The influence of information technology on the socio-political song in Kenya

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Abstract

This article examines how the growth of socio-political songs in Kenya reflects the effect of the evolution of information technology (IT). The unprecedented proliferation of IT – especially mobile telephony, the Internet and frequency modulation (FM) radio – has played havoc with authoritarian control of information, especially by governments. The speed and modes through which information and song are transferred have diversified, making it possible to send, receive and access both quite easily. Using three epochs of leadership in Kenya, we show how the dynamics of the socio-political song have transformed from an authoritarian regime, when the state muzzled freedom of expression, to a more democratic era of IT, where artists can more easily reach their audience. By analysing music with lyrics and secondary data, we show that freedom of speech is as important as the proliferation of IT. Both are necessary conditions for the growth of socio-political song.