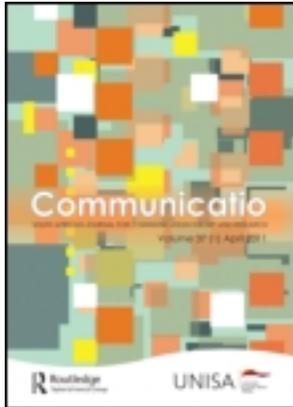


This article was downloaded by: [Professor Anthea Garman]

On: 19 December 2013, At: 14:28

Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office:  
Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



## Communicatio: South African Journal for Communication Theory and Research

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription  
information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rcsa20>

### Making meaning of citizenship: How 'born frees' use media in South Africa's democratic evolution

Vanessa Malila, Marietjie Oelofsen, Anthea Garman & Herman Wasserman

Published online: 17 Dec 2013.

To cite this article: Vanessa Malila, Marietjie Oelofsen, Anthea Garman & Herman Wasserman (2013)  
Making meaning of citizenship: How 'born frees' use media in South Africa's democratic evolution,  
Communicatio: South African Journal for Communication Theory and Research, 39:4, 415-431, DOI:  
[10.1080/02500167.2013.852598](https://doi.org/10.1080/02500167.2013.852598)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02500167.2013.852598>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Taylor & Francis makes every effort to ensure the accuracy of all the information (the "Content") contained in the publications on our platform. However, Taylor & Francis, our agents, and our licensors make no representations or warranties whatsoever as to the accuracy, completeness, or suitability for any purpose of the Content. Any opinions and views expressed in this publication are the opinions and views of the authors, and are not the views of or endorsed by Taylor & Francis. The accuracy of the Content should not be relied upon and should be independently verified with primary sources of information. Taylor and Francis shall not be liable for any losses, actions, claims, proceedings, demands, costs, expenses, damages, and other liabilities whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with, in relation to or arising out of the use of the Content.

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden. Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at <http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions>

## Making meaning of citizenship: How ‘born frees’ use media in South Africa’s democratic evolution

Vanessa Malila, Marietjie Oelofsen, Anthea Garman and Herman Wasserman\*

### Abstract

By examining young people’s habits of using the media in relation to citizenship, this article responds to calls that the starting point for research into citizenship and democracy should be the perspectives of citizens themselves. Drawing on both quantitative and qualitative research with young South Africans (the ‘born free’ generation), the study sought to gain insight into how young people use media to make sense of notions of citizenship and participatory democracy in ways that are relevant and reliable to their everyday lives. The findings suggest that young South Africans are distrustful of politicians and political institutions. Media consumption was high amongst participants, as well as media trust, but the lack of relevance of media content suggests that those wanting to engage with the youth through the media need to target content through more youth-orientated genres.

**Keywords:** ‘born frees’, citizenship, civic agency, democracy, media, political engagement, public sphere, South Africa

### INTRODUCTION

The objective of this article is to contribute to an understanding of how citizenship, civic identity and political participation could be mediated in ways that improve prospects for young citizens to ‘exert influence over public decisions by combining with others who share their values or interests’ (Friedman 2010, 117).

The article draws on the baseline study entitled *Youth identity, the media and the public sphere in South Africa* (Malila 2013), that explored the way in which young South African citizens use the media to shape notions of social and civic identity. The authors of this article were involved in collecting qualitative information through focus groups based on the quantitative data from the initial baseline survey. Rather than a Habermasian definition of the public sphere as a space for ‘rational’ deliberation, this baseline study presumes a South African public sphere that allows space for resistance and subaltern voices to emerge and to be heard (Malila 2013, 23–24). The baseline study further responds to calls that the starting point for research into citizenship and democracy should be ‘the perspectives of citizens themselves’ (Robins, Cornwall and Von Lieres 2008, 1069).

In analysing the data, this article is grounded in the following assumptions about media, democracy and society:

\* Dr Vanessa Malila is Mellon post-doctoral research fellow in the School of Journalism and Media Studies at Rhodes University (v.mallia@ru.ac.za), where Marietjie Oelofsen is a PhD student (m.oelofsen@ru.ac.za), Anthea Garman is associate professor (a.garman@ru.ac.za) and Herman Wasserman is professor (h.wasserman@ru.ac.za).

- In South Africa, the media do not seem to play a role in making young citizens more interested in political discussion, more inclined to participate in political processes or more confident to voice their political concerns to elected representatives (Mattes 2012);
- The potential of the media to play a role in improving the quality of South Africa's democracy is compromised by media practice that is rooted in a liberal normative framework, while the local context requires a different approach (Nyamnjoh 2005);
- South African youth construct identity through a 'complex web' of 'vertical, horizontal and diagonal channels', with an equally complex dynamic between 'individuals, groups and power structures' (Curran 1991, 31);
- To build agency and confidence among South Africa's youth, in order for them to participate in politics, the media need to navigate cultural, societal and economic differences and different understandings of democracy, and to experiment with appropriate models of media practice.

## YOUNG CITIZENS AND DEMOCRACY IN SOUTH AFRICA

In 1994, South Africans embarked on a road of constitutional democracy to transcend the disenfranchisement and divisions created by apartheid. This new era in South African politics broadened prospects for all South Africans to participate in democratic processes, and in doing so, to create and invoke new meanings of citizenship. In 2008, more than three in ten eligible voters were from the 'born free' cohort – young people eligible to vote for the first time after 1996 (Mattes 2012, 139–140). As young people in South Africa take up the task of citizenship, their constructs of civic identity, political participation, agency and voice are indicators of the potential for a vibrant democracy in South Africa.

