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Traditional media and creating a public sphere in a new media dominated environment: the case of Newzroom Afrika

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Abstract

This study is conducted against the backdrop of the interaction between South African youth, new media and traditional media. Recently, it has become clear that new media is dominating the media industry. However, there is room for traditional media journalists to be gatekeepers of information and to facilitate public discussion. This study aims to answer the question: Can traditional media still create a public sphere for the youth in South Africa? Newzroom Afrika (hereafter NATV) is used as a case study.

The study uses qualitative research in the form of open-ended interviews with South African youth and major role players within NATV. The data and quoted literature clearly indicate that the youth are apathetic towards political news and are unlikely to watch television news.

Public sphere and agenda-setting frameworks are used as guidelines to identify why South African youth populations are disengaged from traditional media and whether NATV can create a public sphere where the youth can safely engage.

Some previous studies prove that even though youth avoid traditional media, they often look to it for confirmation of news stories published in the public domain and social media.

This places the newly established NATV in the perfect position to create a public sphere where the youth can engage and critically discuss relatable news. However, the data indicates that NATV currently does not create this space as it is enveloped in the systematic agenda setting like other news broadcasters in South Africa. This systematic approach to news production includes political talking heads and repetitive political news stories that do not interest the youth who are distant from politics. The study therefore argues that to create a public sphere, NATV must take on the role as gatekeeper and facilitator and become much more active in online spaces such as Facebook, Instagram and YouTube.