Masters Research Report

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Title:
Sourcing of HIV/AIDS Treatment News: a case study of selected South African Print Media.

A research report submitted to the Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Journalism and Media Studies.

Abstract

The basis of this study is to establish whether news on HIV/AIDS treatment issues is dominated by non-expert and activist sources as opposed to state or government and expert sources. It also seeks to determine if there is a growing use of the alternative or non-official sources in the reporting of this issue in the selected South African Press (*The Star* and *The Sowetan*). In reference to the concept of 'primary definition' by Hall (1978) and his colleagues, official sources have automatically been assumed to be the dominant sources as regards usage by journalists or reporters and have as a result been expected to be the definers of news agendas. However, this concept has been criticised by Schlesinger (1990), who argues that non-official/activist sources may have more power to define media topics than has been implied in the past. This study therefore has examined whether such a trend may be shifting to pave way for the increased use of alternative sources as well.

The findings of this report have proved that while official sources continue to be used in dominance as sources, there is undoubtedly a large use of non-official sources as key sources as well. This is a challenge to Hall's (1978) concept that in its rigid nature fails to accommodate such a notion. It is however in concurrence with Schlesinger's (1990) views that recognise the fact that non-official/alternative sources cannot be underestimated in terms of their power to define news agendas. Further, in an attempt to explain why and how these non-official sources have succeeded in achieving media attention, the study has also examined some media strategies that have been put in place by various source organisations. It has also proposes a more nuance model of the 'theory of dominance' that gives a provision for the ability of sources to be dynamic because of various factors.

Declaration

I declare that this research is my own unaided work.

It is submitted for the degree of Master of Arts in the Graduate School of Humanities (Journalism and Media Studies Department) at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

It has not been previously submitted for any other degree or examination at any other university.

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(Name of candidate)

29th   March, 2005
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Thank You.

Dedication

I dedicate this work to the memory of my loving brother Ken. I know that you would have been especially proud of me. Happy 29th Birthday!

Thuthukani, this is for you too.

Acronyms

PLHA – People Living with HIV/AIDS

ARV – Antiretroviral

DoH – Department of Health

TAC – Treatment Action Campaign

ALP – AIDS Law Project

NAPWA – National Association for People living with HIV/AIDS

THT – Terrence Higgins Trust (of Britain)

HEA – Health Education Authority

GSK – GlaxoSmithKline

SAMA - South African Medical Association

Contents

List of Tables