Boyce (2010, 87) suggests that South Africa has an 'ambiguous relationship' with its youth. On the one hand, Boyce notes, the youth are characterised as a generation in crisis, beleaguered by HIV/AIDS, crime, unemployment and poor socialisation skills. On the other hand there is an expectation that 'their energy can be harnessed to address the challenges facing the country' (ibid.). There are higher unemployment levels among youth than older people and less than half of young people in South Africa are 'satisfied with their lives as a whole' (Boyce 2010, 95). At the same time, South Africa's youth show higher levels of trust in societal institutions (ibid, 91) than other age groups. This is testimony to the ambiguity of the lived reality of young South Africans, who are defining their place in a democratic space that is a 'totally different world than that of their parents' (Mattes 2012, 139). Yet, that world is still informed by much of the political, social, economic and cultural baggage of the apartheid dispensation. Added to this mix of factors that shape and inform the construction of the young South African 'civic subject' are forceful discourses on Africa's postcolonial identity. Diouf (2003, 1) describes this as 'the whirlwind of globalisation, the metamorphoses of the processes of socialisation, the production of new forms of inequality accompanied by their own representations and imaginations, and the extraordinary mutation of the chronological and psychological constructions of the passage from youth to adulthood'.

Heller (2009, 123–124) notes that 'the capacity of citizens to participate in policy-making and engage in public life' is crucial for deepening democracy, yet it remains a 'core deficit' (ibid, 126)

of representative democratic practice in South Africa. In this scenario, the proposal by Mattes, namely that young people in South Africa do not feel that their voice will make any difference to the political dispensation, can be interpreted as a lack of confidence or agency, and this warrants further examination. Perceptions of a lack of agency have implications for the nature of participatory politics in South Africa, and for the role of the media in civic education, in terms of mediating cultural and societal differences and providing indigenous or locally appropriate understandings of democracy.

## THE MEDIA AND THE QUALITY OF DEMOCRACY

How central are the media in democratic processes, and do they have the potential to provoke meanings of citizenship and democratic practice among young South Africans? In the South African context, two issues are pertinent as starting points for answering questions on the centrality of the media in democratic practice: (1) South Africa as an 'emerging' rather than an established democracy; (2) the implications for media practice (when taking into account the perceptions of citizens – in this case, young citizens) of the value of democracy.

In comparing South Africa to other 'new' or emerging democracies, Mattes (2012, 136) proposes the mass media as a contributing factor driving the evolution of democratic practice in transitions from authoritarianism to democracy. In contrast to other post-authoritarian contexts, Mattes (*ibid*, 148) provides evidence from South Africa that shows 'the absence of any positive impact of education or of news media use' on the attitudes of young South Africans in terms of political interest and discussion, political knowledge, or the extent to which young people believe their voices are heard outside of elections.

In the liberal framework, the centrality of the media as an independent watchdog of political power is often assumed as an institutional function in democracy. Challenging this assumption, Curran (1991, 29) calls this a 'wearisomely familiar' and prevailing 'traditionalist' version of the role of the media. A more useful departure point for an investigation of the role of the media as regards the quality of democracy is perhaps Dahlgren's (1991, 1) description of the function of the media as assisting citizens to 'learn about the world, debate their responses to it and reach informed decisions about what courses of action to adopt'. The problem in applying Dahlgren's description to South Africa is that it appears to assume that citizens have equal and even access to the media. It further assumes that media practitioners are likely to consider their role in democracy in terms of democracy education, strategies to enhance the discursive potential of news content, and innovative approaches to enable civic action. Nyamnjoh (2005), however, in relation to media in Africa warns that the potential of the media to make a contribution to the quality of democracy is not covered by a one-size-fits-all approach. Nyamnjoh argues that unequal access to wealth and power has implications for access to the media, and that the extent and nature of these inequalities differ from society to society. He proposes that media routines and practices be dictated by a cultural hierarchy that excludes and marginalises 'entire world-views and cultures that do not guarantee profitability' (*ibid*, 2). Nyamnjoh highlights the tension experienced by media practitioners in Africa who feel

obliged to serve the values associated with liberal democracy, often expressed as an individualist emphasis on the independence of the media, and the imperative of remaining loyal to ethnic/cultural communities where ‘alternative ideas of personhood and agency’ manifest (ibid, 3). Schooled in the liberal normative framework, but faced with a context which requires a different approach, the media are ‘torn between conflicting understandings of democracy’ and, caught up in the tension between rhetoric and practice, end up serving neither democracy nor development (Nyamnjoh 2011, 20).

Curran (1991), like Nyamnjoh, positions power as a variable that is not sufficiently considered in versions of the traditional or the liberal account of the public sphere. That version of the public sphere proposed by Habermas (1989), according to Curran (1991, 29), ‘does not consider how the media relate to wider social cleavages in society’. Curran (ibid, 31) proposes an alternative version of the public sphere in which the media articulate a complex web of ‘vertical, horizontal, and diagonal channels of communication between individuals, groups and power structures’. Couldry, Livingstone and Markham (2010, 65) refer to a ‘mediated public connection’, where the starting point for interrogating the public role of the media is from the viewpoint of the media users themselves.

