

# **LANGUAGE AND CULTURAL IDEOLOGIES ON THE INTERNET: SOCIAL MEDIA USE OF ADOLESCENTS IN SEMI-RURAL SOUTH AFRICA**

Adelina Mbinjama<sup>1</sup>

Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University

There is a fallacy that people living in South Africa's small towns or rural settlements are conservative and narrow-minded. These people are also perceived to be technologically behind and are afraid of ground breaking information. In South Africa, the recent online phenomenon of Facebook ([www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com)) and MXit ([www.mxit.co.za](http://www.mxit.co.za)) has drawn much media attention to the role that these social networking sites play in young people's lives. According to Stald (2008, p. 143) similar research on adolescent affiliation with social media has been fairly narrow in the Western world over the past few years.

Research normally focuses on the use of social media among an adult population. However, apart from the metropolitan areas usually covered in literature, the population in small towns has not yet been investigated. Considering that the new democratic South Africa is a plethora of diverse cultures and sub-cultures, the lack of such research indicates that the responses of millions of multi-cultural potential consumers to social media have not yet been researched. The study identified a gap in literature as no formal research had ever been conducted in semi-rural areas with regards to Black adolescents and their experience with social media. This paper reports on an investigative study conducted in 2009 of Black bilingual, isiXhosa/English speaking female adolescents living in semi-rural King William's Town and their experience with social media. The aim of the study was to determine how Black female isiXhosa speaking adolescents make use of social media, and exemplifies how their cultural heritage influences their online behavior. Furthermore, the paper establishes to what extent social media differs from socializing agents such as family, school, community and

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<sup>1</sup> Associate Lecturer at the Department of Public Relations and Communications, at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University in Port Elizabeth, South Africa. MA Applied Media Studies (2009), Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University. BA Media, Communication and Culture (obtained 2007), Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University.