

Conventional Mass Media and Social Networks in a Democratic South Africa: Watchdogs for Good Governance and Service Delivery?

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Abstract: *Media is one of the most powerful medium accepted in democratic systems for representing voices of the citizenry, in the absence and/or addition to the existing informal and formal legislative provisions. The philosophical fulcrum of this paper is that citizenry participation in decision making processes is an imperative tenet for democratic governance to be "good" and to serve the public interests for service delivery. In this context, South Africa's violent protests about service delivery raises question of the voices that the powerful conventional mass media is representing. The paper asserts that the editorial rooms of the conventional media appear to use the protests of the poor people for making headline, selling their products and running their businesses, rather than communicating the unfettered voices of the majority. A conclusion is made that the social media networks, notwithstanding their drawbacks, hold a strong realistic potential to promote the voices of the poor majority for good democratic governance of service delivery.*

Keywords: Conventional mass media, social media networks, governance, service delivery, South Africa

Introduction

Recent experiences of the so-called Arab Spring have displayed the power of social media networks in mobilizing the energies of citizens around diverse themes, raising popular concerns and enforcing political change. A generally accepted assumption holds that conventional media has served as a watchdog for democratic principles and ensuring that ruling parties deliver on their electioneering promises (Reddy, Naidoo and Pillay, 2005; Kollapen, 2008; Labuschagne, 2010; Sebola, 2012). But evidence of journalistic extremes has been uncovered where on the one hand privately-funded media is bought to serve the interests of those who desire to destabilize the state, and on the other state-funded media is accused of being untrustworthy and sympathetic to incumbent government (Steward, 2010; Sebola, 2012). The recent evidence of the now defunct UK-based *News of the World*, especially *News International*, intrusions into private lives, including those of children with fatal consequences, perpetrated by conventional media has increasingly raised vexed questions of its journalistic fairness, objectivity and accuracy, as well as service as watchdog on behalf of public interests for good governance and service delivery (Steward, 2010; Sebola, 2012). In this context, this paper argues that social media networks hold the potential to serve as uncensored watchdog and mass-based communication of citizens' authentic needs, aspirations, interests, fears and concerns about public service delivery. The apparent trend of the ANC-led government towards gagging conventional media freedom amidst widespread and evident public discontent with the delivery of services, as well as the continued suspicion that the large majority of media is either state-controlled or privately-funded detractors that seek to undermine government, suggest that social networking could offer the only reliable platform for originality, accuracy and objectivity in reporting and communication of citizens concerns about good governance and service delivery. However, the paper remains non-committal in regard to insinuations that social media too has been infiltrated by state agencies of the most powerful nations that use it against governing regimes of weaker states.

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Theories of the Media, Exercise of Citizenship, Good Governance and Service Delivery

Theorization of media includes, among others, the uses and gratification theory, two-step flow theory and the hypodermic needle theory (Fourie, 2001, 2009; Steward, 2010; Sebola, 2012). According to the theory of uses and gratification, people use the media content to escape from their daily routine and work, and from a wide variety of problems that they encounter in their lives (Fourie, 2001: 297). Gratification is an emotional release, albeit of contemporary nature. However, media also provides content that gratifies the needs of companionship and sociability; and, people use its content to compare themselves and their situations and values with those of others. More importantly, they use the media for information, entertainment and education.

The two-step theory provides for co-determination of human behaviour and attitudinal change, because users are not necessarily at the mercy of the media but can selectively expose themselves on the basis of their own knowledge, experience, background, education, culture and expectations (Fourie, 2009). People tend to expose themselves selectively to media content with which they agree, prefer and understand. Also, the group (friends, family or community) of the media users can filter their interpretation and experiences of media messages as buffers against bias. However, media contributes to behavioural change and reinforces existing behaviour.

The hypodermic needle theory was popularized with the advent of mass media, radio and cinema. In its simple description, it holds that mass media can easily influence a large group of people without any challenge and opposition from them (Fourie, 2001, 2009; Wikipedia, 2011b). Mass media is assumed to be capable of injecting messages and information directly and uniformly into audiences' minds with immediate impacts. According to this theory audiences do not use their experience, intelligence and opinion to analyse the messages, with the result that media is understood to be producers and creators that manipulate audiences for self-interest. That is, this theory equates the media with an intravenous injection of certain values, ideas and attitudes into societies, for particular behavioural patterns. To this extent, the recipient is seen as a passive and helpless victim of media (Fourie, 2009; Steward, 2010).