## METHODOLOGY

This research is based on both qualitative and quantitative methods. The article draws on a baseline study conducted with researchers across South Africa. The survey included more than 900 respondents, mostly between 15 and 30 years of age, in four of South Africa’s most populated provinces – the Eastern Cape, Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal and the Western Cape. In addition to the survey, qualitative focus groups conducted with young people were aimed at further exploring some of the results emerging from the quantitative data. The study included a quantitative content analysis aimed at understanding how young people, and the issues affecting them, are represented in the South African media. Both print and broadcasting content were analysed.

To achieve as reliable and credible a data set as possible, the quota sampling method was used for the quantitative surveys, since it allowed for a representation of the population across the four provinces. Because it was not possible to sample the population in a random way in any of the sites, random sampling was excluded as a possible method for sampling. Researchers (Kruskalis and Mosteller 1979; Udney and Kendall 1950) argue that a well-designed quota sample (such as the one used in the baseline study) should be at least as representative as a random sample, in order to be deemed valid and credible for making statistical inferences.

Just over 87 per cent (87.2%) of respondents were between the ages of 15 and 30, with only 12.8 per cent above 31 years. There was a fair gender balance across respondents, with 50.8 per cent being female and 49.2 per cent male. Because race remains a significant socio-economic indicator in post-apartheid South Africa, respondents were asked to identify themselves as black (57%), coloured (13%), Indian (11%) or white (6%). Due to the relatively small number of Indian

and coloured respondents, and because there were no significant differences in responses across questions for these two categories, they have been grouped together in the results.

Focus group interviews were conducted in three provinces<sup>1</sup> (the Eastern Cape, Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal), drawing participants from a range of geographic, socio-economic and political backgrounds. Fourteen focus group discussions were conducted with a total of 107 participants. Based on the results of the quantitative surveys, a number of key variables were identified as significant indicators of patterns in media use, and perceptions of citizenship and political participation. These included location, education, employment, race and age. Of these key variables, three were chosen as sampling criteria for the focus groups, namely location (rural/urban), education (up to and including secondary school/tertiary) and employment (employed/unemployed). Keeping to the parameters of youth classification in *South Africa's National Youth Policy* (1997), participants were between the ages of 18 and 36. Race, although an important variable, was not included in the criteria for selecting focus group participants, the rationale being that differences in responses related to race would be analysed as they emerged from the focus group discussions. Snowball sampling was used to recruit participants, where one or two individuals who matched the profile of participants within each focus group were identified and asked to identify other participants based on those variables.

The study included a content analysis in which a total of 8 736 articles were analysed from South African print media between January 2011 and July 2012. In addition, broadcast television was also analysed for media coverage of the youth. This article does, however, not draw directly on the content analysis data published in the final study (Malila 2013).

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### The media and the quality of democracy

The findings of the 2011 Afrobarometer<sup>2</sup> survey show important shifts in the way South Africans in general view the media and democratic processes in the country. For example, in 2008, 80 per cent of South Africans believed the media have a right to publish without government control. The latest figures (2011) show 61 per cent saying the same thing. The percentage of respondents who believe the government should have the right to prevent the media from publishing news that 'might harm society' doubled from 16 per cent in 2008 to 33 per cent in 2012 (Afrobarometer 2011). At the same time, it seems the extent to which South Africans rely on and trust the media to expose corruption has increased. In 2008, 59 per cent of respondents said the media should investigate government corruption. In 2011 this figure increased to 70 per cent.

These insights are echoed in the survey results of the baseline study and the focus group discussions. Survey respondents expressed high levels of trust in all types of media. Participants in the focus groups confirmed the high levels of trust reflected in the survey (Figure 1). Close to eight out of ten

survey respondents (79.5%) said they trusted television news, 78.3 per cent said they trusted radio news, and 71.9 per cent said they trusted newspapers. The respondents also expressed relatively high levels of trust in the social media, with 57.7 per cent of survey respondents saying they trust this media source. The focus group participants also expressed high levels of trust in the media – particularly television, which was trusted more by unemployed participants. The participants regarded television as trustworthy because it allowed them to see visually what was being discussed in the news broadcast. Comments in this regard include:

*‘I would say that I trust TV the most because they always show what happened live. They don’t just say that something happened. There is something, a picture that shows you that something did happen so that you trust it and it’s live.’*

*‘I like TV because you can see that thing when it is happening and you can see that it happened, but the newspaper you cannot see it happen when it’s written.’*

*‘TV is real because the cameras were there, so it’s something real and newspaper people were not there.’*

This correlates with studies conducted in The Netherlands, which show that young people were more trusting of television news because the images were proof of what had occurred (Costera Meijer 2006). One focus group participant in this study regarded television as trustworthy because *‘they always show what happened live. They don’t just say that something happened. There is something, a picture that shows you that something did happen so you trust it.’*

