

ABSTRACT

Print media transformation in South Africa has been an ongoing area of debate and contention in the first twenty years of democracy. Especially given the country's history of colonialism and apartheid, where racism was institutionalised and impacted the character and functioning of the print media. The attainment of true transformation in the press is critical to reverse the injustices of the past and to ensure today's print media is reflective of South African society and its many axes of diversity.

This study critically analyses the extent of print media transformation in the first twenty years of democracy to decipher whether it amounts to true transformation or token transformation. The study understands true transformation of the media as holistic and deep transformation, where the ownership, content and staffing of the media reflects the diversity of South African society in terms of race, socio-economic status (class), gender, religion, sexual orientation, region, and language (Boloka and Krabill 2000).

In the South African context, ownership diversity and content diversity are the key measures of transformation. This research contributes a holistic and empirical study to the transformation debate by analysing transformation across a long time period of the first twenty years of democracy, and focusing on both ownership and content diversity, as well as exploring the relationship between the two. Previously, the print media transformation debate and scholarship has focused narrowly on the ownership aspect.

In this regard, the study conducts a systemic critique of the broad transformation agenda from the vantage points of ownership, control and power. The study also explores the extent of print media diversity by analysing the coverage of three issues that have framed post-apartheid South Africa. Namely: socio-economics issues, labour issues and protests, government vs. big business.

The study adopts four theoretical frameworks – the revised role of the media in a liberal democracy; the public interest role of the media; critical political economy of the media; and theories of power. The research design of the study consisted of a triangulation of research methods with qualitative and quantitative paradigms. The research methods used are document analysis, expert opinions of a Media Transformation seminar panel and content analysis of a large sample of articles spanning in the first twenty years of democracy. The historically

English print media companies are the focus of analysis: Tiso Blackstar Group (formerly Times Media), Independent Media, as well as M&G Media.

The major findings of this thesis demonstrate that press transformation in the first twenty years of democracy to a great extent resembles token transformation. Tokenism in the regard that black people have replaced white people in some ownership and staffing aspects, but not in a meaningful way that disrupts elite class continuities, “inferential racism” of negative stereotypes of the black race, and white racial power at the top of the hierarchy of press institutions. Print media transformation is also significantly tainted by the overly neo-liberal nature of the press in a number of areas found by the study. The study also finds that transformation is a point of politization of the press.

The content findings of the study demonstrate that ownership matters to some extent. Apart from ownership, the following components also matter to print media transformation and need to be addressed: the media system as a whole; the neo-liberal architecture; journalism training; and a print media specific transformation policy. Thus, the broad agenda of press transformation requires a normative re-think. The study recommends that the press consider adopting the principles of developmental journalism that is based on the redeeming nature of the concept, to substantially address the content diversity and transformation shortcomings uncovered by the study. This requires a paradigm shift that would take a long time period to realize, in addition a review needs to be conducted to consider the feasibility of such a change. A feasible short term solution to solve the fundamental issue of media diversity in both ownership and content, is the return of alternative media to the post-apartheid media terrain to play a developmental role.