

State of the Newsroom 2017

Fakers & Makers



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September 27, 2017. Congress of South African Trade Unions
(Cosatu) regional secretary for the Western Cape, Tony Ehrenreich,
addresses a crowd outside the provincial legislature. Thousands
marched under the Cosatu banner in Cape Town calling for an end
to state capture.

Find full report at:

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Corrected edition.

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PREFACE

There is no question that journalism across the world continues to be under enormous pressure. Under the impact of new technologies which are changing audiences in profound ways, traditional media business models are in decline and may not survive. Political pressures continue, and the increased use of targeted misinformation – often described as fake news – undermines trust in more formal journalism. And yet journalism continues to matter. The forms and institutions through which information circulates may – and probably will – change. In the last edition of this report, we highlighted the increasingly blurry line between those inside and those outside the newsroom, all feeding the information ecosystem. But no matter the changes in forms and structures, citizens' need for reliable, solid information will not disappear. Democracy depends on it.

In confronting these uncertain times, journalists and those interested in the media need solid information and analysis of the media landscape itself. A few years ago, Wits Journalism embarked on researching and writing these regular reports to deepen the public understanding of important trends. Our interest is not just academic, in two senses. For one thing, we have chosen to adopt an approach that takes the best of academic rigour, without losing accessibility for the text. The research presented here has been peer reviewed in the academic way, but it has tried to keep to a style and tone appropriate to a wider audience.

In another sense, Wits Journalism has never seen its role just as teaching journalism in the traditional academic sense. We are deeply enmeshed in the world of professional media: our career-entry students learn through doing journalism; we host major events such as the 2017 Global Investigative Journalism Conference that brought 1300 muckrakers from 130 countries to our campus; our projects produce significant, award-winning journalism in their own right and our grants support the telling of stories that might otherwise remain untold.

Our strength lies in our deep integration into the working world. Our students need to be prepared for a media that will look very different to today, and so our perspective cannot be that of outsiders. These trends affect us too.

This report, the fourth edition, tries to provide a snapshot of the state of South Africa's newsrooms in 2017. It tries to be both broad and narrow: identifying the broad trends that affect the media, and focusing on some fine-grained detail that provides depth and texture to understand them. As before, we provide an overview of the year's major developments and events, and then pick out a few particular issues that we feel deserve a closer look.

It took around a year to prepare. As we release it, we are beginning to think about the next one, due for release in early 2019. Of course, it is too early to know the detail of what will happen in the media in 2018, but we can begin to choose themes and topics that deserve a closer look. If you have suggestions, or feedback on this report, please let us know.

A warm word of thanks must go to everyone who worked on the venture, particularly Alan Finlay, the lead researcher and editor. But there were many others who contributed with feedback and suggestions or in other ways, and can't all be named here. We are also particularly grateful to the Media Programme of the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (Fesmedia), which supported aspects of the research.

Adj Prof Franz Krüger

Head of Department, Wits Journalism

INTRODUCTION

By Alan Finlay

For the first time, in this State of the Newsroom report we publish our newsroom survey – an attempt to map the roles, demographics and experience in a cross section of newsrooms in the country.

We have read over the past few years seemingly relentless news on the retrenchments of journalists – some reading this report are likely to have suffered personally as a result. As print circulation continues to decline, media houses look to digital to try resuscitate their flagging readership, and to shore up their financial losses. At the same time, newsrooms face the imperative of transformation – of hiring and nurturing more black journalists and women, and preparing them for senior roles in media houses.¹

Here we ask: given all these changes, what do newsrooms look like now? What roles do journalists perform, and what are the demographics of journalists?

Our researchers, Alastair Otter and Laura Grant, also attempt to offer a raw indicator of experience in the newsroom. Frequently, claims are made about the lack of senior skills in newsrooms, with the inevitable result of a drop in the quality of our news – but just how junior are the journalists making the news?

Usefully, the survey is conducted across a range of newsrooms in the country, from major news producers such as Media24 and Independent Media, to much younger and smaller independent newsrooms such as The Daily Vox and GroundUp, news centres such as the AmaBhungane Centre for Investigative Journalism, and topic-driven wires services such as Health-e News. The survey can be read in conjunction with our appendix data on the demographics of editors of print titles which we have updated from last year's report.

In this issue of State of the Newsroom we also offer a perspective on “fake news”, showcasing research by honours students at the Wits Journalism programme into the phenomenon. While the Gupta propaganda machine shows how dark the darker side of fake news can get, there have been several recent instances of the media being caught out by content scammers – most notably when Huffington Post was fooled by a blog post arguing that white men should be denied the right to vote, and when journalists (and large swathes of the online public) believed that photos of crowds flying the old South African flag were taken during countrywide marches against farm murders.

Deciding what counts as ‘fake news’ isn’t as easy as it might seem – and, as the summary of the honours

research included here shows, researching fake news poses several problems of methodology and definition. (Some argue that we should do away with the term altogether).

Despite this, authors Irwin Manoim and Admire Mare, who also supervised the students, share some interesting conclusions. For example, the research suggests that there might not be as much fake news circulating in South Africa as we imagine. And when it does go viral, the authors argue, it typically gets attention by tapping into the latent racism and sexism in this country. As they write: “All of the nastiest examples found by the students had a racial element, and some had an additional element of sexism.”

“Fact-checking journalism” as an idea of a new genre for journalism offers a useful counterpoint to the spread of fake news. But as Bob Wekesa’s article here suggests, fact-checking journalism has yet to gain the traction in South African newsrooms as an independent and marketable genre in the way that it has elsewhere in the world.

Of course, anyone can “fact check” anything, and call it that – but if it is to be taken seriously as a genre, it appears to have to have several key characteristics. For example, there needs to be a commitment to transparency, both when it comes to methodology and sources used to establish the truth of a claim. This is different from working with sometimes unverified claims, or using anonymous sources, typical of journalism.

Fact-checking journalism can also have the objective of strengthening democracy, which is not always the case of other forms of journalism, such as entertainment news, sports coverage or even much of our everyday news. Journalists also only sometimes use a public statement or claim as a starting point to coverage, whereas fact-checking journalism is typically reactive in that this is exactly what it does, rather than setting the news agenda afresh.

While the internet is a powerful enabler of fake news, which is dependent on circulation for its authority, fact checking in its current form is also catalysed by the global proliferation of the internet. Wekesa points out that it first started with bloggers who began questioning claims made in the media; and it is the instant availability of online reports, research and other data to verify facts that makes the kind of real-time fact checking we see possible.

The growth in fact-checking organisations and projects across the world in just a few years is quite remarkable –

the number more than doubled from some 62 initiatives in 2015 to 137 in 2017 – but it remains to be seen whether the idea of it being a genre with identifiable methodologies and characteristics will gain further traction in our newsrooms. Right now, South African newsrooms are mostly dependent on the work of external fact-checking organisations for their fact-checking content.

Finally, our “newsroom in review” section kicks off this year’s State of the Newsroom, as it does each year. It has been a busy year – a decline in circulation, The Times closing down, changes in ownership at ANN7 and Mail & Guardian, fake news, digital migration, the crisis at the public broadcaster, and corruption and state capture, all featuring as key media-related threads and stories throughout 2017.

While what has happened at the SABC is an obvious focus of our review – and we dedicate some space to a timeline account of what went on at the broadcaster – the harassment and intimidation of journalists needs to be highlighted. It is becoming a worryingly permanent feature of our media landscape. While in 2017 much of it is linked to the revelations of state capture, this is by no

means always the case. Journalists face death threats, character assassination, are prevented from doing their work by police, intimidated by thugs, and chased away by crowds. In at least one instance, the death of a journalist has been blamed on a sustained and disturbing campaign of intimidation.

We have called this issue of State of the Newsroom “Fakers and Makers”. “Fakers” refers to our focus on fake news and on fact checking – while also hinting at the various attempts to undermine journalists and a free media in South Africa. “Makers” points to the flipside of this. As the head of the Wits Journalism department, Franz Kruger, puts it: “The makers are those who continue to do valuable journalism: the SABC board trying to rescue it; those who succeeded in pushing back and frustrating the fake news onslaught, those left behind after the wave of retrenchments, the new online providers ...”.

We hope you find this issue of State of the Newsroom interesting, and, most of all, useful – regardless of the kind of work you do in shaping or understanding the changing news landscape in this country.

NOTES:

1. See State of the Newsroom 2015/2016 for an overview of transformation in print media from the perspective of ownership.

THE NEWSROOM IN REVIEW: 2017

One of the biggest media-related stories during 2017 was the resuscitation of the public broadcaster, which – after an intensive six-month clean-out by an interim board – finally has a new board in place and appears to be, at least tentatively, back on track.

Fake news also made ‘the news’ regularly in 2017, in one instance seeing an editor resign from her job, and a hate speech complaint being laid at the press council (later to be overturned on appeal). Fake news was also a feature of the Bell Pottinger propaganda campaign – as was the harassment of several journalists, both online and offline, including through the use of automated Twitter bots.

While the harassment of journalists received some attention in the context of the Gupta family and further revelations of corruption and state capture, threats on journalists in this country are coming from all quarters and in different contexts. Journalists receive death threats, are chased from the scenes of unfolding news events, their movement restricted, are robbed, and their characters assassinated. At least one death – of an SABC journalist – is being directly blamed on a campaign of intimidation and harassment after she insisted on her right to report freely and without censorship at the public broadcaster.

In this worrying context, print news circulation continues its steady downward trend – and one major print title was shut down in 2017. Both ANN7 and the Mail & Guardian changed ownership – in the case of ANN7, a clear link to the Gupta dealings in South Africa is made, while we see the exit of Zimbabwean media investor, Trevor Ncube, from the South African media landscape as he sells his stake in the Mail & Guardian. Finally, as the Independent Media’s independent ombud settles into place, Multichoice featured in several contexts – including being accused of corruption – as it wrestles challenges to its dominance in the pay-TV space.

Print circulation continues downward trend

News print circulation continued its downward trend over 2017, with overall losses in circulation experienced in daily, weekly and weekend papers, as well as free papers.¹ Third quarter statistics from the Audit Bureau of Circulations of South Africa (ABC) showed a total decline of 6% in circulation, compared to the previous year. Both weekend (down 12.1% from the previous year) and dailies (11.9%) experienced the steepest decline in circulation, with the circulation of weekly papers falling 6.5%.

With a circulation of over 155,000, Daily Sun remained by far the biggest daily in circulation,² and with a circulation of over 260,000 Sunday Times is the biggest general news weekend paper.³ In December 2017, the top news

websites were news24.com,⁴ which received almost double the unique browser visits of timeslive.co.za,⁵ followed closely by iol.co.za,⁶ and, in fourth place, ewn.co.za.⁷

Meanwhile the radio stations that most people listen to according to November 2017 statistics are: Ukhozi FM (over seven million listeners), Umhlobo Wenene FM (nearly five-and-a-half million listeners), Metro FM (just over four million), Thobela FM (nearly five million) and Lesedi FM (over three million).⁸

The Times shuts down

Despite the continued pressure on print circulation, the fever of retrenchments in the industry over the past five years appears to be breaking. Nevertheless, downscaling in newsrooms persists as a troubling feature of the local media landscape. Following the voluntary severance packages accepted by more than 70 journalists at Independent Media in 2016, Tiso Blackstar Group – previously Times Media Group⁹ – announced that it was shutting down the print edition of The Times, the daily tabloid that was launched in 2007.



News Can't make it up: Zim and invaders evicted PAGE 4	Day's number 73% of our eggs are contaminated with disease-causing bacteria	News Boksburg woman steals R460m PAGE 4	Darrel Bristow-Bovey How love and bad videos got me here PAGE 9
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The last edition of The Times, December 17, 2017

This was part of a broader restructuring process at the group that was expected to impact on the jobs of both print and digital staff.¹⁰ In a letter sent to staff at the beginning of November,¹¹ Tiso managing director Andrew Gill said declining circulation of the tabloid meant that it had become unprofitable, despite an increase in its vendor price, publishing a thinner edition, and cutting its circulation and reach. Instead, Tiso was to focus on an online “premium” product of the publication.

“Changing from print to fully digital would necessitate changes in editorial processes and newsroom structures,” Gill stated in his letter. The retrenchment process was only expected to be complete by the end of January 2018, and by the end of the year it was unclear how many staff would be affected by the closure. Eight staff had already been retrenched at Tiso over the past year.¹²

Changing ownership

In August 2017 came the announcement that former government spokesperson and so-called “Gupta crusader”, Mzwanele Jimmy Manyi, had bought ANN7, the 24-hour news channel broadcast on DSTv, and the pro-government newspaper The New Age – both owned by the Gupta family’s Oakbay Investments. The sale to 100% Manyi-owned Lodidox was financed by the Guptas in a R450-million vendor financing deal. (The New Age went for R150-million and ANN7 for R300-million.)

The sale came in the wake of South Africa’s top banks blacklisting Oakbay’s accounts in 2016.¹³

The sale was reported to have given “certainty” to the 7,500 employees at the two companies,¹⁴ but is likely to continue the questionable contributions of the newspaper and news channel to a robust and critical media landscape in South Africa. “Former employees have said their work is regularly edited to fit with the [Gupta] family’s agenda,” Greg Nicolson wrote in his analysis¹⁵ in Daily Maverick. Meanwhile, The New Age has, despite low

readership, “profited off the family’s ties to government leaders, earning lucrative advertising, subscription and event deals with the state”.¹⁶

Manyi is reported to have played a key role in the Bell Pottinger scandal (see below), and was an outspoken critic of “white monopoly capital”, a catch-phrase of the Pottinger propaganda campaign. Amongst other things, he is also said to have embarked on a Twitter crusade to discredit former finance minister Pravin Gordhan.¹⁷

The Mail & Guardian newspaper, a stalwart of independent-thinking media in South Africa, has also changed ownership following the departure of Zimbabwean media investor, Trevor Ncube, as main shareholder for the past 15 years, and a majority acquisition in the paper by New York-based non-profit independent media financier, Media Development Investment Fund (MDIF), as announced in December.

As part of the deal, MDIF is also disinvesting from Alpha Media Holdings, an independent media house in Zimbabwe, and publisher of The Zimbabwe Independent, The Standard, and NewsDay, giving Ncube a 100% ownership there.¹⁸

The MDIF, which finances and offers technical assistance to “independent news and information businesses in challenging environments”,¹⁹ has been involved in the Mail & Guardian since 2003 when a loan was extended to the newspaper. As part of the deal, the Mail & Guardian’s chief executive officer, Hoosain Karjiekier, becomes a minority shareholder and remains in his executive position. “The new ownership will steady the company and provide much-needed financial stability,” he said,²⁰ stressing that the sale would not impact on the newspaper’s editorial independence.

Separate oversight mechanisms for Independent Media takes root

The Independent Media group meanwhile launched its own ombud office in May, following its withdrawal from the industry’s Press Council in 2016. Speaking at the launch of the office – which has representatives in Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal and the Western Cape – executive chairman of the group, Iqbal Survé, insisted that Independent Media was opposed to a media appeals tribunal as proposed by the ruling-ANC government, and that its withdrawal from the Press Council should not be seen as a lack of commitment to independent regulation by the industry.²¹

The group’s adjudication and appeals panels have also been set up, with the former chaired by group ombudsman Jovial Rantao, who is also chairperson of The African Editors Forum and the Southern African Editors Forum. The appeals panel is chaired by retired Constitutional Court Judge Zak Yacoob.²²



*Ashraf Hendricks/GroundUp (CC BY-ND 4.0)
Pravin Gordhan addresses the audience during the Ahmed Kathrada memorial at St. Georges Cathedral in Cape Town. April 6, 2017.*

Independent Media withdrew from the Press Council because it wanted complainants to waive their right to further legal action, citing exorbitant legal costs. It has included a waiver clause in its new press code.²³

Digital terrestrial television: the controversy deepens

Confirmation that the tentacles of state capture and government corruption had infiltrated the launch of digital terrestrial television (DTT) received a fresh boost in 2017 with news that Multichoice, the owner of DStv and M-Net, had agreed to pay then Gupta-owned broadcaster, ANN7, R25-million²⁴ in a 2015 deal that is seen to have been an attempt to influence the government's position on encrypted set-top boxes.

The alleged payment was exposed in the so-called Gupta Leaks – some 100,000 to 200,000 leaked emails exposing the alleged dirty dealings of the Gupta family's efforts to secure influence over President Zuma and his ministers, a relationship officially documented in the hard-hitting 'The State of Capture' report by former public protector, Thuli Madonsela in 2016.²⁵

The Multichoice dealings were further bolstered by revelations by News24.com – interestingly a news site owned by Multichoice's parent company, Naspers – that Multichoice had also agreed to increase its annual payment to ANN7 from R50-million to around R140-million.²⁶ Both payments were alleged to have been made through the Gupta's Infinity Media Networks. Meanwhile the Democratic Alliance entered the fray, sharing minutes from a meeting between then Multichoice CEO, Imtiaz Patel, and the SABC where the pay-TV executive offered to help finance a 24-hour SABC news channel to the tune of R100-million a year.²⁷ The payment to the SABC was also intended to leverage the broadcaster's influence on encrypted set-top boxes so that Multichoice – owner of DStv and M-Net – could protect its monopoly of the pay-for TV space.

The attempt to influence the government's decision on set-top boxes – drawing comparisons between Naspers and the Gupta family's Oakbay²⁸ – goes back as far as 2014, with the sudden departure of former Communications Minister, Yunus Carrim, and the splitting of the communications portfolio into two departments, weakening the communications minister's influence on broadcasting policy.²⁹

Carrim, who favoured encryption in line with ANC policy, was replaced after only 10 months by Faith Muthambi, who declared a sudden preference for unencrypted boxes, which is favourable to Multichoice. What followed was a lengthy court battle with civil society siding with eTV in an effort to have Muthambi's decision on set-top boxes overturned. While eTV was finally victorious in the Supreme Court of Appeal³⁰ – and Muthambi sufficiently chastised by the judge – the Constitutional Court in early 2017 ruled that the minister was in fact within her rights

to make policy decisions impacting on the broadcasting sector.³¹

The fresh allegations have, however, resulted in the launch of investigations into the affair by at least one international law firm.³² Multichoice has denied any wrongdoing and in December launched an investigation of its own to determine whether there was anything amiss in its actions.³³

Bell Pottinger and the Gupta “propaganda empire”

One of the most dramatic outcomes of the 'Gupta Leaks' was the demise of London public relations firm, Bell Pottinger, following revelations of a behind-the-scenes campaign financed by the Guptas to stoke racial divisions in the country. The Pottinger campaign was said to have been just a cog in the “construction of the Gupta family's propaganda empire”³⁴ that included The New Age and ANN7, a multipronged online strategy using social media, Twitter bots, and fake news websites, and the allegiance of several outspoken public commentators. For its part, the London firm – under a £100,000-a-month contract from Oakbay signed in January 2016³⁵ – drew on both social and traditional media to attack companies and individuals in South Africa, divisively promoting the ideas of “economic apartheid” and “white monopoly capital”³⁶ to divert attention from allegations of corruption and state capture against the president and the Gupta family.³⁷

Pottinger reportedly also resorted to “misleading or undermining journalists questioning the campaign”.³⁸ It further emerged that Black First, Land First (BLF) leader Andile Mngxitama was under the instruction of



Ashraf Hendricks/GroundUp (CC BY-ND 4.0)
Thousands protest outside the Green Point stadium against farm murders. Journalists and the public are fooled into thinking that photos of the old South African flag being waved at a protest are from the day's events. October 30, 2017.

the Guptas.³⁹ The campaign has been called “the first large-scale fake news propaganda war in South Africa”⁴⁰ and caused a visceral national outcry, eventually leading to the collapse of the London firm which was put into administration.⁴¹

From fake news, and dodgy data, to fact checking

So-called ‘fake news’ continued to receive media attention over the year. While notable and malicious examples are linked to Pottinger’s campaign, the industry and its editorial checks-and-balances came under fresh scrutiny when Huffington Post South Africa and its editor, Verashni Pillay, were caught out in a gender-inspired prank by political science graduate, Marius Roodt. That’s after the online news site had published a blog post by one “Shelly Garland” – a pseudonym used by Roodt – arguing that white men should not have the right to vote (and, on top of it all, using dodgy data to make the argument). The piece was taken at face value by the online publication, and initially defended by Pillay despite a public outcry, causing reputational damage to the publisher and ultimately resulting in Pillay’s resignation.⁴² The post was also reported to the press ombudsman by AfriForum, which ruled that it amounted to hate speech, a finding challenged by Pillay, Media Monitoring Africa and the South African Editors’ Forum (Sanef). The Press Council’s appeals panel subsequently reversed the original ruling, arguing that although the blog might have “irritated or annoyed some people”, it should not be classified as hate speech, which needs to both advocate hatred and incite to cause harm.⁴³

In November, HuffPost – the new name of Huffington Post⁴⁴ – came under fresh fire when the press ombud was again called by AfriForum to adjudicate on an article published by new HuffPost editor Pieter du Toit, this time accusing AfriForum of being South Africa’s “Bell Pottinger” and running racially divisive and focused campaigns against individuals and organisations. Amongst other targets of this alleged “subtle and polished” campaign was Jacaranda FM presenter, Tumi Morake, who had come under attack from the station’s largely white, Afrikaans-speaking listenership⁴⁵ after discussing South Africa’s transition to democracy on her breakfast show. The press ombud found that HuffPost had contravened the press code, that its allegations were not based on fact, and that it should apologise to AfriForum.⁴⁷

Finally, in late October the media was again caught with its pants down when several photos of white people waving the old South African flag were circulated, purportedly representing participants in the #BlackMonday protests against farm murders. A number of these photographs were later shown to be from past protests – with one even taken in London⁴⁷ – but were never-the-less published on news sites and circulated on journalist Twitter feeds as an unfolding record of the #BlackMonday marches. At least one journalist later apologised for his oversight.⁴⁸

Restoring confidence in the public broadcaster

The year 2016 left the SABC in a dishevelled state of affairs, with the final collapse of the board, following en masse resignations that left the chairperson Mbulaheni Maguvhe standing alone at the helm – he finally resigned in December of that year. As outlined in State of the Newsroom 2015/2016, at the centre of the resignations were reported disagreements around the permanent appointment of Hlaudi Motsoeneng, the former chief operating officer at the broadcaster. A parliamentary enquiry into the state of affairs started at the end of November in 2016 offered a glimmer of hope – and pressed ahead despite resistance from the SABC, whose delegation was led by Maguvhe, and included Motsoeneng and acting chief executive James Aguma.⁴⁹ The year ended with lobby groups calling for urgent parliamentary action to nominate an interim board.⁵⁰

For the SABC, 2017 was no less tumultuous: the finalisation of the parliamentary enquiry in late March; the appointment of the interim board to help “restore confidence in the public broadcaster”;⁵¹ the launch of a Special Investigating Unit probe into maladministration and corruption in September, with the simultaneous revelation that the SABC needed a massive R3-billion bailout; the appointment of a new board in October, followed soon after by the controversial resignation of one of its members; and a wage strike in December timed to coincide with the ANC elective conference.

