

# **UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL**

## **Title of the study:**

Investigating and exploring the role of community newspapers against  
the background of profit-driven media environment: a  
Pietermaritzburg based study

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Cultural Studies, in the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg Campus.**

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**Unless otherwise specified in the project, this dissertation is the author's own original  
work.**

**2010**

## DECLARATION

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I declare that this thesis is my own work, except where use has been made of the scholarship of other authors, they have been duly acknowledged in the text. This research has not been submitted before, for any degree at any other University.

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**Mauricio Paulo Langa** \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

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## **Dedication**

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This project is dedicated to my late parents Paulo and Lucia Langa, and my grandmother Rosalia Langa, for the support, encouragement and love they have shown me while they were still in this world.

## Abstract

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The aim of the study is to investigate and explore the role of community newspapers against the background of profit-driven media environment.

The study adopted a qualitative research method. Data was collected using in-depth interviews with editors of the four community newspapers under study namely *Public Eye*, *The Mirror*, *Echo* and *Edendale Eyethu*, as well as readers of these publications. The study used focus group discussions as an additional qualitative instrument for data gathering. The SPSS software programme was used to present the data from the readers.

### Findings of the study

The study found that media conglomerates and other businesses on the media possess both the human and financial resources to place them in a powerful position to determine the media content. However, while we know that this happens, some interventions could be considered to make sure that a more viable and sustainable balance between commerce and community is found and maintained. The study also showed that due to “market-driven journalism” embraced by the community newspapers, the right of the readers or consumers is increasingly compromised, and also that the profit-driven aspects of these publications confirm that media or journalism ethics of the community press is also at stake in that appear to benefit private and public sectors. This means the ample space allocated to advertisers as evidenced in almost every page of these newspapers, contribute to denying the readers access to relevant news or information. The study found that local content and political news are of great relevance to the readers, Community newspapers are vital in creating awareness amongst community members of different events taking place in the community hence enabling them to take an active part in different aspects of developments taking place. Community members would like to see more in-depth coverage in local news content, more coverage in events taking place locally such as community initiative projects, and more coverage on schools sports tournaments.

## Table of contents

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### Chapter 1

1.1 Introduction.....	1
1.2 Newspapers in Pietermaritzburg Region .....	3
1.3 Research problems and objectives .....	6
1.4 Research questions.....	7
1.5 Rationale of the study .....	8
1.6 Preliminary literature study.....	9
1.7 Conclusion .....	13

### Chapter 2

Theoretical Frame work and Literature Review .....	14
2.1 Introduction.....	14
2.2 What is community? .....	15
2.3 Community development and Development Journalism.....	17
2.4 The Notion of Community Newspapers .....	20
2.5 Advertisements and Community Newspapers .....	22
2.6 Agenda Setting and Media Hegemony .....	24
2.7 Community Newspapers in South Africa .....	28
2.8 Community newspapers enhancing public sphere .....	34
2.9 Links between the community and the community newspapers .....	35
2.10 Media regulations.....	41
2.10.1 Globalization and Political Economy .....	43
2.10.2 Analysis of four community newspapers from the main approaches used.....	45

### **Chapter 3**

Research Methodology and Methods.....	47
3.1 Introduction.....	47
3.2 Data Capture: Brief content analysis .....	48
3.3 Data collection: interview schedules .....	49
3.4 Sampling .....	50
3.5 Data Analysis.....	52
3.6 Conclusion .....	53

### **Chapter 4**

Data collection and Analysis .....	54
4.1 Introduction.....	54
4.2 Content analysis .....	54
4.3 Presentation of data from the readers.....	59
4.3.1 Which community newspapers respondents read.....	59
4.3.2 Reasons for reading the local paper.....	61
4.3.3 What is special about the newspaper respondents read.....	63
4.3.4 If the newspaper you read ceased to exist which other paper would you read.....	64
4.3.5 The reason for choosing this particular paper.....	66
4.3.6 In what way does the community paper influence the reader.....	67
4.3.7 The main interest of the readers in the community papers.....	69
4.3.8 Readers' contribution of articles to the local papers.....	71
4.3.9 Readers' reasons for contributing articles to the local papers.....	72
4.3.10 Readers attention to advertisements.....	74
4.3.11 The influence of advertisers on consumers.....	75

4.3.12 Readers' expectation of the local newspapers.....	77
4.3.13 Readers' newspapers other than the local papers.....	79
4.3.14 Readers' opinions on whether community papers are more commercial tools than means of news provision.....	80
4.4 Data from Editors.....	81
4.5 Community Newspapers: Means of information and community building tools.....	84
4.6 Touching community lives through local content and involvement.....	86
4.7 Community Newspapers and community links .....	88
4.8 Community newspapers and competition for advertisements .....	90
4.9 Community newspapers and convergence.....	92
4.10 Focus Group.....	94
4.10.1 Data from Focus Group Discussions .....	95
4.10.2 Means of information and community building .....	96
4.10.3 Sensational reporting .....	97
4.10.4 Cultural diversity and community integration .....	99
4.10.5 Community newspapers: promoters of consumerism.....	100
4.11 Distribution Factors .....	103
4.12 Conclusion.....	105

## **Chapter 5**

Discussion of findings.....	106
5.1 Introduction.....	106
5.2 Critical question one: .....	106
5.3 Critical question two: .....	108
5.4 Critical question three: .....	109
5.5 Critical question four: .....	111



5.6 Critical question five: .....	112
5.7 Public sphere and community newspapers .....	115
5.8 Readdressing the hegemonic role of the media .....	117
5.9 Agenda setting plagues freedom of expression .....	118
5.10 Community newspapers and Ethical matters.....	120
5.11 Potential and Limitations of Community Newspapers .....	121
5.12 Recommendations.....	123
5.13 Conclusion .....	124
<b>Chapter 6</b>	
Conclusion .....	125
6.1 Introduction.....	125
6.2 Limitations of this study .....	125
6.3 Area for further Research.....	126
6.4 Summary of the study .....	126
Bibliography .....	128
Appendix A: Letter of Informed Consent.....	133
Appendix B: Interview Schedule for the Editors .....	134
Appendix C: Interview Schedule for the Readers of Community Newspapers.....	137
Appendix D: Focus Group schedule .....	140

## List of tables

---

	Page
<b>Table 4.1</b> Which community newspapers respondents read.....	59
<b>Table 4.2</b> Reasons for reading the local community newspaper.....	61
<b>Table 4.3</b> what is special about the newspapers respondents read.....	63
<b>Table 4.4</b> If the newspaper you read ceased to exist which other paper would you read.....	64
<b>Table 4.5</b> Reasons for choosing this particular paper .....	66
<b>Table 4.6</b> In what way does the community newspaper influence the reader.....	67
<b>Table 4.7</b> The main interest of the readers in community papers .....	69
<b>Table 4.8</b> Readers' contribution of articles to the local papers .....	71
<b>Table 4.9</b> Readers' reasons for contributing articles to the local papers.....	72
<b>Table 4.10</b> Readers' attention to advertisements .....	74
<b>Table 4.11</b> The influence of advertisements on consumers.....	75
<b>Table 4.12</b> Readers' expectations of the local newspapers.....	77
<b>Table 4.13</b> Readers' papers, other than local papers .....	79
<b>Table 4.14</b> Readers' opinions on whether community papers are more commercial tools than means of news provision.....	80

## List of figures

---

	Page
<b>Figure 1</b> Four Pietermaritzburg community newspapers titles.....	3
<b>Figure 2</b> Jacob Zuma supporters outside Pietermaritzburg High Court.....	10
<b>Figure 4.1</b> Pie chart on content analysis for Public Eye.....	55
<b>Figure 4.2</b> Pie chart on content analysis for The Mirror.....	56
<b>Figure 4.3</b> Pie chart on content analysis for Edendale Eyethu.....	57
<b>Figure 4.4</b> Pie chart on content analysis for Echo.....	58
<b>Figure 4.5</b> Pie chart of the publications read by community readers.....	59
<b>Figure 4.6</b> Pie chart of the reasons why readers read community newspapers.....	61
<b>Figure 4.7</b> Pie chart about what is special of the newspaper respondents read.....	63
<b>Figure 4.8</b> Pie chart of alternative papers of the readers.....	64
<b>Figure 4.9</b> Pie chart of reasons for reading the community newspaper.....	66
<b>Figure 4.10</b> Pie chart about how community newspapers influence readers.....	67
<b>Figure 4.11</b> Pie chart about readers' main interest in community newspapers.....	69
<b>Figure 4.12</b> Pie chart whether readers contribute articles to the paper or not.....	71
<b>Figure 4.13</b> Pie chart as to why readers contribute news articles to local papers.....	72
<b>Figure 4.14</b> Pie chart about readers' attention to advertisements.....	74
<b>Figure 4.15</b> Pie chart about the influence of advertisements on consumers.....	75
<b>Figure 4.16</b> Pie chart about readers' expectations in local newspapers.....	77
<b>Figure 4.17</b> Pie chart readers' papers other than local community papers.....	79
<b>Figure 4.18</b> Pie chart about whether community newspapers are more commercial tools than means of news provisions.....	80

## Chapter 1

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*“with the establishment of South African democracy in 1994, media that focused on the needs and interests of specific communities became an ideal instrument to facilitate more diverse media access, and diverse voices as part of the country’s media transformation process,”* (Swanepoel and Steyn 2010:220).

### **1.1 Introduction**

Community newspapers play a significant role not only in the development of the media landscape in South Africa, but they also provide diversity of opinion. Thus they allow local people access to the media and information on various issues of concern. Swanepoel and Steyn pointed out “community newspapers provide information that reflects readers directly, enriches their lives and offers them a sense of safety and belonging” (2010:227). Since community newspapers are familiar with the needs of the communities they serve, they are therefore in a much better position to positively contribute towards socio-economic development in these respective communities. Communities, either rural or urban, which have a local community newspaper, have access to stories of domestic violence, housebreaking, and a missing child. Community initiatives or programmes are central to the newspapers editorial. The above relate to the normative media theory which according to Fourie (2009:190) is about the ideal role of the media in society. According to McQuail normative theory refers “to the ideas of right and responsibility that underlie expectations of benefit to individuals and society (2010:162).

This means, “community papers are a touchable media resource in that local press reaches a specific target audience, connecting consumer to a brand within a geographical designated area and hence the ability to touch the right market” (<http://www.biz-community.com>). This shows or depicts the marketing and advertising perspective of community newspapers. That is, apart from providing local news to the community, community newspapers also play a significant role in serving the interests of the corporate advertisers and readers as consumers and citizens. With the increasing and evident impact of the corporate world, as characterised by major media houses, coupled with political economy of the media, community newspapers find themselves in a rather compromising situation. For instance, the apparent drive to maximise commercial interests and profit poses a serious question about the community newspapers’ ability to maintain the pro-community orientation of providing relevant local news or information.

There are various community newspapers which also play different roles altogether. Such roles depend on the needs of the communities they serve. However, this research project, in order to provide a clear direction focuses only on four Pietermaritzburg-based community newspapers: *Public Eye*, *Edendale Eyethu* (owned by Capital Media Group) while *The Mirror* and *Echo* are part of *The Witness* (owned by Media 24).

See figure 1 below:



*Four Pietermaritzburg community newspapers titles*

## **1.2 Newspapers in Pietermaritzburg Region**

Newspapers are said to be the window reflecting what is happening in society. McNair pointed out that “journalism is our window on the world, our means of contact which, though shrinking is still beyond our direct, personal experience. It provides the information from which we draw our cognitive maps or reality,” (1992: 21). Through dissemination of news, communities are able to keep abreast with current affairs and be part of historical development in society.

The Pietermaritzburg area has for a long time been and continues to be, served by its only commercial and daily newspaper, *The Witness*, formally known as *The Natal Witness*. The newspaper is owned by Media 24 and “serves English readers throughout KwaZulu-Natal with most of its readers in greater Pietermaritzburg and inland KwaZulu-Natal,”

([www.southafrica.info/ess](http://www.southafrica.info/ess)). Since its inception in 1846, *The Witness* has managed to cover extensively the historical development in the province and of the country. In the recent past, for instance, in the 80's and early 90's the newspaper covered extensively the violence in Pietermaritzburg and the Midlands during the conflict between the Inkhata Freedom Party (IFP) and African National Congress (ANC). It also reported on the unbanning of the ANC and the release of Harry Gwala, a liberation struggle icon, from prison. The weekly appears on Saturdays and is distributed throughout KwaZulu-Natal. The company has also established community newspapers in and around Pietermaritzburg. Apart from *Echo* and *The Mirror* "other community paper interests of *The Witness* include Village Talk in Howick, the Greytown Gazette and five Fever titles," (<http://www.kzntopbusiness.co.za>).

Below is a brief description of the four newspapers which form part of this study. The description is based on the profile of the newspapers and comments made by the editors during the interviews.

*Public Eye*, which is part of Capital Media Group, was established in 1999. The newspaper targets mainly Indian readership and is distributed free of charge from door to door mainly in the Northdale area. According to the profile of the publication "the newspaper has a circulation of 30 000 and a readership of 120 000 readers weekly." According to the editor, they "continually resist the temptation to publish national content streams which will dilute our focus on catering for local content. However, this is sometimes difficult to avoid, particularly when we have larger paginations and a limited availability of local content."

*Edendale Eyethu*, was established in 2008 as free weekly newspaper. The newspaper is also part of Capital Media Group and its main target is the black market readership in Pietermaritzburg. According to the newspaper profile, *Edendale Eyethu* has a circulation of 40 000 and a readership of 160 000 readers weekly. Since its inception in 2008 the paper is

growing in popularity, mainly because of its approach in reporting the news. The newspaper employs a simple language with short stories reflecting the life situation of the community. The newspaper is distributed door to door in different parts of Pietermaritzburg but with focus on black areas.

*Echo* is the oldest community newspaper in Pietermaritzburg region. It was established in 1979 and it is owned by *The Witness* together with *The Mirror*. According to the editor of *Echo*, the newspaper's target market is mainly the historical disadvantaged people of Pietermaritzburg. It is a weekly newspaper and distributed free of charge in and around Pietermaritzburg and it also comes as an insert in *The Witness* every Thursday. The editor pointed out that "the newspaper has a circulation of 60 000 copies distributed to the readership of about 400 000." This makes the newspaper not only the oldest but also the biggest in the region. This newspaper has a strong link with *The Witness* in that some of the stories covered by *The Witness* reporters appear in *Echo*. This newspaper is bilingual, isiZulu and English, and boasts an educational insert 'Learn with Echo' produced by the Centre for Adult Education from the University of KwaZulu-Natal. The insert is also in English and isiZulu languages.

*The Mirror*, as mentioned before, is part of *The Witness* and it is a free weekly community newspaper written in English that comes out every Wednesday. According to the editor of the newspaper, the target market of the newspaper is the whole Pietermaritzburg community. The editor indicated that being part of *The Witness* "we have a close relationship with them. As we work from a pool of reporters I do have the opportunity to use stories that are written by *The Witness* reporters." This is a similar scenario with *Echo* stories written by *The Witness* reporters that are used in the *Echo* publication. *The Mirror* has a print order "of 65 000 copies



distributed to every Tuesday to homes in Pietermaritzburg, carries all the latest community events and pictures of happenings in the city,” (<http://www.kzntopbusiness.co.za>).

Therefore, the aim of the study is to investigate and explore the role of community newspapers against the background of profit-driven media environment.

### **1.3 Research problems and objectives**

Community newspapers, on the one hand, according to Swanepoel and Steyn, (2010:222) are supposed to be community institutions owned by the community and thus create an opportunity for the community to take full active participation in the running of the newspaper. On the other hand, community newspapers can also be owned by individuals or organizations for commercial gains. This means as “independent media run by communities, groups or persons as small business for profit” (Swanepoel and Steyn, 2010:222). With the effects of globalization characterized by “higher levels of concentrated ownership” (Doyle, 2002: 13) and the decline of the circulation of mainstream newspapers, community newspapers have become increasingly used to generate revenue for both the owners and advertisers. The inevitable relationship between community newspapers and the advertisers constitutes one of the challenges faced by these publications. This means, the pro-community orientation to “inform citizens of what is happening around them,” (McNair, 2003: 21), may somehow be compromised, since the owners of these publications seem to be “motivated by self-interests rather than community interests” (McManus, 1992: 198). This has prompted the researcher to pursue this study.

This study seeks to address the following research objectives:

- To evaluate the role of community newspapers in providing its readers with information dealing with developmental issues.
- To evaluate the role of community newspapers in reporting on sensational stories such as murder.
- To investigate the role of advertisements in community newspapers.
- To investigate the influence of local newspapers on the readers.
- To identify areas that are not covered in the community newspapers.

#### **1.4 Research questions**

The research questions below were employed to address the research objectives of this study:

- Do readers feel that community newspapers provide them with sufficient or enough news or information dealing with community development?
- Do readers view community newspapers as giving preference to crime than to other issues taking place in the community?
- Do community newspaper readers perceive community newspapers as more commercially orientated or as a means of information or news provision?
- How do community newspapers influence the readers?
- What areas of focus do readers of community newspapers want to see covered?

## **1.5 Rationale of the study**

This research is undertaken with the aim of contributing to the field of journalism and the media industry. This research will assist in the collection of community newspaper intelligence in areas of how these newspapers are perceived by the readers and what the community feels about them. Media intelligence is a form of business intelligence whereby data and information are analyzed and transformed for use in strategic planning and problem solving (Rosnow & Rosenthal, 2000).

Hence knowledge gained from this study will assist in helping management of community newspapers to make wiser decisions when planning, introducing and managing community newspapers. Publishers and owners of these community newspapers are interested in readers' perceptions and opinions with regard to the content and presentation of these papers, so as to appeal to them and ultimately encourage more readers. Thus, the knowledge of what readers think and what appeals to them should constantly be researched.

Findings from this study should help management of the four community newspapers under study, as well as those who are contemplating establishing such publications, to become more aware of how readers perceive the community newspapers and what attributes are more appealing to readers. This will assist the owners of the community newspaper to better understand the challenges that the community newspapers are facing in relation to readers' loyalty, news content as well as quality of these publications.

Results from this study will assist to equip owners of community newspapers with knowledge which will enable them to better provide relevant news and information to readers. The understanding of the changing needs of readers will enable the owners of these publications

to come up with appropriate adjustments of the strategies-service mix, which will influence readers' behaviour through the employment of the appropriate marketing strategies.

With no formal research having been done on this subject matter focusing on the Pietermaritzburg area, the purpose of this study is to investigate and explore the role of community newspapers against the background of profit-driven media environment.

## **1.6 Preliminary literature study**

As part of the preliminary literature study this research project focused on different literature that helped shed light and clear understanding on the issues of the study topic. The discussion begins with the work of Severin and Tankard (1992: 216) who, through media theories, explains the media effects on audiences and readers. For a theoretical approach the study dwelt on agenda setting of the media and media hegemony theories and their indirect influence on media content. According to Severin and Tankard (1992), agenda setting is the idea that the news media come to determine the issues the public thinks and talks about, while media hegemony explains how the ideas and values of the ruling class in the society become the ruling ideas. Linking this to the topic, community newspapers through their allegiance to media companies, i.e. the four community newspapers under study namely *Public Eye* and *Edendale Eyethu* are owned by Capital Media Group while *Echo* and *The Mirror* are owned by *The Witness* which is part of Media 24, and sometimes to political parties, they directly or indirectly help promote the agenda and objectives of the institutions they are associated with.

For instance, the ethics of one of the community newspaper under study was questionable during Jacob Zuma’s court appearance in Pietermaritzburg in 2008. The local community newspaper printed thousands of posters with inscriptions in support of the ANC president, hence indicating its possible bias or agenda setting. See figure 2 below:



*JZ supporters outside Pietermaritzburg High Court*

Deacon et al. (2000), emphasise the crucial role communications have on the lives of the people. They argue that we cannot understand fully the way we live without understanding communications. In its role as regulatory body the Independent Communications Authority of South Africa (ICASA) can also act as agenda setter by determining the type of content that community newspapers or media should cover. I have also used some internet material about Marxist media theories as both media hegemony and agenda setting are based on Marxist theory. On community newspapers, apart from the internet sources, I have in addition focused on Stamm and Fortin-Campbell (1994). They argue that community press plays a significant

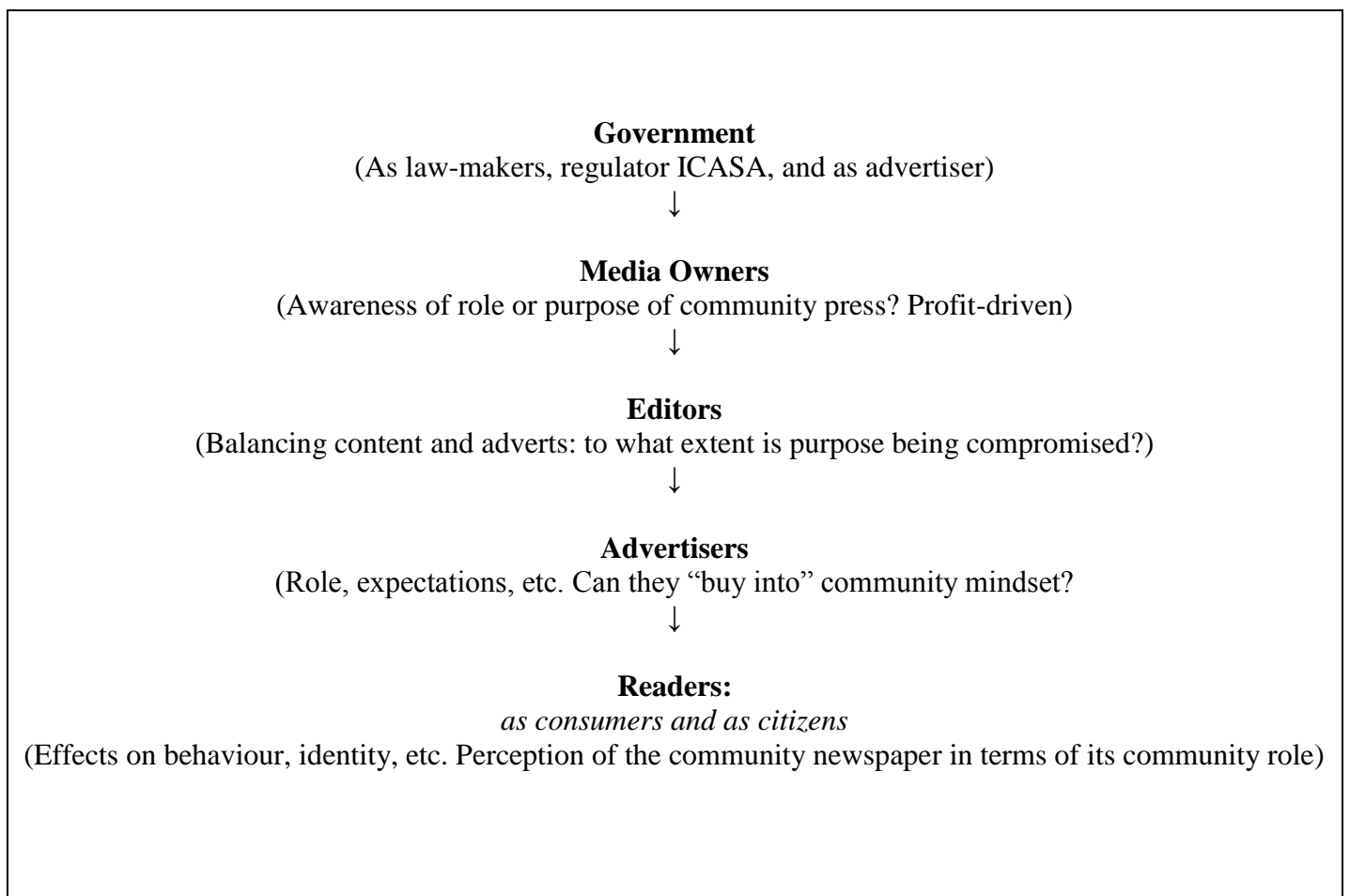
role in providing a primary mechanism by which the social significance of local communities can be determined.

