IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY

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Purpose

The focus of the research was to:

i. Highlight the background circumstances in which the media has been operating in prior to Covid 19, which include the challenges relating to print media vis-à-vis digital content creation, citizen journalism etc.

ii. Analyse the impact of Covid 19 on the media industry including a focus on the capacity of media houses to generate content when nations are on lockdown, distribution channels for such products, the capacity of consumers to pay for media services among other aspects.

iii. Assess the correlation between the impact of Covid 19 on media and the exercise of rights like media freedom, access to information and freedom of expression.

iv. Provide recommendations on how media sustainability and viability can be maintained or improved in the circumstances including the roles that different stakeholders can play including government, civil society organisations and media houses.

This report was focusing on the Southern African region and more specifically countries like Zimbabwe, Zambia, Malawi, Botswana, Lesotho and Tanzania.

Introduction

“

The global Covid-19 crisis has given rise to talk of a need “not to let a good crisis go to waste” to prompt much-needed systemic change. For news media, the increased use of communications technology during self-isolation plus the difficulties of distributing and accessing newspapers and magazines revealed and widened the fissures in the business models of legacy media while boosting broadcasting and online platforms – along with starving all news media of advertising.

A superficial examination of the data available for the countries in the Southern African region reveals that geographical location hides great diversity. The countries of Southern Africa vary in wealth, size, population, language and urbanization. What all have in common is a colonial history, many of them being formerly British colonies, including those examined in this study. The media landscapes of many were marred in the post-colonial era by censorship or State monopolies of news production. It was only in the 1990s did the collapse of communism, symbolized by the fall of the Berlin wall, and the concomitant fading of the dream of African socialism marked by centralized control of communication allow liberalization and news media. The proliferation of independent, private newspapers, radio stations and TV broadcasters accompanied what could be seen as paradigm shift in communication policy.

The global Covid-19 crisis has given rise to talk of a need "not to let a good crisis go to waste" to prompt much-needed systemic change.[1]For news media, the increased use of communications technology during self-isolation plus the difficulties of distributing and accessing newspapers and magazines revealed and widened the fissures in the business models of legacy media while boosting broadcasting and online platforms – along with starving all news media of advertising. The resulting disruption has accelerated shifts that were already under way to the online environment, featuring demands for subscriptions to read articles i.e. retreats behind paywalls, as well as sparking innovation, for instance increasing the use of e-paper editions, simulations of physical newspapers and magazines.

Whether this is another paradigm shift or not is unknown, but what is certain is that the news industry has been suddenly and dramatically shaken, and that the very existence of news production and journalism has been seen as being under threat. In turn, a new focus is needed on sustainability in the sense of the business of news, essentially who will pay for the news and how will it be paid for in a way that allows a degree of independence.

1.Ncedisa Nkonyeni, "OPINIONISTA: Covid-19 Is Too Good a Crisis to Waste – Let's Change the System," Daily Maverick, August 17, 2020, https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/opinionista/2020-08-18-covid-19-is-too-good-a- crisis-to-waste-lets-change-the-system/.

Method and methodology

The methodology employed is mainly qualitative research, with data used both for triangulation and for elucidation. The methodology is aligned with the purpose of the research, which aims to be pragmatic without abandoning academic rigor and aims to come up with evidence-based recommendations. Behind the study was the normative idea of news media as a merit good, and in the regional context this means an emphasis on the financial health of private, independent news media as well as reform of State-owned news media to fulfil its public interest role.

The method was, first, to survey the research already undertaken on the Covid-19 impact on global and the media in the region and the state of media globally and in the region generally and then to conduct semi-structured interviews with senior journalists, media owners, media experts, market experts, and media managers in the region or with knowledge of the region. This was followed up with specific contacts for clarity where necessary. A time constraint and the restrictions on travel prevented the kind of in-depth knowledge that journalistic "shoe-leather" provides but the interviews with journalists and others knowledgeable about the news media provided rich insights, and I have tried to move beyond the anecdotal evidence where possible by finding supporting data elsewhere. Finally, I have tapped my own experience as a business journalist and former board member of the Mail & Guardian newspaper.

The media landscape in the region pre-Covid

Even before the Covid-19 crisis, financial stability in the region of the private, independent news media, which is the major though not sole focus of this report, was of concern.

In terms of freedom of the media, access to information, and potential sustainability, the countries of the region chosen to be examined here differ considerably. Three countries, Botswana, Lesotho and Namibia, have populations below three million people. Three countries, Lesotho, Tanzania and Zambia, are classified as least developed countries. Significantly, the RSF (Reporters without Borders) ranks several of the countries highly and several poorly. Though South Africa far outstrips the other countries in total economic output, it does not rank the highest in media freedom according to the RSF. Nor does Botswana, though it has the highest per capital income in the region; that honor goes to Namibia, with its tiny population but vibrant and diverse private media market.

If there is a common thread it may be the dominance of State media and preferential treatment of State media, and a growing threat to press freedom along with growing authoritarianism even as some progress is made on the legal front, for example the passing of the Freedom of Information Act in Zimbabwe and subsequently the repeal of the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA).[2]The press freedom climate in several countries is inclement, and the crowding out of private, independent news media by State media in advertising markets threatens media pluralism and limits competition in provision of news that is necessary (but not sufficient) for production of quality news.

2. Chido Musodza, "New Information Law Should Set Pace for Repeal of Other Draconian Laws," MISA Zimbabwe (blog), July 2, 2020, https://zimbabwe.misa.org/2020/07/02/new-information-law-should-set-pace- for-repeal-of-other-draconian-laws/.

