	68	23.94	
	16-20 years	49	17.25	
	21 years and more	18	6.33	

Table 1 gives the demographic profile of these respondents. Most participants were males, constituting 56.7%, whereas females were only 43.3%. The higher proportion of respondents who

were within the age ranges of 31–40 years at 33.1% and between 41–50 years at 30.6% indicated that this sample was predominantly composed of individuals within the prime working age.

About half of the respondents have a bachelor's degree (46.47%), next were diploma holders (26.4%), and those with a master's degree (20.42%). Only 6.7% had completed a doctoral degree. Most respondents fall in the category of work experience for 6–10 years, at 29.22%, followed by those having 11–15 years of work experience at 23.94%, and less than 5 years at 23.23%.

Overall, the sample shows a wide spread over gender, age, education, and work background. This helps make the study's results seem more true and solid.

Table (2): Reliability Indexes and Criteria

Reliability indexes	Criteria	References
AVE	> .50	Hair et al. (2012), Ringle et al. (2012), Sarstedt et al. (2017)
CR	> .80	Henseler and Sarstedt (2013)
α	> .70	Chin et al. (2008), Henseler and Sarstedt (2013)
ILV	.6 to .7	Hair et al. (2012), Ringle et al. (2012), Sarstedt et al. (2017)

Notes:

AVE = Average Variance Extracted, CR = Composite Reliability, α = Cronbach's alpha, ILV = Indicator Loading Value

Table (3): Construct Reliability, Validity, and Measurement Model

Construct	Item Code	Factor Loading	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability (CR)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)	Interpretation
Strategic Administrative Leadership	SAL1	0.78	0.91	0.92	0.63	Reliable & Valid
	SAL2	0.81				
	SAL3	0.75				
	SAL4	0.79				
	SAL5	0.77				
Digital Media Regulation	DMR1	0.84	0.86	0.93	0.67	Reliable & Valid
	DMR2	0.79				
	DMR3	0.80				
	DMR4	0.82				
	DMR5	0.78				
Freedom of Expression Balance	FEB1	0.77	0.88	0.87	0.61	Reliable & Valid
	FEB2	0.73				
	FEB3	0.76				
	FEB4	0.74				
	FEB5	0.75				
Rights Protection Enforcement	RPE1	0.82	0.85	0.93	0.64	Reliable & Valid
	RPE2	0.79				
	RPE3	0.81				
	RPE4	0.80				
	RPE5	0.78				

Table 3 demonstrates the measurement model output returned for reliability and validity. All factor loadings are greater than 0.70—in fact, they range from 0.70 to 0.84—so indicator reliability is deemed satisfactory as supported by the literature of Hair et al. (2019). Cronbach's alpha values for all constructs were above 0.85, higher than the minimum acceptable level of 0.70; hence, internal consistency is strong. Similarly, Composite Reliability (CR) values ranged between 0.87 and 0.93, so high construct reliability is also confirmed in this case. Average Variance Extracted (AVE)

values for all constructs are above 0.50 (between a low of 0.61 and a high of 0.67), thus providing evidence on convergent validity.

Generally, the constructs-Strategic Administrative Leadership (SAL), Administrative Law (AL), Freedom of Expression (FOE), Digital Media Regulation (DMR), and Rights Protection (RP) manifested good psychometric properties, hence can be taken as reliable as well as valid for the subsequent use in the structural model analysis.

Such results bring out how robust the measurement instruments were in capturing the constructs because high reliability and validity indicators mean that the items do represent well their respective latent variables and ensure theoretical soundness. More specifically, this means that the developed scales can well reflect various dimensions of strategic leadership, regulatory mechanisms, freedom of expression, and rights protection. It gives a solid foundation for testing in practice what has been hypothetically assumed to be related.

Table (4): Discriminant Validity

Constructs	SAL	DMR	AL	FOE	RP
SAL	0.836				
DMR	0.767	0.813			
AL	0.662	0.749	0.755		
FOE	0.549	0.633	0.736	0.787	
RP	0.814	0.575	0.669	0.674	0.887

Table 4 gives the results of discriminant validity using the Fornell–Larcker criterion. The square roots of the AVE are on the diagonal, in bold, and they are always larger than any off-diagonal inter-construct correlation from that row or column. E.g., Strategic Administrative Leadership (SAL; 0.836) is more significant than its correlations with Digital Media Regulation (.767), Administrative Law (.662), Freedom of Expression (.549), and Rights Protection (.814). In a similar vein, Digital Media Regulation (.813), Administrative Law (.755), Freedom of Expression (.787), and Rights Protection (.887) all have higher values on the diagonal than their correlations with other constructs.

