

# Media Broadcasters as Agents of Participatory Communication through Audience Involvement: MultiChoice's Strategies

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## ABSTRACT

Transnational media broadcasters, including MultiChoice, cater to global (or continental) audiences, but have primary obligations to local domains in their country of origin. This study explores MultiChoice's approach to both its South African and pan-African audiences. We proffer concrete examples of the media as vehicles of inclusive and participatory communication, with a focus on audience involvement strategies, premised on the notion that broadcasters must tailor their programmes to suit the viewing needs of their audiences. The research draws on the political economy of communication, the circuit of culture, and cultural proximity. The qualitative study utilises descriptive data gathered from existing sources. The findings indicate that MultiChoice is involved in the advancement of the South African media industry through local content programming, aided by audience-specific channel distributions and social media involvement. The availability of these local channels satisfies the need for cultural proximity, showcasing local and relatable media content. Efforts by MultiChoice to include "previously disadvantaged groups", as stipulated in the government's black economic empowerment (BEE) policy, are examined. In conclusion, media can promote people-centered communication, allowing local audiences to make their opinions about societal issues known and thus participate in dialogic communication.

**Key words:** transnational media broadcaster; inclusive and participatory communication; dialogic communication

Despite the fact that a handful of media conglomerates—mostly deemed Western in nature—dominate the global scene, emerging southern-based conglomerates such as Naspers (an abbreviated Afrikaans form of "National Newspapers") have created conditions for capital contra-flows. As a transnational corporation (TNC) with facilities in various countries, Naspers is involved in both the South African and the global

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mediascapes to an unprecedented degree. It is heavily involved in Internet services, pay television, print media, and technological advances (Naspers 2014).

MultiChoice, a transnational media broadcaster, is Naspers's pay television service provider in sub-Saharan Africa, through brands such as M-Net, SuperSport, and other channels available on its digital satellite television (DStv). As a transnational media broadcaster, MultiChoice provides transborder flows of information in the form of media content exchange. This study examines how MultiChoice pays attention to the needs of its South African audience while simultaneously servicing its transnational viewership. It also explains how audience involvement strategies can be adapted as a means through which media broadcasters—especially those within the South African mediascape—can foster participation.

Participatory communication in this context refers to the use of specific approaches, involving different stakeholders, to articulate social and decision making processes in order to offer solutions to the shortfalls of monologic communication (Tuftte and Mefalopulos 2009, v). Participatory communication is a committed involvement targeted at those deemed previously oppressed, in order to create critical awareness of the relevance of their own roles as subjects of transformation, rather than as mere objects (Freire 2005, 127).

This study examines the ways in which media broadcasters can be facilitators of this form of inclusive and participatory communication, which is usually perceived to be achievable only at the interpersonal/face-to-face level of communication. The challenge here is to pinpoint media as channels of dialogic (two-way) communication instead of limited to the stereotypical and monologic (one-way) flow. To accomplish this, we examine how traditional broadcasters such as MultiChoice have incorporated the new media of satellite communication and Internet-facilitated technology as means of participatory communication.

Annual and social reports by MultiChoice and Naspers and the primetime television ratings charts by Television South Africa (TVSA), covering the years 2013, 2014, 2015, and 2016, were among the sources of data examined. Other sources include the websites of Mzansi<sup>1</sup> Magic/Mzansi Wethu, DStv media sales, kykNET, kykNET's Facebook page, and the Government Gazettes released in 2014 and 2015 that describe the position of the Independent Communications Authority of South Africa (ICASA) on cultural proximity and the airing of local content. These sources were analysed by a symptomatic reading of the items, which entailed a search for relevant information on business websites on the one hand, and, on the other hand, a systematic search for statements on participation and interactivity, and conversations with viewers on social media.

1 "Mzansi" is the Xhosa word for South Africa.

## The Political Economy of Communication

“Political economy” is a term used to broadly and critically ask macro-level questions regarding media ownership, control, and other dynamics that bring together media industries with other industries. A political economy approach investigates processes of “consolidation, diversification, commercialization [and] internationalization” geared towards generating profits and audiences, and its subsequent consequences for media practices and content (Boyd-Barrett 1995, 186).