The fact that State resources are devoted solely to State-owned media needs further discussion, since the idea of State support for all news media is now being discussed in countries where this would previously have been deprecated. “The debate about the necessity of non-commercial funding of the media comes about as Covid has shaken up our ideas of what’s possible.”[3] It should be obvious that State funding of news media done transparently and fairly is better than covert manipulation through preferential placement of advertising and confusion of State media with public media – to the extent of staff at State media being interchangeable with civil servants[4] or resembling “PR departments of the ruling party.”[5]

The problem with financial fragility for news media is that it aids capture, either by vested interests or the State.

As director of Botswana’s only independent investigative journalism unit, and former newspaper editor, Joel Konopo remarks in raising red flags about bias in Botswana’s media,

“We live in a world in which journalism and freedom of information run up against an invisible wall consisting of money and conflicting interests.”

Much emphasis, it seems to me, has been placed on the legal framework needed for media freedom and not enough on the financial lifeblood of news organisations. News media operates in a complex nexus of money and politics, where the private sector profit imperative has to be balanced against other motives of supporting and advancing free speech and democracy, good governance, and the free flow of information necessary for an efficient and fairer economy. The assumption has been that news media will always be able to function.

Interviews with knowledgeable people in the region confirm that though the region has, in contrast to the immediate post-colonial period, a range of news outlets, the private independent news media was not exactly flourishing pre-Covid-19. For example, John Mukela of the Makanday Centre for Investigative Journalism notes that in Zambia “even before Covid, a lot of stress was being felt.” He says the government wanted to merge the loss-making Times of Zambia with the Zambia Daily Mail because the Times of Zambia and layoffs were seen at privately owned newspapers such as The Mast.[6]

Most of these private newspapers, instead of having people on staff, they are using correspondents or stringers, who report for them but are not on the staff payroll. They are part-time and paid depending on what they produce. I think that is a trend that is increasing.[7]

The Namibian Media Trust director Zoe Titus notes that the major challenge pre-Covid was the dominance of State media, including the national broadcaster, which has a complete monopoly on the broadcasting sector in the country and the State print media. A cabinet directive, which she says no one refers to openly effectively avows that that “state-owned media would get preferential treatment in terms of the placement of advertising from government institutions.” This has had a dramatic impact

3. Guy Berger, Interview with Guy Berger, director for Freedom of Expression and Media Development, Unesco, September 23, 2020.
4. Joel Konopo, Botswana INK media, September 18, 2020.
5. Mukela John, Managing partner, Makanday Centre for Investigative Journalism, September 23, 2020.
6. Mukela John.
7. Mukela John.

on the business, particularly of legacy media such as The Namibian. In circumstances where UN agencies and donors are involved with projects to, for example promote the Sustainable Development Goals, electoral campaigns and civic education, state media is foregrounded.

In some African countries, fears about repressive media legislation may trump economic, financial and business concerns. Tanzania is one, having fallen 25 places to 11th to 118 RSF's World Press Freedom Index for 2019[8] and dropped a further six points to 124 out of 180 countries in the 2020 index. The RSF sees the precipitous fall as unprecedented in recent years.[9] Not content with cracking down on traditional mass media, in July 2020, Tanzania issued new Electronic and Postal Communications (Online Content) Regulations, which have been condemned as repressing "online speech, privacy and access to information." Regulations were also passed imposing censorship on international news.[10]

That said, a weak governance framework enabling capture is also a wider problem.

The multiple constraints facing the media in Tanzania limit its vitality, although critical and analytical reporting does take place. Government control is entwined with business interests in an attempt to retain political power. The overall environment produces a forum of media capture dominated by the centralized state, an emerging democracy marked by rent-seeking and corruption, in a wider context of inequality and exclusion enabled by elite-driven privatization processes and global capital.[11]

The 2019 African Media Barometer on Tanzania commented that Tanzania's media diversity was in spite of "an arsenal of legal regulatory tools … used to stifle the emergence of economically sustainable and independent media. Licence fees for all media, for example, are high and prohibitive. Media inputs are not tax-exempt and even community radios have to pay high licence fees annually."[12] Evidence of media oppression, unrelated to the Covid-19 crisis, is that in June 2020, government revoked the licence of Tanzania Daima, described as a "pro-opposition daily newspaper," ahead of elections effectively closing the newspaper down with the loss of at least 100 jobs.[13]

It must be noted that Tanzania alone of the countries discussed in this report is expected to have economic growth this year, of 1.9%, as measured by real gross domestic product, so it seems to have escaped the impact of the Covid-19 crisis rather lightly, which will have fewer consequences for its media in pure financial terms. However, the lack of economic pressure may give the aid-dependent Tanzanian government room to avoid political and media reform.

8. PMA, "Media Freedom Crisis in Tanzania," Public Media Alliance (blog), December 10, 2019, https://www.publicmediaalliance.org/media-freedom-crisis-in-tanzania/.
9. RSF, "Tanzania : 'Bulldozing' the Media | Reporters without Borders," RSF, 2020, https://rsf.org/en/tanzania.
10. RSF, "Tanzania: RSF Condemns Latest Government Clampdown on the Media | RSF," Reporters without Borders, August 20, 2020, https://rsf.org/en/news/tanzania-rsf-condemns-latest-government-clampdown- media..
11. Ryan Powell, "Unfinished Business: Tanzania's Media Capture Challenge," in In the Service of Power: Media Capture and the Threat to Democracy (Washington, D.C, 2107), 93
12. Fesmedia Africa, "African Media Barometer: A Home-Grown Analysis of the Media Landscape in Africa : Tanzania 2019" (Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2020), http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/africa-media/16280.pdf.
13. Simon Mkina, "Tanzania - Opposition Leaders Locked up, Newspaper Shut Down," The Continent, June 27, 2020.