Community newspapers strive to provide local news which impacts on the life of the community they serve, on the other hand, as a local and community symbol it helps unite as well as promote community participation and integration. That is, news and other information reported in the newspaper become issues that the community talks about, thus creating a sense of ownership of the newspaper. Meanwhile, the connectivity aspect between the community and the local newspaper is based on Reader (2006). According to Reader, connectivity entails a level of intimacy that the journalists have with the communities they serve and how such intimacy can influence how the journalists go about doing their job.

On the Independent Communications Authority of South Africa (ICASA) and Media regulations, the preliminary study used some internet documents which outline ICASA's mandate as the telecommunications and broadcasting entity in South Africa. Such readings include, ICASA Regulator for the South African Communications, Media Development & Diversity Agency (MDDA) and Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA-SA). However, ICASA has specifically mandated the increase in community media as a necessary mechanism to address the imbalances of the past most particularly the previously disadvantaged communities. These communities for decades were not only denied access to media and information but also were economically dispossessed. So the increase of community media in the recent past in South Africa should be seen as "ICASA's remit to establish a strong and committed public broadcasting service and promote provision of public, commercial and community broadcasting services," ([www.icasa.org.za/tabid](http://www.icasa.org.za/tabid)). This

means ICASA as part of critical political economy although it focuses on broadcasting rather than print, much of the principles it uses can be transferred or adapted for print or press.

Throughout this study I will be showing how the various role players or stakeholders involved, have an influence on the process of production and reception of community media or press. See chart below: Fig. 3



## **1.7 Conclusion**

This chapter introduced the topic of the study and outlined the study objectives. Chapter two will provide an overview of the literature relative to the area of the research. It will review the conceptual framework and research within the area of community newspapers.



## Chapter 2

### Theoretical Frame work and Literature Review

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#### 2.1 Introduction

Media theories contribute significantly in the process of understanding the “impact of the mass media on the general public,” (Cook et al. 2001: 16). However, media theories have shifted from a deterministic paradigm to a more humanistic paradigm characterized by active audiences. The deterministic approach or paradigm was mainly based on the Marxist critical theory which maintained that the “power and class differences in society are determined directly by economic structure and processes of industrial production and consumption,” (Lull, 2000: 48). Applying this to mass communication, Du Plooy observed that “those who control or own media could select the ideas and ideology represented in the mass media,” (2005: 30). However, based on Marxist critical theory, one can argue that the ever widening gap between the rich and the poor could be linked in one way or the other to the economic power and control by a handful of companies or individuals, thus contributing to class disparity.

The humanistic approach or paradigm is not only characterized by the “communication age which is the driving force of mediated interactions” (Lull, 2000: 48) but also by active audiences who have the ability to read between the lines and decode the information communicated by the media and act accordingly. To start, it is necessary to discuss and define the term community which community newspapers serve.

## 2.2 What is community?

The term community is a complex concept that scholars have found difficult to define because the term has a wide range of meanings attached to it. The meaning and understanding of the term can only be properly understood within a context in which the concept is being used. However, the term is generally understood as an affectionate and friendly concept that reflects societal bonds and a way of life of a given group of people who live together in given territorial boundaries. In this general understanding community is seen as "emerging from the mutual commitment, mutual involvement, mutual responsibility, and mutual respect between a society and its individual members," (Foster, in Porter, 1996: 25).

However, community boundaries could also represent a nation, province, city or even a village where community members share a lot in common such as cultural practices, beliefs, and language. Community plays a vital role in the lives of its members in that, as part of communal solidarity, community members are bound to cooperate and work together as a single unit. It is in this context that Paek et al. observed that "social interaction builds a sense of community, creates opportunity for recruitment, and consequently encourages deeper engagement in a public life," (2005: 589). For example, when a community is united it will always seek to maintain the virtues and values that bind people together, thus denouncing possible elements threatening their harmony. In most cases, this is evidenced by community initiatives such as anti-crime or drug awareness campaigns as a way to root out criminal elements within their midst. Such initiatives in one way or another help reinforce community building and interaction amongst the residents.

While the general understanding of the term community is that of territorial boundaries representing a larger community, the concept can also mean many other sub-cultures existing within a larger community. Such sub-cultures do not necessarily follow under geographic location or boundaries. For instance within a larger community we find small communities of professionals, such as academics or medical staff and school communities and law enforcement bodies, to name but a few. All these groupings form their own particular communities within a larger community.

Stamm and Fortini-Campbell (1983:5) define community as a multi-dimensional concept that includes “places with boundaries that distinguish it from other places, as social product in terms of existing structure such as institutions and centres of trade, and as social process that emphasises the social efforts to create community through common endeavour and shared interests.” Communities are also held together by communal discussions, and problem solutions.

This study focuses on the definition of community as social product or structure in that the community is understood in terms of existing structures or institutions serving the community. That is, “community as the structural product of collective interests reflect the ways in which common needs have been accommodated through organisational structures, both public and private,” (Stamm and Fortini-Campbell, 1983:5). This means people who read community newspapers become members of the same community through the common interest in the newspaper and its content. The community newspaper becomes an important means in the process of both community integration and communication. This means that the coverage of important issues taking place and affecting the community helps establish a lasting relationship between the community and the community newspaper as an institution.

It is in this context that Paek et al, observed that “consumption of public affairs content, particularly print news readership, has been among the most common predictors of civic participation, community integration, and community ties,” (2005: 59). Similarly Stamm and Fortini-Campbell indicate that “newspapers as a tool of unification in the community facilitate such a process by supporting group activities, enhancing personal prestige, disclosing threats to the community, defining local issues and reflecting local opinion,” (1983: 3). This brings the community closer to the newspaper as readers identify themselves with the publication as part of institutional structure of the community that delivers what the people or readers can easily associate themselves with. By institutional structure the study refers the sense of ownership and the trust that the people may have in the publication as indeed a means through which the community will see it as an integral part of their lives.

### **2.3 Community development and Development Journalism**

For any development to effectively take place entails effective communication or consultation that will enhance community participation in any process of community development. Participatory development is a “planned activity, based on the one hand on participatory process, and on the other hand, media and interpersonal communication, which facilitates a dialogue among different stakeholders, around a common development or problem,” (Cadiz, 2005:146). For such development to take place and empower communities it would require that community newspapers become reliable allies of development in communities, by making sure that skills and other relevant aspects such as “technical information towards productivity, food security and environmental conservation,” (Cadiz, 2005:150) is made available to the people and this will encourage positive participation and community involvement. That is, community press through development journalism can

disseminate a message of establishing close working relationships and partnerships between the community and investors who are interested in sustainable development projects in communities for mutual benefit. Development Journalism is more applicable in the developing world in that it is viewed as part of steering nationalistic developmental goals as many African countries after independence committed themselves to attain socio-economic development. According to Banda, development journalism is about “transfer of the technology and socio political culture of modernity from the developed and industrial north to the so-called third world,” (2009:70). This view is supported by Odhiambo who pointed out that “third world mass media theory views the mass media institutions as both instruments for, and aspects of, wider socioeconomic development,” (1991:19). Therefore, since the term community forms the basis upon which community newspapers operate and one of their main objectives is to provide local content that will help integrate and foster public participation of community members. Therefore, both development journalism and community press could blend together to ensure that their activities benefit and uplift communities they serve and this could also work as catalyst for social change in communities.

It is in this context Cadiz points out, “development work thus involves engaging in action with partners, in the process learning with them in alternating activities and evaluations or reviews of actions taken” (2005: 148). This means, since any development is about the people, it is important therefore, that the people must be at the centre of what is happening in communities and this will help broaden the community’s positive participation as opposed to being mere spectators and recipients of an imposed development that may not necessarily respond to their immediate needs. For instance, the main stream newspapers established community newspapers in an effort to cater for the various needs of communities and provide coverage of issues that would not otherwise be reported in the main stream papers. It is in this

context that some of the editors interviewed by the study indicated the fact that advertising and editorial covered in these publications are relevant to the area that they are distributed in, coupled with the fact that these publications are free and are delivered door to door makes them accessible and readily available to the community.

According to Sparks, “it is at the local community level that the problems of living conditions are discussed and interactions with other communities elicited,” (2009: 57). Similarly, Baker pointed out that “the people know their common problems and the people ought to be involved in applying the intelligence to solving them,” (2002: 159). This means “imposed top-down development projects are likely to fail because they do not command enthusiastic support of the population and indeed might well meet determined popular resistance,” (ibid). This was the case with the Imbali community in Pietermaritzburg that put on hold the revamp of a local soccer stadium, known as Qokololo. The community wanted the stadium demolished in order to make way for the construction of a shopping mall in the area. The community argues that they do not need the stadium because it does not help them much but the shopping centre will provide employment for many unemployed people. Moreover, the mall would be more convenient in that the local people will no longer have to travel to Pietermaritzburg CBD for shopping. The community has support from a local ward councilor, Patrick Jaca, who pointed out that “the people need jobs and not the stadium and that there are many soccer fields which people can still utilize.”

This suggests that people need to be informed about any change of plans, and to be consulted about any possible development initiatives earmarked for their areas. Such an approach would not only provide a desirable environment conducive for effective and sustainable

development, but would also make the community feel that they are also part of the development taking place in their neighbourhood.

According to Banda, development journalism “should examine critically, evaluate and interpret the relevance of development plans, projects, problems and issues...It should provide contextual and background information about the development process, discuss the impact of plans, projects, problems and issues on people and speculate about the future of social development. Development news should refer to the needs of the people, which...include needs such as food, housing, employment; transportation...cultural diversity,” (2007: 159). This suggests that, an active audience will always make its presence felt and push for better conditions, thus remaining committed to bargaining processes aimed at changing their lives for the better. This could also mean that, apart from reporting or highlighting the plight of the community, community newspapers could also be used to mobilize the community to come up with ideas to solve their own problems or embark on community projects to help change the lives of the community. Baker argues that “journalists are to participate by helping the public gain confidence in its ability to reach consensus and solve problems,” (2002: 16). For instance, community members could form neighbourhood watches in response to crime reported in their area. Also they could embark on fundraising initiatives to help the needy identified after reading in the community newspapers about precarious conditions of some members of the community.

#### **2.4 The Notion of Community Newspapers**

Community newspapers in South Africa fall under the category of community media (Swanepoel and Steyn, 2010: 226). Community media in South Africa have always been the

voice of the people. During the apartheid regime community media (press and radio) were found under the banner of alternative media. During this period community media played a vital role not only in being the alternative voice of the majority of the marginalized people but they also helped to denounce the apartheid regime. It is in this context that Swaneopol and Steyn pointed out, “historically, the predominant role of community media was to counter apartheid propaganda, inform and educate the masses about their rights,” (2010: 227). With the new democratic dispensation in the country, in order to address the need to promote media diversity and access to media, the Media Development and Diversity Agency (MDDA) was established by the 2002 Act 14 of parliament.

Even today under the new democratic dispensation community media, which include broadcast, print and new media, continue to be the voice of many South Africans who previously did not have access to information and the media. The MDDA defines community media as “any media project that is owned and controlled by a community where any financial surplus generated is invested in the media project,” ([www.mdda.org.za](http://www.mdda.org.za)). Also, MDDA defines Small Commercial Media as “independent media enterprises that run for personal gain,” (ibid). This means, community newspapers fit into these two categories as community owned (non-profit) and as small commercial media entities. According to Hollander, community newspapers are a means of “diffusion of information about the activities in the community’s backyards, which can create a sense of community and collective. This medium has the concept of community pulsating as the central life-force. It brings community together thorough dialogue and communication, because it gives access to and dissemination of information,” (1975: 22).



For the purpose of this research project, the four community newspapers under study namely: *Public Eye*, *Edendale Eyethu*, *Echo*, and *The Mirror*, fit into the category of small commercial media since they are all privately owned by two different media companies, Capital Media Group and *The Witness* (owned by Media 24) respectively. This suggests, the fact that they are owned by private companies the onus is on them to decide what news content should be published. As Chandler pointed out, “private individuals decide what information should be provided to the public based on what earns them the most money,” ([www.aber.ac.uk](http://www.aber.ac.uk)). Linked to the media ownership of community newspapers in South Africa, according to the AIP report media companies who own community newspapers are mainly geographically based. Media24 and Independent newspapers are dominant in the Western Cape; Johnnic (now AVUSA) dominant in the Eastern Cape and Caxton community newspapers are dominant in both KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng.

## **2.5 Advertisements and Community Newspapers**

Apart from providing news and information of what is happening in the community, community newspapers also have commercial interests to generate funds for their sustainability. Community newspapers generate funds through advertisements placed by companies. One of the reasons advertisers find community newspapers effective is the fact that community newspapers are “best for reaching a large number of people concentrated in one geographic area,” (Kaplan et al, 1991:348). According to McQuail, the “commercialization of the press in the late nineteenth century, had been made possible by a greatly increased potential for mass production and distribution, financially aided by mass advertising,” (1994:123). According to the Audit Bureau of Circulations (ABC) latest print

circulation figures for the period October to December 2009 show that Community Newspapers recorded an overall increase of 3.4% from the corresponding previous period.

This suggests that, community newspapers have become effective means for advertisers to reach their intended target markets who read the community newspapers. As one of the editors interviewed for this study indicated, “from an advertising perspective, our aim is to give advertisers the ideal opportunity to get their message across to the consumer.” Similarly, Schudson (2000) argued that advertisers will always find value in newspapers that attract concentrated target markets, and community newspapers meet this need. This suggests that community newspapers have more advantages for the advertisers and this could be explained by the number of advertisements they sell on these papers which help the readers not only to inform themselves about what is happening around them but also to inform themselves about specials and promotion of goods in different shops. However, advertising in the press can also be viewed as providing more advantage to advertisers as they indirectly influence the content.

According to Soley and Craig (1992) advertising not only inhibits news reporting of controversial issues, but also influences news media to self-censor stories about advertisers or cave in to pressures exerted by their advertisers. This means “when media don't self-censor or cave in to pressure, advertisers respond by withdrawing their advertising from offending media,” (Soley and Craig, 1992:1). In light of this argument, it can be said that the community newspapers “use 'soft' cover stories to sell ads, confuse readers with 'advertorials,' and occasionally self-censor on subjects known to be a problem with advertisers,” (1992:1). An example of this is the C21 story highlighted later in this thesis.

Linking this to Hegemony media theory, one of the theoretical approaches adopted by this study, it can be argued that while advertising is necessary and plays a vital role in the existence and survival of these publications, in one way or the other, these publications seem to represent more the needs of the ruling class (advertisers and other stakeholders) than the needs of educating and informing the community with relevant news which they could use to make well informed decisions. It is in this context that Soley and Craig pointed out that the media “are no longer neutral agents of the merchant but essential gears in the machinery of corporate giantism” (1992:2).

## **2.6 Agenda Setting and Media Hegemony**

People often like to identify themselves with the best and with top range products. Some, even if they don't have money for particular items regarded as the best, will however find means to be seen buying them so that they can be part of the 'family' that knows what is best. That is, it is the aim of advertisers “to influence consumers' beliefs and evaluation regarding the favourable consequences of consuming the brand,” (Shimp, 1981:9). Following a similar argument, Lovaas observed that “market-driven newspapers continue, through a series of new filters, to limit, shape, and censor ideas for the benefit of the private and public sectors,” (2007: 52). Linking this to the topic, the lack of investigative journalism and critical analysis of issues of concern in communities for instance, maladministration and mismanagement of funds by government or municipal officials and also unfair treatment or dismissal of employees by the private sector, only serve to perpetuate the interests of the elite (advertisers and media owners) to the detriment of the right to relevant information to the community.

Severin and Tankard (1992) explain that the mass media are the source to which people look to find distribution of public opinion. Researchers have spent time developing theories that demonstrate how audiences construct their meanings through texts (either visual or graphic), focusing on the main media role players. The Agenda Setting and Media Hegemony theories are two theories which can be used to explain the indirect influence of the media owners, corporate advertisers and even government on media content. For the purpose of this research project, the study has adopted these two theories which explain, not only how different role players use the media for different purposes, but also illustrate how they indirectly influence the media content both national and local.

According to Severin and Tankard (1992: 207), agenda setting focuses on the idea that the news media determine the issues the public thinks and talks about. On a similar note, McCombs (2004) points out that with the increasing salience of public figures in the news, for example, more people move away from a neutral position and form an opinion about these persons. This was the case for instance, during the events leading to the ANC conference in Polokwane. The media reported extensively on the possible implications if former President Thabo Mbeki was to be re-elected for the third term as the ANC president. The issue of two centres of power, the Zuma and Mbeki camps, had been central to political analysis and media coverage. Therefore the media emphasis played a role in the change of mind for many delegates who converged on Polokwane and voted for Jacob Zuma as the ANC president instead of Mbeki. For instance, through the media and various political analyses provided on the issue, it was clear that the ANC went to the Polokwane conference as a divided house mainly characterized by Mbeki and Zuma camps. Mbeki's intention for a third term as the ANC president was viewed by the media and analysts as an unprecedented move, as far as ANC policy is concerned, to have a president for the party and president for

the country. This was seen as unacceptable by the majority of people at the grass roots level, including the Zuma supporters. They insisted that such a move was a way to cling to power and would lead to dictatorial rule in South Africa. As a result of the extensive media coverage on possible implications of two centres of power many delegates at the conference voted for Zuma as the ANC president. This shows that the media play a critical role in shaping the minds and perceptions of the people. Likewise, community newspapers which are aimed at providing information and news to the community can also provide such a platform for the people if they provide unbiased, critical and relevant information to the readers.

One of the main concepts or theories used to analyze the data is media hegemony. Media hegemony explains how the ideas and values of the ruling class in society become the ruling ideas. “The mass media are seen as controlled by the dominant class in society and as aiding in exerting the control of that class over the rest of society,” (Severin and Tankard, 1992: 254). According to Lull, “mass media are used by ruling elites to perpetuate their power, wealth, and status by popularizing their philosophy, culture and morality,” (2000: 49). This is the case with community newspapers, through their ability to connect with communities, being used as a means for profit making by corporate advertisers and the newspaper owners to advance consumerist ideology. This means, while the commercial aspect in the form of advertisements of these publications is important, however, more emphasis to it could relegate other crucial aspects of the community in terms of needs and various other issues that affect communities.

This does not only represent political and economic control, but also the ability of the dominant class to project its own way of seeing the world so that those who are subordinated to it accept it as “hegemonic or dominant cultural order,” (Philo, 2008: 536). It is within this

perspective that Daniel Chandler points out that, “the contents of the media and the meanings carried by their messages are primarily determined by the economic base of the organizations in which they are produced and consequently media organizations must cater to the needs of advertisers and produce audience-maximizing products while those media institutions whose revenues are controlled by the dominant political institutions or by the state gravitate towards a middle ground, or towards the heartland of the prevailing consensus,”([www.aber.ac.uk/media/Documents](http://www.aber.ac.uk/media/Documents)). Unlike Marxist theories that saw societal inequality as based on the exploitation of the working class, however, for the purpose of this study, inequality could be seen through the unwavering support and existing relationship between the community newspapers and the advertisers, where commercial interests of both parties are highly promoted and safeguarded by these publications.

It is important to note that when the concept of hegemony was first used by Antonio Gramsci in the 1930s (Lull 2000), it was to explore how the fascist regimes of Italy and Germany respectively, used the propaganda model to effectively manage and manipulate the masses. Linking this to the topic of this dissertation, it suggests that while propaganda was effectively used by fascist governments to control and create consciousness amongst the people, today in the corporate world (including media conglomerates) characterized by globalization, the ruling ideas and commercial interests are disseminated mainly through “advertising and other informational campaigns to accomplish the same goals,” (Lull 2000: 50).

This is evidenced by competing advertisements in the four community newspapers under study by retail companies and other stakeholders. At the same time readers or customers are constantly urged by the corporate advertisers in almost every issue of publications to look for big promotional sales and competitions that would see the readers win food vouchers in retail

shops. This suggests that advertisers “encourage audiences to think of themselves as markets rather than as public, as consumers rather than citizens,” (Lull, 2000: 50). McChesney observes that “media and communication systems have emerged as central areas for profit making on modern capitalist societies,” (in Thomas and Nain 2002: 3). For instance, in South Africa today, news is controlled by a handful of media companies such as Independent Newspapers, Media 24, AVUSA (formerly known as Johnnic Communications) and Naspers. The art of news propagation plays an indispensable role in society, and this suggests that community newspapers could become integral part of the community they serve, and to which they contribute, for the enhancement of community involvement.

## **2.7 Community Newspapers in South Africa**

The new democratic dispensation in South Africa marked the end of censored media geared to promote the interests of the then ruling party during the apartheid regime. According to Louw and Tomaselli “the 1980s saw greater government curtailment of the flow of information and moves towards the registrations of journalists, newspapers and news agencies,” (1991:77). “By lumping all anti-apartheid publishing ventures into same category, the government created an agenda which distorted public perception and which had the effect of discrediting all its opponents in terms of the pro-revolutionary bogey,” (Tomaselli and Louw 1991: 179). Herman and Chomsky argued that countries where the levers of power are in the hands of a state bureaucracy, the monopolistic control over the media makes it clear that the media serves the ends of dominant elite,” (1988: 68). In the case of South Africa the dominant elite could refer to then apartheid regime. Such measures reaffirmed the government’s position of providing biased information and news that advanced the interest of the state.

With media reforms in South Africa old media regulations or policies were revised in order to reflect the new political dispensation of freedom of expression and media diversity. This development brought about the proliferation of community newspapers which by virtue of their establishment, community newspapers were intended to become the mouthpiece of the communities. According to the Audit Bureau of Circulations (ABC) “community newspapers’ circulation increased by 34, 9% in the last six years,” (Swanepoel and Steyn, 2010: 221). However, on the other hand the Audit Bureau of Circulations figures released for quarter two (July to September 2009), daily newspapers showed a decline of less than 3% year-on-year. While weekly newspapers showed an overall decline of less than 5% and, weekend newspapers showed a 3% decline. ([www.gcis.gov.za/resource\\_centre/sa](http://www.gcis.gov.za/resource_centre/sa)). Through “local community newspapers ordinary citizens can be part of communication process and be represented by their own newspaper to higher levels of the media” (Odendaal, 2005: 90). Such proliferation, which is clear evidence of freedom of expression and media diversity, came as a result of Independent Communications Authority of South Africa’s (ICASA) mandate to help communities uphold their cultures as well as to empower communities with skills to manage their own media. Community newspapers were established with the aim of serving local communities in providing local content on issues and developments taking place in their respective areas. According to Swanepoel and Steyn, “the role of community newspapers in a country such as South Africa is facilitating the transfer of information among all role-players. Community newspapers highlight the implications of development programmes on grass roots level by interpreting information and communicating the context and consequences to readers,” (2010: 228). As mainstream newspapers could not provide effective coverage of the local affairs in different communities, the establishment of community newspapers was, however, seen as a way of promoting media diversity and



provision of multiplicity of information and public opinion through which people could make informed decisions. This forms part of the media transformation in the country as media diversity “entails access to the widest range of opinion and information sources by all, as well as equitable representation within the media in general,” (Swanepoel and Steyn, 2010: 222).

However, due to small circulation, lack of skills and volunteerism most ‘grass roots’ community newspapers have closed down and big newspapers have taken them over. However, the presence of new kinds of community newspapers, boasts a circulation of 5.5 million throughout South Africa (Odendaal, 2005: 86). Not only do they provide the necessary news and relevant information pertinent to the community the newspapers serve, but they also continue to contribute to participatory democracy and community involvement. Community members are not only able to form public opinions, but also are able to voice their opinion through letters to the editor and news articles and comments about issues taking place in the community. For instance, a concerned parent wrote in *Public Eye* (01 October 2009):

“Unilever is boasting a huge new plant in Mkondeni and also letting the country and world know that they have employed a number of people. That is all well and true and good for the economy of the country. The sad thing that people don’t know is that they have contract workers at their Sobantu plant who are working three different shifts to earn a slave wage of between R200 and R250 per week.”