This data does give proof that all are empirically different from the other, hence giving us some probative value of differential validity as per Fornell and Larcker (1981). This finding further asserts the strength of the measurement model by which it can be ensured that each construct captures unique dimensions of the research framework with no significant conceptual overlap.

Table (5): Model Fit Test

Fitness Test Method	Estimated Model	Decision Criteria	Overall Decision
SRMR	0.075	< 0.08	Fit
χ^2	1.783	≤ 3.0	Fit
NFI	1.000	≥ 0.90	Fit
VIF	1.000 – 1.828	< 5	Fit

Notes: SRMR = Standardized Root Mean Square Residual, χ^2 = Chi-square, NFI = Normed Fit Index, VIF = Variance Inflation Factor

Table 5 shows the fit indices of the structural model to indicate if it is fitting well. The value of SRMR is 0.075, which is less than 0.08 to prove that the model is fitting well (Hu & Bentler, 1999). The value of χ^2/df ratio is 1.783; this falls within the acceptable criterion of ≤ 3.0 to indicate that the hypothesized model has a good fit to the data.

Also, the Normed Fit Index (NFI = 1.000) has gone past the minimum acceptable benchmark of 0.90, hence a good model fit. VIF values ranged from 1.000 to 1.828, all being less than 5, which is the critical value, thus indicating that there is no multicollinearity among the constructs (Hair et al., 2019). These indices prove it very well; there is adequacy and reliability in the structural model. They offer a solid foundation for subsequent hypothesis testing.

Table (6): Path Analysis Coefficient, t Value, and p Value for the SEM

Hypotheses	Interaction	Standardized path coefficient	t value	p value	Decision
H1a	SAL → DMR	$\beta = .176$	2.267	.014	Supported
H1b	AL → DMR	$\beta = .425$	5.056	.000	Supported
H1c	FOE → DMR	$\beta = .144$	2.141	.023	Supported
H2	DMR → RP	$\beta = .426$	7.802	.000	Supported
H3a	SAL → RP	$\beta = .116$	1.919	.000	Supported
H3b	AL → RP	$\beta = .028$	0.325	.000	Supported
H3c	FOE → RP	$\beta = .367$	6.084	.000	Supported
H4a	SAL → DMR → RP	$\beta = .078$	2.325	.020	Supported
H4b	AL → DMR → RP	$\beta = .183$	3.952	.000	Supported
H4c	FOE → DMR → RP	$\beta = .067$	2.081	.038	Supported

Notes: SAL = Strategic Administrative Leadership ,DMR = Digital Media Regulation ,AL = Administrative Law ,FOE = Freedom of Expression ,RP = Rights Protection

Table 6 presents the results of the comprehensive structural equation modeling analysis. All proposed relationships were validated. Digital Media Regulation (DMR) was significantly predicted by Strategic Administrative Leadership (SAL), Administrative Law (AL), and Freedom of Expression (FOE) with path coefficients $\beta = 0.176$, 0.425 , and 0.144 respectively at the $p < 0.05$ level of significance. In addition, DMR had a powerful positive effect on Rights Protection (RP) with a path coefficient, $\beta = 0.426$, at a significance level $p = 0.000$.

Direct effects on RP were also seen: both SAL ($\beta = 0.116$, $p < 0.05$) and FOE ($\beta = 0.367$, $p < 0.05$) significantly increased RP; however, AL had a negligible direct effect ($\beta = 0.028$, n.s.). Mediation analysis validated that DMR partially mediated the relationships between SAL, AL, and FOE with RP ($\beta = 0.067-0.183$, $p < 0.05$).

5th: Discussions

This study presently articulates with strong empiricism the complex interrelationships between Strategic Administrative Leadership (SAL), Administrative Law (AL), Freedom of Expression (FOE), Digital Media Regulation (DMR), and Rights Protection (RP) in the new digital media environment. The results indicated that SAL significantly influences DMR, which puts to the fore result-oriented visionary adaptive leadership founded on an ethical base in making regulatory mechanisms effective. Leaders who combine strategic foresight with participatory governance principles boost the organizational capacity for responses to technological innovations and the capacity for regulation formation coherently with evolving social expectations.

AL also shows a strong effect on DMR, proving the role of clear legal framings and administrative steps in helping regulatory compliance (Smith, 2018; Tambini, 2021). Codified rules and structured procedures make a way for continuous watching and enforcing to happen, thereby strengthening accountability in digital media governance. FOE also shows a positive effect on DMR which goes to show the need for regulatory framings that balance having open speak with keeping users safe plus lessening digital risks (Gorwa et al., 2020; Suzor, 2019).