All these theories seem to contain aspects of truth, depending upon the form of media in question. The same perspective can be applied to the state-society relations and exercises of citizenship in public service delivery (Reddy, Naidoo and Pillay, 2005; Erwin, 2008; Kollapen, 2008; Labuschagne, 2010; Mzimakwe, 2010). It could be asked if media could successfully advocate for good governance and effective service delivery?

Jaglin (2008: 1897) notes that "sustainable provision of basic services on a fair and equitable basis has been the most critical municipality priority in post-apartheid South Africa"; and, Bontenbal (2009) observes that public participation is a key requirement for the delivery of services because passive citizenry would remain "users and choosers" rather than "makers and shapers" of services delivered. The challenge of allocating scarce public capital for universal delivery of basic services in starkly unequal; and, starkly poor societies such as South Africa renders the exercise of citizenship an imperative. When the African National Congress (ANC) assumed state power in 1994 the majority of South Africans "lacked access to basic services such as water, electricity, sanitation, good-quality health care, and decent primary education" (Spalding-Fecher, 2005: 53); and, the same segment of the population had no voice in the apartheid public service "delivery". In the post-1994 era, it now appears that other than through public protests, sometimes violent, the majority of the poor continue to be excluded from the exercise of democratic citizenship, even with the legislation for community participation through the integrated development planning processes.

Noting that the state possessed limited investment capital for the provision of services (Smith, 2004; Spalding-Fecher, 2005), South Africa's democratic governments have sought to decentralize and devolve authority to the local sphere in order to encourage political deliberations for "more efficient allocation of public resources and service delivery" as well as the enhancement of institutional responsiveness to "the needs of the 'poor' through new institutions and greater citizen participation" (Bontenbal, 2009: 182). Given the propensity for challenges to local state legitimacy, decentralization and devolution of power should have brought the state and society into close affinity, providing the opportunity for public participation and responsiveness of state institutions to community's genuine needs (Bergh, 2004; Bontenbal, 2009; Tshandu, 2010).

South Africa's democratic constitution provides for public participation through a variety of legislative instruments including, among others, the requirement for municipalities to facilitate the design of Integrated Development Plans (IDPs) and to "create 'new spaces and places' ... for participation of non-public actors in decision-making and policy implementation" (Bontenbal, 2009: 182). The Local Government Municipal Systems Act 32 of 2000 affirms the developmental nature of the municipalities by establishing the requirements for integrated development planning (RSA, 2000). Section 29 (Subsection 1) deals with the process that the municipality must follow in order to (b) "allow for – (i) the local community to be consulted on its development needs and priorities; (ii) the local community to participate in the drafting of the integrated development plan" (RSA, 2000: 40). Additionally, the Community Development Workers Programme (CDWP) was implemented in 2004 as a national mandate to fast track service delivery and development in various local municipalities (Tshishonga and Mafema, 2010) with the expressed hope of enhancing poor people's exercise of citizenship in public service delivery.

The CDWP was viewed to be "a panacea to service delivery backlogs" and a national transformative agenda "pace setter for inclusive endogenous development geared towards sustainable service delivery" (Tshishonga and Mafema, 2010: 561, 562). The primary focus of the CDWs "is firmly on the needs of local communities" because the CDWP was conceived as "part of the process of deepening participatory democracy", especially in social services, social grants and the development on municipal IDPs (Levin, 2008: 34). Together, these instruments seek to establish conditions, spaces and places for effective public participation and exercise of citizenship in decision-making and policy implementation, especially among the poorest sections of the South African population. However, public participation in service delivery in a democratic South Africa has remained a less than straightforward phenomenon because of the inequalities in decision-making power (Reddy, Naidoo and Pillay, 2005; Erwin, 2008; Kollapen, 2008; Labuschagne, 2010). Media has also played a critical role in the nexus of exercise of citizenship, public participation and governance of service delivery. Inevitably, the domination of the state-society relations in South Africa takes place through a variety of mechanisms, including the use of access to different forms of media.

