

## **New Media: Sights of Contestation or Liberation for South Africa's Muslims**

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This paper is positioned in the glocal media landscape with specific reference to access and usage by South African Muslims. The study examines the rise of email discussion lists, social media groups, stand up comedians and music artists in South Africa that aim to present the 'truth' and thwart stereotypes about Islam.

South African Muslims, like their compatriots globally, frequently and vociferously express their discontent with mainstream media's coverage of Islam and its adherents. The Muslim community considers negative perceptions about their religion to be advanced and entrenched by media framing. They write to the newspapers, phone in to radio programmes, engage media bosses and speak out at the mosque and on other public platforms, condemning media's 'attack' on Islam. Media watch groups, too, have been established by Muslims in South Africa to monitor and address prejudices, stereotypes and the resultant Islamophobia, which they contend, are stoked by media.

This distrust and wariness of mainstream media among South Africa's Muslims has resulted in a proliferation of Muslim owned media. A newer phenomenon of Muslims embracing various forms of popular culture – amidst some controversy – and new media platforms thereby bypassing traditional media gatekeepers, also has taken root and continues to gain followers among young, techno-savvy Muslims. The main purpose of all of these Muslim media projects, as protectors of the faith, is to stem the perceived biased portrayal and misrepresentations of Islam by providing 'balanced' news from 'authentic' sources not considered by established media. Their aim also, is to counter what is considered as negative, hegemonic 'western' cultural influences that permeate society via media and galvanise the faithful onto the righteous track. In this paper, an insight will be proffered into the popularity of these Muslim media offerings as more credible alternatives to mainstream media and their efficacy in countering Islamophobia.