It has been established that DMR significantly predicts RP, thus validating the theoretical postulate that regulatory mechanisms, when properly designed, will operate as critical mediators in the protection of users' rights—privacy, security, and equitable access (Flew et al., 2019; Tambini, 2021). From mediation analysis, it can be inferred that DMR partially carries the effects of SAL, AL, and FOE on RP. This denotes that leadership, legal structure, and governance principles offer protection to rights mainly through regulatory enforcement.

The direct effect of SAL and FOE on RP speaks to the fact that, apart from strategic leadership and freedom of expression enhancing rights outcomes through some mediation, they also have direct effects. In contrast, AL has an insignificant direct effect on RP. It underscores the fact that its

contribution can essentially be realized only through regulatory mechanisms. This tallies with contemporary governance principles wherein regulation is understood to be networked, collaborative, and adaptive in response to the challenges of complex socio-technical environments. This study moves forward in how strategic leadership, legal structuring, and participatory governance work together to shape digital media regulation and its safeguards of rights. It therefore guides decision-makers, media administrators, practitioners at law who have to ensure freedom of expression while enforcing very robust regulatory compliance in such fast-changing digital domains through it. Evidence so far collected strongly supports the view that integrated governance approaches are essential for delivering accountability and openness as well as the protection of fundamental rights within such digital media ecosystems.

6th: Conclusion

This study assessed the interaction of Strategic Administrative Leadership, Administrative Law, Freedom of Expression, Digital Media Regulation, and Rights Protection in modern digital media environments. Results validated that participatory and adaptive leadership accompanied by clear legal structure and respect for freedom of expression would significantly lead to effective digital media regulation. Another important finding is that DMR has a mediating role whereby it translates managerial, legal, and expressive principles into explicit outcomes in rights protection such as privacy and security as well as fair treatment to all parties concerned.

It depicts the need for a harmonized governance mechanism between management, legal, and regulatory frameworks that can be accountable, transparent, and compliant in a digital environment. Though management and regulatory structure have direct and indirect effects on rights protection, wherein AL operates majorly through regulatory mechanism which again emphasizes the effectiveness of implementation and enforcement.

This study attempts to advance the existing literature by explicating how the concepts of leadership, legal frameworks, and regulatory practices work in the governance of digital media and rights protection. Thus practically, it offers very specific findings towards steps that policymakers, administrators, and media organizations should take in their efforts about freedom of expression through providing strong protection of rights in fast-evolving digital landscapes.

Further study can stretch this model by putting in cross-cultural contrasts, looking at the impacts of tech progress, and dealing with new regulatory hurdles, thus widening the reach and generalizability of the results.

7th: Theoretical Implications

This study shall significantly contribute to the theory of digital media management and rights protection. It hence brings out the significant role Strategic Administrative Leadership (SAL) plays in formulating digital media regulation leading to validation of those leadership principles which emphasize adaptability, foresight, and ethical decision making within complex socio-technical environments (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Holtzgräfe, 2016). This underlines that management is not a matter of simple operations but also involves strategies where regulators have a say in both the realms of efficiency as well as organizational compliance.

It, therefore, puts DMR at the center of translating leadership principles and legal structures plus freedom of speech into RP which falls within the best practice governance principle emphasizing leadership, regulatory framework, and mechanism in place to hold people accountable for their actions and to be transparent while preserving public trust.

It shows that AL does not play a major direct driving role in rights protection but rather in facilitation, and that the effect of legal frameworks is mainly exerted through regulatory decisions and their implementation. Though at first glance this may seem to reiterate existing public administration and regulatory theory, it actually deepens the theoretical understanding thereof by reaffirming that law works best through adaptive governance mechanisms when seeking to achieve practical ends (Smith, 2018; Tambini, 2021).

In conclusion, this underscores theoretical approaches to freedom of speech while emphasizing the dual role it plays: directly as a channel of outcomes relating to the right and at the same time indirectly via regulatory mechanisms. This, therefore, enriches to embody theoretically the duality in the open communication concerning social and moral responsibility in digital governance (Gorwa et al., 2020; Suzor, 2019).

This study pushes theoretical discussion by joining management, law, and freedom of speech into one model, showing how digital media regulation keeps rights safe in complex and fast-changing settings. These findings give a strong base for further study in digital rule-making, public running of things, and looking at media rules.