In response to this concern Eddie Mkuchane, of Unilever, defended itself saying:

“We wish to state that we employ temporary workers mainly to deal with the seasonal nature of aspects of our business. Temps are paid the same rate as our permanent employees. We refute the allegation that there is 3x differential between what we pay our temps and our permanent staff.”

In another example in *The Mirror* newspaper (Wednesday, October 7, 2009) a concerned resident also wrote in recognition for good work rendered by members of South African Police services (SAPS):

“On a recent Sunday evening, my red Toyota Conquest was stolen out of my yard. I phoned the Prestbury Police station and within a few minutes of my call Sergeant Mdunge and Constable Ngcobo arrived. The police need to receive more recognition for the good work they do; as this is the second time my car has been stolen and recovered in a day. Well done to Prestbury and Howick SAP.”

It is in this regard that Stamm and Fortin-Campbell indicated that “the community press became pivotal...it provides a primary mechanism by which the social significance of local communities could be maintained,” (1983:2). Through pro-community orientation, community newspapers are an ideal means for local news dissemination and they also contribute greatly in community development by informing and educating the community on various issues of concern. For example, as part of *Edendale Eyethu* newspaper’s developmental drive or social responsibility, the newspaper in partnership with other stakeholders launched a community garden project which is aimed at ensuring food security and job creation in Edendale area (October 15, 2009:16). Beisner maintains that community newspapers “have always been responsible for identifying important issues and news in the community and informing the citizens of these issues,” ([www.uky.edu/commInfoStudies/IRJCI/reports/](http://www.uky.edu/commInfoStudies/IRJCI/reports/)).

Apart from informing and educating, community newspapers also contribute significantly in the process of community solidarity. As Stamm and Fortin-Campbell observed, community newspapers support “group activities, enhancing personal prestige, disclosing threats to the community, defining local issues and reflecting local opinion” (1983: 2). This means that

stories reflecting community life and interests not only help generate public opinion but also help to establish community engagement and identity formation.

This suggests that, with the proliferation of community newspapers in South Africa, various communities have now been given an opportunity to have their affairs covered in their local media, which would not otherwise be reported in the mainstream papers.

Claudelle Naidoo points out, “the big hype about daily newspapers has died down and instead there is more interest in the rise and shine of community papers and the influence they have on the market. Community newspapers have transformed with South Africa and play a vital role in enhancing and educating the mind of the consumer” ([www.biz-community.com/Article](http://www.biz-community.com/Article)). That is, through advertisements from different stakeholders in community newspapers the consumers are provided with an array of competitive prices and promotions of several products and services being advertised. This helps give the consumer the choice of where to access the advertised products or services. Randall (2009) observed that “local consumers have come to rely on their newspapers as much for community news as they do for planning their local shopping purchases” (in *The Media Independent Industry Intelligence*, September 2009: 19). Through the information provision, community newspapers provide not only awareness about events or issues taking place in the community, but also, as some respondents in this study, points out, community press “promote social engagement and a sense of belonging, they also promote cultural diversity and tolerance.” This means social engagement is made possible as community newspapers are viewed by the readers as means to provide social awareness which helps the community uphold community values such as cultural and religious values. Paek et al, point out that “newspapers function

both as a source of community solidarity for readers and as the seat of local print culture for socially integrated community members who are not news readers per se,” (2005: 588).

However, with the emergence of television, mainstream newspapers experienced an unprecedented drop in advertising and, as a result media conglomerates bought or established their own community newspapers to generate more revenue with more local advertising. According to the Association of Independent Publishers (AIP) survey of South Africa’s community and grassroots print media, about 238 conglomerate owned community publications were produced in 2005. Caxton and its subsidiary companies owned 160 titles, Media24 published 41; the Independent Group had 14 titles and Johncom 11. *The Witness* in Pietermaritzburg publishes *Echo*, *The Mirror*, *Village Talk in Howick*, *the Greytown Gazette* and five *Fever* titles, as well as two Express Media titles distributed in Durban,” (<http://www.kzntopbusiness.co.za/site/top-business>).

Herman and Chomsky note that “this put papers lacking in advertising at a serious disadvantage, their prices would tend to be higher, curtailing sales and would have less surplus to invest in improving the salability of the paper,” (1988: 14). This is why big companies such Media 24, Independent Newspapers and Caxton, to name a few, have taken over community newspapers. However, a great potential to provide the community with locally brewed news is often compromised with the need to advance and maintain business fraternity interests to the detriment of the community.

## **2.8 Community newspapers enhancing public sphere**

Community newspapers can also play a leading role in enhancing the notion of public sphere. According to McCombs, readers not only “acquire information about public affairs from the news, readers also learn how much importance to attach to a topic on the basis of the emphasis placed on the news,” (<http://www.infoamerica.org>). The notion of Public Sphere was coined by a Frankfurt scholar, Jurgen Habermas, where he described the emergence of public debate at the saloons and coffee houses in France and London. That is, “As in the saloons where intellectuals met with the aristocracy, literature had to legitimate itself in these coffee houses,” (Habermas, 1995: 236). However, in such forums only the elite and bourgeois participated and discussed issues of concern on behalf of the sidelined majority (poor and women). This is contradiction to the notion that “the bourgeois public sphere was based on the principle of universal access, in practice it is restricted to those individuals who had the education and financial means to participate in,” (Thompson, 195: 253). According to Madikiza and Bornman, public sphere is “defined as an arena where a community of individuals is drawn together by participating in rational-critical debate,” (Madikiza and Bornman, 2007:32).

Linking this to the topic of this project, the four community newspapers under study have the potential to contribute more to the enhancement of public debate through “news that is consequential, that changes or enlarges their understanding of their environment,” (McManus, 1992: 202). This is in light of many people still not being able to access information or media, in spite of the establishment of the MDDA, which is aimed at promoting diversity and access to media. “Nine million South Africans live in nodal points including the bulk of the poorest of the poor. In these areas only three quarters of households

have a radio, a third have television. In such areas newspapers are read by less than 20% of people,” ([www.downloads.bbc.co.uk](http://www.downloads.bbc.co.uk)). The main reason that people even today have limited access to information and news could be linked to the fact that they can’t afford to buy the mainstream papers, coupled with the fact that some respondents of this study indicated that they do not receive community newspapers in their homes.

This means that access to information on different issues could help develop deep understanding about people’s cultures, including religious backgrounds of people in a given community. According to Jhally and Lewis, “the goal of media is to help people become sophisticated citizens rather than sophisticated consumers,” (1998: 111). For example, the *learn with echo* feature in Echo newspaper, brings awareness and empowers the readers with information on various issues of concern, such as respect for elders and Zulu cultural rituals, teenage pregnancy, HIV/AIDS, how to manage your finances, and support groups for men and women, to name a few. Stamm and Fortin-Campbell observe community newspapers “function as a tool of unification in the community...by supporting group activities, enhancing personal prestige, disclosing threats to the community, defining local issues and reflecting local opinion,” (1983:2). This acknowledges that the daily affairs of the community are of great significance for the readers.

## **2.9 Links between the community and the community newspapers**

According to Kirkpatrick (2001:19) a community newspaper should be seen as being the heart of the community that helps to keep the very community together. In addition community newspapers ought to “reflect the characteristics of the communities they serve,” (Reader, 2006: 2). Swanepoel and Steyn observed that “community newspapers provide

information that affects readers directly, enriches their lives and offers them a sense of safety and belonging,” (2010: 227). These functions and attributes of community newspapers show that the paper and the community share a close relationship that could be reflected in the enthusiasm of the readers each time they get their paper. Thus the newspaper could serve as a tool that conveys the everyday life of the community, as this is of great importance for its success. For instance, apart from local news that dominates community newspapers the social section of these publications also provides relevant information in the form of pictures about various activities or events that have taken place or are still to happen in the community. This is very important as, for instance, people always would want to see themselves, their family members or acquaintances represented in their community newspaper. “The annual events that shape the community’s traditions are newsworthy and readers expect to find them mentioned in the newspaper so that they can plan to attend them,” (Kirkpatrick, 2001: 21). For example, the Diwali festival in the Pietermaritzburg region does not only bring the Hindu people together but also, it has become an event that draws people of different cultures and race to come together in an open atmosphere of festivity. This could be well explained by the following letter to the editor:

“Congratulations to the Midlands Hindu Society function held at the Protea Grounds. Your motto “Unity in Diversity” has really created a festive environment to the public. The officials and members of this organization should be credited for the hard work for this function held from Friday to Sunday...To the Msunduzi Municipality Mayor, Councillor Zanele Hlatshwayo, thank you for taking your time from your busy schedule to be present at this function. Keep up the good work, Midlands Hindu society and may you grow from strength to strength.” (Source: *Public Eye*, October 1, 2009).

This suggests that for any community newspaper to enjoy a sense of success or acceptance within the area it serves there has to be some kind of a strong existing relationship between

“community ties and newspaper use,” (Stamm and Fortini-Campbell, 1983:1). For example, although *Edendale Eyetu*, is a fairly new publication it seems however to have won the hearts of its readers. During discussions with community members, readers indicated that the newspaper’s approach of short and sensational stories of mainly locally based content, i.e. storms of fury, mom slit children’s throats, toilets for community and Edendale race (fundraising event) impact directly on their lives; some of the readers thus may find it easy to contact the paper each time there is something they want reported in the community. Another positive aspect of the paper is the simple and straightforward language used for reporting, coupled with the tabloid style of the paper. This would work towards the establishment of a sound and good communication rapport between them, thus encouraging the community to directly or indirectly express their view points. Such an attitude could inculcate a spirit of ownership of the newspaper as community members will always strive to identify themselves with the publication.

While such content highlights issues and happenings in the community, it however, does very little to empower community members in terms of skills such as, sustainable gardening projects that would community members find solutions for themselves. While the readers in one way or the other remain informed about crime in their area, in essence they still remain marginalized. This means the type of reporting in some community newspapers not only serves to preserve the interests of the elite but also can make informed decisions difficult for the readers on critical issues such as “social change, development, and a better standard of living,” (Sparks, 2007: 22).

According to Stamm and Fortini-Campbell, “a number of recent studies demonstrate a higher frequency of newspaper use among individuals who are attached to a community,” (1983: 2).



With community newspapers depending mainly on advertising revenue for their survival, the role of community newspapers of putting the interests of the community first may in one way or the other be compromised. That is, the corporate advertisers and other stakeholders tend to use community newspapers for their own advantage, hence the hegemonic power lies with the dominant class or media owners. However, although it is true that community newspapers direct their information to the community and expose problems that affect the community, community newspapers could fail to achieve these objectives, if they do not try to mobilize the people in order to find out how the people or readers react to the stories they read in these publications. One can therefore ask: Are the stories making the readers active consumers or active citizens? This means, if community newspapers do not report stories that represent the interests of the community, thus helping the community to become active citizens, then community newspapers are keeping the hegemony of the elite alive.

It is in this regard that Reader (2006: 2) indicated that connectivity, the level of intimacy journalists have with their communities, can influence how journalists do their job. This means sometimes community members approach community newspapers when they feel that certain stories do not go in their favour. That is, “editors of smaller...papers know they will hear directly from readers and advertisers, including some who will threaten to cancel subscriptions or pull advertising,” (Reader, 2006: 2). This was the case when one of the Pietermaritzburg schools, C21 Private School, threatened to go on a campaign to convince the community and businesses to pull their advertising from a community newspaper after the paper published a picture depicting a derelict building where the school was temporarily operating. The threats made by the school’s management to convince local and big businesses to pull out advertisements from the publication forced the community newspaper management to agree to publish a conciliatory article promoting the school for fear of losing

advertisers. By so doing, the publication compromised its media ethical principles of objectivity and freedom of expression in the public interest as it bowed to pressure. This could show that, with market-driven journalism, community newspapers are in a difficult position tackling controversial issues through investigative journalism that might affect advertisers, hence highlighting the role and influence of the dominant class (advertisers, government and media owners) in determining the editorial content. According to Wasserman and Rao, “in such a media environment satisfying shareholders will become more important than serving the community,” (2008: 165).

However, the controversy of the published picture in *Public Eye* newspaper reflected exactly the derelict building in which the school was operating. This means, the action taken by the school management was necessitated by the visual impact attached to the picture, and the management feared that parents would eventually consider removing their children to other schools with better facilities. According to the school management the picture was not supposed to have been used because of its sensibility and possible “bad” interpretations that would give the school a bad name, thus forcing some parents to take their children out of the school (some did). Deacon et al, pointed out that “the photo-image is the iconic sign par excellence. The photograph is more literal than any other sign,” (1999:188). It is in this context that Stuart Hall, in his essay on encoding and decoding (1980) argues that audiences can interpret or decode media messages in varied ways, ranging from full acceptance to full rejection. Hall saw the audience as an “active participant in the meaning making process within the circuit of communication”; and the meaning of a text cannot be read off the text but instead arises out of the encounter between the text and the reader. This suggests that the commanding approach adopted by the school management to persuade newspaper to publish a reconciliatory story was mainly to safeguard the image and reputation of the school and

thus comprising the newspaper's freedom of expression. Unfortunately the community newspaper bowed to pressure and went on to publish a reconciliatory article about the new facilities. Part of the article reads:

#### C21 School ready to occupy new premises

C21 Private School which was recently forced to relocate to temporary premises is confident that phase one of their new school which is under construction will be ready for occupation by July. School principal Amy Moodley recently took journalists of *Public Eye* on a tour of the temporary facility to see the improvements that have been made. *Public Eye* has also learnt that city attorney and property developer Surendra Singh, has come to the school's assistance and is helping with the construction of the new premises. Singh confirmed his involvement and said he had undertaken the project, at no reward to himself, as he wished to make an investment for the community." (Source: *Public Eye* March 12, 2009).

As far as the readers are concerned, since the newspaper is their own means of information, they may like to see a fair and equal representation of both advertising and information and news covered in the community press. So often the readers do not hesitate to approach the editorial team when they feel that they have been misrepresented in the paper. For example, Edendale community was up in arms when *Edendale Eyethu* reported in one of its editions about a family that practices witchcraft, flying at night using a loaf of bread and a pig. The community was not pleased with such reporting and they delegated their ward councillor to approach the editorial in order to focus more on issues that would help improve the living standards of the people.

## 2.10 Media regulations

The proliferation of community newspapers in South Africa is the result of the establishment of the new democracy in 1994. With the establishment of the new dispensation the country saw the need to improve and regulate media policies in order to address the imbalances of the past and thus promoting media diversity and freedom of expression. The establishment of media regulation bodies such as Media Development and Diversity Agency (MDDA) is aimed at providing the necessary news and entertainment to specific communities and to empower especially the previously disadvantaged communities with access to information and media. This means, “diversity of view and opinions promoting different perspectives enriches citizens to participate in a people driven democratic process,” ([www.mdda.org.za](http://www.mdda.org.za)). This view is also supported by the Press Council of South Africa (PCSA) where one of its objectives is “to promote and preserve the right of freedom of expression including the freedom of press” (Constitution of Press Council). Linking this to the topic the emergence of different types of community newspapers is within this objective to provide the community with diversity of opinion as well as freedom of press through ownership and management.

On the other hand, while ICASA regulations or policies are “to promote and encourage the ownership and control of broadcasting services by people from historically disadvantaged groups,” (<http://www.icasa.org.za/tabid/>) can also be used for guiding the press as well as broadcasting. The main objective of ICASA is to “create an enabling environment for media development and diversity...redress exclusion and marginalisation of disadvantaged communities...from access to the media...and provide support primarily to community and small media,” (<http://www.mdda.org.za>). The question then is, to what extent are these

newspapers, “community media” (according to ICASA), monitored or regulated? This includes community newspapers disseminating and imparting information and knowledge to local communities for purposes of development, socialization, etc. as well as those put to commercial use.

This could be linked to critical political economy in that the media always operates within a given political environment, “which regulates the media and informs the normative expectations of how the media should fulfil their role in society,” (Oosthuizen, 2002: 83). This means with the new dispensation in South Africa the government saw the need to change or improve the media policies previously used to further the interests of the then apartheid regime. Therefore “the type of political dispensation that is in place influences the way in which the values of freedom, equality and order are articulated,” (ibid). Similarly Fourie (2009) argues that after a change in regime, the new regime puts in place some form of regulation to correct the imbalances of the past regime in terms of how community newspapers should operate.

ICASA’s mandate is part of the new government’s rural development initiative which is aimed at providing access to information and media to all South Africans. This is evidenced by the establishment of Highway Radio and Maputaland Community Radio in northern KwaZulu-Natal, to name but two. A community radio station is “non-profit making and pursues a social development agenda. It is responsive to the community’s expressed needs and priorities and is accountable to community structures. Community broadcasters are not looking for profit but provide a service to a particular community,” (<http://www.misa.org/broadcasting/misa-sa>) in terms of skills and knowledge development.

ICASA monitors and controls community radio stations to make sure that they remain community focused, not getting involved in profit making activities.

However, many companies use community newspapers to advance their commercial interests as part of their business objective to generate revenue. This is evidenced by retail companies and other stakeholders who use the community press to sell their products or services to the community. On a similar note some media companies own community newspapers to maximise their profit through adverts, “most community newspapers in South Africa are motivated by profit,” (<http://www.downloads.bbc.co.uk/worldservice>). This could suggest that strictly speaking they are not community media in that the economic factors force them to compromise their goals. So, to what extent are these newspapers, monitored or regulated in terms of development and transformation goals?

### **2.10.1 Globalization and Political Economy**

The phenomenon of globalization has significantly changed the way the media industry operated in South Africa before the new democratic dispensation in 1994. The demise of the apartheid regime in South Africa marked the beginning of a new and interesting phase in the history of the country and this is evidenced by the implementation of neo-liberal policies by the ANC led government. Neo-liberal policies “paved the way for even more foreign direct investment, and corporate mergers and acquisitions in all industries, including the media,” (Lovaas, 2007: 52). According to Hueva et al., “neoliberal ideology advocates the liberalization of political and economic institutions, and led to the increasing commercialization of services previously provided by the state, including most notably

communication services such as broadcasting and telecommunications,” (in Thomas and Nain, 2004:98).

McQuail argues that “these interests relate to the need for profit from media operations and the profitability of other branches of commerce,” (1998:64). This indicates that in a highly commercialised media the pro-community mandate of community newspapers is increasingly in danger of being compromised. Pillay observed that “these contradictory impulses derive in part from the dual character of the media, where it performs both a public service as well as a commercial function (2004:169). This is coupled with the need to balance the pursuit of profits and community interests.

Linking this to the topic of this study, the four community newspapers under investigation operate within this environment of market driven media. The four community newspapers find themselves with no choice but to engage in profit and sustainable business to ensure their survival in the market. This is evidenced by the number of advertisements that these community newspapers carry on a weekly basis. In terms of media theory which “deals with ideas of how media ought, or are expected to, operate,” (McQuail, 1994: 121), the number of adverts in these newspapers may create a perception that the community press is mainly interested in advertisements rather than news and information provision to the readers. It is in this context that McQuail pointed out that the “media are tied into a nexus of market relations with their customers and clients (advertisers), the latter also having some influence on media conduct” (2010: 163). This is confirmed by the current business model of most community newspapers in South Africa.

However, the fact of the matter is that, while the community newspapers under study have the mandate to keep the readers abreast with what is taking place in the community, on the other hand they have to meet the demands of advertisers who sustain the newspapers. It is in this regard that McQuail pointed out the “media are usually established not to serve the public interest as such, but to follow some goal of their own choosing...the goal of making profit as business,” (2010: 164). However, this in contrast to normative media theory that “deals with ideas of how media ought to or are expected to operate,” (McQuail, 1994).

### **2.10.2 Analysis of four community newspapers from the main approaches used**

The notion of political economy of the media could be linked to “Marxist interpretation of communication,” (Madikiza and Bornman, 2007:30). This theoretical approach to media and communications views political economy as closely linked with the question of power which is perceived as instrument the ruling classes use to control the media,” (Madikiza and Bornman, 2007:30). According to this view the class with the means of material production simultaneously controls the means of mental production (ibid). The notion of power and control (ownership) is directly linked to the four community newspapers under study, in terms of both agenda setting and hegemony. This suggests that, the fact that the four community newspapers are owned by private organisations with commercial interests, could be viewed as instruments which are at the disposal of the ruling class (owners and advertisers). However, this is one of the challenges that these publications are faced with. They are more inclined to subjective and biased reporting of news to please the advertisers. On the other hand, without funding from the advertisers these community newspapers cannot afford to run and sustain themselves.



Linking this to both agenda setting and hegemony, the two theoretical approaches adopted by this study, they decide what the public should know and thus promote the hegemonic interests of the ruling class. As McCombs pointed out, “what we know about the world is largely based on what the media decide to tell us. The priorities of the media strongly influence the priorities of the public. Elements prominent on the media agenda become prominent in the public mind,” (<http://www.infoamerica.org>).

## Chapter 3

### Research Methodology and Methods

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#### 3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter focused mainly on some theoretical issues that helped shed light on the role and function of community press in view of the corporate advertisers' influence and the need for the community media to remain as independent entities as far as possible. This chapter, however, sets out how this study will be conducted. As far as methodology is concerned the study adopted qualitative research method coupled with an initial brief content analysis which is a quantitative approach. For data gathering, apart from the literature, the study employed in-depth interviews with the editors of the four community newspapers, and some of the readers of these publications. Also the study used focus group discussions as an additional qualitative instrument for data gathering. According to Myers "qualitative research involves the use of qualitative data, such as interviews, documents and participant observation to understand and explain social phenomena" (1997:241-242). According to Taylor, "qualitative methodology refers in the broadest sense to research that produces descriptive data: people's own written or spoken words and observable behaviour," (1984: 5). It is important to mention that qualitative research methods have gained widespread popularity in the pursuit of humanistic studies over the years. Previous studies have shown that qualitative methods have not only gained widespread popularity but also have successfully proven that they produce reliable and credible data to be used by the researcher. Taylor observed that over the years "so many powerful and insightful studies have been published based on these methods" (1984: 4).

The media not only play critical roles in the lives of the people as sources of information and news, but also affect the people or readers in various ways in their daily routines. The impact of media is felt in every sphere of life, for instance, cultural, socio-economic and political. It is in this regard that Deacon et al, point out, “we cannot fully understand the ways we live now without understanding communications” (1999:1). This means the media are at the core in providing explanations on various issues of concern within a community. The study will adopt a combination of in-depth interviews, and discussions held with some editors, members of the community and regular readers of community newspapers. This is to provide broader information from different respondents as well as deepening an understanding of why, for instance, the editors, the corporate advertisers and the readers behave and respond in the manner they do. That is, “by drawing on other types and sources of data, observers also gain a deeper and clearer understanding of the setting and people being studied,” (Taylor and Bogdan 1984: 68).

### **3.2 Data Capture: Brief content analysis**

The study engaged itself in an initial brief content analysis of the four community newspapers under study. While the study is qualitative in nature it required a brief quantitative content analysis of these publications in order to assess the content of the newspapers in terms of type of news stories and advertisements. This was made possible through the use of SPSS computer program once data has been entered in the computer. The software programme facilitated the analysis of variables as well as their relationship. The programme was only used for the readers’ responses because it was easy to code the responses in terms of the of the topics or issues to be analysed. According to Wigston (2009:5) quantitative data is

always either numerical values or frequencies. In terms of definition “content analysis is a research method for objective, systematic and quantitative description of manifest content of communication” (1952:18). According to Deacon et al content analysis is used to “quantify salient and manifest features of large number of texts and statistics are used to make broader inferences about the process and representation’ (1999:116). The advantage of content analysis, according to Wigston, is the fact that the researcher’s influence is indirect since the study deals with mediated messages (2009:33). For the purpose of this study a small sample of 8 issues per publication (32 in total) was selected where the content was categorized under different themes of news such as politics, crime (murder, rape or robbery) and sports. Advertisements were analyzed in terms of the space they occupy in the newspapers.

### **3.3 Data collection: interview schedules**

As part of data gathering this study used in-depth interviews and focus groups discussions. This research has utilized a triangular data collection method so as to be as objective as possible. It has used two sets of questionnaires, one for the editors and the other for the readers, the focus group, and personal interactions with people, and notes taken during such discussions.