Whereas there could be deep discontent with the ANC-dominated parliament's Protection of State Information Bill, conventional media industry in South Africa has raised many eyebrows in regard to the underlying intent to overstep the limits of media freedom and maintain unfettered reporting and independence, devoid of the virtues of responsibility and accountability. But it is evident that the use of social media networks in the Arab Spring has now precipitated further actions and consequences that even the state-sponsors, in case there were, would not have predicted. Whereas both conventional reporting through newspapers, radio stations and television channels as well as social media networks such as Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn are a double-edged sort, the former group is open to

manipulation by those who hold power, to the exclusion of the voices of the poor who experience the worst effects of poor governance of public service delivery.

Modern media practices have evolved significantly from their traditional forms, and universal public access and participation is central to this “new interactivity media” (Phillips, 2008; Steward, 2010; Wikipedia, 2011b). The digital age has seen a spread out of interactive media whose news can be shaped by everyone. The interactive media involves the Internet and the “online world”; and, Brücks, Mehnert, Prommer and Räder (2008: 2) affirm that “the Internet is part of our everyday life” because “we do the same in the Internet as in real life, probably in a more efficient, faster and cheaper way.” Indeed, public communication through the Internet is becoming increasingly popular. Beyond allowing the virtual meeting of strangers, the new interactive media enables users to articulate their social networks, hence the conception of social media networks. Social networking sites (SNS), like Facebook, Twitter and Mxit are the latest trends in online communication which is virtually open access (Brücks, Mehnert, Prommer and Räder, 2008; Phillips, 2008). They have become extremely popular in recent years and they continue to attract large numbers of users. Since their introduction, millions of users have integrated these sites into their daily routine. They have become some of the most popular online destinations; not surprisingly, this level of user attraction has been accompanied by much coverage in the most popular press, including speculations about the potential gains and harms stemming from the use of social network services. However, the value or otherwise of the social networks in servicing the purposes of good governance for service delivery on behalf of the majority of the poor people, compared to the conventional mass media, remains scarcely tested.

Power and Access to Media: Mediating the State-Society Interface

A democratic South Africa provides for public participation in local government service delivery through a variety of instruments including the Constitution, the White Paper on Transforming Service Delivery of 1997, Local Government: Municipal Structures Act 117 of 1998, and the Local Government: Municipal Systems Act 32 of 2000 (Reddy, Naidoo and Pillay, 2005; Erwin, 2008; Kollapen, 2008; Labuschagne, 2010; Mzimakwe, 2010). The 2001 Local Government Municipal Planning and Performance Management Regulations deal with integrated development planning (RSA, 2001). Beyond increasing public confidence in the functionaries’ service delivery goals through on-going interactions, community participation should also serve as a basis for conflict management, educational campaigns about public needs and government priorities for collective welfare of the society, rather than the gratification of the individualistic interests (Mzimakwe, 2010: 507).

In respect of community participation in integrated development planning, the 2001 Regulations stipulates in Chapter 4, Section 15(1)(a) that “In the absence of an appropriate municipal wide structure for community participation, a municipality must establish a forum that will enhance community participation in - (i) the drafting and implementation of the municipality’s integrated development plan” (RSA, 2001: 17). The forum established for community participation is required, by law, to be representative of the composition of the local community of the municipality. Additionally, Chapter 5 of the 2001 Regulations stipulates in section 2 that “a municipality must – (a) convene regular meetings of the forum ... (1) to – (i) discuss the process to be followed in drafting the integrated development plan; (ii) consult on the content of the integrated development plan” (RSA, 2001: 17). Section 15(3) in Chapter 5 of the 2001 Regulations provides that “a municipality must afford the local community at least 21 days to comment on the final draft of its integrated development plan before the plan is submitted to the Council for adoption” (RSA, 2001: 18).

These provisions for public participation sound benign, but in practice poor communities have remained passive due to government reinventing itself and redefining citizens as end user and chooser clients/customers, rather than “makers and shapers” of services delivered (Reddy, Naidoo and Pillay, 2005; Erwin, 2008; Kollapen, 2008; Bontenbal, 2009; Labuschagne, 2010; Tshandu, 2010). The media has not been a blameless bystander in this muting of the voices of the poor through democratic provisions that allow for selective domination of communication.