The crisis

The impact on the news media of the Covid-19 pandemic in many countries in the world was felt almost immediately, with the assessment by digital media expert Craig Silverman of the media impact as a "media extinction event" quickly becoming currency.14 15

The impact of the Covid-19 crisis globally was two-fold. First, the regulations, including lockdowns, affected the ability of news organizations to distribute newspapers and the mobility of readers to buy newspapers. With shops and transport hubs closed, many newspapers in the UK, for example, reported circulation declines for April, the month many countries were in lockdown. The circulation of the world-renowned Financial Times dropped by 39% and a range of other titles were down between that extreme and minus 12%.[16]

In South Africa, the strict lockdown saw declines in newspaper purchases and distribution, and initially a complete ban on magazines.[17] It might be imagined that consumers in the region were financially stretched and considered print products an unnecessary expense. Will street sales rebound, especially given that the income of many readers has been slashed thanks to the Covid-19 crisis? Those interviewed for this survey put more emphasis on the advertising crisis, though the reduction in disposable income must be a factor. As important as cost, it seems

14. Silverman, "The Coronavirus Is a Media Extinction Event," Buzz Feed News, March 23, 2020, https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/craigsilverman/coronavirus-news-industry-layoffs.
15I. FPM, "International Fund for Public Interest Media," accessed October 4, 2020, https://luminategroup.com/ifpim.
16. Mark Sweney, "UK National Newspaper Print Sales Plunge amid Coronavirus Lockdown," The Guardian, May 21, 2020, sec. Media, https://www.theguardian.com/media/2020/may/21/uk-national-newspaper-print-sales- plunge-amid-coronavirus-lockdown.
17. Reg Rumney, "SANEF'S COVID 19 Impact on Journalism Report (Interim)" (Johannesburg: South African National Editors Forum, June 1, 2020), 10.

there were also initial health concerns about the Coronavirus spreading through contact with newsprint,[18] a concern soon dispelled by research[19] and apparent medical de-emphasis of the virus being spread through surface contact.[20]

In the region, government regulation saw steep falls in circulations, as seen in newspapers that submitted figures for auditing by the Audit Bureau of Circulation, or, in South Africa, by the very fact of circulations being so low they were not worth submitting.

Apart from circulation revenue foregone, some print readers may be lost forever and third and fourth quarter figures will establish the extent of the damage. Lower circulation figures make newspapers less attractive to advertisers who face having to drop their prices for adverts or see advertisers move to social media or other online platforms. This is the bigger threat, since globally "as advertisers are switching to digital channels, they are switching to advertising via Google and Facebook."[21] This strengthens the digital duopoly, which in South Africa swallow an estimated 82% of digital ad revenue.[22]

Second, the lockdowns and contraction in economic activity saw advertising for online, broadcast and print media plummet. Advertising revenue has been the bedrock of news media, and for print media often providing much more income than the cover price.[23]

Globally, it is difficult to gauge exactly how steep the plunge in advertising was because it differed from country to country. For example, it made no sense to advertise when buyers could not see the ads, for instance on billboards (known as Out-of-Home or OOH advertising) or in retail advertising in South Africa, when government regulations restricted what could be bought or sold in the initial, strict period of the lockdown as well as severely limiting individual movement. Initial estimates in South Africa were of declines in advertising revenue of 30% to 65% or even 100%, a wide range, which does not reflect any recovery in advertising as the lockdowns have eased.[24] Retail advertising in South Africa, necessary to get feet through the doors of retailers, rebounded after the lockdown as predicted but brand advertising was expected to be muted.[25] Also, in some markets advertisers have had blacklists stopping ads appearing next to certain categories of news and this has included news about Covid-19, which was clearly the main topic of news even before the lockdown period.[26]

Lockdowns differed across the region, but the economic recession predicted as a result of Covid-19 regulations across the world means advertising is likely to have contracted in most other Southern

18. Konopo, Botswana INK media.
19. Earl Wilkinson, "Zero Incidents of COVID-19 Transmission from Print Surfaces," International News Media Association (INMA), March 23, 2020, https://www.inma.org/blogs/earl/post.cfm/zero-incidents-of-covid-19- transmission-from-print-surfaces.
20. Stephanie Watson, "Coronavirus on Surfaces: What's the Real Risk?" WebMD, September 3, 2020, https://www.webmd.com/lung/news/20200903/coronavirus-on-surfaces-whats-the-real-risk.
21. Harry Dugmore, ed., "PAYING THE PIPER: The Sustainability of the News Industry and Journalism in South Africa in a Time of Digital Transformation and Political Uncertainty" (Digital Journalism Research Project, School of Journalism and Media Studies, Rhodes University, South Africa, May 2018), 13, themediaonline.co.za/.../PAYING-THE-PIPER-The-sustainability-of-the-news-industry-a...
22. Dugmore, 62.
23. Rasmus Kleis Nielsen, "The Changing Economic Contexts of Journalism," in ICA Handbook of Journalism Studies, (Routledge, 2018),
24. Rumney, "SANEF'S COVID 19 Impact on Journalism Report (Interim)," 31.
25. Rumney,
26. "Newspaper Publishers: COVID-19 - Research and Markets," Research and Markets, n.d, https://www.researchandmarkets.com/issues/newspaper- publishers?utm_source=dynamic&utm_medium=GNOM&utm_code=t874gn&utm_campaign=1409740+-+Newspaper+Publishers+See+Drop+in+Advertising+Revenues+as+a+Result+of+COVID- 19&utm_exec=jamu273gnomd.

