

Abstract

Worldwide, commercial print media, by virtue of being privately-owned, are understood to be insulated from the influence of the state. However, critical political economists argue that the commercial media are vulnerable to the influence of powerful interests because of their high level of dependency on advertising for survival, particularly in developing countries, where the bulk of advertising comes from the government. This situation prevents the news media from effectively fulfilling their normative role in society. It also perpetuates erosion of professionalism in the work of journalists and editorial independence of many newspapers, which are often unable to resist the pressure from advertisers. This study examines the extent of government advertising in the most popular weekly newspapers in Lesotho, and investigates how advertising influences the production of editorial content. The results of the study show that the government of Lesotho is the biggest advertiser in print media and it uses advertising as a tool to suppress press freedom and the freedom of expression in the media and also as an incentive, encouraging media organisations and journalists to provide positive and maximum coverage towards it. The case of Lesotho suggests that the media in countries with less developed economies are under a lot of pressure to produce news content that satisfies the interests of those who have political and economic power at the expense of journalistic professionalism, editorial independence and media's responsibility as watchdog to the government.