In a democratic setup, access to media could bear contradictory outcomes in regard to giving pragmatic effect to participatory democracy and good governance, which are key ingredients for universal delivery of public services among the poor. Good governance is intricately interlinked with the success of decentralization, efficiency of the local state and effective public participation because active and engaged civil society can eloquently express genuine interests of the citizenry and enforce responsive state machinery in delivering public services (Reddy, Naidoo and Pillay, 2005; Erwin, 2008; Kollapen, 2008; Bontenbal, 2009; Labuschagne, 2010; Tshandu, 2010). Intensive state-society intersections strengthen governance, citizen participation, state responsiveness and public functionaries’ accountability. As Bontenbal (2009: 182) observes that “a strong state and a strong civic society are therefore simultaneously imperative for better conditions for service delivery and high responsiveness to poverty needs”. A strong local civic society involves citizenship, participation and voice (Mitlin, 2004; Johnson and Wilson, 2009; Tshandu, 2010).

The exercise of citizenship is not just a political right, but it is an act of agency and practice which strives to improve accountability and transparency wherein citizens act as “makers and shapers”, rather than “users and choosers” of the ideal governance structures for service delivery (Bontenbal, 2009: 182). For this reason, participation is intricately intertwined with power and local politics as important ingredients of civic actors’ exercise of citizenship for public service delivery and enforcement of the ideal civic virtues. Reality is that “local politics are embedded in historical, socio-cultural contexts” (Bontenbal, 2009: 188) to the extent that taking part in conventional meetings may not allow for genuine exercise of citizenship. Unsurprisingly, the IDP planning meetings are captivated by technocrats and the local notables to the virtual exclusion of the voice of the poor. Indeed, the mode of citizenship participation is of critical importance because it relates to variable power relations (Reddy, Naidoo and Pillay, 2005; Erwin, 2008; Kollapen, 2008; Bontenbal, 2009; Labuschagne, 2010; Mzimakwe, 2010; Tshandu, 2010; Steward, 2010).

Whereas some modes of participation are straight-jackets that are predetermined in the Editorial Boardrooms, some are flexible, leaving unfettered power in the hands of the user to exercise citizenship, with unpredictable outcomes. The social media networks having being at the core of legitimizing the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) military strikes in Libya, they cannot control the ultimate destiny as there is now genuine fear that Libya could be divided into at least four states. However, the differentness in modes of citizen participation is especially invaluable for the poor who are not a homogenous group because it creates the opportunity for distinct, yet closely related, interest groups and agendas to be exercised (Mitlin, 2004; Skog, 2005; Steward, 2010). A comparison of the conventional and social networks will demonstrate that the latter has the necessary qualities to guarantee a greater unfettered voice of the poor people in service delivery.

Conventional Media and the State-Society Interface

The role of media in the government administration has a long history of existence traceable to the early 20th century (Steward, 2010; Sebola, 2012). Theoretically, there are two propositions about the role of conventional media in modern democracy. The two most commonly acknowledged functions of

conventional media in a democracy are to ensure that citizens make responsible and informed choices rather than act out of ignorance or misinformation; and, that elected representatives uphold civic virtues (Centre for Democracy and Governance, 1999; Steward, 2010; Sebola, 2012). Whereas other conceptualize media as middlepersons mediating the state-society interface, with its role being limited to the recording and passing of information as is, others argue that it is more than mere reporting and passing information to the public, embracing therefore thorough analysis of policy consequences that need to be enacted. These two conceptualizations of the role of the media in the state-society interface are selectively entrenched in the modern society. However, the ease of state intervention in conventional media reportage makes it a less effective alternative for the poor because the state-society interface tends to be dominated by the state, creating a self-serving culture wherein public servants find no obligation to be accountable and responsive to the genuine service delivery needs. Under such conditions of biased control of conventional media by state agencies, good governance and service delivery become unattainable pipedreams.