African countries too. This is confirmed by the interviews for Botswana,[27] and Namibia, where, according to Namibian Media Trust director Zoe Titus, "… with Covid, for the first two months, I think revenues dropped by about 70% in terms of advertising."[28] Some organisations in Zimbabwe reported revenues down 50% to 80%. In Malawi and Zambia revenue reportedly fell by 50% to 80%.[29]

Across the world media advertising revenue fell sharply during the first and especially the second quarter of 2020, but the question is how much of it is coming back. Daniel Kalinaki, GM editorial, Nation Media Group Uganda Daniel is pessimistic.

"Now in 2008 at the financial crisis we saw advertising revenues dropping by about 25 percent but then they bounced back at the end of the crisis when there was a return to normalcy. What we're seeing now with Covid is a reduction of between 40% and 50 %, revenues that will not come back. So in some places there was a drop 80% to 90% but all the research that I've looked at the most optimistic view is that 40% to 50% of the advertising revenue will actually not come back, certainly not to print, and increasingly even the other legacy media platforms like television and radio will see reductions. That's partly because of the economic impact as advertisers keep their powder dry, it will also be as a result of the disruptive impact of new ways of reaching people, which is social media, and which is new media."[30]

The evidence is that the devastating impact of the Covid-19 crisis on the news media represents the tipping point of a process that has been gradual. "The ongoing, coronavirus-fueled media crisis has in fact been in the works for more than 30 years. It is not a new phenomenon."[31] An assessment in the interim study for the South African National Editors Forum was that news organizations were already on the edge, such as the magazine divisions that were the first to be closed, were tipped over by the Covid-19 crisis – yet all news operations that relied on advertising and revenue from print product sales were affected, revealing an over-reliance on advertising as a source of revenue.[32] This assessment of what the Covid-19 crisis has done to print media houses is summed up by Kalinaki:[33]

What Covid has done is it has basically truncated a 20-year slow decline into a six-month shove-the -industry-off-the cliff moment. The downside is that many media houses are going to I think disappear, especially big legacy media houses that have large overheads that can't react very quickly and the upside is that it now forces conversations that have been happening in media houses for decades and they go from something that you also discuss in terms of the digital strategy, in terms of monetization, to something that you actually have to do in order to be around by Christmas this year, Christmas next year.

In other countries in the region, on the other hand, a lack of advertising means reliance on copy sales, and, "For 48 days, almost all

27. Joel Konopo, "Botswana's Media Is in Crisis - The Mail & Guardian," Mail & Guardian, January 29, 2020, https://mg.co.za/article/2020-01-29-botswanas-media-is-in-crisis/.
28. Zoe Titus, Interview on Covid-19 impact on news media in Southern Africa, September 16, 2020.
29. Teldah Mawarire, Internews Effect of Covid-19 on news media, September 23, 2020.
30. Media Sustainability in Eastern and Southern Africa Webinar, Webinar, 2020,
31. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=40vZNq_utmI&t=3815s.
32. Rumney, "SANEF'S COVID 19 Impact on Journalism Report (Interim)," 5.
33. Media Sustainability in Eastern and Southern Africa Webinar.

newspapers did not generate income derived from copy sales since they were forced by

circumstances to suspend their print editions," declared Botswana's Mmegi.[34]

In South Africa, two magazine publishers, one independent and one the magazine division of listed Caxton & CTP, were closed as the lockdown started to wreak havoc the news media industry. This was a result of a change in the behaviour of readers, who deserted the kind of content magazines published, as well as in some cases the rising cost of the royalties that had to be paid to overseas owners of the magazine brands as the local currency depreciated against the dollar.[35] At one stage the rand depreciated by around 36% against the dollar. Currency depreciation also increased the cost of newsprint in South Africa, which is priced at import parity even though it is produced in the country. This too had an impact on print publishers in South Africa and the region, which imports newsprint.

Media24, owner of many of South Africa's iconic newspaper and magazine titles, was frank in assessing the damage to the business of the lockdown in a July 7 statement, in which the company said it was, "considering the closure of five magazines and two newspapers, outsourcing and reducing the frequency of its remaining monthly magazines, taking two newspapers digital only and reducing staff in related support services."

Ishmet Davidson, CEO of Media24, was blunt about the effect of the crisis on Media24's print operations and the necessity of focusing on digital:

… The pandemic has accelerated the pre-existing and long-term structural decline in print media, resulting in a devastating impact on our own already fragile print media operations with significant declines in both circulation and advertising since April. For many of our print titles the benefits of prior interventions to offset the structural declines and keep them on the shelf no longer exist and they've run out of options in this regard.

Even with a return to pre-Covid-19 economic levels, the impact of the pandemic on our print media operations will be unrecoverable. Sadly, we have no choice but to restructure our business now to curtail the losses in our print portfolio and allow us to focus on keeping the retained titles sustainable and in print for as long as possible.[36]

34. Mmegi Editor, "Mmegi Online : Media under Threat," Mmegi Online, June 5, 2020, http://www.mmegi.bw/index.php?aid=85764&dir=2020/june/05.
35. Rumney, "SANEF'S COVID 19 Impact on Journalism Report (Interim)," 24.
36. Media24, "Media24 Media Release," July 7, 2020.