Within the context of media and communication, this approach reveals that political and economic relationships are determinants of media function, and the effects these have on social development and transformation (Fourie 2007, 135). The political economy of communication in the media addresses issues surrounding the relationship between communication systems and societal structures. These structures support and at the same time challenge the conglomeration of existing media class and ownership support mechanisms, including advertising, social relations, and government policies (McChesney 1998, 3). These are inclusive of the social and power relations involved in the production, distribution, and consumption chain of communicative encounters (Mosco 2009). The social and power relations are those factors within an organisational structure that can influence media contents. The political economy of MultiChoice will indicate how it balances its obligations to the South African public in the face of some of these social factors, such as power and size, drawing attention especially to its channels of media distribution and broadcasting. This is the first theoretical stance of this study.

The second theoretical underpinning is the circuit of culture. The idea of the circuit, initiated by Richard Johnson and further developed by Paul du Gay et al. (1997), consists of five categories: representation, identity, production, consumption, and regulation. For the purposes of this study, only media representation and regulation are addressed, to ascertain how MultiChoice has represented its content locally within the guiding policies—that is, the regulations of the South African mediascape that encourage local programming. Broadcasters such as MultiChoice attempt to adequately represent media texts in a manner that is appealing to target audiences, because representation “informs our outlook on various groups and cultures—our own and those of others—[... thus] affecting how social relations are played out” (Long and Wall 2013, 102).

Regulation, another category on the circuit, includes those guidelines by which media organisations must abide. The issues raised in the current research deal with the political economy of organisations in terms of size, power, and finance that necessitates interventions in the form of policies. These policies are institutionalised systems of control wielded by governments over media organisational structures, conduct, performance, and outputs (Jan 2009, 73). Media regulations are constituted in the interest of the public. A cogent example is the institution of the black economic empowerment (BEE) policy and transformation charters within South Africa to facilitate racial inclusion of once marginalised groups in the ownership and control of

organisations (Vilakati and Mavindidze 2014). BEE was a central policy initiated by the government to address the country's historical legacy of "economic exclusion and material inequality" (Davie 2005, 141). The broad-based black economic empowerment (BBBEE) strategy, officially introduced in 2003 as a means of addressing South Africa's "entrenched inequalities", has continued to characterise the country's economy, and has been accused of adversely affecting its economic growth (Davie 2005, 142).

The focus of this study is on statutory regulations that guide media programming within the South African mediascape. Statutory regulations are outcomes from instituted regulatory bodies established by the government. An example is ICASA, formerly known as the Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA), which regulates broadcasting and telecommunications within South Africa (Hadland et al. 2008).

The third theoretical dimension is that of cultural proximity. The notion of cultural proximity was initiated by Ithiel de Sola Pool and further developed in media studies by Joseph Straubhaar (2007, 196; see also Ksiazek and Webster 2008, 486). Cultural proximity identifies an individual's desire for an analogous cultural product, a desire which can be satisfied through culturally relevant television texts, music genres, and Internet sites (Straubhaar, LaRose, and Davenport 2015). Such individuals mostly belong to a similar geo-linguistic space—the distribution of language geographically—or possess similar cultural backgrounds and norms (Straubhaar 2007). The relevance of this is to identify ways in which cultural proximity has been considered in the representation and broadcasting of media programming through MultiChoice, and the guiding media policies that encourage cultural proximity.

## The South African Mediascape

The apartheid mediascape was characterised by a sense of strong racial exclusion—a situation where the minority population dominated the majority population—even though the media sector was credited to be highly advanced compared to others in sub-Saharan Africa (Milton and Fourie 2015, 181; Wigston 2007, 4). This was prior to the democratic era, heralded by the first democratic elections in 1994, that ushered in a more vibrant and free press.