Du Plooy (2005: 39) defines triangulation as a combination of two or more data collection methods, and the main purpose of which is to “test theoretical assumptions in more than one way, and to increase the reliability and validity of observations, analysis and findings” (Du Plooy, 2005: 40).

The in-depth interviews were based on two standardised interview schedules, one for the news editors of the four community newspapers and the other for the readers of these publications respectively. The interview schedules comprise open ended and closed ended questions. Firstly interviews were conducted with the news editors in their respective places of work and then readers were interviewed in different places in and around Pietermaritzburg where the four newspapers are delivered. These places include, Debi Market in Northdale (for *Public Eye* and *The Mirror* readers), Imbali and Edendale townships (for *Echo* and *Edendale Eyethu* readers), Scottsville Mall, the CBD, shopping centres (Spar) and at the taxi rank (for *Public Eye*, *The Mirror*, *Echo* and *Edendale Eyethu* readers). The readers who took part in the study were selected randomly. In these interviews, readers were asked questions relating to their understanding of community newspapers in terms of their role, news content and advertisements. Taylor points out that “in most structured interviewing each person is asked identically worded questions to assure comparable findings” (1984: 77).

The questionnaires include both open ended and closed ended questions and use statements that in one way or the other encouraged respondents to give more information about their experiences. “This is to obtain more facts and opinions...from people who are informed on the issue,” (De Vos, 1988:153). Through in-depth interviews, respondents will have the opportunity to express their views about the topic. Apart from the questionnaire, data was also collected from focus group discussions that comprised twelve participants.

### **3.4 Sampling**

“Sampling involves following a rigorous procedure when selecting units of analysis from a larger population,” (Du Ploy 2005:100). Considering the huge population group targeted by these community newspapers it would be impossible for this study to commit itself in

interviewing every single community member or reader of these publications. The huge population number is evidenced by the free copies each publication delivers weekly. For instance, *Public Eye* delivers 30 000 copies, *Edendale Eyethu*, 40 000, *Echo* 60 000 copies and *The Mirror* 65 000 copies. For the purpose of this study a small sample of eighty conveniently selected readers from different parts of the Pietermaritzburg area, where the study was conducted, was randomly selected and all the respondents (readers) were given a questionnaire to answer or to complete themselves. It is necessary to note that the sample size is one of the limitations of this study, coupled with time constraints and accessibility issues. However, their responses can be generalized across a larger population.

Some respondents preferred the discussions about the role played by the community newspapers instead of answering the standardized questionnaire. However, during the discussions they responded to some of the questions from the questionnaire. They felt that through discussion they could provide more detailed information as opposed to responding on limited dotted lines space of the questionnaire. The main objective of the data collection with the readers was to find out what the readers think the role of community newspapers is and also how they perceive them in terms of being reliable information providers.

Apart from the readers, four editors of the four community newspapers in the Pietermaritzburg region were interviewed. It is important to mention that one of the editors responded on behalf of two publications owned by his organization called Capital Media Group. The interviews were based on the standardized questionnaire.

The editors indicated that they needed to be given enough time to go through the questionnaire before they could answer it. They completed the questionnaire themselves and

after a week or two they emailed me their responses. The main objective of the data collection from the editors was to investigate the role and influence played by advertisers in the editorial content of the community press and how the newspaper itself perceives its role and goal. One can then refer to it when going through readers' responses.

### **3.5 Data Analysis**

After an initial brief content analysis of the newspapers to see what type of content and advertisements they contained, data was collected, and analysed using qualitative data analysis methods. Taylor defines data analysis as “an ongoing and as a dynamic and creative process, and throughout analysis researchers attempt to gain a deeper understanding of what they have studied and continually refine their interpretations” (1984: 130). Firstly the researcher went through and reread the collected data and the various literature linked to the study as part of data analysis. The literature review has contributed to a conceptual exploration of the topic.

Since “data analysis is an ongoing process in qualitative research” (Taylor and Bogdan, 1984: 129), the data analysis began at the conception of this study through reading diverse literature on the topic thus allowing the researcher to apply critical thinking or analysis on the related literature. It is important to note that the collected data was first sorted, analyzed and categorized according to the emerging issues of themes from the data. Also as part of the data analysis, words, concepts, and statements from the collected data that related to different emerging themes were selected and, then some deductions were made from the specific response before coming to findings of this study. According to Taylor and Bogdan, it is always important to “look for words and phrases in informants own vocabularies to capture

the meanings of what they say or do,” (1984: 133). These related to the issues of why and how readers use the community newspapers.

Apart from reading the literature, the study also analysed the data collected through standardised questionnaires and field notes which were taken during the various discussions or interactions with different people and members of the community.

### **3.6 Conclusion**

This chapter dealt with the research methodology used for gathering and analysing data required for the research study. The questionnaires were used to capture respondents (editors and readers) views about and understanding about the role of community newspapers.



## **Chapter 4**

### **Data collection and Analysis**

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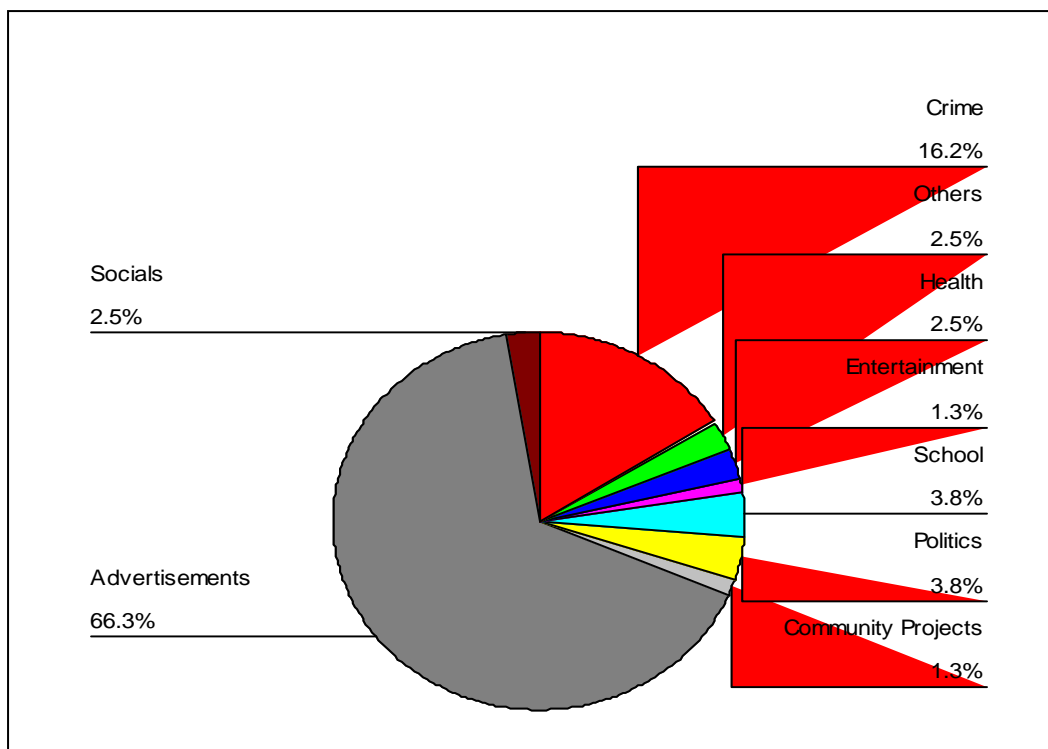
#### **4.1 Introduction**

The previous chapter focused on qualitative methodological tools employed in this project. The research tools include a brief content analysis questionnaires and interviews with the editors and the readers, and focus group discussions. The data collected from the readers was analysed using the SPSS software. The data from the editors and focus group discussions was analysed and similar responses were categorised or grouped together in order to facilitate data interpretation. It is important to note that the study did not tape record group discussion sessions due to the lack of recording equipment. However, the researcher did take comprehensive notes about issues discussed and pertinent to the topic.

#### **4.2 Content analysis**

This subsection reports on the initial brief content analysis of the four community newspapers under study. The subsection is aimed at assessing the content of these publications in terms the type of stories covered and advertisements ratio in this publications.

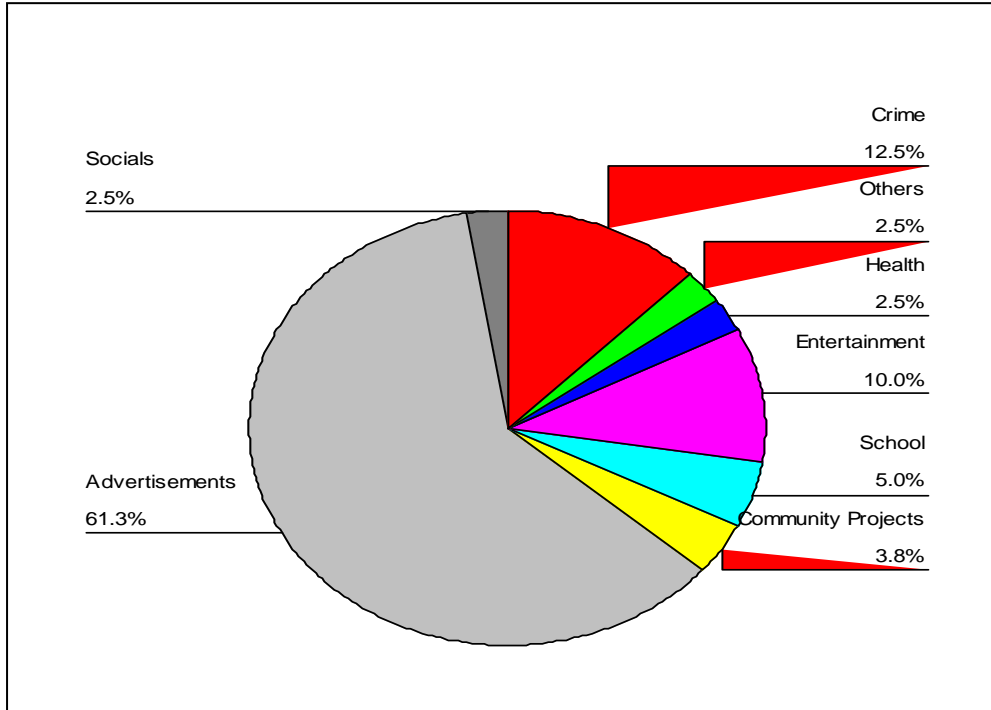
Below are four pie charts representing one of the community newspapers under study.



#### **Public Eye, Figure 4.1**

The pie chart above represents the *Public Eye* analysis of the type of news stories and the number of advertisements in the newspaper. 66.3% of *Public Eye* newspaper is advertisements. Most of the advertisements in the publication are either full, half and quarter pages. Crime reports in this publication constitute 16.2%. Most of the stories reported under this category include murder, assault and robbery and drug trafficking. School news occupies 3.8%. This means, apart from news on schools development other related news articles include stories about parents complaining about certain schools where they take their children in terms unfair dismissals. Reports on entertainment/arts and socials occupy 1.3% and 2.5% respectively. Politics coverage in this publication is 3.8% and such news tends to focus mainly on local government (municipality). Reports on health issues (including advertorials) are at 2.5%. Most of the stores are related to HIV/AIDS. Reports on stories categorised as ‘others’ are at 2.5%. These are different news of issues reported on the newspaper and they include commentary/opinion pieces and letters to the editor. Stories related to community

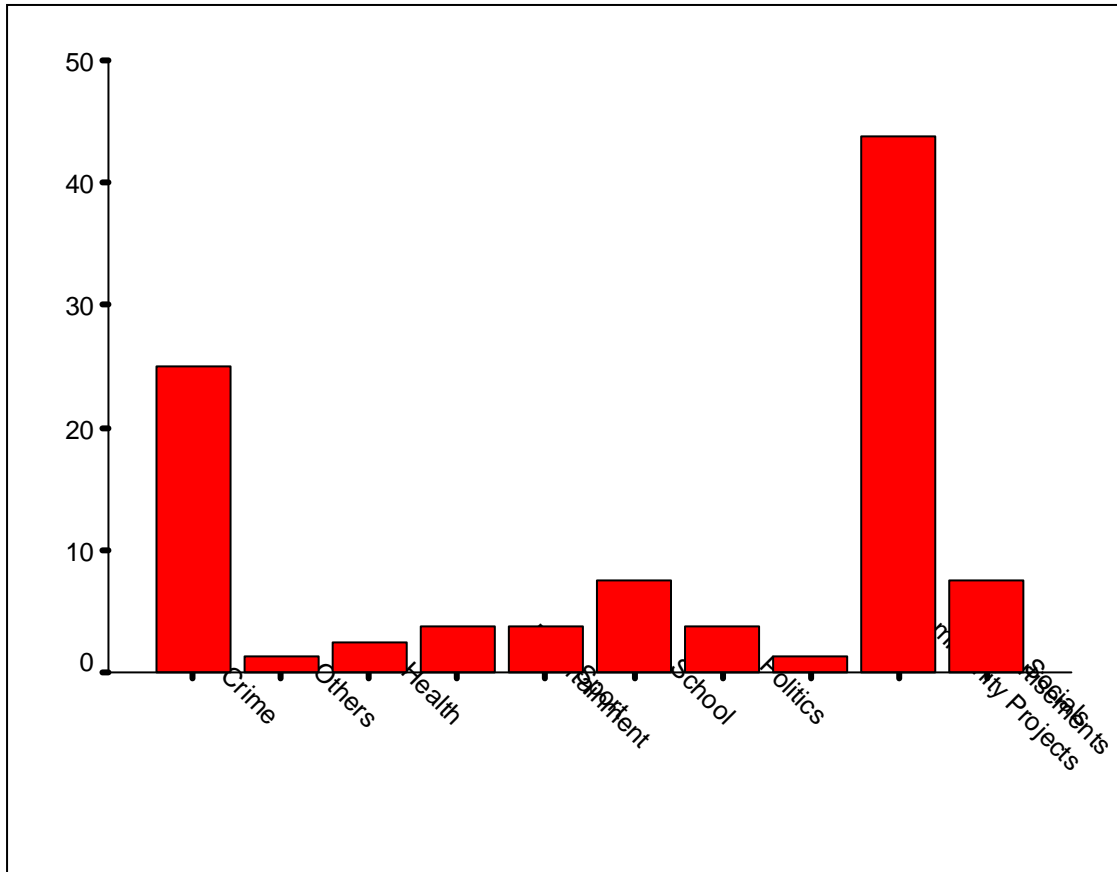
projects are at 1.3%. These stories include community initiatives and partnerships with local businesses.



**The Mirror, Figure 4.2**

The pie chart represents a summary of *The Mirror* analysis of the type of news stories covered in the newspaper and the ratio of advertisements. The advertisements in *The Mirror* are 61.3% while socials and health related stories are at 2.5% and 2.5% respectively. They normally occupy one of two full pages depicting different scenarios in the Pietermaritzburg area. The newspaper has 10% coverage on entertainment/arts related issues. Crime reports are at 12.5% and these stories include murder and rape (sexual abuse). Reports on schools are at 5%. Most of the reports on schools highlight initiatives taken by the schools i.e. gardening projects, cleaning campaigns and some academic achievements. 3.8% of *The Mirror* is community projects. Community projects highlight some community initiatives and some projects which involve businesses. Stories under the category ‘others’ are 5%. Such stories

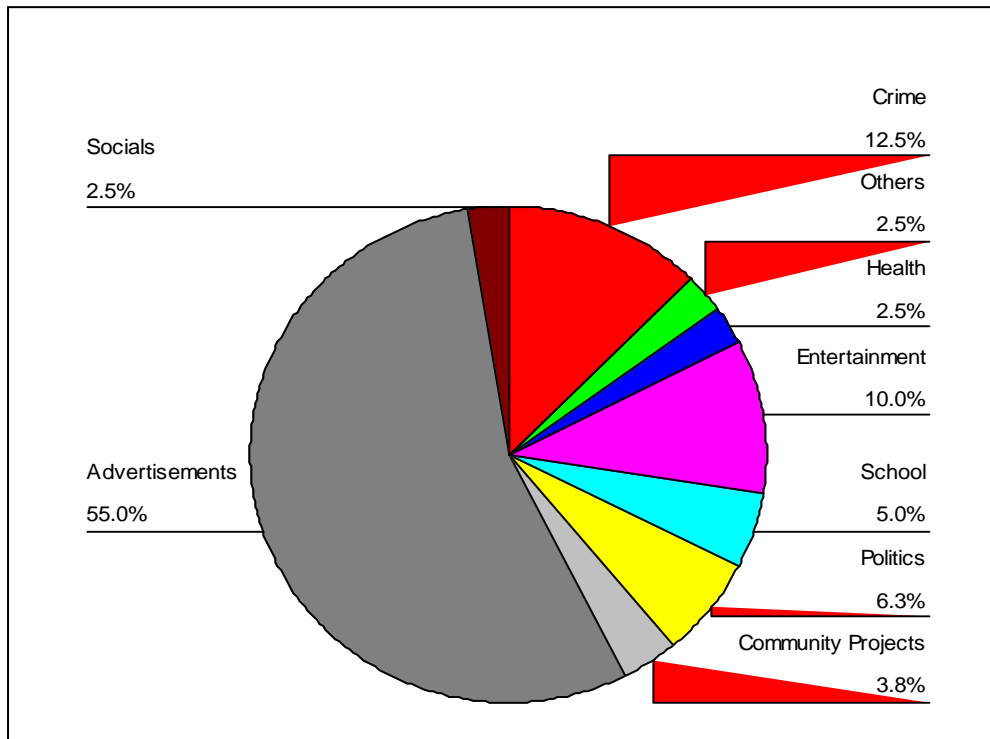
include school notices and some commentaries or opinion pieces. It is important to note that the publication does not focus on politics.



**Edendale Eyethu, Figure 4.3**

The bar chart depicts content analysis of *Edendale Eyethu* in terms of type of news stories covered in the newspaper and the ratio of advertisements in the publication. Advertisements take up 43.8% of this publication and this could be linked to the fact that the publication has only been established recently in 2008. Crime stories registered 25% and these news stories include murder, assault, robbery and rape. Entertainment/arts and sports is 3.8% respectively and school news is 7.5%. News reports on socials are 7.5%. Political news is 3.8% and community projects are 1.3%. These projects include some community initiatives and

partnership with local business i.e. Edendale Sustainable food project which was launched in Edendale.



**Echo, Figure 4.4**

The pie chart, apart from the advertisement ratio, provides in detail different categories of news stories covered by *Echo* community newspaper. Advertisements in the publication take 55% and crime stories are at 12.5%. Community projects and health related issues occupy 3.8% and 2.5%. Reports on health related issues are mainly about HIV/AIDS and supplied material on diabetics and eye care related stories. The publication has 2.5% coverage on socials while school news is 5%. On entertainment the publication has 10%. There is not much coverage on local school sports. On political stories the publication has 6.3%. In conclusion, all the four publications show that they have huge space reserved for the advertisers and, data also shows that these publications have high coverage on crime except *The Mirror* which has a relatively low percentage on crime coverage.

### 4.3 Presentation of data from the readers

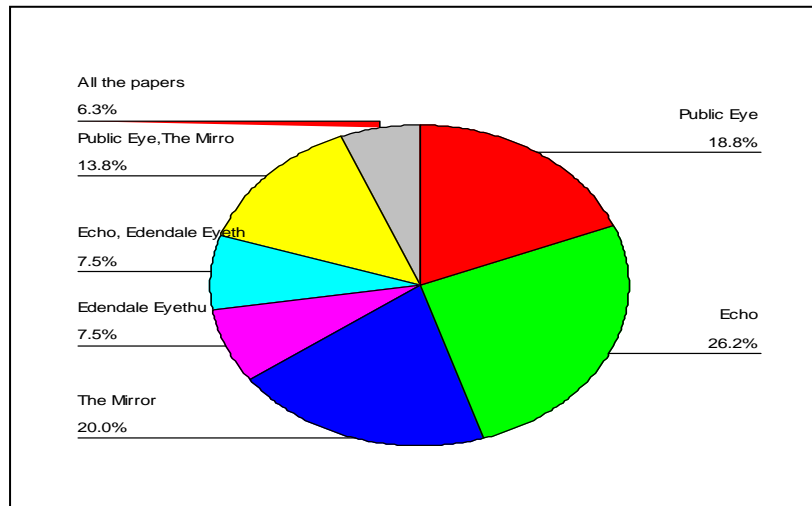
This table and the diagram represent the community newspapers which the readers interviewed by the study read.

#### 4.3.1 Which community newspaper respondents read

The table and pie chart represent the community newspapers respondents read

**Table 4.1**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Public Eye	15	18.8	18.8	18.8
Echo	21	26.3	26.3	45.0
The Mirror	16	20.0	20.0	65.0
Edendale Eyethu	6	7.5	7.5	72.5
Echo, Edendale Eyethu	6	7.5	7.5	80.0
Public Eye &The Mirror	11	13.8	13.8	93.8
All the papers	5	6.3	6.3	100.0
Total	80	100.0	100.0	



**Fig. 4.5 Pie chart of the publications read by the community readers.**

The data collected from the readers and presented in the table and pie chart above shows that 18.8% of the readers interviewed read *Public eye*, 26.2% the *Echo*, 20% *The Mirror*, 7.5% *Edendale Eyethu*, 7.5% read *Edendale Eyethu* and *Echo*, 13.8% read *Public Eye* and *The*

*Mirror*, 6.3% read all the publications under study. It is important to note that under this question, some readers responded that they read only two publications of community newspapers. These respondents admitted that their allegiance to such publications is because of similarity of content and target market. For instance respondents who read *The Mirror* say they would read *Public Eye* because it has somehow similar content and vice versa. Likewise those who read *Echo* admitted that they would read *Edendale Eyethu* because both publications focus mainly on black communities of Pietermaritzburg. This shows that community newspapers have specific target markets and the readers or consumers will always associate with and respond to a publication that meets their specific needs.

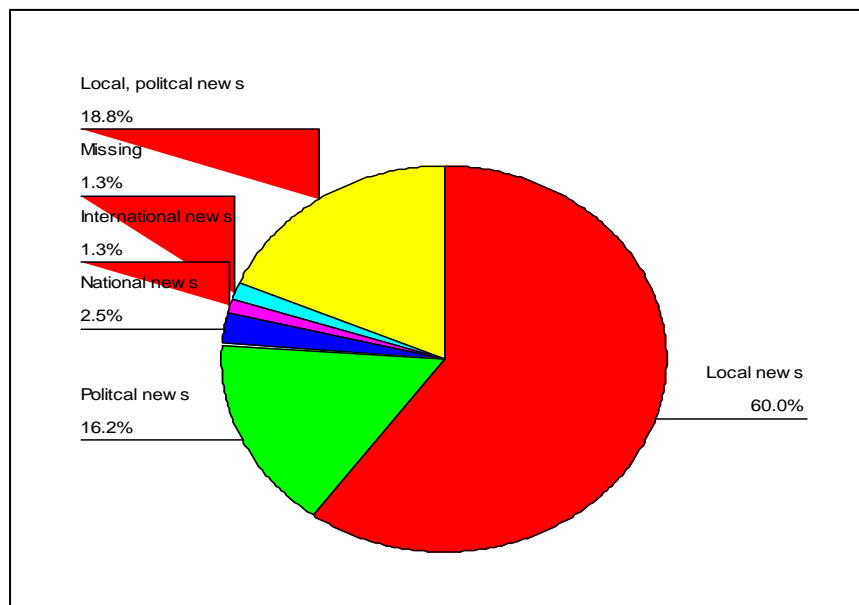
On a similar note, respondents who read more than one publication of community newspapers, indicated that it allows them to get more information about issues taking place across the city of Pietermaritzburg. As some readers answered “when a tragic event or crime has taken place I got to know from the community newspaper”, “they build character and they contribute to the things I value and believe in”; “they influence me to like my town and anything in it”. When asked to mention some of the stories or issues they still remember one of the readers said: ‘I remember a story of a woman who was run over by a taxi and the taxi driver said he thought he had hit a dog’; another one said, “a story of a 27 year old woman who was assaulted with a pickaxe and a mother who slit the throats her children”; “a young woman was bludgeoned to death by a mentally disturbed man,” said another reader. In more recent happenings most of the readers remembered the story of a 21-year-old girl who drowned in her car in Msunduzi River and the firing of the Msunduzi Municipality Mayor and her Executive Committee over allegations of mismanagement of funds. Another reader said he remembered a story where five young adults including two sisters were killed in N3 horror crash.