Going Online

Most interesting was the decision of Media24 in May to stop distributing a print edition of its mass market Sun newspaper to all but four provinces in South Africa, Gauteng, Limpopo, Mpumalanga and North West. The rest of the country would be served by an online version The Sun, a popular tabloid. Since a digital divide exists in South Africa, and like other dividing lines is based on income and race, it could be argued that the paper's predominantly black and low-income audience would be excluded, but the group boasted of the paper's presence online, and recent market research showed the prevalence of smartphones together with access at the workplace and free Wi-Fi hotspots was making online publications more accessible.[37]

Around the region, publishers have decided that some publications should migrate permanently or temporarily online, and often the format has been the e-paper, especially where printing has been physically impossible. [38]The Botswana Gazette, The Patriot on Sunday, and Newsday in Botswana and Zimbabwe were reportedly circulating PDF copies online. "Others, such as The Voice in Botswana, have switched to Press Reader, a digital newspaper distribution platform."[39] During the first phase of the strict lockdown in South Africa, when magazines could not be published, the Financial Mail was distributed as an e-paper readable through the ISUU service.[40] ZimPapers in Zimbabwe too has migrated some of its newspapers online.[41]

37. Glenda Nevill, "Daily Sun Changes Footprint, Goes Digital Only in Five Provinces," The Media Online (blog), May 4, 2020, //themediaonline.co.za/2020/05/daily-sun-publishes-last-print-issue-goes-online-only/.
38. Rumney, "SANEF'S COVID 19 Impact on Journalism Report (Interim)," 26.
39. Ntibinyane Ntibinyane, "Coronavirus May Spell the End for Many of Africa's Print Newspapers," Global Investigative Journalism Network, April 27, 2020, https://gijn.org/2020/04/27/coronavirus-may-spell-the-end- for-many-of-africas-print-newspapers/.
40. "FREE | Read the Full April 9 Edition of Financial Mail," Business LIVE, accessed October 16, 2020, https://www.businesslive.co.za/fm/fm-fox/2020-04-09-free-read-the-full-april-9-edition-of-financial-mail/.
41. ZimPapers, "Reviewed Condensed Half-Year Results of Zimbabwe Newspapers (1980) Ltd for Year Ended June 2020" (Zimbabwe Stock Exchange, September 24, 2020).

According to the editor of Zimbabwe's The Standard, Kholwani Nyathi, "We have had to completely stop printing physical newspapers and instead have moved our content online for both safety and economic reasons."[42] Unlike the Financial Mail, at least some will stay online. 150-year-old local newspaper Grocottt's Mail now has an e-paper edition that circulates far more widely than the newspaper does.

Self-isolation, lockdowns, and working from home all initially pushed more readers of newspapers online, continuing a trend that has been gradual and inexorable until the pandemic. It is too soon to tell how many readers will return to print editions, but the statistics show a remarkable surge in new viewers of news websites in March and April – and for some an increase that has not been entirely reversed as the strict lockdown ended and more workers returned to offices. The biggest gainer has been News24, already the most viewed South African news website.

The gain in News24 viewing comes despite it having introduced a freemium paywall on the 8th of August 2020 to encourage subscriptions to its premium output, while commoditized breaking news remains free. In this it follows Arena Holdings, publishers of business publications among others, and the Money Web financial news website, and those in the news industry who maintain that as advertising revenue declines it must be replaced by reader revenue.

Table 1: Website audience by Unique Browser South Africa

Size	Unique Browsers			% Difference	
	February	**March**	**September**	**Mar - Sep**	**Feb - Sept**
news24.com	5 950 586	12 069 885	11 427 703	-5.3%	92.04%
iol.co.za	5 823 122	7 684 965	6 22 819	-19.0%	6.95%
timeslive.co.za	5 383 543	7 389 704	5 615 460	-24.0%	4.31%
thesouthafrican.com	4 313 191	5 056 594	3 527 961	-30.2%	-18.21%
businesstech.co.za	3 780 576	5 592 804	5 687 989	1.7%	50.45%

[Source: IAB SA, Author's own calculations]

42. Ilmo Ilkka, "Growing Press Freedom Violations in Africa amid COVID-19," International Press Institute (blog), April 28, 2020, https://ipi.media/africa-faces-media-freedom-crackdowns-and-existential-threats-to-its- media/.

Impact on journalism profession

Retrenchments

Published at the end of May 2020, the SANEF interim research report on the impact of the Covid-19 crisis on the media concluded that hundreds of jobs had been lost but could not be precise. The country has in recent years seen a steady decline in the number of full-time journalists. The Wits Journalism State of the Newsroom 2018 report noted that a survey showed the number of professional journalists in South Africa had been "slashed in half" over a decade to around 5 000 - and some interviewed for the survey believed the job loss figure could be higher.[43] After the SANEF study, Media24 announced that the rationalization of its news operations would affect around 510 staff members, with around 660 posts closed. The implication is that some – and they were not all journalists - might be re-employed in the company, but that many jobs would be lost in one company.[44]

The Primedia Group, owner of the oldest independent radio stations in South Africa, announced in mid-July that it would be retrenching an unspecified number of staff.[45] Caxton & CTP Publishers and Printers in September in its annual results announcement, said its restructuring to cope with the tough trading conditions the group expects "for the foreseeable future" would lead to estimated job losses "up to 1 500 positions once completed, out of a pre-Covid-19 staff complement of some 6 000

43. Alan (ed.) Finlay, "State of the Newsroom 2018" (Wits Journalism School, March 2018), http://wits.journalism.co.za/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/906-STATE-OF-THE-NEWSROOM-2018-REPRINT- V2.pdf.
44. Media24, "Media24 Media Release."
45. T. M. O. Reporter, "Primedia Group Starts Retrenchment Process," The Media Online, July 16, 2020,//themediaonline.co.za/2020/07/primedia-group-starts-retrenchment-process/.

persons."[46] No breakdown was given of what positions, so it is unknown how many journalists will be retrenched, but for a publishing and printing company to get rid of a quarter of its staff complement is a drastic step that is bound to affect the newspapers the company publishes and shows how other publishers, some of whom print their newspapers using Caxton presses, have fared and are expected to fare.