Below is a rundown of the year at the public broadcaster:

Parliamentary inquiry finalises its report

February 24: The parliamentary ad hoc committee investigating the SABC adopted its final report, following what is described as a “brutal” overnight deliberation session into the early hours of the morning.⁵² The committee took three months to reach its recommendations. The biggest sticking point was how to handle the actions of Muthambi who, as communications minister, may have acted corruptly in supporting Multichoice in her decision about digital TV and encryption following a payoff by Multichoice to the Gupta family.

The former minister’s meddling at the public broadcaster appeared no less questionable. In an echo of a Supreme Court of Appeal ruling in 2016, the minister was found to be incompetent, and to have interfered in the SABC board’s deliberations.⁵³ The parliamentary inquiry revealed that she had, amongst other things, undermined the board in 2014 when she changed the SABC’s articles of incorporation, giving its executives greater power. In a further twist, the inquiry found that this change may not have proper legal standing, following her failure to register it with the Companies and Intellectual Property Commission (CIPC).⁵⁴

The committee finally decided to hand the fate of the former minister to President Jacob Zuma, while recommending that she be referred to parliament's ethics committee. It was also recommended that action be taken against board members and current and former employees complicit in wasteful expenditure at the broadcaster.⁵⁵ Criminal charges against witnesses who misled the investigating committee or gave false evidence were also mooted.⁵⁶ Finally, the committee recommended that an interim board be appointed as soon as possible.

March 7: The president adopted the report, opening the way for an interim board to be appointed. Only the United Democratic Movement opposed the adoption of the report in parliament, stating that Motsoeneng should have testified. In response, the committee pointed to the fact that the former COO had walked out of public proceedings on the first day.⁵⁷

The appointment of an interim board

March 8: Five members of an interim board were named by parliament's communications committee in an urgent meeting the following day. The five were: Wits Journalism academic, veteran journalist and former editor, Mathatha Tsedu; former ANC national executive committee member and former diplomat, Febe Potgieter-Gqubule; human rights lawyer; Krish Naidoo – one of the board members who had resigned in October the previous year; journalist and author John Matisonn; and former CEO of Business Unity SA, Khanyisile Kweyama. The task of the interim board was to implement recommendations made by the ad hoc committee, and, in the words of communications committee chair, Humphrey Maxegwana, “restore confidence in the public broadcaster, resuscitate the culture of good corporate governance and rebuild staff morale”.⁵⁸ The board, which was to be chaired by Kweyama, was to have a six-month mandate once formally constituted.

April 19: Motsoeneng – who had been suspended from the broadcaster in December 2016 – held a four-hour media briefing in Johannesburg where he attacked the interim board, as well as the ad hoc parliamentary inquiry committee.⁵⁹

The so-called “Hands off Hlaudi” briefing resulted in disciplinary action against him for bringing the broadcaster into disrepute. Motsoeneng then faced concurrent disciplinary hearings, one for insubordination and bringing the SABC into disrepute and the other arising from the Public Protector's report in 2014 relating to him allegedly misrepresenting his qualifications, engaging in a “purge” of staff, and awarding himself a R900,000 salary increase.⁶⁰

April 28. The interim board was formally constituted following a cabinet reshuffle that saw Ayanda Dlodlo named communications minister in the place of Muthambi.

“A consistent factor in the rot...”

May 11: The SABC's acting chief executive, and former chief financial officer, James Aguma told parliament's portfolio committee on communications that the broadcaster's 90% local content policy had cost its radio division some R29-million and SABC TV R183-million. There had also been a decline in audience figures for Metro FM, 5FM, and Goodhope FM, as well as SABC3 TV. The policy was the brainchild of Motsoeneng, and unilaterally pushed through at the public broadcaster by him.⁶¹

May 17: A Standing Committee on Public Accounts (Scopa) meeting considered “irregular, fruitless and wasteful” expenditure at the broadcaster to the tune R5.1-billion.⁶² Aguma, who was chastised during the meeting for his role in a “Hands off Hlaudi” press briefing, and who an MP called “a consistent factor in the rot which is in the SABC”,⁶³ is not present, apparently due to “ill health”.⁶⁴ May 18: Motsoeneng's attempt to have his “Hands off Hlaudi” disciplinary charges collapsed into the charges stipulated by the Public Protector failed.⁶⁵

May 24: Motsoeneng's disciplinary hearing started. In an affidavit to the hearing, Aguma attacked the interim board, and said he had given Motsoeneng permission to hold the controversial media briefing – statements which riled the board. The disciplinary hearing found Motsoeneng guilty of misconduct and recommended his dismissal.⁶⁶

May 26: Aguma is suspended by the interim board.⁶⁷

July 12: The interim board announced the dismissal of Motsoeneng after he had been found guilty of misconduct at a disciplinary hearing.

July 14: The SABC opened its editorial policy for public input. This is after the Independent Communications Authority of South Africa (Icasa) rejected a revised editorial policy from 2016 – which prohibited violent public protests from being aired – because it contravened the Broadcasting Act. As a result, the broadcaster reverted to its 2004 policy.⁶⁸

Six aspects of its editorial policy were opened for public input: news editorial, programming, local content, language, religion and universal service. However, the interim board said that it would drop the current 90% local music policy regardless of the outcome of the public participatory process. A deadline of August 31 was set for input. This was later extended due to public demand. More than 200 written submissions were received and all provinces were visited. The draft would be taken back to communities for input before finalisation.⁶⁹

“We can't fix broken doors and leaking roofs...”

July 17: The interim board said it would sue Motsoeneng in order to try to recoup a R11.4-million bonus paid to him in 2016,⁷⁰ while also considering criminal charges.

The bonus followed a R533-million deal struck with Multichoice without the then board’s approval, which allowed the digital broadcaster access to the SABC’s extensive archives for five years through the SABC Encore channel, which repackaged archive shows for rebroadcast. Motsoeneng was said to have received a R33-million sweetener, to be paid out over five years, with the first instalment of R11.4-million paid in 2016.⁷¹ September 4: The government’s Special Investigation Unit (SIU) started its investigation into the mismanagement of funds at the public broadcaster. Under the spotlight was some R5-billion of funds, most of which was irregular expenditure due to the SABC accepting duplicate tax compliance certificates instead of originals, as stipulated by treasury.⁷² Also in early September, parliament’s standing committee on finance revealed that the SABC needed a R3-billion bailout. This was twice the amount requested by the broadcaster in 2009.⁷³ Interim SABC board deputy chairperson, Mathatha Tsedu, had earlier told parliament that while the SABC would “survive” without the bailout, it would not be able to fulfil its public broadcast mandate. He said the financial affairs at the broadcaster were so dire that it could not do “basic maintenance on its buildings, including fixing leaking roofs and broken doors”.⁷⁴ It was anticipated that the broadcaster would end the 2016/2017 financial year with a R1.1-billion net loss.⁷⁵

A new SABC board is appointed

September 28: The six-month mandate of the interim board expired. During the first weeks of October, pressure mounted for Zuma to appoint a new board, which had already been nominated by the national assembly.

October 17: The new SABC board was appointed by Zuma, following weeks of delay that included an urgent court application by civil society to force the president to appoint the permanent board.⁷⁶

The new 11 board members – including several drawn from the interim board – were appointed for a five-year tenure. The board members were Bongumusa Makhathini



Ashraf Hendricks/GroundUp (CC BY-ND 4.0)
Supporters of Right2Know protest against the SABC outside Parliament in August 2016.

(chairperson); Potgieter-Gqubule (deputy chairperson); Naidoo; Kweyama; Matisonn; Tsedu; Rachel Kalidass; Michael Markovitz; Victor Rambau; Dinkwanyane Mohuba and Jack Phalane.⁷⁷

November 16: The new board, however, soon ran into trouble. While the opposition Democratic Alliance cast a wary eye at Makhathini and Potgieter-Gqubule,⁷⁸ board member Rachel Kalidass – who had also been a member of the previous board at the broadcaster – quit under a cloud of controversy.⁷⁹

Kalidass said that her resignation was due to her opposition to the board’s preferred candidate for the new CEO, Alan Mukoki, citing fraud and corruption allegations from a previous employer against the candidate, and a conflict of interest with an SABC service provider.⁸⁰ She said his appointment would “[hinder] the restoration of stability and integrity at the SABC”.⁸¹ She claimed that her opposition to his appointment had resulted in her “sidelining” and “victimisation” at the broadcaster.⁸²

Mukoki, who was a former head of the Land Bank and current CEO of the South African Chamber of Commerce and Industry, was also criticised by the Democratic Alliance over his suitability for the position. The board, in its response, said that no decision had been taken to appoint anyone and that Kalidass’s resignation letter contained inaccuracies.⁸³

Board Chairperson Bongumusa Makhathini said a thorough background check was being done to assess the validity of the claims against Mukoki. The board also said that Kalidass had flouted board regulations by approaching members of parliament and the media on the matter.

The allegations, which stem from his time as CEO of the Land Bank, have been disputed by Mukoki, who pointed out that a 2007 investigation into the allegations was found to be flawed and set aside by parliament.⁸⁴

Kalidass lost her position on the previous SABC board following her objection to Motsoeneng’s permanent appointment as chief operations officer (a permanent appointment to the position has yet to be made).⁸⁵

Multichoice, again

November 22: In continued efforts to boost the flagging finances at the broadcaster the SABC asked Icasa to conduct a public review of regulations allowing Multichoice to carry its channels for free.⁸⁶ The broadcaster told Icasa that its channels – SABC 1, 2 and 3 – are the most popular on DStv, with the five most watched shows coming from the broadcaster.⁸⁷ The so-called “Must Carry Regulations” issued in 2008 state that subscription broadcasters offering over 30 channels must carry the three SABC channels for free.

“Unfortunately the regulations stipulated that it should be for free and we’ve taken it on the chin that for eight years the SABC did nothing about it. The fact is, if something is wrong, and nothing has been done about it for eight years, it doesn’t make it right,” SABC board member Michael Markovitz said.⁸⁸ Multichoice is opposing the SABC request. OpenView HD, the high definition satellite service of SABC’s opposition eTV, also carries the SABC free-to-air channels for free and will be affected by the application.

Journalists, workers down tools

December 3: Controversy was stoked at the broadcaster after it was announced that staff would receive no salary increases for 2018, but that the interim board had been paid R3.9-million for its six-months work – reportedly nearly double the earnings of the previous board.⁸⁹ However, the new board defended the salaries pointing out that the five-person interim body had met frequently during its tenure (there were a total of 99 meetings), and had been at the broadcaster “almost daily”.⁹⁰

December 14: An end-of-the-year strike at the SABC over wages also reportedly affected the news bulletins at Ukhozi FM, which were off-air for a time. Ukhozi FM is the broadcaster’s biggest station, with a listenership of over 7.7-million.⁹¹ SABC employees demanded a 10% salary increase to the SABC’s offer of 4.5%. An agreement of 4.8% backdated to July was finally reached with unions.⁹²

Harassment of journalists on the increase

The freedom of journalists to do their work came under increased scrutiny in 2017, with a notable upswing in the harassment of journalists by both by state and non-state actors – in some instances Twitter bots were used to do the harassing, part of what Sanef condemned as the “weaponisation” of social media to attack and intimidate journalists.⁹³ The death of at least one journalist is being blamed on targeted attacks related to her work.

While Sanef expressed outrage at the death threats received by investigative journalists Siphon Masondo (City Press) and Mzilikazi wa Afrika (Sunday Times), two investigative journalists who published books in 2017 exposing how far state capture had progressed in South Africa – Jacques Pauw and Pieter-Louis Myburgh – were harassed by police, and finally ordered to report to a Durban North police station in December.

In the case of Pauw, after the publication of his book *The President’s Keepers*, the South African Receiver of Revenue (Sars) filed high court papers against him⁹⁴ for allegedly contravening the Tax Administration Act by sharing confidential taxpayer information. In the book Pauw accuses Zuma of tax evasion, and a Sars commissioner of being complicit in this evasion.⁹⁵ The State Security Agency also served Pauw and his publishers, NB Publishers, with a cease-and-desist letter soon after publication. It claimed the book contravenes

the Intelligence Service Act, and demanded it be withdrawn.⁹⁶ Pauw was executive producer of the SABC’s Special Assignment, and a *Vrye Weekblad* founder and assistant editor. Myburgh, whose book is called *The Republic of Gupta*, is a News24 investigative journalist.

The Gupta-linked BLF movement was hauled before court after about 20 of its members descended on the Johannesburg home of Business Day columnist and editor-at-large, Peter Bruce, accusing him of racism and selective reporting.⁹⁷ The protesters graffitied Bruce’s garage door, and allegedly manhandled Business Day editor Tim Cohen when he arrived to support Bruce.

Political commentator Karima Brown was also subject to the harassment.⁹⁸ The incident in June occurred several days after a website called WMC Leaks [White Monopoly Capital Leaks] – part of the Gupta-Zuma propaganda campaign in South Africa – published what it called an exposé claiming Bruce was having an extramarital affair. (Bruce says he and his wife were tailed by a photojournalist in 2016).⁹⁹ The harassment at Bruce’s home, damage to property and attempt to intimidate him was thought to be a result of a column published in Business Day critical of the Guptas, and, in passing, mentioning BLF leader Andile Mngxitama. Bruce first wrote critically of the Guptas in early 2016 in a column called ‘How to buy a mine for next to nothing’.¹⁰⁰

Meanwhile, Sanef condemned the incident at Bruce’s home, and approached the High Court with an urgent application to stop any further harassment, including the names of 11 journalists and columnists in its application.¹⁰¹ All of them had written about the Guptas and state capture.¹⁰² In a statement, Sanef said the BLF had “since threatened more editors and journalists with similar protests at their private homes”, including calling them “askaris” (or traitors to the anti-apartheid cause). Co-applicants named in the papers were HuffPost South Africa editor-at-large Ferial Haffajee and Talk Radio 702 presenter Eusebius McKaiser, Sam Sole from the investigative journalist unit amaBhungane, News24 editor Adriaan Basson, Talk Radio 702 presenter Stephen Grootes, political commentator and author Max du Preez, Eyewitness News editor Katy Katopodis and Eyewitness News reporter, Barry Bateman.¹⁰³

While the interdict was successful,¹⁰⁴ less than a month later the court order was extended to cover all journalists, after BLF disrupted a public event staged by amaBhungane.¹⁰⁵ The group was found to be in contempt of court, and was threatened with arrest and a R100 000 fine if they did not comply with the court order. Mngxitama was given a suspended three-month jail sentence. The new court order applies equally to threatening journalists on social media.¹⁰⁶

Meanwhile, Haffajee published her own gruelling account of online harassment as part of the so-called #whitemonopolycapital campaign, where she also talks about the army of Twitter bots – the fake software-driven Twitter accounts – used in the sustained assault.¹⁰⁷

Journalists Grootes, Bateman, and financial journalist, Alex Hogg, were amongst those also targeted by Twitter bots.¹⁰⁸

State capture was not the only news context for the harassment of journalists. At the beginning of 2017, Sanef expressed its unhappiness at chaos unfolding at the State of the Nation Address (Sona) preparations in February, which saw the Economic Freedom Fighters ejected from parliament. Sanef lamented what it called the growing “securitisation” of parliament.

Journalists were prevented from reporting on the events by authorities, including having their freedom of movement restricted. Sanef said in a statement¹⁰⁹ that, amongst other incidents, journalists based at parliament’s media offices were hampered from leaving and returning to their offices by riot police. Some photographers were also prevented from taking photographs.

In April, journalist Godknows Nare was shot dead by three Johannesburg Metro police officers, however, it remained unclear if this was related to his work as a journalist. Nare, who was subsequently praised by media colleagues, had worked for the BBC, Al Jazeera, the New York Times, the SABC’s Special Assignment, and eNCA, amongst others. (The three police officers were arrested and charged with murder, assault and defeating the ends of justice in 2018).¹¹⁰

Also in 2017 was the death of SABC journalist Suna Venter, one of the broadcaster’s journalists dismissed in 2016 after refusing not to report on anti-government protests. Together with seven other journalists, Venter challenged her dismissal and was reinstated by the

Labour Court. However, her family said the journalist faced severe harassment for taking the stand against censorship imposed at the broadcaster, which was one of the key causes of her death from ill-health. Reports said her family claimed that “her flat was broken into multiple times; the tyres on her car were slashed; she was allegedly assaulted on three separate occasions, shot at, and once even abducted”.¹¹¹

In November the now-resuscitated SABC was called to condemn the harassment and intimidation of one of its journalists by police while reporting from outside the Beit Bridge border post. Journalist Mike Maringa had been covering the unfolding crisis in Zimbabwe when the incident occurred.¹¹² “These actions are shocking as the police are supposed to be protecting citizens and journalists,” the broadcaster said.¹¹³ In a statement, it called on the police to allow its journalists to “freely and independently discharge their public service mandate”.¹¹⁴

By the end of the year, strong indications began to emerge that South African freelance photojournalist, Shiraz Mohamed, who had been kidnapped in Syria in January, was alive.¹¹⁵ This is after the NGO, Gift of the Givers, which Mohamed had accompanied to the war-torn country on an informal assignment to take pictures for the organisation,¹¹⁶ said it had received word that he had been seen earlier in the year.

Mohamed was reportedly snatched by gunmen with two aid workers while on their way to the Turkish border on January 10.¹¹⁷ The Committee for the Protection of Journalists, which called for Mohamed’s release soon after his kidnapping, says that over 100 journalists have been abducted in Syria since 2011.¹¹⁸



Ashraf Hendricks/GroundUp (CC BY-ND 4.0)
Egyptian Geese wander through a Cosatu protest against state capture in Cape Town. September 27, 2017.

HOW REAL IS 'FAKE NEWS' IN SOUTH AFRICA?

Despite incidents of so-called 'fake news' causing serious public concern in South Africa over the past year, research by students in the Wits Journalism programme suggests that the amount of fake news passing as real news in the country is lower than we might expect. It also suggests that the most believable lies trace the fault lines of race and gender to bait the reader.

By Irwin Manoim and Admire Mare

How large is the 'fake news' phenomenon in South Africa? Does it compare with the levels of disinformation that have been reported upon and analysed in the United States (US) and other countries?

A group of nine mid-career honours-level students at Wits University's journalism programme spent the second semester of 2017 investigating aspects of the fake news phenomenon in South Africa.¹ Many of the students are experienced journalists in their own right.

Their assignments ranged widely, including: interviews with editors and writers who had been victims of social media-inspired attacks; an automated survey of hundreds of news websites in search of "faked" information; an interview with a self-confessed news "faker"; an investigation of the relationship between fake news and xenophobia; and a look into fake news and right-wing white racism. There were also examinations of what the "mainstream" news media were doing to counteract disinformation.

The challenge of defining fake news

The notion of fake news has received so much publicity in the past year that it has become part of everyday speech. But pinning down its meaning – and indeed, agreeing as to whether it even exists – has proved a rather more complex methodological challenge. There is general agreement that disinformation is as old as writing itself, that the manipulation of public opinion and official records for the benefit of the powerful goes all the way back to the earliest settled societies.

Hoaxes and falsehoods have been associated with the internet since its early days, but it is only in the last two years that organised, systematic misinformation campaigns, often linked to governments, have emerged online, and their effect on democracy and society scrutinised.² Organised campaigns have always been there, it's only that they have become more pronounced in the online context as a result of the emergence of social media platforms and mobile instant messaging sites. What distinguishes the current outbreak of fake news from its predecessors is the extraordinary ease and rapidity with which information can be disseminated

and shared globally over the internet, by anonymous individuals who need no expensive equipment or intensive training. The egalitarian openness of the internet was hailed by its champions as its greatest contribution to global democracy, breaking down the self-interested monopolies of large publishing or broadcast corporations, or the censorship of autocratic states. For the first time in history, "the people" would have the right to speak and be heard. And for a while, in some oppressive societies, this did indeed prove true, and revolutions were waged and won over cellphones and social media.

But more recently, the apparent innocence of the internet has allowed those with sinister agendas to manipulate open platforms for their own ends. Now, apparently ordinary individuals, who, on closer examination, prove not to exist, are posting news which purports to be true whereas the truth is the polar opposite, pursuing manipulative agendas that are hidden from sight.

The rise of new media technologies, especially social media, has broken down many of the boundaries that prevented fake news from spreading in different political contexts. It has allowed anyone to create and disseminate information, especially those that have proven most adept at 'gaming' how social networks operate.

In working with the honours students, the first difficulty was in distinguishing between hyper-partisan polemic, propaganda, satire and fake news. While the working definitions adopted by the students are not conclusive – they are, rather explorative of what we might or might not want to include in the basket of content called "fake news" – they hopefully offer useful pointers to the nature of fake news.

The students each set up own methodologies and arrived at different conclusions, but in the main, their working definitions of fake news show shared criteria:

- Stories that are provably false, but have enormous popular appeal and are consumed by millions of people.
- Hoaxes, propaganda, and disinformation purporting to be real news—often using social media to drive web traffic and amplify their effect.
- Fictional pieces of information or narratives which are used to discredit individuals, as well as their viewpoints and agendas.
- News stories that have no factual basis but are presented as news.
- Completely false information that is created for financial gain.
- Content which is sensationalised in intentional ways to drive up the volume of clicks and shares.

These definitions underscore that fake news is similar to hoaxes, propaganda, misinformation and propaganda. It is premised on deception, and, some argue, is little more than propaganda.³

Yet a distinction needs to be made between once-off hoaxes by individuals that get taken up by social media or even traditional media as genuine, and systematic attempts to deliberately publish misleading, deceptive or incorrect information purporting to be real news for political, economic or cultural gain. Both can be considered fake news in a loose definition of fake news, and both are taken up as news, yet the intention of the progenitor of the content is quite different in each case.

A hoax or fabrication by a disgruntled individual is not propaganda – nor is it, strictly, “news”, yet it is shared as news by content consumers connected through social media and the internet. We are cognisant that there is a huge debate about the use of the term ‘fake news’, with some arguing that the term should be dropped completely, and others pushing for the use of the concept of ‘false news’ instead. Our use of the term fake news – which is quite loose – must be understood within the context of an evolving debate.

Case studies by our students also underscored the fact that fake news is not only limited to online platforms, but also travels through mainstream media and other channels. Despite this, the internet feels intrinsically part of the nature of much of what we call fake news – of what makes fake news fake news. As Wasserman observes,⁴ if social media is the theatre of this new propaganda war, Twitter is where the deepest trenches are dug. Fake tweets, photoshopped pictures and posters, and even automated Twitter bots, are the weapons deployed in this dirty fight.

Finally, it also feels as if a unique characteristic of fake news – at least right now – is that, depending on the social, political or other impact measured in various ways, fake news content and its creators can be newsworthy in itself or in themselves. As one case study shows here, the creator of a hoax is hauled into a radio studio to explain himself – and a frequent question is: who is behind controversial content published online or elsewhere. Fake news, that is, currently has a high degree of newsworthiness in the South African newsroom.

Case studies of fake news in South Africa

The nine students involved in the programme examined different, narrowly defined aspects of the field, and made use of different research methods. In some cases, their focus was on propaganda, rather than fake news. Being journalists, most made use of interviews and conducted conventional online research via search engines.

