

**Conformity in the selected print media content as a threat to democracy: The case
of the Schabir Shaik trial**

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Media Studies**

DECLARATION

I declare that this research report submitted for the degree of Master of Arts in Journalism and Media Studies at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg is my own original work and has not been submitted to any other institution of higher education or for any examination in any form. I further declare that all sources cited or quoted are indicated and acknowledged by means of a comprehensive list of references.

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Patience Thembeke Ntuli

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Date

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To my God, thank you, Lord, for always keeping your promise of “never leaving nor forsaking me” throughout the time of writing this thesis. Lord, this is once again the living testimony that you are God. Thank you for allowing me to continue to enjoy your blessings, everlasting love and protection.

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Dedication.

To the lovely blessing from God, my daughter *Sphesihle Chuleza Nomahlwani Mpapama*, who was born a week after I had received the news about passing the MA.

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ABSTRACT

By

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It generally appears that headlines, story content, photographs and sources in different South African newspapers are often the same. This conformity poses a major threat to democracy as diversity in all facets of the media is important in order to help the public make informed choices. Using the case of the Schabir Shaik trial, the study investigated the extent of conformity in the news output of selected newspapers: *The Citizen*, *The Star*, *Sowetan* and *Natal Witness* from January 2001 to June 2005. Only selected front page stories and editorials of the newspapers were studied.

Thematic content analysis, quantitative and qualitative methods were used to explore the subject. The study was predominantly informed by theories of news production which posit that news is not the actual truth; it is in fact a selective representation of the world. The notion of objectivity was extensively debated and it was observed that complete “objectivity” as an ideal is unattainable especially when one considers that news-making processes are complex and influenced by a number of diverse factors. The study also argues that sources play an important role in shaping news content because they set parameters and define terms of reference. It emerged in the results that the sharing of news and reliance on similar sources across publications breed homogeneity; that most news is covered in an episodic/dramatic fashion for the purpose of profit and that objectivity is frequently not practised in newspaper editorials. The study concludes that media should promote diversity in all facets and strive for balance when covering stories.

“They look like newspapers; they feel like newspapers; they even leave ink on your finger tip. But they are not really newspapers” (Guy Berger, *Sunday Times*, 1 May 2005, p.3)

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CHAPTER 1

CONFORMITY IN THE SELECTED PRINT MEDIA CONTENT AS A THREAT TO DEMOCRACY: THE CASE OF THE SCHABIR SHAIK TRIAL¹

1.0 Introduction

With the end of apartheid after 1990, the new South African Interim Constitution explicitly guaranteed press freedom with the view that this would encourage diversity of ownership and therefore diversity of opinion. Over the past few years the researcher has observed incidents in which different South African newspapers have come up with headlines, story contents, and photographs and used sources that are strikingly similar². Schabir Shaik trial has been chosen because of the following reasons: it is arguably South Africa's biggest post-apartheid corruption trial. The Schabir Shaik trial was the subject of intense media attention owing to the involvement of several high profile members of the South African government. The number of newspapers referred to it as a biggest court case in a democracy. It has had an influence in the sucking in of the deputy president, Jacob Zuma and is having a negative impact on his (Jacob Zuma's) political career and lastly the very same trial has also led to the biggest division within the African National Congress in its 95-year history. It is therefore interesting for the researcher to use it as the case study for this project. The Schabir Shaik trial was punted to be the trial of the decade. *The Star*, 06 Oct 2004:12, editorial. And was labelled the same by *Natal Witness* (02 June 2005:1).

South African media often comes out with close, sometimes even identical headlines, and uses the same pictures for stories especially in major news stories. For example, when the South African swimming team won Gold, the same picture was used in all four of the following newspapers: *The Star*, *Sowetan*, *The Citizen*, and *Business Day*. Also, when

Jacob Zuma was cleared of rape charges on the 9 May 2006, three newspapers had strikingly similar headings and pictures. Most newspapers used the picture of him and his daughter. This poses a major threat to democracy because the mass media in any modern society is central to the process of democratisation, as it represents a major resource for effective citizenship without which people cannot make informed decisions that are crucial to democracy. The central theme of liberal democracy is the need for diversity in all facets of the media (Croteau & Hoynes, 2003:98).

Ideally, responsible journalism calls for media that provides the public with diverse items of information, thereby enabling them (the public) to make informed choices. According to liberal theory, meaningful political discourse can only take place if the public is provided with a wide range of information (Curran 2002:217). The major argument about newspapers is that they pander to the lowest common denominator of public taste; they “generally fail to provide information that helps citizens make informed political judgments” (Strelitz and Steenveld 2005:265).

Continuing the debate, McQuail (1994:71) adds that media freedom calls for originality of the press, diversity in the news supply, critical stance of the press and independence of the media. When observing the way in which the media covers some of the big stories, for example, the Schabir Shaik corruption trial, it generally appears that there is a diversity decline, specifically in the print media content, and this poses a threat not only to the independent functioning of the media, but also to democracy at large.

According to Curran (1991:92), some newspapers venture into business to make a profit and not to provide news as expected, but one needs to consider the fact that media outlets are not the same as other businesses. By law, media has an important mandate from government not only to provide information, but also to be critical in doing so (Curran, 1991:92). The question is then: To what extent are journalists fulfilling that role if their motive is now more focused on profit?

In an effort to answer this question, Curran (1991:99) makes an important contribution by introducing a professional responsibility model which postulates that the journalist's first duty is to serve the public. This entails ignoring all the internal and external forces that may threaten good journalism. In view of all the pressures facing journalists, one can agree with Curran (1991:87) that media outlets are, therefore, not independent watchdogs of the state but are instead "self-seeking" and using their muscle to promote their interest

Graber (2003) argues that journalists do not find the mandate given to them by government compelling, and this is why there has been a decrease in stories where a journalist would, for example, investigate and find facts on his/her own. Nowadays, journalists wait for leaks, tips and news packs from public relations officials, something that is not supposed to happen in a democratic country like South Africa. As a result, stories end up becoming similar across all newspapers; this is the key focus of this study.

In view of the background provided, the main problem to be addressed by this study is conformity in the selected print media content. Using the Schabir Shaik trial, the study will critically analyse the extent of content conformity in the daily newspapers: namely, *The Citizen*, *The Star*, *Sowetan*, and *Natal Witness*. Second, the study will explore the implications of such conformity for democracy in South Africa. Third, it is expected that the findings will suggest strategies for increasing diversity in the selected print media content³.

1.1 Research Questions

Three research questions arise in relation to this topic:

1. To what extent did the selected print media in South Africa conform in the coverage of the Schabir Shaik trial?

³ *Citizen*, *Sowetan*, *The Star*, and *Natal Witness* were used. The selection of these three newspapers was influenced by the fact that they are South Africa's biggest national daily newspapers in circulation and, more importantly, are from different stables. Their availability on the Sabinet online database was also an influencing factor.

2. What are the implications of such conformity for democracy?
3. What can be done to increase content diversity in the print media?

1.2 Historical Background of the Schabir Shaik Trial

The historical background of the story is important in order to ensure that readers of this study understand why this particular study was chosen. The trial of Schabir Shaik⁴ began in a packed court in Durban and first made headlines in January 2001 when *The Mail and Guardian* (Nov 16-22, 2001, p.2) revealed that Durban businessman, Schabir Shaik, was the brother of Chippy Shaik, a government arms procurer, Jacob Zuma's struggle comrade and financial adviser, and a director of the company that had won a R400 million tender in the arms deal. This indicated how the watchdog function of the media can assist in fighting corruption by government officials.

One of the reasons for choosing the Schabir Shaik trial was that it was subject to intense media coverage owing to the involvement of several high-profile members of the South African government. In October 2001, Schabir Shaik was arrested by the Scorpions and charged with the theft of Cabinet documents, including minutes containing information on the arms deal procurement process. He pleaded not guilty to both the charges of fraud and corruption. The matter was then referred to the regional court for trial on the 27th of May 2002. During the trial, Durban businessman Schabir Shaik, sometimes charming, sometimes volatile and always impeccably dressed, arrived on time every morning. On occasion he greeted everybody around him.

Though Shaik claimed that his financial dealings were legitimate, he asserted in his plea explanation that the State had misunderstood his dealings with Zuma. He agreed that there was a financial relationship between Zuma and him, but it was not a corrupt one as payments he made to Zuma were "loans made in friendship". In spite of all his claims, on

⁴ The Schabir Shaik trial was one of the most prominent court trials in post-apartheid South Africa. The case, tried in the Durban High Court before Hilary Squires, proved the fraudulent and corrupt relationship between Durban-based businessman Schabir Shaik and South African politician and the anti-apartheid leader, Jacob Zuma.

the 30th May 2005, the Durban High Court handed down its final judgment. He was pronounced guilty of corruption for paying Jacob Zuma R1.2 million to further their relationship and for soliciting a bribe from French arms company Thomson-CSF, as well as guilty of fraud for writing off more than R1 million of Zuma's unpaid debts. Judge Squires sentenced Shaik to two terms of 15 years for corruption and one term of three years for fraud, to be served concurrently.

While Jacob Zuma was not in court, the judge found that he and Schabir Shaik had a "generally corrupt relationship". Following the decision, Zuma stepped down from his seat in parliament but remained the president of the ANC. This case attracted more media attention as Schabir Shaik attempted appeals at the Supreme Court of Appeal. However, all five judges under President Craig Howie unanimously rejected his appeal and agreed that the correct sentence had been given. Furthermore, Schabir Shaik was later given parole for medical reasons. On the 7th of April 2009, this was followed by the National Prosecuting Authority (NPA) officially dropping all the charges against Jacob Zuma who was later elected as the South African president⁵.

1.2 Chapter Outline

Chapter one provides a general introduction to the study, the problem statement, and the description of the scope and overall objective of the study. The chapter contains a brief motivation for choosing print media (newspapers) and for using the Schabir Shaik trial as the case study.

Chapter two presents the theoretical framework and literature review. This chapter looks at the relationship between the two concepts: media and democracy. In the first section, a detailed definition of democracy is provided, followed by a discussion on the role of media in democracy. The third section discusses the concept of public sphere in detail as a platform through which citizens can actively take part in a democracy. The chapter ends with a section that provides a detailed discussion of African media and democracy as they

⁵ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Schabir_Shaik_trial

relate to the concept of public sphere.

Chapter three covers news production theories. It presents an analysis of different theoretical views of the sociology of news production theories, as well as other relevant media theories. It argues that there are various factors that threaten democracy. It posits that the supply of information is considered to be the “media’s most important function”. It is, therefore, important to determine what is considered as news and how it supplies the information processes involved in this process of supplying information. The major argument is that news has been constructed by the media. This chapter provides a detailed analysis of the concept of the objectivity of news.

Chapter four outlines the history of SA print media and posits that historical discussion of the press is important because it provides a broader political and economic context in which the South African media operated. The chapter notes that it is characterised by different newspaper firms that are largely conglomerates. It also notes that before democracy, the media was more focused on fighting apartheid.

Chapter five discusses the research methodology. It examines content analysis as the research method employed in this study. The focus is the justification of the use of this particular method instead of others.

Chapter six presents the findings and data analysis of the study. It covers the integration of data collected, as well as a review and analysis of the same. This chapter also provides answers to key research questions posed at the beginning of the study. It emerges that sharing of news and reliance on similar sources across publications breed homogeneity. Also emergent is that most news is covered in a more episodic fashion. The analysis of the editorials reveals that objectivity is not practised by some newspapers.

Chapter seven concludes and provides recommendations for this research. Conclusions based on the findings of the investigation as well as the literature review are presented. The report establishes that media should be encouraged to promote diversity of voices;

editorials should remain objective and not be partisan. Recommendations regarding increasing diversity in the media content are made. Possible research projects that could emanate from this research are suggested.

CHAPTER 2

MEDIA AND DEMOCRACY

2.0 Introduction

Mass media plays an important role in society – hence it is always referred to as a fourth estate that checks on government (Bennet 1982:32; Nwanko 2000:3; Curran 2002:217 and Wasserman and de Beer 2005:37). Mass media shapes public opinion, but it is also influenced and manipulated by different interest groups in society. It must also be noted that mass media can be used to promote democracy; it is actually referred to as being central to democracy. However, the very same media can pose a threat to the healthy functioning of democracy, in that it can cripple democratic consolidation.

This chapter looks at the relationship between the two concepts: media and democracy. In the first section, a detailed definition of democracy is provided, followed by a discussion on the role of media in democracy. The third section discusses the concept of public sphere in detail as a platform through which citizens can take part actively in a democracy. The chapter ends with a section that provides a detailed discussion of the African media and democracy as they relate to the concept of public sphere.

2.1 Defining the Concept of Democracy

Dahl (2005:191) states that for many it is very difficult to understand what is meant by the concept of democracy. To prevent confusion, it is therefore important for the researcher to begin this chapter by defining what is meant by the concept of democracy.

Various definitions are provided in this regard. Keane (1991:168) posits that the struggle to control the definition of democracy is an intrinsic feature of modern societies. Yet, democracy is not a word that can be made to mean whatever one chooses it to mean. Keane (1991:168) defines democracy as a concept that “comprises procedures for

arriving at collective decisions in a way which secures the fullest possible and qualitatively best participation of interested parties”. As democracy requires citizens to take part, it is important for citizens to be capacitated to engage in the decision-making process.

Continuing with definitions, Dahl (1989:112) asserts that “each citizen ought to have adequate and equal opportunities for discovering and validating the choice on a matter to be decided that would best serve the citizens’ interests”. Dahl (1989:109) also points out that “throughout the process of making binding decisions, citizens ought to have an adequate opportunity and equal opportunity to express their preferences”. What is noted here is that the quality of citizen participation is as important as participation itself.

Dahl (2005:187) and Jacobs (2002:10) note that democracy is a concept that requires broader popular inclusion and effective participation in government and political life. Dahl (2005:188) further states that large-scale democracy requires the following criteria: elected officials; free, fair and frequent elections; freedom of expression; alternative sources of information; associational autonomy and inclusive citizenship. Garnham (1986:250) points out that for proper democracy to survive, public participation is important but acknowledges that it is impossible and undesirable to require all citizens to participate or debate.

Steenveld (2002:119) and Splichal (1993:4) comment that “democracy denotes a form of government that ensures to the people political equality and involvement in decision making about public affairs”.

It is clear from all these definitions that the literature does not offer only one definition of the concept of democracy. Common to all the provided definitions is that democracy is based on the understanding that there should be active participation of citizens. It has also been proved that media plays a fundamental role in the workings of democracy (Dahl 1971:2 & Keane 1991:168).

A discussion of the role of the media is central to this study for several reasons. Any critique of any publication needs to be based on pre-determined performance criteria so that it may be easy to determine whether the publication is fulfilling its role as expected. The next section discusses the role that must be played by the media in a democracy and most of the issues discussed will be revisited later in the study.

2.2 The Role of the Media in a Democracy

Wasserman and De Beer (2005:37) state that the role of the media in a democracy is a topic surrounded by many controversies and involving much debate, as it is understood differently by different role players. According to Wasserman and De Beer (2005:37), all the discrepancies in defining the role of the media in a democracy are largely attributed to the fact that scholars often approach this issue from different theoretical viewpoints. These approaches/viewpoints may be functional, critical or comparative evaluations.

The role of the media is outlined using two theories: namely, the liberal pluralist approach and the political economy approach. The two theories posit different expectations of the role played by the media. The liberal-pluralist approach tends to stress the importance of the media's watchdog role while the political-economy approach focuses on the media as an instrument of the public sphere.

According to the liberal theory, one of the primary roles of the media in a democratic country is to act as a watchdog (Curran 2002:217). Contemporary democratic theory appreciates the watchdog role in ensuring that the government is held accountable for all its actions. It is argued that the government cannot be held accountable if citizens are ill-informed about the actions of officials and institutions. This role, therefore, requires the media to act as a guardian of the public interest, warning the citizens against those who are doing them harm⁶.

⁶ <http://safrica.info/ess info/sa glance/constitution/news.htm>

It must be mentioned that for the media to perform this role effectively, it must be independent of the government and of all other pressures that might influence its operation. It is feared that once the media is subject to state regulation, it becomes difficult to fulfil the watchdog role (Curran 2002:217). The watchdog role requires that the media not only “monitor the full range of state activities but also fearlessly expose abuses of those in power” (Wasserman and De Beer 2005:37). Additionally, the media must ensure that the government and politicians do not abuse the office power granted to them or exceed their mandates.

The watchdog role of the media ensures that the media keep a strong eye on any public process especially elections. During elections, many things can go wrong and one of those is rigging by some of the political parties or those in government. (Tettey 2001:7) notes that the media’s watchful eye helps to minimise if not eliminate rigging and bring transparency to the process to ensure that elections are conducted freely and fairly. This normally increases the credibility of the results and is essential in ensuring credible democracy.

Continuing the argument, Curran (2000:121) posits that the watchdog role overrides all the other important functions of the media and, despite various criticisms, the watchdog role is still considered in most of the literature as an important role for media in any democracy. Having said that, Curran warns readers not to read too much into this view – it is simply based on the position in the 18th century when all media was largely controlled by the press.

Wasserman and De Beer (2005:37) hold similar views on the importance of the watchdog role of the media but argue that this function no longer lies with the state, but with the media itself. Continuing the debate, they argue that the media cripples its own functioning by focusing too much on light news so that sales can be increased. Secondly, it is a conglomeration and homogenisation, and that can only result in poor news content. Lastly, the media no longer exercises its independence because it is faced with the

responsibility of adhering to management practices (Wasserman and De Beer 2005:37).

The second key function of the media for the healthy functioning of democracy according to the liberal theory, is to facilitate debate and provide necessary information so that the public may make informed decisions (Curran 2000:128, Baker 2002:155). Oosthuizen (2001:447) agrees that supplying information is the media's second most important function. As a tool for information, media also helps the public make informed choices by providing a forum for public debates.

Curran (2002:225) posits that it is the duty of the media to ensure that there is a free flow of information between the governed and the government. Thus, mass media plays an important role in terms of linking the government and the public. Murdock (1993:21) agrees that in order for citizens to exercise their full rights, they must have access to the information, advice, and analysis that enables them to know what their personal rights are and allows them to pursue them effectively.

Historically, mass media has fulfilled a variety of functions: namely, information, education, mobilisation and entertainment. It is expected that some functions are more important than others. Stokke (1971:11) argues that mass media plays an important informational role in that it has helped to develop countries. He adds that it then becomes important for scholars to ask questions such as who gets to decide the relevant importance of functions and who decides which function the media should perform, for example, whether the mass media should perform a watchdog, political or administrative function.

Pillay (2004:169) asserts that the "mass media in liberal democracies is often seen as a conduit of information and ideas that empowers ordinary citizens". However, the media does not always do this successfully. To a large extent the media often neglects the views, struggles and aspirations of the poor and marginalised. In any democratic country the media is expected to provide diversity in the news and information. Meaningful political discourse can only take place if the public is provided with a wide range of

information. As a tool for information the media helps the public to make informed choices by providing a forum for public debate. Access to information is essential to the healthy functioning of democracy, because it ensures that citizens make well-informed decisions. For any democratic country the media is an important body that must provide diversity in the news and information (Pillay 2004:169).

Following on from the role of providing information and analysis, the media is also expected to interpret and analyse information for citizens. In a democracy ordinary citizens, according to Waldhal (2004:13), are not always in a position to understand and interpret what is happening in the political sphere. Journalists are sometimes required to elucidate complicated matters to a level that may be understood by ordinary citizens. The researcher has decided to discuss these two roles together because there is usually a very thin line between the two and they are normally debated in the same context.

Linked with the above role, the media also has a duty to ensure that the public engages in public debate and discussion normally by devoting columns to letters from readers and giving prominence to editorials and other commentaries. Such practice ensures that the public play some form of role in the agenda-setting of the political discourse. Some newspaper agencies, however, tend to allow mostly influential people to air their opinions. Such actions have implications in that often such individuals use the publicity to push their own agendas.

The continuous investigation by scholars and researchers into what constitutes high quality journalism is not merely aimed at planting the seed of doubt in the media, but such criticism is aimed at ensuring that democracy is not short-lived (Harber 2004:79). McNair (2000:197) argues that one cannot run away from the fact that journalism is being blamed for undermining the integrity of democracy because some are not truly independent in their functioning. From this one can ask the question: What does the independence of the media mean in a young democracy?

The answers to the above questions need to begin with what we mean by the independence of the media. It is generally assumed that independence means media that functions without any interference from government. During the apartheid period, there was a great deal of government interference when it came to the media performing its watchdog role. Interference took place in the form of censorship and the closing down of some newspapers.

Most of the government intervention was to a large extent caused by the fact that many newspapers were receiving government subsidies, thus making them vulnerable to manipulation. Gillwald (1993:74) posits that subsidies tend to lay publications open to manipulation. Sparks (1992:48) argues that “[j]ust as subsidies do not necessarily mean government intervention in the content of the press, neither does its absence guarantee non-interference”. News organisations must, therefore, move toward financial viability so that they can be sure of their independence. A study on media in Central and Eastern Europe and the newly independent states of the former Soviet Union recommends that news organisations be given training in financial management as well as assistance in setting up advertising and business departments (South Africa 2007). The study states: “Media owners need forums to work without arrangements such as circulation audits, advertising rates and production and distribution networks”⁷.

It is also important to note that these problems do not exist only in Africa. It is for that reason that McNair (2000:198) maintains that while it is clear that the media has not yet reached its highest level of operation as compared with that of other democratic countries such as Great Britain, “the picture is far from as bleak as some critics portray it to be”. Most of the international audits conducted, such as the 2001 Mayne and Chil Study in Germany, and Drok’s 2002 survey in the Netherlands, show that poor functioning of the media is a worldwide trend. The findings indicate a lack of practical skills among reporters and journalism teachers not being involved in the actual practical practice.

⁷ Freedom House, Media responses to corruption in emerging democracies: Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania, Ukraine p.10 <http://freedomhouse.org/reports/mediatxt.html>.

The fact that practising journalists are not receiving enough training is also another reason for concern (Steyn and De Beer, 2004:387). Training is important in ensuring that journalists fulfil their tasks effectively in a democracy. Journalists need to be taught how to move away from reliance on sources such as press releases and press conferences. Journalists must learn how to write with depth and insight. It generally appears that most of these accusations are being aimed at the print media, but McNair (2000:198) maintains that the broadcast media is obviously also guilty of the same charge.

Given all the developments and changes discussed in this research report, perhaps it is important to agree with Berger (2001:172) when he states that the media has played a significant role in terms of providing a forum, promoting an informed citizenry and a common public sphere. In case of the print media, Berger (2001:173) posits that indeed the media has helped in terms of keeping government accountable. It is, however, safe to say that the role of the print media in terms of providing diverse opinions is still highly debatable. The next section deals with the concept of public sphere as a useful concept in understanding the role of the media in a democracy.

2.3 The Concept of Public Sphere

A good starting point for understanding the democratic role of the media is considering the 1962 work of Jurgen Habermas. The concept of public sphere is largely rooted in the history of capitalism. Habermas wrote the first text on the public sphere in 1969. It, however, was not translated until 1989. Calhoun (1992) and Dalgren were the first critiques. Keane and Thompson came later. Public Sphere is considered useful in understanding the role of the media in democracy. Dahlgren (2002:196) conceptualises public sphere as “a realm of social life where exchange of information and views on questions of common concern can take place so that public opinion can be obtained”.

Public sphere as a concept is also known as public space in which opinion is formed (Curran 1991). Keane (1993:77) defines sphere as a

particular type of spatial relationship between two or more people, usually connected by certain means of communication (television, radio, satellite, fax, telephone etc.), in which non-violent controversies erupt, for a brief or more extended period of time, concerning power relations operating within their given milieu of interaction and/or within the wider milieux of social and political structures within which the disputants are situated.