### 4.3.2 Reasons for reading the local community newspaper

The table and pie chart below represent reasons why readers read community newspapers.

**Table 4.2**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Local news	48	60.0	60.0	60.0
Political news	13	16.3	16.3	76.3
National news	2	2.5	2.5	78.8
International news	1	1.3	1.3	80.0
Missing	1	1.3	1.3	81.3
Local & political news	15	18.8	18.8	100.0
Total	80	100.0	100.0	



**Fig 4.6 Pie chart of the reasons why readers read community newspapers**

Data collected from readers show that 60% read the community papers for local news, 16.2% for political news, 1.3% for international news, 2.5% for national news, 18.8% for local and political news, and 1.3% of readers did not respond this question.

This suggests that, since the majority of the respondents indicated that they read community newspapers for local news shows that access to information and communication is vital for



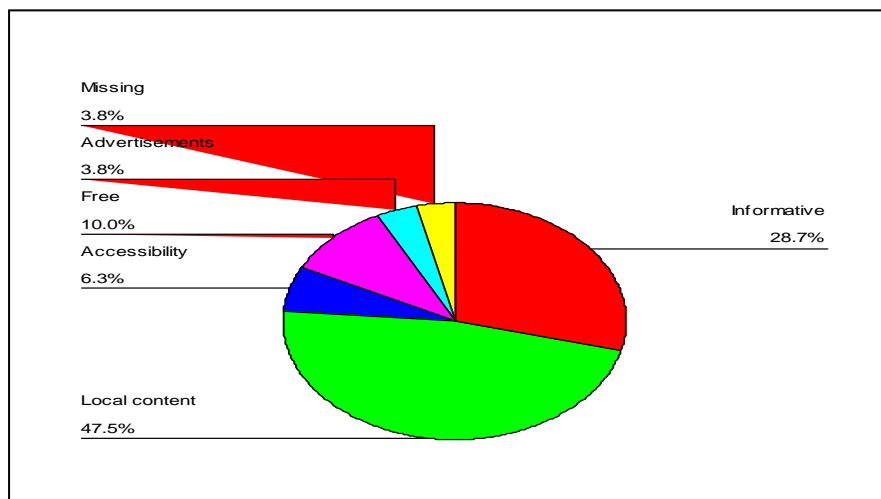
any positive development, integration and democratic participation of an individual or community. Most readers who were interviewed by this study responded that community newspapers play a significant role in their lives. For instance, when asked why they read community newspaper(s) they responded, “it lets me know about what’s going on”; “it creates awareness about the people and different issues in the community”; “there are a lot of opinions from people about national issues”, “they keep me updated about what is happening in and around the city of Pietermaritzburg.” “They give in-depth analysis of news happening in areas we live in and community events.” Some of the examples of stories given by the readers, which illustrate what is happening in the community include: “Crematorium in the city burns down while a body was being cremated”; “two elderly women robbed in their flat”; “pensioner conned out of R5000”; “Killers of Sandesh Poorun found guilty – Poorun was lured to a local B&B drugged and strangled (in *Public Eye*). “A body of a woman found in Westgate bridge”; “wheel theft leave Imbali residents afraid to park their vehicles outside” (in *Edendale Eyethu*). “Mother issue fundraising warning” (after a number of people collected money under her name for their own interests. The funds were aimed for her daughter, a toddler, who needs a liver transplant); “grandfather forces granddaughter, 12, to watch porn movies and then forces her to perform oral sex on him” (in *The Mirror*). Meanwhile, *Echo* readers remembered the incident of a mother who slit the throats of her two children in attempt to protect her boyfriend who was accused of raping her child; and the Selebi trial. Such responses show that members of the community rely on these publications to inform themselves, thus keeping abreast with what is going in the community.

### 4.3.3 What is special about the newspaper respondents read

The table and the pie diagram below are aimed at having readers' views about what is so special about the newspaper respondents read.

**Table 4.3**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Informative	23	28.7	28.7	28.7
Local content	38	47.5	47.5	76.3
Accessibility	5	6.3	6.3	82.5
Free	8	10.0	10.0	92.5
Advertisements	3	3.8	3.8	96.3
Missing	3	3.8	3.8	100.0
Total	80	100.0	100.0	



**Fig. 4.7 Pie chart about what is so special of the newspaper respondents read**

From table and figure above, when readers were asked to indicate what is special about the community newspapers that they read, 28.7% indicated that they read it to be informed, 47.5% read the paper for its local content, 6.3% read the paper because it is accessible, 10% because the paper is given to them free of charge, 3.8% read the paper in order to access the advertisements, and 3.8% of the readers did not respond on this question. Respondents who did not respond said they did so because they hardly have access or receive community

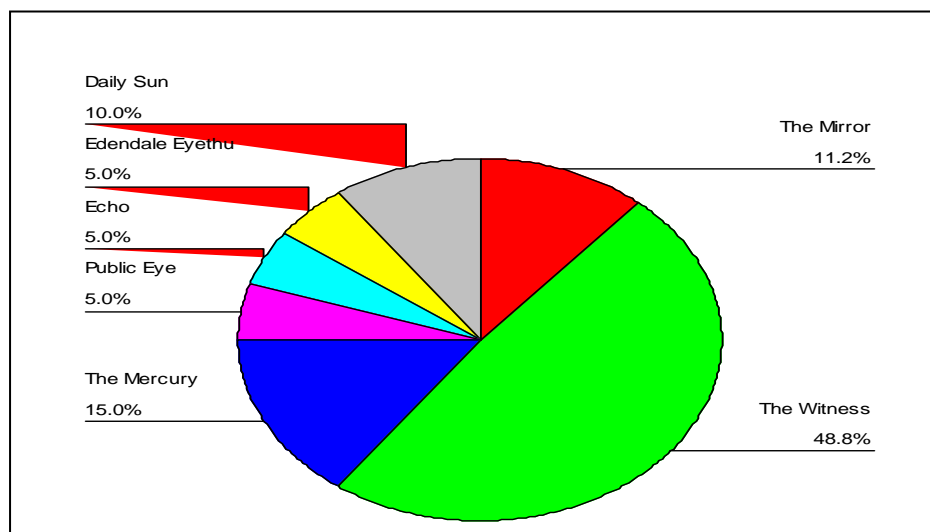
newspapers. One of the interesting aspects under this question is the fact that some of the readers of the four community newspapers under study indicated that they were reading these publications because they were free of charge and that they would not be able to afford on daily basis to buy *The Witness* and other mainstream papers.

#### 4.3.4 If the newspaper you read ceased to exist which other paper would you read

This question based on the table and pie chart below was to assess other alternative newspapers respondent read.

**Table 4.4**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
The Mirror	9	11.2	11.2	11.2
The Witness	39	48.8	48.8	60.0
The Mercury	12	15.0	15.0	75.0
Public Eye	4	5.0	5.0	80.0
Echo	4	5.0	5.0	85.0
Edendale Eyethu	4	5.0	5.0	90.0
Daily Sun	8	10.0	10.0	100.0
Total	80	100.0	100.0	



**Fig 4.8 The pie chart of the alternative papers of the readers**

When readers were asked to indicate the alternative paper that they would read should their preferred community newspaper cease to exist, 11.2% of respondents indicated that they would read *The Mirror*, while 48.8% would read *The Witness*, 15% *The Mercury*, 5% *Public Eye*, 5% *Edendale Eyethu*, 5% *Echo*, 10% would read the *Daily Sun*.

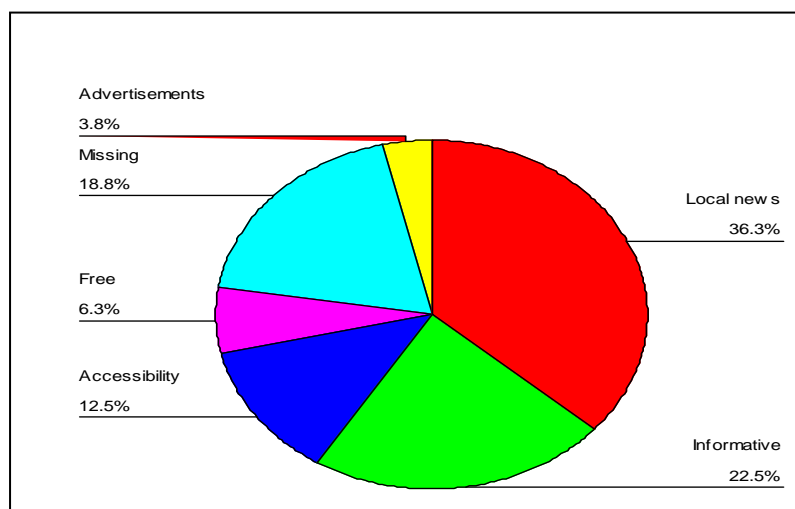
An interesting aspect to note under this question is the fact the majority of respondents indicated that if their preferred community publication or publications were to be sold or ceased to exist they would read *The Witness* although it is a provincial mainstream newspaper that has a strong focus on Pietermaritzburg. “*The Witness* tells us the latest news and also about new developments in our city”, “it promotes its people, their business and encourages the citizens of Pietermaritzburg to identify themselves with the city of choice, people of choice and the team of choice. Such responses show that community members who read community newspapers have over the years established close links with the community press serving in their respective areas. This may indicate that *The Witness* is trying to be both a community and mainstream newspaper. Over the past few years it has consciously made an attempt to be more inclusive.

### 4.3.5 The reason for choosing this particular paper

The table and pie diagram below indicate the purpose why the respondents read the newspaper of their choice.

**Table 4.5**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Local news	29	36.3	36.3	36.3
Informative	18	22.5	22.5	58.8
Accessibility	10	12.5	12.5	71.3
Free	5	6.3	6.3	77.5
Missing	15	18.8	18.8	96.3
Advertisements	3	3.8	3.8	100.0
Total	80	100.0	100.0	



**Fig. 4.9 Pie chart of the reasons for reading the community newspaper**

From the table and the figure above, 36.3% of the respondents indicated that they read a community newspaper of their choice mainly for the local news, 22.5% read the community paper in order to be more informed of the events taking place in their community, 12.5% read the community because they access it easily, 6.3% because it is free, 3.8% read the paper in order to access the advertisements and 18.8% of the readers did not respond on this question. The percentage of people who did not respond to the question is very high and this could be

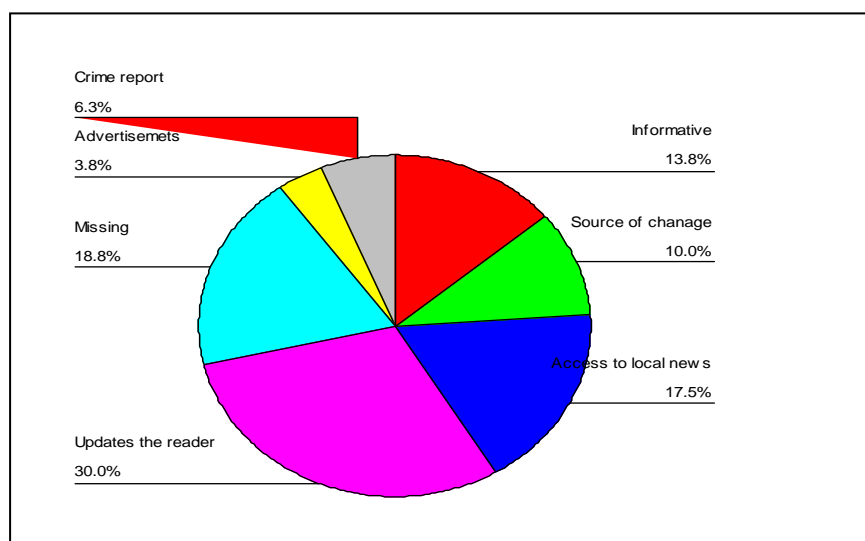
linked to the fact some respondents indicated that they do not receive the newspapers in their area. This could be linked with the distribution of these publications in that most copies of the newspapers are distributed in shopping centres thus defeating the notion of ‘knock and drop’ in households.

#### 4.3.6 In what way does the community paper influence the reader

The table and the pie chart represent a summary as to how community newspapers they read influence them.

**Table 4.6**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Informative	11	13.8	13.8	13.8
Source of change	8	10.0	10.0	23.8
Access to local news	14	17.5	17.5	41.3
Updates the reader	24	30.0	30.0	71.3
Missing	15	18.8	18.8	90.0
Advertisements	3	3.8	3.8	93.8
Crime report	5	6.3	6.3	100.0
Total	80	100.0	100.0	



**Fig. 4.10** Pie chart about how community newspapers influence readers

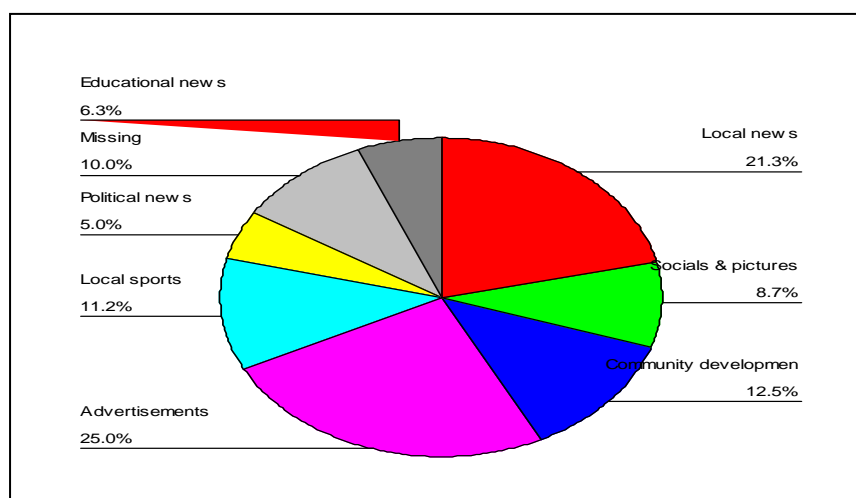
From the table and the figure above, 13.8% of the respondents indicated that they read a community paper for its informative aspect, 10% of the respondents view community press as a source of change, 17.5% to access local news, 30% to be updated on the local events, 6.3% to know more about crime, 3.8% for advertisings and 18.8% did not respond to this question. This could be linked to the fact that, apart from distribution problems faced by theses publications, is not every reader interested in advertisements.

### 4.3.7 The main interest of the readers in the community papers

The table and the chart below represent a summary of main interests of the readers in community newspapers.

**Table 4.7**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Local news	17	21.3	21.3	21.3
Socials & pictures	7	8.8	8.8	30.0
Community development	10	12.5	12.5	42.5
Advertisements	20	25.0	25.0	67.5
Local sports	9	11.3	11.3	78.8
Political news	4	5.0	5.0	83.8
Missing	8	10.0	10.0	93.8
Educational news	5	6.3	6.3	100.0
Total	80	100.0	100.0	



**Fig. 4.11 Pie chart about reader main interest in community newspapers**

From the table and figure above, 21.3% of respondents indicated that their main interest in community newspapers is local news, 8.7% are interested in socials and pictures, 12.5% are interested in community development, 25% are interested in advertisements, 11.2% of respondents indicated that they are interested in local sports, 5% of respondents are interested



in political news, 10% of respondents did not answer this question, 6.3% for educational news.

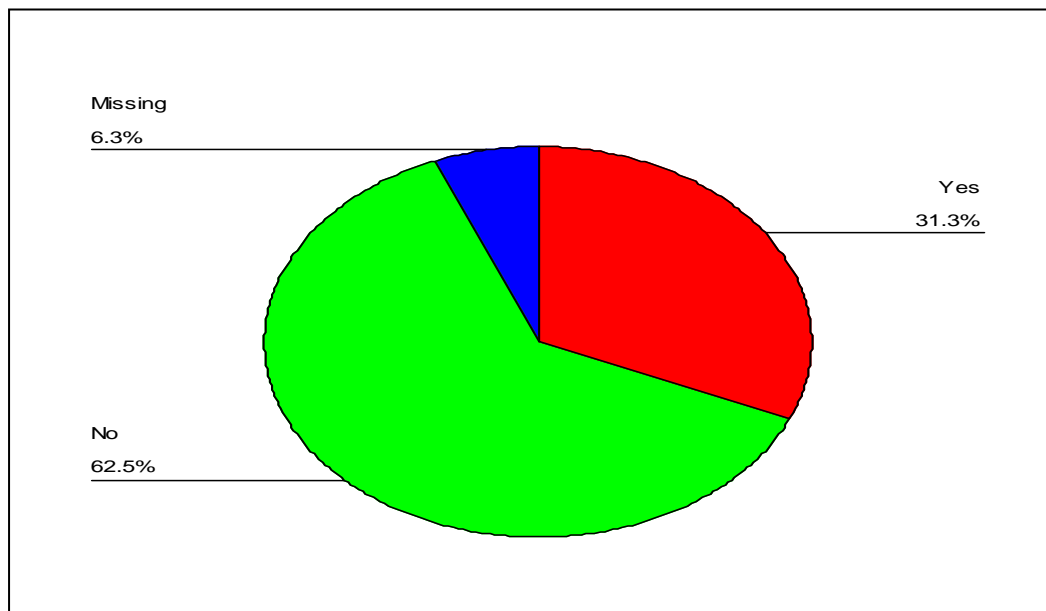
For the majority of respondents under this question maintained that their main interest in community newspapers are advertisements, specials and promotions, while 21.3% of respondents indicated that local news as their main interest in these publications. This is also supported by tables and pie charts (4.10, 4.14 and 4.11 and 4.15) respectively. This means that most of the readers view the four community newspapers partly as tools used by advertisers to provide more advertisements than news itself. Such perceptions of a newspaper filled with advertisements tend to shadow one of the roles of these publications as the mouth piece of the community. But it could be said, from a development perspective, that the community is becoming more discerning, active consumers which is a good thing, exercising freedom of choice compared to the past in South Africa. However, developing active citizens could also be achieved by delivering relevant content.

#### 4.3.8 Readers' contribution of articles to the local papers

This question was aimed at finding out if readers do contribute articles to the newspapers they read.

**Table 4.8**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Yes	25	31.3	31.3	31.3
No	50	62.5	62.5	93.8
Missing	5	6.3	6.3	100.0
Total	80	100.0	100.0	



**Fig 4.12 Pie chart whether readers contribute news articles to the paper or not.**

From the table and figure above, when readers were asked if they contribute news articles to community newspapers they read, 31.3% indicated that “yes”, 62.5% indicate “no”, whereas 6.3% did not answer on this question. It is however interesting that from the eighty readers who answered the questionnaire only a few responded that they sometimes do contribute with input to the community newspaper. Some said they occasionally contribute with letters to the editor. This suggests that, since the majority of the readers interviewed in this study indicated that they have not written any news article about what they see happening in their area, it confirms that people have accepted that it is the media that determines what they should

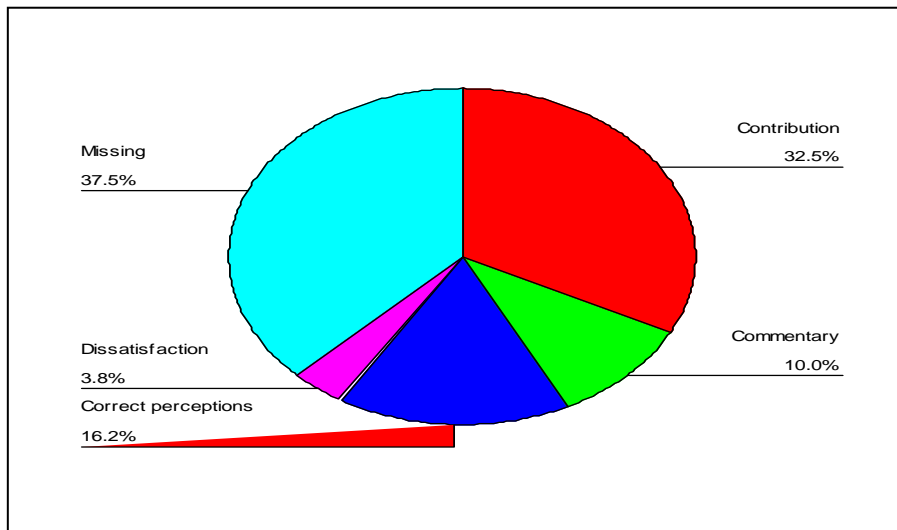
know and talk about, hence the agenda setting aspect of the media. For example, some of the readers pointed out that community newspapers “cover community news and have adverts from different stores that allow the people to view the goods on special”; “they are a reliable source and report accurately.”

#### 4.3.9 Readers' reasons for contributing articles to the local papers

The table and the pie chart represent summary as to why readers contribute to the newspaper.

**Table 4.9**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Contribution	26	32.5	32.5	32.5
Commentary	8	10.0	10.0	42.5
Correct perceptions	13	16.3	16.3	58.8
Express dissatisfactions	3	3.8	3.8	62.5
Missing	30	37.5	37.5	100.0
Total	80	100.0	100.0	



**Fig 4.13 Pie chart as to why readers contribute news articles to the local papers**

From the table and figure, 32.5% of readers indicated that they submit news articles to the newspaper to highlight pressing issues in the community and they view this as part of their

contribution to the paper, 10% of the respondents write article as commentary on certain issues, 16.2% write articles to correct perception, 3.8% write news articles to express dissatisfaction, whereas 37.05% did not respond to this question. This shows that most readers do not take active part in these community newspapers by contributing articles. One could argue that may be the readers expect the newspapers to provide them with any information that they may consider relevant to make informed decisions. The few respondents who contribute articles to the newspapers said they do so to complain about (dissatisfaction) poor service delivery, electricity and water supply disruptions, to comment on topical issues while others said they contribute with letters to the editor. Other respondents are of the view that that contributing articles or letters to the editor plays a vital role in the process of community interaction amongst community members. For example, in letters to the editor, a community member, after reading about a pensioner who was attacked at home, called for a need to unite against crime and she wrote:

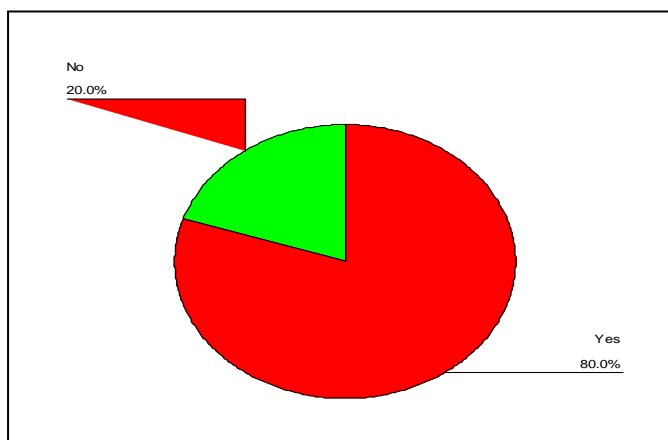
“I read the article dated June 2009 in *Public Eye* pensioner attacked at home with much sadness and anger. How can people be so uncaring and inhuman? Thieves target, plot and plan to take advantage of our elderly. Why do we need to continue to allow these creatures to assault, rape, and vandalize our older generation? I think community should stick together to protect the old and the frail. We should organize neighbourhood watches to target these criminals and we should also work together with our police to ensure that these criminals are caught and brought to justice. Let’s fight back and against crime. Let’s stop the vicious attacks on our homes and elderly and break the cycle of crime.” (Source: *Public Eye* 2009).

#### 4.3.10 Readers' attention to advertisements

The table and pie chart below represents a summary whether the readers look for advertisements in community newspapers.