Only one student made use of automated, qualitative techniques and sampling. The research began late in June 2017, with discussions of methodology, attempts to define fake news, and the choice of areas of research. What made the research difficult is that, because fake news sites are untrustworthy at every level, including their reader statistics, their publishers, authors, locations and publication dates, they are not easily pinned down, nor have they been reliably archived by any independent outsiders.⁵

A critical limitation of the studies is that because they operated during a narrow time frame, the students were not able to gather the extensive data that some others, such as Andrew Fraser and his collaborators⁶ have made over a period of more than a year. Thus, it cannot be said that the research, for instance, has shed new light upon the Gupta-generated Twitter-bots phenomenon, but it did open up a number of other interesting areas.

Below are brief summaries of the findings of each of the research reports.

A large-scale investigation into fake news in South Africa using natural language processing entity detection⁷

Researcher: Phillip De Wet

Unlike other students, who chose narrow fields to explore, Phillip De Wet chose to go wide. He was also the only one with sufficient technical skills to use automated techniques to sweep across a broad range of websites in search of fake news. There was indeed some narrowing: the research was confined to a 72-hour period in the month of September 2017, and looked specifically at news websites, but did not look at social media.

After a discussion of theories around the intent of the user and the effects upon the audience, De Wet settled on a tight set of selection criteria for fake news:

- Does the article pretend to be real news?
- Is the central assertion of the article false?
- Is the likely effect of the article socially negative?
- Is the presumed intent of the creator malicious?

To qualify as a fake news site, a majority of the articles on the site had to satisfy all the above criteria. Satisfying only some was not sufficient. An untruthful article pretending to be real news could, for example be satire. An article could be full of errors, but the central assertion might be valid. An article might be nonsense, but unlikely to cause social damage. An article might be untrue, but the author might be unaware of it.

The weapon behind this analysis was the Google Cloud Natural Language Processing platform, released in 2016, and based upon tools Google had developed over the years for intelligently sorting search queries. One of the most difficult tasks facing computer systems has been to understand the messy and frequently illogical nature of human speech. Google’s own natural language processing engines, which have been extraordinarily successful in sorting vast troves of information, are based less upon pre-written rules than on systems which “learn” and become more accurate over time.

The Google Cloud Natural Language Processing platform is provided free to those who use it on a short-term basis, but is scaled at increasingly expensive rates for those who buy long-term subscriptions. The intended audience is corporations which need to constantly evaluate public sentiment towards their brand and products. But it can also be used for other purposes, including searching

for specific information in large document archives ... or finding fake news websites.

A user of the Google platform does not have to be a qualified programmer, but that does not make it simple to use. The quality of the results depends on how well the user defines the search terms, as well as the filters used to exclude or include certain kinds of websites.

De Wet began with lists of fake news sites identified by the fact checking organisation, Africa Check,⁸ which he supplemented with websites identified by the news media as “fakes”. On the basis of the shared criteria of those websites, he was able to use the software to expand the list of suspected fake news sites to 101 examples, of which more than 80 had not previously been identified. These criteria included shared email addresses and the tendency of “fake” sites to plagiarise one another.

Then began a ruthless culling process. De Wet’s first requirement was that a fake news website had to look like a news website. He therefore excluded those which were company sites, brochure sites or discussion forums. He required the websites to operate within the South African domain name space, excluding for example websites based in Zimbabwe. The websites also had to be available for browsing during the 72-hour test period. By the end of the culling exercise, only 26 websites were left for closer examination. The most recent 10 articles on each website were “scraped”, meaning that the text was pulled into a single document, which was then run through the Google software.

Various small-scale exercises with the software were tried out first. These revealed difficulties with software trained mainly in the US. For example EFF, a common enough political acronym on South African websites, was confused with Electronic Freedom Foundation, the Free State town of Bethlehem was located in Pennsylvania, while Nkandla was identified as a work of art. Various corrections were made to the filters to compensate. By the end of the study, the raw data extraction files amounted to over a thousand pages. Examining the final list of articles per website for accuracy vs inaccuracy, however, had to be done manually, by deciding whether a claim could be verified or not, and whether the intent appeared malicious or not.

The counter-intuitive conclusion of the study is that no more than seven websites can be classified as predominantly ‘fake news’ websites. Even acknowledging that the criteria might be too tight, and loosening them, the number of fake news sites identified stands at 26 only (those left after the culling exercise). Many of the faked articles seem to have satisfied no particular political agenda – for example there were no recorded attempts during the period to engage with the ‘state capture’/’white monopoly capital’ controversies. There were articles claiming that Robert Mugabe had promised his wife Grace to Jacob Zuma upon his death; that both Jacob Zuma and Edward Zuma had cancer; that EFF leader Julius Malema and Johannesburg mayor Herman Mashaba were either rushed to hospital or had died; that various celebrities had died; that a man had

turned into a baboon while having sex with a prostitute; that a survey proved that South African husbands were the least faithful in the world.

Even soccer match reports were faked. Many of the claims circulated and were repeated on other websites. The closest to malicious political fake news were an article saying President Zuma had announced free tertiary education, and another saying that he had told soldiers to open fire on protesters if they gathered outside parliament.

That websites that had been classified as political “fake news” at the beginning of the year – by careful researchers including Africa Check – have evolved instead into the realm of lurid celebrity news suggests that audiences have tired of political news and that celebrity shenanigans are more appealing. Moreover, the celebrity websites tend to plagiarise much of their information – in De Wet’s phrase: “South Africa does not have a fake news problem ... what it does have, is a plague of plagiarism.” In many cases De Wet was able to trace the origins of plagiarised articles, to sources such as the tabloid Daily Sun.

De Wet ended by cautioning that his was a modest study over a brief period and that it might be risky to draw conclusions that are too broad. Nonetheless, if fake news really were proliferating, he ought to have readily picked up on it. His technique provides a model for broader long-term studies that others might embark upon.

Below are the final 26 websites under consideration. Each was given a score out of three for ‘fakeness’. The seven that scored two or three were classified as predominantly fake.

http://imzansi.com	3
http://www.mzansiguards.com	3
http://zagossip.blogspot.co.za	3
http://www.bizarresouthafricanews.co.za	2
http://gossipmillsa.com	2
http://www.mzansistories.com	2
http://newsdaily.co.za	2
http://asinavalo.com	1
http://www.ijozi.co.za	1
http://morningpost.co.za	1
http://thesoutherndaily.co.za	1
http://asidlalebola365.com	0
http://celebgossip.co.za	0
http://diskidaily.co.za	0
https://ekasinewsonline.co.za	0
http://www.hellomzansi.com	0
http://mzansi2day.blogspot.co.za	0
http://www.mzansileaks.co.za	0
http://mzansilive.co.za	0
http://mzansiville.co.za	0
http://www.muzamagazine.co.za	0
http://sasopies.com	0
http://satrucker.co.za	0
http://www.southafricalatestnews.co.za	0
http://www.thegatsby.co.za	0
http://tellitallsa.co.za	0

#Guptabots? How social media platforms targeted journalists

Researcher: Qaanitah Hunter

Early in 2017, journalists uncovered a massive South African online disinformation campaign, based on fake Twitter accounts and automated bots,⁹ and operating on lines similar to the Russian-linked US election disinformation campaigns.¹⁰ Unlike the campaigns abroad which may have been more wide ranging in interests and themes, the South African campaign centred around a single set of interests, those of the controversial Gupta family.

The campaign seems to have begun when pressure on the Gupta family increased in mid-2016, following claims of state capture in the final report of the outgoing Public Protector. The British public relations company, Bell Pottinger, devised a counter strategy, designed to discredit journalists and politicians critical of the Guptas, based on the racially divisive notion of “white monopoly capital”. This proved both explosive and highly effective. Whether co-ordinated by Bell Pottinger or by other unknown actors, a massive and savage campaign broke out, including some 220 000 tweets and hundreds of Facebook posts, often targeted at specific individuals, from July 2016 onwards.¹¹

Social media automation techniques used abroad have reached the point where fake accounts are almost indistinguishable from real people, have personal biographies and plausible photographs, and can even engage in back-and-forth interaction with other users. Sophisticated manipulators can rapidly conjure up armies of such fake ‘people’, pretending to represent waves of genuine public opinion. Bots can perform legitimate tasks such as delivering news and information, or undertaking malicious activities such as spamming, harassment and hate speech. On social media platforms, bots are able to rapidly deploy messages, replicate themselves, and pass as human users.

But the South African equivalents were cruder. Their names were an improbable mangling of local and foreign names (Vladimir Dlamini, Sandra Nkumalo, Boitumelu van Rensburg and Pendile van der Westhuizen). Ostensibly black names were attached to white profile pictures. The language did not ring true as local South African English, and no indigenous languages were used. This would seem to support claims that the perpetrators were largely based in the Guptas’ home base of northern India.¹² Thamm and Le Roux¹³ suggested that the attacks increased in sophistication in 2017, adding personal biographies to fake accounts and spoofing the accounts of mainstream media such as the Mail & Guardian, Daily Maverick and Radio 702.

Qaanitah Hunter interviewed five journalists who were prominent targets of the Twitter bot attacks. Three were writers, two were editors; three of the five were female; two were white; and they worked for different organisations. They were columnist and former Business Day editor, Peter Bruce, columnist and former City Press

editor, Ferial Haffejee, former Daily Maverick associate editor Ranjeni Munusamy, now a columnist on Tiso Blackstar publications; Sunday Times investigative reporter Thanduxolo Jika, and Daily Maverick/ Scorpio investigative reporter Pauli van Wyk.

The interviews showed that the attacks invariably coincided with articles by the journalists that renewed criticism of the Guptas. Intimidation was therefore the primary motive. In this, the strategy backfired, since, while all five were badly shaken by their unexpected experiences, all have continued to file articles exposing the Guptas.

The attacks were invariably crude, abusive and personal. They were seldom responses to specific detail in the articles. Peter Bruce had to fight off false accusations of having an affair, was followed and spied upon, and his home was besieged by demonstrators. The women reported gender-specific insults, for example Munusamy’s face was Photoshopped onto images of dogs and into sexually comprising photographs. Ferial Haffejee said that much personal misinformation about her was spread. She was portrayed as sexually promiscuous, and her name was used to spread malicious stories about others.

The most “digitally sophisticated” of the five interviewees was Scorpio’s Pauli van Wyk, who had the best understanding of the nature of the attacks. Scorpio – the Daily Maverick’s new investigative journalism unit – launched an investigation into the leaked Gupta emails¹⁴ in mid-2017. She noted that a tell-tale give-away was that the fake accounts had as few as half a dozen followers, yet were retweeted over a hundred times. The same tweets were repeated by supposedly unconnected individuals, who shared the same spelling mistakes in their tweets. She felt that she was able to fight back with some success. “If you strategically block about five, you take out hundreds of bots mindlessly following the five,” she said.

Three of the interviewees were not directly involved with the Scorpio investigations. They said that attacks on them fell off when the Scorpio investigation started. The two who were involved with the leaked emails, Jika and Van Wyk, reported an increase in attacks. So did AmaBhungane’s Sam Sole, who was prominent in the Scorpio investigations, but not one of Hunter’s interviewees.¹⁵

It is uncertain whether the collapse of Bell Pottinger, following the uncovering of their role in the Gupta disinformation campaign, might disrupt the activities of the Twitter armies. A report by African Network of Centers for Investigative Reporting (ANCIR)¹⁶ warned that the attacks might actually intensify and become more sophisticated. It said the Guptas or their collaborators had bought an army of bots on the international black market, consisting of generals that directed the campaigns and battalions of foot-soldiers which re-tweeted the disinformation. Whether that has happened is unclear. Hunter’s study does not look into that.

Andrew Fraser, in a workshop held at Wits after this study was completed, described repeated Twitter attacks on Cyril Ramaphosa, which seemed to have been generated locally and lacked technical sophistication.¹⁷ It seems quite possible that tactics have shifted. What mattered most in the second half of 2017 was winning grassroots votes in the ANC branches before the crucial December conference. There is plenty of evidence to suggest that the terrain of struggle within the various ANC camps has shifted from fake Twitter accounts to the buying of votes and even the murder of ANC officials.

Perhaps the last word should go to Pauli van Wyk: “The bots clearly find it difficult to keep up with the content produced by journalists. In the past couple of months, it has actually died down a lot, as if the people behind the accounts realised the strategy has been ousted and doesn’t work.”

The Fake News Factory: An investigation into the construction and dissemination of fake news in South Africa

Researcher: Beauregard Tromp

Beauregard Tromp interviewed an unashamed and successful publisher of fake news in search of answers to such questions as: How do fakers come up with their story ideas? What elements are common to the most frequently read articles? What kind of revenues can fake news sites expect? And, how do they avoid legal pitfalls?

A Zimbabwean living in South Africa was exposed in July 2017 by the Mail & Guardian as the publisher of a fake news site, the South Africa Morning Post.¹⁸ The original Mail & Guardian article, by Simon Allison,¹⁹ described him under the alias “Ernest”, and told of a journalist with a respectable reputation who had started a conventional news site and then discovered that fake news was far more lucrative. The Morning Post claimed 770000 unique visitors per month “putting it on a par with some established news outlets”, said the Mail & Guardian. Ernest told the newspaper that he could earn as much as R66 000 per month from his fake news site, but when a story “goes viral” it could earn him up to R200000.

Tromp went back to “Ernest Moyondizvo”, whom he interviewed in greater depth. The South Africa Morning Post has the bland appearance of a conventional news website, respectable and professional. Genuine news is mixed in with fakes. Moyondizvo now has a staff of six, but Tromp noticed that he makes little attempt to direct them or edit their copy, which the writers paste directly into the WordPress content management system, according to no apparent deadline schedule. There are no offices, and Moyondizvo works from home. Tromp says Moyondizvo gave him access to records, which confirmed his claims about audiences and revenues.

Moyondizvo is open about Morning Post’s fake news status, but it seems he and his team have created as many as 50 other fake news sites over the past year, which have not been named. These sites are targeted at

various audiences, tried for a while, and abandoned if they fail to take off. Once a story is posted to one of the sites, the author promotes it on Facebook and Twitter; most of the traffic for Morning Post comes from Facebook links. The team use no forms of automation; everything is done manually.

Early on, Moyondizvo discovered by trial and error that stories about wayward pastors were best sellers, and he now has an entire subject category devoted to fictional pastors and their sexual exploits or their outrageous claims of supernatural powers.

Another popular category is about baboons. An example is a gay baboon which terrorises and rapes men in North West Province, forcing the village boys to wear skirts so as to pretend to be girls. This story has been read 130 000 times. Initially the content was aimed largely at Zimbabweans, and simply called the Morning Post, but when Moyondizvo discovered that advertising to South Africans brought in nine times as much revenue, he renamed the site the South African Morning Post and changed to predominantly South African copy.

Advertising on the sites, like advertising on almost every other internet web site, is driven by Google’s Ad Sense or “programmatically advertising” in which banners are displayed “on the fly” in response to the demographics of the reader, which Google is able to guess from that reader’s browsing history on many other websites. Other advertising on the Morning Post pages is of a more dubious form, consisting of salacious pictures and headlines leading to “special offer” clickbait websites.

According to Tromp, Moyondizvo shifts between moments when he shows signs of a conscience, and moments of pure cynicism. He felt guilty for example, about a story ascribing a fake parent to a celebrity rapper; the story went viral, was picked up by mainstream news outlets and caused much hurt to the rapper.

But Moyondizvo also described plans for a fake news site aimed at racist white South Africans, with content focussed on farm murders, the corruption of the ANC government and white genocide. “The beauty of racists is that they love other racists,” said Moyondizvo, revealing that over the years, he has created a number of fictional right-wing social media personalities.

“I have tons of fake accounts on Facebook and social media. I write a lot of crap but [there are] a lot of racist guys who follow me. But they can’t see that beyond the keyboard it’s a black guy. Some accounts are seven years old so they look genuine. It draws a significant audience. It’s a way to infiltrate groups and audiences. To them, I’m one of them, and they open up.” (See the next section for more about the white right-wing and fake news.)

The “white right” fake news is Moyondizvo’s only venture into contentious political news, and he justifies it as a form of revenge for what he perceives as the white right’s attempts to shut down black online voices. He was previously hosted by the South Africa-based internet

service provider, Hetzner, which threatened to close down Morning Post after complaints about his site's fake news. Another black-owned fake news site, Black Opinion,²⁰ was suspended after complaints from a white South African expatriate. Moyondizvo now hosts on Amazon, which is more expensive than a South African platform, but makes it harder to shut him down.

Defining his formula, Moyondizvo says that a story needs first to be just plausible enough to be believed by its audience, and, secondly, to play on common fears and prejudices. He spends a great deal of time on social media, watching out for people's prejudices, which he plays into story ideas. "You feed the prejudice and the niche and we know we can make money from that," he says.

Nonetheless, it is worth noting that Moyondizvo largely steers clear of mainstream political fakery of the kind practiced by Bell Pottinger and Gupta-allied websites earlier in the year. His pastors and baboons have no political ramifications. His forays into white racist provocation are far more reckless and dangerous, but even that is playing out at the edges of the political arena. This case study further corroborates Ylva Rodny-Gumede's²¹ argument that fake news has become an industry on its own and it will not be easy to stop it.

Fake news and the right wing: What is shared and what constitutes news on right-wing Facebook groups

Researcher: Khanyiso Tshwaku

Khanyiso Tshwaku focussed on Facebook pages associated with the Afrikaner right wing, and showed how an embittered and isolated group have formed their own online echo chamber, exchanging information that is frequently both racist and distorted.

Tshwaku began by describing the steady loss of power of the white supremacist right wing from 1990 onwards and the rise and collapse of such movements as the Afrikaner Weerstandsbeweging and the Afrikaner Volksfront, and the formation and dissolution of parties such as the Conservative Party and the Freedom Front (now the Freedom Front Plus). He drew upon the analyses of such writers as Christi van der Westhuizen²² on the effects of this loss of power upon white Afrikaner culture. This includes the rise of a "neo-nationalism", which seeks a form of self-determination, but is ambiguous as to what this actually means. A central element is a pervasive fear of an ostensibly imminent "white genocide", which has manifested itself in particular in attacks on white farmers.

To provide a framework for the analysis, Tshwaku focussed on a particular incident that had sparked a social media row. The Pretoria-based radio station Jacaranda FM broadcasts across the deeply conservative northern parts of the country to a mixed audience of both English and Afrikaans speakers.

On September 12, the breakfast show host Tumi Morake made an analogy about post-apartheid reconciliation. She said it was like a bully who had taken a bicycle from

a child, but was later told to share the bicycle with the child. The bully had suffered no punishment, and the child had lost out by being forced to share equally with the bully. Podcast recordings of her remarks were spread on social media. The Afrikaner civil rights group Afriforum, its trade union partner Solidarity, and the Afrikaner self-determination group Front National, petitioned online for a boycott of the radio station and the firing of Morake. At least one Afrikaans-owned furniture company did indeed cancel advertising and join the boycott.

Tshwaku looked at the content of seven active Facebook pages over a two-week period (September 12 to 26) following the Morake broadcast. These were the Facebook pages of:

Afriforum, an activist group formed in 2006 with the objective of looking after the rights of Afrikaners, their culture and language. It claims 190 000 members. It has been particularly prominent in battles against the renaming of streets named after Afrikaner heroes.

Facebook statistics on September 26: 223 449 likes, 223 461 follows

Solidarity, a 100 000 member-strong trade union, largely of white Afrikaners, that grew out of a defunct white mine workers union. Mainly based in the mining and engineering sectors, it has spread to other sectors such as education and finance. Facebook statistics on September 26: 155 040 likes, 152 545 follows

Maroela Media, an Afrikaans media house launched in 2011 with the aim of creating an Afrikaans online media community. The community is said to have had 1.6-million unique users in March 2017.

Facebook statistics on September 26: 232 256 likes, 230 779 follows

Front National, a right-wing political party formed in 2013 as the successor to the Federal Freedom Front. It promotes secession from South Africa and Afrikaner self-determination.

Facebook statistics on September 26: 38 632 likes, 38 837 follow.

There were three other campaigning Facebook pages that were not tied to a specific organisation:

Stop White Genocide in South Africa. Open Facebook page dedicated to the stopping of "white genocide" in South Africa.

Facebook statistics on September 26: 18 782 likes, 18 633 follow

Letters from White South Africa. Open Facebook page dedicated to the self-determination of Afrikaners and white South Africans.

Facebook statistics on September 26: 36 068 likes, 35 761 follow

Stop Farm Attacks. Open Facebook page dedicated to stopping farm attacks in South Africa.

Facebook statistics on September 26: 35 501 likes, 34 999 follow

Tshwaku found that there had been a relatively low level of activity on the pages until the Morake broadcast, which sparked a frenzy of activity, although not all of it was directly related to her. The day after the broadcast, Solidarity, Afriforum and Front National took up arms against Morake, with Afriforum starting a petition to have her morning show boycotted. An open letter from the CEO of Solidarity, Dirk Hermann, saying he was tired of racist bullies, was shared with other sites. His point was that racist attacks by blacks on whites were being ignored by the media. By September 15, Solidarity had its own anti-Morake petition, which included a list of demands to Jacaranda FM. The attacks on Morake expanded to include her breakfast show colleague, Martin Bester.

At this point the campaigns broadened out into a discussion of whether apartheid was ever actually unfair or racist. On September 15, Afriforum published a video called Feiteblad (Fact Sheet) in which their deputy CEO disputed the facts of apartheid, including the number of black people who were killed during the apartheid era or died in detention. There were regular articles on Afrikaner self-determination, and even an admiring article on Zulu self-determination, based on Inkatha's role in the pre-1994 election violence. While Solidarity and Afriforum shared much of their material, Front National tended to work largely on its own, publishing articles that were more explicitly racist, and which discussed historic themes such as colonialism.

Maroela Media was much less overtly racist in its rhetoric, although it shared in the attacks on Morake. The pages tended to focus on religion, self-help and general news, frequently in the form of reports on murders of white people.

The three Facebook campaign pages, Letters from White South Africa, Stop Farm Attacks in South Africa and Stop White Genocide, did not produce content of their own and shared stories from the mainstream news sites, for example when there was a farm attack. There were also sporadic posts, some with racist comments.

Much the same pattern was repeated over the second week that Tshwaku monitored the seven Facebook pages. The Jacaranda FM controversy died down, partly because the radio station managers successfully appeased opponents by meeting with them, partly because the following week's big story was about Grace Mugabe's assault on a model in a South African hotel, and partly because there was a long weekend.

Solidarity's Dirk Hermann wrote an open letter to the United Kingdom's Prince William, describing Afrikaner suffering at British hands during the Anglo-Boer War, suffering which he said continued to this day. There were articles on the benefits of the apartheid homeland system, of colonisation and a defence of Jan Van Riebeeck. There

was a video that provided statistics about rising white poverty in South Africa, and more discussions of farm murders.

Maroela and Solidarity, the two most active sites, gave daily coverage to religious topics. Solidarity also had articles on business and health, lifted from other sources, and Maroela had five articles in seven days about farm murders. Solidarity, in keeping with its role as a trade union, also carried material intended to benefit its members, although even this took on political connotations: for example how to deal with unfair accusations of racism.

