

The State of South African Journalism Paper Presented at the IAMCR Conference, Montreal

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Online Journalism



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This presentation is about three intertwined factors impacting on SA journalism

The broader political economic context, within which journalism is practiced;

The specific media markets/ institutions for which journalists work; and, Journalists themselves.



The political Context

Attempts to curb liberal media?

SA finds itself in the politically and ideologically-inspired support for the *New Age* newspaper and *ANN7*.

Relentless attempts to compromise the autonomy of the SABC.

The ANC and SACP's calls for Media Appeals Tribunal; Protection of State Information Bill.

The government's launch of its own newspaper- *Vuk'zenzele*.



Political context

The increase in public officials' and government departments' self-advertisement and branding in media.

Endless and racial-ised questioning of *bona fides* of national commercial news media content.

The belligerent Jimmy Manyi (when he was government spokesperson).



Political Context

Izimbizo.

The decision to deliver the State of the Nation Address in the evenings.

The firing of the journalists and commentators at the Sekunjalo Group.

What was behind the buying of the now defunct *UmAfrika* newspaper and attempts to buy the more than 100 years old *Ilanga* newspaper for ANC's Centenary in KZN?



Global Markets

Universal issues and SA markets.

The generic problems facing journalists all over the world are also affecting South African journalists.

Declining readership and circulation figures for mainstream (quality) newspapers, particularly the one in English and Afrikaans (dominant) languages).



Global markets

Declining ratings figures for national TV news broadcasters=(trends over time, across age categories)

Declining revenues.



Global markets

Citizens declining interest to being informed , mainly young people.

The gravitation towards new media .

Social media impact on traditional news media .

Tabloidisation.



Global/local Markets

Then there are challenges that are peculiar to the South African condition, owing to its history, contemporary political state, and sociological set up of news media institutions.

With respect to media/markets institutions, the global economic meltdown affected South African institutions differently and this depended on respective media institutions' already existing financial strength, governance and type.



Global/local Markets

Some media houses then felt the pain more intensely than others. Equally, print media, because SA news consumers had already been withdrawing from it since 1994 long before the global meltdown hit, felt the pain more than the broadcast and online media.

Local markets

- The reason, for example, Sekunjalo was hit hard by loss of advertising revenue was not only because of the general decline in advertising spend in the media market;
- It is because it lost reputation among some advertisers .
- It was undergoing controversial takeover.
- Some of the shareholders have links with ruling party . It fired some of the journalists on ideological grounds and the management interfered with editorial decision.
- This means journalists at Sekunjalo tended to be negative about their future then, then those in other newspapers.

Some print media houses were undergoing internal governance turbulences. To this degree then staff reductions, inability to recruit interns, reductions of travel funds, recruitment stoppages, etc. affected print media more than it did broadcast media.



Journalism, audiences

Broadcast journalism is going to continue being dominant in SA because of declining print, relatively low literacy, and citizens' passive forms of news consumption, accompanied low culture of reading.




Journalism, audiences

Indigenous journalism
Community media
journalism
Online journalims




Thirdly

SA journalists themselves are specifically studied in terms of their: social/ demographic profiles; job satisfaction; professional orientation and social responsibility; and, perception of differences between old and new media.




A number of journalists reported to need a bigger democratic space to do their work. This is in the context of (perceived) political threats to their independence, which they hold dearly.



Journalists complain about pay and are anxious about their future. More financially insecure are independent liberal media that, however their ideological deficiencies and as journalists indicated above, have kept their autonomy from the interference of the State.


Relatively financially secure is the public service broadcaster, which is not sufficiently insulated from political influence and the State, while at the same time offers more opportunities for journalists in terms of personal upward mobility and financial security.



Though SA journalists are passionate about journalism and their journalistic work *per se* as shown above, passion alone may not be sufficient to keep them in the field in long run and for them to perform the social functions that they said help uplift citizens. These are relatively young people who may need to take up more family responsibilities.



As much as the above is the case, the future of SA journalism is online and is digital. First, of late, almost each every SA news media is advertising the fact it also delivers news via new digital technologies, including downloadable Apps. Second, most SA journalists have fully embraced social media, Twitter and Facebook, for news gathering, monitoring and dissemination



Third, traditional news media are continuing to offer subsidised digital copies of their printed versions and are leveraging on the existing brands. Fourth, reputable blogs are becoming part of news media and are being read. The *Mail & Guardian's Thought Leader* is an example. Fifth, the recent launch of *The Rand Daily Mail* as a digital only news service speaks to the increasing confidence in online journalism, where *Daily Maverick* is in the lead. Sixth, the content nature and ideological orientations of *The Rand Daily Mail*, *Daily Maverick*, *Groundup* and *Politicweb*, as digital only news services speak not only to the increasing confidence in online journalism, growing independent digital journalism that is more interpretive- and opinionated.