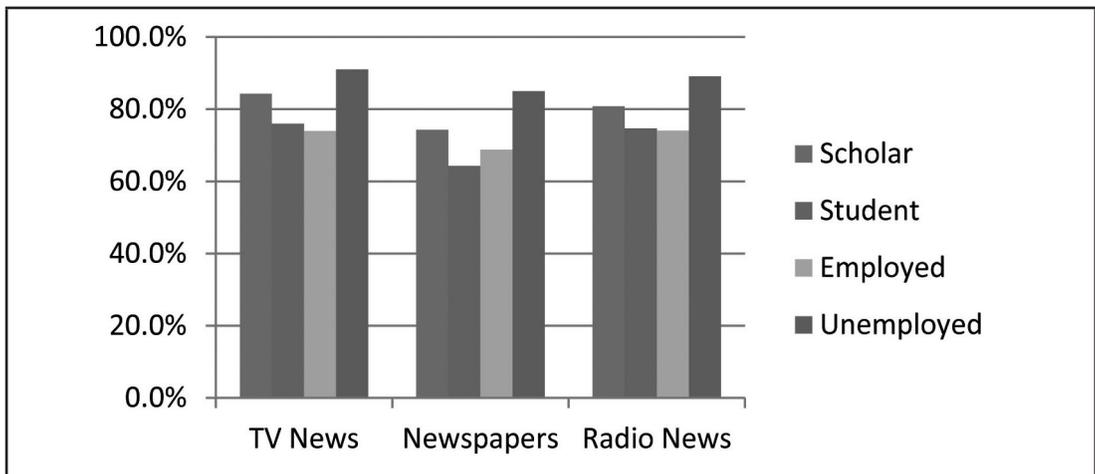


Figure 1: Level of trust of media, based on situation of survey respondents

Levels of trust were significantly different between the employed and the unemployed. Unemployed youth were more likely to trust the media than employed youth.

While young people trust the media, and use the media for news and entertainment consumption, they do not regard the media as a relevant source of news. Radio was used most by survey respondents (70.8%) for news information, followed by television (67.3%), and Google or other search engines (62.8%). Young people mostly trust what they see on television (79.5%) and hear on the radio (78.3%). But just more than four in ten young people reported that radio and television news (44% and 42.9% respectively) was relevant. Fewer than four in ten young people (39.1%) reported that mainstream newspapers contained news that was relevant to them.

When asked whether the news media supplied information that would help them understand the problems in their lives, the focus group participants gave mixed responses. Negative perceptions about the news media were that they tended to focus too much on societal problems, without also seeking solutions to those problems. One focus group participant noted that the media *'depresses me. I get angry. I get so angry and so sad. I would like to see more positive coverage.'* Another said: *'I would like to see more things that are uplifting in the media'*, while a third participant was more specific, stating that *'90% of the news is focused on violence'*. The young people in the focus groups also felt that some of the television programmes they were exposed to were not relevant to them. One participant argued that the media would be more pertinent if *'it could ... focus on our local areas and show things that affect people'*, while another stated: *'I would like the media to focus on things closer to home, on our issues.'* This confirmed the survey results that showed low levels of relevance with regard to the news media. Only 44 per cent of respondents found radio news relevant, 42.9 per cent found television news relevant, and 39.1 per cent found mainstream newspapers relevant. These three media scored highest in terms of relevance amongst the survey respondents. It appears that while young people may be consuming these media, they do not necessarily find the content useful for their lives and their identities. This was particularly true of the unemployed youth surveyed, who found the media less relevant than those youth did who work either part time or full time (Figure 2).

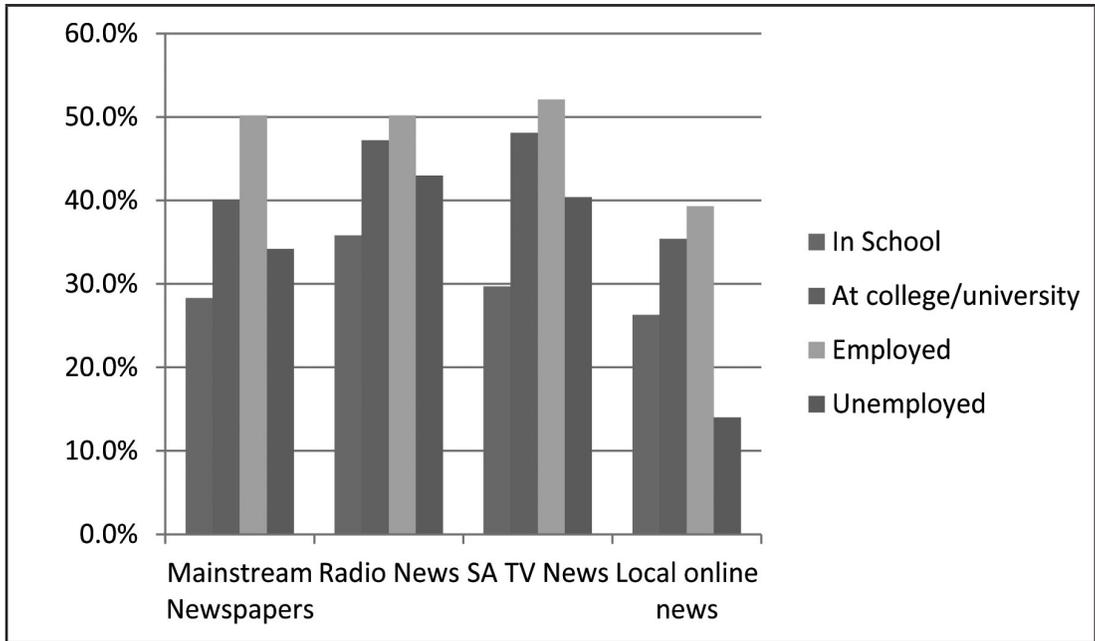


Figure 2: Relevance of news media across employment situation by survey respondents

Perhaps this lack of relevance relates to what Harber (2013) calls ‘the suburban news agenda in much of our media, drowning out the voices of those – the majority – who have less access to power, wealth and media’. Friedman (2011, 107) argues that despite claims by the South African media that they are the ‘eyes and ears’ of citizens at large in this country, and ‘a source of knowledge which is the property of the entire society, and therefore presumably reflects a common social reality’, the media in fact fulfil this role solely for the suburban middle class. Friedman (ibid, 107) notes that the press ‘sees the world through the eyes and ears of the middle class, and the freedom it seeks to guard is that of the middle class’. This relates to the earlier argument by Nyamnjoh that the media fail to serve democracy and are alienated from communities because they are serving the interests of a liberal democratic model of media practice.