As Tshwaku points out, none of this activity falls into the conventional definition of "fake news". Rather, the articles are heavily opinion-based and polemical, with an underlying racial theme in which a white minority is being unfairly singled out by a bullying black majority. He writes: "What can easily be deduced from this research is that fake news is not something that is shared on these Facebook pages. However, they can be a conduit for misinformation. What also emerged in the study was the high level of racist tropes and hatred towards black people. There is also a trend for whites-only stories being published and posted in the groups in regards to sports, business and achievements and the only time black people are mentioned, it's in regards with crime and affirmative action."

He also noted that while the two most prominent of these organisations, Afriforum and Solidarity, are careful not to make explicitly racist comments, "their tone of reporting and how they construct their releases and articles speak to an audience where black people do not form part of their populace". The seven Facebook sites represent an example of a "hyper partisan" social media bubble, insulated from and indifferent to the mainstream, feeding off its own conspiracy theories and its own reconstructions of history, to support a narrative of perpetual white victimhood.

Fake news, misinformation and stereotyping shared on Twitter during the (January to March) 2017 xenophobic unrests in South Africa

Researcher: Sizwe Hlatshwayo

Sizwe Hlatshwayo's research into the role of social media in fuelling outbreaks of xenophobia was expected to reach similar conclusions to the research into right-wing social media discussed above. But this is not what happened.

Xenophobia in this country, particularly aimed at foreign migrants from other African countries, has become an almost permanent problem in the poorer areas of South Africa's large cities, where foreigners are the daily victims of discrimination or physical attacks. These hostilities occasionally explode into outbreaks of mass violence that receive media attention, as they did in the first three months of 2017, the period on which this study was based. In that period, the unrest was at its height in Rosettenville, in southern Johannesburg, and in Atteridgeville, outside Pretoria.

The situation was made worse by politicians from across the party spectrum who played on xenophobia for their own short-term benefits, a pattern repeated at both the lowest and the highest levels of government. Since xenophobic attacks are driven by resentment, disinformation and scapegoating, social media would seem ideal platforms for brewing xenophobia.

Facebook and WhatsApp are the most widely used social media platforms in South Africa, but Hlatshwayo chose to concentrate on Twitter because, unlike the other two, it is fully transparent to the general public, can easily be sorted and retains its own history. Three thousand, six hundred tweets from the period were retrieved and analysed. Hlatshwayo searched for such hashtags as #StopXenophobia, #Rosettenville, #AntiForeignMarch and #Atteridgeville. He also searched for such keywords as “Tshwane Unrest”, “Xenophobic Attacks in SA”, “Pretoria West Violence” as well as the names of politicians who had stepped controversially into the fray, including Johannesburg mayor, Herman Mashaba, and then Home Affairs minister, Malusi Gigaba.

Once duplicate tweets had been discarded, 2 460 tweets remained. Various sophisticated tools are available for automatically sorting tweets according to sentiment expressed, but they required expensive subscriptions. In the end, Hlatshwayo used a basic tool called Brand24, which has limitations. Much of the work had to be done by manual sorting. The tweets were sorted into five categories:

Provocative tweets Intended to stir up further antagonism	12%	295 tweets
Pacifying tweets Attempts to calm the situation	54%	1 328 tweets
Nuanced tweets Attempts to provide credible information	22%	541 tweets
Stereotyping tweets Repeating common stereotypes	11%	271 tweets
Fake news or disinformation Deliberate false information	1%	25 tweets

The results are something of a surprise. Provocative tweets, which might have been expected to be significant during a period of intense conflict, made up no more than 12%. Most of the tweets falling into this category concerned grievances about poor policing and bad encounters people had with foreign nationals living in South Africa.

Very little fake news was shared. Africa Check, which verifies the authenticity of stories, reported on only four cases. One, for example, was about a letter, shared more than 200 times, telling the children of foreign nationals attending a local primary school that they had to provide documentation proving they were in the country legally. Johannesburg mayor, Herman Mashaba, reported on the

front page of the Sowetan newspaper to have said “All illegal foreigners leave my city!”, denied having done so. A video was circulated, showing a group of young men shooting dead a foreigner at point-blank range. Several people on social media questioned the veracity of the video, and Africa Check discovered that the incident had happened several years earlier, in another African country.

Only 11% of the tweets fell in to the category of “stereotyping” of foreigners. These dealt mainly with people’s own frustrations, which included claims of increases in crime, prostitution and drug peddling, and a belief that police were in the pay of foreign criminals and doing nothing to stop crime. These were used to justify hostility towards the presence of foreigners. Examples were: “We are not xenophobic but these Nigerians have been a nuisance. They did not have respect for other people. They are rough, cruel and dangerous.” Or: “What good do Nigerians do in South Africa, apart from prostituting young girls and drugs.”

The most encouraging return from the survey was that pacifying tweets, from people attempting to calm the violence, made up more than half the total number of tweets. For example they called for peace and harmony among all African people. There were also tweets from outside the country supporting those calls. This suggests that social media platforms are capable of self-correction. A similar category was “nuanced tweets”, which came to more than a fifth. These were tweets, often from public figures or from organisations, attempting to clarify points by providing additional information.

There would seem to be no direct correspondence between the violence reported on the streets of Rosettenville and Atteridgeville, and what was happening on social media. If one adds the pacifying and nuanced tweets together, more than three quarters of tweets relating to xenophobia were attempts to calm or clarify the situation.

Brand attack: corporate reputation management in the digital age

Researcher: Busisizwe Mokwena

Social media have provided the corporate world with the cheapest and most sophisticated marketing tools ever devised, capable of reaching huge numbers of people with close targeting of individual consumer preferences. The downside is that the same social media have provided an effective platform for surging grassroots campaigns against corporate targets that have offended public sensibilities for any number of reasons, including the political and religious. But the even greater risk to corporate reputations is that they provide an outlet for disgruntled customers to take down institutions based on fabricated evidence. The South African case of the MiWay insurance company provides an excellent example.

On July 20, Mondli Madlala, a client of MiWay, a short-term insurance company which had declined to pay out on his motor car claim despite a lengthy dispute with them, devised what seemed the perfect revenge plan. He invented an email, complete with MiWay branding, from a

manager named Aarthi Roopnarain (the claims assessor whom he blamed for his rejection), which referred to a meeting at which it was agreed that: “The final decision was to reject 90% of claims made by black people as from 1 August 2017. They are an easy target, it’s also a great opportunity to save money and also punish these black baboons.” Madlala does not have a Twitter account in his own name. But the image was posted on Twitter as a “leaked” company email, under the name @ziggymoyo.

The company took only 20 minutes to respond with its own reply: “Oh no! Please be assured that this is certainly not the MiWay way - in any way! We will look into this immediately and give feedback.” But the response made almost no difference, perhaps because it was ambiguous – it was not a flat “No”. Madlala, or rather, @ziggymoyo, posted the image twice. The first, directed at the company, was little noticed. The second quickly went viral, because it played effectively into feelings of disempowerment among large numbers of black consumers.

The student, Busi Mokwena’s research into the saga, followed in detail the complicated back and forth path of the Twitter posts that followed. Large numbers of people believed the post, which quickly became a trending topic. Many people responded with examples of their own claims being rejected, amplifying the message that black people were ill-treated by the company. Then a number of them noticed anomalies and became suspicious, noting for example that the screenshot showed the letter in spell-check form, with the cursor still visible. Some even urged MiWay to sue @ziggymoyo, causing Madlala to panic, delete tweets, protect his tweets and even change his user name to @ziggywest.

What was remarkable was how swiftly the row played out, moving from the social media to the mainstream media. Within hours, Eye Witness News, eNCA and others had picked up on the controversy, had interviewed the CEO of MiWay, Rene Otto, and confirmed that the letter was a fake. What complicated the scenario, however, was that a celebrity radio personality, Thabo Molefe, with some 566 000 Twitter followers, congratulated the unknown person who had leaked the email, and offered him a job at his radio station if he was fired. His post received 3 092 retweets with 3 635 likes and 532 responses; the rebuttal from EWN had gone up a few minutes earlier, but was retweeted only 239 times. eNCA managed to find and round up a profusely apologetic Madlala himself, and put him in a studio with Rene Otto and the unfortunate claims administrator, Aarthi Roopnarain, who said she was receiving death threats.

What can be learnt from the scenario is that while MiWay played their response by the book – acting swiftly, taking the matter straight to the CEO, going back to the public with repeated denials, uncovering the fake and the motives behind it – the controversy did them damage nonetheless. A relatively little-known insurance company became famous overnight. The issue demonstrated that resentment of corporate treatment of black consumers runs deep. The topic of corporate racism continued, and the MiWay brand remained tied to this debate. People

started pointing out, for example, that only 30% of the company’s senior management were black. Madlala profited very little from his hoax, but he did get his revenge at a larger scale than he may have anticipated.

What can be done about the problem?

Researchers: Ntokozo Kumalo and Thando Kubeka

Two of the students examined what is being done to counteract the threat of fake news. The first, by Ntokozo Kumalo, looked at the efforts made by traditional printed newspapers, using Business Day and Business Day Live as the test cases. The second, by Thando Kubeka, looked at the aims and activities of the Wits-based fact checking organisation, Africa Check.

Kumalo noted that one ironic outcome of the global fake news controversy has been the sense of an increase in public trust in the printed newspapers industry, which desperately needed some encouragement after years of plunging circulations and staff cutbacks. This was the view expressed by those she interviewed as part of her study.

An important decision by Business Day’s digital division was made in May 2017, when it cut ties with Outbrain, an international programmatic advertising company whose links to third-party publishing sources, usually displayed at the foot of article pages, provide a useful advertising stream for many of the world’s leading news titles, including The Guardian. But in choosing to cut the ties with Outbrain, many of whose links are to “clickbait” and advertorial sites, Business Day made a brave decision to put editorial integrity first.

Following the Huffington Post South Africa debacle, in which an editor was fooled by a faked column submission from a contributor, the Tiso Blackstar group, owners of Business Day and other titles, called for an organisation-wide assessment of editorial safeguards. Business Day, which rarely accepts outside contributions from unknown persons, felt it was sufficiently safeguarded. Journalists were, however, given training in being alert to the possibility of fake news on social media, and learning how to spot it. For example, one technique they were taught was to use the Google Chrome browser to verify photographs, by right-clicking on the photo and searching Google to find other instances of the same picture.

Tiso Blackstar has taken legal action where revenues or reputations have been affected, for example against a fake news site that credited misleading information to TimesLive, and against cybersquatters who create domain names designed to be confused with real domain names, particularly aimed at Sowetan and Sunday World. But the interviews revealed that the fakers and cybersquatters have proved elusive, and the expensive legal action has not yet succeeded.

Tiso Blackstar has also attempted to engage with Facebook over their treatment of old-fashioned bricks-and-mortar publishers, whose news is given the same verification status as any other individual or organisation. Facebook is an important source of referrals for news

publishers. But the company has called on Facebook to authenticate genuine publishers via their audited circulation statements, tax returns, membership of industry bodies or other independent measures. Tiso Blackstar has also made submissions to Facebook about how to structure their forthcoming news subscriptions model.

Thando Kubeka described operations at Africa Check, launched in 2012 together with the Wits Journalism Department, and sponsored by the AFP Foundation. It was the first journalism fact checking operation in Africa, and its work covers the entire continent – it has opened editorial offices in Kenya, Nigeria, and Senegal. The organisation not only investigates contentious claims made in public, it also runs education programmes to encourage better fact checking at media houses and provides tips to the public, including lists of known fake news sites.

The process of fact checking is slow and laborious, which means that it cannot keep up with the daily streams of questionable reports. During the six-week period in which Kubeka watched the staff at work and interviewed key personnel, 12 stories were fact checked to completion. The process starts with choosing which among a multitude of disputed claims are worth following, calling the writers or editors to ask for their evidence, checking against archives or other sources, asking experts for their opinions about the evidence, writing up a report, and having a second person fact check that report, before publishing. Reports are classified according to one of six ratings: incorrect, mostly correct, misleading, exaggerated, understated, unproven.

Perhaps the greatest value of Africa Check is that it has pushed newsrooms to take their fact checking more seriously. Partly this has been due to the courses it runs in newsrooms. But another factor is shame: Fact Check researcher Ina Skosana, who once worked for the Mail & Guardian, recalled how the paper was deeply embarrassed to have a story labelled “incorrect” by Africa Check, and quickly improved its internal processes. Africa Check also believes that the best way to fight misrepresentation in the media is through education: that if the public were more news-literate, they would be able to spot fakery themselves.

Conclusion

The nine students have shed additional light on some interesting and little-noticed by-ways of the “fake news” phenomenon. But because they worked separately, over a relatively short period, and did not cover all possible areas, we must be cautious about making broad assumptions. However, some themes have emerged.

Fake news spreads along existing fissures and fears in society, and in ours, race and gender are the primary fault lines. All of the nastiest examples found by the students had a racial element, and some had an additional element of sexism. The MiWay hoax would have gone nowhere if it had chosen to attack the company on a basis other

than race. The Zimbabwean fake news publisher was explicit that race was the explosive ingredient – hence his eagerness to stir up racism among white supremacists – while race was also an underlying motive in the attacks on the journalists.

The quantitative research, into the broad range of fake news websites, whittled 101 possible contenders down to just seven, concluding that many fake sites were now dormant and that rampant plagiarism was a far more serious problem than actual faking. This conclusion might have been different if the filters had been set less tightly, for example if it had included sites outside the .za domain name space. Because this study looked specifically at misleading websites designed to give the appearance of being “genuine”, it did not extend into the social media realm where “faking” is much easier and would appear to continue.

Perhaps most gratifying, there appears to be at least some level of “self-correction” within online media. The MiWay fake email was picked up almost immediately, not by any formal investigation, but by ordinary people on Twitter. Regardless of the high level of stereotyping among tweets during the xenophobic violence, a majority of tweets were in fact calls for peace. The five journalists who were interviewed about personal attacks, spoke mainly about incidents in 2016 and the first part of 2017, suggesting that by the second half of 2017 these had tailed off. The Business Day research and the Africa Check interviews suggest that the proliferation of fake news has caused the mainstream media to be far more cautious, and shows that Africa Check has had the effect it had hoped for, in promoting a culture of greater newsroom responsibility.

Finally, we should not forget that it has been journalism itself which has been responsible for the steady whittling away at “state capture” and, in particular, for exposing the Bell Pottinger role in disseminating disinformation. Let us be grateful that despite plunging profits and circulations, widespread retrenchments and loss of morale, courageous and intrepid journalism has still managed to demonstrate its essential corrective role in a democratic society.



Ashraf Hendricks/GroundUp (CC BY-ND 4.0)
A banner depicting a member of the Guptas is seen during a march in favour against president Jacob Zuma in Cape Town. The next day, Jacob Zuma would face a vote of no confidence in Parliament. Fake news was a key part of the Gupta propaganda machine. August 7, 2017.

The student research projects

The projects below are unpublished research essays produced by honours-level, mid-career students during the second semester of 2017.

De Wet, Phillip. A large-scale investigation into fake news in South Africa using natural language processing entity detection

Hlatshwayo, Sizwe. Fake news, misinformation and stereotyping shared on Twitter during the (January to March) 2017 xenophobic unrests in South Africa
Hunter, Qaanitah. #Guptabots? How social media platforms targeted specific South African journalists in the wake of the leaked Gupta emails

Kubeka, Thando. How journalists can fight the manifestations of 'fake news' online, using Africa Check as a case study

Kumalo, Ntokozo. Traditional media's role is safeguarding against fake news in the advent of online media

Mokwena, Busisiwe. Brand attack: corporate reputation management in the digital age

Motloung, Neo. What are the human factors that drive the circulation and amplification of fake news on social media?

Tshwaku, Khanyiso. Fake news and right wing Facebook groups: a look at the extent of what is shared and what constitutes news on right wing Facebook groups
Tromp, Beauregard. The Fake News Factory: An investigation into the construction and dissemination of fake news in South Africa

NOTES:

1. They were supervised by the authors, together with Lesley Cowling.
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GETTING THE STORY STRAIGHT

THE TAKE-UP OF FACT-CHECKING JOURNALISM IN SOUTH AFRICAN NEWSROOMS OVER THE PAST FIVE YEARS

Fact-checking initiatives have proliferated across the world in the last few years. On the one hand, they reflect a need to fill the gap left by resource-weakened newsrooms battling to roll up their sleeves and do the work of journalism well and accurately, and on the other, an upswing in the circulation of misinformation and fake news that has heralded what some have called a “post-truth” era. This study assessed the take-up of fact-checking journalism as a new genre in journalism in the South African newsroom.

By Bob Wekesa¹ with Blessing Vava² and Hlabangani Mtshali³

The following study sought to map the prevalence of what we call “fact-checking journalism” in South African news media for the period January 2012 to September 2017. Not to be confused with general editing for accuracy, fact-check reports are articles that check and verify factual statements and claims made in the public domain, with the aim of establishing the truthfulness, correctness or authenticity of the assertion based on verifiable facts.

The point of departure for this study – which was commissioned by Africa Check – was that while this new form of journalism has proliferated rapidly in the global north, as an identifiable genre of journalism it is a latecomer in Africa and elsewhere in the global South.⁴ The first dedicated fact-checking organisation in Africa – Africa Check – arrived only in October 2012 in South Africa, over a decade after the pioneers had been established in the United States.

The interest in fact checking occurs in the context of an egregious rise in the extent of misinformation and disinformation available in the public domain, much of it facilitated by the widespread access to the internet, and a weakened media globally. In this context, sometimes described as a “post-truth” or “post-fact” world, the value of fact checking is that it ideally creates better-informed citizens, and through this strengthens democracy.⁵ The goal of the study was to find out if fact checking has gained traction in the South African media over the six year period. We also wanted to assess the extent to which the work of Africa Check, as a pioneer in the practice of fact checking on the African continent, had been drawn on by South African media organisations.

What is fact-checking journalism?

A growing community of practitioners and scholars is convinced that fact checking is a trend and innovation in journalism similar to previous developments such as news interviews, the inverted pyramid and analytical reporting that have defined the profession over time.⁶ As a verification of figures, facts and narratives before publication as well as acknowledging errors and publishing corrections, fact checking is an old and entrenched journalistic practice. For instance, Graves (2017)⁷ indicates that terms such as “proof-reader”, “copy editor” and “factchecker” were in use in the late 19th and early 20th centuries as precursors to present day fact checking. Farby (2017)⁸ points out that it is “between the sensational yellow journalism of the 1890s and muckraking in the early 1900s that the American journalism industry began to really focus on facts”.

However, the fact-checking genre referred to here is one in which claims by public personalities are researched and judged as false or true, often by journalists designated as ‘fact checkers’ as opposed to corrections that newspapers publish when they misreport or the quality control within a newsroom usually by news and sub-editors – what the profession knows as “subbing”.

The definitional and conceptual contours of the new form of fact checking are still being negotiated by practitioners and scholars alike. One of the basic definitions sees fact checking as a “new style of journalism, which focuses on evaluating the accuracy of public statements by political figures” and organisations.⁹ For Amazeen, “it is a form of accountability journalism [in that] dedicated fact-checking is committed to publicizing errors or falsehoods regardless of the source”.¹⁰ The phrase “dedicated fact-checking” is an important one in the fact-checking sphere as it speaks to the differentiation of fact-checking from the age-old newsroom correction of errors that arise when journalists get facts and figures wrong. Graves et al¹¹ explain that “the term may refer narrowly to stories which formally research a specific claim by a public figure or more broadly to any reporting which seems to challenge political rhetoric”. Dobb (2012:3) argues that fact checkers need not pander to the ‘objectivity’ and ‘fair and balanced’ norm of affording two or more sides of a story equal treatment (the ‘he said, she said’ practice), as a reporter can make judgement on a claim as false or true.

Fact checkers simultaneously make fresh claims to objectivity – a notion eroded in the traditional newsroom and in journalistic practice. The American Press Institute offers a pithy definition:

Fact checkers and fact-checking organizations aim to increase knowledge by re-reporting and researching the purported facts in published/recorded statements made by politicians and anyone whose words impact others’

lives and livelihoods. Fact checkers investigate verifiable facts, and their work is free of partisanship, advocacy and rhetoric. The goal of fact-checking should be to provide clear and rigorously vetted information to consumers so that they may use the facts to make fully cognizant choices in voting and other essential decisions.¹²

Different fact checkers use different methods to evaluate and rate claims.¹³ The connecting thread however is that, broadly, the fact checkers identify a claim by a newsmaker with substantial societal influence, subject it to some form of research aimed at ascertaining accuracy (or lack thereof), and publish the results. While some fact checkers deliver a judgement rating or categorising a claim as either false or true or in any number of intermediate categories (e.g. Politifact in the United States (US), The Washington Post's Fact Checker, Full Fact in the United Kingdom), others settle for statements, commentary or explanation on potentially erroneous claims without rating them (e.g. factcheck.org in the US, The New York Times fact checks).¹⁴ In other words, most fact checkers are in agreement with the selection of claims and consideration of evidence but diverge in so far as the manner of rendering judgement is concerned.

Debate on the ideal fact-checking style or format is ongoing pitting those in favour of clear-cut rating against those in favour of a more loose explanation of a claim's veracity.¹⁵ Most fact checkers however agree on the need for transparency in the approaches they use.

The number of fact-checking organisations is increasing rapidly across the world. A 2016 report found that there were 96 fact-checking projects operating in 37 countries. This is a 50 percent increase from 2015.¹⁶ As of December 2017 – a year later – there were some 137 fact-checking projects globally.¹⁷ The growth in fact checking is even more impressive when one considers that in its current form it emerged as recently as the early to mid-2000s (in the US) as part of the internet revolution. As some scholars have pointed out, the need for fact checking arose after bloggers started questioning the veracity of news and information in mainstream media.¹⁸ Michael Dobbs,¹⁹ the founding fact checker at The Washington Post asserts that “fact checking political debates was an idea whose time had arrived by the start of the 2008 presidential campaign”.

Since 2012, Africa Check has established branches in Kenya, Nigeria and Senegal. However, it is not the only fact-checking organisation on the continent. Another notable African fact checker is PesaCheck established in Kenya in March 2016, focusing on checking financial statistics,²⁰ while Kenya's Daily Nation newspaper has an internal fact-checking unit called NewsPlex. There are other emerging independent fact-checking organisations in Africa, but information about them remains patchy, suggesting the need for a continental mapping study.

Designated fact-checking organisations can be differentiated into independent ones exclusively dedicated to fact checking on the one hand, and in-house fact-checking entities within news or media organisations. In the former category are fact checkers such as , Full Fact, Chequeado in Argentina and Africa Check. In the latter

category are fact-checking units of media outlets such as The Washington Post (Fact Checkers), Tampa Bay Times in the US (Politifact), CNN (Reality Check), BBC (Reality Check) and NewsPlex.

