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### Afrikaans media: 'Better than the rest'

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Wadim Schreiner dares to repeat the statement that earned him an "Oscar" for "Sweeping Generalisation".

I think the Afrikaans media are doing a better job than their English counterparts. There, I said it again.

The last time I made this statement during the release of analysis that suggested that the Afrikaans media seem to better comprehend their audiences' needs and tailor their contents accordingly, I was awarded an "Oscar" for "Sweeping Generalisation". This by a fellow journalist, who then "informed" me of an alternative view: "Afrikaans media (especially *Rapport*) promote a diverse, race-based agenda, which does little for reconciliation and nation-building".

Naturally, I did not continue with the discussion, because when "race" is thrown into an equation, the argument itself becomes obsolete. My only crime has been to oversee some research that has counted the origins of agency versus own journalist-sourced articles, over a 12-month period in leading South African newspapers.

The 2006 results showed that Afrikaans media had the least agency-sourced content, particularly compared to the Independent Newspapers. The Afrikaans media (*Die Burger*, *Volksblad*, *Beeld* and *Rapport*) had on average only 10% agency sources versus the Independent Group's (*The Star*, *Pretoria News*, *Cape Times*, *Daily News*) 40%. Not that bad considering that *The Citizen* had a total of 75% agency copy.

I interpreted this as the Afrikaans media forced to use their own journalists' copy due to the absence of Afrikaans in news agency reports. Added to this the prerequisite of unique articles, for an audience that is specific, has particular interests and possibly particular political views; makes own copy far more desirable. Am I wrong in this hypothesis?

If correct, should this tailoring not also be valid for English-language media as well? Honestly, what is the difference between a *Pretoria News*, a *Star* and a *Cape Times*?

Afrikaans media have been opinionated for quite some time, through editorials, article selection and supplements (such as *By*). This opinion seems to increasingly count abroad.

When the much admired *Financial Times* reported on the Zimbabwe-destined Chinese weapons cargo, it cited not the *Mail & Guardian* nor *Sunday Times*, but *Beeld*. An English medium, based in the UK, attributing *Beeld* as a source.

This possible trend is supported in our research. Of all the media cited by other media in South Africa, Afrikaans media are increasingly used as sources: *Beeld* has in 2007 become the fourth most cited, up from position seven in 2006. This is slightly ahead of *Business Day*, and behind the *Sunday Times*, *Mail & Guardian* and *City Press*. *Business Day* is, in turn, followed by *Rapport* and *Die Burger*.

The sole Independent Newspaper representative amongst the top ten: *The Sunday Independent* in 10th position. I really cannot comment on the "alternative view" around the Afrikaans media and their alleged lack of "reconciliation and transformation". But I see often unique stories, personal accounts and that extra bit of "skinder" (gossip). Now, before I get another "Oscar", let me fix that intro for those sensitive English sour-grape colleagues: Some Afrikaans media are seemingly, occasionally, perhaps doing a better job than some English media in possibly some ways.

Happy now?

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■ This article first appeared in *The Media* magazine.

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