During the apartheid period, the media found themselves in a difficult position, with limited space to manoeuvre. While the English-language press resisted the more draconian policies of the National Party-dominated government structures, the Afrikaans language press was more supportive of the state (Tomaselli, Teer-Tomaselli, and Muller 1987). The broadcasting sector was dominated by the state broadcaster, the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC), whose signal footprints were largely coincident with race-space allocations (Hayman and Tomaselli 1989). M-Net was the only broadcaster operating in the pay television sector. This subscription service, initially a joint venture in 1986 between the four major press houses (Naspers, Argus, Times

Media, and Perskor), was gradually secured by the Afrikaans news group Nasionale Pers (Naspers), which became its sole proprietor. M-Net's licence did not extend to the broadcasting of news, and thus the entertainment mix, apart from the investigative *Carte Blanche*, was notably apolitical and socially bland, despite the fact that M-Net was established as a subscription service to compete (though to a limited extent) with the SABC in television broadcasting (Milton and Fourie 2015, 185; Wigston 2007, 5).

The establishment of the IBA in 1993 signalled the start of change within the broadcasting sector (Wigston 2007). With the growing importance of convergence between broadcasting, telephony, and the Internet, the IBA merged with the South African Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (SATRA) in 2000 to form ICASA (Moyo and Hlongwane 2009). The implication of this was "that the mediascape became expanded and more competitive, making room for more black businesses and the advent of new technologies, which implied that a single broadcast entity could no longer control the order of things" (Berger 2001, 8). Another strategy of the transitional post-apartheid government to ensure adequate inclusion of groups previously discriminated against was the establishment of the BEE policy for previously historically disadvantaged individuals (HDIs).

All the above were measures of inclusive and participatory development and communication that further modified audience profiles and viewing habits, enabling the emergence of a multichannel mediascape. The resulting plurality has ensured that diverse content is made available to the populace, who in turn now have the opportunity to make their opinions known. Television viewing advances in pay television services such as MultiChoice and Netflix, enhanced by Internet technology and online streaming, have plunged the South African mediascape into a higher competitive stratum. The loss of some DStv subscribers to Netflix necessitated the introduction of DStv's streaming-only package (Vermeulen 2018). Such competitiveness cripples monopoly and aids growth within the mediascape.

## The Global Media as Vehicles of Globalisation

The impact of the media on societies could sustain or weaken the fabric of social life, as "the more efficient the media is in communicating, the more effective it is in (e) stablishing or (dis)establishing existing social, political, cultural, economic, legal, religious and moral arrangements" (Ambirajan 2000, 2141). As a result of globalisation, the global media fulfil other important roles—apart from their basic functions of information, education, and entertainment—in this ever-changing global terrain.

Globalisation makes global, national, regional, and local boundaries porous to the influx and exchange of information—an interactive process of flow and counter-flow not limited by time, space, or distance—and brings people into closer contact with one another (Thussu 2010; Wang 2008, 204). Media globalisation creates a unifying

trend that incorporates different societies as a single whole—that is, into one world—in much the same way as predicted by Marshall McLuhan (1964, 93); thus the media offer essential channels enabling inter-cultural flows (Jan 2009, 73). The manner in which these media direct symbolic resources provides recourse that involves audiences in participatory ways.

Although Western media are prominent in the global scene, media industries that are heavily invested across the world have also originated from other countries (Jan 2009, 69; Thussu 2010). Such is the case of Naspers, which has positioned itself as a dominant TNC in South Africa, on the African continent, and beyond. TNCs are primary vehicles promoting the phenomenon of the global media (Lyons 2014). A TNC “maintains facilities in more than one country and plans its operations and investments in multi-country perspectives” (Herman and McChesney 1997, 13). A TNC is usually domiciled in a major headquarters, with operating arms in different locations around the world. MultiChoice, being a subsidiary of Naspers, was chosen as the case study due to its uniqueness as a transnational broadcaster operating from South Africa. Despite the fact that transnational broadcasters such as MultiChoice cater to the listener- and viewership needs of global audiences, their primary obligations are still towards audiences within the local contexts where their headquarters are based.