**Table 4.10**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	64	80.0	80.0	80.0
No	16	20.0	20.0	100.0
Total	80	100.0	100.0	



**Fig. 4.14 Pie Chart about readers' attention to advertisements**

From the table and figure above, 80% of respondents indicated that they look at advertisements in community newspapers while 20% indicated that they do not look at advertisements. Responses from respondents who look at the advertisements include “yes I look at the adverts all the time”; “it is the first thing I look at; it is always good to know about specials in stores, property and other services.” While others said “not really; not at all.” Previous studies suggest that “based on the increasing advertising revenues generated by community newspapers, it would seem that advertisers are finding community newspapers to be a lucrative and effective means of communication,” (Mwangi, 2008: 17). While the advertisers play a crucial role in the process of sustainability of community newspapers, however, the ethos and role of these publications could be in line with journalism ethics such

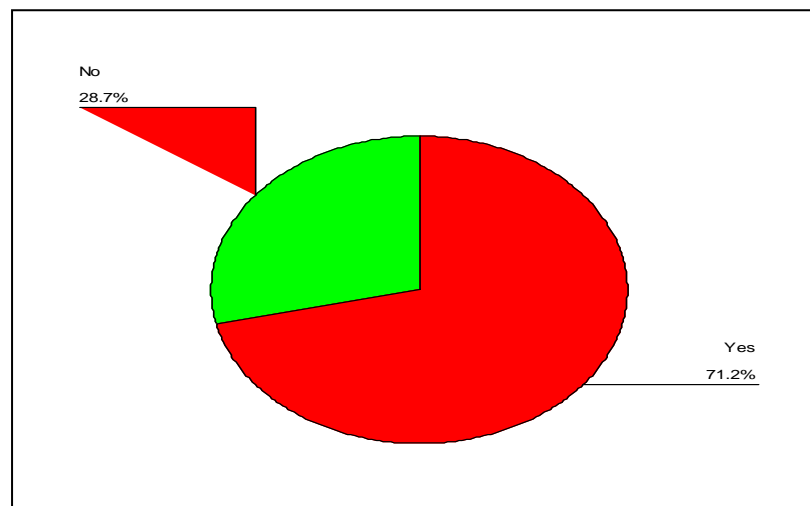
as social responsibility, objectivity and freedom of expression. This suggests that when the community newspapers function according to media ethics and balancing the demands of market-driven journalism they could be in a position to provide community information and news that could help stir critical public debate such as political news and investigative journalism.

#### 4.3.11 The influence of advertisements on consumers

The question was intended to assess if advertisements influence respondents in their shopping patterns.

**Table 4.11**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	57	71.2	71.3	71.3
No	23	28.7	28.8	100.0
Total	80	100.0	100.0	



**Fig. 4.15 Pie chart about the influence of advertisements on consumers**

From the table and figure above, 71.2% of respondents indicated that they are influenced by advertisements in community newspapers, while 28.7% indicated that they are not influenced by advertisements in community newspapers. This indicates that the majority of respondents view community newspapers as medium to connect with consumers. They indicated that

while community newspapers may provide some local news they are however filled with advertisements from retail companies and other stakeholders selling their products or services. Their responses include: ‘they cover community news but they also have more advertisements from different stores that allow people to be able to view goods that are on special;’ most percentage of the paper is full of advertisements on each page;’ there are more advertisements than news in community newspapers.’

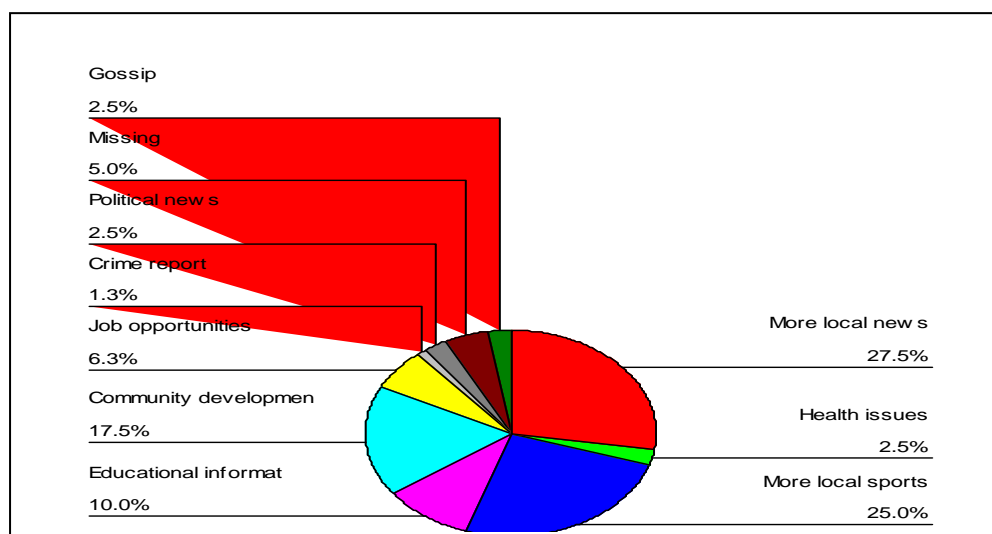
These responses show that apart from providing news and other relevant information, the four community newspapers’ other purpose seems to be that of connecting the consumer with different products or services being advertised. Some respondents said community newspapers influence the way people think with biased articles, while for others community newspapers have influence in their shopping patterns in that if they see something cheap in the paper they are tempted to go and purchase.

### 4.3.12 Readers' expectations of the local newspapers

The table and pie chart below provide readers expectations of community newspapers.

**Table 4.12**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
More local news	22	27.5	27.5	27.5
Health issues	2	2.5	2.5	30.0
More local sports	20	25.0	25.0	55.0
Educational information	8	10.0	10.0	65.0
Community development	14	17.5	17.5	82.5
Job opportunities	5	6.3	6.3	88.8
Crime report	1	1.3	1.3	90.0
Political news	2	2.5	2.5	92.5
Missing	4	5.0	5.0	97.5
Gossip	2	2.5	2.5	100.0
Total	80	100.0	100.0	



**Fig. 4.16 Pie chart about readers' expectations in local newspapers**

From the table and figure above, 27.5% respondents indicated that they prefer more local news, 2.5% respondent prefer to see more health issues, 25% more local sports, 10% educational information, 17.5% community development, 6.3% prefer to see job opportunities covered, 1.3% expect crime reports, 2.5% prefer more political news, 2.5% want to see a gossip column, whereas 5% respondents did not answer this question.



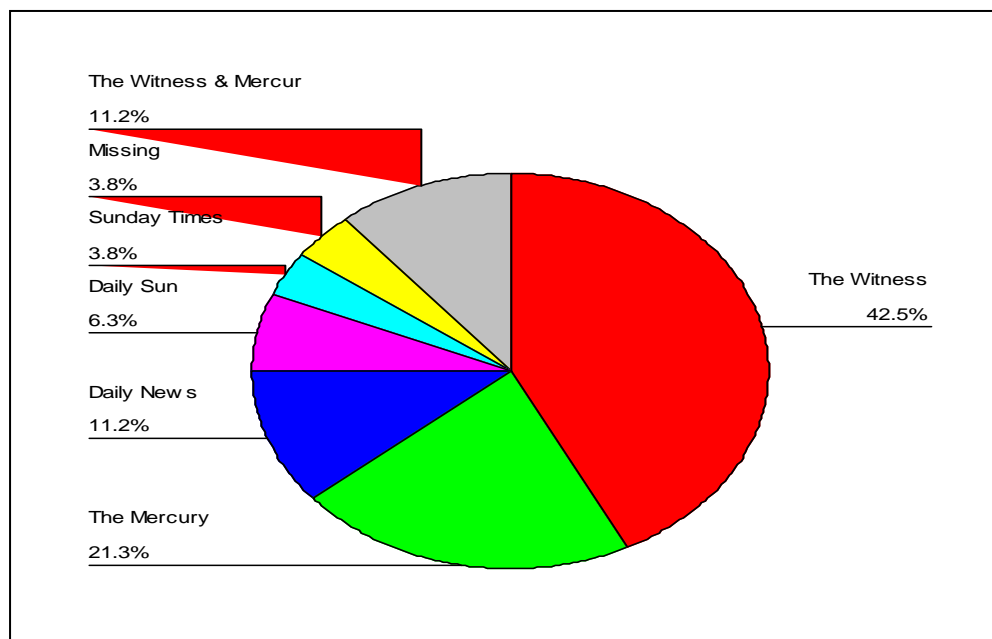
It is important to note that apart from local news and local sports respondents indicated that they would be interested in reading more about community development and achievements gained in different communities. Their responses include ; “it would be good to read interviews with older citizens to share history of local areas with us”; “more local news and initiatives that will empower our communities e.g. business skills, mentorship programs and institutions that can help train people for less cost”. For others, community newspapers should also have more general topics to boost the general knowledge of the reader. Such topics include “aviation, science, more reports on both school and community sports and activities, positive aspects of the community and its residents.”

### 4.3.13 Readers' papers, other than the local papers

The table and pie chart below provide a summary of the alternative newspapers respondents read.

**Table 4.13**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
The Witness	34	42.5	42.5	42.5
The Mercury	17	21.3	21.3	63.8
Daily News	9	11.3	11.3	75.0
Daily Sun	5	6.3	6.3	81.3
Sunday Times	3	3.8	3.8	85.0
Missing	3	3.8	3.8	88.8
The Witness & Mercury	9	11.3	11.3	100.0
Total	80	100.0	100.0	



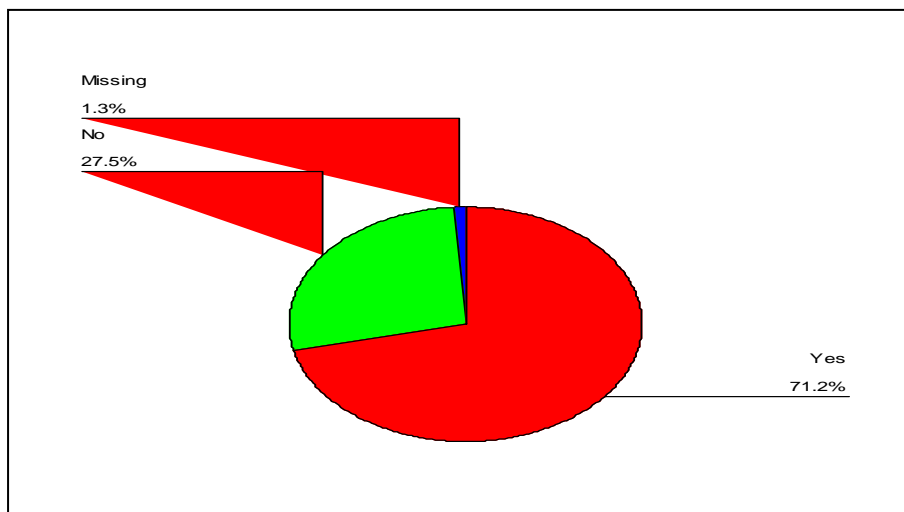
**Fig. 4.17 Pie chart readers' papers other than local community papers**

The table and figure above, 42.5% of respondents indicated that apart from local newspapers they read *The Witness*, 21.3% read *The Mercury*, 11.2% indicated they read the *Daily News*, 6.3% read the *Daily Sun*, 3.8% read *Sunday Times*, 11.2% read *The Witness* and *The Mercury*, whereas 3.8% did not respond on this question.

**4.3.14 Readers' opinions on whether community papers are more commercial tools than means of news provision**

**Table 4.14**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	57	71.3	71.3	71.3
No	22	27.5	27.5	98.8
Missing	1	1.3	1.3	100.0
Total	80	100.0	100.0	



**Fig. 4.18 Pie chart about whether community newspapers are more commercial tools than means of news provision**

The table and figure above, 71.2% of the readers indicated that they view community newspapers as more commercial tools than means of news provision, while 27.5% indicated that community newspapers are a means of news provision, 1.3% did not answer this question.

#### 4.4 Data from Editors

At the outset, it is important to note that a brief content analysis revealed that the editorial focus of these publications seems to be shifting from community issues or human interest stories to more sensational or crime stories. For example, under crime stories the predominant themes in community newspapers are murder, robbery and to a lesser extent rape. So often when reported, these themes make lead stories or front page stories in community newspapers. It is also important to note that of these four publications, *The Mirror* is the only one that seems to stick to its principles and objective of focusing on human interest stories. The editor of *The Mirror* indicated during an interview, “we run more human interest stories as opposed to crime and court related stories.” The editor further indicated that the focus on human interest stories is necessitated by the fact that “it is difficult to run major news stories in a weekly publication as news becomes stale if you get it a couple of days before you are due to publish.” Some of the examples of human interest stories in *The Mirror* include: A woman found sleeping in a wooden shack the size of a dog kennel; Grandfather abused child; Raisethorpe new mall; waste left off road; local teacher wins award for innovation and hard work.

By contrast, the lead stories in other community newspapers include, for instance: resident stabbed by shebeen owner for small change; taxi driver and companion gunned down in rush hour ambush; conflict between friends leads to murder; killers found guilty; pensioner conned out of R5000; murder: mom in court; mother slit throats of her children; assaulted with a pickaxe. These headlines were in *Public Eye*, *Edendale Eyethu* and *Echo*. These types of stories normally occupy the first two pages of the publications while the other pages are filled with social pictures and school sports.

Community newspapers do not only provide relevant information and knowledge to the community but also they spearhead community development. Community development could be successful if media owners, stakeholders and the community work together with a common objective. This means that consultation and dissemination of information about certain plans or projects earmarked for the community is very important in order to avoid unnecessary disputes or the community's refusal to accept an imposed developmental effort that will not help address their plight. For example, this was the case in Sobantu community in Pietermaritzburg when angry residents boycotted municipality's decision to build a new cemetery instead of houses. According to a news report in *Echo* newspaper dated 22 October 2009:

“The protest which included the burning of tyres came after *The Witness* reported last week that with the shortage of space in cemeteries around Pietermaritzburg, the Hollingwood site, which is between Sobantu and Lincoln Meade, could be used as a cemetery. The residents said that their four-roomed houses are too small to accommodate their extended families and therefore they want to use the site to build more houses.”

However, many pages of community newspapers are reserved for advertisements and advertorials, and this could be well explained by the editors' responses during interviews that they depended on advertisements for their survival. “Our newspaper is a free sheet but even if there was a cover charge it would not make the profit that would make it to survive,” said the editor of *Echo*. “We are a commercial publishing company and in the absence of a substantial cover price, advertising is the only source of revenue,” said the Editor of *Public Eye* and *Edendale Eyethu*. *The Mirror* editor added, “we are a free sheet therefore advertising is what gets us out every week.” It is through such dependency on revenue that community newspapers are highly susceptible to the demands and needs of the advertisers, thus

relegating the rights of the community to access relevant information to a minor second priority.

It is relevant for this study to indicate some of the major (retailers) advertisers in the four community newspapers. The advertisers include all the big retail chain stores in the city such as, Game, Pick n' Pay, Spar, Rhino Cash and Carry, Jwayelani, Save You Food Town, Siyaya Pick N' Build, Meats Cash and Carry, EB's Continental Meats. Also other businesses which feature prominently as advertisers in these publications include the car industry (mainly second hand), Poobie Naidoo's (sporting shop), Fruit & Veg, and various cosmetic and pharmacy outlets, firework dealers, and building and construction material businesses.

According to Lovaas, "market-driven newspapers continue through a series of news filters to limit, shape, and censor ideas for the benefit of the elite. The manufactured, one-dimensional, pro-market world view that results restricts both freedom and democracy," (2007: 52). For example, when Northway Mall, in Northdale, celebrated eight years of its establishment in 2009, the management of the mall not only published two colour pages of advertisements from different shops at the mall, including the Superspar, but they also demanded that a news story be published about their products and services. Part of the story read:

"Residents and shop owners endorsed the mall's eight years of existence in the area as a resounding success. Shop owners said that over the past eight years Northway Mall has grown from strength to strength...Superspar who is the anchor tenant for the Northway Mall prides itself in offering clients the highest quality service and the finest products, in their well stocked bakery, fresh produce and butchery departments...." (Source: *Public Eye* December 10, 2009).

In another example in *The Mirror* of 30 September 2009, an advertorial and promotional feature article was published to complement full page advertisements placed in the paper. The story promoted the new owners of *Battery World*.

#### **4.5 Community Newspapers: Means of information and community building tools** (See Appendix B for questions)

The following verbatim responses are based on the question “what is the role of community newspapers according to your understanding?” All the responses from the informants are quoted verbatim.

The editor of *The Mirror*: “To act as a mouthpiece for the community and to take up causes for local residents. Community newspapers are more intimate, have a closer relationship with residents than large daily newspapers.”

The editor of *Echo*: “Like any other newspaper they educate, inform, entertain and tell the news stories as they happen depending on the frequency and resources. So more than anything they empower communities.”

The editor of *Public Eye* and *Edendale Eyethu*: “To provide content that is relevant to a specific and defined target audience.”

The above stated responses by the editors of community newspapers suggest that the main responsibility of these publications is to serve not only as providers of news or information but also, as tools for community building and community integration. The editors highlighted the attributes of community newspapers as means to provide “locally based content” and also as means to “empower the community” and thus working as “mouthpiece for the community”. Also as a way to enhance the notion of community building among the readers

through the newspaper, the editor of *Echo* responded “we conduct market researches where the community is asked for input aimed at improving the editorial content and the look of the paper, and the paper carries unique stories which are mainly exclusively ours...stick to your quality standards, but always have your ear to the ground to hear what your reading community wants, and give them what they want without compromising your integrity. Tell only the truth.” This suggests that this editor is of the opinion that this newspaper is only providing the news that the community wants to hear that will help build a strong community.

The editors also indicated that their publications have managed to fulfill their purpose or objective in different ways. For example, the editor of *Public Eye* and *Edendale Eyethu* said such achievements were made possible through commitment to provide “news of locally based content”, aimed at meeting the “information needs of the communities.” He said while they strive to remain locally based as far as content is concerned they are sometimes forced to compromise with national content in the absence of local news. According to the editor, such a phenomenon is evident when they have “larger paginations and not much local content.” This could mean that, because of the increasing focus on profits in the form of advertisements, local content is sacrificed for the readily available national content from other sources such as *Bua News* and *SAPA*. Most of the time such content is not relevant to the community as it does not affect them but has been used in the paper to fill the space. However, this study argues that if the national content impacts on the lives of the people community newspapers could also consider creating space for national news. For the editor of *Echo*, they are able to achieve their goals mainly because “we stick to our standards and tell the truth.”



These comments or insights propose that the four community newspapers are at the core of community affairs, how to address the issues of lack of service delivery, employment and provision of health facilities in rural areas as they not only identify themselves with communities they serve, but also play a role in the process of social engagement and community participation. Aside from the provision of news, like any other media outlet, community newspapers could, or in the case of these four newspapers should, according to the editors, contribute to the social mobilisation of communities. For instance, residents of Bombay Heights in Pietermaritzburg, resolved to tackle the rampant crime in the area by employing a security company to patrol the area and to revive neighbourhood watch.

#### **4.6 Touching community lives through local content and involvement**

The purpose of this subheading was to find out from editors how they view their publications contributing or getting involved in community affairs. “Do you think your publication has managed to fulfil its purpose?” This refers apart from educating and providing news and information to the community, to the editors also seeing community newspapers, particularly their own publications, as contributing significantly in the daily affairs or social life of the community which they serve. The responses from the informants are quoted verbatim.

The editors’ responses under this category indicate that community newspapers do play an important role in the process of community involvement. The editors indicated that they assist the community through sponsorship of several projects linked to Non Governmental Organizations (NGO) and other outreach programs. The editors also said that through their newspapers they seek causes and community issues around which to champion and lobby both private and state sectors. “We often leverage our community penetration to raise funds

for worthy causes;” “we do get involved in certain events by being media sponsors, and we very involved in community affairs as we publicize and attend many functions.” This means, as part of the social responsibility of these publications, they sometimes engage in community activities and support various initiatives aimed at improving the lives of the community. Also this suggests that these editors are of the opinion that they are fully involved in helping address issues affecting the community.

Furthermore, the editors view the community newspapers as contributing towards developing relationship between the readers and the newspaper through locally based content. The editor of *Public Eye* and *Edendale Eyethu* newspapers responded: “We continually resist the temptation to publish national content streams which will dilute our focus on catering for local content”, and the editor of *The Mirror* newspaper “we run more human interest stories as opposed to crime stories.” These answers show that through the newspapers’ content, which focuses on and reflects development concerning community issues, touches the lives of the very people the newspapers serve. As Jones et al. observed, “such stories are articulating their daily lives and struggles and it is unlikely they would see themselves similarly featured in most of the rest of the media,” (in Hadland et al. 2008: 177). For example, in *The Mirror* of December 9, 2009, two stories of human interest were reported. “Hospital negligence in dealing with patients, where a pensioner was discharged from hospital with a blocked feeding tube in her nose,” and “grandfather abusing his granddaughter forcing her to perform oral sex on him.” While in *Edendale Eyethu* of 29 October 2009, “Ward Councillor applies for more toilets, where a local community has been living in the area (France settlement outside Pietermaritzburg) without toilets and they relieved themselves in plastic bags and in the nearby bushes.” Such stories depict the day to day struggles faced by community members. Linking this to the theme of touching

community lives, one could say that the community's approach suggests that people are getting involved in the process of addressing their plight as they are able to talk about their experiences which are central to their social life. This means, highlighting the plight of their living conditions is a way of showing the relevant authorities that something is wrong and needs urgent attention in order to provide better living conditions. Also, since community newspapers have specific target markets, e.g. *Public Eye* has particular emphasis on the Indian community and *Edendale Eyethu* focuses on the black community, whereas *Echo* targets mainly the historically disadvantaged of Pietermaritzburg. For instance *Echo* was first established as an educational tool mainly for the black community and over the years it has developed into a means of information and news provision to the community. Such development entails that the community too has come to identify itself with the paper as a tool that always accompanies community development. The development and construction of a shopping mall in Imbali, the improvement of the Harry Gwala stadium, the construction of the first artificial pitch in Wadley Stadium in Imbali, and stories depicting community initiatives aimed at empowering the youth as far as skills development goes i.e. computer courses, are some of the developments covered in the paper.

#### **4.7 Community Newspapers and community links**

The following verbatim responses are based on the questions "What role should the community play in supporting the newspaper?" "What makes your publication unique compared to other local community newspapers?" All the responses from the informants are quoted verbatim.

Community newspapers, through their value laden content, help establish community links with members of community and the readers. According to the response of the editor of *The Mirror*, “community newspapers are more intimate, have a closer relationship with residents than large daily newspapers.” Jeffres et al. observed that “community ties and organisations are likely to reinforce each other, so a decline in the latter could have negative effects on the strength of the community newspapers,” (2007: 6). A suggestion being that, if organisations happen to be doing very well they could fund community newspapers as a way of reaching a balanced compromise between information and advertisements. This suggests that through locally based content which is aimed at a specific target market helps create and cement a workable “relationship with residents,” (ibid). Also, community links with the newspapers are part of the community involvement, as the editor of *Public Eye* and *Edendale Eyethu* pointed out “we encourage readers to use the papers as a platform for social expression via the submission of letters to the editor”. Whereas for the editor of *Echo* the “requests for more copies from community institutions and other places tell that there is a demand for the paper and this is a clear indication of support desired.” Also what contributes to establishing community links with the newspaper is the type of content that the newspaper offers. The editor of *Echo* pointed out that his publication “carries different and unique stories which are mainly exclusively ours. It is also the biggest paper in Pietermaritzburg. This makes it the tried and tested voice of the people who read it.” Such responses show that communities served by these four publications have strong relationship with the newspapers in their respective areas. Community members are not only able to approach the organisations publishing the four newspapers used in this study or the newspaper company on different issues of concern but they are also able to voice their opinions through letters to the editor in the four publications.

#### 4.8 Community newspapers and competition for advertisements

The following verbatim responses from the editors of the four community newspapers are based on the questions below. The purpose was to find out how the editors view their publications in terms of competition for advertisements with the mainstream papers.