Research approach

The study triangulated quantitative and qualitative methodologies. Quantitative content analysis was undertaken for the period January 2012 to September 2017 as the first step. Qualitative in-depth interviews with editors were undertaken in the second phase. The quantitative dimension of the study sought to probe the diffusion and therefore prevalence of fact checking in South African media by looking at the quantity of reporting while the qualitative in-depth interviews sought to interpret the results from the quantitative phase as well as understand any fact-checking processes and procedures.

Online content from the following publications was the focus of this research: weekly media (Mail & Guardian,²¹ The Sunday Independent,²² City Press²³), daily media (The Citizen²⁴) and online-only media (Daily Maverick, The Daily Vox,²⁵ News24, Eyewitness News,²⁶ TimesLive²⁷). This created a diversity of primary sources. The definitional parameter for the identification of the fact-checking articles was: “Articles that check and verify factual statements and claims with the aim of establishing the truthfulness, correctness or authenticity of the assertion based on verifiable facts”. Content items that seemed similar to fact-checking journalism but were merely corrections of editorial mistakes and errors were diligently excluded.

Content items were collected from the websites of all the nine media outlets using keywords “fact check”, “fact-checking” and “Africa Check”. By using these key words, only content items where the author self-identified as engaging in a form of “fact-checking journalism” (even if variously understood), or the publication considered a fact-checking exercise were captured. Other forms of journalism that seek to verify claims made in the public domain, including investigative journalism, but which don't refer to themselves as a form of “fact checking” are therefore excluded from our search. In this was we were able to pin-point an approach to journalism that was seen by journalists or publications as being different to the normative journalistic roles, with the baseline indicator being the use of the term “fact checking” and its variants.

Quantitative trends and patterns: 2012-2017

Who published what?

Table 1: The overall distribution of the fact-checking content items from 2012 to 2017

Year	Number of articles
2012	0
2013	29
2014	60
2015	69
2016	50
2017	68

The table above shows the total incidence and distribution of fact-checking stories and related content from the nine media outlets over the research period. There was a total of 277 content items collected from the online platforms. The table shows that there were no content items to do with fact checking in 2012. In 2013, 29 content items were published, followed by 60 in 2014. The year 2015 recorded the highest number of fact-checking items (69) for the entire study period. From the high of 69 content items in 2015 the figures dropped by 19 items to 50 in 2016. In 2017 (January-September), the figure rose again to 68 content items indicating that 2017 is likely to be the highest period of fact-checking stories or other content items published by media outlets.

Table 2: Distribution of content items across the news organisations

Media house	Number of content items
Daily Maverick	92
Dailyvox	10
Mail&Guardian	39
News24	18
EyeWitnessNews	95
Citizen	17
City Press	3
Timeslive	3
Sunday Independent	1

The table above shows the total distribution of content items that mention the research terms from the nine news organisations for the research period. Overall, Eyewitness News and Daily Maverick recorded the highest number of content items at 95 and 92 respectively. Far fewer instances were found in the Mail & Guardian (39), The Citizen (17) and The Daily Vox (10). The lowest number of content items with the search terms were from The Sunday Independent with a single content item found and Timeslive and City Press with three each.

Table 3: Percentage distribution of themes

Theme	Percentage
Economic	38
Political	27
Cultural	35

The above table shows the distribution of themes in the fact-checking content items from the nine news outlets. Every item was categorised as economic, political or cultural with no single item falling in two or three categories. In the economic theme are articles that speak to profit and loss, financial matters, economic policy and so on. In the political theme are articles that deal with matters such as governance, elections, political competition, political parties and the like. In the cultural theme are articles focused on ways of life, the arts and entertainment, traditions and heritage.

The economic theme had the highest coverage with a total of 105 content items, which amounted to 38% of the content items recorded in the period under study. The cultural theme was second recording 93 content items, or 35% of the total, while the political theme was the least with 27% or 73 articles. Six articles were found not fit into any of the themes and were therefore removed from the data analysis.

Table 4: Distribution of themes from 2012-2017

Year	Politics	Economics	Culture	Total
2013	4	8	17	29
2014	16	27	17	60
2015	22	32	14	68
2016	5	17	23	45
2017	26	21	22	69
Total	73	105	93	271

The table above shows the trends and distribution of the themes for the period under review. The highest number of fact-checking content items was recorded in 2015, with the highest number, 32 content items, falling under the economic theme. In the same economics theme category, Daily Maverick and Eyewitness News contributed the highest number of content items, between 13 and 15 respectively. The years 2013 and 2016 had the least numbers in the economics category, with a total of eight and 17 content items respectively. The political theme recorded the lowest content count with four content items in 2013 and six in 2016, while 2017 recorded the highest figure with 26 fact-checking content items. The cultural theme was evenly distributed in the five year period under review, recording its highest count in 2016 and the lowest in 2015. The key take-away from the distribution indicates that crunching numbers relating to economics is the more popular aspect of fact checking compared to culture and politics.

Some topics lend themselves to fact-checking more than others, and show that fact-checking is in line with international trends. The State of the Nation (SONA) speech by the South African president, traditionally held annually in parliament in early February, is in essence an audit of the economic status of the country. From the data, this event resulted in 12 content items dealing with the speech itself, and a couple with comments, responses and reactions to the speech. As much as SONA emerges as a major focus for fact checking, the 12 published content items are directly sourced from Africa Check, rather than the result of media houses fact checking the president’s speech on their own.

Surprisingly, only two content items were found on the controversial Gupta family and its involvement in state capture – one of the biggest news stories in South Africa in recent years. Published by Mail and Guardian as

internal fact checks, the two articles use the commentary rather than rating style of fact checking organisations and are based on a 2013 incident. The poor representation of this news story may reflect the fact that Africa Check has just one fact check on the topic (Report: Just how many people do the Guptas employ in South Africa? 14 April 2016). Moreover, it is the case that issues to do with state capture and the Gupta family fall more into the investigative journalism beat. Nevertheless, that the story with its intricate network of companies, actors, and money trails is not considered easy fodder for fact-checking journalism, may suggest the extent to which South African media houses have not yet fully embraced fact-checking as a useful or marketable genre (compared to, for instance, media houses in the states or in countries such as Spain where the fact-checking segment “Pruebas de Verificación” is broadcast on TV as viable prime time fare).²⁸

How do personalities feature in the data?

If we consider headlines alone, President Jacob Zuma is fact-checked the most at 21 items, understandably so because of the public scrutiny of his controversial performance as president. Quite interestingly, US President Donald Trump is the second most fact-checked personality with six content items. Fact checks on Trump are predominantly by News24 and are republished from the Associated Press. The Guptas follow featuring in the headlines of four content items. Police Minister Fikile Mbalula, former president Nelson Mandela, former Zimbabwean first lady Grace Mugabe, and Housing Minister Lindiwe Sisulu each feature in two content items a each. In total, 54 headlines feature personalities, 15 of them, such as former presidents Thabo Mbeki and Barack Obama, appearing once. This bears out the hypothesis that much fact checking is indeed about the public claims made by prominent people.

Table 5: Trends and patterns between news organisations in the use of fact-checking content items

Media house	Africa Check	Africa Check referenced	External fact checked	External referenced citing Africa Check	Internal fact checked	Mixed internal and Africa Check
Daily Maverick	83	4	1	1	2	1
The Daily Vox	0	10	0	0	0	0
Eyewitness News	91	1	1	1	0	1
The Citizen	5	5	2	5	0	0
Mail & Guardian	35	1	0	0	2	0
News24	1	2	12	0	3	0
TimesLive	1	2	0	0	0	0
City Press	2	1	0	0	0	0
Sunday Independent	1	0	0	0	0	0
Total	219	26	16	7	7	2

'Africa Check' content items are those that are wholly based on Africa Check reports. 'Africa Check referenced' is where content items refer to Africa Check in one way or another. 'External checked' is where items are wholly based on fact-checking organisations other than Africa Check. 'External referenced citing Africa Check' is where items rely on fact-checking organisations other than Africa Check which in turn cite Africa Check. 'Internal fact checked' is where content items rely wholly on the news organisation's own verification methods. 'Mixed internal and Africa Check' is where the items combine internal and Africa Check verification.

The table above shows that the bulk of fact-checking journalism in South African media is reliant on Africa Check reports. The period under review recorded a total of 219 reports from Africa Check that have been reproduced across the nine news organisations with Eyewitness News and Daily Maverick recording the highest number of those content items at 91 and 83 respectively. The Daily Vox referenced Africa Check reports at 10 items meaning all their published fact-checked content items were from the organisation. The data also shows a low number of internal fact-checked content items as compared to external fact checking. A low figure of only seven content items fall into the category of internally fact-checked items across the nine news organisations. The data reveals that Africa Check reports are also harvested and referenced by other fact-checking organisations and media houses (AP, AFP, Reuters, The Conversation) as the data recorded a total of seven stories from that category. The Citizen published the highest number in this category with five articles generated from sources such as The Conversation, Caxton News Services (which is The Citizen's sister organisation) and African News Agency (associated with Independent Media) and AP. The data also recorded fact checks from other external agencies such as Associated Press were published on News24 which had about 11 fact-checked articles from this American news organisation.

A point to note here is that some of the news organisations may have harvested content from Africa Check without attributions – a point raised in the interviews that were part of this study.

What the editors say

The quantitative interviews that were conducted as part of this study suggest that there is some awareness in newsrooms of the importance of fact checking – and how it is different to normative journalistic practice. For instance, Mail & Guardian associate editor Phillip De Wet agrees that fact checking is an important way through which government officials and politicians can be held to account for their public utterances:

In South Africa, politicians tend to make unsubstantiated claims especially at rallies and it is thus important for journalists to act as a watchdog by checking [whether] the claims [made by politicians] are true or false.

Similarly, acting managing editor for The Daily Vox Benazir Cassim highlights the political significance of fact checking as a way to debunk false claims: "People, especially those in power, have been getting away with making false claims and spouting nonsense for far too long, and fact-checking journalism is necessary to hold them to account"

However, there also appears to be a lack of clarity in newsrooms about what "fact-checking" is – in particular, that it can be seen and performed as a specific genre of journalism, and journalistic task.

Of the news organisations considered in this study, only City Press and News24 claim to do fact checking in the stricter definition of the term. In its fact-checking process, City Press makes use of reports and documents published by research institutions such as Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), Human Science Research Council (HSRC), Institute of Race Relations (IRR), and the World Health Organisation (WHO) to corroborate facts and publish new findings. It also makes use of the South African Institute of International Affairs (SAIIA's) African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) in order to check facts externally. Information gleaned from these reports and documents is then attributed to the institution in question (Radebe, 2017).

Like City Press, News24 credits the organisation or institution from which the information was sourced:

With investigative work, [News24 corroborates] information with as many sources as we can. With general reporting - the fact checking is often a basis of putting together a new story to interrogate information put out to the public. [For example] with crime stats, if the police say the rate of rape was 'X' this year, [News24] often tries to interrogate that [by] checking with NGOs who might have contrary information or who could clarify why that information is not accurate...we also obviously as news editors verify information filed by our reporters. The sub editors also provide a second level of checking content for accuracy.

However, The Sunday Independent describes a similar process for internal fact-checking (i.e checking claims as part of everyday journalism), whereas fact checking is done as part of the 'traditional journalistic editing process' at TimesLive.

The table below shows the news topics and themes News24, TimesLive, Sunday Independent and City Press, according to each news organisation's editors, are likely to fact check – both internally as part of building a news story and externally or as a separate fact-checking process to corroborate public statements or claims.

Table 6: Topics and themes most likely to be fact-checked by South African news organisations

Topics/Themes	Publications
Politics and governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •TimesLive •News24 •City Press •Mail & Guardian •The Daily Vox
Soccer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •City Press •TimesLive
Science and technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •The Sunday Independent •TimesLive
Economics and business	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •City Press •TimesLive
Statistics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •TimesLive •News24
Social justice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •The Daily Vox •TimesLive

While TimesLive claims all its stories, regardless of topic and theme, are subject to internal fact-checking, News24 and Mail & Guardian are more likely to perform fact-checks on stories pertaining to politics and governance with News24 also running fact-checks on statistics.

City Press is more likely to check facts in its soccer stories, stories to do with economics and business as well as stories that fall under the politics and governance theme. The Sunday Independent is more likely to carry out fact checking on stories pertaining to science and technology.

Online-only news site The Daily Vox will fact-check social justice issues such as gender-based violence, race, Lesbian, Bisexual, Gay and Transgender (LGBT) issues as well as politics and student issues. At the same time, Mail & Guardian is more likely to fact check topics which

fall into the broader political realm such as claims made by high-ranking government officials and members of parliament.

Conclusion

While this study suggests that fact-checking journalism became more visible over the research period, showing that it has rapidly gained traction in the South African media, it also shows that the South African media is mainly reliant on external sources for fact-checking, primarily Africa Check. There might be several reasons for this: one might be that despite an understanding of the importance of fact-checking amongst some editors interviewed as part of this study, South African media houses have not yet fully embraced fact-checking journalism in the newsroom as a credible or necessary form of journalism – or a marketable one – in the way that counterparts in other parts of the world have. To do this would require a specific and considered approach to the creation of in-house fact-checking content and processes, and specific editorial guidelines and skills. Rather than be led by what the likes of Africa Check do or do not fact check, media houses would set the fact checking agenda on their own. Another reason might simply be one of lacking the necessary resources already under strain in the newsroom.

This study also shows that there is currently a measure of lack of clarity in some newsrooms about what fact-checking is, or can be, and how it can be considered a specific journalistic genre.

In the future, research in audience interest in fact-checking journalism would be beneficial for media houses. How do audiences consume fact checks – what medium is most useful and what format? Does fact checking make a difference in their news consumption habits? Or to their empowerment as citizens? It is the last consideration – how fact checking journalism can strengthen democracy and accountability through empowering people – that is ultimately the most important question if it is to sustain itself as an important new genre in journalism.

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NEWSROOM SURVEY: 2017

JOURNALISTS IN SOUTH AFRICA'S NEWSROOMS: WHO ARE THEY, WHAT DO THEY DO AND HOW ARE THEIR ROLES CHANGING?

In this newsroom survey by State of the Newsroom, Alastair Otter and Laura Grant map the demographics, roles and experience of journalists working in print and online news media. The survey considers a useful cross-section of the many different kinds of newsrooms at work in the country. While it confirms often made observations about an overall lack of experience in the newsroom, it also suggests that news journalism, as it grapples with its digital future, is a strong employer of young, black women.

By Alastair Otter and Laura Grant

Newsrooms in South Africa, and indeed around the world, are undergoing significant changes as the dual pressures of financial stability and the inevitable shift to digital media take hold. The most obvious manifestations of these changes are contractions in newsrooms and frequent retrenchment processes, while the transition to digital journalism has meant simultaneous changes in the roles and skills requirements of journalists.

In addition, the South African newsroom faces the imperative of transformation – there is a need to employ more black people and women in order to remedy the economic and social exclusions of the past.

Until now there has been no data listing the numbers of working journalists in South Africa's newsrooms – their demographics, roles and experience levels. While there have been retrenchment processes at a number of publishers, there is no way to measure the impact of these processes without a reference dataset. This is the first attempt to build that: a dataset of information on the numbers of editorial staff in major newsrooms.

Two questionnaires were compiled. The first was sent to the human resources departments of major publishers, and the second questionnaire was sent to select newsroom managers and editors. The questionnaires were different, based on the kind of information we were trying to solicit.

The survey for the human resources departments requested quantitative information about the total numbers of editorial staff they employed across all their titles (if they published on more than one), and a breakdown of demographic information and level of experience in total and across each title.

The second survey, for newsroom managers and editors, requested additional information on the particular roles editorial staff performed. In addition, a selection of senior editorial staff were interviewed to obtain more nuanced information and to clarify data obtained from the questionnaires.

The data gathered here can be considered relevant as of November 2017.7.

Findings

We received information on 25 print titles and 16 online titles published by Independent Media, Media24 and M&G Media. We also collected data from five independent publishers – the AmaBhungane Centre for Investigative Journalism, Daily Maverick, GroundUp, The Daily Vox and Health-e News. We were unable to obtain data from Tiso Blackstar or Caxton.

The findings are divided into two sections. The first section looks at the breakdown of editorial staff in the newsrooms surveyed. In line with the methodology, it tracks the demographics of the staff, whether they are employed full-time, part-time or as interns, and the number of years of experience they have.

The second section is the result of survey questionnaires sent to select newsroom managers and editors, which attempted to capture the nuance of changing editorial roles in the newsroom.

Section 1: Overview of editorial staff

Independent Media

Independent Media's stable includes 21 newspapers and three websites. It also has a number of community newspapers in the Western Cape, but those are not included in this report.

Their print publications include four Gauteng newspapers: The Star, Pretoria News, Saturday Star and Pretoria News Weekend. In the Western Cape they publish four papers: the Cape Argus, Cape Times, Weekend Argus (which publishes Saturday and Sunday editions) and the Daily Voice. In KwaZulu-Natal they publish five in English – The Mercury, Daily News, Post, Independent on Saturday and Sunday Tribune – and another three in isiZulu – Isolezwe, Isolezwe ngoMqibelo and Isolezwe ngeSonto. They have one daily paper in the Northern Cape, the Diamond Fields Advertiser, and one isiXhosa newspaper in the Eastern Cape, Isolezwe lesiXhosa. The group also has a national Sunday newspaper, The Sunday Independent.

Independent Media also publishes a national business supplement, Business Report, and a personal finance supplement, Personal Finance, which run in a number of daily and weekend titles, but their circulations are not counted separately. The African Independent, a relatively new title launched in 2015, is a weekly tabloid print publication aimed at readers in East, West and Southern Africa.

The group has three websites. IOL¹ is the main website, which carries content from all its South African publications – plus each of the main print titles has a subsection on the main IOL website, except for the Daily Voice² and the African Independent³, which have their own websites.

Published numbers from the Audit Bureau of Circulations of South Africa (ABC) for Q3 2017⁴ show that Independent Media's eight audited daily papers had a total daily circulation of 286,888 and its seven audited weekend and weekly papers had a total circulation of 323,424 and 360,127 respectively (see Table 1). Independent Media's audited publications accounted for 31% of the country's total daily paid-for newspaper circulation as measured by ABC, 36% of the weekend newspaper circulation and 9% of the weekly newspaper circulation.

It should be noted, however, that three of the group's publications, the Daily Voice, The Sunday Independent and the African Independent, are not included in the list of ABC's audited newspapers.

Table 1: Independent Media publications audited by ABC for Q3 2017⁵

Publication	Circulation Q3 2017
Dailies	
Isolezwe	85,807
The Star	75,288
Cape Times	29,608
Cape Argus	27,640
The Mercury	25,129
Daily News	23,283
Pretoria News	12,570
Diamond Fields Advertiser	7,563
Daily Voice	Not listed
I'solezwe lesiXhosa	Not listed
Total	286,888
Weekend	
Isolezwe ngeSonto	67,499
Isolezwe ngoMgqibelo	65,213
Weekend Argus (Saturday and Sunday editions)	51,651
Sunday Tribune	51,510
Saturday Star	44,929
Independent on Saturday	35,092
Pretoria News Weekend	7,530
The Sunday Independent	Not listed
Total	323,424
Weeklies	
Post	36,703
African Independent	Not listed
Total	360,127

Editorial staff

Independent Media employed 423 staff members – 90% (387) of them were permanent staff members, 7% (30) had contracts, and 1% (six) were interns – as of the end of November 2017.

Nearly 60% did not work for any particular publication, but for Independent Media Solutions (IMS), which the company’s human resources department said covers “photographic, business, lifestyle, motoring, production, property, sport, politics and development”.

Instead of having staff in each title dedicated to covering these beats, content is centrally created within the IMS content “hubs” (as they are known) and then distributed across the individual titles. The Star, for example, will not have dedicated lifestyle reporters, but will use content provided by the lifestyle hub and, therefore, the same content is likely to be published by a number of titles in the group.

Similarly, production staff such as subeditors will not necessarily work for one title only, but will edit copy for various publications. Staff working for IOL and wire service African News Agency (ANA)⁶ are also included in the IMS staff count, according to the human resources department.

Table 2 is a breakdown of the editorial staff employed by Independent Media.

Of the print titles, Isolezwe, a Zulu-language daily which has the biggest circulation, also has the most staff – 41, comprising 39 full-time and two on contract. There are also two weekend editions, Isolezwe ngeSonto and Isolezwe ngoMgqibelo. The next largest newsroom is the Cape Argus, which has 28 staff, comprising 22 full-time, four on contract and two interns. The Cape Argus also publishes two Weekend Argus editions, one on Saturday, the other on Sunday, which are not listed as having their own separate staff. The Daily Voice came next with 14 full-time staff and one intern.

The group’s editorial staff was supplemented by 191 freelancers, bringing the total number of staff to 614. Freelancers therefore made up about a third (34%) of Independent Media’s total editorial staff, with some publications, such as the Sunday Tribune, Independent on Saturday, The Mercury and the Diamond Fields Advertiser, employing more freelance staff than permanent staff. However, the bulk of the freelancers were used by IMS hubs.

Table 2: Editorial staff working at Independent Media publications

Publication name	No. of permanent staff	No. of contract staff	No. of interns	Total staff (excl freelancers)	Freelancers used per month	Total staff (incl freelancers)
Independent Media Solutions (IMS)	224	20	2	246	65	311
Isolezwe	39	2		41	16	57
Cape Argus	22	4	2	28	10	38
Daily Voice	14		1	15	8	23
The Star	12	1		13	6	19
Pretoria News	13			13		13
Cape Times	10	1	1	12	10	22
Daily News	12			12	5	17
Sunday Tribune	10	2		12	15	27
Independent on Saturday	7			7	10	17
Post	7			7	7	14
Sunday Independent	6			6	3	9
The Mercury	6			6	16	22
Saturday Star	5			5		5
African Independent				0	1	1
Diamond Fields Advertiser				0	4	4
Isolezwe-related titles*					15	15
Total:	387	30	6	423	191	614

* An additional 15 freelance staff members were employed for Isolezwe-related titles, according to the information provided by the human resources department, but it is unclear exactly which titles they worked on.

Print versus digital

Independent Media's human resources department did not provide a breakdown of staff numbers working specifically on the IOL website. But, according to personal interviews with senior staff, IOL's staff comprises five people, who do some desk-based reporting but are largely gatekeepers and content managers for the IOL site as a whole.

IOL is also home to the online sites for each of the group's news titles but the IOL staff members are not primarily responsible for publishing the content on behalf of the titles. Instead each title newsroom has two "live" editors who are responsible for publishing the content on that title's portion of the IOL site. So, for example, The Star has a set of live editors that manage the content on the <https://www.iol.co.za/the-star> portion of the IOL site. It is not clear how many of the Daily Voice staff work on its website.

It is difficult to separate digital and print staff because there appears to no longer be a clear distinction between print and digital roles, particularly within IMS.

Staff demographics

Of the 423 permanent and contract staff and interns working for Independent Media, nearly 80% (330 people) come from population groups that were disadvantaged because of their race by apartheid (see Table 3).⁷ That four out of five of the non-freelance staff members are black demonstrates the company's commitment to transforming to better reflect the racial demographics of the country.