## Incorporation of New Media Technologies

New information and communications technologies (ICTs) provide opportunities for large corporations to maximise their profits and expand into new and foreign markets (Jan 2009, 67). Technological progress or advancement has captured and framed forms of interaction at new levels that were not initially visible. Such improvements are evident in areas such as mobile telephony, the Internet and Internet-mediated platforms (websites, social media, and so on), and computing systems, among others.

The Internet is a primary factor in the globalised free-flow of information from one place to another. It gives media producers and broadcasters the means to measure and also monitor consumer feedback, due to its largely uncensored and unrestricted nature. Therefore, the integration of participatory communication via social media—a paradigmatic shift from the monologic or one-way traditional communicative approach to an interpersonal approach—incorporates social media and users in an inclusive, dialogic communicative encounter. The term “dialogic communication” describes a two-way information flow and an open-ended process of interactivity. Dialogic communication can assess risks, identify the opportunities provided, prevent impending problems, and also point out or confirm needed changes (Tufte and Mefalopulos 2009, 15).

The use of social media for networking facilitates a similar user-interactive process. Angelina Russo and her colleagues (2010), in their study on how social media were

used to engage museum users in participatory communication, concluded that social media can be leveraged for various participatory and awareness purposes. Their conclusion was based on the fact that the social media space offers opportunities for museums to create online communities for those with similar interests in cultural information. Social media thus facilitate participative cultural experiences (Russo et al. 2010, 22). The Internet and social media—notwithstanding the fact that they can be used for questionable motives—can provide access to a wider reach of people, because they are cost-effective in the sense that all that may be needed are receptive Internet-enabled devices, in contrast to face-to-face approaches. These media can thus serve as platforms for dialogues and act as catalysts of social mobilisation, not only as channels of communication (Tufté and Mefalopulos 2009, 12).

People's active involvement on social media helps media organisations to assess their services through consumer feedback, creating another point of view on the use of mass media as a monologic or one-way communication process. Media involvement can thus be dialogic because of the audiences' and producers'/broadcasters' access to interactive social media feeds—a computer-mediated data gathering process that offers an alternative to face-to-face contexts in situations where populations may be uncomfortable or unavailable to express themselves (Marshall and Rossman 2011). In order to ensure a form of participatory communication, the public should be granted admission to spaces of communication and dialogue. This is because participatory communication involves an approach of “visibility” (concretely or abstractly/anonymously, especially online) and “voice” within the mediated public sphere (Tufté and Mefalopulos 2009, 12).

A five-step participatory communication strategy around which media-specific concerns evolve is offered by Thomas Tufté and Paolo Mefalopulos (2009, 12–13). These are type of media, level[s] of media, nature of media, institutional characteristics of media, and economic logics. These strategies will be adapted to demonstrate the placement of MultiChoice and how it can function as an agent of participatory communication rather than the stereotypic monologic function commonly associated with the mass media.

## Regulations on Local Programming

The discussion of regulations and media policies in South Africa directs our attention to local content programming and how this attempts to meet the need that may be created by cultural proximity. ICASA stipulates that local content on television and radio should reflect the life experiences, aspirations, languages, and cultural diversity of the country, as this enhances the development of the country (2014, 5). Local content provisions aim to protect people's cultural identity and promote content and cultural diversity. ICASA also stipulates that the production, distribution, and consumption of local content must be promoted by media outlets, thus ensuring the growth of the local media industry by promoting a vibrant and diverse media (2014, 6).

The local content regulations aim to develop cultural identities, encourage plurality of views, promote freedom of expression, create access to information and language rights, promote local national pride and social cohesion, promote the domestic media market (especially for indigenous contents), develop a market that can be vibrant within a global market, and also promote and sustain a national culture (ICASA 2014, 8). The execution of these provisions is expected to lead to a standard of equity for all identities present within South Africa, because “broadcasting plays an integral role in developing and reflecting a South African identity, its character and cultural diversity within the framework of national unity” (White Paper on Broadcasting Policy 1998, in ICASA 2015, 4). The policy also promotes the broadcasting of content in the country’s 11 official languages, to encourage regional and cultural diversity and freedom of expression (ICASA 2014, 6)—a major pointer to the promotion of cultural proximity.