In South Africa various institutions were put in place to secure and ensure good governance and service delivery; and, these instruments include the Office of the Public Protector, Special Investigations Unit, Auditor-General, the Hawks and other anti-corruption legislations such as Executive Members Ethics Act 82 of 1998, Corruption Act 94 of 1992, the Prevention and Combating of Corrupt Activities Act 2004 and the Protected Disclosures Act 26 of 2000 (Steward, 2010; Sebola, 2012). In addition to these institutions and legislations, there is a good element of the freedom of speech and expression by the conventional media industry in South Africa. South Africa's governance provisions hold promise and a realistic potential for successful implementation and application in service delivery. However, media is varied, with different power dynamics and mechanisms of its relations to the citizens and the state; as a result, the role of conventional media in enforcing civic virtues for good governance and service delivery is not a given. Whereas applicable to the private and public sectors, the concept of governance is often identified with the latter as a set of operational processes and system required by a public institution in service delivery (Smith, 2004; Fourie, 2009; Maldonado, 2010). Poor governance, as the antithesis of "good governance", is characterized by corruption, lack of unaccountability and unresponsiveness to the genuine needs of the poor (Pillay, 2004; Sebola, 2012). Intricately intertwined with the concept of governance are issues of public participation, rule of law, transparency, responsiveness, consensus-orientatedness, equity and inclusiveness, effectiveness and efficiency and accountability (Godbole, 2001; Pillay, 2004; UNESCAP, 2010).

There is specific legislation adopted for the purposes of service delivery in South Africa; and, they include the White Paper on Transformation and Service Delivery of 1997 (Labuschagne, 2010; Mzimakwe, 2010; Tshandu, 2010; Steward, 2010; Sebola, 2012). Legislative instruments such as Batho Pele Principles were designed to foster good governance and public service delivery (Sebola, 2012). A democratic South Africa, in its aspiration for good governance in service delivery, adopted the corporate concept of clientilism and redefined the public as clients/customers, who are per legislation expected to receive fair public administration. Notwithstanding the numerous legislative instruments to curb transgression against civic virtues, acts such as corruption, nepotism, fraud, bribery and self-enrichment, appear to have persisted. The recent violent protests point to continued disaffection among the majority of the poor. The fact that conventional media has been at the forefront of the challenges in service delivery, including expose of open-toilets, yet accountability and good governance at the local state continues to be non-existent, implies that the exercise of citizenship by wider publics remains wanting. Perhaps, it is the dominant mode through which the citizenship is being

exercised that does not serve the interests of the poor, who are in the majority in South Africa, in ensuring genuine service delivery and accountability.

Government monitoring institutions such as the Auditor-General and the Public Service Commission have appeared to be trapped in bureaucratic engagements and political squabbles, rather than enforcing accountability (Ruhinga, 2009). Pressure groups such as AfriMAP and the Open Society Foundation for South Africa have lamented the unresponsiveness and ineffectiveness of service delivery and good governance oversight institutions such as the Public Service Commission and the Auditor-General (Sebola, 2012). More often than not, when all such formal institutions fail to entrench the exercise of citizenship, the poor in particular, become disillusioned and disengaged; and, it has appeared that the “haves” tend to look up to conventional media to critically oversee the conduct of the public sector for self-interests. There are historical incidences that suggest that the objectivity and integrity of conventional media have been compromised.

By legislation, the South African media industry has a role in nation-building and the provision of information to the public. Among others, the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, the Broadcasting Amendment Act of 2002, the Independent Broadcasting Authority Act of 1993 and the Independent Communications Authority of South Africa are central to guiding the conduct of conventional media. In addition to the ethical requirements imposed on the media industry, these legislative instruments equally provide for freedom and independence of reportage. The Constitution encapsulates the right to freedom of expression, which includes freedom of press and other media, freedom to receive or impart information or ideas (RSA, 1996). This right does not allow for propaganda, incitement of violence or advocacy of hatred along racial, ethnic, religious or gender divides (Sebola, 2012). But access to conventional media is dependent upon position and class in society. That is, the poor are unable to access media or to use it as a tool for exercising citizenship and enforcing good governance, accountability, civic virtues and universal public service delivery.

Conventional media in a democratic South Africa appears to have been discredited because the function of the new legislation on the Protection of State Information Bill is to regulate the freedoms guaranteed by the Supreme Law. Commenting about the Media Appeals Tribunal proposed in this Bill, the ANC Youth League argued that conventional media has lost its integrity because its reportage is shrouded in “spiteful agendas” and that media monitoring and evaluation institutions such as the South African National Editors Forum (SANEF) and the Press Council of South Africa have equally failed the test of objectivity (Szabo, 2010). Further, it is held that newspapers such as *City Press*, *Mail & Guardian*, *the Citizen*, *Sunday Times*, *the Times*, *die Burger*, *Rapport* as well as all other Independent Group newspapers have compromised their journalistic objectivity and integrity (Szabo, 2010; Sebola, 2012). Other than being seen as ANC detractors, a significant section of conventional media in South Africa is accused of being funded and goaded by opposition parties and, therefore, unqualified to raise genuine service delivery concerns of the majority of the poor (Szabo, 2010).