“Do you see your publication as competing with mainstream publications such as *The Witness*, *Mercury* and the *Daily News*?”

*Public Eye* and *Edendale Eyethu* editor: “Not so much in terms of news, but, in terms of advertising definitely. The current print media advertising market is shrinking rapidly and this contributes to aggressive competition. On a broader level mainstream papers are experiencing declining circulation levels and it seems inevitable that the two categories will at some point merge.”

This suggests that the editor is of the opinion that in a world characterised by globalisation and hence political economy of the media, competition for advertisements and profits has become evident amongst community newspapers and mainstream papers.

On the question of target market, the editor of *Public Eye* and *Edendale Eyethu*, responded that his publications were serving two distinct Pietermaritzburg communities namely the Indian and Black communities of Living Standard Measures (LSM) 4 - 9. The editors of *Echo* and *The Mirror*, responded that their target market was “the previously disadvantaged people of Pietermaritzburg” and “Pietermaritzburg community” respectively. This shows that with free movement of people and freedom to choose where to reside, community boundaries can no longer be determined through racial groupings. For example, an individual who grew up in

Imbali and now relocates to Raisethope, may still continue to read *Echo* while at same time trying to identify with the new environment through reading *Public Eye*. This will help the individual learn and know more about different communities, thus making him or her aware about information pertaining to different communities. This could also be seen as critical in promoting cultural diversity and tolerance between community members.

When the editors were asked if they saw their community newspapers as competing with the mainstream papers, the editor of *Public Eye* and *Edendale Eyethu*, pointed that while there is no possible competition as far as news collection is concerned, however, competition between community newspapers and the mainstream papers is evident “in terms of advertising” collection. The response shows that advertising revenue is the driving force for the establishment and survival of these publications. This is however supported by the editors’ responses on the question of whether their publications would survive without advertisements. This is what they said: “Most certainly not. We are a commercial publishing company and in the absence of a substantial cover price, advertising is the only source of revenue”; “Not at all. Our newspaper is a free sheet but even if there was a cover charge, it would not make profit that would make it survive”, and “No. We are a free sheet, therefore advertising is what gets us out every week”. These responses show that they cannot survive without advertisements to serve their particular target markets.

The drive to maximize profits is well illustrated by the existing advertising costs offered to advertisers by the community newspapers. For instance, *Echo* for a full page, charges R18 465.40, whereas *The Mirror* would charge R12 420.72 for a full page. And for half a page: *Echo* R12 420.72, and *The Mirror*: R6210.36. A quarter page in *Echo* is R4 616.35, and in *The Mirror* is R3105.18. However, the editor of *Public Eye* and *Edendale Eyethu* declined to

give the advertising costs. These figures show that *Echo* newspaper has higher advertising costs compared to *The Mirror*. This could be linked to the fact that *Echo* comes out every Thursday as an insert in *The Witness* newspaper and also that it is printed according to minimal circulation of *The Witness* which is widely read not only in Pietermaritzburg but also across the province of KwaZulu-Natal. This suggests therefore that the higher circulation of the paper, the higher the advertising costs.

However, the editor of the *Public Eye* and *Edendale Eyethu* did not provide the advertising costs of his publication, but this could relate to elements of agenda setting (for commercial or political reasons) in terms of negotiating the advertising rates depending on who the advertisers are. The political factor lies in actions such as when *Edendale Eyethu* printed thousands of posters, as mentioned earlier in chapter one, in support of the ANC president during his court appearance in Pietermaritzburg. This political connection could lead to critical ideas against the ruling party being suppressed, and that the newspaper editorial will always tread carefully to avoid putting the ruling group in the spotlight, hence the agenda setting of the media.

#### **4.9 Community newspapers and convergence**

The following verbatim responses from the editors of the four community newspapers was to find out from the editors about possible convergence between community newspapers and the mainstream newspapers in the Pietermaritzburg region.

The editor for *Public Eye* and *Edendale Eyethu* maintained that “On a broader level mainstream papers are experiencing declining circulation levels and it seems inevitable that the two categories will at some point merge.”

As a result of the evident “fierce” competition for advertisements and the shrinking print media advertising, one editor foresees a possible convergence between community newspapers and the mainstream papers in the near future. However, such a possible move, though it may seem good in terms of media conglomerate growth and establishment, it could however contribute to homogenisation of news, favouring corporate advertisers, thus reducing or eliminating competition and diversity of opinion. For community newspapers such a move towards convergence would reduce by far the pursuit of objectivity, thus denying the community the right and opportunity to experience quality journalism or reporting on critical issues within the community for fear of upsetting the interests of media owners and advertisers. Previous studies have shown that “media’s dependence on advertiser revenue makes it difficult to imagine these newspapers “rocking their boat” by publishing news articles that may be of public interest but with the potential to antagonise an advertiser and the publication’s potential future revenue,” (Mwangi, 2008: 62). According to Vincent Mosco, political economy is a “resource rooted in an unequal representation, built into a system that rewards market position within social hierarchies,” (1998: 257). This suggests that media hegemony and agenda setting of the media will always strive to safeguard the interests of the elite (media owners, government and advertisers) and make sure that the interests of the ruling class remain unchallenged to the detriment of the community.



#### **4.10 Focus Group**

As part of this research project a focus group was also conducted as one of the methods used to gather more in-depth data regarding the study. The two focus groups consisted of twelve respondents (six per group) and they were also conveniently selected. The group consisted of twelve participants with different backgrounds and qualifications in order to get a wide range of information about the four community newspapers under study. The selection of the sample was also influenced by the availability of the participants and this was evidenced by the fact that two separate focus group discussions consisting of six members each were conducted. The focus group was comprised of different demographics: Indians, blacks, and coloured participants. Amongst these participants there were journalists, students, two teachers. The focus group aimed at providing a more positive environment conducive to an open debate amongst the participants. Thus giving more in depth and focussed responses which one would not otherwise get in a one to one in-depth interview. That is, “in a focus group situation, the participants are likely to relax and interact more naturally. They have the opportunity to pick up on and react to one another’s comments and responses, creating a richer set of data than can sometimes result from a single interviewer’s interaction with a single respondent,” (Priest, 1996: 109). The main objective of the focus group as far as this study is concerned, was to assess the participants’ understanding of the community newspapers as guided by the following questions:

**What do you think is the role of community newspapers?** This question was aimed at assessing what roles the participants would prefer to see the community newspapers play.

**What can you say about the abundance of advertisements in these publications?** The purpose of this question was to find out from the participants how they understand the role of advertisers in a medium that is supposed to be providing weekly news and relevant information to the community. In order to find a more satisfactory response in this regard, participants were also asked if the number of advertisements in these publications have influence on the editorial content.

**Do community newspapers provide enough local and relevant news to the community?**

The question was aimed at finding out from the participants if they were satisfied with the current content provided in these publications, and if not, what is lacking and what should be done to improve the ideal type of community newspapers. It is important to note that the ideal type in the study does not refer to an universal ideal, but the ideals of the focus group participants.

While the focus group session was in process notes were taken. It is worth mentioning that all the participants played a very active role and this was evidenced by their critical comments and interactions during the focus group session. Data collected was then categorised according to emerging themes.

#### **4.10.1 Data from Focus Group Discussions**

*(See appendix D for questions)*

Data obtained or gathered from the discussion groups will be reported verbatim in inverted commas. Two separate focus group discussions were conducted since it was not easy to meet all twelve participants at once. During the discussions the readers or participants showed

great interest in the topic and they plainly indicated that information provision and social awareness are among the main roles of community newspapers.

#### **4.10.2 Means of information and community building**

Most of the issues that participants raised during the focus group discussions show that they have different perceptions of community newspapers. Participants' perceptions about community newspapers range from means of information, promoters of cultural diversity and integration, to promoters of consumerist culture amongst the readers or consumers.

As far as the role of community newspapers is concerned most respondents remarked that community newspapers are the core of information provision. Some respondents indicated that "community newspapers are there to articulate the interests of local people through reporting on local news, community events and festivals, as well as creating social engagement or cohesion." On a similar note, other respondents indicated that access to different community press allows them to understand better about local issues, politics, including cultural and religious festivals. This encourages community members to always get their newspaper as it provides them with news and issues that affect them." According to Paek et al, "people who live in stable communities are more likely to pay attention to local newspaper content, because they grow attached to their communities," (2005: 597). In other words, community newspapers become an integral part of the life of the community or people by keeping them abreast with what is happening around them. So, public education about current affairs (McManus 1992: 196) contributes to both community participation and awareness about events and many other issues of importance. For instance, in an era plagued by HIV/AIDS the KZN local government, led by Dr Zweli Mkhize, called for the re-

introduction of circumcision amongst the Zulu men, not only as a cultural practice but also as way to fight HIV/AIDS. A part of the article read:

“More male nurses will be trained to perform circumcision as part of a campaign to return the tradition of “ukosoka” which was banned by King Shaka more than 200 years ago...Government Departments such as Health, Local Government and Traditional Affairs and the Office of the Premier agreed that performing circumcision might decrease HIV/AIDS infection.” (Source *Edendale Eyethu*, 21 January 2010).

This is a clear example of promoting awareness and addressing issues of concern such as HIV/AIDS which affect communities.

#### **4.10.3 Sensational reporting**

On the other hand, some respondents saw community newspapers as gradually adopting sensationalism characterized by crime lead stories, as opposed to many human interest and developmental stories in the community. For instance, some lead stories include “Mom Slits Children’s Throats (*Edendale Eyethu* 29 October 2009), “Murder: mum in court” (*Echo* 29 October 2009), “Northdale mother confess to murder”; “killers found guilty”, “feud leads to murder” and “stabbed for small change” (in different issues of *Public Eye*). Meanwhile, *The Mirror* newspaper, led with rather human interest story “woman lived in a kennel”, and “Raisethorpe’s new mall”. Most of the respondents in one focus group pointed out that most stories in community newspapers are bad stories, such as murder, robbery and rape...there is not much reported on good things being done by some committed members of the community. On this approach to news reporting, respondents commented that it gives an impression that only crime stories can make good lead stories. According to respondents such

an approach has a negative impact on the community, as negativity takes the centre stage as opposed to developmental issues.

One could argue that this reflects the society in which we live. There is much crime and sensationalism in society and it is encroaching on all media institutions both broadcast or print. However, sensationalism is not always a bad thing in that it is important for the readers to be informed about what is happening in the neighbourhood so that they can take necessary measures for their safety. This does not suggest that crime stories should not be reported in the community, but such stories should not take precedence over some good initiatives rendered by interested members of the community. For example, a retired teacher from Edendale on several occasions had requested for his project of promoting sign language to be reported in *Public Eye* and *Edendale Eyethu* but without success. The failure of his project to get coverage could be linked with the notion that some editors prefer “juicy” stories to soft stories since the so called juicy stories attract huge readership and the people like to read about such stories.

Other participants pointed out that the lack of comprehensive reporting on a wide range of issues is very detrimental, and this is one of the challenges faced by these community newspapers. On this view some respondents said the lack of cultural and religious awareness in a multicultural society like Pietermaritzburg, and South Africa as whole, can lead to a cultural shock. Respondents argued in the light of a recent “controversial” report on the Zulu cultural practice known as *Ukweshama* where a group of men would kill a bull with their bare hands. According to the respondents this practice constituted cultural shock for some, because community newspapers normally do not have pages specifically dedicated to reporting and educating the people on various cultural practices. Another respondent who

firmly supported the idea pointed out that, if such rituals had been communicated before, the ritual wouldn't have created so much of a problem in that people would have already learnt about such cultural practice. This indicates that lack of proper information and awareness about issues peculiar to other cultures or nation may lead to racial tensions. This is a clear example of South African society. Racial tension because the white minority in South Africa now feel that they are being marginalized, such a situation is motivated by the perception that white people control the economy and "are still in power." This implies that organizations promoting animal rights opposed to the above mentioned ritual were immediately linked with white supremacy trying to undermine the Zulu cultural practice. This comes after the "Animal Rights Africa took the Zulu King and KwaZulu-Natal Premier Zweli Mkhize to court on the ritual *ukweshama* where a bull is killed with bare hands," ([www.news24/SouthAfrica](http://www.news24/SouthAfrica)). It is in this context that "King Goodwill Zwelithini gave a speech and said no nation was to dictate the way the Zulus practiced their culture," (ibid).

#### **4.10.4 Cultural diversity and community integration**

Some respondents saw the cross-reading of community newspapers as a means to acquire and promote cultural diversity and community integration. They said that reading different community newspapers not only empowers them with necessary information, but, it also paves a smooth integration of the individual in a multicultural environment such as Pietermaritzburg. According to some respondents reading different community newspapers which focus on different communities "help provide a better understanding and tolerance amongst people", "appreciate each other's cultures," as well as "understanding why some people sometimes behave in certain ways."

When asked how the lack of information would impact on the community engagement or integration, some respondents pointed out that “information was vital for the community.” They pointed out that “the lack of significant information could be detrimental to the community and it could lead to cultural shock and community disintegrate” in that the sense of belonging is not sustained properly. Supporting this view other respondents indicated that the lack of vital information “promotes a sense of alienation amongst members of the community since people hardly get the necessary content to make informed decisions.”

This shows that access to information and knowledge is vital to communities as they are able to inform themselves on various issues of concern, such as community events, cultural and religious practices. The lack of understanding of certain cultural or religious practices may lead to cultural shock or controversy by other social groups which may not necessarily be part of that particular cultural practice. This could be linked with the bull ritual report, mentioned above.

#### **4.10.5 Community newspapers: promoters of consumerism**

Almost all the participants in the focus group discussions observed and commented that the pursuit of profit as the main aim of the establishment of community newspapers undermines the value and the role of these publications as far as relevant community building information is concerned. According to some respondents, “community newspapers are moving away from one of the fundamental objectives of providing important news to the community” and are “focussing more on commercial objectives”. Other participants argued that these “publications are promoting the culture of consumerism in communities”, and this has resulted in some consumers living beyond their means because of excessive exposure to

advertisements in the newspapers. Such comments or responses indicate that the inevitable partnership between the advertisers and the owners of community newspapers compromise one of the fundamental objectives of community newspapers of being pro-community as far as news and information is concerned. As another respondent pointed out “this shows that community newspapers have embraced more commercial objectives”, thus moving away from the primary objective of being a “mouth piece of the community.”

Respondents pointed out that advertising plays a vital role in working as a link between consumers and different products or services as more businesses are showing more interest in these publications. Respondents also indicated that businesses use community newspapers as their market tool to sell their products, and the newspapers themselves benefit a lot from the advertisement revenue and communities benefit by accessing information about products or services as well as their prices. Such comments suggest that the challenge for the editorial or the media owners is how to balance news and educational information with advertisements which might be regarded as the life blood of the paper. When asked about the influence of the advertiser on editorial content, all the participants admitted “yes”: “advertisements have influence on editorial content”; “corporate advertisers run the newspapers”; “who pays the paper dictates the editorial content of the paper”. Such responses suggest that if the editorial content is not palatable to advertisers they may simply pull out and advertise in another newspaper. It is because of this dilemma that community newspapers hardly commit themselves to investigative journalism for the fear of “making statements that bring any state official into disrepute,” (Nyamnjoh, 2002: 124) or undermining the major advertisers, thus revealing their political agenda.



According to McManus, “advertisers seek public attention for their products rather than public education about current events. Thus advertiser-supported news media following market logic compete not in a news market, but in a larger market for public attention,” (1992: 196). The emergence of diverse themes from the focus group data shows that participants had different understandings or perceptions about the role of community newspapers. On the question about the role of community newspapers, participants described community newspapers as a means to provide information and social awareness about different events in the community. The general feeling amongst the participants in focus group discussions indicated that community newspapers are there to articulate the interests of local people such as community events and festivals. While some view the four publications as a means to allow the people to know about important events taking place in the community, as well as creating social engagement or cohesion. While this is a positive thing to do, through the collected data it was found that community newspapers tend to focus more on crime stories or sensationalism to the detriment of good (and selfless) work done by many members of the community.

Another aspect highlighted by participants of the focus group was the fact that they read community newspapers because these publications are distributed to the readers at no cost. Readers expect to get more information from these papers that would impact on their lives but this has proven to be a challenge since these community newspapers depend on advertisers for their vitality. This aspect was again highlighted by readers in question 4.3 where 9.9% of respondents indicated that they are interested in community newspapers because they are made available to them at no cost.

#### 4.11 Distribution Factors

Findings confirm that the distribution of some community newspapers is not done properly particularly to communities of the northern areas where *Public Eye* is supposed to be delivered from door to door. Some respondents have pointed out that the newspaper is not delivered to their homes and that piles of the newspapers are left in shops. Respondents argued that if they can't get the paper how would they know about what is happening in their own community. Other respondents indicated that "we can't be going to the shops all the time to collect the paper." These comments from the readers suggest that the distribution of some newspapers is poor and it would appear that the company is not much interested in delivering the paper to the members of the community in their respective places but delivers piles of the newspaper to different retail shops and other major businesses trusting that people will get the paper when they go to the shop. So this leads to questions of just how many people actually receive the paper and how many actually read and respond to the content and adverts. Therefore the lack of effective distribution also contributes to loss of brand loyalty of the paper and this was evidenced by copies of *Public Eye* newspaper found dumped in Northdale areas. However the dumping of copies of the newspaper prompted the management of the newspaper to issue a warning article to the disgruntled readers or community members that:

*"Public Eye* takes the distribution of its newspaper seriously and is calling upon readers and community to immediately notify the newspaper of any problems or disruption to the distribution" (Source: *Public Eye* June 18, 2009).

The dumping of newspaper copies could also mean that, since these publications are mostly distributed in major shops within their area of distribution, community members are therefore forced to walk distances to the shops to collect the paper. So, the role of community newspapers as channels of information and community building tools is not properly served,

as the primary goal of community newspapers seems to be that of showing and assuring the advertisers that their adverts are in the paper by delivering them to the shops. Also, by so doing, media owners are doing a disservice to the advertisers as the paper does not reach the intended communities. It is in this context that Wasserman and Rao observed that “market driven journalism media often encourages editors to prioritize commercial goals and satisfying shareholders becomes more important than serving the community,” (2008: 165). So, this study suggests that for community newspapers to maintain their brand loyalty they could strive to keep meeting readers needs and make sure that the content is locally sourced, even from community members, and distribution issues addressed.

As far as agenda setting is concerned, findings suggest that both media owners and the advertisers decide what is good for the community. As some respondents pointed out, when they read the community newspapers they don't get the news they are looking for. They argued that often positive stories that bring hope to the community are not reported in these newspapers. This means, the dilemma that the editors find themselves in is linked to the fact that so often people in communities expect the government to address development issues and to do things for them in the form of service delivery. However such development can't be done outside politics and that is why some community newspapers are affiliated or have close links with political parties (see fig 2, page 10).

This means, if some community newspapers have political partnership or affiliations with political parties there should be some form of intervention and regulation as to who should own community newspapers. In addition, the community or the readers must be informed about such affiliation so that they may question the type of reporting in community newspapers. This means, if there is a link to the ruling party, there could be a certain amount

of gate keeping and agenda setting in terms of limiting criticism of the government on issues such as poor service delivery and corruption. It is in this context that some respondents indicated that community newspapers are supposed to provide an image of editorial independence and objectivity as they inform the people about issues of socio-economic and political that have bearing on their life.

In view of this dilemma, to effectively serve both the community and commercial interests, there needs to be a balance at least between information and advertisements but also regulation bodies such as SA Press Council and MDDA could put in place monitoring measures and control of community newspapers in terms of the content balance. Although intervention is not desirable in a free market system, in a developing democracy it is sometimes imperative.

#### **4.12 Conclusion**

This chapter presented a descriptive analyses of data obtained from readers, editors and focus group discussions. The SPSS software programme was used to present the data from the readers. The following chapter will discuss the findings by answering the research questions which will in turn address the research objectives.

## Chapter 5

### Discussion of findings

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#### 5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter presented the data collected from the respondents. This chapter will discuss the findings in order to answer the research questions and address the research objectives of the study. Based on the findings from the study, this research project will provide recommendations as well as explore ways to identify possible practical solutions to the matter.

#### 5.2 **Critical question one: How do readers and editors perceive community newspapers' contribution towards issues of community development?**

According to Banda, development journalism should examine critically, evaluate and interpret the relevance of development plans, projects, problems and issues. It should provide contextual and background information about the development process, discuss the impact of plans, projects, problems and issues on people and speculate about the future of social development. Development news should refer to the needs of the people, which include needs such as food, housing, employment; transportation and cultural diversity (2007:159). This suggests that, an active audience will always make its presence felt and push for better conditions thus remaining committed to bargaining processes aimed at changing their lives for the better.

Based on Banda's (2007) ideas the study used questionnaire to extract information on how readers of community newspapers perceive the contributions being made by the community newspapers towards community development.

The results from the data collection in section 4.2 are discussed below. Respondents or readers of community newspapers were asked to indicate the reasons for reading the local newspaper. From the results presented in section 4.2.2, it is evident that the majority of the readers, 60% read community newspapers for local news. These findings are further supported by table 4.12 where 17.5% of the respondents read the paper in order to be updated with community development issues in the community, 1.2% of the respondents did not answer this question and this can be attributed to either the fact that they do not access the local newspapers or have no particular interest in the local newspapers. For example on the issue of community development some respondents indicated that what community newspapers need to carry is news stories about real life situations and how the people have recovered and made best use of their lives. Other respondents pointed out that community newspapers could also talk about sustainable gardening projects, and NGOs and other donors could help provide skills to the community in order to find solutions for themselves. Talking about success stories in the community would encourage many other people to come on board and make difference.

The editors of the community newspapers under study emphasized that their publications sponsor different community projects and also play a role in linking the community projects to Non Governmental Organisation [NGO] and outreach programmes. They also indicated that their newspapers are actively involved in seeking causes and community issues around

which to champion and lobby the private and state sectors; hence the community newspapers leverage community penetration to raise funds for worthy causes. For example, *Edendale Eyethu* newspaper recently a pilot food production project in Edendale area. The project was in partnership local business and the department of agriculture. On similar note, *The Mirror* in partnership with Rotary Club launched a training project aimed at training and preparing unemployed young people for the working world.

Therefore, it can be concluded that community newspapers are vital in creating awareness amongst community members of different events taking place in the community hence enabling them to take an active part in different aspects of developments taking place. These findings confirm the results from previous studies conducted on the subject; that access to information and communication is vital for any development, integration and democratic participation of individual members of the community.

### **5.3 Critical question two: Do readers view community newspapers as giving preference more to crime than to other issues taking place in the community?**

The findings show that crime stories take preference in community newspapers as lead stories. The initial content analysis in chapter four (figures 4.1, 4.2, and 4.4), shows that crime stories have a huge percentage in terms of coverage in comparison to other issues taking place in the community. However, it is only *The Mirror*, with less than 10%, that has relatively low percentage of crime reporting. This could be linked to the fact that the editor of this publication indicated “we run more human interest stories as opposed to crime and court related stories.” This indicates that, other editors seem to be satisfied that with emphasis on

crime stories their newspapers have relevant news and this indicates the tabloidization aspect of the community press. It is in this context that some of the respondents pointed out, “Most percentage of the paper is full of advertisements on every page” and “there are many more advertisements than news items in community newspapers.” This suggests that the deliberate focus on crime stories not only serves to highlight negative aspects of the community but also community newspapers overlook the relevance of local issues depicting the day to day struggles of the ordinary people to make ends meet as well as the success and developmental initiatives in communities. These are some of the issues that could constitute the notion of power behind the success of community newspapers. While crime is a day to day reality in communities and needs to be exposed and find ways of eradicating it, however, the more emphasis on crime may create a perception amongst readers that only crime stories are better local news.

#### **5.4 Critical question three: Do community newspaper readers (and the editors) of the community newspaper under study perceive the publications more as commercial tools or as means of information or news provision?**

Apart from providing news and information on what is happening in the community, community newspapers also have commercial interests to generate funds for their sustainability. Community newspapers generate funds through advertisements placed by companies in the community newspapers.