Just under half (46%) of the employees are female and just over a third (36%) of the staff are black women.

Table 3: Demographic breakdown of Independent Media's permanent and contract staff

Black Men	Black women	White Men	White Women	Total staff
177	153	49	44	423
42%	36%	12%	10%	100%

Years of experience

At Independent Media only about one in eight of the non-freelance staff members (13%) had 15 or more years of experience and are therefore likely to be over the age of 35. This means that 87% of the staff had been working in journalism for less than 15 years⁸ (see Table 4).

Seventy-four percent of the staff who were reported to have more than 15 years' experience in journalism worked for IMS (i.e, the content hubs) rather than for a particular publication.⁹ Of the titles, Isolezwe had the most experienced staff with a total of three. The level of experience of the freelance staff is not known.

Table 4: Years of experience of Independent Media's editorial staff

Title of publication	15 or more years' experience	Less than 15 years' experience	Total staff (excl freelancers and interns)	% with 15+ years of experience
Cape Argus	2	24	26	8%
Cape Times		11	11	0%
Daily Voice		14	14	0%
Daily News	1	11	12	8%
Independent Media Solutions	40	204	244	16%
Independent on Saturday	2	5	7	29%
Isolezwe	3	38	41	7%
The Star	2	11	13	15%
The Mercury	1	5	6	17%
Saturday Star		5	5	0%
The Sunday Independent		6	6	0%
Post	1	6	7	14%
Pretoria News	2	11	13	15%
Sunday Tribune		12	12	0%
Total:	54	363	417	13%

Media24

Media24 publishes six daily newspapers and four weekly papers. It also owns the largest news website in the country, News24.com,¹⁰ as well as Afrikaans-language website Netwerk24.com,¹¹ business news website Fin24.com,¹² the South African edition of HuffPost SA,¹³ as well as Food24.com, Health24.com, Parent24.com, Sport24.com, Wheels24, W24.com and an isiZulu news site, izindaba24,¹⁴ among others.

Four of Media24's dailies are Afrikaans. They are Beeld,¹⁵ which is published six days a week in Gauteng, Limpopo, Mpumalanga and North West; Die Burger,¹⁶ which has two editions published six days a week, one in the Western and the other in the Eastern Cape; Son,¹⁷ a tabloid published five days a week in the Western and Eastern Cape; and Volksblad,¹⁸ which covers the Free State and Northern Cape.

Its two English-language dailies are Daily Sun,¹⁹ a tabloid that targets readers in the major urban centres, and The Witness,²⁰ a broadsheet published in KwaZulu-Natal. It has three national Sunday papers, City Press,²¹ an English-language broadsheet, Rapport,²² an Afrikaans broadsheet, and Sunday Sun,²³ an English-language tabloid. It also publishes the newspaper with the largest paid-for circulation in the country, Soccer Laduma,²⁴ which focuses on football.

As of Q3 2017, the group's dailies have a total circulation of 333,388, which accounted for 40% of the total audited circulation of paid-for dailies, according to the ABC. Its five audited weekend papers have a total circulation of 350,756, which accounted for 34% of the total circulation for weekend papers. (see Table 6).

Table 6: Media24 newspaper publications audited by ABC for Q3 2017

Publication	Circulation Q3 2017
Daily	
Beeld	37,560
Daily Sun	155,908
Die Burger	46,379
The Witness	12,637
Son	66,645
Volksblad	14,259
Total	333,388
Weekend	
City Press	62,962
Rapport	115,878
Sunday Sun	75,906
Saturday Beeld	36,962
Saturday Burger	59,048
Total	350,756
Weeklies	
Soccer Laduma	281,950
Total	281,950

Editorial staff

Media24 employed more than a thousand editorial staff across its paid-for newspapers (see Table 6), its online publications, its 60 magazines, 50 free local and community newspapers, and its book publishing businesses, according to information provided by its human resources department.²⁵

Extracting information for its 10 paid-for newspaper titles audited by ABC, Media 24 employed 340 editorial staff in its print title newsrooms.

Ninety-seven percent (331) of the staff employed by the print titles were permanent staff, 2% (6) were on contract and 1% (3) were interns, as of the end of November 2017. Table 7 provides a breakdown of the editorial staff employed by Media24's print titles.

The Daily Sun, which has the largest circulation of the print dailies, also has the most staff, 73 in total. This is followed by Son, which has 48 staff members. City Press is next in terms of staff numbers with 45. After that comes Die Burger with a staff of 38. The Witness has 33 staff members, while Soccer Laduma, a weekly sport newspaper which has the biggest circulation of all Media24's paid-for print titles, comes in sixth with 32 editorial staff. Interestingly, Rapport, the national Sunday newspaper with the second-highest circulation after Soccer Laduma, has only 29 editorial staff.

Table 7: Editorial staff working at Media 24's paid-for newspapers

Publication name	No. of permanent staff	No. of contract staff	No. of interns	Total staff (excl. freelancers)
Daily				
Beeld	14			14
City Press	42	1	2	45
Daily Sun	69	3	1	73
Die Burger	38			38
Natal Witness	32	1		33
Rapport	29			29
Soccer Laduma	31	1		32
Son	48			48
Sunday Sun	12			12
Volksblad	16			16
Total	331	6	3	340

Media24's online titles employ 262 editorial staff, its local and community newspapers employ around 150, and more than 300 work on its magazines. A breakdown of the online staff is provided in Table 8. Ninety-five percent of the online staff are permanent employees.

Two in every five online staff are employed by Netwerk24²⁶ (42%) and another 20% (or one in five) are employed by News24.²⁷ Those two titles together employ 163 editorial staff, or two-thirds of Media24's online editorial staff²⁸ (see Table 8).

Table 8: Editorial staff working at Media24's online titles

Title of publication	No. of permanent staff	No. of contract staff	No. of interns/learners	Total staff (excl. freelancers)
Netwerk24	108	1	1	110
News24	49	1	3	53
24.com	14	3		17
HuffPost SA	15			15
Media24 News	13			13
Fin24	11			11
Sport24	10			10
Health24	8			8
Channel24	4			4
W24	4			4
Izindaba24	4			4
Parent24	3			3
Traveller.com	3			3
Wheels24	3			3
The Juice	3			3
Food24	1			1
Total:	253	5	8	262

According to Media24's human resources department, the group employs an average of 1,500-2,000 freelancers per month across all its paid-for and community newspaper titles, magazines and online publications.

Table 9: Demographic breakdown of Media24’s permanent and contract staff on its paid-for newspaper titles and online publications

	Black Men	Black women	White Men	White Women	Total staff
No. of staff in paid-for print titles	109	74	84	73	340
% staff in paid-for print titles	32%	22%	25%	21%	100%
No. of staff in online titles	31	72	72	87	262
% staff in online titles	12%	27.5%	27.5%	33%	100%
Total	140	146	156	160	602
% Total	23%	24%	26%	27%	100%

Staff demographics

Of the 340 permanent and contract staff working for Media24’s paid-for print newspaper titles (see Table 7), just over half are black people (183 people or 54%), according to the definition used in the BBBEE Amendment Act, 2013 (see Table 9). In its online titles 39% (103 people) of the editorial staff are black. Overall, of the print and online titles included in this analysis, 47% of the editorial staff are black and 53% are white.

Black males make up about a third (32%) of the print titles’ staff, followed by white men (25%), then black women (22%) and white women (21%). In the online titles white women make up the largest demographic with one in three staff members, or 33%, followed by black women (28%), white men (28%) and black men (12%).

Women make up two of every five (43%) of the staff at the print titles with roughly a 50/50 split between black and white. In the online titles, 61% of the staff are women. Black women make up 28% of the online staff included in this analysis.

Table 10: Years of experience of Media24’s editorial staff (excluding interns)

Title of publication	15 or more years of service	Less than 15 years’ service	Total staff	% with more than 15 years’ service
Beeld	9	5	14	64%
City Press	2	41	43	5%
Daily Sun	3	69	72	4%
Die Burger	10	28	38	26%
The Witness	5	28	33	15%
Rapport	13	16	29	45%
Soccer Laduma	1	31	32	3%
Son	7	41	48	15%
Sunday Sun		12	12	0%
Volksblad	7	9	16	44%
24.com	2	15	17	12%
Channel24		4	4	0%
Fin24	1	10	11	9%
Food24		1	1	0%
Health24		8	8	0%
HuffPost SA		15	15	0%
Izindaba24		4	4	0%
Media24 News	6	7	13	46%
Netwerk24	33	76	109	30%
News24	1	49	50	2%
Parent24		3	3	0%
Sport24		10	10	0%
Traveller.com		3	3	0%
W24		4	4	0%
Wheels24		3	3	0%
The Juice		3	3	0%
Total:	100	495	595	17%

Years of experience

Media24's human resources department provided information on the "years of service" its editorial staff had rather than the "years of journalism experience". This makes it difficult to compare Media24's staff levels of experience with those working for other media outlets. However, it remains valuable information, because if someone has worked for Media24 for 15 or more years one can assume that person has at least 15 years of journalism experience, but the total number is likely to be undercounted. Nonetheless, in the paid-for print and online titles about one in six of the non-freelance staff members (17%) had 15 or more "years of service". This means that of a total editorial staff of 595 (not including interns), at least 100 people are likely to be over the age 35 (see Table 10).

Some of the titles have a much higher percentage of staff with 15-plus years of service than others. For example, about two-thirds of Beeld's editorial staff have more than 15 years' experience at Media24, as have nearly half of the editorial staff at Rapport (45%) and Volksblad (44%) and about a third (30%) of Netwerk24 staff.

Mail & Guardian

The Mail & Guardian²⁹ is a high-end national tabloid that has since the mid-1980s built a good reputation for its investigative reporting and political coverage; but, like all South Africa's paid-for print media, it has been experiencing a steep decline in circulation over the past three years. ABC figures for Q3 2017 put its weekly circulation at 27,766, down from 37,627 in 2014.³⁰

Its website is one of the oldest news sites in South Africa. It was started in the mid-1990s and for a time it was among the top five biggest news websites in the country. In 2016 most of the online content was put behind a paywall. In December 2017, the Mail & Guardian was acquired by the Media Development Investment Fund (MDIF), a New York-based non-profit organisation.

Table 11: Editorial staff working at the Mail & Guardian

Title of publication	No. of permanent staff	No. of contract staff	No. of interns	Total staff (excl. freelancers)	Freelancers used per month	Total staff (incl. freelancers)
Mail & Guardian	34	7	6	47		47
Bhekisisa	6	2		8	2	10
Total:	40	9	6	55	2	57

Editorial staff

The Mail & Guardian newsroom had 47 staff members as of November 2017, 70% of whom were permanent, full-time staff. Seven had contracts and six were interns. An additional six permanent and two part-time staff work for the Bhekisisa Centre for Health Journalism. This brings the total number of editorial staff in the Mail & Guardian's newsroom to 55.

For the purposes of this report, the employees of the Bhekisisa Centre for Health Journalism have been listed separately

Table 12: Demographic breakdown of the Mail & Guardian and Bhekisisa staff

	Black men	Black women	White men	White women	White gender neutral	Total staff
No. of staff at M&G	11	17	12	7		47
% of staff at M&G	23%	36%	26%	15%		100%
No. of staff at Bhekisisa		2		5	1	8
% of staff at Bhekisisa	0%	25%	0%	63%	12%	100%
Total	11	19	12	12	1	55
% Total	20%	34%	22%	22%	2%	100%

even though its health content is published every week in the print edition of the Mail & Guardian and its staff work from the Mail & Guardian's offices. This is because Bhekisisa is separately funded, publishes its own website, Bhekisisa.org, and employs an additional 10 freelance reporters at a rate of about two freelancers per month who file health stories about other African countries. It also employs a part-time monitoring and evaluation (M&E) officer (see Table 11).

Of the Mail & Guardian's 47 permanent staff members, 60% (28 people) were from previously disadvantaged population groups and one in three of the staff members were black women (see Table 12).

Bhekisisa's staff is made up of seven women and one gender neutral person. One in four of the women is black. The only men who work for Bhekisisa are freelancers: five of the 10 regular freelancers are male. Overall, 54% of the staff in the newsroom are from previously disadvantaged backgrounds and 56% of the staff are women.

Years of experience

Forty-three percent of the Mail & Guardian's editorial staff have 15 or more years' experience and are therefore likely to be over the age of 35; of the 27 staff members (57%) with less than 15 years' experience, six are interns. (see Table 13).

Three out of the eight staff members at Bhekisisa have more than 15 years' experience, but two of those staff members are not full-time employees. Overall, two out of five of the editorial staff have more than 15 years' experience.

Table 13: Years of experience of the Mail & Guardian's and Bhekisisa's editorial.

Title of publication	15 or more years' experience	Less than 15 years' experience	Total staff	% with more than 15 years' experience
Mail & Guardian	20	27	47	43%
Bhekisisa	3	5	8	38%
Total:	23	32	55	42%

Independent publishers

There are a number of independent publishers that produce journalism either for their own websites or provide content that is published by mainstream print and digital publications, as well as on their own websites. The distinguishing characteristic of these media outlets is that they are not affiliated to one of the traditional media companies, although one of them, AmaBhungane did start its life at the Mail & Guardian.

Amabhungane

The AmaBhungane Centre for Investigative Journalism³¹ is a non-profit outfit producing investigative journalism in the public interest, which it publishes on its own website and provides to other media outlets for publication, including the Sunday Times, News24, and Daily Maverick. Until 2016, AmaBhungane was affiliated to the Mail & Guardian and its journalism was published exclusively in that weekly, but it is now a separate entity. Since it split from the Mail & Guardian the centre has proved to be an example of how a journalism non-profit can work without being dependent on one traditional media outlet for the distribution of its stories.

Editorial staff

AmaBhungane has nine employees – eight full-time and one part-time (see Table 14).

Table 14: Editorial staff working at AmaBhungane

Title of publication	No. of permanent staff	No. of contract/part-time staff	No. of interns	Total staff
AmaBhungane	8	1	0	9

Staff demographics

Two-thirds of AmaBhungane's full-time staff (six people) are white. The staff comprises four men and four women. Two of the staff are black women (22%) (see Table 15).

Table 15: Demographic breakdown of AmaBhungane's staff

	Black men	Black women	White men	White women	Total staff
No. of staff at AmaBhungane	1	2	4	2	9
% of staff at AmaBhungane	11%	22%	45%	22%	100%

Years of experience

Three of AmaBhungane's nine staff members have 15 or more years' experience – the two managing partners and the trainer/support person, who works part-time – and are therefore likely to be older than 35 years. The rest of the staff have less than 15 years' experience (see Table 16).

Table 16: Years of experience of AmaBhungane's editorial staff.

15 or more years' experience	Less than 15 years' experience	Total staff	% staff with 15 or more years' experience	Total staff
3	6	9	33%	9

Daily Maverick

The Daily Maverick³² has been publishing a “blend of news, information, analysis and opinion” on its own website since 2009, although it arguably became known more for analysis and opinion than news. In 2017 it launched a grant-funded investigative journalism unit named Scorpio. It is also the majority owner of Daily Maverick Chronicle,³³ which produces bespoke editorial mainly for Daily Maverick, but also for NGOs and corporates. The employee information below includes Daily Maverick and Chronicle.

Editorial staff

Daily Maverick has 32 employees – two are part-time, four are freelancers on monthly retainers and six are interns (see Table 17). Five of the permanent staff work at Chronicle.

Table 17: Editorial staff working at Daily Maverick

No. of permanent staff	No. of contract/part-time staff	No. of interns	Total staff	No of freelancers	Total staff including freelancers
20	2	6	28	4	32

Staff demographics

Nine (28%) of Daily Maverick's staff are black. Two-thirds are women (66%), and 22% are black women (see Table 18).

Table 18: Demographic breakdown of Daily Maverick's editorial staff

	Black men	Black women	White men	White women	Total staff
No. of staff at Daily Maverick	2	7	9	14	32
% of staff at Daily Maverick	6%	22%	28%	44%	100%

Years of experience

A substantial chunk of Daily Maverick's editorial staff (41%) has 15 or more years' experience and are therefore likely to be over the age of 35. The rest of the staff have less than 15 years' experience (see Table 19).

Table 19: Years of experience of Daily Maverick's editorial staff

Title of publication	15 or more years' experience	Less than 15 years' experience	Total staff	% staff with 15 or more years' experience
Daily Maverick	13	19	32	41%

The Daily Vox

A substantial chunk of Daily Maverick's editorial staff (41%) has 15 or more years' experience and are therefore likely to be over the age of 35. The rest of the staff have less than 15 years' experience (see Table 19).

The Daily Vox is an online publication that, according to its website,³⁴ "aims to put young citizens at the centre of the news". It does this by getting its reporters to "find, curate and amplify the voices of young South Africans". At present it works from the offices of the Mail & Guardian: one of The Daily Vox's founders, Khadija Patel, is now the editor of the Mail & Guardian.

Editorial staff

The Daily Vox has nine staff members, five of whom are full-time, two are interns and two are part-time. The team also includes a freelance graphic designer (see Table 20).

Table 20: Editorial staff working at The Daily Vox

No. of permanent staff	No. of contract/part-time staff	No. of interns	Total staff (excl. freelancers)	Freelancers	Total staff (incl. freelancers)
5	2	2	9	1	10

Staff demographics

All of The Daily Vox's staff come from previously disadvantaged population groups and two-thirds of them are women (see Table 21).

Table 21: Demographic breakdown of The Daily Vox's staff, excluding freelancer

	Black men	Black women	White men	White women	Total staff
No. of staff	3	6	0	0	9
% of staff	33%	67%	0%	0%	100%

Years of experience

All of The Daily Vox's staff have less than 15 years' experience. (see Table 22).

Table 22: Editorial staff working at The Daily Vox

15 or more years' experience	Less than 15 years' experience	Total staff	% staff with more than 15 years' experience
0	9	9	0%

GroundUP

GroundUp³⁵ is a donor-funded non-profit news agency whose articles are available for free republication by news publications under a Creative Commons licence. It started in 2012 as a joint project of Community Media Trust and the University of Cape Town's Centre for Social Science Research. Its website states that it "reports news that is in the public interest, with an emphasis on the human rights of vulnerable communities".

Editorial staff

GroundUp has 16 staff members – nine full-time, two part-time and five interns. It also works with approximately 15 freelance reporters a month (see Table 23).

Table 23: Editorial staff working at GroundUp

No. of full-time/permanent staff	No. of contract/part-time staff	No. of interns	Total staff (excl freelancers)	Freelancers per month	Total staff (incl. freelancers)
9	2	5	16	15	29

Staff demographics

Of GroundUp's nine full-time and two part-time staff members, three-quarters (73%) are black people and eight are black women (see Table 24).

Table 24: Demographic breakdown of GroundUp staff, excluding interns

	Black men	Black women	White men	White women	Total staff
No. of staff	1	7	2	1	11
% of staff	9%	64%	18%	9%	100%

Years of experience

Two of GroundUp's 11 full-time and part-time staff members have 15 or more years' experience – an associate editor and a co-editor. The rest of the staff have less than 15 years' experience (see Table 25).

Table 25: Years of experience of Ground Up editorial staff, excluding interns

15 or more years' experience	Less than 15 years' experience	Total staff	% of staff with 15 or more years' experience
2	9	11	18%

Health-e News service

Health-e News³⁶ is a donor-supported non-profit health news agency that provides content for television as well as print and digital publication. It started in 1999. It also has a network of citizen journalists based in villages and small towns around South Africa.

Editorial staff

Health-e has 26 staff members – six full-time, four interns and 16 part-time citizen journalists (see Table 26).

Table 26: Editorial staff working at Health-e News Service

No. of full-time/permanent staff	No. of contract/part-time staff	No. of interns	Total staff
6	16	4	26

Staff demographics

Health-e News staff, two-thirds of whom are citizen journalists, is 80% black. Two-thirds are women, most of whom are black (42%) (see Table 27).

Table 27: Demographic breakdown of Health-e News Service's editorial staff

	Black men	Black women	White men	White women	Total staff
No. of staff	10	11	0	5	26
% of staff	39%	42%	0%	19%	100%

Years of experience

Three of Health-e's staff members have 15 or more years' experience. The rest of the staff, including all the 16 citizen journalists and the four interns, have less than 15 years' experience (see Table 27b).

Table 27b: Years of experience of Health-e News Service's editorial staff

15 or more years' experience	Less than 15 years' experience	Total staff	% of staff with 15 or more years' experience
3	23	26	12%

Section 2: The types of editorial jobs in South Africa's newsrooms

This section explores the types of jobs staff do in newsrooms. It is the result of the questionnaire sent to select newsroom managers and editors asking for more detailed information about the roles staff perform. This included whether their staff work mainly in traditional print or mainly on digital platforms or whether they work in both traditional and digital roles. These roles are then cross-referenced with experience. Newsroom managers were also asked what the most important skills needed in their newsrooms at the moment are.

The information included here from the City Press, the Mail and Guardian, Bhekisisa, AmaBhungane, Daily Maverick, The Daily Vox, Health-e News and Ground Up offers a snapshot of a cross section of publishers that operate in different ways in print and online.

City Press

City Press is a traditional Sunday newspaper in the Media24 stable, which, like all paid-for newspapers in South Africa has seen its circulation falling. Three years ago in Q3 2014 its circulation was just over 113,000, as of Q3 2017 it was 62,967, according to ABC data – that's a fall of 45%. It is not alone, the Sunday Times, the biggest weekend newspaper, lost 33% of its circulation over the same period. It has its own website³⁷ which is continually updated with breaking news stories as well as stories from the weekly paper.

Numbers provided by the Media24 human resources department show City Press employs 45 staff members – 42 permanent, one on contract and two interns. However, according to City Press's managing editor, there are 53 staff members, 48 of whom are permanent, three on contract and two interns. The discrepancy in numbers may arise from the fact that six of the full-time staff and one intern on a year-long contract are "digital people", and they may fall under one of the online categories in Media24's human resource department's list (see Table 8).

The six-person digital team edits and uploads content onto the City Press website and shares social media responsibilities. Four of them also write stories, take photographs and produce videos. They comprise 11% of the title's staff.

The rest of the staff also share some responsibility for producing online content; although the reporters and editors work mainly for the print edition, they all cross over to digital to some extent.

Table 28: Editorial staff working at City Press

Job description	Number employed	% of total staff
Reporters	25	47%
Editors	8	15%
Sub-editors	12	23%
Photographers	2	4%
Digital team	6	11%
Total	53	100%

Nearly half of City Press's staff (47%) are reporters (see Table 28), while two of the 25 reporters are interns. The next biggest group is made up of subeditors (23%): there are 12 of them, nine full-time and three "dash subs", a common term used to describe people who work shifts. These days subeditors often have to work on both online copy and in print, but at City Press they still work mainly on the print edition.

The eight editors make up 15% of the team. These people are the senior staff, and comprise an editor-in-chief, executive editor, managing editor, sports editor, politics editor, news editor, business editor and digital editor (see Table 29). All have more than 15 years' experience, as do the production editor, the creative editor (both counted separately from the content editors), the chief subeditor, and two of the deputy editors and an assistant editor. Two of the senior investigative reporters and a photographer also have more than 15 years under their belts. All told, 17 of the 48 permanent staff members, or about a third of the staff, have at least 15 years' experience and, based on our assumptions about age and experience, are likely to be over the age of 35. The other two-thirds are most likely in their 20s and early 30s.