In terms of the Broadcasting Amendments Act of 2002, there is a requirement that the Public Broadcaster reflects South African attitudes, opinions, ideas, values and artistic creativity, supports South African talent in education and entertainment programmes, embraces a plurality of views and variety of news, information and analysis from a South African point of view and advances the national and public interest (RSA, 2002b). The Broadcaster is further required to adhere to a Code of Practice that ensures that the services and the personnel comply with the constitutional principle of equality, equitable treatment of all segments of the South African population and official languages, the rights of all South Africans to receive and impart information and ideas, the mandate to provide for a wide

range of audience, interests, beliefs and perspectives and a high standard of accuracy, fairness and impartiality in news and programmes that deal with matters of public interest (RSA, 2002b). On paper, these provisions are benign, but the reality among the poorest segments of the South African population is that of poor and inadequate access to this medium for exercise of citizenship for service delivery, other than when violent protests make for “good headline news”. Unfortunately, it has emerged that some commentators were barred, albeit unofficially, from appearing on the Public Broadcasters because of the views they hold about state and society. True or otherwise, such incidences raise vexed questions of whose voice the Public Broadcaster has sought to promote; and, the reasons thereto could as well be ominous signs of democratic decay.

The objective of the Media Development and Diversity Agency Act of 2002 is to promote development and diversity in the South African media, consistent with the right to freedom of expression, especially freedom of the press and other media as well as freedom to receive and impart information or ideas (RSA, 2002a). This Act seeks to balance the rights of journalists with those of politicians, without necessarily enhancing the access to the media by ordinary citizens. Additionally, it avoids the necessary requirement that journalists’ reportage should embrace an analytical engagement. The Independent Communications Authority of South Africa Amendment Act of 2006 on its part, seeks to deal with the granting, renewal, amendment, transfer and revocation of licenses (RSA, 2006), rather than engendering the mechanisms for the exercise of citizenship by the poorest sector of the population. These legislative instruments are indeed necessary, but they do not extent access of conventional media to the poor as a platform for enforcing good governance for service delivery. That is, the reformist tendencies in South Africa is a reflexive reordering of the relationship between the state and media, rather than allowing for scope for the voiceless majority to transmit unfettered messages through conventional media houses.

A democratic South Africa is blessed with national public television stations such as SABC 1, 2 and 3 as well as its sister Radio Broadcasters that cover almost all the official languages, privately-owned television and radio stations such as M-NET, e.tv and eNews Channel and numerous other community television and radio stations (Wikipedia, 2011a; Sebola, 2012). Additionally, newspapers include well-established ones such as *Business Day*, *Daily Sun*, *Mail & Guardian*, *Rapport*, *Sowetan*, *Sunday Independent*, *Sunday Times*, *Sunday Sun*, *Sunday World*, *the Citizen and City Press*, all of which purport to be raising the voices of the marginalized. But none of their stories could have been possibly authored or co-authored by the poor people themselves. That is, a significant number of the stories about the plight of the poor, service delivery, corruption and so on, are written on behalf of the voices of the poor by journalists who are not so poor, with limited “lived experiences” of the conditions in informal settlements and rural South Africa. If conventional media promotes good governance and genuine service delivery, it may not be due to the direct citizenship and enforcement by poor people themselves. Development requires people themselves to be active, makers and shapers of their own service delivery. In the same spirit, citizenship exercised on behalf of the poor is incomplete and inadequate. Given that full democracy is impossible in reality, the most powerful instrument for the poor to raise their voices is equally situated in the prevailing power relations.