The Covid-19 crisis forced Zambian publication The Daily Nation to cut staff by 50%, according to Editor Mary Mbewe.[47]The Namibian retrenched by a similar percentage.[48] In Botswana, the government put a hold on retrenchments during the state of emergency, so news media job losses may still happen.[49]

Job cuts are not confined to the private, independent news media, though State-owned news media may find it hard to retrench. The South African public broadcaster has for some time tried to undertake its own retrenchment process, in the teeth of political opposition, including from the Minister of Communications.[50] The South African Broadcasting Corporation's latest reported plan is to cut 600 permanent jobs and 1 200 freelance posts.[51] Already the recipient of R3.2 billion in a direct bail-out from government and therefore unable to ask for more from the cash-strapped state, the SABC has argued that it has no option but to retrench because although it has to buy programme material to attract audiences its staff costs are disproportionate, with 40c out of every rand of revenue spent on staff costs and 28c on acquiring content.[52] According to the SABC's strategic plan, the Covid- 10 crisis had deeply reduced revenue and the parlous State finances would also affect both advertising revenue and TV licence revenue in future.[53]

In Zambia, too, the State media have been affected because though they are "anchored by the State" the state only bankrolls basic operational costs. Sometimes staffers go for several months without being paid at The Times of Zambia, and sometimes at Zambia National Broadcasting Corporation."[54]

Salary cuts

Newspapers around the region have resorted to salary cuts to save jobs. At the Namibian salary cuts were instituted, and waiver of benefits – one of which was the 13th cheque.[55] In South Africa, salary cuts, temporary layoffs, pension holidays and conversion of paid leave to salary were resorted to across the industry.[56] The Caxton group - which has major printing and packaging operations as well as publishing country-wide free-sheets and one major newspaper - instituted cuts to salaries and

wages across the group for a three-month period, together with employees taking their annual

46. SENS, "CAXTON & CTP Publishers and Printers Reviewed Provisional Results for the Year Ended 30 June 2020" (Stock Exchange News Service, September 21, 2020).
47. Simone Flueckiger, "African Publishers Adapting to Offset COVID-19 Challenges - World News Publishing Focus by WAN-IFRA," September 21, 2020, https://blog.wan-ifra.org/2020/09/21/african-publishers-adapting- to-offset-covid-19-challenges.
48. Titus, Zoom interview Covid-19 impact Zoe Titus.
49. Konopo, Botswana INK media.
50. Bekezela Phakathi, "Ndabeni-Abrahams Halts SABC Job Cuts over Lack of Staff Consultation," Business Live, August 26, 2020, https://www.businesslive.co.za/bd/national/2020-08-26-ndabeni-abrahams-halts-sabc-job- cuts-over-lack-of-staff-consultation/.
51. Staff Reporter, "EFF Condemns SABC Retrenchment Plans," SABC News - Breaking news, special reports, world, business, sport coverage of all South African current events. Africa's news leader. June 20, 2020, https://www.sabcnews.com/sabcnews/eff-condemns-sabc-retrenchment-plans/.
52. Thinus Ferreira, "TV with Thinus: SABC Now Spends Almost Double on Paying Staff than on Content - 40 Cents out of Every Rand Compared to 28; Says Its Revenue Is Already R1.5 Billion under Budget Because of Debilitating Impact of Covid-19 as Advertisers Withdraw Ad Spend.," TV with Thinus (blog), May 20, 2020, http://teeveetee.blogspot.com/2020/05/sabc-now-spends-almost-double-on-paying.html.
53. Rumney, "SANEF'S COVID 19 Impact on Journalism Report (Interim)," 20.
54. Mukela John, Managing partner, Makanday Centre for Investigative Journalism.
55. Titus, Zoom interview Covid-19 impact Zoe Titus.
56. Rumney, "SANEF'S COVID 19 Impact on Journalism Report (Interim)," 31.

leave, a freeze on annual pay increases and "flexible working hours, on a no work no pay basis, to match the reduced demand."

In Botswana the staff of the Guardian group with Mmegi had been on half salaries for a couple of months.[57] The Botswana Gazette told staff that from the end of August until the end of November salaries would be reduced by 70%.[58] Also, "the Botswana Media and Allied Workers Union (BOMAWU) has condemned some media houses for using the COVID-19 pandemic to cut salaries of employees without consultation" and to begin retrenching workers.[59]

The Lesotho Times announced staff salaries would be cut by 20% for two months.[60] At the start of Zimbabwe's hard lockdown in March, Alpha Media Holdings (AMH), publisher of NewsDay, the Zimbabwe Independent and The Standard, announced a 50% pay cut for all staff and some staffers were sent on leave.[61]

Global financial impact

A survey of a diverse sample of 1 406 English-language respondents involved in news production from all over the world found that 17% "'with knowledge of their news organizations' financial losses" reported that revenue had fallen by more than three-quarters since the start of the pandemic and 43% said revenue had dropped by more than half. Almost 90% reported job losses, salary cuts and/or outlet closures. Seven percent reported closure of print editions and 11% reduced print runs.[62]

Another major survey of more than 1 300 frontline journalists in 77 countries at the end of April by the International Federation of Journalists of Journalists found 65% of those surveyed replied "Yes" to the question, "Have your pay, job security and/or working conditions been negatively affected by the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic?" and that around 7% of those surveyed had lost their jobs; around 38% had lost income.[63]

Impact on individual journalists

The ICFJ survey results on the effect of the pandemic and how it has been covered on journalists themselves is worth quoting in full.