Dahlgren (2002:196) posits that “public sphere takes place when citizens, exercising the right of assembly and association, gather as public bodies to discuss issues of the day, specifically those of political concern”.

Continuing with the definition, Calhoun (1992:21) asserts that the concept of public sphere is made up of “private individuals gathering together as a public and articulating the needs of society with the state”. Both Schudson (1992:147) and Calhoun (1992:2) concur that public sphere becomes a reality only when “private individuals assemble to form a public body”. Habermas (1974:49) defines “public body” as that body consisting of citizens who have the freedom to express and publish their opinions about matters of general interest”. Curran (2000:134) states that it is important to note that these private individuals in the public sphere debate matters of common interest.

Thompson (1993:257) points out that the concept of public sphere is largely an “ideology conception”. He further notes that “it is based on the idea that individuals come together in a shared locale and engage in a dialogue with one another, as equal participants in a face-to-face conversation”. McKee (2005:9) posits that the public sphere enables society to indicate whether they are happy with government or not. Furthermore, the public sphere enables ordinary citizens to understand what their role is, especially in the matter of the running of government.

Dahlgren (1995:9) claims that democracy requires participation and participating entails mechanisms or channels that could be used by the people in voicing opinions and formulating public agenda. He posits that public sphere takes place when citizens,

exercising the rights of assembly and association, gather as public bodies to discuss issues of the day. Elsewhere, Dahlgren (2002:198) sees the concept of public sphere as the “fulfilment of communicational requirements of a viable democracy

Given all the above definitions, it appears that the concept of public sphere can best be understood as a platform whereby people come together, discuss issues, form public opinion and shape policy preferences.

2.3.1 Criticism of the Habermasian theory

Media scholars have criticised the public sphere concept over what they see as its critical failures. The entire book by Calhoun entitled *Habermas and Public sphere* (1992) criticises Habermas on various issues. Calhoun (1992:38) raises four broad concerns about the Habermasian theory. First, he argues that Habermas fails to address issues of power relations: “... the networks of communication, the topography of issues, and the structure of influence of the public sphere except in very general terms of faction and parties”. Second, he posits that Habermas overestimates degeneration of the public sphere. He believes that things are not as negative as Habermas suggests in his theory. Third, (1992:38) he claims that the concept of public sphere fails to address various issues in the theory, particularly the issues of power relations. Calhoun (1992:37) adds that the unified public sphere is actually more relevant to white and rich men. He “takes issue with Habermas's neglect of social movements by his conforming too closely to the liberal bourgeois ideal in imagining the public sphere simply as a realm into which individuals bring their ideas and critiques. He argues that social movements are crucial to reorientating the agenda of public discourse, bringing new issues to the fore”.

Habermas's study of the media as the public sphere was based on the middle class public sphere of the 18th century. This involved private individuals who used to gather and discuss matters of public importance. According to Habermas (1989:118), only men and property-owning private individuals were admitted to the public sphere. Dahlgren confirms that in the past the public sphere was inclusive of men and took place only in certain settings such as salons, coffee houses and clubs (2002:197). Thompson

(1993:253) also notes that the bourgeois public sphere was based on the principle of universal access. In practice this theory was restricted to individuals who had education and financial means and was dominated by males.

This provoked a lot of criticism from feminists. Fraser (1990) brings our attention to the exclusion of women from the official public sphere and the privatisation of gender politics. For her, Habermas's account reveals mostly a bourgeois, masculinist conception of the public sphere which also subordinated workers, people of colour, and gays and lesbians. Other critics argue that the exclusion of women was not a contingent historical circumstance but was constitutive of the very nature of the public sphere (Thompson 1993:254).

Calhoun (1992:3) further criticises Habermas when he argues that Habermas's demands for equal and unrestricted participation is in a way paradoxical because in its early days, the public sphere was mainly restricted to the elite and to educated males.

Dahlgren (2002:195) also criticises Habermas for excluding other segments of society. According to him, the public sphere operated largely in the sophisticated media such as intellectual journals, pamphlets and newspapers which could only be read by the educated segment. This is not good for democracy because true democracy is about the public participation of citizens regardless of their class (Dahlgren 2002:196). He (2002:198) offers three areas when conceptualising the public sphere: namely, institutions, media representation, socio-cultural interaction. Dahlgren (2002:199) posits that the dimension of media institution and that of media representation receive more attention because both are the centre of policy debate.

The dimension of social structure refers to the “political ecology” of the media, setting boundaries for the media's institutional and organisational profile. The dimension that the public sphere cannot be seen as a space operating in isolation from all other social, political and economic domains, as if it were a self-contained entity, is one of Habermas's central points.

The last dimension that links well with social structure is socio-cultural interaction. It generally refers to “non-mediated, face-to-face encounters between citizens, to relevant aspects of subjectivity and identity processes, and also to the interface of media and citizens, that is, the process of reception” (Dahlgren 2002:198).

In his defence, Habermas (1992:152), in a detailed note in *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, expresses his appreciation to all scholars, not only for the interest shown in his work, but for critical insights provoked by it. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1989) offers a historical narrative of the changing forms of public life which is, in many ways, quite compelling. Continuing his response, he concedes that his earlier account would have to be substantially revised today. He further acknowledges that there is a need for a “more flexible approach to popular movements and popular cultural forms”. *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* has been widely criticised (Calhoun 1992, Fraser, 1992, Garnham, 1992, Schudson 1992) Habermas has attended to many concerns raised by critics in his recent works but Thompson (1993:253) finds it intriguing that Habermas, although informed about the marginalisation of women, still does not give this issue full attention in his latest work, *Structural Difference*.

Hallin (1994:2) also rejects Habermas’s conception. He opposes Habermas’s portrayal of the history of journalists as the decline of the golden age of the public sphere. Dahlgren (2005:199) also came out with a book addressing some of the problems pointed out by various critics. Supporting Dahlgren’s viewpoints are Calhoun (1992), Hallin (1994) and Fraser (1990) who state that Habermas overlooked many issues.

The other problem of Habermas's conception of public sphere concerns refeudalisation of the public sphere. Thompson (1993:255) defines refeudalisation as “showiness characteristics of mediated politics today, and its concern to cultivate personal aura rather than critical debate”. In his theory, Habermas fails to acknowledge the impact that the mass media has in the modern world. Thompson (1993:252-53) notes that the adequacy and plausibility of Habermas's account of the emergence of the bourgeois public sphere

without acknowledging that during the 18th and 19th centuries there were other forms of public discourses is a problem. She posits that the bourgeois public sphere “was from the outset, embedded in the field of confidential social relations which shaped its formation and development”. Thompson argues that popular social movements were very important during the 18th century and it is a pity that even in the *Structural Transformation* work, Habermas concentrated largely on the “liberal model”.

The Habermas concept fails to acknowledge the importance of mass media in public debates and for initiating discussions about matters of general concern (Grbesa (2004:115). The Habermas concept has failed to acknowledge that media structures are central to democracy. In his concept, Habermas actually sees the mass media as “distorting the public sphere and only providing false impressions of it”. (Dahlgren 2002:195). Supporting this notion, Elliot (1982:262) concurs that print was the medium that underpinned the concept of public sphere by providing an arena for politics.

In his revised work, Habermas (1992:163-65) recognises the new forms of communication such as radio and television but the role of the media in the public sphere is not properly outlined and he does not acknowledge new forms of communication such as television chat shows, panel discussions and other debate shows. He, however, argues that all the mentioned forms are in no way comparable to the critical rational debate that was constituted in the bourgeois public sphere. Thompson (1993:257) notes that this conception does not outline the importance of the kinds of communication that have been established and sustained by the media and does not outline clearly that the press assisted in the creation of the public sphere. Instead it portrays the press as an entity that was simply interwoven into the life of clubs and coffee houses.

Elliot (1982:262) argues that the newspapers celebrated by Habermas were engines of propaganda for the bourgeoisie rather than the embodiment of disinterested rationality and their version of reason was challenged by radical papers whose other project was developing a set of ideas that generalised the interest of a class excluded from the political system.

Despite all the criticism directed against the concept of public sphere, the literature reviewed generally shows that the Habermasian conception of public sphere is still essential in understanding the role that must be played by the media in democracy. Authors like Garnham (1992:394) still believe that the concept of public sphere provides “a sounder basis for critical analysis of current developments both in the media and democratic politics and for the analysis and political action necessary to rebuild systems of both communication and the concept of public sphere touches on the importance of exchanging views and discussing issues of importance so that decisions can be made” Media such as newspapers, radio and television played as a forum in discussing these matters. Dahlgren (2002:198) supports Garnham’s viewpoint, arguing that the concept of public sphere is still valid and helpful because it touches on relevant issues.

Based on all the above arguments, it can generally be concluded that the concept of public sphere is still essential in providing direction for the role that must be played by the media within democracy (Berger 2000:25). The next section discusses African media and democracy as they relate to the concept of public sphere. It must, however, be noted that literature in the African press is scant compared to that focusing on other parts of the world.

2.4 African Media and Democracy as they relate to the Public Sphere

This study requires the researcher to conceptualise the role of the media from the African media perspective. Some argue that there is a need for a different approach to the role of the media in Africa. According to authors like Curran (1991:82) “new times call for new thinking”. From this one can ask whether the concept of public sphere can be used when analysing the role of the media in a democracy within the African media context. The following section is an attempt to answer these questions.

The analysis of African media as it relates to the concept of public sphere is very important. Berger (2002:31) posits the following:

[t]he analysis of the public sphere in African countries therefore needs to take into account not just who is included and with what effects ... Africa's media does not exist in a sealed compartment but includes much international content ... from outside newsmakers, content suppliers and donor funders.

From this it is, therefore, important to ask the question: Who then dominates the public sphere? And who determines what issues to discuss in the public sphere? The issue of power relations again comes to the fore. Note, however, that Calhoun (1992:38) argues that the concept of public sphere fails to address various issues, particularly the issues of power relations.

In Africa the main problem that the media is faced with is the decline of the public sphere. Factors such as government interference in media operations have played a role in the decline of the public sphere. In his analysis of challenges facing the African media, Kupe (2005:194) posits that African media is faced with various problems such as journalists' ability to report perspective or views or alternatives. Media has not facilitated meaningful debate. One can say in a democracy, media is expected to encourage citizens to take part in meaningful debates. This is called participatory communication. Kupe (2005:195) defines participatory communication as the "ability of the media to play two critical roles: to provide the public with information and analysis, and to open forums for debate and discussion".

It is important to note that in Africa there are countries where government policies still inform how the media must function. For example, Tahsoh (2000:141) asserts that the Cameroonian government's interference with the media is important because the press is seen as a powerful tool. He argues there is a strong fear that the media will serve as a disruptive force if left uncontrolled (Tahsoh 2000:141).

Ramaprasad (2001:539-555) develops a profile of journalists in post-independence Tanzania, and argues that the concept of "nation building" is crucial to understanding the country's fledgling media sector. He further points out that the Tanzanian government

believes that all resources – including the mass media – should play an important role in realising this goal. In Tanzania, media is responsible for “initiating discussions on any subject relevant to the development of a socialist and democratic society” (Ramaprasad 2001:541).

Continuing the debate, Ramaprasad (2001:541) claims that in Tanzania, independence of the media is crucial and notes that “the press must be free to report, comment and criticise any faults in society without any government intervention”. Kasoma takes a different view, contending that government interference is needed in Africa. He believes that the existence of “media unprofessional conduct including the use of newspapers as political opposition, bad advocacy journalism and overuse of anonymous sources” requires the government’s interference so that the media can be more responsible (Kasoma 1997:296-7).

Writing mainly in reference to Kenya, Mak’ Ochieng (1993) posits that most literature on democracy and media in Africa borrows too heavily on the outdated four theories of Siebert et al. (1956). According to him, this should not happen because the four theories are largely criticisms. He asserts that the concept of public sphere is the viable alternative for Kenya and other African countries.

Fombad (2002:650) argues that Botswana’s public service media “face many challenges particularly from competing and abundant alternative sources of information made available by independent institutions that are part of the broader democratisation process designed to render government more transparent, accountable and closer to the people”. Jacobs (2002:1-15) also finds that South Africa’s new democracy has resulted in many developments, such as media freedom, freedom to criticise the government, unprecedented access to state-held information and the breaking of the state’s monopoly over broadcasting. But Jacobs warns that some critical issues in the mass media were still being overlooked, and cites conformity as a concern for democracy.

Similarly, Zegeye and Harris (2002:239) posit that South Africa is a highly diverse society that is continually undergoing “complex, far-reaching and multifaceted” change in which mass media are expected to play a significant role. The role of the media is not only to provide public information but also to provide a forum for public debate about the matters of public interest for the purpose of the formation of public opinion. Thus, media plays an important role in a democracy. According to Zegeye and Harris, South Africa is a country rich with groups with diverse interests. These different groups with their interests are represented by mass media in the public sphere.

Second, citizens must have access to the broadest possible range of information, interpretation and debate on areas that involve public political choice. Third, citizens must be able to recognise themselves and their aspirations in the range of representations on offer within the central communications sectors. Murdock (1993:21) argues that in order to meet the above criteria, communication systems need to be diverse and open to all citizens. The question is how then to organize the communication systems so as to extend diversity and openness and thereby provide adequate resources for full citizenship.

Another factor that contributes to the decline of public spheres in Africa is that in some countries, some citizens cannot afford media resources. Language is also a problem, because language inadequacy in South Africa, for instance, limits the citizens from participating in public debates. This is mainly because most of South Africa’s new media especially the print media are published in English or Afrikaans. Some people cannot even read. According to Megwa (2001:282), this creates a perception that “whites make informed political decisions and intelligently challenge the government whereas blacks wallow in ignorance and blindly support the government even when it blunders”.

It must be noted that in Africa, Habermas’s notion of public sphere becomes undermined because there is a concentration of media ownership, a dominance of advertising and public relations which sells ideas instead of debating them (Gillwald 1993:67). It is, however, equally important to note that the concept of the transformation of the public

sphere is still important and applicable.

Common to most African countries are the concerns from various authors about the decline of the public sphere, owing to government interference in countries like South Africa. It is, however, noted that in countries like Cameroon and Tanzania, government intervention is considered important because it addresses issues such as bad journalism and overuse of anonymous sources can also be properly addressed if the media is accountable to government (Kasoma 1997:297).

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter noted that media can play a positive role in democracy, only if there is an enabling environment to do so. This chapter also indicated that journalists and writers need to be trained so that they can perform the in-depth reporting that democracy requires. It argued that the public sphere is important and serves as a necessary part of a democratic society. The chapter also highlighted the importance of media's role in a democracy and noted that active participation of citizens is important in a properly functioning democracy. It also became apparent in this chapter that there is a need for a more scholarly attention insofar as the role of the media in democracy is concerned. The next chapter looks at the theories of news production, as well as some of the influences that cause conformity in the selected print media.

CHAPTER 3

NEWS PRODUCTION AS A SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF REALITY

3.0 Introduction

The previous chapter outlined the role that is expected to be played by the media in a democracy and the concept of democracy was defined in detail. The section on public sphere illustrated that public space is important in ensuring active participation in a democracy. If news plays such an important role in our culture, then journalists and their work deserve some form of scrutiny so that we may understand the process through which news is produced. This chapter begins by discussing the sociology of news production. It argues that there are other factors that threaten democracy. Oosthuizen (2001:447) posits that supply of information is considered to be the “media’s most important function”. It is, therefore, important to determine what is considered as news and how the information processes involved in the process of supplying information function. The major argument is that news is constructed by the media (Schudson 1992:151-155). The other argument in this chapter is that news is not an objective reflection of reality.

3.1 Sociology of News Production

The study is predominantly informed by theories of news production. The underlying assumption of the social construction theory is that news is not the actual truth; it is, in fact, a selective representation of the world (Schudson 2003:3). This assumption is supported by Williams (2003:165) who states that newspapers give reports as seen through the eyes of their staff, and doctored, assessed and interpreted by the news workers. Simply put: journalists “remain messengers when reporting news” (Schudson 2003:28). Manning (2001:50) has a similar view when he posits that news does not mirror reality but is instead more of a manufacturing and fabrication process. Elaborating

on this view he argues that journalists do not deliberately fabricate stories or lies but the production of news involves the routine gathering and assembling of certain constituent elements which are fashioned to construct an account of the particular news events.

Sociologists hold a view that news is merely the product of certain working arrangements. Fishman (1982:219-20) offers a clear description of this view.

The practical accomplishment perspective says that journalists' routine methods for producing news – that is the process of newsgathering – construct an image of reality. In distortion of reality because either of these characterisations implies that news can record what is out there. News stories if they reflect anything, reflect the practices of the workers in the organisations that produce news.

The social construction theory posits that the practice of news journalism is far from mirroring reality but it is more of a manufacturing and fabrication process (Manning 2001:50). How then is news produced on a day-to-day level? Theorists suggest that there is no such thing as “reality” (Croteau and Hoynes 2007). The social construction approach to news has stimulated a major debate between social scientists and journalists. Sociologists hold the opinion that news is not truth, but a reality that has been manufactured by the journalists (Schudson 2000:176). Journalists vigorously defend themselves by saying that they do not manufacture news, but only report on the facts. In a study of literacy of editors, most editors claim that they do not select news but are only responsible for responding to events that are already happening.

Interestingly enough, the findings of the study contradict editors' claims (Stokes, 2003:65). The findings confirm that editors do play a major role in the selection of news, which means that they actually do construct reality. Editors select the news by the mere fact that they (editors) decide on what to print, in what position, how much space to allocate and with what emphasis (Lippmann 2000). In another study conducted by Schlesinger (1978), it was found that the existence of editorial policies implies that news organisations construct news in identifiable ways in terms not only of selection of news but also their angling and mode of presentation. The issue of news selection is well

outlined by Staab (1990:423-443), who argues that news selection is both “a conscious and unconscious decision made by an editor when writing news”. Staab (1990:428) outlines the Instrumental Actualisation Theory invented by Kepplinger, which posits that news selection does not happen because of certain factors but is an intentional act by journalists which is done for the purpose of achieving certain organisational objectives. The assumption in this theory is that “news selection is understood as a direct response to stimuli” (Staab 1990:428).

Manning (2001:50) contributes this idea and seeks to clarify the point that journalists do not fabricate stories but are required to work according to certain routines and editorial policies when compiling stories. Shoemaker and Reese (1996:105) argue that for people to understand the media content, it is important to examine the routines and organisational practices that are followed when writing the news. Routines are defined as “those patterned, routinized and repeated practices and forms media workers use when gathering the news” (Shoemaker & Reese 1996:105). Bennet (1996:129) offers the advantages and disadvantages of routines. The notable advantages of using routines are that they enable newspapers to capture the same readers, which automatically leads into their catching similar advertisers. Another advantage is that using routine reporting increases objectivity and consistency of facts across newspapers. The main disadvantage of routine reporting is that it decreases content diversity in the media, which automatically results in the principles of democracy being undermined. Using routines is considered by critics as a bad thing in the journalism profession (Shoemaker & Reese 1991:107).

It is important to outline what different authors understand as news. Studies on news production like that of Lester (1980: 984) posit that news is a product of reality-making activities and not simply reality-describing ones. Fowler (1991:4) believes that news is the representation of a world in language. Through language, individuals are given an opportunity to explore and understand their own individuality and through language individuals gain access to social relationships (Hartley 1982:14).

According to Oosthuizen (2001:453), news is primarily comprised of the events that are selected as newsworthy by journalists and which are eventually published and/or broadcast. This writer further argues that news is semiotic in nature. Fourie (2001:327) defines semiotics “as the science of signs” and codes. The main aim of media semiotics is “to sharpen our critical awareness of the ways in which the media reflects, represents and imitates reality or aspects of reality with the purpose of conveying specific meaning usually in support of an underlying ideology, point of view, ideal, argument and attitude”. This, therefore, is in agreement with the theory of social construction that news is not the reality in itself but a representation and an imitation of reality.

3.1.1 News framing and values

Fowler (1991:11-13) similarly maintains that news is not something that just happens on its own but journalists more or less unconsciously make use of socially constructed categories called news values. He (1991:12-15) posits that news workers use frames to organise reality applying variables such as time, space, facticity and presentation. The concept of frame analysis was first proposed by Goffman (1974). When people interpret what is going on in their world they do so through the framework or schemata of interpretations they have which Goffman calls the primary framework. News framing is the process of filtering and transmitting news through an angle or “frame” in order to support specific ideologies, stimulate widespread attention or persuade an audience. Schudson (2003:35) points out that to acknowledge that news stories frame reality is also to acknowledge that it would be humanly impossible to avoid framing. Production of news involves routine gathering and assembling of certain constituent elements which are fashioned to construct an account of the particular news events.

The findings of this study will be largely based on the news framing literature. Another study that has used the frame analysis approach is that of Tuchman (1978) who studied news reporting. His findings indicate that news reporting consists of events framed to organise everyday reality. A similar work is provided by Entman (1993) who develops Goffman’s idea and clearly conceptualises framing and how frames work. He posits that

framing involves “selection” and “salience”. These, therefore, mean that framing is about deliberately selecting some pieces of information to report and obviating others.

As stated, news workers work according to frames. The first frame that news workers work according to is time. Media workers are required to meet certain deadlines which mean that every story has a certain life span before becoming obsolete. Watson (2007:108) asserts that time is a dominant frame. News workers often find themselves having to conform to deadlines and “deadlines cut things short and drop things out”. Oosthuizen (2001:457) notes that time frames determine what type of news one eventually reads or sees/watches in the news media.

The second frame that guides the news media is space. As with time, media staff impose a structure upon space to enable them to accomplish their daily work and plan across days (Oosthuizen 2001:457). As it is practically impossible for news workers to be in every place, many news organisations rely heavily on the correspondents of bigger news organisations that are able to put their news reporters everywhere rather than rely on stringers. It appears, however, that most editors prefer to publish material produced by their own staff than rely solely on stringers/agencies.

Third, journalists are largely guided by the facticity frame. This frame deals primarily with the way in which journalists find facts. According to Tuchman (1978:93), it is important for journalists to ensure that they follow professional procedures to reflect and separate facts from comments. This is usually done through the use of quotation marks.

Lastly, Oosthuizen (2001:458) asserts that the final frame is actual presentation of the story. This tool is used by journalists to transform events into news by using specific codes. This frame primarily deals with the fact that for news to be news it needs to be presented in a certain format.

The issue of frames clearly outlines that news does not select itself and reinforces the view of sociologists that authors and journalists are guided by various frames and do not

present news as it is. Similarly, the study conducted by Schlesinger (1978) found that the existence of editorial policies implies that news organisations construct news in identifiable ways in terms not only of the selection of news but also in their angling and mode of presentation. Watson (2007:112) argues that news values provide/serve as rules for news selection. Schudson (1979:19) maintains that news values are “commonly assumed, unnoticed background assumptions through which news is gathered and within which it is framed”.

It is also important to state that news is produced according to news values: namely, frequency, threshold, unambiguity and relevancy among others. Each value will be discussed briefly in the table below.

It is argued that “events are likely to meet the criteria of newsworthiness if they satisfy the conditions of frequency, intensity, unambiguity (clarity), cultural proximity, relevance, consonance, predictability, unpredictability, continuity, composition, elite persons and elite nations, negativity and ethnocentricity” (Kisuke 2004, Galtung and Ruge 1965:53-60). For the purpose of this study, the researcher will not cover all the news values; only the ones relevant to the study as seen in the table.