Similar patterns of news media relevance emerged when ‘race’ as a variable was examined in the data (Figure 3).<sup>3</sup> Black African, coloured and Indian survey respondents found the media significantly less relevant than white youth did. It seems clear that the media in South Africa consistently disregard marginalised youth in reporting, targeting the news at a minority audience.

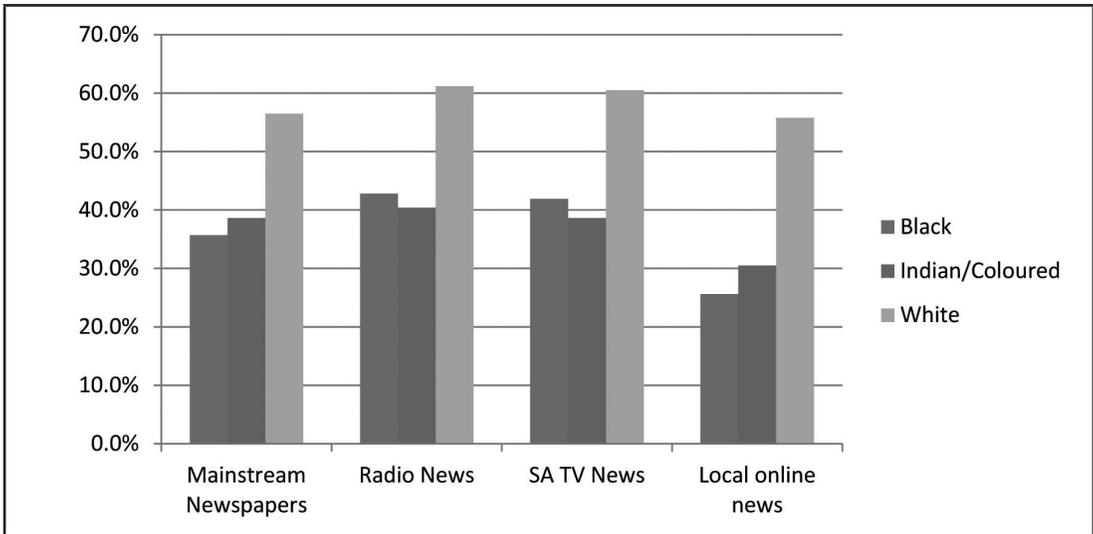


Figure 3: Relevance of news media across race by survey respondents

The findings show that young people have high levels of trust in the media, but low levels of trust in political institutions and politicians. Just over three in ten young people (30.7%) said they trusted political parties; only 34.6 per cent trusted local party elections, and only 40.9 per cent trusted the national government. Of the three levels of government (national, provincial and local), national was the most trusted, with local government trusted by only 34.4 per cent of respondents (provincial = 38.3%). This was reflected in the focus group discussions, where participants reported that they felt they had very little impact on government services. The perception from a large portion of the participants was that the political system was inaccessible, and even if a different political party governed South Africa very little would change for them in terms of service delivery. Focus group participants were specifically asked if they felt their vote would improve the quality of government services, and the prevalent response was negative. One respondent noted: *'It's all the same, if you vote or not because nothing improves. Your vote does nothing.'* Another said that voting does not improve their own lives, only the lives of the politically powerful or the elite: *'It certainly improves the party that is in power or the person who is in power at the time, [but] not service delivery.'* Many respondents perceive politicians negatively, arguing that they make promises without fulfilling them. Participants' perceptions of political engagement were that it is difficult because politicians are inaccessible: *'Politicians are out of reach to us in our community. We only see them in the media and on TV. We have never heard that they are around or that they are contributing something.'*

### The media and an active public sphere

The relationship between the media (particularly news and mainstream media) and young people in South Africa seems to be largely characterised by one-way traffic from the media to the youth.

Young people surveyed in this project consumed news media but did not use it as a means of engaging within the public sphere. Fewer than two in ten young people said they had ever written a letter to the media (Figure 4), and the focus group participants did not regard the media as a means through which to engage in civic or political action. When asked how they would engage with other people in their community about issues of common concern, many suggested mechanisms outside of the media. Responses included putting up posters, handing out flyers, and more often calling community meetings. One respondent added: *'There is nothing better than calling a meeting.'* This may relate to the fact that young people feel the media do not focus on issues in their communities, and provide little information about their local context. This resonates with the finding regarding the lack of relevance of news media in the lives of young South Africans. It is clear from the above that young people feel disconnected from the mainstream media and that, despite high levels of consumption from those surveyed, they do not regard it as a means through which to engage with public issues locally.

Responding to a question about where or with whom they would discuss news or current events, young people said they would primarily do so with their family (77.9%) and friends (77.3%), while 42.2 per cent said they would use blogs or online forums. Lack of access is not as likely an explanation, as is the fact that young people feel disconnected from the media. This disconnection may speak to the lack of power young people feel they have within the public sphere. Recent studies have found that one in three South Africans are Internet users, and that 'if this rate of growth is maintained, then more than half of the population will be online by 2014 and more than two out of three could be online by 2016' (De Lanerolle 2012, 6). The survey results also showed that 62.8 per cent of respondents used Google or other search engines to access news information. This shows higher than expected levels of access to search engines by young people.

