The media as agents of democracy in Mauritius: Issues and challenges since independence

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and on the African continent:

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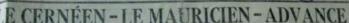








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Happy Birthday

Agitations!

Mauritius



e 7,9% en trois mois

WANTED

VENUS DEPARTMENTAL STORE







à l'ordre du jour



Very brief timeline

Multiplicity of media titles over the years after independence: Cernéen,
Advance, Le Mauricien, La Sentinelle, L'express, 5-Plus Dimanche, Défi
Plus.... + many medium-size and smaller players

- Public radio since 1927 Private radio since 2002
- Public TV since 1965 No private TV!

Like elsewhere, big changes since 2010s with new media players

Media as "agents" of democracy

The People

Media

Political representatives / State

Economic agents

•••

Media in the political system

Key role in public sphere to channel information to and from citizens

Myth of objective, unbiased conduit / forum:

- Agenda setting
- Gatekeepers
- Ideological stance
- Economic imperatives

No better alternative yet though...

Media as "agents" of democracy

The People

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Economic agents

•••

Media and Politics

Journalism is political





Journalism shouldn't be politicized. But it is political. Three of these five are political. Image via @paulbradshaw



Media and Politics

Media as Fourth Estate

- 1970s: State censorship
- 1984: Newspaper and Periodicals (Amendment) Bill
- 1994: Creation of Media Trust
- 2005-2015: Paralysis of Media Trust
- 2013: Robertson's preliminary report
- 2017: Parliament TV

Several sporadic onslaughts on media: boycotts, burning of newspapers, interrogations, lawsuits (Dhooharika), temporary banning from National Assembly...

Yet, overall, the media in Mauritius are perceived as free and independent.

Media as "agents" of democracy

The People

<u>Media</u>

Political representatives / State

Economic agents

•••

Media and economic agents

Corporate stronghold

- Links/dependency on corporate world with legacy of sugar industry
- Ownership structures: families, shareholders from big corporations, media barons
- Advertising as key source of revenue = patronage

Media as "agents" of democracy

Political representatives / State

Economic agents

The People

<u>Media</u>

Media and the people (also known as the audience)

Media awareness and literacy. Consider the overall ecosystem.

- Is it diverse enough?
- Taken together, is there sufficiently broad coverage?
- Are ideological stances clear?
- Are affinities (economic and political) clear to audiences?
- Do audiences understand the basic rules of engagement?

"Nous vendons du temps de cerveau humain à Coca-Cola"

Constraints

- Merging / consolidation leading to hegemonic tendencies
- Fragmentation of audiences

- Patronage journalism
- "He said/she said" journalism + copycat reporting
- Entertainment/infotainment
- Rise of sensationalism/voyeurism
- Little serious long haul investigation
- Pursuit of likes and shares through social media and fad apps
- Native advertising

Constraints (ctd)

- Political affiliation/affinities, the communicating vase (newsrooms/PR)
- Legal and regulatory constraints
 - Official Secrets Act.
 - Public service management manual chilling effect
 - Reliance on internal officious sources
- Lack of professional standards /absence of a unified ethical framework
 - No self-regulation (Morgan and Robertson)
 - Short-lived associations or unions: AJM, USEP, NEPA

Constraints (ctd)

- High turnover rate
 - o "he says, she says" journalism
 - o simplistic reporting
 - o desk and phone journalism
- Difficulty to collaborate
- Little to no induction
- Ego wars

Still, good ranking

- Relatively free despite constraints and weak framework
- No arrests, no physical aggression, no deaths
- Diverse players

<u>Love</u>-hate relationship with political figures

Opportunities/Challenges

- Fragmentation of audiences / social media / G/F/T
- Flurry of new entrants: pure players and bloggers thanks to cheaper tech and online media
- Audience participation (though policed and moderated) and co-creation - the "people formerly known as the audience"
- The "Paul Lismore" phenomenon

Final words

Fundamentals still in dire need of consolidation

Solidarity in profession

Clear self-regulation and accountability

Serious innovation and not just clickbait journalism

Need of firewall between editorial and advertising departments