Table 3.1: Values in news

News value	Description of the value
1 Frequency	Frequency refers to the time span taken by an event (Hartley 1982:76). News stories differ according to their importance. Some stories take very little time while others take very much longer to unfold and to be made meaningful. The case of the Schabir Shaik trial suited the daily newspapers well because people/readers had to be updated continually on what was happening.
2 Threshold	Hartley (1982:76) posits that threshold refers to the size of the event. The bigger the story, the more added drama is needed to keep it going. Crime reporting is an example of this. During the Schabir Shaik trial, many small trials unfolded. <i>Natal Witness</i> reported as follows: Shaik has following – out with his legal team (<i>Natal Witness</i> , 25 Feb 2005:1). I will sort you out (<i>Natal Witness</i> , 12 March 2005:1).
3 Unambiguity (Clarity)	Unambiguity is one of the important news values. Hartley (1982:77) maintains that clarity of the story is very important and range of possible meanings must be limited. In news it is important for a story not to generate too many meanings but Hartley (1982:77) posits that “news events that accord with the cultural background of news gatherers will be seen as more

	meaningful than others and so more liable to be selected".
4 Relevance	Relevance is another important news value. Relating to cultural proximity, it is important for news reports to cover issues of local importance.
5 Consonance	Consonance means that the media expects that something will happen. Hartley (1982:77) posits that the danger of reporting like this is that in most cases important issues are ignored while special attention is given to one anticipated issue.
6 Unexpectedness	The unpredictability and the rarity of events are important in news reports. According to Hartley (1982:78) unexpected news is normally unleashed via expected contexts.
7 Continuity	Hartley (1982:78) writes that it is important for a story to have a long life span. The case under investigation is the classical example of a running story.
8 Composition	Composition refers to different kinds of events. It is important for a newspaper to be packed in a balanced fashion (Hartley 1982:78). People with economic means are

9 Reference to elite persons	<p>considered to be of more value than ordinary citizens. Stories concerning rich people are covered far more than those about ordinary people. The Schabir Shaik trial falls under this value. This case touches on high profile people in the land like Jacob Zuma. Gans (1979:26) notes that ordinary working citizens are only given media coverage when they are victims of accidents such as mine disasters and construction accidents.</p>
10 Reference to elite nations	<p>Hartley (1982:78) posits that stories involving influential countries are more likely to be reported than events in poor countries. For example, if something happens in the USA, it is more likely to be reported than something that occurs in Zambia.</p>
11 Ethnocentrism	<p>Ethnocentrism assumes that news reporters give more attention/coverage to news that is relevant to their country – stories about domestic conditions (Gans 1979:42).</p>
12 Altruistic democracy	<p>This notion generally assumes that news media should pursue stories that are largely based on public interest and public service. Journalists tend to cover stories in a way that differentiates winners from losers. According to Gans (1979:43), news media tends to have little patience with losers.</p>

	News media also pays attention to racial integration. It is generally assumed that by paying special attention to racial integration, the media adheres to the norms that are viewed as expressions of public interest (Gans 1979:44). This value further requires that the media constantly report on political and legal failures to achieve altruistic and official democracy.
13 Negativity	Hartley (1982:79) maintains that bad news is actually good news. News that is bad is more likely to be covered than purely good news. Good news tends to be boring; hence does not get enough coverage. Hartley (1982:79) maintains that news values are able to provide a good idea of a kind of event that will survive the selection process. Values further provide the “clues as to the priority different stories will be given.

McManus contributes to the social construction theory debate by discussing various steps of news production. According to McManus (1994:88) the first step of news production is uncovering potentially newsworthy issues. The major problem, however, is that significant news is often expensive to discover because powerful interests want it hidden.

McManus (1994:98) posits that the second stage of news production is “choosing among those events and issues uncovered in step one a subset for inclusion in the newspapers”. This is a difficult process because journalists are faced with the choice of having to choose journalism needs and market demands.

The final stage of news production is the actual reporting of the story (McManus 1994:89). When reporting, a journalist is normally faced with various choices such as which angle to emphasise and the angling of news constitutes bias. McManus (1994:89) further notes that newspapers report according to their needs. If, for example, the aim of the newspaper is increased profit, then less care may be taken with information. It is generally assumed that too much information tends to be very boring.

Additionally, it is important to note that news is not selected and constructed in a vacuum. Most authors posit that with every profession, including that of journalism, there are limitations, pressure, structures and norms under which journalists are expected to work (Tuchman 1978, Gans 1978 and Oosthuizen 2001:463). Institutions and individuals under which the media works largely influence the nature of news. Gassaway (1984:77) asserts that just as in any profession, news workers are influenced by many things when performing their function – culture, family, schools, churches and others that they deal with daily.

Oosthuizen (2001b:164) believes that media institutions function within specific societies and any society provides the framework for the expression of expectation about media functioning. And most of the time a society is guided by a set of fundamental values, for example, in a democracy values like freedom, equality and order are important.

3.2 Socialisation of Media Workers

Another important aspect to consider when studying conformity in the print media output is the socialisation of media workers. Croteau and Hoynes (2000:14) define socialisation as “a process whereby we learn and internalise the values, beliefs and norms of our culture and in so doing develop a sense of self”. The socialisation process influences journalists when performing their functions. Journalists behave in ways that are defined by Croteau and Hoynes as “socially acceptable ways”.

As in any other career, journalists not only socialise, but also rely on one another for story ideas. In as far as the media is concerned, Croteau and Hoynes (2000:20) identify three types of social relations: namely, relationships between institutions such as interactions between the media and government; relationships within an institution as well as relationships between an institution and the public. This involves the influence of mass media on readers.

The relationship between the media and other social institutions is another relationship to consider. For people to understand how media functions, it is essential to take into consideration that media exists within a social, economic and political context which plays a big role in its operation.

Yet other relationships to understand are the relationships within the media industry, such as the relationships among journalists from different newspapers. As journalists normally function within similar standards, it is inevitable that they will copy one another's styles of reporting. Within the media industry standard journalistic practices normally shape the process of news reporting and even the content of news.

Socialisation is again, is bound to inject content conformity into the print media. An example of socialisation where reporters end up sharing information is provided by Tuchman (1978:75), where a *Times* reporter is witnessed sharing information with a *News* reporter. Tuchman (1978:78) also observed that when John F. Kennedy was shot, journalists were sharing information with everyone, including their competitors. The sad result for democracy is that journalists do not regard such practice as a problem; instead they view it as a form of cooperation that is used to help one other get a story out on time (Tuchman 1978:78).

One of the causes of content conformity is this habit of journalists relying heavily on one another for ideas, and this reliance decreases content diversity (Shoemaker & Reese 1991:101). This practice – closely related to socialisation – is pack journalism, whereby journalists covering the same beat or the same story tend to emphasise the same angle

and adopt the same viewpoint (Schudson 2003:139). Pack journalism also refers to a notion whereby journalists gather and report news in groups, promoting the sharing of ideas and news judgments with other journalists (Schudson 2000:188; Shoemaker and Reese 1991:221). Reporters are in many cases expected to cover news in "packs" so that they can obtain stories similar to those of their competitors. Failure to cover stories with a similar angle is perceived as the reporter having "missed".

Underwood (1995:146) points out that the main reason behind this trend is the pressure to sell. Reporters are in most cases under pressure from their editors to conform to other news organisations. According to Shoemaker and Reese (1996:170), news workers consider this behaviour a good way of reporting, because stories are accepted easily by editors. Reporters are, therefore, often not prepared to differ or to approach the stories from a different angle, because differing will increase the chances of the stories not being approved by their editors. One must mention that such pressure is against the norms of journalism and poses a threat to the healthy functioning of democracy.

According to McManus (1994:105) the lack of investigation units in news rooms is another reason for concern. Stories are not followed up and some media houses cannot afford to finance a unit dedicated specifically to the investigation of stories. It is important to note that investigative journalism is costly, and many media managers are not willing to spend for it. Investigative journalism also requires journalists who are willing to take risks. It is also worth noting that many journalists have neither the skills nor the training that investigative journalism requires (Steyn & De Beer 2004: 387). Limited budgets restrict journalists from performing the good reporting that democracy requires. In some cases media houses do not invest in training journalists. Large budgets are normally used for buying resources, rather than for actual reportage.

Tuchman (1978:90) adds that the lack of investigative journalism in the news media is caused by the pressure to meet deadlines. It is clear that having an investigative unit is not popular amongst newspapers. For example, *KULG* in the United States was the first television station in the nation to have a team that specifically focuses on investigations

(McManus 1994:105). Investigative journalism can assist in achieving the highest standards in journalism, and it is important to note that it is only through investigative journalism that the media ensures that its role as a watchdog is fully realised.

3.3 Reliance on Sources

Another reason for content conformity in the media output is the use of one source by both print and electronic media and heavy reliance on external news providers. McManus (2004:111) posits that as it is practically impossible for reporters to cover every story, most media houses rely largely on their reporters, correspondents and news agencies which are responsible for covering events as they happen around the world. It is assumed that facts are self-validating; people with more facts are, therefore, likely to be more accurate. Legitimate organisations are regarded as being inherently more correct because of the procedures they follow to protect the institution and people who come into contact with them. According to Vermeer (1995:9), over-reliance on these limited news sources is a constraint on the independent functioning of the media.

The researcher believes that over-reliance on the same limited news sources does not only inject content conformity into the media, but may also expose the media to manipulation by the very same sources. In contrast to the researcher's opinion is the fact that the use of news services seems to be useful to reporters. According to Shoemaker and Reese (1996:119), news services help the media organisations operate smoothly, enabling journalists to meet deadlines. Furthermore, most journalists rely on pictures, copies of speeches and other handouts that are provided by public relations practitioners and spin doctors.

Given all the above factors influencing the media content, can the media remain objective in its reporting? The following section discusses the issue of objectivity in the media.

3.4 Objectivity in the Media

Objectivity means that news comes to the consumer unattained by conscious bias or external influence that could make it appear but what it is. There are various opinions relating to the existence of objectivity when producing news. Croteau and Hoynes (1997:106) state that objectivity is more than simply getting the facts straight. It is “a doctrine that perceives the separation of facts and values as a messy business that requires the use of practices to ensure their separation”. Croteau and Hoynes (1997:108) posit that objectivity is “an ideal that is unattainable”.

It is important to note that not all journalists subscribe to the notion of objectivity. For example, David Brinkley was one of the several panellists on the ABC-TV viewpoint programme considering the role of the media covering US presidential election campaigns. Responding to the question from the audience on whether journalists can remain objective or not, David Brinkley responded as follows: “Well, first of all, I would question the use of the word objectivity. In my opinion, there is no such thing. Possibly a computer is objective. A human being who is objective would have no standards, no values. He would be in favour of nothing. And such a person, if there is one, probably should be locked up” (Koppel 1983:10).

Legun (1971:206) strongly asserts that “there is no such thing as objective news” but admits that there are things such as neutral facts. These, according to him, are mostly statements about simple events. He continues (1971:206) that being “neutral can be done up to a certain level”. As soon as the reporter moves into writing a story with different angles, however, it is inevitable that he/she will be required to “select” one angle. Selectivity according to him is more to do with the process of the reporter choosing what to take and what to leave out. This process results in the news losing the claim of being absolutely objective because it involves value judgments by the reporter.

Although Legun (1971:206-207) admits that it is difficult to attain objective reporting, he strongly suggests that “balanced reporting should be the aim of every serious journalist ... a committed journalist should attempt to describe as fully as possible the total situation”. Manning (2001:68) supports Legun when he argues that objectivity cannot be achieved by producing value-free and comprehensive accounts of real events. The term rather describes a set of practices that journalists can defend as objective. McNair (1998:70) concurs with this viewpoint as he writes that news, like all human observations, is not truly objective. He argues that achieving objectivity is just an ideal for journalists.

A similar argument is presented by Jim Kuypers, in his book *Press Bias and Politics*, where he compares the text of six speeches made by political figures about race and homosexuality with the ways that the news media covered the events. He argues that the comparisons show that “only a narrow brand of liberal thought is supported by the press; all other positions are denigrated” (Kuypers 2002:19).

Hallin (1995), Lippmann (2000) and Lichtenberg (2000) discuss the issue of objectivity in the news at greater length. Hallin (1995) and Lippmann (2000) state categorically that there is no such thing as objective standards of journalism. Everything that the public reads is the result of various selections and choices that are made by journalists. Continuing the argument, the two critics state that objective standards in journalism can never be achieved, because editors are faced on a daily basis with the task of deciding what should be printed, in what position, in how much space and with what emphasis.

Judith Lichtenberg (2000:238) defends objectivity and looks at it from various perspectives. She attacks critics such as Lippmann (2000) and Hallin (1995) who firmly believe that there is no such thing as objective standards in journalism. Lichtenberg (2000:239) refers to these claims as “not making sense” and adds that the assertion that objectivity is not desirable makes the complaint that journalism is not objective senseless. According to Lichtenberg (2000:239), if objectivity were impossible to achieve in

journalism, critics would not complain that some piece of journalism was not objective; to doubt objectivity is more like saying it is not possible to know reality.

Critics such as Schudson (2003:34) hold a different view: there *is* an objective way of representing each event and believe that failure to be objective can only mean bias. Schudson believes that journalists are in a better position to know the reality but they deliberately make efforts not to present reality as it is but colour it in the way that will serve their particular interests.

From the above different viewpoints it is very difficult to tell if the media can truly remain objective in its reporting.

It is important to note that my having discussed only the print media does not mean that television reports objectively. Electronic broadcasting especially television is considered to be a very biased medium when compared to newspapers because on television the audience does not have the same opportunity of thoroughly looking/reading the story. Moreover, the structure of television does not allow for balance and in-depth coverage of facts. Time is very limited. Reporters are prevented from doing the kind of job that a person in print could do.

3.4.1 The issue of balance

The issue of objectivity links well with the concern about the lack of balance in the news media. McManus (1994:146) defines a balanced story as "a story where all major sides of the story are given appropriate access to the audience". Kariithi (2005:154-56) attributes the lack-of-balance problem to the fact that daily newspapers tend to be more reactive than proactive when reporting stories. He defines proactive journalism as that kind of journalism that defines news content and news agenda and reactive journalism as "often restricted and uncritical", explaining that reactive reporting is widely seen in weekly publications and not much in weekend newspapers. Kariithi (2005:154) ascribes this to the fact that weekend newspapers have more time to interact with particular stories. He

(2005:154) criticises this type of reporting as bad reporting because it does not provide in-depth coverage of stories.

Kobre (1981:3) supports Kariithi when he posits that in-depth and balanced reporting is essential in a democracy. For a person to be a good citizen, it is important to be well informed. It has been noted that argument is based on the fact that citizens are required to vote intelligently. Garnham (1986:248) points out that the answer to this is to ensure that there are trained journalists and self-sustaining newspapers. Garnham (1986:248) claims that high quality information is expensive to find and in most cases powerful elites want it hidden. Garnham (1986:248) further find it strange that the media, under the banner of balance and objectivity, claims to serve the public but is not accountable to the populace.

3.5 Gatekeeping Theory

The objectivity argument links up well with Shoemaker's gatekeeping model. The gatekeeping model was invented by Kurt Lewin and studied in 1950 by David Manning. It emphasises that for news to be news there need to be people who are responsible for selecting it. These people are called gatekeepers (Shoemaker, 1997:57). This theory argues that the selection /of stories depends largely on editors, meaning that editors and journalists select stories according to what they prefer. In the study conducted by David Manning, results indicate that editors are responsible for making the final decisions as far as news selection is concerned (Schudson 1997:9; Shoemaker 1997:57). These findings confirm the notion that news is far from mirroring reality and is more of a manufacturing and fabrication process.

This theory is not without its critics. The gatekeeping approach to news fails to acknowledge that news gathering is a process that includes many facets such as sources and news routines. The theory also fails to consider that editors and advertisers are not the only ones responsible for determining what goes into the paper. It does not explore the impact of external factors such as the influence of advertisers. The gatekeeping model merely portrays the news media as the only active participants in the news production process (Shoemaker 1997:57).

Closely related to the gatekeeping theory is the revised work of Schudson (2000:175-195) in which he looks at three perspectives of news production. Among these he employs the view of the political economy of the media, which posits that the capitalist class places pressure on editors and reporters to report their desires. The political economy approach emphasises that the outcome of the news process is shaped by the structure of the state and the economic foundation of that particular news organisation (Schudson 2000:178).

Furthermore, the political economy of the media approach has shown that professional journalistic ideology tends to be undermined because newspapers are both directly and indirectly obliged to reflect not only the interests of the media owners and advertisers, but the socially powerful forces (Golding & Murdock 2000:73; Schudson 2000:179; Williams 2003:56).

3.6 Media Ownership

In the light of the above dynamics, the researcher attempted to unbundle the question of the impact of ownership on the news content. There seems to be a direct link between ownership and news content. The underlying assumption is that the media is an instrument that reflects the position of those who control it. It is therefore important for the researcher to look at the issues of ownership in more detail.

The position of many authors is that newspaper owners and advertisers put pressure on editors and reporters as to which stories are "suitable" for the newspaper (Schudson 1991:143; Williams 2003:74-86; McQuail 2005:99-100; Croteau & Hoynes 2003:58). Failure to adhere to the needs of a newspaper owner often results in serious action being taken against a particular editor or reporter.

Doyle (2002:173) concurs that media ownership plays an important role in the functioning of the media and ultimately determines news output. A study conducted in 2001 of 97 countries, commissioned by the World Bank and conducted by Djankov, McLeish, Nenova and Shleifer, states:

In our sample of 97 countries, only four per cent have other ownership structures – a mere two per cent of our sample – and family-controlled newspapers account for 57 per cent of our sample, and families control 34 per cent of television stations. State ownership is vast. On average, the state controls approximately 29 per cent of newspapers and 60 per cent of television stations. The state owns a huge share – 72 per cent of radio stations. The media is therefore owned overwhelmingly by parties most likely to extract private benefits of control. (Djankov, McLeish, Nenova & Shleifer 2001).

The results of both studies above support the notion that ownership is still a problem in most countries and is concentrated in the hands of the few.

McNair (1998:101) gives a detailed analysis of how economic forces impact on journalism. He argues as follows:

Journalism is in a real sense the private property of these individuals and conglomerates and they are free within the law to dispose of and use it as they like. Journalists are employees, strongly influenced by those who own or control their organisations. They are subject to direct economic power in the same way as other employees of capital enterprises, although some journalists with "star" value bring their own reputations to the market and use them to buy autonomy.

McNair further contends that journalism is an industry, meaning that it has a right to do whatever is necessary in order to increase its chances of survival in the crowded market.

The foregoing discussion highlights conformity in media content at the global context. While still systematically untested, there is reason to believe that the South African media also suffers from these tendencies. There are numerous anecdotal reasons to subscribe to this point of view. First, the South African media is highly globalised, by ownership, media training, exchange programmes, and socialisation. Berger (1993, 2005) highlights

ownership structures in the media, while Strelitz and Steenveld (2005) offer some discussion of the globalisation character of the local mass media. There is ample evidence of globalisation patterns in formal training and professional exchange programmes: all major journalism schools have formal links with partner programmes in North America and Europe, and many South African editors are alumni of major global exchange programmes like Harvard University's Nieman Fellowship. This anecdotal evidence, if demonstrated through systematic research, would most likely bring to our attention the urgent need to understand and deal with conformity in the local media. A failure to test these persuasive patterns might not only mean that South African audiences are inadequately served by the mass media, but that significantly high levels of conformity could even jeopardise the country's young democracy. These observations undergird the purpose of this study.

Croteau and Hoynes (2003:51) argue that the media, which is owned by the few, often has content that lacks diversity. Croteau and Hoynes (2003:52) believe that this decline in diversity in newspapers poses a threat to the ideal free press. In his book, *Media Monopoly*, Ben Bagdikian (2004:27-54) asserts that media ownership is becoming concentrated in the hands of conglomerates. Illustrating this point, Bagdikian (2004:27-54) points to the "Big Five" in USA as good examples of conglomeration, positing that the Big Five are simultaneously engaged in both print, electronic media, movie production and even music industries. Machesney (1998: 1-25) concurs with Bagdikian when he claims that the media no longer focuses on one thing but consists of big business with various interests. These mergers are bad for democracy, however, because they discourage competition among newspapers; sometimes one conglomerate owns up to six newspapers.

The results of a content analysis study of newspapers conducted by Entman (1993) reveals that competition can instead encourage newspapers to produce news with similar content in order to attract the same readers and catch the same advertisers. Competition

breeds sensationalism⁸. In most cases journalists are expected to cover similar stories, and it is difficult to make a profit under such circumstances. Reporters end up sensationalising stories with the hope of increasing readership figures and selling more newspapers than their competitors.

3.7 Influence of Advertisers on Content

Linked with the issue of ownership influence is the influence of advertisers. It is generally assumed that some advertisers insist on a particular type of news presentation and threaten to withdraw their advertising should the newspapers fail to comply (Curran 1991:87). Schudson (2003:125) conducted a study with 118 television directors and the results indicate that advertisers do indeed pressure editors either to run positive stories or kill the negative ones.

Another example which supports Schudson's findings is the case of a tobacco company in the United States which immediately withdrew its advertisement in the *Mother Jones Magazine* after that magazine ran a negative story insisting that tobacco is the major cause of lung cancer (Parenti 1993:32). These results indicate that advertisers do indeed indirectly control the media. In his book (2004), Bagdikian (1983:61) argues that news organs are often beholden to advertisers, who may be potential subjects of critical stories. He adds that in spite of that, journalists and editors still have a duty to produce news fearlessly and without any coercion from outside forces from business or from their own media sources.

Given the above evidence it is, therefore, safe to say that over-reliance on advertising is bad for media output because it is difficult to imagine these newspapers standing on their own by publishing news articles that may be of public interest but have the potential to antagonize an advertiser and the publication's potential future. Schudson (1986:114) posits that advertising is not good for a healthy democracy. Herman and Chomsky (1994: x) concur that over-reliance on advertising as the primary source of income is a problem

⁸ The term "sensationalisation" is used to refer to the form of reporting that is not objective (McQuail 2005:357). Sensationalisation is used by newspapers to sell more newspapers. Sensationalised news appeals more to a wider audience; on the other hand, normal news is seen as boring to the readers.

because it inevitable directly affects media content. They argue that advertisers exert two kinds of pressure: namely, selecting and packaging of news.

Murdock (2004:247) identifies three more problems associated with over-reliance on advertising. He argues that dependence on advertising revenue subjects newspapers to editorial pressures from large advertisers wishing to promote their corporate interests. Second, dependence on advertisers limits space for more voices. Third, advertisements lead newspapers to sensationalism. Given this argument, it is equally important to note as argued by Bagdikian (2004:247) that 80% of the profit for most newspapers comes from advertisers. Murdock (1982:145) also admits that the costs of producing a newspaper are covered largely by advertisements and not by the public. It is for that reason that editors, in most cases, find themselves not knowing whether to adhere to journalism norms or create an environment that is good for selling. Any newspaper will think twice about publishing a story that might upset its biggest advertiser (Herman and Chomsky 1994: x; Jackson 1993:76).

Murdock (1982:145), however, reasons that although the press obtains most of its income/profit from advertisements and not from the public, this does not mean that advertisers are more important than the public. Golding and Murdock (2000:75) contribute to this debate by contending that the public are as important as advertisers in terms of bringing in profit for the newspaper, because the price that advertisers pay for advertising depends entirely on the size and the composition of the readers.

The viewpoint of Sparks (2000:268) is different as he argues that newspapers do need advertisers to make a profit. He states that generating profit is important for a newspaper so that it can carry out its daily duties but the only problem is that sometimes editors are faced with indirect pressure from advertisers to act according to what the advertisers want. He further notes that without profit there can be no fourth estate, no investigative journalism and even no newspaper at all. Despite his viewpoint, however, Sparks (2000:268) admits that profit-generating newspapers pose a threat to democracy. Negrine (1989:88) posits that without readers, no newspapers can survive; without sufficient

readers but with willing advertisers, the chances of survival are greater but the medium still has to prove itself. Unless it does so, it is likely to lose both readers and advertisers.

