

Political economy of the Kenyan media - towards a culture of active citizen journalism

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
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Abstract

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This paper utilises Hall's (1977) 'encoding-decoding' theory in the context of critical political economy theories of the media and cultural studies to explain the political, economic and cultural factors that influence media operation and content both at a macro and micro level. While political economy provides the setting in which the Kenyan media operates, cultural studies show how media content is not only shaped by the political and economic environments comprising those in power positions. Audiences are also actively engaged in the process of meaning construction. Considering Hall's (1977) encoding-decoding theory, the audiences can reject, negotiate or accept media content based on their own value systems and cultural orientation. Meaning, therefore, becomes a product of continual struggle between different discourses and power cannot be located in a top down manner as to who influences meaning as seen in a propaganda model. This is due to the fact that texts are diffused in different locations in society. The 2008 Kenya Communication Bill is utilised as an example to trace briefly the political and historical developments of policy issues that have influenced the Kenyan media. The Bill, furthermore, indicates how a weak socio-economic, political and cultural environment is marred by ineffectual policies meant to safeguard and guarantee the freedom of the press as an extension of individual freedom of expression as enshrined in the Kenyan constitution. This weak policy context has ensured the Kenyan media remains subject to easy political manipulation and control. However, the paper concludes by showing how citizen journalism is growing out of a regulated mainstream media through internet technology.

Keywords: [Citizen journalism](#); [Communications Bill](#); [Critical political](#); [Cultural studies](#); [Economy of the media](#); [Ideology](#); [Internet blogging](#); [University of Witwatersrand](#)