Social Media Networks and the State-Society Interactions

Social network sites were launched first in 1997; and, the first was named SixDegrees.com which allowed users to create profiles, list friends and, as of 1998, surf the friends lists (Wikipedia, 2011b). Despite having attracted millions of users, SixDegrees became financially unsustainable, apparently because it came ahead of time, when social networking was poorly understood. Ryze.com launched the next wave of social networking sites (SNSs) in 2001 helping to leverage networks business. This

re-launch of SNS was backed by entrepreneurs and investors. The venture was supported by, among others, Tribe.net, LinkedIn and Friendster, which were closely entwined hoping to avoid a repeat of the recent history of the collapse of SixDegrees (Chafkin, 2007; Ellison, Steinfield and Lampe, 2007; Wikipedia, 2011b). But Ryze.com did not generate mass popularity, whilst Tribe.net grew to attract a passionate niche user-base; and, LinkedIn became a powerful business service whilst Friendster grew to be the most significant network (Chafkin, 2007: 1). Currently, social networking sites have increased and regularized into normal daily experiences, each site bringing something new that will make it stand out of the rest.

Facebook was founded in 2004 to, originally, facilitate social interactions exclusively among college students (Ellison, Steinfield and Lampe, 2007). The site grew to include more than 49 million users; and, it is now available for use by anyone with a valid email address and/or cell phone. It allows users to select one or more "networks", in accordance with specific interests and foci, to which they wish to belong. Facebook allows for group communication, which provides the potential for use in the exercise of citizenship. Twitter is now the fast growing popular social media (Philips, 2008). It offers a social networking and micro-blogging services, enabling users to send and read messages called tweets, which are text-based posts of up to 140 characters displayed on the user's profile page and are publicly available by default, but senders can restrict message delivery to specific groups. According to Barnes (2006: 13), Mxit is one of the biggest mobile instant messengers worldwide; and, it is widely used in South Africa and is very popular amongst the younger generation. Basically, it is a small java application that runs on mobile phones, allowing multiple users to chat instantly over the internet through GPRS packet data. Messages are sent for the fraction of the cost of a sms where a couple of characters of text amount to only a few kilobytes. Mxit's rise to popularity relied solely on word of mouth-marketing. Taken together, these SNS provide a powerful platform for potential popular and full democracy where diverse and multiple voices could be raised to shape governance for public service delivery.

According to Hodge (2006: 3), SNSs play a crucial role in bridging boundaries, enabling communities to communicate on a platform of virtual equality. They offer a popular means of staying in touch and communicating with friends and family whilst simultaneously growing the social circle of new acquaintances. Online social networking, which commonly uses websites, creates virtual social sites that are controlled by the users themselves, thereby functioning like an online community of Internet users. Depending on the website in question, many of these online community members share broadly common interests in hobbies, religion and/or politics. The socialization associated with this new interactive media tends to be deeper, including reading the profile pages of other members and, sometimes, making personal contacts with them. Making friends is just one of the many benefits of social networking online. It also exposes users to diversity of views, debates and consensus building, which are central to democratic systems. Besides creating the possibility for friendships, social networking sites make for on-going learning among the users, which is a critical requirement in public service delivery as it could enforce convergence of public sentiments. For instance, in the Arab Spring, people who participated in the removal of leaders did so for a diversity of reasons, sometimes even contradictory to each other. This character of social media networks demonstrates power to transcend divisive propensities of human beings; and, it should be a good quality for collective enforcement of civic virtues, good governance and service delivery at the local state scale. Its capacity to bring together individuals and/or organizations as interest groups as cheaply as it does, points to its usability to representing the voices of the poor in exercising citizenship for good governance of service delivery.

Conventional Mass Media Versus Social Media Networks: Public Versus Self-interested Voice

Public participation should generate mutual communication, information and education exchange process wherein the public and their functionaries learn on an on-going basis because public needs and aspirations as well as local government challenges and priorities are in a state of flux (Reddy, Naidoo and Pillay, 2005; Erwin, 2008; Kollapen, 2008; Labuschagne, 2010; Mzimakwe, 2010). In South Africa, though, comprehensive blue-print plans are devised by professionals and accepted by the dominant social, political, education and economic institutions” as reflective of “consensus of the majority on how to solve social problems (Reddy, Naidoo and Pillay, 2005; Erwin, 2008; Kollapen, 2008; Labuschagne, 2010; Mzimakwe, 2010). The poor and specifically the informal settlement communities in South Africa are “a living example of passive consumers of the services”. That is, despite all the public participation provisions, poor communities have not engaged their rightful democratic spaces in local government service delivery, other than through violent protests (Van der Waldt, 2007: 28; Mzimakwe, 2010: 514). That is, the democratic provisions made to secure good governance through the exercise of citizenship, which include among other things the 1996 Constitution of South Africa, the Municipal Finance Management Act 56 of 2006, Protected Disclosures Act, Municipal Systems Act, Corruption Act and Public Service Regulations (Pillay, 2004; Mafunisa, 2007; Sebola, 2012), have continued to circumvent the voices of the poor.