3.8 Commercialisation

Over-reliance on advertisers leads to commercialisation which is discussed in more detail in this section. Ross (1997:4) defines commercialisation of the press as the drifting of ultimate control into the hands of men with business motives. It is apparent that mass media has become too commercialised and this commercialisation of news undermines responsible reporting (Croteau & Hoynes 2003:58 & Hallin 2000:259). The underlying assumption of the concept of commercialisation is that media normally produces whatever is sold the most and that the content of news is packaged in a way that encourages readers to buy.

This is what Bagdikian (2004:242) calls “buying mood”. The search for profit compromises quality and according to McKee (2005:68) quality is compromised mainly in that a newspaper avoids complex language and “climbs down”. Furthermore, commercialised news is bad for democracy because it suppresses diversity of viewpoints (McManus 1994:34). Keane (1991:53) holds a similar view when he writes that the media should not only be aimed at making a profit but should operate for the benefit of all citizens; failure to cater for all members of the public poses a threat to democracy.

From a public sphere perspective, the concern is whether commercialisation compromises public service obligations. It is clear that commercial pressure in the print media sector has resulted in many problems such as “tabloidisation”, reduction of staff, and a “juniorisation” of newsrooms (Wasserman and De Beer 2005:39).

3.8.1 Market driven journalism

Since the early eighties there has been a worldwide tendency to follow a marketing approach in the newspaper business and this tendency is generally referred to as market-driven journalism. McManus (1994:194) posits that commercialisation analyses news as a commodity in which normative journalism ideals take a back seat in subordination to

market driven journalism. In essence, this notion means that newspapers are doing what they must to respond to the needs of the market, so that profit can be generated (Hallin 2000:221; Underwood 1995:19). The concept of market driven journalism assumes that media owners put pressure on journalists to think and act like marketing managers. Some newspapers even go to the extent of employing marketing managers from retail industries for the purpose of introducing a business for their newspapers firms. An example in the United States of America is Mark Wile, who became chief at Times Mirror Co. in 1995 after a career with food industry giant, General Mills, and Jim Rosse, an economist who was selected to head Freedom Communications in 1992. This was done to put the newspaper in a better position to achieve its commercial objectives.

Gillmor (2004:24) posits that market driven journalism delineates the limits and the extent to which the media can be open to dissident voices and encourage genuine debate. This view is supported by Bagdikian (2004:247) when he argues that market-driven journalism gathers an audience “not to inform it, but to sell it to advertisers”. This is not good for democracy in that the public loses an opportunity to engage in constructive debate and readers consequently become what Gillmor (2004:24) calls “a mass of shallow citizenry”.

In a market driven journalism environment, public interest is subordinated to commercially favourable content. Bagdikian (2004:247) notes that the sole purpose of market driven journalism is to gather an audience not for the purpose of informing them but selling and making a profit. McManus (1994:191) further argues that market driven journalism is not good for democracy because it causes society to suffer from “information poverty” and he refers to “junk journalism”. This viewpoint is reinforced by Shoemaker and Reese (1991:162) who posit that “Today the editor's job is more function of management than editing”. Most experienced journalists are unhappy with this form of journalism.

According to McManus, the author of the market driven journalism theory (1994:21), most news is produced by profit-making business in America. The pressure to generate

profit conflicts with journalism norms (McManus 2004:34). Journalists' standards call for independent, fair and complete coverage of events, diversity and representative opinions (McManus 1994:35). In the study conducted by McManus to assess the quality of news gathering, one news director indicated that it is very frustrating to balance the demands of the market and those of journalism; the results indicate that putting either one first, compromises the other (McManus 1994:35).⁹

Market driven journalism encourages competition in the media industry which automatically results in journalists monitoring one another's coverage (McManus 1994:70). This is contrary to the standards of good journalism which require that the media must work independently of one another. Underwood's study (1995:118) to determine the impact of market driven journalism in news organisations indicates that most journalists are unhappy with this form of journalism. In addition, results show that market driven journalism has resulted in media outlets changing policy from public-oriented journalism to profit-oriented journalism. It is further noted in Underwood (1995:19) that most editors label market driven journalism as an "unhealthy trend" that creates friction in the newsrooms. McManus (1994:197) claims that market driven journalism poses a threat to democracy. He elaborates (1995: xx) that newspapers engaging in profit-driven journalism are in a danger of losing the true spirit of the

⁹ Quality is a concept that can mean different things to different people. Picard (2004:61) writes that in business terms "Quality involves providing value for money". In journalism quality is not about achieving profit but "it is a central element in achieving the social, political and cultural goals asserted for journalism and democratic societies". Continuing with the definition, Picard (2004:61) posits that "Newspaper quality invoices the content and methods of journalism and information. It is providing comprehensive coverage and information that produces understanding; it is evidenced in the expertise of personnel, in reportage rather than in having personnel at places where news is made; in articles that provide context and background and in articles based on thoughtful analysis. Quality also involves the operational activities associated with the newspaper, such as consistent availability of the newspaper at newsstands and few delivery errors; the technical effectiveness of the organisation; printing excellence; ease of the use of the paper; accuracy in billing and quick problem resolution. The above stance captures most of the aspects that define a quality newspaper. The question is to what extent newspapers are adhering to the provided description of quality.

journalistic mission – the commitment to provide information. McManus notes that market driven journalism and journalism norms cannot co-exist as these two concepts are “mutually exclusive”.

The issue of market driven journalism then poses a question of how newspapers can serve the interests of the public in the light of the market-journalism concept. McManus (1994:1) states that most media cooperations (as discussed in chapter 4) are businesses that are listed on the stock exchanges. He further explains that it is normal that a shareholder's or investor's primary interest will be to generate profit. It, therefore, goes without saying that the media's objective of pursuing truth will be a secondary objective.

Doyle (2002:13) takes a different view when he argues that commercialisation should not be seen as a threat to good journalism but needs to be viewed as “a breath of fresh air in the news market”. McManus (1994:2) supports this view when he contends that market forces can be a mixed blessing which possess the potential to invigorate journalism that was previously “too serious, sanctimonious and often plain boring”.

3.8.2 Tabloid journalism

Tabloid journalism may have many faults as pointed out by critics, but Ornebring and Jonsson (2008:33) posit that it can be seen as an alternative arena for public discourse. It has an ability to broaden the reading public, giving news access to groups that previously have not been targeted by the prestige press. Tabloid journalism is also said to give rise to new forms of journalistic discourse that may be more accessible than traditional authority. Ornebring and Jonsson (2004:33) also note that tabloid journalism can help in stimulating political participation by speaking to the senses and feelings as well as the rational mind.

Ornebring and Jonson (2004:285) observe that there is actually a need for an alternative public sphere because most newspapers have been largely aimed at covering stories that cater for elite groups. According to these authors, tabloidisation¹⁰ has the ability to broaden the public, giving news access to groups that have not been previously targeted by the prestige press. Sparks (1991:63) asserts that the British press caters for different kinds of publics and it is, therefore, not surprising that the content of newspapers directed to the working class should be different from that directed to the ruling class.

Picard (2004: 60) notes that over the past 30 years the number of newspapers has exceeded 60 per cent: "The majority of editorial material does not classify as news. In most newspapers, three-fourths or more of the material is made up of reviews, comics, advice, puzzles and automatically entertainment, lifestyle and other sections that are not truly news". Notably, most newspapers are keen to cover non-local content rather than local content. Picard (2004:61) posits that the reason for this practice is that non-local content is easy to obtain because most of it comes from news services, whereas local content requires editorial staffing that is far more expensive. This, therefore, means that local and equality stories are often ignored in favour of stories that are more appealing to advertisers and entertaining to a larger number of readers.

Roberts (2001:15) concurring with Picard, points out that the end product of market driven journalism is "thinner and blander news & reports". Newspapers are becoming less distinctive institutions and journalistic and community achievements remain secondary. This point is well illustrated in Underwood and Stamm's survey (1992:307) which shows that increased reader and market orientation of newspapers manifests itself in loss of depth in stories and displacement of informative news with "softer" reporting.

¹⁰ "Tabloid journalism" is the term used to define the tendency of the media to report stories that interest the public instead of writing quality news. Ornebring and Jonson (2004:23) posit that "tabloid journals lower the standards of public discourse or even worse, tabloid journalism may even actually be a threat to democracy breeding cynicism and a lack of interest".

In this study it is argued that there is a shift of interest. Newspapers are more interested in pleasing advertising interests than informing readers. Hadland (2005:13) believes that both market driven journalism and commercialisation pose a threat to editorial independence because both lead to suppression of news that may upset advertisers. With similar view is Bagdikian (2000:XV) when he observes that serious journalism has been neglected in favour of trivial and banal content and, consequently, there is superficialisation of public discourse that results in degradation of news.

Picard (2004:54-64) explores the diminution of the importance of public service through commercialism. He posits that newspaper content has diverted its attention from journalism to activities primarily related to business interests of the press. He further states that “there is a growing conflict between the role of newspapers as the servants of readers and the exploitation of readers to seek additional gain. It is sad for democracy – as pointed out by Picard (2004:55) – that many publishers have adopted strategies that make commercial considerations equal to or in some cases more important than editorial quality. Such practice is harmful to the social service role of newspapers.

Picard (2004:55) further comments that it is not fair to blame newspapers for attending to commercial aspects. He acknowledges the danger of focusing on commercialisation but notes that “newspaper companies, like all firms, have economic self interests and can be expected to attend to them”. He, however, warns that too much emphasis on economic interests by some newspapers poses a reason for concern.

Based on the above arguments it is, therefore, clear that both commercialisation and market driven journalism undermine the role of the press in the media and have worrying implications for democracy. Both commercialisation and market driven journalism are, therefore, a “diminution of quality and diversity of quality and diversity as commercial media emphasis on serving broad audiences and providing content that will not lead to reductions in audiences and advertisers”.

3.9 Conclusion

The chapter highlighted the fact that news production is a process that involves many facets that ultimately affect the output. The chapter asserted that news is largely shaped by various factors. It also argued that newspapers tend to rely too much on advertisers and that this is not good for democracy as advertisers tend to be more concerned about profit than the production of quality news. In addition, it showed that news values are criteria used in newsroom practice to select items that qualify for inclusion in the news from the several contending items that are potentially news.

The following chapter considers the South African press as the context of the study.

CHAPTER 4: THE SOUTH AFRICAN PRESS IN CONTEXT

4.0 INTRODUCTION

The context of the study emphasises the importance of diversity of opinions in the media. Not only does there need to be a diverse and generally representative range of views and interests represented within the media, but all South Africans need to have avenues through which to express their views and ideas in the media (Kisuke 2004). An array of electronic and printed media in South Africa provides an opportunity to express views. The question here is to what extent the media fulfils this requirement.

This chapter posits that historical discussion of the press is important because it provides a broader political and economic context in which the South African media operate. The history of the South African media is important in this study because as Wigston (2001:4) points out, the present media environment is largely influenced by what happened in the past. Wigston (2001:5) admits that studying media history is never easy because there is still “no usable model to enable us to undertake an all-encompassing study of the media environment”.

4.1 History of the South African Press

Historically, the *Cape Town Gazette*, an official government publication was first published on 16th August 1800, by Alexander Walker and John Robertson (Wigston 2001:35; Kareithi 2005:2 & Jackson 1993:17). The paper appeared mainly in English and was largely used for official notices and advertisements which were controlled by the governor. This resulted in the newspaper carrying only the interests of the colonial rulers. Wigston (2001:35) notes that the title of the newspaper was changed to *Kaapche Courant*, but reverted to its original bilingual title in 1806 when the British re-occupied the Cape. According to Ocitti (1999:13), the paper’s appearance in Cape Town was to prove only a journalist teaser. It is, however, noted that the lifespan of this publication

was very short. Within just three months of its existence it had to close down and “there is no record in the literature as to why Africa’s first newspaper suffered such a sudden death”. Ocitti (1999:13) believes that one of the possible reasons for its early demise was that it was run by people without any journalistic background: “... these were probably amateurs who had no experience whatsoever in the successful press”.

Expanding on this view, Ocitti (1999:13) posits that the proprietors of the newspaper might have found out that publication of a newspaper requires much more than they anticipated. It is suspected that problems such as profitability and the quality of the newspaper might have led to its sudden death. Kareithi (2005:2) in support of Ocitti’s work, states that the main reasons for the closure of this newspaper were the lack of economic or technical resources and government persecution of the newspaper through severe forms of censorship. It is equally interesting to note that the publication of this newspaper was nearly 150 years after Dutch settlers first arrived at the Cape of Good Hope in South Africa. From this, one can conclude that the press was not a priority of white settlers in South Africa as they survived for 150 years without a newspaper.

Two months after its closure, Thomas Pringle and John Fairbairn started the bilingual periodical known as *The South African Journal (Het Nederduitsch Zuid-Afrikaansch Tydschrift)* together with Reverend Abraham Faure (Wigston 2001:35). It is important to point out that this journal became unpopular because the content was largely about constitutional matters, such as curbing despotic power, and in later issues it contained issues on the freedom of the press. The journal was eventually closed down in 1824 (Wigston 2001:36). The first non-government newspaper was *The South African Commercial Advertiser*, which first appeared on 7th January 1824 in Cape Town (Wigston 2001:35). Reporting on Africa, Legun (1971:29) notes that major newspapers were wholly or largely in the hands of the powerful and were primarily responsible for defending their interests.

With the coming of democracy in 1994, South Africa's newspapers were freed from all restrictions. The new constitution safeguards freedom of the media; freedom to receive or impart information or ideas; freedom of artistic creativity; academic freedom and freedom of scientific research (Stokke 2000).

The study is not based on broadcasting, but it is, however, important briefly to discuss the history of broadcasting. Teer Tomaselli (2005:203) tells us that broadcasting was largely dominated by the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) which was formed on 1st August 1936.

SABC radio is dominant in South African broadcasting. AMPS indicates that over 78% of South Africa's adult radio listeners tune in to SABC radio. The on-line news service, SABCnews.com attracts an average of 600 000 site visits a month. Radio is mostly the domain of the state broadcaster, the SABC, although there are also growing numbers of community stations. There are currently three main players in television: the SABC, which has three channels (SABC1, SABC2 and SABC3); the free to air broadcaster, etv and Multichoice, which has sewn up the pay channel market. The SABC was incorporated into the network of cultural, economic and political institutions through which the Afrikaner nationalism of the National Party secured its hegemony from the 1950s onwards.

According to Barnett (1999: 4), things have not been easy for the SABC because it has operated as a commercial broadcaster since the 1950s. Given its relation to the institutional frameworks with Afrikaner nationalism on one hand and its financial dependence on advertising revenues on the other hand, the SABC stood in a highly compromised relationship with respect to the imperatives of both the state and the market. As the result of all that, the SABC is guilty of having fallen short of the principles of public service broadcasting as they have been understood over the past half century (Teer Tomaselli 1996).

The SABC played an important role in both constructing and supporting apartheid structures of pre-1991 South Africa (Tomaselli and Tomaselli 2001:124). Some authors posit that during the 1980s the SABC was used to support the interests of the ruling party and it is for this reason that it was eventually perceived as the government mouthpiece (Tomaselli and Tomaselli 2001:124; Wigston (2001:3). Tomaselli and Tomaselli 2001 (124-125) note that during apartheid there were two broad “camps”; namely, the ANC camp and the National Party camp. The National Party camp was made up of parastatal organisations such as the SABC, the Electricity Supply Commission (ESKOM), South African Posts and Telecommunications (SAPT/Telkom), Human Sciences Research Council and many others. The ANC camp on the other hand consisted of Film and Allied Workers' Organisation (FAWO) and protest press such as *Weekly Mail*, *Rand Daily Mail*, *Vrye Weekblad*, *New Nation* and *South*.

For over 40 years the apartheid state tried to gag the country's newspapers, using legislation, harassment and imprisonment, culminating in the late-1980s States of Emergency. Through all of this, South Africa's press continued to report on all the news they could (Stokke 2000). In April 1994, nationwide non-racial elections marked the formal end of apartheid in South Africa, leading to many changes such as the changes in the way media operated specifically in programming, diversification of ownership as well as expansion of services.

Currently, South Africa has a listing of 20 daily and 13 weekly newspapers, most in English. Some 14.5 million South Africans buy the urban dailies, while community newspapers have a circulation of 5.5 million. There is also a range of general and specialised news websites which, in terms of the speed and breadth of their coverage, are on a par with the best in the world (ABC 2008/9).

Jackson (1993:34) posits that in addition to the daily and weekend newspapers, the country has a number of regional, provincial and suburban press. Most of these newspapers are produced in suburbs of large metropolitan areas or in small towns around the country. Other media include extensive consumer magazines which do not

produce political news but are specifically aimed at the consumers. Jackson (1993:34) contends that hundreds of other magazines and journals cater for professional, trade and special interest groups. In these publications, political issues are largely ignored. In the early years South African media were clustered into categories: namely, English Press, the Afrikaans Press, the Black Press and Protest Press. These categories are also important when outlining the history of the South African press. The following section discusses each category in more detail.

4.1. 1. The English press

The target audience of English Press is largely rooted in the mining industry. The English press was formed by mining tycoons through Johannesburg Consolidated Investments, subsidiary of mining giant Anglo American. The English press was seen as a weapon for fighting apartheid (Tomaselli 2001:134). Jackson (1993:39) posits that the English press is one of the newspaper groups that are generally perceived as having some form of credibility. The Independent Newspapers group that falls under the English Press and is South Africa's largest newspaper group, traces its history back to 1889 when Francis Dormer established the Argus Printing Company, which had close links with mining magnate Cecil Rhodes.

4.1.2 Afrikaans press

According to Wigston (2001:37), "The Dutch/Afrikaans press was established largely as a reaction to the liberal views of Fairbairn in the *South African Commercial Advertiser*, particularly regarding issues such as slavery, the tensions between the Dutch farmers and the Xhosa and the work of the missionaries". The newspapers survived for 22 years before closing down owing to financial complications. The *South African Commercial Advertiser* was shortly followed by a publication called *De Zuid-Afrikaan*, the first to represent the interest of the Dutch/Afrikaners. This publication was established on 9th April 1830 by Christoffel Joseph Brand, an advocate unpopular with local authorities for his ability to defend cases against government in law courts with some success. In summary, this publication was all about championing the rights of the Afrikaner.

The Afrikaans press, mainly aimed at Afrikaans-speaking people, originated because there were people who were not happy with the English press and felt that they needed something to meet their needs. The Afrikaans press was seen as a cultural and political weapon for the promotion of the Afrikaans language (Tomaselli 2001: 134). As it was upfront about protecting Afrikaans cultural interests, it contributed immensely to the apartheid era in South Africa and generally enjoyed good relations with the government of the time. Jackson (1993:33) observes that the “Afrikaans papers have never pretended to be anything but a party press to promote the cultural and political interest of Afrikanerdom”. A former editor of *Die Burger*, once described the relationship between his paper and the National Party government as “a sort of marriage in which partners never really think in terms of divorce, but do think, sometimes, in terms of murder”(Jackson 1993:33). Literature shows that until relatively recently, the government and the Afrikaans press traditionally regarded the English papers with a mix of wariness, anger or outright hostility.

The first newspaper in *Natal* was *De Natalier*, a four-page weekly, mostly in Dutch with some smatterings of English which first appeared on 15th March 1844 (Wigston 2001:39). This newspaper was edited by Boniface, previously with *De Zuid-Afrikaan*, who left the Cape hastily when faced with a charge of libel.

The first newspaper to appear in *Gauteng*, formerly known as the Transvaal, was the *Government Gazette* which was published by Cornelius Moll in Potchefstroom, beginning on the 25th September 1857 (Wigston 2001:42; Muller 1987:120). This publication was renamed many times. First, within just two years of its existence, it was changed to the *Gouvernements Courant der Zar*. Soon after this publication many other publications came into existence and collapsed. Some of the newspapers of both languages worth mentioning include *Emigrant*, which was established on 15th October 1859, *De Oude Emigrant*, *Staats Courant*, *Transvaal Argus*, *Die Volkstem*, *Mining Argus*, *The Standard and Transvaal Mining Chronicle*. Note, however, that *The Standard* and *Transvaal Mining* amalgamated with the *Diggers News* to form the *Transvaal Observer*. Soon after this string of newspapers a newspaper called *Eastern Star* was formed and was

later known as *The Star* on 3rd April 1889. This newspaper was the largest selling daily newspaper in the late 1800s and was overtaken by *Sowetan* which is in turn currently being overtaken by the *Daily Sun*. According to AMPS *Daily Sun* is the biggest selling daily newspaper with 507,328 readers (Audit Bureau of Circulation -January 2009 - March 2009)

Some of the Afrikaans newspapers that existed include *Het Volksblad* which was the first to appear in March, 1915 having evolved from the Dutch weekly *Het Western* which began publication in 1904 (Wigston 2001:42; Muller 1987:120). This publication was later followed *De Burger* which first appeared in July 1915 in Cape Town. *De Burger* was later renamed as *Die Burger*. This newspaper was considered as “the official mouthpiece of the National Party” (Oosthuizen 2001:142).

There were four anti-apartheid Afrikaans newspapers: namely, *Die Zuid-Afrikaan*, *Vrye Weekblad*, *Saamstaan* and *Namaqua Nuus*. All the mentioned newspapers participated in the struggle for a democratic, non-racial South Africa. Under the leadership of Max du Preez, *Vrye Weekblad* was launched on 4th November 1988 and is one of the newspapers that were committed to objective journalism. *Vrye Weekblad* enabled people to read about Nelson Mandela without his being branded a violent terrorist (Wigston 2001:42; Muller 1987:120).

4. 1. 3 The Black press

The history of the South African press will not be complete without a brief analysis of the black press. The literature attributes its inception to missionaries. The first black newspaper *Umshumayeli Wendaba* which literally means “publisher of news” was printed at the Wesleyan Mission Society in Grahamstown from 1837 to 1841. Soon after that, another newspaper followed known as *Imvo Zabantsundu* which means *The African Opinion*. This newspaper – the first written for, owned and controlled by black people – was started by John Jabavu in 1884 in King William’s Town. Another newspaper that is worth mentioning, *Indian Opinion*, was formed in 1903 by Mahatma Ghandi, the founder of the Indian National Congress. This newspaper was written by an Indian, for Indian

people who are also considered to be black. Switzer (2000:44) posits that the *Sowetan* grew out of Bantu World which was founded in 1932 with the ANC leader as the editor. It was originally intended for Africans residing in Soweto and other urban townships in South Africa's industrial heartland. It still exists.

4. 1. 4 The Protest press/Alternative press

Any historical study of the South African print media is not complete without mention of the protest press, also known as the resistance press. Keyan Tomaselli (2000:378) defines the term alternative press as a serial publication supportive of a broader democratic tendency of the period, organised mainly via the United Democratic Front (UDF) and the Mass Democratic Movement (MDM). A number of newspapers evolved during the apartheid years, some lasting for only a few issues, while others are still in publication. Some of those newspapers include *Weekly Mail* – founded after the liberal *Rand Daily Mail* was closed down – *Vrye Weekblad* and *New Nation* and *South*. These newspapers had a wider national readership and were able to secure advertising.

The anti-press was also made up of smaller newspapers, produced by organisations and educational institutions. One of these was *Sash*, originally known as the *Black Sash*, produced by the Black Sash organisation from 1956-1994. The bad part, however, is that these newspapers were always under the threat of being closed down by the government of that time. Most of those newspapers were banned, one example being *Grassroots*, *Grassroots* was started in 1980, the first of a series of anti-apartheid community newspapers, with a circulation that grew to 20 000. The paper struggled financially, but was helped by small donations. Another newspaper falling under protest press was *Work in Progress*; this was a trade union publication that was founded by *University of Witwatersrand* postgraduate students. This publication was able to challenge a number of bannings and made inroads into the Publications Act committee declaring its material undesirable¹¹.