Our survey paints an unsettling picture of burnt-out journalists in the grip of a mental health crisis, who are increasingly living in fear of unemployment. These are journalists who are exposed to great risk by neglectful employers who have failed to provide essential safety equipment, while coming under attack from politicians and others seeking to chill critical reporting. Our data also points to significant gaps in support on offer to those covering the pandemic and seeking to hold governments to account for their responses to the crisis. These range from mental health support and protection from physical burnout, to urgent training and development needs, and help for employees trying to balance intense (often home- based) work with child care and home- schooling responsibilities. While there are some reasons for optimism as outlined below, unless these gaps in support are addressed, the

57. Konopo, Botswana INK media.
58. Rudolf Olsen, "Letter to Staff, Botswana Gazette MD," 2020.
59. BOMAWU, "Botswana Media and Allied Workers Union | Facebook," n.d, https://www.facebook.com/BOMAWU1/.
60. Chido Musodza, "SADC Governments Should Cushion Media against COVID-19 Threats," MISA Zimbabwe (blog), June 23, 2020, https://zimbabwe.misa.org/2020/06/23/sadc-govts-should-cushion-media-against- covid-19-threats/.
61. Musodza.
62. Julie Posetti, Emily Bell, and Pete Brown, "Journalism and the Pandemic - A Global Snapshot of Impacts" (ICFJ and the Tow Center for Digital Journalism, October 2020), https://www.icfj.org/sites/default/files/2020- 10/Journalism%20and%20the%20Pandemic%20Project%20Report%201%202020_FINAL.pdf.
63. IFJ, "Exposed: The Crisis Facing Journalism in the Face of Covid-19 / IFJ," International Federation of Journalists, April 30, 2020, https://www.ifj.org/media-centre/news/detail/category/press- releases/article/exposed-the-crisis-facing-journalism-in-the-face-of-covid-19.html.

impacts on journalists - mentally, physically, professionally and socially - are likely to worsen as the pandemic wears on.[64]

According to ARISA, the huge burden of the Covid-19 story has imposed increased workloads leading to exhaustion and trauma.[65]

PPE, internet access and equipment

An IFJ survey of more than 1300 frontline journalists in 77 countries found, "More than a quarter lack essential equipment to enable them to work safely from home, while one in four lack any protective equipment to work in the field." An ICFJ survey noted many employers failed to supply reporters with protective equipment, and 30% said "field reporters had not been supplied with a single piece of safety equipment."[66]

An IFJ survey cited above found a quarter of the respondents lacked personal protective equipment (PPE) and more than a quarter lacked equipment to work from home.[67] In the region, these constraints on journalism activity would have varied greatly.

Covering the Covid-19 crisis while maintaining social distance and ensuring personal safety while being productive brought new challenges for journalists and their organisations. News organisations would have had to buy laptops for journalists to work from home and provide cellphone data for journalists to communicate digitally. The costliness of data in the region is uneven, with eSwatini and Zimbabwe topping the list, according to policy and regulation think tank Research ICT Africa's 1GB Basket statistics.[68]

Research by Internews found that the employers of radio and TV journalists did not have the budget to buy equipment such as parabolic microphones for safe social distancing during interviews.

Journalists also wanted cell phone data form their organisations.[69]

"There were countries where there was no protective clothing in the newsrooms so Malawi I think and Zimbabwe with some journalists even having reported to us that they were having to access isolation centres without any form of protection because their media houses couldn't afford it. And then the amount of money the media houses were providing for data support, for transportation, for research for stories on the internet is a pittance compared to what the journalists have to use, and that was resulting in some poorly researched stories."[70] At the beginning of May, the Swedish embassy in Zimbabwe donated $25 000 of PPE and hand sanitizer to protect journalists from Covid-19 infection in the course of their duties.[71]

64. Posetti, Bell, and Brown, "Journalism and the Pandemic - A Global Snapshot of Impacts."
65. {Citation}
66. Posetti, Bell, and Brown, "Journalism and the Pandemic - A Global Snapshot of Impacts," 12.
67. IFJ, "Exposed."
68. Paula Gilbert, "The Most Expensive Data Prices in Africa," Connecting Africa, December 18, 2019, http://www.connectingafrica.com/author.asp?section_id=761&doc_id=756372.
69. Mawarire, Internews Effect of Covid-19 on news media
70. Mawarire
71.Herald Reporter, "Journalists Get Protective Clothing," The Herald, May 5, 2020, https://www.herald.co.zw/journalists-get-protective-clothing/.

Measurement

Print

Actual published freely available data is scarce. Nonetheless, the effect of the Covid-19 pandemic on Print is discernable in figures provided by South Africa's Audit Bureau of Circulation (ABC) on newspapers in the region that submit circulation figures for auditing. Most South African newspapers submit figures to the ABC – so it was a shock when not a single daily or weekly newspaper, along with several notable magazine titles, such as the Financial Mail, Noseweek and Popular Mechanics, submitted any figures for the second quarter, which included a particularly bleak April thanks to the strict lockdown. The ABC allowed publishers to do this "… if their circulation has been materially impacted by the crisis."[72]

Table 1 shows the figures for daily newspapers outside South Africa in the second quarter of 2020, designated Q2, covering the three months April, May and June, when lockdowns were in generally in effect, and the percentage change compared to the first quarter when lockdowns were not in full force if at all, and compared to the second quarter of 2019, long before the Covid-19 pandemic.

The table shows losses for almost every newspaper except for Bukedde, both compared to the first quarter of the year and compared to the previous comparable period, the second quarter of 2019. Table two shows even big losses for Botswana weekly newspapers and the Lesotho Times..Table 2:

72. Herman Manson, "#CircData: ABC Q2 2020 Plagued by Non-Submissions •," MarkLives.Com (blog), August 13, 2020, https://www.marklives.com/2020/08/circdata-abc-q2-2020-plagued-by-non-submissions/.