### The media, civic agency and participatory politics

The results show that despite the survey respondents' low levels of trust in politics and political institutions, there were relatively high levels of voting reported in terms of past elections and the intention to vote in upcoming elections. More than four in ten (42.1%) survey respondents said they had voted in the most recent national elections, and 40.7 per cent had voted in the most recent municipal elections. These figures are lower than those for actual voters in the last national elections (56.7%), but significantly higher in relation to other political activities surveyed. When asked about activities they participated in during the preceding 12 months, 16.6 per cent said they had participated in party-political activities, 21.9 per cent had attended a public demonstration, and 32.8 per cent had signed a petition. The survey respondents were more actively engaged in social activities such as helping a neighbour (79.1%) and being involved in a social group (67.4%).

While the focus group responses very often supported the results of the survey findings, the issue of voting did show some disparity on this question. Focus group respondents were largely disparaging of voting and had strongly negative attitudes towards this political activity. This was particularly

true of the unemployed participants, who felt let down after having voted in the past and not seeing any change in their circumstances. Some stated that they had never voted and would not be voting in upcoming elections (national or local). One participant stated: *'[I have] never voted, because the thing is, I feel that the party that's in power right now, even if it loses its nantsika, its rule, another party's going to do the same thing that they are ... so I don't really participate in politics.'* Another argued: *'Me, myself, I have never voted because I do not wish to vote [for] the same person who does not give me my rights.'* Others stated that they had voted, but continued to feel let down by politicians because political *'parties make promises, they promise heaven and earth ... and then after the election, they don't do anything of that.'*

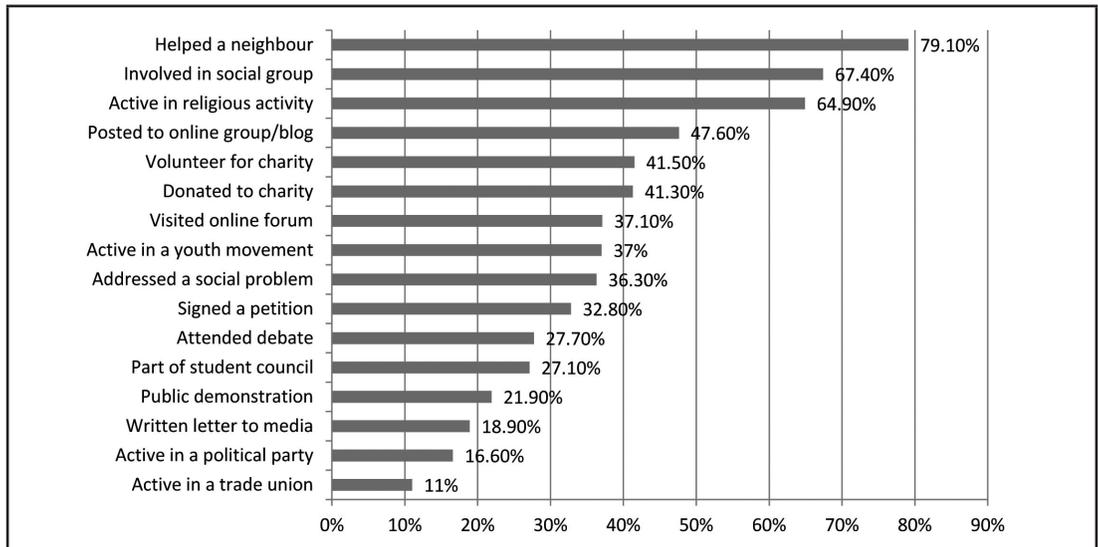


Figure 4: Participation by youth surveyed in civic and political activities

Civic engagement by young people (see Figure 4), such as volunteering for a charity (41.5%) or taking part in a demonstration (21.9%), may be inhibited by the fact that the youth do not know how to get involved. This emerged from a number of focus group participants, who said they had thought about engaging with an issue that was troubling them, but did not actually take any action because they did not know how to: *'One thing I would like to do something about is the children I see sleeping on the street, and I think one can do something about it, but I just don't get to doing something about it.'* Another participant noted that *'we have often discussed the possibility of helping out but we don't know where to start.'*

**CONCLUSION: ARE THE MEDIA IMPROVING PROSPECTS FOR CITIZENS TO INFLUENCE PUBLIC DISCOURSE?**

The high levels of news media consumption contradicted perceptions that the news media had little relevance to respondents' lives and local contexts. Significantly low levels of trust in politicians

Downloaded by [Professor Anthea Garman] at 14:28 19 December 2013

and political institutions were contrasted by high levels of trust in the news media. These contrasts and contradictions raise important questions for further research.

One possible entry point is further investigation into assumptions of a 'normative vision' of citizenship, when in reality citizens do not always manage to acquire new political identities by claiming their democratic rights (Robins et al. 2008, 1071). As in the case of other post-colonial settings, unequal relationships between citizens and the government persist in South Africa, despite new democratic spaces having opened up. The research results analysed for this article show that while many young South Africans feel the media can be trusted as a source of information, they do not feel strongly represented in the news media, and find the information largely irrelevant to their lives. This could be an indication that the news media are not providing young people with the information they need to define meaningful civic and political identities, and/or to identify possibilities for political engagement. It also highlights the manner in which the media are failing to engage with marginalised members of society, due to asymmetrical power relations within society and the media's relationship to society (Curran 1991).