¹¹ <http://safrica.info/ess info/sa glance/constitution/971558.htm>

South is another newspaper that was established in 1987 by a group of coloured journalists who formerly worked for *Cape Argus*. Founded by Alan Boesak, the former UDF leader and activist, *South* was established to fight “racism in the newsroom”. Adhikari (2000:327-369) has written extensively about *South* and posits that *South* was unique in such a way that “it was the only left-wing commercial newspaper in the region in the last decades of the apartheid era. It is further stated that *South* lifted media activism to a higher plain”. According to Adhikari (2000:346), this newspaper gave a lot of effort but failed to sustain circulation figures of more than 10 000 and, struggling to make a profit, finally closed.

Other newspapers falling under the Alternative Press include *Indicator* and *New Nation*. *Indicator* was published biweekly and was largely aimed at a broader black community while *New Nation* was more African oriented and openly analysed national politics (Jackson 1993:47). Also falling under this category is *New Nation*, *New African*, *Grassroots*, *Samstaar*, *Work in Progress*, *Staff Rider* and *Sapsu Nation* (a student publication of that time). *Grassroots* was mainly concerned with expressing the views and aspirations of communities and workers, was aimed at the coloured and African readership in the Cape Peninsula. *Grassroots* formed part of the new alternative press.

The *Weekly Mail* and the *Vrye Weekblad* both based in Johannesburg were unusual in that they were both intended for a white audience. Another alternative press paper was *Mail*, respected as the most professionally produced paper (Jackson 1993:47). Democracy in South Africa saw the death of the liberation movement support media. Some of the newspapers that died include *South*, *Vrye Weekblad*, *New Nation* and *Work in Progress* (a magazine). Newspapers like *Mail & Guardian* and *Sowetan* are still in existence (Berger 2001:153). Most of the other newspapers were closed mainly because of problems relating to funding and limited advertising resources (Jackson 1993:61-63).

According to Switzer (2000:39) most of these newspapers were shut down because “they were unable to survive without foreign subsidies”. Ownership of newspapers has also changed to a large extent. The papers that previously belonged to the government are

now privatised allowing them an opportunity to serve their watchdog role. This change is also visible in the newsroom. There is also a considerable difference in editorial independency allowed to editors.

4.2 Newspaper Firms in South Africa

South African media is currently dominated by a handful of large corporations, with their interests ranging from newspapers to magazines and the Internet. Major media owners are Media 24, Independent News and Media, Avusa and Caxton and the CTP Group. These four own almost all the major newspapers and community newspapers, most of the consumer magazine titles, a slew of specialist magazines and have a finger in Internet and broadcast pies.¹²

Berger (2001:152) posits that media prior to 1993 “was entirely a state monopoly”, with ownership limited to only four white-owned groups. Tomaselli and Tomaselli (2001:131) contend that during the 1994 elections the print media industry was largely dominated by two media groups, Argus Holdings Ltd, Times Media Ltd and two Afrikaans language groups, Perskor and Nasionale Media BPK. Berger (2001:153) argues that owing to foreign investment, South African print media was given a chance to end the white South African monopoly. As a result, competition and arguable diversity were also added.

The media in South Africa is not a neutral purveyor of information – writers and editors pre-select and construct information for specific audiences. South African media can be divided into commercial media, which is mainly sold to make profit, state-funded public service media, and community media (Duncan & Seleone 1998:10). The South African media is characterised by its lack of diversity in all respects. The debate in this study is situated within this context¹³. The following section discusses each newspaper firm in detail.

¹² www.southafrica.co.za

¹³ www.SouthAfrica.info.

4.2.1 Naspers

Nasionale Media BPK also known as Naspers, is a multinational media group with its principal operations in print media – newspapers, magazines, printing, book publishing and private education and electronic media such as pay television and Internet service provision. Formed in 1915, the first newspaper of Naspers, *Die Burger*, was the official mouthpiece of the National Party in the Cape.

Print media comprises two segments: Media24 and book publishing and private education. Media24 is the largest publisher and publishes five national dailies: *Daily Sun*, *Die Burger*, *Beeld*, *Volksblad*, *Sondag*, *Son* (daily and weekly), *Witness*, *City Press*, *Beeld*, *Rapport* and *Soccer Laduma*. The company is owned by Naspers, which owns the MIH group, the owner of Multichoice.

Daily Sun, the largest daily newspaper in South Africa, competes directly with the *Sowetan*. It is the first South African tabloid aimed at the black working class. Initially met with disdain by the established press, its huge sales – and the fact that it has made new newspaper readers out of millions of South Africans – have earned it some respect. It is sold in Gauteng, Limpopo, Mpumalanga and North West. Average daily sales: 301 800; average daily readers: 2.29 million. On Sundays, *Naspers*, publishes *Rapport*, *City Press* and *Sunday Sun*, printed in four cities and distributed nationally¹⁴.

4.2.2 Independent News and Media

Formerly known as Independent Media or Independent Newspapers, Independent News and Media owns 14 national and regional newspapers in most of the major cities such as *The Star*, *Cape Argus*, *Isolwezwé*, *Daily News*, *Daily Voice*, *Cape Times*, *The Mercury*, *Pretoria News*, *Diamond Field Advertiser*, *Business Report*, *The Post*, *Sunday Tribune*, *Independent on Saturday*, *Sunday Independent* and the voice (www.iol.co.za).

¹⁴ <http://safrica.info/ess info/sa glance/constitution/news.htm>

Independent Media is owned by Irish tycoon Tony O'Reilly who first acquired a stake in the local newspapers in 1995 when he took control of Argus Newspapers in the 1990s and renamed it Independent Newspapers. The company has some presence in the community newspapers and magazines markets. Its Internet presence is IOL, which carries news, classifieds and information from all its newspapers.

As noted in Table 4.1 below, *The Star* is published in Johannesburg and distributed throughout South Africa, with most sales in Gauteng. Once aimed exclusively at the white market, today over 50% of *The Star's* readers are black. It is owned by Independent Newspapers. Launched in Grahamstown in the Eastern Cape in 1887 as the *Eastern Star*, the paper moved to Johannesburg in 1889. The paper is the flagship daily newspaper, enjoys average daily sales of 2.8 million copies, reaches about 63% of English newspaper readers and receives about 48% of total advertising spend in the newspaper market¹⁵.

¹⁵ <http://www.mediclubsouthafrica.com>

Table 4.1: Independent Newspapers

Name	Type of Publication	City/Region
<i>Cape Argus</i>	Daily	Cape Town – Western Cape
<i>The Star</i>	Daily	Johannesburg – Gauteng
<i>Isolezwe</i>	Daily	Durban – KwaZulu-Natal
<i>Daily News</i>	Daily	Durban – KwaZulu-Natal
<i>Cape Times</i>	Daily	Cape Town – Western Province
<i>The Mercury</i>	Daily	Durban – KwaZulu Natal
<i>Pretoria News</i>	Daily	Pretoria – Gauteng
<i>Diamond Field Advertiser</i>	Daily	Kimberley – Northern Cape
<i>Business Report</i>	Daily (inserts in four daily papers)	Durban, Johannesburg and Cape Town
<i>The Post</i>	Bi-weekly	Durban – KwaZulu-Natal
<i>Sunday Tribune</i>	Weekend	Durban – KwaZulu-Natal
<i>Independent on Saturday</i>	Weekend	Durban – KwaZulu-Natal
<i>Sunday Independent</i>	Weekend	Johannesburg
<i>The Voice</i>	Daily	Cape Town Western Cape

Courtesy of Independent Newspapers (www.iol.co.za)

4.2.3 Avusa Limited

Avusa Limited, formerly known as Johnnic Communications/Johnnic Communications or Johncom, Avusa), its beginning can be traced back to 1902. Today, Avusa is the leading provider of news and information. It is owned by a coalition of black business groups and trade unions, the National Empowerment Consortium. The consortium bought TML from Anglo American's Omni Media Corporation in 1996. The National Empowerment Consortium's takeover of Johnnic Communications coincided with the establishment of a joint venture between British group Pearsons and TML, under which the former acquired half of TML's *Business Day* and *Financial Mail*. In Buffalo City in the Eastern Cape, the company publishes the *Daily Dispatch*, which was edited by Donald Woods from 1965 until his arrest and banning in 1977 for exposing government responsibility for the death of Steve Biko.

Some of the newspapers that are published by Avusa Limited are *Sunday Times* which is one of South Africa's biggest Sunday newspapers as well as the *Sowetan*, *Business Day*, *Sunday World*, *Daily Dispatch*, *The Herald*, *Weekend Post*, *Algoa Sun*, *Ilizwi* and *Our Times*. It is important to state that the group also owns music publishing company, Gallo Music, movie distributor Nu Metro, the Exclusive Books chain of Bookshops, and Struik, New Holland and Map Studio Publishers¹⁶ Its magazine division has titles in the consumer, specialist, business and medical sectors, while Picasso Headline publishes a range of titles and takes care of custom publishing for other organisations.

Note that Avusa is leaning towards broadcasting, with a stake in *Home Channel* and *Summit TV*, which are both carried through DStv. Its online presence is strong, with Internet sites for many of its newspapers. It also owns the citizen journalism site, Reporter.co.za and has I-Net Bridge, an electronic provider of data, news and applications to the professional investment community and corporate market.

¹⁶ www.southafrica.info; www.johnnic.co.za

4.2.4 CTP/Caxton Publishers and Printers LTD

Caxton and CTP Publishers and Printers are 38% owned by Johnnic Communications. The group publishes *The Citizen*. *The Citizen* is published six days a week and is distributed mainly in Gauteng. *The Citizen* has daily sales of 90 978 and an average of 466 000 daily readers. The newspaper division stables 88 free and sold Caxton owned or co-owned titles as well as 30 regional and community newspapers. According to the World Wide Web, the magazines published total 15 titles, including *Farmers Weekly*, the oldest magazine in South Africa. Just like other media companies, CTP is not only limited to printing magazines and newspapers, it is also involved in other printing business such as book printing and stationery¹⁷.

4.2.5 M&G Media

Although it is a small group, M&G Media must be included in any overview of the South African media. The company publishes the highly regarded *Mail and Guardian*, which began life in 1985 as the *Weekly Mail*, a newspaper that earned international respect for its fearless exposure of apartheid-era abuses. This is one of the few newspapers that managed to survive to see democracy. Its target audience remains the more serious reader.

The *Mail and Guardian* was also the first South African – and African – newspaper to have its own website, with its original editors, Irwin Manoim and Anton Harber, launching M&G Online in 1994. The site is now co-owned by Internet service provider MWeb. M&G media is the joint owner of the M&G online, along with the Internet service provider MWeb. M&G Media is 87.5% owned by Newtrust Company Botswana Limited, which is owned by a Zimbabwean with minority shareholders making up the rest.

¹⁷ www.southafrica.info

4.3 Challenges Faced by South African Media, and Developments

The historical background of South African media is not complete without discussing some of the challenges that are facing the media. This section looks at some of the developments as well as the media-state relationship.

Hindrances such as commercialisation and market driven journalism make it increasingly difficult for the news media to play the role it should in a democracy. Most media accept that South African media is commercialisation of news. This is well illustrated in the ANC document, Transformation of the Media:

The freedom of the South African media is today undermined not by the State, but by the various tendencies that arise from the commercial imperatives that drive the media. The concentration of ownership, particularly in the print media sector, has a particularly restrictive effect on the freedom of the media. This is not a particularly South African phenomenon. Around the world, consolidation of the media groups and the drive to maximise profit – have led to a global homogenisation of news. Despite protestation to the contrary, there is an increasing number of instances where the supposedly sacred separation between management and newsroom is breached, where commercialisation considerations influence editorial control.

(Transformation of the Media, ANC documents, 2007).

According to Steyn and De Beer (2004), skills decline is another reason for concern in the developing democracy. Other issues such as juniorisation of newsrooms and moving of senior journalists from writing to managing are some of the issues that are considered as contributory factors in the problems facing the media. Most of these problems were discussed in an annual general meeting of the South African National Editors Forum (Sanef). The same meeting also noted that no research had been conducted to measure the extent of these problems.

Sanef then undertook to conduct a situation analysis of journalism reporting, writing, and accuracy skills among the reporters of between 2 - 5 years experience (Steenveld 2002). According to Tsedu (2002), the Sanef audit was one way of determining how true, relevant and deep the problem was.

The results confirmed that there is a low level of competency within the media. The Sanef skills audit also discovered that in most reports only one source is used which leads to limited and shallow reporting. The reviewed literature in chapters 2 and 3 does not provide what should be covered by the media in a properly functioning democracy. Most of the literature reviewed covers what the media should cover during elections (Ramsden, 1996). Ramsden (1996) also points out that media scholars always stress the importance of freedom of the press in a democracy but little is said about what and how stories should be covered in order to fulfil that role.

Jacobs (2004:159) states that there is a strong need to acknowledge the role that was played by the media during the first elections in South Africa in 1994. He attributes peace during elections to the way the media covered the stories relating to the elections. He, however, points out that journalists of that time were largely white, male and middle class. According to Nelson Mandela in his address to the International Press Institute Congress, (1994), this resulted in their providing "a skewed picture of African experience" (Mandela 1994)¹⁸. Fourie (2002:20), concurring with Mandela, posits that during the apartheid era, African media operated according to the Western system and with Western news values resulting in African news being largely limited to famine, war and corruption. During the apartheid era there was little media freedom and Fourie (2002:22) comments that journalists were not even allowed to quote leaders of the anti-apartheid struggle such as Nelson Mandela. Journalists who broke these laws were either

¹⁸ Mandela, N (1994) Address to the International Press Institute Congress. Retrieved April 18, 2008, from <http://www.anc.org.za/ancdoc/history/mandela/1994/sp40214.html>

imprisoned or had their newspapers banned.

One of the most important achievements in transforming the South African media environment since 1994 has been the removal of censorship and the commitment of the new democratic order to guaranteeing the rights of South Africans to freedom of expression. However, the exercise of this right is constrained by the lack of media diversity and the domination of commercial considerations within the media (ANC Policy Documents, 2007).

4.4 Media-State Relationship after Apartheid

There were visible strains on the relationship between the post-apartheid media and government¹⁹. According to Wasserman and De Beer (2005:43), the initial years of democracy were largely marked by mutual mistrust between the media and government. Although elections on 27th April 1994 marked the official end of the apartheid system and the beginning of democracy, it is important to note that the very beginning of democracy was also the beginning of bad blood between the press and the government.

Statements made by the former South African presidents, Nelson Mandela and Thabo Mbeki, highlight the fragility of these relations which according to Wasserman and De Beer 2005:193 had been under severe strain on many occasions since the advent of democratic elections. Bad relations between the government and the press can also be traced back to the apartheid era, for example, F.W. de Klerk often accused English journalists of negativism towards the National Party.

The media and the government have been at loggerheads on several occasions and this sour relationship was highlighted by a two-day Sun City conference. The former

¹⁹ The former President of South Africa, Thabo Mbeki lashed out at the media for what he called "unprofessional reporting" (Megwa 2001:281-5). Johnston (2005:13) also notes some of the controversial issues highlighting bad blood between the government and the media: angry government reaction to newspaper speculation that Parks Mankahlane, former press aide to former South African President, Nelson Mandela, died owing to Aids-related causes. And court action for defamation by the Mail and Guardian newspapers against Jeff Radebe.

president of South Africa, Thabo Mbeki, members of the cabinet and members of Sanef initiated the dialogue between the journalists and the media. This conference was organised after a number of statements had been issued by the government voicing its concern about the media's apparent "reluctance to embrace the concept of national interest". Note that this meeting was not productive as planned because the media did not accept "national interest" as an adequate description of its role in post-apartheid South Africa. Instead, it asserted its role as being in the service of "public interest" in its submission to the Broadcasting Amendment Bill in 2003.

The Media Institute (MISA) stated it is our contention that the use of the term national interest in relation to newsgathering and dissemination is too restrictive and can have a narrow political connotation. Journalists work in the public interest, which is much wider. Politicians of the ruling party may decide that there should be secrecy over an issue but a sounder, and much wider base might override national interest. Chapter two of the Constitution protects the public interest". Wasserman and De Beer (2005:45) posit that these two concepts encapsulate the different perspectives from which the media and government view the media's role in society. It is important to mention that the meeting led to the establishment of a Presidential Press Corps which was meant to create a better flow of information from government to the public.

Johnston (2005: 13-14) argues that hostility between the press and the government is not something new and should not raise too much concern because in other democracies with free presses, government and media do not get along let alone trust each other. This is usually interpreted as healthy for democracy. Wigston (2001:3) notes that the relationship between the state and broadcasting is different from that between the state and the press.

This study focuses on print media only but it is significant that, since 1994, the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) has been dramatically transformed with the proliferation of new radio and television services, diversification of new programming and restructuring. According to the Bill of Rights contained in South Africa's constitution

(Act 108 of 1996), everyone has the right to freedom of expression and freedom to receive or impart information or ideas. The media diversity in South Africa is regarded as a good starting point for democracy. It is, however, important to pose a question from this: Is there diversity in the content of the added media?

4.5 Conclusion

The chapter has briefly outlined the history of South African print media and noted that a great deal has been written on print media as compared to broadcasting. Reasons for this imbalance are not very clear but it safe to assume that most media scholars are more interested in the print media because of its rich history. The chapter noted that before democracy, the media was more focused on fighting apartheid and that South African print media is characterised by different newspaper firms that are largely conglomerates. It also noted that with the birth of democracy in 1994, the media environment underwent many changes. One of the notable ones was that the SABC was transformed from being a state broadcaster to being a public broadcaster. Other changes highlighted were that through democracy South Africa's newspapers were freed from all restrictions.

The next chapter discusses the methodology chosen for this study. The advantages and disadvantages of each method chosen are explored.

CHAPTER 5 RESEARCH METHODS

5.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the research methodology used in this study, discussing the research techniques as well as the design implemented for the study. The chapter also outlines the feasibility of the methods chosen. This is done by studying each method chosen, taking into account the advantages and disadvantages of each method.

The chapter later explores issues such as selection of articles, data collection, data coding and data analysis. As stated in chapter one, the focus of the study is to analyse all the front pages and editorials of the four newspapers: namely, *The Star*, *Sowetan*, *The Citizen* and *The Natal Witness*. The researcher analysed the articles from the beginning of the Schabir Shaik Trial to his final sentencing in court. The following section discusses the methods employed in this study as an effort to find answers to the research questions posed in chapter 1 of this project. It is important to be reminded that this research project is aimed at answering the following questions:

- To what extent did the selected print media in South Africa conform in the coverage of the Schabir Shaik trial?
- What are the implications of such conformity for democracy?
- What can be done to increase content diversity in the print media?

5.1 Methodology

Because of the complexity of this study, qualitative content analysis supported by thematic analysis and news discourse analysis was predominantly used as a data collection method. This combination of methods is referred to as triangulation. Denzin in Mouton (1996:156) defines triangulation as the "use of multiple methods of data collection". Wimmer and Dominick (1997:111) define the term as "the use of both quantitative and qualitative methods to fully understand the nature of the research

problem". Bertrand and Hughes (2005:239) maintain that it is the use of two or more research data gathering methods. This argument is elaborated by Van Dijk (1988:66) who posits that the combination of quantitative and qualitative analysis is the adequate approach to the study of mass media messages.

The advantage of using multiple methods (triangulation) is that it increases the reliability of the study (Mouton, 1996:156). According to Cresswell (2003:100), this integrated approach to document analysis converges both broad numeric trends from quantitative research methods and the details of qualitative methods. It is important to note that the combined use of qualitative and quantitative research methods in data collection is widely accepted for social sciences research. For instance, Morris Janowitz in his study (1952/1967) of the community press used both qualitative and quantitative research methods and they complemented each other well.

The researcher used quantitative content analysis, since it is imperative to group the themes and count how many articles and editorials adopted similar views and how many did not. Qualitative content analysis is the first method employed followed by thematic content analysis. Later, two or three themes will be selected for discourse analysis.

Gunter (2000:82) defines qualitative content analysis as the method that "emphasises the capacity of texts to convey multiple meanings, depending upon the receiver". He further elaborates that the central thrust of content analysis is to provide a descriptive account of what the text contains and to do so in a fashion that can be easily replicated by another researcher. Krippendorff (2004:88) posits that qualitative researchers search for multiples of interpretations by considering diverse voices and alternative perspectives. This method is considered by some scholars to be useful. For example, Tuchman (1991:79) states that the most valuable research done in his time is qualitative content analysis. Content analysis is "well suited to the study of communication" (Du Plooy 1995:152). According to Du Plooy (1995:165), one of the strengths of content analysis is that it combines well with other research methods. For example, in this study the researcher will combine qualitative content analysis with news discourse analysis.

Other advantages of using content analysis are that it is not expensive especially when the data being investigated is available. Content analysis is unobstructive; in other words, it does not interfere with people's lives, and problems such as people refusing to give interviews are prevented (Bertrand and Hughes 2005:184). Some of the other strengths of content analysis are that it is easy to find material from the past and it is considered the preferred method when it comes to managing large amounts of data (Bertrand and Hughes (2005:184).

A limitation of this method is that it is time consuming and relies heavily on "recorded" information (Du Plooy 1995:166). It is also limited in analysing data that has been already recorded, and sometimes it becomes difficult for the researcher to find all the data. As stated earlier, the researcher will use Sabinet, a comprehensive online database covering a wide range of information including media clippings. As such, no missing data is anticipated.

Content analysis involves ten important steps (Wimmer et al., 1997:116): namely, formulating the research question or hypothesis; defining the population in question; selecting an appropriate sample from the population; selecting and defining units of analysis; constructing categories of content to be analysed; establishing a quantification system; training of coders and conducting a pilot study; coding the content according to established definitions; data analysis, and drawing of conclusions.

The sampling in content analysis often takes place in more than one step (Gunter 2000:65). First, using the purposive sampling procedure, the researcher selects the newspaper titles to be used. Du Plooy (2001:114) defines purposive sampling as a "sampling method that relies entirely on the judgment of the researcher".

To ensure that the sample is representative of daily newspapers, the researcher will use four daily newspapers: namely, *The Citizen*, *The Star*, *Sowetan* and *The Natal Witness*. The selection of these four newspapers is also influenced by the fact that three of them

are South Africa's biggest national daily newspapers in circulation and, more importantly, these newspapers are from different stables. *The Citizen* is published six days a week and distributed mainly in Gauteng. The newspaper is co-owned by Johnnic Communications and CTP/Caxton. *The Citizen* has average daily sales of 90 978 and an average of 466 000 daily readers. *Sowetan* is *Daily Sun*'s main competition, also aimed at an English-literate black readership. Initially distributed as a weekly free sheet in Soweto, the paper was transformed into a daily in sales of 118 261 and average daily readers of 1.54 million.

The third newspaper that the researcher will use is *The Star*. It is published in Johannesburg and distributed throughout South Africa, with most sales in Gauteng. Once aimed exclusively at the white market, today over 50% of *The Star* readers are black. It is owned by Independent Newspapers. *The Star* has average sales of 171 542 and averages /616 000 daily readers.

The fourth newspaper chosen is *Natal Witness*. This is the South Africa's oldest newspaper and serves English readers throughout Kwazulu Natal with most of its readers in greater Pietermaritzburg and inland KwaZulu. Owned by Media24, it was formally known as the *Witness*. It has average daily sales of 23 804 and averages 167 000 readers. The reason for inclusion of the *Witness* is that it is KwaZulu Natal's major publication and as Shabir Shaik is a businessman from KwaZulu Natal, it will be interesting to see how the media in that area covered this particular case.

The researcher ensured that all the newspapers are from different publishing houses because it is documented that media ownership is one of the variables that can influence media content. There is speculation that the content of newspapers is largely determined by the ownership of the newspapers. It is alleged, for example, that newspapers from the same stable produce the same content (Schudson, 2000:178). None of the weekend newspapers such as *The Sunday Times* or *City Press* were used, as their news production processes are informed by different factors from those of the daily newspapers.