Interestingly, only one of the 17 more experienced staff members works on the digital team, the digital editor. The others work mainly on the print edition.

Table 29: City Press staff with more than 15 years' experience in journalism

Job title	Print, or digital or both?	No. with 15 or more years' experience
Editor-in-chief, executive editor, managing editor, deputy managing editor, sports editor, deputy sports editor, politics editor, news editor, assistant editor news, business editor.	Print	10
Digital editor	Digital	1
Senior investigative journalists	Print	2
Production editor, creative editor, chief sub	Print	3
Photographer	Print	1
Total		17

When asked what skills the City Press newsroom needs at the moment, the managing editor's response was: "We need to continue the education of print journalists to understand digital formats, though all the time we are improving in making our newsroom digital first.

It is not so much skills we are short of, but more people with those skills. Increasingly there is news diary triage as we try to cover the most important news with less people while maintaining our stringent standards."

Mail & Guardian

The Mail & Guardian employs a total of 55 staff members, 77% of whom are reporters, editors or subeditors (see Table 30). Although these are traditional media roles, all of them now cross over between print and digital. About one in three (31%) of its staff members are reporters; 11 work full-time, four are on contract and one is an intern. About a quarter of the staff are editors: 11 of them are responsible for the content of the Mail & Guardian, and three, one of whom is part-time, work for Bhekisisa.

The subs-desk comprises 11 people, seven of whom work full-time; three are on contracts and one is an intern. These people, plus a graphic designer and two photographers make up the 45 people who work on both the print and digital products.

The digital-only staff make up 15% of the total staff – there are three multimedia journalists, one of whom works for Bhekisisa and the other is an intern, and four content uploaders, of whom three are interns, and one a social media editor.

The newsroom manager and Bhekisisa's part-time monitoring and evaluation officer make up the total.

Table 30: Editorial staff working at the Mail & Guardian

Job description	Number employed	% of total staff
Reporters	17	31%
Editors	14	25%
Subeditors	11	20%
Photographers	2	4%
Multimedia journalists	3	5%
Graphic designer	1	2%
Social media editor	1	2%
Content editors/uploaders	4	7%
Newsroom manager	1	2%
Monitoring and evaluation officer	1	2%
Total	55	100%

Most of the editors (nine of 14) have more than 15 years' journalism experience, as do seven of the 11 subeditors. Most of the reporters and digital staff have less than 15 years' experience (see Table 31).

Table 31: Mail & Guardian staff with more than 15 years' experience in journalism

Job title	Print, or digital or both?	15 or more years	Less than 15 years	Total number
Reporters	Both	3	14	17
Editors	Both	9	5	14
Subeditors	Both	7	4	11
Photographers	Both	1	1	2
Multimedia journalists	Digital		3	3
Graphic designer	Both	1		1
Social media editor	Digital		1	1
Content editor/uploader	Digital		4	4
Newsroom manager	Both	1		1
M&E officer	Digital	1		1
Total		23	32	55

When asked what skills the Mail and Guardian's newsroom needs at the moment the managing editor's response was: "Investigative reporting, data journalism, and a developer."

The Daily Vox

As expected in a digital start-up, all The Daily Vox's staff work only on the digital product. Most of the staff (70%) are reporters, but only three of the seven reporters work full-time. There is also an editor, a subeditor and a freelance graphic designer (see Table 32).

All of the staff members have less than 15 years' journalism experience.

Table 32: Editorial staff working at The Daily Vox

Job description	Number employed	% of total staff	Less than 15 years
Reporters	7	70%	7
Editors	1	10%	1
Subeditors	1	10%	1
Graphic designer	1	10%	1
Total	10	100	10

When asked what skills The Daily Vox's newsroom needs at the moment the response was: "We believe our newsroom needs to work on the following skills: 1. Time management; 2. How to better engage our audience on social media and get them to click through to our website; 3. Asking the right questions in interviews and extracting the most important information; 4. Multimedia skills: Reporters need to be able to think about audiovisual components in stories. It's not enough just to write anymore."

AmaBhungane

Most of the AmaBhungane Centre for Investigative Journalism's staff are reporters, which is not surprising (see Table 33) given that their core job is to do investigative reporting. All the reporters are full-time employees. The work they do is primarily digital on the content supply side, but it is published on third-party platforms that can be either print or digital. One staff member is a digital coordinator who also handles social media. A trainer/support staff member works two days a week.

Three out of the nine staff members have more than 15 years' journalism experience, the rest are all younger than 35 years old.

Table 33: Editorial staff working at AmaBhungane

Job description	Number employed	% of total staff	More than 15 years	Less than 15 years
Reporters	7	78%	2	5
Digital coordinator	1	11%		1
Trainer/support	1	11%	1	
Total	9	100%	3	6

When asked what skills AmaBhungane needs at the moment the response was: “Financial suss. The ability to understand corporate structures and reports is becoming increasingly important for investigative journalism.”

GroundUp

Most of GroundUp’s 16 non-freelance staff (78%) are reporters. The reporting team is supplemented with five interns and copy from about 15 freelancers a month. There is one full-time editor, who has less than 15 years’ journalism experience, and a part-time associate editor and co-editor, who both have more than 15 years’ experience. There is also a full-time photographer (see Table 34).

All the staff, except for the two part-time editors, have less than 15 years’ journalism experience.

Table 34: Editorial staff working at GroundUp

Job description	Number employed	% of total staff	More than 15 years	Less than 15 years
Reporters	7	78%	2	5
Digital coordinator	1	11%		1
Trainer/support	1	11%	1	
Total	9	100%	3	6

When asked what skills GroundUp needs at the moment the response was: “Competency in English as well as at least one other official South African language is immensely helpful for a GroundUp reporter given the communities that we report from. We are currently satisfied with the language skills our current journalists have. [However] good English writing and photography skills are most needed in our newsroom at the moment.”

Daily Maverick

Most of Daily Maverick’s staff are reporters (69%) – there are 22 of them, with six interns and four freelancers on monthly retainers. Eight of the reporters (30% of them) have more than 15 years’ experience. There are four editors, three of whom have more than 15 years’ experience, and two subeditors, both with 15-plus years’ experience. The rest of the staff comprises two multimedia journalists, a graphic designer and a social media editor (both of whom work part-time) all have less than 15 years’ experience.

Table 35: Editorial staff working at Daily Maverick

Job description	Number employed	% of total staff	More than 15 years	Less than 15 years
Editor	4	13%	3	1
Subeditors	2	6%	2	
Reporters	22	69%	8	14
Multimedia journalists	2	6%		2
Graphic designer	1	3%		1
Social media editor	1	3%		1
Total	32	100%	13	19

When asked what skills Daily Maverick needs at the moment, the response was: “Investigative journalism, digital security training, multimedia, spreadsheets and data visualisation.”

Health-e News service

Most of Health-e’s editorial staff are part-time citizen journalists who report from rural areas and small towns, but it also employs seven full-time reporters – one does print/online stories, two are TV reporters, and four are interns.

Only the three editors – managing editor, news editor and head of TV – have more than 15 years of experience in journalism.

Table 36: Editorial staff working at Health-e News

Job description	Number employed	% of total staff	More than 15 years	Less than 15 years
Managing editor	1	11%	1	
News editor	1		1	
Head of TV	1		1	
Reporters	6	23%		6
Citizen journalists	16	62%		16
Multimedia reporter	1	4%		1
Total	26	100%	3	23

When asked what skills Health-e News needs at the moment the response was: “Data visualisation and social media.”

What conclusions can be drawn?

While financial pressures brought by declining advertising revenues and print reader numbers have resulted in the recent waves of retrenchments³⁸ in newsrooms, the need to switch to digital publication models has put pressure on newsrooms to re-skill their staff or, in many cases, replace more traditional print staff with editorial staff that have the needed skills.

Locally this demand for new digital-related skills is most apparent in the rise of adverts for multimedia journalists at many of the major publishers. A typical job advertisement for a multimedia reporter/editor³⁹ includes the following skill sets:

- Produce newsworthy stories that are well researched, accurate, balanced and well written
- Produce high quality stories that are error free and ready for publication for all platforms
- Establish a strong network of contacts
- Editing copy that complies with legal, style and space requirements
- Follow up stories
- Use social media to drive readership
- Supply links, pictures, audio and or videos
- Use social media to break news and engage with online audience
- Generate ideas for unique story packages and community focus and reader engagement
- Manage a personal diary
- Initiate stories
- Meet the deadline demand of the title whilst projecting a positive image
- Any other functions as and when required

It is this demand for hybrid skills that is placing the most pressure on traditional print journalists who have until now worked in an environment in which the separation of tasks was institutional and clear.

Independent Media, for example, appears to have restructured to move away from a print focus to a more multi-platform approach to publishing. Its 21 newspapers are no longer self-contained, with their own sets of journalists, photographers, editors and production staff. Now two-thirds of the group’s editorial staff are employed by IMS, the centralised division which produces lifestyle, business, sport and politics content that is shared across all the groups’ print and online titles.

Those journalists do not work only for a print publication – their stories are published online as well. The print titles still have some staff of their own, but far fewer than IMS – 246 people are employed by IMS and 186 are employed across 15 print titles, which is an average of about 12 staff per title. Some newspapers, like the Zulu-language Isolezwe, still have fairly large newsrooms, but others like the Saturday Star, The Sunday Independent and The Mercury, have less than 10 editorial staff of their own, according to data provided by Independent Media’s human resources department.

The rise of digital media can also be seen at Media24. Its 10 print newspapers employ 340 editorial staff, but it now has 16 online publications that could be classified as carrying news content rather than magazine-style content, which together employ 262 editorial staff. Of all the Media24 titles we looked at, print and online, Netwerk24 employed by far the most editorial staff, with 110. The only print publication that came close was the Daily Sun, which employed 73 people.

At the Mail & Guardian, four years ago the print subeditors were rarely expected to sub copy that was not intended for print; there were separate online subs to handle online content. Now the former print copy subs handle all the copy, print and online. The wall between print and digital staff also appears to have come down at the Mail & Guardian.

Even independent publishers who do not have to transition from traditional to digital media are expanding their digital skills repertoire. The Daily Maverick, for example, has recently acquired a stake in a bespoke publishing company, Chronicle, that produces videos and high-quality long-form multimedia stories.

Digital skills, such as multimedia, data journalism, coding and social media were among the skills managers said their newsrooms needed most.

Another apparent trend in news media around the world is the skewing of editorial staff ages towards the lower end. The International Centre for Journalists' 2017 Tech Survey⁴⁰ found that among newsrooms surveyed, the median age for editorial staff in digital-only, print-only and hybrid newsrooms was between 30 and 35. When looked at separately, the largest number of editorial staff in hybrid and traditional newsrooms were in the 30 to 35 range, while in digital-only operations the largest number of staff was in the 25 to 29 age range.

Based on the data collected for this survey, local newsrooms exhibit a similar pattern. Only 13% of Independent Media's editorial staff had 15 or more years of journalism experience. Assuming that any journalist who has 15 years' experience is most likely to be at least 35-years old, and journalists with less experience are likely to be younger, this would mean that most of the editorial staff at Independent Media are likely to be in their 20s or early 30s.

At Media24, even though the data provided was years of service rather years of journalism experience, across the print and online titles we surveyed 17% of the staff had 15 or more years of service. (Although there may be more journalists at Media24 who have been in the business for over 15 years, just not employed by Media24 for all of that time.)

What stands out about Media24 is that its Afrikaans print titles and two of its key news websites seem to have a larger number of more experienced staff than average. Nevertheless, of the newsrooms included in the study only one – Beeld – had a staff complement that had a majority of staff with more than 15 years' experience.

Of the English-language titles, the Mail & Guardian had the most staff members with more than 15-years' experience (42%), followed closely by Daily Maverick with 41%. The Daily Vox, on the other hand, had no-one among its relatively small staff of nine that had been in journalism for 15 years. AmaBhungane, GroundUp and Health-e News all had two or three staffers with more than 15 years' experience.

In most cases, the journalists with more than 15 years' experience are employed in the more traditional media roles, with job titles such as editor, managing editor, sports editor and subeditor. In the newsrooms we surveyed, very few reporters had been in the media for more than 15 years and none of the people working in roles specific to digital media, such as multimedia journalists or social media editors had been in journalism for 15 years.

Certainly, the influx of younger journalists into the large publishing houses is a valuable thing for the industry, as long as it isn't at the expense of more senior skills. Journalism has always been an industry in which mentoring by senior staff was key to developing young talent. The concern here is that it would appear that very few of the more experienced journalists in the newsrooms have been skilled up for an online world.

Most media companies have been actively looking to recruit staff from previously disadvantaged backgrounds. Independent Media is notable in that 80% of its editorial staff are from previously disadvantaged groups. This is higher than any of the other media companies and a clear indicator that the group has made good on its promise to transform. Independent Media also had a low number of editorial staff with more than 15 years' experience (13%), suggesting that the majority of incoming staff are young and black.

At the other large employer, Media24, the number of editorial staff from previously disadvantaged groups depends on which of the titles one looks at. In the print titles, 54% of staff were black, while in the online divisions 40% were. At the Mail & Guardian 54% of editorial staff are from previously disadvantaged groups. At the independent publishers, the proportion of previously disadvantaged staff ranges from about 30% – at AmaBhungane and the Daily Maverick – to 100% at The Daily Vox.

In terms of gender parity, at the traditional media companies there are slightly more men than women – 54% compared to 46% at Independent Media and 57% to 43% at Media24's print titles. The Mail & Guardian tips in favour of women with

56% female and 44% male staff. But at the online titles the women tend to outnumber the men. At Media24's online titles, 61% of the editorial staff are women. Health-e is also 61% female. At Daily Maverick it is 66%, at The Daily Vox is 67%, and GroundUp is 73% female.

Two questions that remain unanswered are:

- What percentage of the senior editorial staff currently working in these newsrooms is from previously disadvantaged backgrounds?
- How many women hold senior positions?

NOTES:

1. www.iol.co.za
2. www.dailyvoice.co.za/
3. www.africanindy.com/
4. ABC figures are published quarterly on www.marklives.com.
5. ABC Analysis Q3 2017: The biggest-circulating newspapers in SA, 8 November 2017, <http://www.marklives.com/2017/11/abc-analysis-q3-2017-the-biggest-circulating-newspapers-in-sa/> [visited 13 January 2018]
6. <https://www.africannewsagency.com/>
7. In terms of the Broad-based Black Economic Empowerment Amendment Act, 2013, “‘black people’ is a generic term which means Africans, Coloureds and Indians”. This report uses this as a definition of “black people”. See: Available at https://www.thedti.gov.za/business_regulation/acts/BEE-Amendment_ACT2013.pdf. [Accessed 13 January 2018].
8. It is possible for someone to have less than 15 years’ journalism experience and be older than 35 years, however it is highly unlikely that someone with 15 or more years of experience will be younger than 35.
9. Note that the editor of the Cape Times was clearly not included in the category of 15 or more years’ experience by the human resources department. An email was sent to Independent Media’s human resources department asking for clarification, but a response was not received by the time of going to print.
10. www.news24.com
11. www.netwerk24.com
12. www.fin24.com
13. www.huffingtonpost.co.za
14. <http://isizulu.news24.com/iLanga>
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23. www.dailysun.co.za
24. www.soccerladuma.co.za
25. This information was provided in January 2018 and applies to November 2017.
26. www.netwerk24.com
27. www.news24.com
28. The titles included in Table 8 were selected from a longer list provided by Media24 because they can be classified as news sites, rather than magazine sites or online services. Magazines were not included because they were beyond the scope of this report, even though they are major employers of journalists.
29. <https://mg.co.za/>
30. ABC Analysis Q3 2014: The biggest circulating newspapers in South Africa, 13 November 2014, <http://www.marklives.com/2014/11/abc-q3-2014-biggest-circulating-newspapers-south-africa/>
31. www.amabhungane.co.za
32. www.dailymaverick.co.za
33. <https://www.chronicle.digital/>
34. www.thedailyvox.co.za
35. www.groundup.org.za
36. www.health-e.org.za
37. <http://city-press.news24.com/>
38. The State of the Newsroom 2014 “conservatively” counted at least 596 retrenchments during the 2013-2014 period (see:<http://www.journalism.co.za/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/State-of-the-newsroom-2014.pdf>). The State of the Newsroom 2017 noted that retrenchments continued during 2015 and 2016, although at a “dissipated rate” and, with the closure of wire service Sapa, the job market shrank (See: http://www.journalism.co.za/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/STATE-OF-THE-NEWSROOM-2015_2016_FINAL.pdf.)
39. Independent Media vacancies: <https://www.independentmedia.co.za/en/work-with-us/vacancies/> Accessed: 8 February 2017. At the time this page was accessed this was the listing for just one of six similar multimedia editor vacancies at the group.
40. ICFJ, (2017), The State of Technology in Global Newsrooms, [online], Available at <https://www.icfj.org/resources/first-ever-global-survey-news-tech-reveals-perilous-digital-skills-gap>. [Accessed 5 December 2017].

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Comparable circulation of daily, weekly and weekend newspapers, Q3 2016 and 2017

The following statistics are compiled by the Audit Bureau of Circulations of South Africa. See: <http://www.abc.org.za/>

Dailies

Publication	Circulation, Q3 2017	Circulation, Q3 2016
Beeld	37,560	43,374
Burger, Die	46,379	49,418
Business Day	20,030	23,614
Cape Argus	27,640	30,062
Cape Times	29,608	31,104
Citizen, The	44,216	45,947
Daily Dispatch	18,086	20,763
Daily Monitor	17,736	18,652
Daily News	23,283	25,301
Daily Sun	155,845	183,345
Diamond Fields Advertiser	7,563	8,264
Herald, The	18,172	20,387
Isolezwe	85,807	94,839
Mercury, The	25,129	25,758
Namibian, The	38,967	43,191
Pretoria News	12,570	15,206
Son	66,645	73,170
Sowetan	73,650	88,299
Star, The	75,288	85,975
The Times	45,098	59,072
Volksblad - Daily	14,259	15,703
Witness, The	11,888	13,570
Total	895,419	1,015,014

Weeklies

Publication	Circulation, Q3 2017	Circulation, Q3 2016
Ilanga	63,718	72,023
Mail & Guardian	27,766	28,781
Post, The	36,703	43,037
Soccer Laduma	281,950	295,556
Total	410,137	439,397

Weekend

Publication	Circulation, Q3 2017	Circulation, Q3 2016
Beeld, Saturday	36,962	40,311
Burger, Die Saturday	51,002	53,920
Burger, Die Saturday	8,048	8,914
Burger, Die Saturday	59,048	62,833
Citizen, The (Saturday)	32,646	33,282
City Press	62,962	83,980
Ilanga Langesonto	37,746	42,770
Independent on Saturday	35,092	37,097
Isolezwe ngeSonto	67,499	75,100
Isolezwe ngoMgqibelo	65,213	75,672
Pretoria News Saturday	7,530	9,034
Rapport	115,818	127,764
Saturday Dispatch	16,372	17,648
Saturday Star, The	44,929	51,145
Son op Sondag (formerly Sondag Son)	38,066	43,612
Sunday Sun	75,906	101,825
Sunday Times	260,781	283,360
Sunday Tribune	51,510	61,146
Sunday World	54,836	70,386
The Southern Cross	7,744	8,297
Volksblad - Saturday	13,470	14,583
Weekend Argus	33,464	36,835
Weekend Argus	18,189	17,335
Weekend Argus	51,651	54,166
Weekend Post	16,458	17,809
Weekend Witness	11,806	13,807
Total	1,164,045	1,325,627

**Appendix 2:
Selected insights from the Broadcast Research Council's Radio Audience Measurement
(Nov 2017 release)¹**

Overall radio audience (over 15):

35 million South Africans listen at some point in the week (89% of potential audience).

Average length of listening per day:

3 hours 48 minutes

Loyalty of listeners:

62% of listeners listen to only one station.

Devices used to listen:

Radio	Cellphone	Car radio	TV	Computer
62%	37%	25%	10%	2%

(Percentages do not add up to 100% as respondents are able to choose multiple options)

Where people listen:

Home	Car	Work/ university / college	Restaurant / shopping / airport
85%	31%	9%	6%

(Percentages do not add up to 100% as respondents are able to choose multiple options)

**Average weekly cume² (over 15 years old) of public and commercial stations.
Reflects the number of people listening at some point in the week.**

Ukhozi FM	7,209,000
Umhlobo Wenene FM	5,409,000
Metro	4,028,000
Thobela FM	2,915,000
Lesedi FM	3,057,000
Motsweding FM	2,383,000
Gagasi	1,514,000
Ikwewezi	1,249,000
RSG	1,259,000
East Coast Radio	1,105,000
Jacaranda FM	1,005,000
Kaya	979 000
Munghana Lonene	925 000
Ligwalagwala	920 000
947	900 000
Phalaphala	689 000
Heart FM	745 000
KFM	726 000
5FM	735 000
Algoa FM	501 000

YFM	560 000
Good Hope	457 000
702	471 000
Radio 2000	420 000
Capricorn	257 000
OFM	224 000
North West FM	232 000
Safm	201 000
Smile	162 000
Lotus FM	176 000
trufm	209 000
Vuma	134 000
Power	114 000
CapeTalk	87 000
Classic FM	59 000
Rise FM	40 000
Magic828 A	19 000

Average weekly cume (over 15 years old) of largest community radio stations with over 100 000 audience. Reflects the number of people listening at some point in the week.

Jozi	580 000
Kasie	276 000
Voice of the Cape	177 000
Unitra (UCR-FM)	219 000
Vukani	229 000
Radio Tygerberg	176 000
Radio Zibonele	226 000
Nongoma	135 000
Thetha	161 000
Mkhondo	146 000
CCFM	152 000
Forte	164 000
Izwi LoMzansi	138 000
QwaQwa	137 000
Eden	125 000
Bok Radio	108 000
Inkonjane	125 000
Voice of Tembisa	115 000
Icora	105 000

NOTES:

1. Full details are at <http://www.brcsa.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/BRC-RAM-NOVEMBER-2017-RELEASE-PRESENTATION.pdf>
2. Cumulative audience

Appendix 3:

Media freedom incidents in 2017: Consolidated South African National Editors' Forum (Sanef) media statements

Below is a consolidated breakdown of South African National Editors' Forum (Sanef) media statements made in 2017 on issues of media freedom. By implication, we take this as a proxy indicator of the state of media freedom in this country.

A total of 21 statements were made on media freedom issues ranging from concerns with the safety of journalists (7), the freedom of journalists to do their work (6), targeted threats against journalists (4), the protection of sources (raised in two media statements), freedom of expression (2) and journalism ethics (1). Fake news was also raised at a Sanef annual general meeting. Two of the media releases concerned the same issue, namely, the security clampdown at the State of the Nation Address in February, and the Press Ombudsman's ruling on hate speech against Huffington Post South Africa. Protection of sources was raised with regards to Jacques Pauw's book *The President's Keepers* as a secondary issue in a media statement on journalism ethics.