## Analytical Discussions of MultiChoice’s Participatory Approaches

For the media to be vibrant and inclusive of its public, the media must “speak in a language understood” by its audience (Balancing Act 2014). MultiChoice ensures that its activities extend to corporate social investment by participating in social transformation, providing services, and rendering assistance to individuals and communities through advances in technology (MultiChoice 2013, 8; MultiChoice 2015b, 5).

M-Net is one of the major channel service providers of MultiChoice via DStv. M-Net “delivers premium thematic channels and exclusive content (sourced from international content owners and commissioned localised productions) to DStv customers in South Africa and the rest of the continent” (MultiChoice 2015b, 6). M-Net is required by ICASA to fulfil minimum local content production quotas (ICASA 2014, 6). According to Imtiaz Patel, the chief executive officer of video entertainment for Naspers, in order to further satisfy M-Net’s local audience and to fulfil its production quota, it “produces a large component of its content locally, stimulating the local production industry and supporting the local economy [... which is] evident in the increase in local programming” (MultiChoice 2013, 17). In addition, as a way to contribute to the South African mediascape, “M-Net and MultiChoice invest more than R1.5 bn a year on [*sic*] local content” (MultiChoice 2015a, 20).

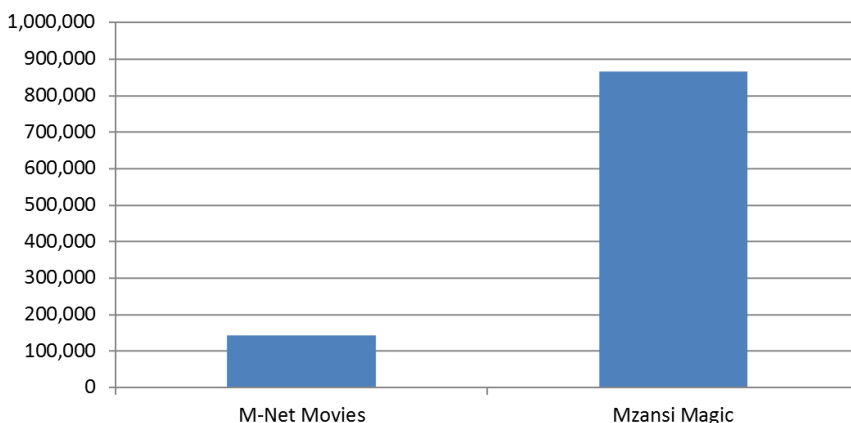
Furthermore, in order to improve its appeal to low-income households, MultiChoice acquired more programmes and became more involved in producing its own local programmes (Naspers 2008, 11), which are screened on audience-specific local channels such as Mzansi Magic, Mzansi Wethu, and kykNET, alongside channels with global/continental interests such as the M-Net movie channels and their social media pages (MultiChoice 2013, 32). These local channels feature indigenous languages, indicating the level of cultural proximity that MultiChoice had to consider in the creation of these



channels for its local audiences. The other continental channels that are not limited to South Africa, such as the M-Net movie channels, serve as channels of interest to both the South African and continental audiences. These are indications that the political economy of MultiChoice in terms of social relations, power, and size contributes to its compliance with regulatory policies and its success in the inclusion of its audiences in participatory communication through audience-specific channels and the interactive websites of these channels.

The other strategies accomplished through content programming in order to promote cultural proximity will be illustrated through a comparative example of *Idols*, a global television reality format that has both global/continental and local appeal. These strategies are also employed in instances where global television content is adjusted to local contexts. For instance, M-Net Movies, being the commissioning broadcaster of the *Idols* franchise, has been able to further strengthen the stance of cultural proximity—that is, the desire for local and relatable content—by limiting the broadcasting of the local version, *Idols South Africa*, to Mzansi Magic, although it aired on M-Net Movies and Mzansi Magic simultaneously. This may be attributed to the higher viewership obtained on Mzansi Magic compared with that of M-Net Movies, as shown in Figure 1 below, and the relative ease of access because of the availability of Mzansi Magic on cheaper bouquets in comparison with M-Net Movies.

