

Shop Keepers and Street Vendors as Active Agents of Change

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Mainstream media has always played a great role in shaping public discourse and even ideas about what is true and not true about society. This ranges from different types of media.

The public has also played a very huge role in spreading the news, even when it is 'fake news'. News stories can travel easily through social media and word of mouth but that doesn't mean that the news is accurate. This of course is often seen as fresh gossip so it is easy for the public to believe the new information being passed around. The passing of information sometimes changes the details of the information the more the information is being passed. Small video clips sometimes circulate around social media and which raises alarm in different communities, further adding to the confusion.

While a lot of detail about important events is sometimes inverted on social media, there is a group of people that might help with accurate details. These are shopkeepers and street vendors who are dispersed around areas of community news hotspots like the CBD. It makes it easier for them to witness events and puts them in a position to report accurate news.

Ntokozo (39), a street vendor at the rank says in as much as he loves to see things that are happening, it might be a little hard for him to accurately recall events he witnesses as he moves around the rank the whole day and won't be able to remember some details. He feels that if there was an easy way to communicate with local news as stories unfold then that would be better than covering the whole story himself. MaMkandla (44) who sometimes works with her daughter to cook chips on the roadside says that it is very risky because of the way some of what happens is in the interest of powerful people.

"Ziningi indlela zokubiza ukufa, ezinye zazo ngezokubhala izindaba zabantu," she says, meaning 'there are many ways in which fatal danger comes, one way is to go around writing about people's business'. While a lot of the people I met were resistant to the idea of passing on scoops there was one shop owner who spoke about a coded way to communicate with people in the community through an SMS or Whatsapp messenger.

Dugnate (30), also a shop owner, originally from Bangladesh, says that during the unrest in July, he and his brothers developed a network of communication that helped them keep in touch and track down the mass of people looting in different areas. In that way, they were able to move their stock from one shop to another. The network code is similar to Ntokozo's idea of being able to keep in touch with local news and that could help cover different stories.

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