

Social media as a tool for social transformation: Encouraging Civic Engagement, Good Governance and Democratisation?

17th of May

Joint seminar hosted by the Media, Empowerment and Democracy in East Africa (MEDIeA) research project

Nairobi

Boulevard Hotel

9.30 am – 4.00 pm

Media are crucial to the exercise of freedom of expression. Public opinion can only be formed if a public that engages in rational discussion is able to create and occupy a communicative space that is, ideally, free and independent of established interests and as well as, open and accessible to all citizens. The ongoing emergence and convergence of the electronic media has changed notions of the public sphere radically.

Social media amongst other Web 2.0 applications have a decisive potential to facilitate ‘alternative’ spaces of mediated communication which may contribute to an emerging, more participatory and egalitarian public sphere. They not only play an increasing role in the mediation of social networks, but they also allow for the articulation of the voice of those, who are often silenced by the gate-keeping processes of mainstream media.

However the potential of participatory and user-generated-content driven online networks such as Twitter, Facebook, the blogosphere etc. is far from uncontested. Not just the structure of old and new media, but the entire structure of society is subject to change, as new network structures come into place. The technological infrastructures of communication networks are influencing the social structure of society; their development is closely related to the development of social structures in a process of interchange and mutual dependence. New technologies (as employed by mass and network media) are creating a new public sphere, a new realm of mediated democracy, and are thus challenging public intellectuals to gain techno-literacy and to make use of the new technologies for promoting progressive causes and social transformations.

It is in this context that our MEDIeA seminar invites you to discuss the transformative affordances of the Web 2.0 in relation to issues of civic engagement, an advocacy approach to

communication and the struggle for a democratic public sphere. A specific, but not exclusive regional focus will be on emergent trends in Kenya and Tanzania.

The invited guest speakers, including both practitioners and academics, will address some of the far-reaching implications of the contemporary transformation of the media environment in these countries, for the way media development and e-participation strategies may practice and understand the encouragement of a multi-layered, democratic public sphere.

A number of presenters from Kenya, Tanzania and Denmark will, on the one hand, question the challenges faced by strategic communicative intervention: What are the particular challenges and constraints for the proliferation and sustainability of civil society-centered initiatives to e-advocacy and digital empowerment. As they will, on the other hand, question the unplanned, user-driven proliferation of online media uses and new media habits that characterize an ever growing number of citizens' appropriation and participation of digital network platforms via mobile phones and the computer.

Participation is free, but we kindly ask you to register with Norbert Wildermuth (norbert@ruc.dk) or call +254 (0) 724 391 980) to facilitate our logistic planning.