### Viewership trends for *Idols South Africa*



**Figure 1:** Viewership for *Idols South Africa* on M-Net Movies and Mzansi Magic (TVSA 2016a)

The comparison shown in Figure 1 was randomly done between October 26, 2015 and November 15, 2015, the last four weeks that the show was aired on M-Net Movies and Mzansi Magic simultaneously. The average viewership was 142,750 on M-Net Movies and 866,250 on Mzansi Magic, as listed on the primetime TV ratings of TVSA (2016a). This illustrates an important aspect of cultural proximity, in that members of

the audience may be more attracted to relatable local media content or channels (Hansen 2014), since Mzansi Magic is an audience-specific channel for South Africans and also a major broadcaster of local content.

Additionally, Mzansi Magic aims to position itself as “an authentic South African entertainment channel” (DStv Media Sales 2016a). It offers a variety of content, of both local and international genres, such as films, music specials, telenovelas, and many others, but with a strong focus on locally produced content in order to promote local media content within the South African mediascape and beyond (TVSA 2016b). In order to engage producers and South African film makers, M-Net partnered with these key players to develop Mzansi Magic. This was done by encouraging talented local artists to produce content that has both local and universal appeal, to aid the development of the South African mediascape (TVSA 2016b).

A medium such as Mzansi Magic utilises social media as platforms for engaging its audience. Prominent among these media is its main website (<http://mzansimagic.dstv.com/>), which serves as a link to its other social media accounts. Another prominent feature is the “social” column, which contains opinions and comments from viewers on a variety of programmes aired on Mzansi Magic, for instance *Mzansi Comedy Wednesdays*, *Our Perfect Wedding* (OPW) and *Isibaya* among others (Mzansi Magic 2016a). The social space mainly features Twitter feeds and comments with trending topics and Twitter handles/hashtags<sup>2</sup> such as #MzansiComedyWednesdays, #opw, #mandlexi, and so on.

Likewise, Mzansi Wethu, a channel owned by M-Net, provides local entertainment mostly in vernacular (South African languages) in compliance with ICASA’s regulations in order to “reflect the day-to-day reality of South Africans” (DStv Media Sales 2016b). Mzansi Wethu is categorised under the channel archives of Mzansi Magic; hence, its social media outlook is the same as that of Mzansi Magic (Mzansi Magic 2016b). KykNET is another channel owned by M-Net. It is a purely Afrikaans channel with “real local flavour” (DStv Media Sales 2016a). The outlook of its website is similar to that of Mzansi Magic. The icons of its other social media accounts, such as WeChat, Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, are located conspicuously at the top right-hand corner of the page. For each feature article on the website, there are comment columns beneath the articles where fans and “followers” can make their opinions known about such articles and related trends (see <http://mzansimagic.dstv.com/>).

The social media involvement strategy using platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and other accounts functions as a means of participatory communication, which supports Srinivasa Ambirajan’s (2000) view of the media as contributing to society building. Through the active participation of media producers and consumers, who use these

2 A “hashtag” is a Twitter term, represented by the pound sign (#) followed by word(s) without spaces between them. Its purpose is to draw attention to the key words in the sentence (Lewis 2013) or a trending topic.

media as platforms for dialogues, opportunities for social relations and mobilisation are created (Tuftes and Mefalopoulos 2009). An instance of the interactive nature of one channel's website will be explained to show how producers and consumers relate within the social media space. Figure 2 below illustrates this in light of the channel's Facebook page and how the social media team have responded and involved their fans in a dialogic encounter.