From the results presented in table and figure 4.14, the majority of readers of community newspaper, 71.3%, indicated that they view community newspapers more as commercial



tools than means of news provision, while 27.5% of the readers indicated that community newspapers are a means of news provision, and 1.3% did not respond on this question.

From these results it can be clearly seen that community newspapers have become more of commercial vehicles putting more emphasis and interest on commercials than being a source of information for the community members. This is further supported by the findings from figures 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, and 4.4 on the initial content analysis where all the four publications have 138.5% combined of advertisements. Findings from literature confirm that in such a media environment satisfying shareholders will become more important than serving the community (Wasserman and Rao 2008: 165). This confirms the finding that advertisers and other shareholders (elite) indirectly have influence on the editorial content of these publications.

Findings from the focus group discussions highlight that both media owners and advertisers need the community in order for them to ply their trade successfully. The community is a fundamental component for their functions and a compromise has to be reached between media owners and the community that will ensure that community interests are attended to fairly.

Findings from the editors on this question clearly show that there is competition between community newspapers and the mainstream papers in terms of advertising collection. This shows that advertising revenue is the driving force for the establishment and survival of these publications. The editors emphasized that these publications are commercial entities and advertising is the only source of revenue.

The study found that the ample space allocated to advertisers, as evidenced in almost every page of these newspapers, contribute to denying the readers full access to relevant news or information as citizens.

#### **5.5 Critical question four: How do community newspapers influence the consumption patterns of readers?**

From the literature review there is a strong confirmation of Claudelle Naidoo's (<http://www.biz-community.com>) idea that the big hype about daily newspapers has died down and instead there is more interest in the rise and shine of community papers and the influence they have on the market. Naidoo argues further that community newspapers have transformed South Africa and play a vital role in enhancing and educating the mind of the consumer. That is, through advertisements from different stakeholders in community newspapers the consumers are provided with an array of competitive prices and promotions of several products and services being advertised. This helps give the consumer the choice of where to access the advertised products or services. This argument is supported by Randall (2009) who observed that local consumers have come to rely on their newspapers as much for community news as they do for planning their local shopping purchases.

The results from the data collected from readers presented in table and figure 4.10 it is evident that 80% of respondents look at advertisements in community newspapers while 20% indicated that they do not look at advertisements. These findings are further supported by findings presented in table and figure 4.11 where 71.3% of respondents indicated that they

are influenced by advertisements in community newspapers, while 28.7% indicated that they are not influenced by advertisements in community newspapers.

Findings from focus groups indicated that businesses use community newspapers as their market tool to sell their products, and the newspapers themselves benefit a lot from the advertisements revenue. Communities benefit by accessing information about products or services as well as their prices. The editors also indicated that by providing a wide range of advertisements in their newspapers they afford community members or consumers a wide variety of products and services, hence widening their product choices and making the shopping experience easier through focusing on readers as consumers.

From these findings it can be concluded that community newspapers have an influence on the consumers' consumption patterns: the wide variety of advertisements presented in the community newspapers assist with their product search process which in turn affects the purchasing decisions of consumers, in some cases promoting a culture of consumerism and materialism. Commercialization of the press in the late nineteenth century had been made possible by greatly increased potential for mass production and financially aided by mass production (McQuail 1994:123). This confirms the finding that the community newspapers under study are perceived to be more commercial tools or profit driven entities than means of news and information provision.

## **5.6 Critical question five: What do readers look for in the community newspapers?**

From the literature review, chapter two, there is strong confirmation of Swanepoel and Steyn's idea that the role of community newspapers in a country such as South Africa is

facilitating the transfer of information among all role-players. Community newspapers highlight the implications of development programmes on grass roots level by interpreting information and communicating the context and consequences to readers, (2010: 228). As mainstream newspapers could not provide effective coverage of the local affairs in different communities, the establishment of community newspapers was, however, seen as a way of promoting media diversity and provision of multiplicity of information and public opinion through which people could make informed decisions.

Using this as the basis, a research questionnaire was designed to extract information on how readers of the four community newspapers under study feel on whether the community newspapers provide them with relevant information. The results from the data collection can be found in section 4.2.2 and are discussed below. Question two of this section asked the readers of the community newspapers to indicate the reasons for reading the local newspaper. From the results presented in section 4.2.2, it is evident that the majority of the readers, 60%, read the community newspapers in order to keep themselves abreast of the local news and happenings taking place in the neighborhood, for example, community developments taking place in the area, school programmes and activities. This was followed by a 16.2% of the readers who read the community newspapers in order to be informed of the political developments taking place in the area where these community newspapers are serving.

From the findings presented above it can therefore be concluded that local and political news are the main reasons attracting the community members to read the community newspapers. This indicates that local content and political news is significant to the readers and as long as the community newspapers continue providing such information they will best serve as the mouth piece of the community.

Furthermore, according to literature from chapter two, it is at the local community level that the problems of living conditions are discussed and interactions with other communities elicited (Sparks 2009:57). Similarly, Baker (2002: 159) pointed out that the people know their common problems and the people ought to be involved in applying the intelligence to solving them.

From the table and figure presented in 4.7, 21.3% of respondents indicated that their main interest in community newspapers is local news, 8.7% are interested in socials and pictures, 12.5% are interested in community development, 25% are interested in advertisements, 11.2% of respondents indicated that they are interested in local sports, 5% of respondents are interested in political news, 10% of respondents did not answer on this question, and 6.3% focus on educational news.

These findings are further supported by the responses presented in table and figure 4.12 where 27.5% respondents indicated that they prefer more local news, 2.5% of respondents prefer to see more on health issues, 25% want more local sports, 10% seek educational information, 17.5% expect items on community development, 6.3% prefer to see job opportunities covered, 1.3% on crime reports, 2.5% prefer more political news, 2.5% want to see a gossip column, whereas 5% of respondents did not answer this question.

From the results presented above, it is evident the community members would like to see more depth coverage in local news content, more coverage of events taking place locally such as community initiative projects, and more coverage on schools sports tournaments. The results indicate that inasmuch as the four community newspapers need advertisements, it is necessary that these newspapers increase their coverage on burning issues affecting the community.

During the focus group discussions participants highlighted that while crime reporting depicts negative issues taking place and affecting the community, community newspapers, on the other hand, could be used to promote debates in communities in order to find practical solutions to fight or eradicate crime in their respective communities. This means, by engaging the people in discursive forums aimed at addressing the ills of the community the people themselves become more active citizens.

From the literature review, Stamm and Fortin-Campbell (1983:2) observed that community newspapers function as a tool of unification in the community by supporting group activities, enhancing personal prestige, disclosing threats to the community, defining local issues and reflecting local opinion. This shows that the daily affairs of the community are of great significance for the readers.

## **5.7 Public sphere and community newspapers**

According to Madikiza and Bornman (2007), public sphere is an arena where a community of individuals is drawn together by participating in rational-critical debate. From the literature review, chapter two, there is strong indication that McManus views are endorsed by findings. Public engagement or debate can be enhanced through news that is consequential, that changes or enlarges readers' understanding of their environment. This suggests that, in order to help readers to make informed decisions on a wide range of issues, the community newspapers under study could be of great assistance in providing vital information, be it for reconciliation or nation building. For example, the current gay issue was never an issue some thirty years ago. But due to repeated media coverage and debates around the issue in the recent past, it now appears to be normal and acceptable behavior in some parts of the world.

With this in mind, community newspapers through repeated pictures depicting for example black children playing with white or Indian children, could instil acceptance and tolerance amongst people of different cultures particularly in a multiracial society like South Africa.

From group discussions it was highlighted that often when people come together during social events they talk or discuss different issues including politics and sports. For example, men in particular would prefer to know what the president or the premier or the mayor said. Also they talk about sports as they comment on the past or coming games. For example, who won the game between Pirates and Chiefs, or who will win the league this season. However, in such social gatherings or events the people hardly talk about development but they would want to see if development is being spearheaded by the government in their respective areas. While for women, they may want to hear about government's ideas on gender issues, poverty and abuse of women and children. Therefore, through the provision of a wide range of relevant information the four community newspapers under investigation could help provide the readers with a formidable public arena where they could debate issues that would help them make well informed decisions about their life. For example, reading different community newspapers which serve different communities or target markets helps the reader to broaden her or his horizon about what happens in other communities and about specific issues such as cultural and religious practices.

Findings show that at times the media could be seen defending or preserving the interests of the elite or cultural hegemony. For instance, the issue of bull killing is a clear example of this. The findings confirm that the bull killing saga was negatively reported as the case was perceived as being one culture trying to dictate or impose its principles of what is right or wrong onto another culture, hence exhibiting hegemony. That is, so often the media is viewed

has having a tendency to promote values of dominant cultures (western) to the detriment of the so called “inferior” cultures. In this regard, community newspapers are in not seen to foster unity amongst people of different backgrounds and cultures but only contribute to create divisions between people of different racial or cultural groups in that the media are seen as playing a role in the maintenance of “the cultural leadership of the dominant social groupings,” (Curran and Morley, 2006: 129). Therefore, in order to enhance more critical debate amongst community, the community newspapers as institutions which are very close to people could lead by example in making sure that there are various ways and means through which people are informed or educated in various issues of concern i.e. the slaughtering of animals is one of the ways through which people communicate their experiences and identity. As Curran pointed out this would help develop “a coherent alternative understanding of society that connects to people’s social experiences and identities through different symbolic forms,” (Curran and Morley, 2006: 129).

## **5.8 Readdressing the hegemonic role of the media**

From the literature there is confirmation of Lull (2000) and McChesney (2002) that the media in one way or the other help to enhance the hegemonic role of the elite (media owners and advertisers) through advertising and other informational campaigns to accomplish their goals and that media have emerged as central areas for profit making on modern capitalist societies. This means that the profit-driven aspect of community newspapers is rooted in the hunger to sell as many advertisements as possible rather than to provide news and information that would help promote critical debate and development amongst people. For example, it is through advertisements and advertorials that community newspaper owners show their allegiance to and support for the corporate advertisers and other stakeholders.



The findings of this study suggest that, while on the one hand such a relationship enhances the hegemonic role of the ruling class (media owners and advertisers), on the other hand, it diminishes the relevance of editorial content of these publications as they tend to carry superficial information with no community interest at heart. This study argues that this is one of the ways that some community members come to believe and accept that publishing advertisements and promotional specials is the main reason community newspapers have been established. In other words, as one respondent observed, “it seems that their main objective is to inculcate the culture of consumerism amongst the community.” That is, as indicated earlier, even if the consumers don’t have enough money or means to acquire the advertised products, they will eventually succumb to both persuasive advertisements and peer pressure. “Advertising attempts to create an association between the products offered and socially desirable and meaningful traits, as well as manager of consumer demand,” (Kellner 1995: 249).

## **5.9 Agenda setting plagues freedom of expression**

Findings of this study clearly indicate that due to “market-driven journalism” (Wasserman 2008: 163 and Shimp, 1981:9) embraced by the community newspapers, the right of the readers or consumers is increasingly compromised, and also that the profit-driven aspects of these publications confirm that media or journalism ethics of the community press is also at stake in that appear to benefit private and public sectors.

The findings of this study support Louw and Tomaselli’s idea (1991) that elite or ruling class used their power to control the media for their own interests thus in the process creating an

agenda which distorted public perception of what was happening. Even today, through agenda setting, newsworthy stories which the public should know are not published, especially when they implicate the ruling class: advertisers and other stakeholders. However, if a controversial story happens to be published, it happens that the advertisers or other stakeholders either threaten to pull advertisements in order to force the management of the paper to publish a reconciliatory story in favour of the ruling class. For example, the story of C21 Private School, (which I have mentioned earlier in this dissertation). According to the findings, community newspapers are caught between two really important agendas: the need to serve the community by providing relevant local news and the unwavering desire to maximize commercial interests and profits.

The findings of this study indicate that while some community members view the community newspapers under study as sources of information and community building, community newspapers have somehow failed to be reliable sources of information comprising locally brewed content. This is confirmed by the fact that community press is inclined to employ more staff on advertising and promotional departments than journalists in editorial department. According to Davis, advertising and “promotional intermediaries are frequently outnumbering journalist...promotional intermediaries play a key role in aspects of consumption of commodities,” (in Curran and Morley, 2006: 150). Because of the lack of enough journalists, owners of community newspapers tend to focus, as mentioned before, on sensational or crime stories. By so doing they promote negativity about the communities they serve thus destroying the trust and relationship of the people. This means people become suspicious of each other for fear of being victimised as this has been highlighted by the media, and it may also prevent potential investors or tourists from visiting the areas. So, an ideal community newspaper would commit itself to offering a variety of issues such as

political, economic and social issues which people may not have been aware of. Even local government, NGOs and the private sector could use community newspapers to connect with the communities and bring awareness of issues of health such as HIV and AIDS as well issues of development in communities.

### **5.10 Community newspapers and Ethical matters**

On ethical issues, because community newspapers are closer or more intimately connected to the people or community they serve, often community members and other stakeholders have the opportunity at any time to contact or demand to see a reporter if they are not happy with coverage of a particular event or issue. While it is important for the paper and the journalist to establish a firm relationship with members of the community, however, most of the time such a relationship is detrimental to media objectivity and the exercise of freedom of expression. That is, when some community members or other stakeholders from the community feel that if they have been misrepresented in the paper, they would not hesitate to approach the paper, in most cases, in a confrontational or disappointed attitude. Thus forcing the editorial or management to apologize or write a reconciliatory article for the sake of maintaining the good relationship between the editorial and advertisers. This explains why community newspapers would not venture into investigative journalism because most of the time the people or institutions that need to be investigated happen to be corporate advertisers, government officials and other prominent members in the community. So, community newspapers choose to ignore such issues only because they can't risk embarrassing the advertisers. It is in this connection that Reader observed that, in cases of controversial issues, "editors of small papers know they will hear directly from the readers and advertisers, including some who will threaten to cancel subscriptions or pull advertising," (2006: 2).

The issue at stake here is what has happened to the media ethics of objectivity and freedom of expression and the social responsibility to inform the community? This suggests that, because of such working relationships between the community newspapers and different stakeholders, controversial issues which may be of great interest for the community are often ignored to the benefit of the ruling class or elite as their interests or hegemonic social order remains unchallenged.

### **5.11 Potential and Limitations of Community Newspapers**

The findings of this study, mainly from the literature, in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, indicate that community newspapers have been designed specifically to reach the ordinary people. The community press has been established with the aim of providing news and discussing issues affecting communities and because they are free publications community newspapers boast higher readership compared to the mainstream newspapers i.e. as one of the editors pointed out, “the current print media advertising market is shrinking rapidly and that mainstream papers are experiencing declining circulation levels.” This suggests that because of the advertisements filling community newspapers most people or consumers eagerly wait to receive their copy of these publications on a weekly basis, not only for news but most importantly for specials or products advertised in community newspapers. That is, since community newspapers “have been one of the fastest growing media types in the country over the last couple of years,” (Randall, 2009: 19) businesses and other stakeholders such as government departments view these publications as the quickest means to reach their target audience in order to communicate their interests, either economic or

political. Findings of this study further indicate that through advertisements people are able to make their informed decisions as to where to go and shop.

The findings confirm the notion that in the present day, characterized by the globalization of the media, there is little that one can do to get rid of the apparent strong influence of the media conglomerates and other businesses on the media. They possess both the human and financial resources to place them in a powerful position to determine the media content. However, while we know that this happens, given the fact that South Africa is still a developing democracy, some interventions could be considered to make sure that a more viable and sustainable balance between commerce and community is found and maintained. The community at large, being one of the critical shareholders, should be consulted in the process towards finding a balance as to how community newspapers should operate and what they would like to see reported and who the sources of information should be.

According to the findings of this research project, respondents have indicated that they have different perceptions or understandings about the role of community newspapers. Some respondents saw community newspapers as a means of information and news provision to the community, agents of both community and identity building, fostering linkages with between the paper and community through letters to the editor. Others view these publications as commercial and promotional tools serving the interests of the elite (media owners and advertisers).

## 5.12 Recommendations

These findings are only applicable to the four community newspapers under study. Therefore, based on the findings of this research study, and for the improved relevance of these community newspapers, the study suggests the following:

- To focus more on locally based content, could improve the trust and relevance of community newspapers amongst the readers.
- Maintaining journalism standards and media ethics would help boost the confidence of the readers who would not see these publications as mere tools for commercial gains.
- Locally based content can only be achieved through employing enough qualified, journalists or reporters. Community newspaper owners could also consider establishing correspondents (readers and locals themselves) in outlying areas for more information about the day to day struggles and experiences of the ordinary people with more focus on development. This would help elevate the publications' status and compete more efficiently with the mainstream newspapers as far as relevant editorial content is concerned. To enhance a sense of community ownership, the management could consider involving experienced and retired journalists who could contribute to the editorial of the publications on voluntary basis.

- Community newspapers should be seen to be more involved in many levels within communities, from championing awareness campaigns on issues such as eradication of poverty and diseases, to cultural and religious issues.
- In order to have the papers efficiently distributed there is a need to work with community based organisations that would help distribute the newspaper to communities. As a result the people would benefit from the link between the newspaper and the community based organisations.
- Consult with various stakeholders including the community and local businesses on any development aspects involving the community. This will ensure that the editorial content of these publications is informed by the needs of the people or community.
- Encourage community focussed journalism that will be the driving force behind socio-economic development in the community.

### **5.13 Conclusion**

This chapter presented the discussion of findings and addressed the research objectives by answering the critical questions posed by the study. The next chapter present the limitations of the study, area of further research and summary of the study.

## **Chapter 6**

### **Conclusion**

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#### **6.1 Introduction**

This chapter addresses ways in which the community newspapers can strike a balance between the need to carry advertisements for the sustainability of the newspapers and the need to provide local and relevant information and news to the readers. It will further highlight the limitations of the study encountered whilst conducting the research and also suggestions in the area for further studies.

#### **6.2 Limitations of this study**

The limitations of this study are linked to the small sample which was used to gather data. With this in mind, no attempt should be made to generalize the findings as if the sample represented the whole country. Generally, scholars will not be able to agree, due to the sampling procedures and size. However, based on the information gathered from the literature and all the participants, i.e. editors and the readers, the findings of this study are credible and could be used elsewhere to analyze similar situations.

Secondly, while administering the research questionnaire to editors, some editors found it difficult to give honest answers and, this being the case, the respondents avoided giving direct responses to the questions.



Another limitation of the study is linked to the lack of resources. Due to lack of resources, this research was confined to the four community Newspapers based in Pietermaritzburg area, and a small sample size, 80 respondents conveniently selected was used. Thus, the findings of this study cannot be generalized to the greater population. The why and how questions omitted to elicit valuable descriptive data of a more in-depth and qualitative nature.

### **6.3 Area for further Research**

Considering the complexity of this topic this research project revealed a need for further research into the area of effectiveness of community newspapers in providing balanced and critical information without bowing to pressures of the advertisers. Therefore this study proposes further research to be carried out in the following area:

- To evaluate how community newspapers can protect their independence as mouth pieces of the community from the pressures of advertisers.
- To evaluate ways and means for community members to take ownership of community newspapers through meaningful contribution to the community newspapers.

### **6.4 Summary of the study**

This chapter provided the concluding remarks of this research project. This project moved from an overview of the role of community newspapers in general, to the proliferation of community newspapers in South Africa as part of the new democratic dispensation in the country. The study also highlighted challenges faced by community newspapers, i.e. profit orientated media which in one way or the other hinder the effective functioning of an “ideal

type” community newspaper: a pro-community orientated paper, and mouthpiece of the community. Through the data gathered from different respondents, the study sought to have first hand information from respondents about their perceptions of the role of community newspapers in view of community newspapers being commercialized and characterized by competition for advertisements and profits. This is applicable to the four community newspapers under study.

The research findings of this study found that advertisements play a vital role for the sustainability of community newspapers; however these publications should strive to strike a balance between advertisements and the need to remain the mouth piece of the community.

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## Appendix A: Letter of Informed Consent

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FACULTY OF HUMANITIES, DEVELOPMENT AND SOCIAL SCIENCES  
SCHOOL OF LITERARY STUDIES, MEDIA AND CREATIVE ARTS - UKZN

Dear participants,

I am Mauricio Langa a Masters student with the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN). I am conducting a research study about community newspapers and my research topic is: “Investigating and exploring the role of community newspapers against the background of profit-driven media environment: a Pietermaritzburg based study.”

By means of this letter, I would like to request in this study by responding the questionnaire in order to gather enough data to investigate your understanding and the role of community newspapers. It is important to inform you that your identity will remain anonymous throughout the study and confidentiality will remain maintained. The data collected during the interviews will be secured and remain confidential. The participants are at liberty to withdraw from the project at any time should they wish to discontinue their involvement.

I..... (Full names of participant) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project, and I consent to participating in the research project. I understand that I am at liberty to withdraw from the project at anytime, should I so desire.

Signature of participant

Date

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Signature Researcher

Date

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



## Appendix B: Interview Schedule for the Editors

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I am Mauricio Langa a Masters student with the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN). I am conducting a research study about community newspapers and my research topic is: “Investigating and exploring the role of community newspapers against the background of profit-driven media environment: a Pietermaritzburg based study.”

1. What is the name of your publication?

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2. What is the role of community newspapers according to your own understanding?

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-----  
-----

3. Do you think your publication has managed to fulfil its purpose?

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-----  
-----

4. If not, what needs to be done to achieve the main objective of the publication in the community it is serving?

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-----  
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5. Do you see your publication as competing with mainstream publications such as The Witness, Mercury and the Daily News?

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-----  
-----

6. What makes your publication unique compared to other local community newspapers?

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-----  
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7. What is your target market? Would you say your target audience contributes to the uniqueness of the publication? How?

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-----  
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8. What is the relationship between your publication and other mainstream newspapers?

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-----  
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9. What can you say about the role of advertisers in influencing editorial content?

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10. Do you think your publication could survive without advertisers and private funding?

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-----  
11. What role should the community play in supporting the newspaper?

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12. What is the cost of advertisements in your publication? For instance:

**Full page**.....

**Half a page**.....

**Quarter page**.....

13. How do these advertisement rates differ from those of mainstream papers?

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-----  
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14. How does your publication involve itself in community affairs?

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15. What can you say about the perception that community newspapers are not serious about news reporting but are used as tools for selling the services and products of the advertisers?

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16. What is the distribution of your publication?

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## Appendix C: Interview Schedule for the Readers of Community Newspapers

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I am Mauricio Langa a Masters student with the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN). I am conducting a research study about community newspapers and my research topic is: “Investigating and exploring the role of community newspapers against the background of profit-driven media environment: a Pietermaritzburg based study.”

1. Which community newspaper (s) do you read?

a) *Public Eye*----- b) *Echo* ----- c) *The Mirror* ----- d) *Edendale Eyethu*-----

2. Why do you read community newspapers? Local news: -----, b) Political news: -----,

c) National news: ----- d) Sports: ----- e) Advertisements: -----

3. What is so special about the community newspaper you read?

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4. If the community newspaper you read was to be sold or cease to exist, which other newspaper would you read? why?

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5. In which way your community newspaper influences you?

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7. What is your main interest in community newspapers?

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8. Do you sometimes write articles or opinion pieces for publication?

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9. If yes, why do you do it?

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10. When you read newspapers, do you ever look at the advertisements?

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11. Do you think advertisements influence the way you shop? Elaborate.

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-----  
12. What would you like to see covered or reported in your community newspaper?

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-----  
13. Apart from weekly community newspapers which daily newspaper(s) do you read?

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-----  
-----

14. Do you think community newspapers are more commercial tools than means of news or information provision? Why?

Yes ----- or No-----

15. Which stories do you still remember which were published in your paper?

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-----  
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16 How often do you receive you community newspaper in your area?

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## **Appendix D: Focus Group schedule**

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1. What do you think is the role of community newspapers?
2. What do you think is the main challenge faced by community newspapers?
3. What can you say about the newspapers being filled by advertisements?
4. Do you think community newspapers provide enough and relevant local news?

