Talk Radio, Democratic Deliberations and the Critical Appreciation of its role in the Public Sphere

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ABSTRACT
This paper critically engages with issues concerning the role of the media in Kenya’s democratization. It reviews literature on talk radio as a public sphere for democracy focusing on how talk radio acts as an avenue where deliberations on matters crucial to democracy are discussed and potentially resolved. Jürgen Habermas’ (1962) theory of the public sphere will form the foundation of this paper as an attempt to demonstrate the importance of the application of the concept in the critical appreciation of the role of talk radio in Kenya’s democratization. The paper is premised on the argument that the media has played a facilitative role in intervening between the state and the citizens in these growing democracies by intervening in the relationship between the state and the public by “reflecting the political order in which [people] are situated” and “promoting dialogue among their [audiences] through communication” (Christians et al., 2009:158). The study uses content analysis as a method of studying talk radio’s content as it carries the responsibility of keeping the citizens well informed and educated on all the issues to which they have to make decisions, encourage active participation in the governance of the country by ventilating their grievances and problems, take the decisions of those who hold public power to the public and to project and give space to plurality of news and opinions.

Key Words: Talk Radio, Democracy, Public Sphere, Citizen, Deliberation