Figure 2: kykNET's Facebook comments on *Hotel* (kykNET 2016)

Figure 2 depicts a level of interaction between the fans and the administrators of the Facebook account. It shows the comments of an Afrikaans fan<sup>3</sup> and an English fan, and the response of kykNET in Afrikaans and English. The dialogue was about a programme (*Hotel*) that was to be aired on the kykNET channel on DSTv. This is an instance which shows an interactive and participatory encounter between “producers” (kykNET) and “consumers” (audience/fans).

By adapting and relating Tuftes and Mefalopoulos's (2009) five-step participatory communication strategy to the roles of MultiChoice (in terms of channel distribution and social media awareness within the South African mediascape), the way in which media broadcasters can be channels of interactive, inclusive, and participatory communication is emphasised. In this instance, the type of media is a mass-mediated broadcasting organisation that uses the new media of satellite communication and the Internet through social media platforms that facilitate interactivity. This broadcaster operates at the transnational level, because its broadcasts transcend South Africa; however, it

3 The Afrikaans fan commented that the show was hilarious.

still focuses on local content while balancing continental demands. The nature of this transnational media broadcaster is both electronic and interactive, because of its satellite broadcasts and social media awareness, while its institutional characteristics and economic logic are those of private and commercial positions respectively. Considering the political economy of MultiChoice in terms of its media functions, development, and transformation (Fourie 2007), it is apparent that, although it is transnational, it actively involves its audiences via its electronic and interactive platforms in order to cater to the local audience within South Africa. Additionally, in compliance with the BEE policy, MultiChoice's total BEE score for the 2012/2013 fiscal year was 85,82%<sup>4</sup>. Its ownership was 102,87%<sup>5</sup>; management control 98,94%; skills development 84,71%; preferential procurement 81,52%; enterprise development 78,91%; socio-economic development 75,85%; and employment equity 64,75% (MultiChoice 2013, 36).

To conclude, in order to maintain the close link between government policies and its social relations (McChesney 1998), MultiChoice has endeavoured to create a balance of local content on audience-specific channels and people-involvement through its BEE policy and social media strategies. The inclusion of marginalised groups of South Africans via BEE is a way to involve them in the day-to-day activities of the company and welcome their inputs on media programming and broadcasting via MultiChoice.

The abovementioned participatory and social media involvement strategies used by MultiChoice illustrate how the mass media can be interactive and participatory through the involvement of a dialogic mode of communication, especially via electronic and Internet-enabled channels. In this way, the media can involve people rather than limiting participatory communication to a one-on-one or face-to-face approach, as has been the case in recent times.

## Conclusion

The political economy of the transnational broadcaster MultiChoice indicates its commitment to local programming and the furtherance of the local media industry within South Africa. This was evident from its array of thematic channels made available in South African languages (with the South African audience in mind, especially in terms of airing local programmes) and the accompanying social media websites for these channels. The representations of thematic channels are also in accordance with ICASA's local content stipulations, particularly as regards language use—another important aspect of cultural proximity. The availability of these local channels will in one way or

4 This score was attained due to the *Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment Policy*, an Act established with the expectation that organisations will comply with its guidelines on the active involvement and participation of previously marginalised groups.

5 According to the *Amended Broad-Based Black Empowerment Codes of Good Practice* of the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) in South Africa (DTI 2012), the total points of the Ownership Scorecard increased from 100 to 105; hence this score attained by MultiChoice.

another fill the void created by cultural proximity, because they are strategically poised to showcase more local and relatable media contents. The implication of this is that local media content can be used as avenues for communicating about societal matters on a wider scale to a wider audience, especially in instances where the media corporation's reach transcends local broadcasting. The issues raised will generate talking points on social media, where relevant stakeholders can learn how people feel about those issues and topics. These are ways in which people can be involved.

The political economy of MultiChoice also shows how participatory communication can be developed through the inclusion of previously disadvantaged groups, in tandem with the BEE policy. Equally, in the case of guiding policies, if the aims of local content regulations (among other aims) are met—in the areas of cultural identity, plurality of views, freedom of expression, and other information and language rights—these will pave the way for a more synergised media sector that involves both media organisations and the public.

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