The media have a potential role in assisting citizens in emerging democracies such as South Africa to give meaning to notions of citizenship and civic identity, but these effects are not 'direct, simple, [n]or immediate' (Nyamnjoh 2005, 1). While adherents of the media's watchdog role claim that it 'provides citizens with information about civic rights and responsibilities' and that it 'makes the public more aware of what is expected of the citizens in a democracy' (Hyden and Okigbo 2002, 48), the findings of this baseline study suggest that more innovative approaches are needed if the media in South Africa aspire to be seen as 'promoting and protecting the discursive realm that makes democracy real and functioning' (ibid, 51).

- These innovative approaches could be based on the following key issues that emerged in this study:
- High levels of consumption of radio and South African television, combined with high levels of trust in those media, are positive indicators for the potential of the media to shape perceptions of citizenship and civic identity among young people, if the media are willing to close the relevance gap. The data suggest that more targeted content and more youth-oriented genres would make the media more relevant for South Africa's young citizens;
- Perceptions, as captured in the focus group discussions and survey data, reveal that the 'born frees', while less inhibited by apartheid and therefore less intimately connected to this past, feel disconnected from democratic process as embodied by politicians and political institutions. While young people do claim to vote, many spoke of negative experiences of the voting process and encounters with politicians. In this regard the article proposes that the South African media have some responsibility for the extent to which young people are shaping their civic identity, and that 'good journalism must at some level engage us in the world it presents to us' (Dahlgren 2009, 81);
- To generate enthusiasm for democracy, the challenge facing media practitioners is to understand those present conditions that hamper the fulfilment of young people's expectations of 'a brave new world'. Young people need to see their reality reflected in all its diversity, in order for

them to perceive the public space as one in which their participation is respected and taken seriously;

- The fact that South Africa's commercial media take their 'view from the suburbs' (which sees them prioritising minority communities and ignoring 'the experiences and perspectives of people outside [their] suburban world' [Friedman 2011, 109–110]) poses particular challenges to current approaches to media practice. Journalists and media owners need to develop ways of listening to young voices more systematically, and reflecting those voices in media content in pertinent and useful ways.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This article is part of a larger project – the Media and Citizenship Project – funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, based at the School of Journalism and Media Studies at Rhodes University. The Mellon Media and Citizenship Project is co-directed by Prof Anthea Garman and Prof Herman Wasserman.

## ENDNOTES

1. For practical and logistical reasons, focus groups could not be conducted in the Western Cape.
2. Idasa and Afrobarometer present the latest South Africa survey findings (2012). [http://www.idasa.org/our\\_products/resources/output/press\\_release\\_idasa\\_and\\_afrobarometer/](http://www.idasa.org/our_products/resources/output/press_release_idasa_and_afrobarometer/) (accessed 14 March 2012).
3. Although the researchers do not regard race as a true classification of people, it is still a significant socio-economic factor in South African society and does impact significantly on gender, class, location and situation. The survey used the race classifications: black, white, coloured and Indian for survey respondents. These classifications are used for demographic data in major institutions such as Statistics South Africa, which conducts the national government census.

## REFERENCES

1997. National Youth Policy [Online]. <http://www.polity.org.za>. National Youth Commission. Available: <http://www.polity.org.za/polity/govdocs/policy/intro.html> [Accessed July 25, 2013].
2012. Census 2011, statistical release (revised) [Online]. <http://www.statssa.gov.za>. Available: <http://www.statssa.gov.za/Publications/P03014/P030142011.pdf> [Accessed July 31, 2013].
- Boyce, G. 2010. Youth voice in South Africa: Echoes in the age of hope. In *South African social attitudes: The second report – reflections on the age of hope*, ed. B. Roberts, M. Wa Kivulu and Y.D. Davids, 87–104. Cape Town: HSRC.
- Costera Meijer, I. 2006. *De toekomst van het nieuws*. Amsterdam: Otto Cramwinckel.
- Couldry, N., S. Livingstone and T. Markham. 2010. *Media consumption and public engagement – beyond the presumption of attention*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Curran, J. 1991. Rethinking the media as a public sphere. In *Communication and citizenship*, ed. P. Dahlgren and C. Sparks, 27–57. London and New York: Routledge.
- Dahlgren, P. 1991. Introduction: Communication and citizenship. In *Communication and citizenship*, ed. P. Dahlgren and C. Sparks, 1–24. London and New York: Routledge.