As an indicator of media freedom issues faced in 2017, it is clear that the safety of journalists from physical and verbal attacks by the public, restrictions placed on them by authorities while trying to work, and direct threats made on journalists all rank high on challenges to a free media in the country.

Date of media statement	Media freedom issue	Details
24 February 2017	Safety of journalists	Sanef calls on police to investigate reports of violent attacks on journalists from SABC which included robbery of their mobile phones and confiscation of their equipment by demonstrators in protests in Pretoria.
(undated/ January)	Safety of journalists	Sanef condemns the abduction of photojournalist Shiraz Mohamed on 10 January in Syria. According to reports, Mohamed was kidnapped in northern Syria by unidentified armed men as he tried to leave the country in the company of members of the charity Gift of the Givers.
(undated/ February)	Safety of journalists	Sanef condemns the violent behaviour of soccer fans that vandalised a stadium and injured scores of people, including two photographers during a Sundowns and Orlando Pirates match at Loftus Versfeld Stadium in Pretoria on 11 February. Daily Sun's Themba Makofane said fans attempted to rob him of his wallet and spare camera during the riot. Another photographer, BackpagePix's Sydney Mahlangu, had his laptop, which he used to download, edit and transmit images from the stadium, stolen. Both were struck by objects that fans had hurled during the commotion.
4 April 2017	Safety of journalists	Sanef calls on authorities to investigate reported verbal attacks and threats of physical harm by members of the public on ANN7 journalists who were covering a protest in Cape Town.
8 May 2017	Safety of journalists	Sanef condemns physical attacks on SABC journalists covering protests in Vuwani, Limpopo. One camera person was assaulted and three vehicles belonging to the public broadcaster were damaged by members of the public. In the same statement, Sanef also speaks out against protestors and farmers in Coligny in the North West that attacked and chased away journalists who were covering violence that erupted in the aftermath of a court decision. Photographic equipment belonging to journalists from various media houses was also damaged.
(undated)	Safety of journalists (Lesotho)	Sanef calls on the Lesotho government to ensure the safety of journalists following a deterioration of the security situation in the country. It also highlighted the threats to the life of SABC correspondent in Lesotho, Nthakoana Ngatane, who had to flee the country. It said that this was the latest in a string of incidences of violence and intimidation against journalists in the landlocked country.
(undated)	Safety of journalists	Sanef condemns the harassment of SABC journalists by members of the community in Tshitavha, a village outside Thohoyandou in Limpopo Province. Cameraperson Llewellyn Carstens together with TV reporter Lutendo Bobodi and radio reporter Rudzani Tshivhase went to the area to cover a story about bodies that were to be exhumed. In order to cover the story, the trio were apparently allowed to enter the village. However, a group of young men arrived, started to swear at them, and slapped Carstens. The men then pelted the SABC vehicle with stones as the journalists drove away.
(undated/8 February 2017)	Freedom to report	Sanef expresses its concern that security arrangements for SONA address may restrict the ability of journalists to carry out their work.

(undated/9 February 2017)	Freedom to report	Sanef condemned events which unfolded in Parliament during President Jacob Zuma's chaotic State of The Nation Address (SONA), which saw journalists restricted in their ability to do their job, and the Economic Freedom Fights ejected from parliament. Sanef also called on parliament to review the progressive heightening of security measures and what it described as the "securitisation" at parliament. In the context of a heavy security presence at parliament, some journalists were intermittently prevented from doing their jobs as SONA events unfolded. Civilian clothed police officials prevented camera persons and journalists from freely moving through parliamentary corridors. Journalists based at parliament's media offices were hampered from leaving and returning to their offices as a line of riot police blocked off the access road. Police also attempted to prevent some photographers from taking photographs in the parliamentary precinct. Earlier
(undated)	Freedom to report	Sanef expresses concerned about plans by the eThekweni Council to introduce new Rules of Order which would deny access by reporters to some meetings and restrict the use of electronic equipment in filing story updates.
10 April 2017	Freedom to report	Sanef appeals to the government and political parties to respect the right of journalists to do their work after a report of the intimidation of freelance photojournalist Jacob Mawela by security details of Gauteng Member of Executive Council, Lebogang Maile. According to Mawela, he was covering the Township Entrepreneurship Awards at Carnival City when he was accosted by the security details for having trained his camera on the MEC. He was ordered to either pack his photographic equipment or be physically removed from the venue.
8 May 2017	Freedom to report	In a media release condemning attacks on journalists (see above), Sanef criticises the police for preventing journalists from reporting freely: "We also wish to reiterate our disappointment with the police's conduct at public events, especially their regular interference with the work of journalists – in their process flouting their own Standing Order 156 which regulates their conduct at public and crime scenes. We have witnessed a number of incidents where police officials block journalists from freely gathering information at public events, and news-worthy scenes like public protests and car accidents."
18 September 2017	Freedom to report/ consumer boycott	Sanef urges the Zion Christian Church (ZCC) to withdraw its call on members to stop buying newspaper titles owned by the Tiso Blackstar media group. It says the call for a consumer boycott is tantamount to editorial interference, bullying and censorship in order to stop what is perceived as unflattering coverage of the church's activities.
10 June 2017	Threats to journalists/ Fake news	Sanef annual general meeting highlights threats to journalists both on and offline. In particular death threats received by investigative journalists Sipho Masondo (City Press) and Mzilikazi wa Afrika (Sunday Times) are highlighted, as is the "weaponisation" of social media to attack and intimidate journalists. The problem of fake news is also addressed at the meeting.
29 June 2017	Threats to journalists	Sanef expressed its shock at news that Suna Venter, an SABC journalist who was one of eight suspended from the public broadcaster when they voiced their concerns about editorial interference in the newsrooms, had been victimised and intimidated and had received death threats as a result of her battles with the SABC. Suna also had to undergo surgery to remove metal pellets after she was shot in the face with an unknown weapon.
4 July 2017	Threats to journalists	Sanef files an urgent application against Black First Land First (BLF) and its founder, Andile Mngxitama, at the South Gauteng High Court in Johannesburg. It asks the court to interdict BLF and Mngxitama from harassing, intimidating, assaulting and threatening eleven senior journalists, editors and commentators that have been targeted for their reporting on state capture.
19 July 2017	Threats to journalists	Sanef condemns the harassment of AmaBhungane investigative journalist Micah Reddy, again by Mngxitama and BLF supporters. Reddy was accosted by the BLF as he left an SABC TV production set in Braamfontein, Johannesburg. He had just taken part in a debate to be aired by the SABC. As an investigative journalism unit, AmaBhungane has written extensively on state capture.
23 February 2017	Protection of sources	Sanef expresses concern after two members of the South African Police Services (SAPS) visit the Mail & Guardian newspaper on what they described as an investigation of a complaint by the Public Protector. The SAPS members requested a statement from journalist Philip de Wet on the source of a 'leaked' draft report by the Public Protector on the Absa-Bankcorp matter relating to an apartheid-era bailout.

14 December 2017	Journalist ethics/ Protection of sources	In the lead-up to the elective conference of the African National Congress, Sanef reminds journalists on the need to uphold the highest standards of ethics as prescribed in the Press Code in their reporting. This in the context of noting that Tiso Blackstar had instituted disciplinary proceedings against its reporter Jan-Jan Joubert on the basis that the journalist had not declared an apparent conflict interest in the coverage of a story linked to the Democratic Alliance. In the same statement, Sanef also said it was disappointed by pressure [from the state] to reveal the sources behind Jacques Pauw's book on state capture, <i>The President's Keepers</i> .
3 May 2017	Freedom of expression	Sanef supports the application for leave to appeal a hate speech ruling by the press ombudsman of South Africa against Huffington Post South Africa. This follows a complaint by Afriforum that a blog post published on the website called "Could it be time to deny white men the franchise" amounted to hate speech. The post stirred up a storm of controversy after it emerged that the post was a hoax and the blogger a fake. The South African National Editors Forum and Media Monitoring Africa were amici curiae in the appeal.
22 August 2017	Freedom of expression	Sanef welcomes a ruling by the Appeals Panel of the Press Council on whether or not the blog post amounted to hate speech. In the ruling, Judge Bernard Ngoepe set aside ombudsman Johan Retief's earlier ruling that comments contained in the blog were discriminatory.

Appendix 4: Press Council report for 2017

The following is a report compiled by the Press Council, summarising the complaints received in 2017, listing its representatives and judges, and discussing the importance of its work, including to the “ordinary citizen”.

By Joe Thloloe

Press Council of South Africa 2017 – a report to the nation

As the plough turns row after row of soil, it's important that we lift our heads as we do now to see how much we have covered thus far, the impact we have had, and determine what still lies ahead.

And as we do, our attention is drawn to our core business, adjudicating in complaints by readers against the editorial content of print and online publications: in 2017 our Public Advocate, Latiefa Mobarra, received 499 complaints - a steady decline from 591 in 2015 and 536 in 2016.

This number of complaints is worrying because one complaint against the media is one too many, but looked at from another perspective, 499 is tiny against the backdrop of the millions of words that journalists in this country churn out every day.

In our system the Public Advocate is the champion of the complainant and in that role she was able to resolve 107 of the complaints with the publications even before they went for adjudication. Only 145 complaints were referred to the Ombud, Dr Johan Retief.

On average the Ombud rules on three complaints a week and he reports:

“The most common complaints, by far, are:

- Not having given the subject of critical reportage the right of reply; and
- As a direct result of this, complaints about accuracy and fairness usually follow (although these complaints often stand on their own as well).

“ The other main complaints are:

- Reporting allegations as facts. This is prevalent especially in headlines;
- Information from anonymous sources which was not verified (often publications merely repeat what others have published, arguing that a matter is in the public domain, or they take an anonymous source's word as gospel without any attempt to verify the information).”

The Chair of Appeals, Judge Bernard Ngoepe, received 35 applications for leave to appeal against the Ombud's rulings from both readers and the editors and he dismissed 25 of these applications.

Only two rulings by the Ombud were overturned this year.

Forty-eight of the complaints received by the Public Advocate were against publications in the Independent Media Company, which has hived off from the Press Council and established its own in-house system.

As this core work was being carried out the Press Council again reviewed its structures and processes as it has

done regularly in its history. At the end of that process the Appointments Panel, headed by Justice Yvonne Mokgoro, and the Constituent Associations of the Press Council – i.e. the South African National Editors' Forum, the Interactive Advertising Bureau South Africa (online media), the Association of Independent Publishers, and the Forum of Community Journalists - appointed a new Council and Panel of Adjudicators to take office from February 1, 2018.

The names are:

Press Council

Public Representatives

Ms Mary Papayya
Mr Andrew Allison
Mr Faizal Dawjee
Mr Themba Sepotokele
Ms Dinesh Balliah
Mr Kalim Rajab

Press Representatives

South African Editors' Forum
Raymond Louw
Amina Frense
Forum of Community Journalists
Graeme Campbell
Interactive Advertising Bureau South Africa
Mr Izak Minnaar
Mr Andrew Trench
Association of Independent Publishers
Ms Louise Vale

Panel of Adjudicators

Public Representatives

Ms Pria Chetty
Mr Mpho Chaka
Mr Patrick Roy Mnisi
Prof Karthy Govender
Ms Paula Fray
Mr Peter Mann
Mr Brian Gibson
Ms Carol Mohlala

Press Representatives

South African Editors' Forum
Mr Tshamano Makhadi
Mr Joe Thloloe
Forum of Community Journalists
Mr Fanie Groenewald
Interactive Advertising Bureau South Africa
Ms Judy Sandison
Ms Megan Rusi
Association of Independent Publishers
Mr Wandile Fana

Judges

The three eminent judges who currently anchor the Press Council – Judge Phillip Levinsohn (Chairperson of the Press Council), Judge Bernard Ngoepe (Chair of Appeals) and Judge Yvonne Mokgoro (Chairperson of

Appointments Panel) were asked to continue for another five years and they have agreed.

Endorsements

We have files of endorsements for our system, including a 2015 one from President Jacob Zuma's office:

I wish to thank you, on behalf of the Presidency, for the excellent and professional manner in which your office handled our grievance regarding a story published by the City Press.

Furthermore, we were immensely pleased by the subsequent ruling and how it continues to inspire faith in the office of the Press Ombudsman.

We thank you again most sincerely,

Regards

*Mr Bongani Majola
Chief Director: Communications
The Presidency.*

And a more recent one:

Dear Latiefa

I trust you are well.

Many thanks for discussing my complaint with Ms Charlene Rolls who was kind enough to contact me personally – this I appreciated very much.

Allow me to thank you too for taking note of my complaint and all your kind trouble in phoning me twice and also for contacting Ms Rolls on my behalf.

Please consider the case now closed as she kindly apologised and gave me perfect reasons why this dreadful article was published.

I too thank you for attaching the Complaints Procedures and Press Code, the contents of which I found to be most interesting.

My very best regards to you.

Margaret van der Lingen

The irony is that in spite of the public's and the Presidency's acceptance of the bona fides of the Press Council, the ANC is still continuing to spread its propaganda against it. For example, at its elective conference in December 2017, the ANC was again urged by its NEC SubCommittee on Communications and Battle of Ideas to push for a Parliamentary inquiry into the desirability and feasibility of a media appeals tribunal.

This sword has been hanging over the media since the ANC's Polokwane conference in 2007 – TEN YEARS! – with no action. All these years the Press Council has said it is ready to make a presentation to such an inquiry because we believe our system bolsters freedom of speech and democracy as enshrined in the country's constitution. One wonders: Who benefits from this ever-present threat?

Another twist of irony is that the Press Council and our Press Code of Ethics and Conduct for Print and Online Media is acknowledged by the legislature in laws like the Films and Publications Act, in the draft Bill to amend it, and in the Protection of Personal Information Act. This recognition that the legislature has granted us has been largely ignored by the ANC in its threats.

The Press Council has also participated actively in the lawmaking process, making presentations to Parliament and other organs of government, e.g. the Films and Publications Amendment Bill and working alongside Sanef, AmaBhungane and Media Monitoring Africa on a submission on the Protection of Personal Information Act (POPIA) and the regulations published by the Information Regulator for public comment.

The structure of the Press Council is tailor-made to advance the Freedom of Expression clause in the country's constitution.

The Press Council, what in another organisation might be called the Board, is chaired by a retired judge, Judge Phillip Levinsohn, formerly Deputy Judge President of KwaZulu-Natal and has six media representatives and six public representatives. The public representatives and the judge make the non-media voice in the Press Council the bigger one.

The same is true for the Panel of Adjudicators. It is chaired by Judge Bernard Ngoepe, formerly Judge President of the North and the South Gauteng High Court. The Panel, a pool from which the Chair and the Ombud get people to hear complaints and appeals with them, has six media representatives and eight public representatives – again amplifying the non-media voice.

We are a not for profit company and membership by publications is voluntary and publications pay a membership fee to pay for the costs of running it. And above all "the Constituent Associations ... explicitly guarantee the independence of the PCSA, so that it can act without fear or favour in the interests of a free and ethical press".

It is truly a "co-regulatory" system managed by the media and the public and excluding politicians. The public members are appointed by an Appointments Panel led by Justice Yvonne Mokgoro after vacancies have been published widely, the candidates shortlisted and interviewed to test their commitment to quality journalism, freedom of expression and freedom of the media and their knowledge of the media industry. Every adult South African is free to apply for vacancies.

The three senior judges would not be active in the Press Council if it didn't live up to the standards of the South African Constitution.

It costs the complainant nothing to lodge a complaint – unlike the courts that cost an arm and a leg and time to hear cases against the media.

We give the ordinary citizen a chance to clear his or her name quickly.

Appendix 5:

Summary of complaints received by the Press Council in 2017

The following is a breakdown of the complaints received by the Press Council from January to December, 2017.

Complaints received by Public Advocate

No of complaints received by Public Advocate, 2013-2017:

2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
487	461	591	536	499

No of complaints received by Public Advocate by month, 2013-2017:

Month	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
January	20	24	28	46	25
February	32	43	62	67	33
March	23	47	50	36	52
April	47	41	45	45	56
May	42	26	50	49	66
June	32	47	59	41	61
July	34	47	52	50	33
August	37	44	52	47	44
September	61	37	56	47	29
October	61	41	44	30	44
November	73	26	58	46	39
December	25	38	35	32	17

Breakdown of 2017 complaints received by Public Advocate:

Month	No of complaints	Resolved	Dismissed	Withdrawn/ Closed	Open	Sent to Ombud
January	25	3 (one resolved by Deputy PA)	11	3	0	8
February	33	8	14	4	0	7
March	52	11	21	5	0	15
April	56	16 (one resolved by Deputy PA)	20	4	0	16
May	66	14	29	4	0	19
June	61	11	23	5	0	22
July	33	4	13	3	0	13
August	44	8	14	4	0	18
September	29	10	9	2	0	8
October	44	7	24	2	1	10
November	39	8	19	2	2	8
December	17	7	2	1	6	1

Overview of Ombud's rulings

The Ombud adjudicated 146 complaints in 2017.

No of complaints received by the Ombud, 2013-2017:

2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
127	100	129	113	146

No of complaints received by the Ombud by month, 2013-2017:

Month	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
January	2	6	6	4	8
February	6	8	7	18	7
March	4	7	21	12	15
April	5	10	10	8	16
May	12	3	10	15	19
June	9	11	18	10	22
July	11	7	12	10	8
August	7	9	8	12	18
September	7	9	7	9	13
October	14	13	7	4	10
November	40	7	13	8	8
December	10	10	10	3	2

The Ombud's adjudication during 2017 amounted to an average of three rulings per week, which has been the trend during the last few years.

Results of appeals

35 applications for leave to appeal were made during 2017.

Judge Ngoepe on Appeals

Complainant	Publication	Outcome of application for leave to appeal
Adv Boyce Mkhize	City Press	Ombud ruling upheld – correction to be made
Dr Bongani Ngqulunga	Mail & Guardian	Complainant decided not to proceed with appeal process
Dr Abe Seakamela	Sowetan	Newspaper ordered to publish complainant's response
Mr Vivian Reddy	Mail & Guardian	Panel dismissed complaint but ordered newspaper to correct headline
Martins Antonio	Sunday Times	Application dismissed
Brian Molefe	Sunday Times	Application dismissed – newspaper ordered to publish retraction and apology
Colin Gabriel	The Herald	Application dismissed – Ombud ruling upheld
Verashni Pillay	Huffington Post SA	Appeal upheld by five-member panel
Dr N Dlamini-Zuma	Sunday Times	Newspaper ordered to publish "puff" on page 1 and apology on inside page

Makosi Luvo	City Press	Application dismissed
Edwards Cameron	Daily Maverick	Application dismissed
Modiba Lovey	Sowetan	Application dismissed – Ombud ruling upheld
Willem Landman	Rapport	Application dismissed
Black First Land First	News24	Application dismissed
N Mbalula	Sunday Times	Matter referred back to Ombud
Mulaudzi Michael Tuwani	Sunday Times	Application dismissed
Dr I Surve and Independent Media	Sunday Times	Application dismissed
Bayoglu Vuolat	City Press/ Rapport	Ombud sanction upheld – newspapers asked to publish apology
Trillian	Business Day	Paper's appeal against Ombud ruling upheld
Michael Biribauer	Eyewitness News	Application dismissed
Mrs Thato Dladla	Sunday World	Appeal hearing centred on the issue of jurisdiction pre-publication. Newspaper and complainant resolved issue amicably.
Mr Hlatshwayo	Roodepoort Rekord	Application dismissed
Black First Land First	News24	Application dismissed
Willem Prins	Eyewitness News	Application dismissed
Frankel family	Daily Maverick	Application dismissed
Mabuza Joseph Solly Madubula	City Press	Application dismissed
Minister L Sisulu	News24	Application dismissed
Alwyn Smith	Weekend Post	Newspaper's application for leave to appeal against Ombud sanction dismissed
Gayton Mckenzie	Sunday Times	Ombud ruling upheld; application for leave to appeal dismissed
Mark Leather/ McNaught and Co	Sunday Times	Ombud ruling upheld; application for leave to appeal dismissed
JH de Lange	Sunday Times	Application dismissed – Ombud ruling upheld
Flora Mokgohloa	News24	Ombud ruling upheld, application for leave to appeal dismissed
DeVere Group and Nigel Green	Moneyweb	Ombud ruling upheld – application for leave to appeal failed
Gengezi Mgidlana	Sunday Times	Application for leave to appeal dismissed – paper to publish apology as directed by Ombud
Gengezi Mgidlana	Eyewitness News	Appeal hearing scheduled for 2018

Appendix 6: Demographics of editors of major South African newspapers

1. Cape Argus:
Aziz Hartley – Coloured, male
2. The Times:
Stephen Haw – White, male
3. Beeld:
Bernard Beukman – White, male
4. Sunday Times:
Bongani Siqoko – Black, male
5. Business Times:
Ron Derby – White, male
6. Sunday World:
Abdul Milazi – Black, male
7. Daily Dispatch:
Sibusiso Ngalwa – Black, male
8. Rapport:
Waldimer Pelsler – White, male
9. Business Day:
Tim Cohen – White, male
10. The Herald & Weekend Post:
Brett Horner – White, male
11. The Witness:
Stephanie Saville – White, female
12. Daily Voice:
Taariq Halim – Coloured, male
13. Die Burger:
Willem Jordaan – White, male
14. The Citizen:
Acting Editor: Trevor Stevens
15. Cape Times:
Aneez Salie – Indian, male
16. Daily News:
Aakash Bramdeo – Indian, male
17. Son and Son op Sondag:
Andrew Koopman – Coloured, male
18. Daily Sun and Sunday Sun:
Daily Sun: Reggy Moalusi – Black, male
Sunday Sun: Prince Chauke – Black, male
19. Diamond Field Advertiser:
Johan du Plessis – White, male
20. Isolozwe:
Slindile Khanyile – Black, female
21. Isolezwe weekend:
Sandile Mdadane – Black, male
22. Ilanga:
Sazi Majola – Black, male
23. Ilanga Langesonto:
Bheki Ndlovana – Black, male
24. The Mercury:
Yogas Nair – Indian, female
25. Pretoria News:
Val Boje – White, female
26. Sowetan:
Sithembiso Msomi (April 1, 2018) – Black, male
27. The Star:
Japhet Ncube – Black, male
28. Volksbald:
Gert Coetzee – White, male
29. The New Age:
Dudu Dube – Black, female
30. Saturday Star:
Kashiefa Ajam – Coloured, female
31. Independent on Saturday:
Deon Delport – White, male
32. Sunday Independent:
Steve Motale – Black, male
33. Weekend Argus:
Yunus Kemp – Coloured, male
34. Mail & Guardian:
Khadija Patel – Indian, female
35. Post:
Krisendra Bissey – Indian, male
36. Soccer Laduma:
Vuyani Joni – Black, male
37. Sake24:
Johan Van Wyk – White, male
38. Sunday Tribune:
Mazwi Xaba – Black, male
39. City Press:
Mondli Makhanya – Black, male
40. Business Report:
Andri Senekal de Wet – White, female

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