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The media wars and their discourses in the South African print media

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2017

https://hdl.handle.net/10539/24465

Mgibisa, Mbuyisi (2015) The media wars and their discourses in the South African print media, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, <https://hdl.handle.net/10539/24465>

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Abstract

In post-colonial, post-apartheid South Africa, "media wars"[1] appear to have become a strong feature. Traditionally, the news media rarely report about other media. Media wars seem to manifest themselves more when news publications subject each other to critical scrutiny. Recent media wars between newspaper companies and editors have highlighted the agonistic pluralist nature of the South African print media which is facing persistent and complex disruptions. This research asserts that a notable feature of these media fights is that they are linked to the battle to gain market share in the South Africa print media market stranglehold by big media organisations. They are often couched in ideological discourses which are constitutive of editors and media owners speaking out publicly about issues internal to the media in order to carry the freight of public attention. The foci of this study will be two-fold: Firstly, it seeks to investigate whether these media wars are related to the broader issues of transformation in the South African print media. Secondly, the study seeks to unravel how some of the country's leading news publications represent their competitors using editorial platforms and will investigate the editorial motivations behind certain representations. Despite the growing interest in media wars, South Africa is still underrepresented due to a lack of literature published in the field. The main rationale behind the study is to show how the media's 'independence' from political parties plays itself out in ideological discourses found in the tensions between newspaper companies and editors in the period between 2010 and 2015. Two examples or case studies of media fights will be critically examined in this study and a qualitative discourse analysis will be undertaken in order explore the ways in which the media war texts spoke to or problematised the main theories employed in this study, namely: Critical Political Economy (CPE) of the media and Michel Foucault's material post-structuralism blended with Bourdieu's concept of the 'media field'.

Keywords: media wars, agonistic media space, market share, ideological discourses, transformation, representations.

[1] The term *media wars* suggest media fights turned ugly in the public. It is conceived and deployed in this research to support calls for media researchers to assess more closely the media institutions' own privileged position in the distribution of social power (see Couldry, 2005).