- Dahlgren, P. 2009. *Media and political engagement – citizens, communication and democracy*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- De Lanerolle, I. 2012. *The new wave: Who connects to the internet, how they connect and what they do when they connect*. Johannesburg: University of Witwatersrand Press.
- Diouf, M. 2003. Engaging postcolonial cultures: African youth and public space. *African Studies Association* 46(2): 1–12.
- Friedman, S. 2010. Beneath the surface: Civil society and democracy after Polokwane. In *Testing democracy: Which way is South Africa going?*, ed. N. Misra-Dexter and J. February, 117–139. Cape Town: Idasa Publishing.
- Friedman, S. 2011. Whose freedom? South Africa's press, middle-class bias and the threat of control. *Ecquid Novi: African Journalism Studies* 32(2): 106–121.
- Habermas, J. 1989. *The structural transformation of the public sphere – an inquiry into a category of bourgeois society*. Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press.
- Harber, A. 2013. Thick-skinned rhinos and newsmakers. *The Harbinger* [Online]. <http://www.theharbinger.co.za/wordpress/2013/01/21/thick-skinned-rhinos-and-newsmakers/2013>
- Heller, P. 2009. Democratic deepening in India and South Africa. *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 44(1): 123–149.
- Hyden, G. and C. Okigbo. 2002. The media and the two waves of democracy. In *Media and democracy in Africa*, ed. G. Hyden, M. Leslie and F. Ogundimu, 29–53. New Jersey: Transaction Publishers.
- Kruskalis, W. and F. Mosteller. 1979. Representative Sampling III: The current statistical literature. *International Statistical Review* 47: 245–265.
- Malila, V. 2013. A baseline study of youth identity, the media and the public sphere in South Africa. Pre-publication. Grahamstown: Rhodes University.
- Mattes, R. 2012. The 'born frees': The prospects for generational change in post-apartheid South Africa. *Australian Journal of Political Science* 47(1): 133–153.
- Nyamnjoh, F.B. 2005. *Africa's media – democracy and the politics of belonging*. London, New York and Pretoria: Zed Books & Unisa Press.
- Nyamnjoh, F.B. 2011. De-Westernizing media theory to make room for African experience. In *Popular media, democracy and development in Africa*, ed. H. Wasserman, 19–31. London and New York: Routledge.
- Robins, S., A. Cornwall and B. von Lieres. 2008. Rethinking 'citizenship' in the postcolony. *Third World Quarterly* 29(6): 1069–1086.
- Udney, Y.G. and M.G. Kendall. 1950. *An introduction to the theory of statistics*. New York: Hafner.

## Appendix One

### Focus group discussions moderator's guide:

#### Let's begin with where you live:

1. Thinking about the problems you face as young people today, which is the most important problem you face?
  - Do you think there is something you can do about these problems? What?
2. Do you think the information you get from the news media is useful to give you a better understanding of these problems?
  - What is most useful about this information?
  - What is least useful about the information?
3. Can you recall anything you have read in the newspaper, heard on the radio, watched on television or read on social media that made you want to go out and do something about it?
  - What did you do?
  - Did you use the media to help you do this?
  - Did you ask your friends or others who live in your community to help you?
4. If you want to do something about a problem in this community / neighbourhood how would you find out if there are other people who would join you?

#### Now let's talk a bit about your experience with elections and political meetings:

5. Think of the last time you voted in an election – either local or national government – what or who helped you most in deciding which party to vote for?
6. Have you ever attended or participated in a meeting with politicians – nationally or locally?
  - Did that experience motivate you to get more involved in politics?
7. Have you ever participated in a community meeting about problems facing this community?
  - Did that experience motivate you to get more involved in your community?
8. Do you think that your vote will improve the quality of government services? (like education, or health care or roads or housing)

#### Now I would like to talk about ways in which you get and share information

9. Do you think there is enough information in the news media that is of interest to young people?
  - What would you like to see more of? Why?
  - What would you like to see less of? Why?
10. What media that you use do you trust most? Why?
  - Do you trust the news in tabloid newspapers like The Sun or The Daily Voice? Why?

#### And the last two questions:

11. What do you think are the responsibilities of younger citizens, like yourselves, in South Africa?
  - What do you think it is that newspapers or the radio or television or social media can do to help young people do that?
12. Could you live without newspapers, or the radio, or television or social media? Why?

## Appendix 2

### **Details of focus group discussions**

Focus group 1 – Eastern Cape (Grahamstown)

No of participants: 7

Age groups: 18–36

No of males: 5

No. of females: 2

Variables: Unemployed, maximum Grade 12, rural town

Focus group 2 – Eastern Cape (Grahamstown)

No of participants: 7

Age groups: 18–36

No of males: 4

No. of females: 3

Variables: Pilot study

Focus group 3 – Eastern Cape (Grahamstown)

No of participants: 7

Age groups: 18–36

No of males: 5

No. of females: 2

Variables: Tertiary education, rural town

Focus group 4 – Eastern Cape (Alice)

No of participants: 7

Age groups: 18–36

No of males: 6

No. of females: 1

Variables: Employed, tertiary education, rural town

Focus group 5 – Eastern Cape (Alice)

No of participants: 7

Age groups: 18–36

No. of females: 7

Variables: Unemployed, rural town

Focus group 6 – Eastern Cape (East London)

No of participants: 8

Age groups: 18–36

No of males: 3

No. of females: 5

Variables: Unemployed, Grade 12, urban city

Focus group 7 – Eastern Cape (EL)

No of participants: 8

Age groups: 18–36

No of males: 6

No. of females: 2

Variables: Employed, tertiary education, urban city

Focus group 8 – Eastern Cape (Port Elizabeth)

No of participants: 6

Age groups: 18–36

No of males: 6

Variables: Unemployed, Grade 12, urban city

Focus group 9 – Eastern Cape (PE)

No of participants: 7

Age groups: 18–36

No of males: 5

No. of females: 2

Variables: Tertiary education, urban city

Focus group 10 – Gauteng (Johannesburg)

No of participants: 6

Age groups: 18–25

No of males: 2

No. of females: 4

Variables: unemployed, Grade 12, urban city

Focus group 14 – Gauteng (Johannesburg)

No of participants: 5

Age groups: 26–36

No of males: 2

No. of females: 3

Variables: employed, tertiary education, urban city