The second step of the sampling process was for the researcher to select manually the actual articles to be analysed. This step was guided by the duration of the trial. The Schabir Shaik trial began in October 2004 and ended in May 2005. Because many articles were published during the eight months' period of the trial, the researcher selected only front page stories and editorials. Front page stories were chosen because their visibility made them more likely to be read by many readers, and were deemed important by editors and by readers alike. Tuchman (1978:97) states that readers consider front pages as representing the "reality" of the story. Editorials, on the other hand, represent the internal position of a newspaper (Tuchman 1978). The researcher paid particular attention to the tone of the editorials to confirm whether the editors were fulfilling the media role of providing a forum for critical analysis.

In working out this methodology the researcher relied heavily on archival material as well as the Internet. All newspaper articles on the Schabir Shaik trial were secured from Sabinet using key words such as trial, corruption, Schabir Shaik. Sabinet offers research information from major South African media and Sapa databases. Media clippings are from 1997 onwards, with an archive backdated to 1978 (Sabinet 2005); as such, it is hoped that there was no missing data.

5.2 Thematic Analysis

Altheide (1996:42) defines thematic content analysis as the methodology that seeks to understand the process and character of social life and to arrive at meaning and process. Themes can also be referred to as issues, topics and events that the media selects when reporting. Neuendorf (2002:34) defines thematic content analysis as "the scoring of messages for content, style or both for the purpose of assessing the characteristics or experiences of persons, groups or historical periods". Jensen (2002:251) defines this method as "an attempt to identify, compare and contrast meaning, as they emerge from and recur in several contexts. What distinguishes thematic coding from much quantitative content analysis is the emphasis on defining each of the elements in relation to their

context”.

Kelly (1999:412) states that thematic development/analysis is a kind of pattern – finding process where we identify a type of occurrence by virtue of its being perceived as underlying “a common form” found in different contexts. Kelly (1999:412) further posits that in identifying themes it is important for one to overlook certain contextual differences in the things being compared. Altheide (1996:31) refers to themes as boundaries or parameters for discussing a particular event by bracketing or marking off something as one thing rather than another.

The first step in doing thematic analysis is to collect data. All data relating to the Schabir Shaik trial was collected. Patterns of reporting were then noted and listed. The next step to thematic analysis was to relate to already classified patterns. This step was followed by combining and cataloguing the related patterns into sub-themes. The next step was to build a valid argument for choosing the themes. This was done by reading the related literature. Once the themes were collected and the literature studied, the researcher was able to formulate theme statements to develop the story line. When the literature was interwoven with the findings, the arguments that the researcher constructed would be able to stand with merit.

The following section discusses the advantages and disadvantages of discourse analysis because it is another method that was used in this study.

5.3 Discourse Analysis

As noted earlier, news discourse analysis is another data collection method that is employed in this study. Discourse analysis postulates that news is a presentation of the world in language and it is best suited to analysing newspaper reports (Gunter, 2000:87). The underlying assumption of discourse analysis is that language plays an important role in the construction of reality. Van Dijk (1997:27) adds that discourse analysis is the method that analyses the deeper meaning by going to the extent of questioning the

definition itself. According to Bertrand & Hughes (2005:94), discourse analysis provides a way to understand the deeper structure of any text as well as its surface content. This, therefore, means that using this method will assist the researcher in assessing the extent of conformity /construction in the selected print media.

In most cases, discourse analysis is combined with other research methods (Gunter 2000:88). The researcher in this study has done exactly that. The advantage of using discourse analysis is that it deals with any personal bias stemming from the use of content analysis, and it furthermore helps to validate results obtained in the content analysis methodology.

For the purpose of this research, one or two themes were chosen and discourse analysis was employed. In using discourse analysis, the researcher is required to determine broad patterns of the data. Such procedure is also a general form of content analysis (Gunter 2000:88). As already stated, the main weak point of discourse analysis is that it tends to be very biased (Gunter 2000:88).The researcher will be using multiple methods, so that the content analysis will counteract this limitation.

Table 5.1: Readership profile of the four newspapers during the period of the study was as follows:

	Total Universe	The Citizen	Sowetan	The Star	Witness
TOTAL	31305	496	2097	1081	126
Gender					
Men	15600	290	1300	685	68
Women	15705	206	797	396	58
Age					
16-24	8258	54	455	162	16
25-34	7524	106	614	313	37
35-49	8389	201	675	380	28
50+	7134	136	353	226	45
Race					
Blacks	23617	286	2023	732	42
Coloureds	2758	19	41	49	5
Indians	831	17	9	45	33
Whites	4099	174	25	254	46
Level of education					
No School	1044	0	8	0	0
Some Primary	2345	4	32	6	0
Some High	12462	115	672	199	33
Matric	8927	190	906	431	57
Technikon Diploma Degree	1741	63	176	193	12
University Degree	1075	53	114	126	13
Other Post Matric	1163	55	120	110	8
Household Income					
R1-R299 HH -R499 HH	906	3	43	0	0
R500-R899 HH	3161	14	87	10	3
R900-R2499 HH	8432	60	320	81	15
R2500-R3999 HH	4143	43	291	78	9
R4000-R6999 HH	4926	64	392	147	23
R7000-R11999 HH	4655	107	520	263	33
R12000+ HH	5082	204	443	502	43

Source: AMPS 2008 Main Branded AB (Jan 2008-Dec 2008)
Weight: Population

5.4 Time Frame

The study analysed the four selected newspapers, from Jan 2001 until the time of sentencing on the 8th of June 2005. The researcher, however, included the 14th of June because some of the newspapers may have published their stories after this date. This time frame was chosen because the Schabir Shaik trial was the biggest corruption trial in the history of South Africa involving people in high positions such as Jacob Zuma. It has been labelled the trial of the decade (*Natal Witness*, 02 June 2005, p1).

5.5 Selection of Articles

As earlier mentioned, the focus of the study is threefold. First, using the case of the Shabir Shaik trial, the study seeks to investigate the extent of conformity in the news output of the selected newspapers. The study used purposeful sampling (Dominick and Wimmer 1987).

This section provides details of the articles that were selected. As previously stated, because so many articles were published during the eight-month period of the trial, the researcher selected only front page stories and editorials.

Front page stories were chosen because their visibility makes them more likely to be read by many readers, and they are deemed important by editors and readers alike. Tuchman (1978:97) states that front pages are considered by readers as representing the "reality" of the story. The selection of the front-page story is based on the claims that stories that appear on page one are more newsworthy than others. These claims were confirmed in the study by Kisuke (2004:62). He posits that “ the selection of front page stories calls for a daily editorial conference involving a group of editors whose task is mutually to negotiate judgments of these stories and accomplish newsworthiness together”.

Page one is considered as the newspaper's showplace and additionally a measure of a reporter's success. Croteau and Hoynes (2000:126) posit that the selection of the front page story “identifies the editors' selection of the most important event of the day”. This influences which stories will be most visible.

As stated, the researcher also used editorials. Tuchman (1978) posits that editorials represent the internal position of a newspaper. The researcher paid particular attention to the tone of the editorials to see if the editors were fulfilling the media role of providing a forum for critical analysis.

5.6 Data Collection

Articles covering the Schabir Shaik trial were secured from Sabinet, a comprehensive online database.²⁰ The articles on the Schabir Shaik trial were retrieved using keywords such as "trial" and "Shaik Schabir" and "corruption". "Schabir Shaik" was used as the key word meaning that any story making reference on Schabir Shaik was retrieved. Sabinet is structured professionally and allows the researcher to specify the name of the newspaper and one may even specify the name of the newspaper and the period that is needed. All the articles were retrieved from all four newspapers.

5.7 Conclusion

This chapter discussed the methods used for the study. Advantages and drawbacks of each chosen method were outlined. A combination of qualitative content analysis, thematic analysis and discourse analysis was discussed. For the purpose of this study the combination of the three methods was necessary to bring insight and perspective into how the case was covered.

The following chapter covers the integration of data collected, as well as a review and analysis of the same. It is also expected that the next chapter will answer the key research questions mentioned at the beginning of the study.

²⁰ Sabinet Online Academic and Library Division is dedicated to serving all academic institutions, Government Libraries and other library clients with value added access to information services, cataloguing and interlibrary support services. According to their website, they further strive to provide products and services of high quality as well as exceptional client service. <http://aclib.sabinet.co.za/about.html>.

CHAPTER 6

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS AND DATA ANALYSIS

6.0 INTRODUCTION

This important chapter presents the results of the study and contains what the research is all about. It is through this chapter that the researcher determines whether the aims of the study were achieved. It kicks off by providing a brief history of the Schabir Shaik trial in order to offer an understanding of the context in which the study is happening. The second part contains an analysis of themes and categories found in the data, and is followed by an analysis of news values.

It must be noted that the findings and interpretation thereof belong to the researcher and they are, according to Wimmer and Dominick (1987), prone to bias/personal perception. It will, therefore, be incorrect to posit that results presented here are completely free from bias but they are useful in terms of understanding how the media functions. Most positivists claim objectivity when interpreting results and that is actually not possible according to Wimmer and Dominick (1987). To minimise the possibility of bias in interpreting the results, the researcher has adhered to the rules and procedures of the methodologies chosen.

This chapter presents answers to the key research questions posed at the beginning of the study – an assessment of the four newspapers to ascertain the degree to which they correctly reflect that designation and whether their performance is inimical to the growth of democracy or supportive of it. This research project was aimed at answering the three questions:

- To what extent did the selected print media in South Africa conform in the coverage of the Schabir Shaik trial?
- What are the implications of such conformity for democracy?

- What can be done to increase content diversity in the print media?

The researcher analysed all front page articles and editorials from January 2001 to the 14th of June 2005. Although Schabir Shaik was sentenced on the 8th of June 2005, receiving a sentence of 15 years in prison, the researcher did not conclude the analysis on the 8th but decided to continue to the 14th of June 2009 because media coverage of the sentencing was sustained.

6.1 Data Collection and Data Analysis

In order to answer the research questions, the researcher used both qualitative and quantitative analysis. The front page news articles about Schabir Shaik were all clustered according to what Rossman & Rallis (1998:171) refer to as chunks or categories. Categories can also be called frames. It is argued that classification and labelling of events into discrete categories is a central part of most research in the social sciences because it enables investigators to identify and group similar instances of a phenomenon together for the systematic study and is important to any quantitative analysis. The success of content analysis generally lies in determining categories and ensuring that they do not overlap. Each news article was evaluated, itemised and placed in the appropriate column in one of the researcher's pre-defined categories. Articles appearing on any page other than the front page or editorial were not used. It is important to state that from the articles, the researcher checked the following:

- The types of sources used in the story. A closer analysis of the sources helped the researcher to determine whose voices were given certain prominence and which ones were not. The rationale for this analysis stems from a position that "foregrounded and backgrounded information" (Goatly 1997). This originated from Jan Mukarovsky, a Prague literacy scholar of the 1930s, who defines it as "The opposite of automatization, that is, the de-automatization of an act; the more an act is automatized, the less it is consciously executed; the more it is foregrounded, the more completely conscious does it become [A]utomatization

schematizes an event; foregrounding means the violation of the scheme...” (Mukarovsky 1970:43). Many meanings are attributed to the term “foregrounding” but in this context the one that implies the act of reading a particular set of information is given a special prominence and “backgrounding” simply refers to the opposite of foregrounding.

- The researcher also checked articles covering the same event. The rationale behind this was to find out to what extent the media conforms when covering a story. As argued, by Radebe (2006:92), “diversity and differences in reporting should be encouraged as it is likely to promote divergent ideas which are necessary for creating diverse media with diverse view points, which they perceive as good for democracy”.
- Headlines of the articles were also analysed. Hartley (1982:155) posits that headlines can be checked by studying their significance and pondering on what alternative possibilities one can suggest to “make sense” of the particular story or event. He adds that another method for analysing newspapers is comparison. He reasons that comparison brings out the distinctive features of the study by showing which characteristics are unique to themselves, which are common with others and what possibilities are absent altogether (Hartley (1982:155). Headlines are normally good starting points when checking issues like objectivity, bias, and market driven journalism. Jones (2005:154) argues that headlines perform four main functions: they summarise the story for the reader, in other words, serve a fundamental framing function; upgrade or downgrade topics; attract readers' attention and serve as a guide to the themes. For the purpose of this analysis exercise, the researcher selected some headlines.
- The researcher also checked the values that were prominent during the Shaik trial. Journalists share many societal values and understanding of news values (Gans 1979; McNair 1998:6-7). The question is then to what extent news values contribute to conformity in the media.

Table 6.1 Overall coverage (front page articles) of the Schabir Shaik trial by *Sowetan*, *The Star*, *The Citizen* and *Natal Witness*.

Title	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	Totals
<i>The Citizen</i>	3	2	3	8	5	22
<i>Sowetan</i>	1	1	9	0	0	11
<i>The Star</i>	2	1	18	22	19	62
<i>Natal Witness</i>	6	1	1	14	18	40

The bulk of the Schabir Shaik trial coverage was in 2004. This is due to the fact that he was arrested in that year for being in possession of illegal documents. Year 2002 and 2003 were quiet years but the story was still in the media with developments here and there. The trial began to make front page headlines again in May 2004 with intense coverage for the eight-month period from May 2004 to June 2005. It must be repeated that as this was a big case, the researcher chose to limit the data by focusing on only some front-page stories and editorials (January 2001 to 14th of June 2005). Sentencing took place on the 8th June 2005 but the analysis was stopped on the 14th because some of the newspapers might have published their articles about sentencing later.

It generally appears (see Table 6.1) that *The Star* had more articles (62) on Schabir Shaik than other newspapers. This was followed by *Natal Witness* which covered the case intensively with 40 front page articles. This may be attributed to the fact that Schabir Shaik is from Durban. *The Citizen* and *Sowetan* covered the Schabir Shaik trial reasonably. *The Citizen* had a total of 22 articles while the *Sowetan* had only 11 front page stories. All four newspapers wrote more articles about Schabir Shaik but as they were not front page stories they were disqualified from inclusion in the analysis.

6.1.1 Analysis of the editorials

Table 6.2: Editorial pieces on Schabir Shaik trial as covered by *Sowetan*, *The Star*, *The Citizen* and *Natal Witness*

Title	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	Totals
<i>Natal Witness</i>	0	0	1	4	3	8
<i>Sowetan</i>	0	0	0	2	4	6
<i>The Citizen</i>	1	0	0	1	2	4
<i>The Star</i>	1	0	0	2	0	2

The researcher analysed all the editorial pieces from all four newspapers. The same approach used for analysing front page articles was used in the analysis of editorials. Themes were extracted and then all articles were analysed by grouping them into “chunks” (Hartley 1982:155). Altheide (1996:31) refers to themes as boundaries or parameters for discussing a particular event by bracketing or marking off something as one thing rather than another. Grouping of articles into themes made it easy for the researcher to analyse all articles falling under one theme together instead of analysing each article separately.

As this was a case that aroused high public interest, all four newspapers published editorials that dealt solely with the case. As noted in the literature, the use of editorials was important in the study because they convey the views of the editor and (by extension) the newspaper as a whole and express opinions and frame situations by directing readers to a selected meaning. Analysis of editorials enabled the researcher to ascertain whether the media’s role of providing critical analysis was well played out. As discussed in chapter five, the main function of editorials is the “expression and persuasive

communication of opinions". They also make up a relevant body of text for the examination of predominant ideological assumptions in a society.

The following section discusses the themes as seen in the editorials of the four newspapers.

Theme 1: Objectivity in the media

To what extent were editors objective in their analysis of the Schabir Shaik trial?

This study noted in chapter 3 that objectivity in the media is important though contested by many. Objectivity in the media must be promoted by allowing diversity of perspective. *The Citizen* editorial took a rather arguably subjective stand in as far as the coverage of this case is concerned. It is one of the newspapers that pre-empted the outcome of the case before hearing the judge's decision. *The Citizen* editorial commented as follows: "He (Jacob Zuma) is clearly unsuitable for his current job, never mind the presidency" (*The Citizen*, 04 June 2005, p.10).

In another editorial piece *The Citizen* editorial again repeated comments about not believing that Jacob Zuma was fit to lead. In the editorial entitled "A point against Zuma" (*The Citizen*, 20 Feb 2005, p.14), the editorial stated: "With each passing day it becomes more obvious that Jacob Zuma is unsuitable to be the next president of this country no matter what the ANC Youth league says". This is a negative editorial and looks as if *The Citizen* editorial was sentencing Jacob Zuma before he was given his chance in a court of law.

With regard to this matter, the *Sowetan* editorial took a very different position in an editorial entitled "Innocent until proven guilty". This editorial began: "So many things have been said about the relationship between Deputy President Jacob Zuma and his former financial adviser Schabir Shaik who goes on to trial today". It continued that the media had tried Zuma before even giving him a chance to present his case in court – "Like all South Africans, Zuma has a right to be presumed innocent until the State can

prove beyond reasonable doubt that he was guilty of any allegations made against him. If he is found to have acted corruptly in any of the financial transactions, Zuma will have to do the right thing – quit". It is very important – as stated above – for the editorial writer to be very careful about what he/she writes because as stated in the literature, editorials represent the internal position of a newspaper (Tuchman 1978).

These findings are in line with Croteau and Hoynes (1997:108) when positing that objectivity is "an ideal that is unattainable". McNair (1998:70) concurs with this viewpoint as he writes that news, like all human observations, is not truly objective. He argues that achieving objectivity is just an ideal for journalists.

Theme 2: Media independence

Research question: To what extent was media independence evident in the editorials?

Manning (2001) argues that there is an assumption in democratic societies that a free and independent media plays an important role in maintaining the flow of ideas and information upon which groups of people make choices. The editorial on whether to broadcast the trial live or not, with the headline "To TV or not to TV? – (*The Star*, 06 Oct 2004, p. 4) does not take any particular stance on this matter. The editorial begins by providing the advantages and disadvantages of covering the case live on air. It argues that television coverage would provide an "edited version, which offers sensational highlights that could misrepresent the facts (*The Star*, 06 Oct 2004, p12).

A similar article about media independence titled "Small triumph for openness" (*Sowetan* - 31 May 2005, p.10) comments that the *Sowetan* welcomes the decision to allow live media coverage of the Schabir Shaik trial as it considers it a small triumph for openness. The editorial expresses concern that there is a great increase in media intolerance in South Africa. It is important to note that this was a significant day in as far as the Schabir Shaik trial was concerned because it was the day on which judgment was handed to the accused.

In another headline entitled "Fraud's Vaseline unglues society" (Sowetan, 09 June 2005, p.12), it is clear that the stance of the *Sowetan* is that if you commit a crime, you must be punished. In fact the *Sowetan* is concerned that it seems as if the most powerful are able to get away with serious crimes. This editorial looks into the matter from both sides and concludes that Schabir Shaik without doubt committed a serious crime that needed to be punished; thus the sentencing to 15 years was correct. In the last paragraph, the editorial asserts that as a young nation, South Africa has to be vigilant about ensuring that those committing serious crimes are punished.

Theme 3: Democracy

Research question: Are the principles of democracy adhered to?

Schudson (2003:198) points out that the press is an important instrument of democracy. Both *The Star* and *Sowetan* expressed great concern that the Schabir Shaik trial had a great impact on who became South Africa's president in 2009, seeing that Jacob Zuma's name appeared on every charge sheet of the Schabir Shaik trial. In an article titled "Our future is also on trial" *The Star* editor, writing about the impact of the Schabir Shaik trial, reminded readers that it is wrong for the media to ignore the principle that a person is presumed innocent until proven guilty. (*The Star* - 08 October 2004, p. 2). In closing, the editorial reminded readers that the trial was due to start on the following Monday and stated that the trial itself would have a great impact on who became the next president of South Africa.

The *Sowetan* editorial covering the same subject was titled "Zuma trial tests our democracy". The editorial argued that should Jacob Zuma be sent to trial and lose the case, the ANC might find itself without a presidential candidate in 2009. *Sowetan* editorial went on to say "If Zuma is found guilty, it would be a tragic end to a sterling political career of a man who sacrificed his life to a noble struggle of his people". In view of what is being foregrounded and backgrounded, the above paragraph fails to offer a fair and balanced coverage/opinion. The use of terms such as it would be "tragic" is questionable. One wonders why it would be tragic, because another person might say it

would be triumphal in that justice would be served. The editorial, therefore, offers one side of the story. The editor further goes on to praise what Zuma has done and refers to him as a “a man who has sacrificed his entire life to noble struggle of the people”. This type of writing again shows that the article offers one-sided arguments and largely emphasises how unfair it would be for this country to lose such a person.

Natal Witness (04 June 2005 p.6) referred to the same issue in an editorial entitled “Credibility crossroads”. The headline of the editorial denotes that the Schabir Shaik trial and its outcome have brought South Africa to what is referred to as “Credibility Crossroads”. In the first few paragraphs, the editorial indicates that the trial has revealed many implications that the outcome of the trial might have on the future president, Jacob Zuma. According to the editorial, this case has also put the credibility of this country under threat because the verdict itself has shaken the independency of the judiciary system.

Towards the end of the editorial, the position of *Natal Witness* is clear that there must be thorough investigation of the arms deal and Zuma’s role in it, which may be illuminated by the study of the financial relationship of Schabir and Chippy Shaik. The editor goes on to say South Africa as a country can only take the right turn at the “credibility crossroads” if Zuma is compelled to appear in court and explain his involvement in the arms deal. If all that does not happen, it will mean that “we would have taken a wrong turning at the credibility crossroads and it will be difficult to go back and get it right” (*Natal Witness*, 04 June 2005, p.6).

The Citizen editorial (18 October 2004, p.14) covering the same subject is titled “Succession looking Shaiky” (*The Citizen*,). It is interesting to note the humorous dimension in some of the editorials. For instance, in this editorial; the editor has turned Schabir Shaik's surname into an adjective (Shaiky). The editorial is about the concern that it is not clear who will succeed Thabo Mbeki. The first paragraph states that “it is no coincidence that with the Schabir Shaik corruption trial underway, there has been a lot of interest in who will succeed Thabo Mbeki (*The Citizen*, 18 October 2004, p.14). The

following paragraphs state that Jacob Zuma and Schabir Shaik had a long-standing relationship but it is wrong to assume that friendship equals crime. In view of objectivity, the editorial has tried to provide a fair and a balanced picture by emphasising that it is wrong for the media and others to conclude that Schabir Shaik and Zuma were committing a crime just because they were friends. *The Citizen* editorial continues that “the crucial question was whether Shaik tried to buy political influence and how he went about doing so”. The editorial comments that whether Shaik was found guilty or not Jacob Zuma's political standing has been largely dented. In the end the editor warns that there may be a bigger game being played by people seeking to control the politics of this country (*The Citizen*, 18 Oct 2004:4).

In an article by *Natal Witness* (08 Oct 2003, p.8) entitled “Seeking the truth”, the editorial’s main concern is that South Africa as a country stands a great chance of losing its credibility. The editorial goes on to say that “the murky convolutions of the arms deal have turned it to a burden and handicap for the South African government”. The crux of this editorial is that everyone should be treated equally before the law and that all people must be thoroughly investigated and punished if found guilty.

When covering the case, the editors of all four newspapers generally adopted similar positions in that they all raised a concern that the future of the country was also being tried. They were also worried about the fact that some of the people in senior positions like Jacob Zuma were not being charged for their wrongdoings. Their main concern was that justice was not fairly dispensed to all as expected. *The Star* (08 Oct 2004) took a very strong position stating a concern that with the Schabir Shaik underway, it was clear that our future was also on trial. It must, however, be noted that *The Star* did not have as many editorials on Schabir Shaik as *Natal Witness* which had more editorials covering the trial than any other newspaper. This may be attributed to the fact that *Natal Witness* is based in Kwa-Zulu Natal. *Sowetan* adopted the same approach as *The Star*. It took a strong position especially in insisting that those involved in corruption must be charged in order to protect our democracy. A *Natal Witness* editorial (29 Nov 2004 p.10) noted that “...during the 10 years of democracy we’ve already travelled some distance down

the road to endemic corruption and that although much of this is exposed and punished, there are “sacred cows” or untouchables here”.