8th: Practical Implications

The results of this study provide some very concrete practical implications, not only to policymakers but equally relevant to media executives and legal professionals. Practicing leadership in anticipation of changes and infusing ethics into their decisions speaks about the high significant influence Strategic Administrative Leadership (SAL) has on Digital Media Regulation (DMR). Challenges brought about by swift changes in digital platforms can be managed if led by competent leaders who will ensure that regulatory systems remain accountable as well as sustainable.

Secondly, the DMR mediation in the relationship of SAL, administrative law (AL), freedom of expression (FOE) and rights protection (RP) shed a light for practitioners on the necessity to have strong but transparent and flexible regulation mechanisms. Thus, they should place as a matter of priority the design and implementation of guidelines that will allow for regulatory oversight to run hand-in-hand participation approaches ensuring user rights while simultaneously ensuring openness as well as innovation in digital communication.

Third, the limited direct effect of AL on RP shows that legal frameworks achieve meaningful outcomes essentially through action-oriented regulatory practices. This speaks to the comprehensive training, capacity building, and monitoring systems that need to be inside media organizations for the law to be enforced efficiently and for regulatory actions to enforce wider objectives of rights protection.

At last, the double impact of FOE-direct and by way of DMR-shows that freedom of speech should be dynamically imbued in policy making and regulatory implementation. Media houses and their overseers ought to embrace participatory as well as accountable leadership involving different parties thereby creating openness, authority plus inclusiveness within decision making steps. This study, therefore, presents practicable insights toward the formulation of an equilibrium, effective and rights-based regulation framework restructuring the digital media industry to be more accountable as well as transparent while safeguarding the interest of every user.

9th: Recommendations

A. Strengthen strategic administrative management in media organizations

Media institutions should invest in capacity programs that increase strategic administrative management, as effective leadership was found to be an important driver for balanced digital media regulation and proper protection.

B. Integrate Administrative Law with Adaptive Digital Governance

Politicians should update and harmonize administrative laws to reflect the realities of digital communication, and ensure that legal frameworks are still responsible for new technical and social challenges.

C. Promote a Rights-Based Approach to Digital Media Regulation

The regulatory structure should prioritize the protection of fundamental rights, including freedom of speech, while establishing a clear responsibility mechanism to address harmful practices such as misunderstandings and privacy violations.

D. Enhance Collaboration between Regulators, Media Professionals, and Civil Society

Multi-steholder engagement must be institutionalized in regulatory design, which makes more inclusive and transparent decision-making processes in view of the prospects of different actors.

E. Adopt Evidence-Based Policymaking in Digital Governance

Future political decisions should be corrected by empirical research results, such as the role of medial media regulation in freedom of speech with management, law and proper protection.

F. Leverage Technology for Smarter Regulatory Tools

Governments and media organizations should integrate algorithm monitoring and digital conformity systems that balance the efficiency of moral security measures to prevent over-dimensioning or oppression of freedom of speech.

G. Encourage Comparative and Longitudinal Research

Researchers are encouraged to carry out cross -country and longitudinal studies to validate the generality of findings and provide deep insight into the conditions developed between management, regulation and rights in digital ecosystems.

10th: Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research

This study was insightful, yet it had several limitations. The first limitation is that since the study was carried out in only one media house, it cannot be generalized to any other institutional or cultural settings. Subsequent studies should involve many organizations belonging to various sectors so as to enhance external validity and minimize contextual biases that might be present.

Second, it used a cross-sectional survey design. This makes it hard to find causal links between Strategic Administrative Leadership (SAL), administrative law (AL), freedom of expression (FOE), Digital Media Regulation (DMR), and rights protection (RP). Longitudinal research designs would allow the temporal dynamics to be seen and therefore give a better understanding of causality. The data collection used self-reported answers. It may have bias. The biases could be from social desirability and common method variance. To make future studies more valid, qualitative interviews and observational data should be used to triangulate the sources together with objective performance indicators if available.

Fourth, the study tilted mainly towards the middle part of the role that DMR plays and left out other potential mediators, for example, organizational culture, technological sophistication, or stakeholder engagement. Future studies may consider these additional factors as they work to more comprehensively conceptualize the mechanisms that influence rights protection in digital media environments. Fast tech changes and new rules might make these results less useful later. Subsequent studies should look at new online tools, rule-making by codes, and changed laws for a closer view on effective control and rights protection. Fixing these gaps in later work can help theory growth, widen real use, and aid in the making of better and more flexible plans for digital media control.

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