State’s propaganda has tended to legitimize and validate itself through conventional media. As a result, the genuine public service delivery grievances of the poor may be underreported and/or misrepresented. The South African Broadcasting Corporation’s role in democratization and good governance has become highly questionable because of strong suspicion of government censorship. Apparently, the Public Broadcaster selectively manages the state-society interface by the nature of news reported or excluded. E.tv, on its part, is feared for investigative journalism that has unsettled both politicians and public officials in regard to neglect of duty, corruption, nepotism and self-enrichment. Indeed, some of the station’s expose have earned it further journalistic credibility, amidst sentiments of the station’s reportage being criticized for being extremist and less objective. Even as e.tv regard itself as the free-to-air “watchdog of the people of South Africa”, it does not necessarily afford ordinary poor people the editorial freedom of choosing and authoring their own genuine stories. This point shows that the measure of journalistic integrity and objectivity applied in conventional media may perhaps exclude the circulation of genuine news among the poor. Demonstrating the conventional media’s association with power and class, Cunningham (2010) indicates that some disillusioned members of the ruling party started newspapers of their own in order to control the reportage and to serve their self-interests. Whereas it may be speculative to argue that conventional media represents the powerful voices, it is perfectly legitimate to enunciate that the poor people have no means to react to their exclusions from conventional media, whose transformation has failed to enhance their exercise of citizenship.

The focus of social networking websites is variable, and some emphasize particular interests, whereas others do not; hence, Skog (2005) characterizes social networking websites as “traditional” open-membership spaces and places. This means that anyone can become a member, irrespective of differentness in hobbies, beliefs, views or political persuasion. For this reason, the new interactive media lends itself for effective use and exercise of citizenship among the poor communities, even in starkly unequal societies such as South Africa. Despite claims of infiltration in some cases, it is not as yet evidently clear how the state would dominate the state-society interface through this potentially effective mode of participation. Indeed, there are dangers associated with social networking; and, these include data theft and viruses, which are on the rise. The most prevalent danger though often involves online predators or individuals who claim to be someone that they are not. However, these

dangers cannot preclude the use of networking online. Addiction may be the most worrying site effect of the new interactive media; and, Skog (2005) observes that social networking sites have brought tremendous changes in people's life. It is now easier and cheaper to chat over the phone with a friend using Mxit, Facebook and Twitter. Some people have even got addicted to the networking sites and use them more often and as such their life is completely influenced by the frequent usage. In the final analysis, it should be accepted that by design, SNSs are designed to foster social interactions in a virtual environment wherein communication is facilitated through information posted in the profile by the users themselves. Communication can take place through a variety of applications similar to email or online message boards. Such interactions can potentially address a variety of social and political matters. With proliferation of social networking online, there may be no reasons to avoid using it to enhance exercises of citizenship for good governance and public service delivery among poor people.

Conclusion

This paper has argued that genuine exercise of citizenship by the majority of the poor continues to be elusive due largely to the power relations, exercised through conventional media among other things, embedded in the state-society interactions. Access to conventional media is highly variable and dependent upon economic and socio-political class. Whereas the "haves" access all forms of media, poor people may be limited to the social media networks, unless when conventional media seek to exploit their plight for suspicious, unspecified agendas. On the one hand, it cannot be concluded with uncertainty that conventional media act as a responsible watchdog over state accountability and good governance at both the individual and institutional scales. The critique of government policies and activities by conventional media has indeed kept politicians and public officials on their toes in dealing with public affairs; simultaneously, conventional media has been criticized for being goaded and abused by capital. On the other hand, social media networks too, despite being accessible to ordinary citizens, uncensored and offering full power to the end users, have been criticized for allowing the spread of uninformed, clumsy, opaque and irresponsible hearsay. However, social media networks seem to provide the best available option for poor people in exercising citizenship for service delivery. This paper proposes that the local state too should seek to rely on social media networks for education, information exchange and learning about the public's genuine needs, as well as managing fair state-society relations.

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