Theme 4: Shaik judgment

To what extent did the selected print media support or oppose the Shaik judgment?

In determining whether the selected print media supported or opposed the Shaik judgment, the researcher analysed all the editorials that appeared after the judgment. It must, however, be noted that *The Star* did not have an editorial on this theme, so the researcher considered only the three other newspapers.

All three newspapers advocated that the decision by the judge needed to be respected. *Natal Witness* editorial (8 June 2005, p.8) posited that the responses of the African National Congress Youth League (ANCYL) that the judge was an apartheid judge were “immature”. *Natal Witness* (08 June 2005, p.8) further stated that critics need to be made aware of the workings of the legal process ... and that Judge Squires did not work alone; he was assisted by two assessors and repeatedly used the pronoun “we”. From this it is clear that *Natal Witness* was supportive of the judgment and encouraged critics to respect the independence of the South African judicial system. *Sowetan* took a similar position. We can “sympathize with Shaik’s family for all the troubles they have endured but we “cannot feel sorry for the man who has been found to have used underhand tactics because he wanted to win at all costs”. The closing comments of the *Sowetan* editorial were “As a young nation, South Africa has to be vigilant so as not to be tainted with the brush of corruption. The Shaik trial has been a transparent demonstration of justice” (09 June 2005, p12).

The Citizen (04 June 2005, p.10) editorial supported the Shaik judgment, insisting and adding that the “whole arms procurement process must be more thoroughly investigated and the person best suited for the position is Judge Squires”. In another editorial about Shaik’s judgment, *Sowetan* (07 June 2005, p.10), urged The Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), African National Congress Youth League (ANCYL) and the

Young Communist League (YCL) not to insult the judiciary system. In its editorial, the *Sowetan* clearly stated that it supported the notion that Zuma should have been put on trial or should have his day in court but rejected with contempt the racist attack on the judge and found the suggestion that a black judge would have absolved Zuma insulting in the extreme.

6.1.2 Analysis of front pages

In analysing the front page stories of the four newspapers, the researcher used thematic analysis which allowed her to look into various themes/patterns as they frequently appeared. Thematic development is a kind of pattern-finding process where we identify a type of occurrence by virtue of its being perceived as an underlying “common form” found in different contexts. It is important to analyse themes emerging from reports because themes provide an indication of what was considered important by journalists when covering the news on the Schabir Shaik trial.

Thematic analysis of news discourse is significant given that the theme is the most prominent and informational part of a news text. The theme is usually expressed in the headline of the story. As a prominent feature of news texts, headlines both summarise and give the story a focus. The following section analyses themes as they appear in the front page articles of the Schabir Shaik trial in all four selected newspapers.

Theme 1: Dramatisation of the trial

Theme	Dramatisation of the trial
Total number of occurrences	16

The study found that most of the articles about the Schabir Shaik trial were episodic/dramatic, focusing on events that are entertaining with little representation of the context. The most frequently occurring theme was dramatisation of the trial with a total of 16 occurrences.

The first article by *The Star* (12 Oct 2004, p.1), depicting the dramatisation theme was titled “The Shaik Show starts ... but the judge to decide if it will be on TV”. It is interesting to note that the term "show" has been used by almost all four newspapers in their reporting. The use of this word is an attempt by the newspapers to present the news in an interesting way and this type of reporting undermines responsible reporting (Croteau & Hoynes 2003:58 & Hallin 2000:259). This story took up the major part of the paper. The first paragraph alerted the readers to the beginning of the Schabir Shaik fraud and corruption trial. It further highlighted the names of those that accompanied Mr Shaik on the first day of the trial. The style of writing reinforces that the main aim was to create excitement and spark debate.

The picture presented in the front page stories is contrary to McManus's view (1994:219) that this page should be the “newsiest” page in the newspaper". During the first week of the trial most newspapers announced the trial as if it were some kind of a show. For example, *The Star* (14 October 2004, p1) had a big headline: “The Big Showdown”. This type of headline is questionable as it is written in an entertaining and dramatic rather than informative manner and is done to please advertisers. This is in line with what is said by Strelitz and Steenveld (2005:265) that newspapers pander to the lowest common denominator of public taste; they generally fail to provide information that assists citizens to make informed political judgments.

Another article reported in an episodic/dramatic fashion titled “Shaik’s Mighty Fall” appeared on page 1 of *The Star* on the 9th of June 2005. The article is reminiscent of a soapie. The use of the phrase “mighty fall” implies that Schabir Shaik fell in a very big way. The article foregrounds the Schabir Shaik appeal court case. Emphasis is placed on the statement that he would be forced to give up his expensive lifestyle in exchange for that of a prisoner. What is more prominent is that half of the article does not describe the trial itself but emphasises what he would be losing should he really end up in jail as sentenced to 15 years in jail on corruption charges.

This six-paragraph article gives the readers the views of legal experts who believe that Shaik's sentence was the heaviest ever handed down for corruption by a South African court. Although the article is about Schabir Shaik, it gives only the views of Golden Miles Bhudu, a former inmate who heads the South African Prisoner organisation for human rights. This article may be viewed as one-sided and unfair to Schabir Shaik as he is not given an opportunity to give his side of the story.

Towards the end, the article elaborates the views of Golden Miles Bhudu who posits that although Schabir Shaik has been given such a heavy fine, he may still be able to live like a king because he can afford to. Mr Bhudu continues that "regardless of the rules and regulations, if Schabir Shaik ends up in prison he will be able to go out of the jail's back door when he wants to" (*The Star*, 09 June 2005, p.1).

A similar headline was used on page 1 by *Natal Witness* on the 12th of October 2004 entitled "The Shaik Show Opens". The approach is similar to that of *The Star*. The following sentence illustrates without a doubt that reporters were covering the trial as some kind of film or soapie: "At the top of the stairs at the entrance of the court buildings, Shaik, stopped, turned to the members of the media and smiled" (*Natal Witness*, 12 October 2004, p.1).

The *Sowetan* also appears to have followed the same "entertaining" approach. The page 1 headline on the 11th of October 2004 – "The Drama Begins in Parliament" – assumes that all readers are aware of the Schabir Shaik trial. During the continuation of the trial, it is clear that the same approach was being followed by all four papers.

Dramatisation is also evident in the article entitled "Ins, Outs of Schabir Shaik" (*Sowetan*, 11 Oct 2004, p.1). The article begins by foregrounding that the trial has all the elements of the soapie. The journalist, Waghiled Misbach, warns that it is easy for readers and the media to be side-tracked from the essence of what the trial is all about – corruption in the multibillion rand arms deal. The article states in the second paragraph that within the Schabir Shaik trial there are subplots and political consequences for

deputy president Jacob Zuma, who the prosecution argued, had a “corrupt relationship” with Schabir Shaik.

In closing this theme, it generally appears that the articles mentioned above are more slanted towards market driven than informative journalism. These findings are in line with what was noted by Gillmor (2004:24) in chapter three that market driven journalism delineates the limits and the extent to which the media can be open to dissident voices and encourage genuine debate. Market driven journalism gathers an audience “not to inform it, but to sell it to advertisers” (Bagdikian 2004:247). This is not good for democracy in that the public loses an opportunity to engage in constructive debates and readers consequently become what Gillmor (2004:24) calls “a mass of shallow citizenry who can be turned into a dangerous more easily than an informed one”.

Theme 2: Personalisation of Schabir Shaik

Most articles covering the Schabir Shaik trial are personality oriented rather than trial informative. Specifically, they are more geared to referring to Shaik’s attributes than to the actual meaning of the case. He has been referred to both negatively and positively. In the beginning of the trial, Shaik was presented as some form of a movie star, and a hero. The most widely used term when referring to him was “Durban business man”. This reference has appeared more than 56 times in the articles analysed. He was also referred to as the “wealthy Durban business man” (*The Star*, 17 Oct 2003, p.1), Zuma’s close friend (*The Star*, 26 Aug 2003, p.1), Zuma’s financial adviser (*The Star*, 26 Aug 2003, p.1) and deputy president’s financial advisor (*The Star*, 08 June 2005, p.1);

According to Thetela (2001:363), personalisation is not always complimentary. This is evident in that Shaik was frequently presented very negatively during the trial. Some newspapers like *The Star* referred to him as “The Fraudster” (08 June 2005, p.1); “Fraud and corruption accused” (*Natal Witness*, 25 Aug 2005, p.1); “corrupted businessman” (*The Citizen*, 27 Aug 2003, p.1); “controversial business man” (*The Citizen*, 11 Oct 2004, p.1); “Durban’s arms dealer” (*The Citizen*, 03 Feb 2004, p.1) and “an exam cheat” (*Natal*

Witness, 12 Nov 2004, p1). It must be noted that Schabir Shaik was also referred to by the judge as an “an unreliable witness” (*Natal Witness*, 02 June 2005, p.1). Such words from the judge indicate the possibility that Shaik cheated his way to the top and that perhaps his dishonesty was greater than has been evident.

The media also paid a great deal of attention to the way in which Schabir Shaik was dressed and the cars he drove. For example, "Shaik arrived at court in a black BMW ..." (*Natal Witness*, 03 Nov 2004, p.1). A BMW is a symbol of wealth and status. In another article by *Natal Witness* (12 October 2004, p.1), a reference was made to the clothes that he wore – "Dressed in a dark blue striped suit and a crisp shirt". His portrayal as a movie star fits in with the trial being presented as some sort of drama.

Special focus was given to the way in which Schabir behaved during the court proceedings. *Natal Witness* reported: “Shaik turns scorn on auditors (*Natal Witness*, 25 Feb 2005, p.1). A similar headline was “Shaik’s agitation intensified when he admitted that Zuma lied to Mandela” (01 March 2005). His outbursts were highlighted in various newspapers. For example, *Natal Witness* (12 March 2005, p.1) reported that he shouted at his legal team: “I’ll sort you out”. Again: “Shaik’s agitation began when Downer inquired about payments” (*The Star*, 01 March 2005).

Towards the end of the trial, the media portrayed Shaik no longer as a hero but as a zero – and helpless. Some of the newspapers reported that “Shaik remained calm (*Natal Witness*, 01 March 2005, p.1). Another similar headline was “Shaik remained expressionless (*Natal Witness*, 09 June 2005, p.1). In an article entitled “Shaik begs for mercy”, he was portrayed as very helpless and despairing. In another it was reported: “... as he awaits sentencing, fraudster is defiant, remorseless and scared” (*The Star*, 08 June 2005, 1). This section has shown that the media may be responsible for creating a dramatised version of a person from a hero to zero through the way it reports.

Theme 3: Homogenisation of content

This section checks how many newspapers used the same standard, similar angle etc. During the coverage of the trial, it generally appeared that news workers work according to certain procedures. The researcher noted that there was homogenised content across newspapers and found cases of duplication within particular editions of the conglomerate- owned newspapers. An example of this is *The Star* (08 April 2005) and *Natal Witness* (08 April 2005). Both newspapers had the same story titled “End in sight for Shaik” and used the same headline, same picture and verbatim description. The information was supplied by one source: namely, SAPA.

The researcher noted that all four newspapers adopted a similar approach when announcing that the Schabir Shaik trial was starting. This was identified by the use of the word “show” across all the publications: These are some of the headlines that were published:

- The Shaik **show** opens (*Natal Witness* 12 Oct 2004, p.1)
- The big **showdown** (*The Star*, 14 Oct 2004, p.1)
- **The drama** begins " (*Sowetan*, 11th October 2004 ,p.1)
- The Shaik **Show** starts (*The Star*, 12 Oct 2004, p.1).

These findings are in line with what was noted in the literature review on chapter three that sharing news content/views across publications does not promote originality but breeds homogeneity in newspapers that results in publications losing their individuality. Croteau and Hoynes (2001:153) insist that homogenisation of content can be the outcome of minimising risks and maximising profits, which results in very little innovation and a great deal of imitation. This kind of newspapering is not good for democracy and it is a characteristic of market driven journalism. As discussed in chapter 3, market driven journalism denies citizens the opportunity of being exposed to a wide range of ideas and perspectives.

The uniformity shown above begs the question: Is this journalism practice the result of sloppy editing or is it the result of insufficient copy?

The following section takes a look at the pictures that were used during the trial.

6.1.3 The analysis of pictures

Hartley (1982:181) writes that pictures play a crucial role in the construction of meaning in a story. In some instances, newspapers use similar photographs. The purpose of this section is to check to what extent this happens and also the significance of pictures used during the trial. The study found that not many pictures were used but this may be attributed to the fact that the researcher was using Sabinet (an online database). However, she managed to find at least four photographs and it became evident that *The Star* and *Natal Witness* used similar pictures. In these four photographs – all head and shoulders only – Schabir Shaik is dressed formally. One can see a tie, a shirt and jacket. The clothes on their own signify the expected dress of any business man. The formality that accompanied Schabir Shaik symbolised that he was a well-behaved man. This is of course contrary to the fact that he was facing charges of fraud and corruption.

The photo taken from *The Star* (22 Oct 2004, p.1) is a close-up picture of a smiling Schabir Shaik and it makes one wonder how a man accused of such serious misconduct could smile. It is of course probable that he was trying to maintain an appearance of confidence and unconcern. It may also be a possibility to assume that the selectors of the photographs chose the photographs for satirical reasons, to detach sympathy and to make their readers unsympathetic towards Schabir Shaik for what he was alleged to have done. In both instances, the photographs are placed in the middle of the articles, surrounded by the text. This depiction may put emphasis on how Schabir Shaik was entrapped by the arms deal but the main concern of this study is that the photo used is strikingly identical with the one used in other newspapers under analysis. These findings are in line with the literature review on chapter three that one of the reasons for content conformity in the media output is the use of one source by both print and electronic media and heavy

reliance on external news providers. McManus 2004:111) posits that as it is practically impossible for reporters to cover every story, most media houses rely largely on their reporters, correspondents and news agencies which are responsible for covering events as they happen around the world. It is assumed that facts are self-validating; people with more facts are, therefore, likely to be more accurate. Legitimate organisations are regarded as being inherently more correct because of the procedures they follow to protect the institution and people who come into contact with them. These findings are also in line with Vermeer's (1995:9) view that over-reliance on these limited news sources is a constraint on the independent functioning of the media. The following section analyses the sources that were used for front page stories.

6.1.4 Analysis of sources used in the front page articles

The hypothesis for this section is that newspapers rely more on sources than on their own reporters. News sources are very important in analysing news frames. As stated in the literature, news sources refer to people to whom journalists turn for information; they play an important role in determining which events become news and which are ignored. For a general definition, this research takes Gan's (1979:80) perspective of news sources as people "whom journalists observe or interview". In addition, one must note that these sources can provide information in conjunction with members of the newspaper as a news origination. But newspaper staffs also choose the sources they deem suitable for their readers. From Gans's perspective, it can generally be assumed that news sources are not mutually exclusive from the audience of the newspaper.

Owing to organisational pressures such as deadlines, limited budget and need for objectivity, reporters find themselves relying too heavily on some sources especially news agencies. To answer the research question, the researcher examined sources that were used during the coverage of the Schabir Shaik trial and to what extent they differed. The hypothesis is that some newspapers use similar sources. It is generally assumed that the use of different sources means diversity which refers to the spectrum of opinions that are expressed on a particular subject. Throughout the Schabir Shaik trial, it has generally

appeared that sources may be categorised into newspaper reporters, SAPA, and agencies such as Durban Bureau, legal sources, family sources, spokespersons and others.

Although journalists talk about the importance of using diverse sources to increase diversity in the media content, it is clear that most newspapers rely largely on news agencies to supply them with news. News sources for each story were analysed and their names were noted as they appeared in the articles. Second, the researcher then coded the articles using the Excel program. The coding schedule was designed to guide the classification of certain categories of analysis.

The reason for using SAPA rather than the newspaper's own staff is that it is generally known that newspapers work according to strict deadlines and some journalists find it very difficult to keep up with the demands to deliver newsworthy items on time. This is in line with McManus' argument (2004:111) when he posits that it is practically impossible for reporters to cover every story. Vermeer (1995:9) warns that over-reliance on limited news sources is a constraint on the independent functioning of the media. The use of agencies may result in homogenised media content and does not promote originality. To illustrate this point, consider the story published by both *The Star* and *Natal Witness* (08 April 2005, p.1). It is amazing to note the strikingly similar wording of the articles from these two different newspapers. It, however, became apparent that both stories were supplied by the South African Press Agency (SAPA).

In an article entitled "Blame shifted unto Shaik" (*The Star*, 27 Aug 2003, p.1), written by Jeremy Michaels and Anfre Koopman (*The Star* reporters), the leader of the Democratic Alliance, Tony Leon said: "The institution of democracy is under threat". This was supported by a statement by the leader of the United Democratic Movement, Bantu Holomisa: "Zuma must go immediately". The UDM leader is quoted more than any other source in the article. In an article about the same subject by *The Citizen* (27 August 2003, p.1), the headline announces: "More pressure on Zuma to quit". Both articles were published on the same day and both appeared on the front pages of their papers and it appears that both used Bantu Holomisa, the UDM leader, as their source. In the article by

The Citizen, written by *The Citizen* reporter, Eleanor Momberg, Bantu Holomisa has been referred to almost throughout the article.

This supports the notion that because newspapers are limited to small sources they end up sharing them with the result that the news is similar across newspapers. It must be reiterated that relying on similar sources reduces diversity. Another article entitled “Zuma and Shaik face new charges” (*The Star*, 26 Aug 2003, p.1) written by Margie Inggs, *The Star* reporter, deals with the new charges that were being added to both the Zuma and Shaik cases.

6.1.5 Analysis of metaphors

During the analysis the use of metaphors was also checked. Metaphors are important to consider in this study. There are many ways of discovering metaphors such as from propositions, modals and so on. The researcher will refer to only obvious metaphors. Gardy (1997:8) posits that “metaphor occurs when a unit of discourse is used to refer unconventionally to an object, concept, process, quality, relationship or world to which it does not conventionally refer to colligates. Metaphors are not just devices to paint language; they are used with the aim of offering significant comparisons or connections that help to enhance, clarify, challenge and even reinforce existing ideas and concepts (Carter & Goddard 1997) . Checking metaphors is very important. Beard (2000) argues that metaphors are not just figures of speech but are deeply engrafted in one’s construction of the world and the way one’s world is constructed by others. Furthermore, Kess (1999) argues that metaphors are used to pre-empt the possibility of other alignments. Some of the metaphors that were used follow:

Metaphor 1: Arms Scandal rolls on (*Natal Witness* 11 Jan 2005, p.10)

The expression “Arms Scandal rolls on” is a metaphor in the sense that an arms scandal cannot actually “roll” in the physical sense; the expression denotes that the trial is continuing. The use of the word “roll” is another indication that this trial was perceived as some sort of an episode or drama, hence the use of the word “roll”.

Metaphor 2: "Chippy" lands in hot water (*The Citizen*, 20 Nov 2001, p.1).

The phrase "hot water" denotes "trouble". Chippy is Schabir Shaik's brother who worked for the Department of Defence as the Chief of Acquisition and Procurement. He was apparently in trouble for alleged misconduct relating to the alleged passing on of classified information including Cabinet minutes of meetings where the arms purchase was discussed to his brother Schabir Shaik who had an interest in companies bidding for the arms tender. The information apparently assisted Schabir Shaik to gain an unfair advantage over other bidders.

Another metaphorical headline is "Shaik down: is Chippy next?" (*The Citizen*, 17 Nov 2001, p.1). The word "down" refers to Shaik's arrest. The first line of this article also contains a metaphor: "Shamin "Chippy" Shaik may be the next head to roll as the Scorpions' investigation into the arms deal irregularities gains momentum ..." The phrase "head to roll" has been used here to imply that he might be the next in line to be arrested. It is a reference to the nobles who literally lost their heads during the French Revolution. Similar to it is another headline entitled "Shaik's mighty fall" (*The Star*, 10 June 2005, p.1). The "fall" refers to Adam and Eve's fall from grace in the Garden of Eden. Shaik's fall is "mighty" as he was wealthy and prominent in SA's affairs and ended up in prison. Another metaphoric headline is the "Shabby Shaik" trial (*The Citizen*, 21 Oct 2004, p. 28).

Metaphor 3: Succession looking Shaiky (*The Citizen*, 18 Oct 2004, p.14).

The word "Shaiky" refers to Schabir Shaik's surname that has been used figuratively by newspapers to refer to various meanings such as "unsure", "trembling". In this instance, "Shaiky" means "uncertain, doubtful, unsure". The editorial commences with: "It is no coincidence that with the Schabir Shaik corruption trial under way, there is a flurry of interest in who will succeed Thabo Mbeki". The editorial goes on to say that whether Zuma is guilty or not, the ANC needs to be worried that Jacob Zuma's name has been dented in a serious way. A similar headline is entitled "Zuma given shaky advice". This headline – like the previous ones mentioned – is a metaphor based on Schabir Shaik's

name. Another metaphor: “in a bombshell admission, he told the court that he made payments” appeared in *The Citizen* on the 14th of October 2004 on page 1. In this metaphor, the admission is likened to a bomb explosion – surprising, unanticipated and out of the blue.

Metaphor 4: “The Shaik show starts but the judge still to decide if it will be on TV”

This headline of *The Star* informed readers that the Shaik trial had started. It likens the trial to a show, a dramatic presentation. This sort of headline entertains more than it informs. This is suggested by the use of the word “show”. As noted in chapter three, the news media has increasingly become part of the entertainment industry instead of providing a forum for informed debate of key issues of public concern. (Franklin 2008:13)

The headline of the *Natal Witness* article that covered the same issues had a strikingly similar headline: “The Shaik show opens”. As argued in chapter 3, content diversity is important in order to strengthen democracy. One of the reasons for such headline conformity may be pack journalism. (Schudson 2003:139) defines pack journalism as a notion whereby journalists gather and report news in a group, thereby sharing ideas and adopting similar angles (Schudson 2003:188; Shoemaker and Reese 1991: 221).

Metaphor 5: “Arms deal: Chippy shaking in his shoes”

The headline is a metaphor based on the name of the individual (Chippy Shaik) involved and implicated in the article. This pun is based on the literal word "trembling or shivering" Chippy's surname (Shaik) is used as a verb “shaking” implying quivering or trembling as he is afraid of being charged next. Other figurative terms that were used include the following: "Succession looking Shaiky" – it simply means that there was a lot of uncertainty as to who would become the next president after President Thabo Mbeki especially because Zuma's name was linked to the arms deal corruption charges that were facing Schabir Shaik.

The use of all the above metaphors clearly confirms what was noted in the literature review on chapter three that there has been a loss of depth in stories and displacement of informative news with “softer” reporting. This point is well illustrated in Underwood and Stamm’s survey (1992:307). In this study it is argued that there is a shift of interest. Newspapers are more interested in pleasing than informing readers. Hadland (2005:13) believes that both market driven journalism and commercialisation pose a threat to editorial independence because both lead to suppression of news that may upset advertisers. With similar view is Bagdikian (2000:XV) when he observes that serious journalism has been neglected in favour of trivial and banal content and, consequently, there is superficialisation of public discourse that results in degradation of news.

6.1.6 Analysis of news values/frames

News values provide researchers with how news should be covered. Watson (2007:112) argues that news values provide rules for news selection. News values are the essential elements of every good story and it is important for every reporter to check them when analysing stories. Hartley (1982:79) posits that news values give a good idea of the kind of event that will survive the selection process. The lists of values provide clues to the priority different stories will be given – a story that fulfils many of these conditions, will obviously be bigger. The purpose of this section is to outline which values were prominent during the coverage of the Schabir Shaik trial. In most of the news articles analysed, it generally appeared that in each article there was an inclusion of the following values: *proximity, controversy, personal influence, frequency, continuity, the unexpected, personalisation, negativity, threshold, novelty, unpredictability, relevance and altruistic democracy*.

Proximity: *Natal Witness* – originally based in the same area as Shaik – published more articles on the trial than on any other story because of its *proximity* value.

Controversy: The trial was also *controversial*. The more controversial a story, the bigger the chance for it to be published. Even limited *controversy* has relatively high news

value. The Schabir Shaik trial was controversial and was, therefore, included in most news coverage.

Personal influence: Shaik and Zuma were/are both influential citizens.

Frequency: Every week there was a story covering the trial.

Continuity: Hartley (1982:78) writes that it is important for a story to have a long life span. The case of the Schabir Shaik trial was very useful to the daily newspapers because people/readers had to be updated continuously on what was happening.

The unexpected: One can also say that the case was unexpected as it implicated two prominent citizens: Schabir Shaik and Jacob Zuma. As shown in the literature (chapter 3), people with economic means are considered to be of more news value than ordinary citizens. Gans (1979:26) notes that ordinary working citizens only receive media coverage when they are victims of accidents such as mine disasters and construction accidents. According to Hartley (1982:78) unexpected news is normally unleashed via expected contexts.

Personalisation: most articles were personality oriented rather than trial informative.

Negativity: The Schabir Shaik trial had a strong aspect of negativity. As stated in the literature, Hartley (1982:79) maintains that bad news is actually good news. Issues that are bad are likely to be given more space than purely good news. Good news tends to be boring and is consequently not given enough coverage.

Threshold: The threshold of the Schabir Shaik trial was also right. As explained in chapter three "threshold" refers to the size of the event. The bigger the story, the more added drama is needed to keep it going. During the Schabir Shaik trial, there were many unfolding small trials. *Natal Witness* (25 Feb 2005:1) reported as follows: Shaik has following – out with his legal team He also had a heated exchange of words with his legal team which became a headline in its owned entitled “I will sort you out” (*Natal Witness*, 12 March 2005, p.1).

Novelty: New, unusual or strange events attract readers and sell newspapers. This was a big story which resulted from the combined efforts of police and journalistic investigation and so it had the added value of *novelty*.

The unpredictability and rarity of an event are also important in news reports.

Relevance: The case was relevant because it concerned South African matters well known to readers. "Relevancy" refers to the local importance of the news reports.

Altruistic democracy: As noted in chapter three, the altruistic democracy value assumes that news media should publish stories that are largely based on public interest and public service. The main reason why the case had so much interest from the public is that both Shaik and Zuma are prominent people and as noted in chapter three, journalists tend to cover stories in a way that always differentiates winners and losers – they tend to have little patience with losers (Gans 1979:43).

6.2 Conclusion

Using quantitative and qualitative content analysis, the study has revealed that newspapers follow market driven journalism, writing stories in an entertaining way. It appears that the Schabir Shaik trial was dramatised by all four selected newspapers. The number of occurrences of dramatisation indicates that for newspapers this case was not about giving critical analysis to the readers but it was more about what sells.

The analysis of front page stories indicates that sharing of news by newspapers breeds homogeneity. The study has also shown that news agencies tend to be predominantly selected for stories and this is not in accordance with good journalism. Good journalists are expected to use competing sources to show both sides of a story. In fact it seems that newspapers take similar approaches when covering the news.

In the analysed editorials, it generally appears that some newspapers did not remain objective in the coverage of the Schabir Shaik trial. This is not bad because it is in line with Croteau and Hoynes (1997:108) when positing that objectivity is "an ideal that is unattainable". The *Citizen*, for example, took a subjective stand and even pre-empted Schabir Shaik's guilt, implying that Jacob Zuma was also guilty. The researcher feels that it was wrong for a newspaper to take that particular stand because Jacob Zuma has not been charged. A newspaper's role is to provide information and assist readers by providing critical analysis. Most newspapers in the study failed to offer a fair and

balanced analysis of the trial. It was argued in chapter three that responsible journalism calls for media that can provide the public with critical analysis thereby enabling them (the public) to make informed choices.

One can also conclude that the Schabir Shaik trial exploited a number of additional news values not mentioned in the list above such as reference to elite persons and institutions, human interest and tragedy, consequence, impact, national importance, scandal and proximity. The subsequent chapter concludes as well as offers some suggestions for further research.

CHAPTER 7 CONCLUSIONS

7.0 INTRODUCTION

This study set out to analyse conformity in the selected print media as a threat to democracy. I tried to establish what causes newspapers to cover stories in a similar fashion across publications. This analysis was done by looking at the way in which the Schabir Shaik trial was covered by the four selected daily newspapers. Themes were selected from the front pages. Editorials were also analysed where it appeared that some newspapers did not remain objective when covering the stories. The analysis of front page stories indicated that the sharing of news and reliance on similar sources across publications breeds homogeneity.

This chapter sums up the key issues that arose during the study of conformity in the selected print media as a threat to democracy. Conclusions based on the findings of the investigation, as well as the literature review, are presented. In this chapter, the aim and theories used are re-examined to see if the research has achieved the objectives presented at the beginning of the study. Possible research projects that could emanate from this research will also be suggested.

7.1 Conclusions on Literature Review

Chapter two provided discussion on the role and functioning of the media. The emphasis was on the role of the media in democracy. The concept of democracy and that of a particular medium were explored. It was stated that in the context of democracy the media is expected to play a watchdog role by exposing corrupt officials from both government and the private sector who are guilty of misusing power conferred on them by their portfolios. Following on from this, the chapter highlighted that the media is also expected to interpret and analyse information for citizens. In a democracy ordinary citizens are, according to Waldhal (2004:13), not in a position to understand and interpret

what is happening in a political sphere. It is sometimes necessary for journalists to interpret complicated matters on a level that ordinary citizens may understand and use. The researcher was mainly interested in the question: To what extent are democratic principles put to work in the four newspapers?

The media are often condemned by various authors for failing to fulfil these roles. According to liberal theory, meaningful political discourse can only take place if the public is provided with a diverse range of information and this is apparently not happening. To a large extent the media often neglect the views, struggles and aspirations of the poor and marginalised.

Chapter two also outlined the Habermasian conception that the public sphere is still essential in understanding the role that must be played by the media in a democracy. This concept has been criticised as being elitist and idealised. Also that it overestimates the degeneration of rational critical debate in mass communication. Despite this criticism, the concept is important in understanding the link between communication and politics; even more so, the problem of media regulation, ownership and government interference.

The section on analysis of African media as it relates to the concept of public sphere in chapter two is also important. Through this section, it emerged that the media in Africa is faced with a problem of the decline of the public sphere; journalists in Africa also fail to provide alternative voices when reporting news. From this point, it can generally be argued that the media is still a force that continues to shape, define and establish democracy in all African countries. In spite of this significant role, there has been very little that the media has done under the new democratic dispensation sweeping the continent. The following section provides some critical reflections about chapter three.

Chapter three outlined the theoretical perspectives underlying the production of news and the qualities which are used as guiding principles to judge stories as meriting inclusion or omission in the newspapers as news. These theories posit that the media is not a neutral purveyor of information – it pre-selects and constructs information for specific audiences.

The chapter also highlighted the significance of news values and their placement in front page stories. It further focused on the operation of the media in the processes of producing and disseminating news.

Through chapter three, it emerged that news production is a process that involves many facets that ultimately affect the output. Despite the claims of many newspapers, the chapter highlighted that news does not mirror reality – it is largely shaped by frames that seek to reflect part of reality. It showed that news values – a significant consideration in the process of selection – are criteria used in newsroom practice to select from the several contending items those few that are potentially news. Having established this factor, the study went on to examine the kind of news sources that are preferred for the front pages.

It emerged during chapter three that news sources are very important in analysing news frames. The use of sources is closely tied to "balanced" reporting and, as demonstrated in the previous chapters, all four newspapers in the study failed to provide a balanced reportage of the Schabir Shaik corruption trial. Balanced reporting demands that opposing sources be allocated a space for their views in a news story. Throughout the Schabir Shaik trial, it appeared that sources could be categorised into newspaper reporters, SAPA and other agencies such as Durban Bureau, legal sources, family sources and spokespersons. As stated in the literature, "news sources" refers to people to whom journalists turn for information. These sources play an important role in determining which events are newsworthy and which are ignored. The research question was for the researcher to check to what extent the use of sources during the coverage of the Schabir Shaik trial differed.

The hypothesis that the some newspapers use similar sources was proven correct. Although journalists always talk about the importance of using varied sources to increase diversity in the media content, it was clear that most of the four newspapers studied relied largely on news agencies to supply them with news. It was amazing to discover the strikingly similar wording of the articles from different newspapers. It is apparent that the wider the spectrum of sources, the wider the range of opinions expressed. These findings

are in line with the literature review on chapter three that another reason for content conformity in the media output is the use of one source by both print and electronic media and heavy reliance on external news providers. McManus 2004:111) posits that as it is practically impossible for reporters to cover every story, most media houses rely largely on their reporters, correspondents and news agencies which are responsible for covering events as they happen around the world. It is assumed that facts are self-validating; people with more facts are, therefore, likely to be more accurate. Legitimate organisations are regarded as being inherently more correct because of the procedures they follow to protect the institution and people who come into contact with them. These findings are also in line with Vermeer's (1995:9) view that over-reliance on these limited news sources is a constraint on the independent functioning of the media.

It also appears that most articles analysed were slanted towards market driven journalism. This was in line with Gillmor (2004:24) when he posits that market driven journalism delineates the limits and the extent to which the media can be open to dissident voices and encourage genuine debate. Through this chapter, it was noted that journalists were writing news to sell, not inform. Such behaviour was noted in the front page articles by the constant use of the word "show" when referring to the trial. This is not good for democracy in that the public loses an opportunity to engage in constructive debate and readers consequently become what Gillmor (2004:24) calls "a mass of shallow citizenry" instead of being an informed one". Bagdikian (2004:247) concurs with Gillmor when he claims that this kind of journalism gathers an audience "not to inform it, but to sell it to advertisers".

It became apparent in this chapter that journalists face various pressures, structures and norms and the mentioned factors have a large influence on the news content. It also emerged that journalists prefer elite sources compared to ordinary sources and that preference for certain sources is an outcome of processes and routines followed during production. In their endeavour to beat deadlines, news workers follow routines when performing their jobs. The next section discusses the conclusions based on chapter four.

Chapter four noted that the South African print media is characterised by different newspaper firms that are mainly conglomerates. It also discussed the history of South African print media and noted that a lot has been written on South African print media as compared to broadcasting. The chapter further revealed that before democracy, the media was focused on fighting apartheid. The end of apartheid meant that most newspapers including the four under investigation had to re-define their role in line with democratic principles. Although elections on 27th April 1994 marked the official end of the apartheid system and the beginning of democracy, the initial years of democracy were largely marked by a mutual mistrust between the media and government with the latter accusing the media of reluctance to embrace the government of the day.

What was of great importance to this study was the role that *The Citizen*, *Sowetan*, *The Star* and *Natal Witness* are playing in our democracy. As demonstrated in chapter four, these four newspapers aim at different target publics. *The Citizen* is published six days a week and distributed mainly in Gauteng. The newspaper is co-owned by Johnnic Communications and CTP/Caxton and is aimed at white readers. *The Star* is published in Johannesburg and distributed throughout South Africa, with most sales in Gauteng. Once aimed exclusively at the white market, today over 50% of the *Star's* readers are black, *Sowetan* is mainly aimed at black readers.

The difference in these newspapers was also highlighted when analysing their editorials. *Sowetan* is a mild critic of the ANC government and its officials and insisted on stating facts on the principle of innocence until proven guilty while *The Citizen* was quick to judge and even took a strong stand that anyone implicated in corruption is not fit to be the president of the country. The *Star* on the other hand, managed to inform and maintain some form of neutrality. *Natal Witness* was surprisingly harsh in its reporting considering that Schabir Shaik is from Durban and a more positive approach might have been expected.

The next section looks at whether the methodology chosen managed to provide some direction in terms of answering the research questions posed at the beginning of the study.

7.2 Conclusions on Methodology

This study employed content analysis as the method of data collection, and one can say this was indeed a viable choice for this particular study because the method was able to assist the researcher in addressing research questions posed at the beginning of the study. As content analysis is a method that is very systematic and less prone to subjective procedures, it can be concluded that the results of this study not only depict high standards of reliability but are also valid.

The researcher can confirm, after using this method, that it did provide many advantages. It was indeed inexpensive because available text was obtainable from Sabinet, an online database. Second, it was easy to obtain the data itself through the use of key words and following the simple directions indicated in the database. Third, the method was indeed unobtrusive and did not interfere with people's lives, which means ethical problems relating to dealing with human beings were avoided.

This research method provided a way of obtaining data to measure the frequency and extent and meaning of messages. A progression of category construction: sampling; data collection; data analysis; data-coding; interpretation and quantitative content analysis was used to determine the objective content of messages of pre-defined categories.

As discussed earlier, this study employed thematic content analysis in the classification of articles and editorials into categories. Through the use of thematic analysis, the study also managed to analyse front page stories and editorials retrieved from the Sabinet database. Not many editorials were obtained but the number obtained was sufficient for analysis.

The next section provides detailed critical reflections about the key findings.

7.3 Conclusions on Findings

The analysis of front page stories indicated that sharing of news/relying on similar sources across publications breeds homogeneity. Croteau and Hoynes (2001:153) insist that homogenisation of content can be the outcome of media minimising risks and maximising profits, which results in very little innovation and a great deal of imitation. This kind of news reporting is a characteristic of market driven journalism which denies citizens the opportunity of being exposed to a wide range of ideas and perspectives.

The analysed editorials indicated that newspapers were not analysing the Schabir Shaik trial in a fair and balanced manner. Some editorials were taking sides in their analysis. According to Croteau and Hoynes (2001:6) the media, watchdogs of freedom, have a special task of providing independent information to citizens especially in editorials because they represent the internal position of the newspaper.

An editorial conveys the views of the editor and (by extension) the newspaper as a whole. In this the researcher tried to ascertain whether the media fulfilled its role of providing critical analysis. It must be stated that some editors took a subjective stand when reporting the Schabir Shaik trial. *The Citizen*, for example, took a subjective stand and even pre-empted the outcome of the trial before the decision of the judge could be heard (*The Citizen*, 04 June 2005:1). It generally appeared in the editorials that were studied that some failed to provide a fair and balanced analysis of the trial; this is contrary to the editorial code of ethics.

The researcher further established that news values are a significant consideration in the process of selecting news. Having established this factor, the study also went on to check what news sources were used by the four selected newspapers when writing their front page stories. The findings in both quantitative and qualitative studies (see chapter five) show that journalists use similar sources and other voices (sources) are not afforded an opportunity to be heard, especially those of females.

One can conclude that although the way the Schabir Shaik trial was reported created interest in many people and contained many news values, it also exploited a number of news values like personalisation, negativity, reference to elite persons and institutions, drama, human interest, tragedy and so forth. Other news values that could be identified included consequence, impact, national importance, scandal because it was exposing the secrets of highly placed individuals in society (Schabir Shaik and Jacob Zuma), elite personalities, interest and proximity. This was a big story which resulted from a combined effort of police and journalistic investigation and so it had the added value of novelty.

The studied articles revealed that sources used during the Schabir Shaik trial were not representative of all civil society. The findings in chapter 6 show that there was a preference for selecting elite sources. The voices of the people at grassroots level in the front pages were scant. None of the newspapers dared to obtain the views of civil society. Most of the sources selected were largely influenced by the type of trial that was being covered. Attention was given to this particular issue of under-representation of grassroots sources in this study because of the social and demographic significance of their contribution to society and the assumed importance of media in democracy to which *The Citizen*, *The Star*, *Sowetan* and *Natal Witness* subscribes and that can also be witnessed in their editorial policies.

Contrary to what is expected from the media, journalists and editors are not motivated to promote diverse views in the news and this compromises diversity in the media. It generally appeared in the analysed data that the lesser the number of sources used, the lesser the number of opinions that were being portrayed. One can, therefore, conclude that the use of sources was not satisfactory and balanced.

It has been argued by various authors that responsible journalism calls for media that can provide the public with diverse items of information thereby enabling them (the public) to make informed choices. As argued by Curran (see chapters 1 and 2), political discourse

can only take place if the public is provided with a wide range of information (Curran 2002:217). The researcher noted that in some inside pages there were instances where reporters quoted ordinary citizens. It was beyond the scope of this study to examine the types of sources that were chosen in those pages. As stated in chapter 5 as well as at the beginning of the study, the researcher only focused on the front pages and editorials.

After having established that there are imbalances in terms of selecting sources for front page stories, it is clear that such actions have negative implications in terms of the newspapers in the study. First, it may mean to the readers that those groups chosen are irrelevant and relatively unimportant in terms of offering valuable information in a democratic society. Second, it may appear that *The Citizen*, *The Star*, *Sowetan* and *Natal Witness* are promoting the views of a certain class of people with political power, while still claiming to represent different perspectives in news reporting. Third, the four newspapers, by narrowing news sources to such a small sector of society, do not give a rich picture of social reality which is made up of diverse groups of people that represent varying views and interests. Within a democratic paradigm of news reporting, the news media ought to present a true picture of society in terms of selecting news topics, writing news topics, writing news and analysis of front page stories. That means widening the scope of news and source selection, reporting in a balanced fashion and analysing issues critically.

Chapter six also provided evidence that qualified claims and criticism discussed in chapters two and three of the literature review. Findings show that the media is not fulfilling its role as outlined in chapter two. The conclusion is that the selected newspapers did not cover the case as critically as expected from an open democracy. They failed to offer a significant forum for public debate and engagement even in a trial as big as this was. Habermas's concept of public sphere allows citizens to interact, study and debate on public issues. To re-institute the public sphere notion, the media will have to encourage public participation so that cases of such public interest can be covered in a more balanced manner and be open to the public for discussion and reflection.

The next section provides the limitations of the study.

7.4 Limitations of the Study

As the study focused on only the four selected newspapers, one cannot generalise the results to all the South African newspapers which were not represented.

The use of front pages was good in terms of controlling the study but it limited the researcher because some articles which would have provided an interesting analysis appeared on inside pages of the newspapers. The study focused on print media only; it would have been interesting to check how radio stations covered the stories about this case.

Another limitation is that the researcher does not know how to use the SPSS program. These days most researchers use sophisticated statistical software packages called Statistical Programme for Social Sciences (SPSS) for analysing data. The researcher could not use this package because she is not familiar with it.

The researcher was also not able to obtain the particular photograph used by the newspapers during the trial but managed to obtain four others. It would have been very interesting to conduct a deeper analysis of the photographs used to discover whether the newspapers all used the same photo/s provided by news agencies so that deadlines could be met.

Finally, it would have added some value to conduct one or two interviews. Pottton (1990) and Lindlof (1995) posit that qualitative interviews allow the researcher to enter other people's worlds. It is, however, important to note that the results and findings of this study are still of importance in spite of these shortcomings. Some of these challenges may themselves be answered in future research on this subject. The following section covers further research that may be conducted.

7.5 On Further Research

A comparative study on the same topic would be very interesting to explore. As mentioned in the literature, one of the major drawbacks is that objectivity of the results is in most cases contested because results depend on the interpretation of the investigator. Should the investigator be dishonest, the results will not be honest. A study is needed that will include other methodology such as critical discourse analysis. This would help in obviating the weaknesses of content analysis.

While this study obtained good insights into the significance of selecting balanced news sources, the findings are only important in as far as they are related to front pages. It should, therefore, not be assumed that a variety of news sources is also missing on the inside pages of the newspapers. A study that looks at the entire content of the newspapers would add an interesting dimension.

The research project only investigated conformity in the print media. The same study of electronic media would also provide an interesting dimension. Furthermore, the research investigated conformity in the print media by using content analysis only. Further study could expand this to include interviews and observations conducted within the newsroom. Finally, a comparative study sampling a number of media houses might bring interesting insights into the general outlook on media practice.

This chapter has highlighted issues for further research. As stated in the beginning the aim of this study was not to accuse the media but was to take a closer look at how some of the newspapers handled a significant trial. It is hoped that the insights of this study will be valuable elsewhere in terms of understanding how the media functions.

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Audit Bureau of Circulation January 2009 - March 2009

APPENDIX A



			Subscriptions								
Publication Name	Frequency	Cover Price	Individual	Business	Travel & Commercial	Copy Sales	Third Party Bulk	PMIE	Digital Editions	TOTAL CIRCULATION	Corresponding Previous Period
Beeld, (Daily)	MD, Mo-Fr	R 4.90	47,042	2,809		43,932	423	1,708		95,914	105,149
Bukedde	MD, Mo-Sat	UGShs 800.00	276			19,452				19,728	14,401
Burger, Die (Daily)	MD, Mo-Fr	R 4.50/3.40	32,731		970	42,421	3,926	172		80,220	84,545
Burger, Die (Daily)	Oos Kaap									14,758	17,123
Burger, Die (Daily)	Wes Kaap									65,462	67,422
Business Day	MD, Mo-Fr	R 9.50	3,986	21,379	4,456	9,636	59			39,516	41,975
Cape Argus	MD, Mo-Fr	R 4.50	18,721	1,254		30,134	1,266	9,177		60,552	70,401
Cape Times	MD, Mo-Fr	R 5.20	14,696	3,606		29,212				47,514	50,621
Citizen, The (Daily)	MD, Mo-Fr	R 4.00	3,595	4,208	9,906	48,128	1,667	355	13	67,872	71,324
Daily Dispatch	MD, Mo-Fr	R 4.00	3,684	1,452	49	27,229	505			32,919	32,194
Daily Monitor	MD, Mo-Sat	UGShs 1000.00	671			19,231				19,902	24,065
Daily Nation	MD, Mo-Sat	KShs 35.00	746			162,346				163,092	162,813
Daily News	MD, Mo-Fr	R 4.00	21,200	479	578	16,500	120	3,397		42,274	52,018
Daily Sun	Mo-Fr	R 2.00	131			507,197				507,328	499,436
Diamond Fields Advertiser	MD, Mo-Fr	R 3.20	1,238	497	500	7,208		735		10,178	10,138
Herald, The	MD, Mo-Fr	R 4.50	6,079			19,423				25,502	25,978
Isolezwe	MD, Mo-Fr	R 2.30	666	249	95	101,444				102,454	99,098
Mercury, The	MD, Mo-Fr	R 5.00	14,582	2,573	1,595	17,047	159	1,124		37,080	38,916
Namibian, The	MD, Mo-Fr	Nam\$ 3.00		538		25,132				25,670	23,438
New Vision	MD, Mo-Sat	UGShs 1000.00	1,220			31,540				32,760	32,653

Pretoria News	MD, Mo-Fr	R 4.30	5,895	1,452		15,476	544	3,551		26,918	28,202
Son (Daily)	MD, Mo-Fr	R 2.00				107,899				107,899	102,402
Sowetan	Mo-Fr	R 3.50	1,304	5,625	1,253	104,179	3,527	14,172		130,060	145,173
Star, The (Daily)	MD, Mo-Fr	R 5.00	43,260	17,935	6,700	81,798	1,202	16,319		167,214	178,294
Taifa Leo	MD, Mo-Sat	KShs 25.00	18			11,196				11,214	13,965
Swaziland	MD, Mo-Fr	E 2.33	788			25,855				26,643	24,821
Volksblad (Daily)	Mo-Fr	R 4.00	11,297	1,017	200	14,076	-16			26,574	28,176
Witness, The	MD, Mo-Fr	R 4.40	10,625			11,308	254			22,187	23,187
			244,451	65,073	26,302	1,528,999	13,636	50,710	13	1,929,184	1,983,383

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Daily Newspapers: January 2009 - March 2009 (Summary)