Daily newspapers in the region

Publication	Country	Circulation Q2 2020	Percentage change Q2 2020 vs Q1 2020	Percentage change Q2 2020 vs Q2 2019
Bukedde	Uganda	41 141	22,95%	15,21
Daily Monitor	Uganda	No Submission	n/a	n/a
Daily Nation	Kenya	69 379	-31,44%	-32,43%
The Namibian	Namibia	20 922	-22,55%	-33,71%
New Vision	Uganda	17 331	-26,43%	-29,47%
Taifa Leo	Kenya	6 768	-39,31%	-38,80%
Times of Swaziland	Swaziland	17 985	-9,53%	-11,61%
Zambia Daily Mail	Zambia	5 215	-13,67%	-16,33%

Source: Audit Bureau of Circulations of South Africa

Table 3: Weekly newspapers in the region

Weekly Newspapers				
Publication	**Country**	**Circulation Q2 2020**	**Percentage change Q2 2020 vs Q1 2020**	**Percentage change Q2 2020 vs Q2 2019**
The Botswana Gazette	Botswana	No Submission	n/a	n/a
Lesotho Times	Lesotho	5 611	-18,87%	-25,28%
The Mmegi Reporter	Botswana	5 524	No submission	-51,61%
The Monitor (Formerly Mmegi Monitor)	Botswana	4 014	No submission	-53,05%
The Voice	Botswana	8 435	-35,28%	-41,87%

Source: Audit Bureau of Circulations of South Africa

Another source of information about the financial performance of news media is a listing on a stock exchange. In South Africa, the only print group that remains listed on the JSE is Caxton, which publishes freesheets around the country and regional newspaper The Citizen. Caxton's financial year-end was June, so it encompassed the lockdown period in South Africa. Caxton's publishing, printing and distribution business figure, after depreciation and amortisation, was down around R100-million or 186% compared to the previous financial year. Its packaging business was also hit.

Revenues declined by R748.5 million or 11.8% to R5 572.4 million which has had a significant impact on profits. This decline can be attributed to the impact of the lockdown in the 4th quarter, given that from a turnover point of view, the Group was trading at similar levels to the prior year, pre-lockdown. The lockdown significantly impacted all our businesses, with the major impacts being felt in our newspaper business where advertising revenues dried up, the commercial printing operations were impacted by no publication or advertising insert printing work and the packaging divisions that service the fast food, cigarette and alcohol markets were also severely affected by the bans on trade in these sectors.[73]

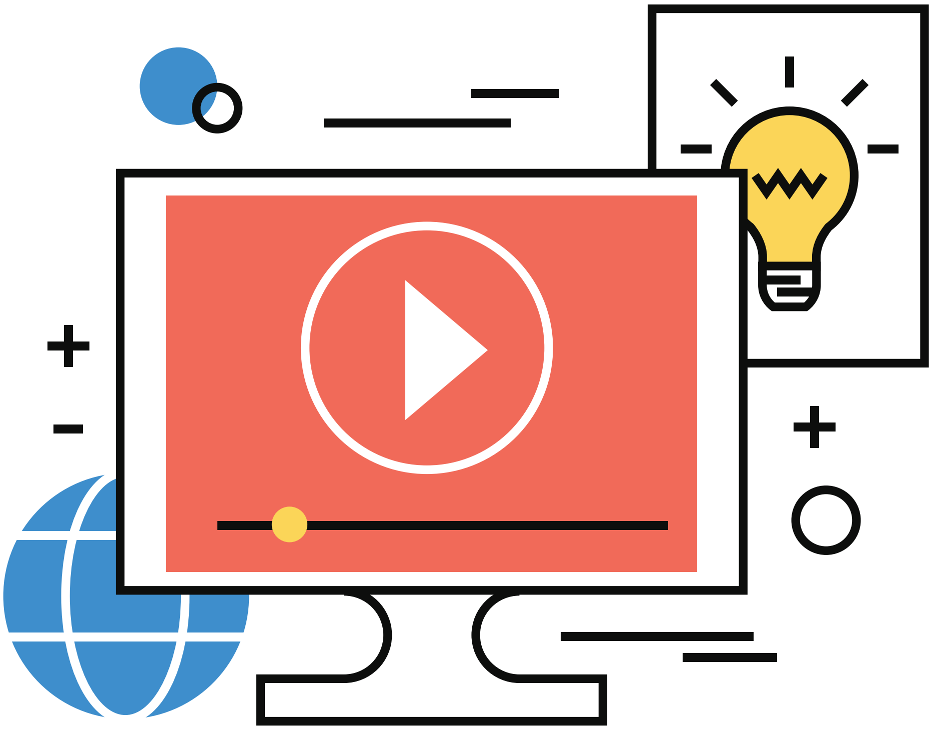
Two of the big Print media companies, Arena Holdings and Independent Media, are unlisted and under no obligation to divulge company information. The remaining media company, the biggest in the country, Media24, a subsidiary of JSE-listed SA-based multinational Naspers, does publish financial statements and annual reports

Media24 also has a year end on March 31, five days after the extended, strict South African lockdown came into effect and which was to last the whole of April. It boasted an operating loss of around R222- million for the year ended 2020, almost 40% less than the loss for the previous year, but a loss nonetheless – and this was before the punishing lockdown.

ZimPapers' half-year results announcement to end-June 2020 tells of the company migrating some newspapers online "to conserve imported newsprint in the face of uncertainty in the movement of this critical raw material across the borders." Another way of looking at this is that the company is conserving the brands and avoiding the embarrassment of shutting titles. The company seems to indicate these are now permanently online, but nothing stops the return to a print edition, unlike simply shutting down the titles. Moving titles online as a way of retaining some part of the business has been common in the region. The company's results (examined in the accompanying case study) were dragged down by the newspaper division which had an operating loss of around ZWL$11 million, while its revenue comprised 58% of total revenue. In other words, the biggest earner of revenue lost money, and company profits were saved mainly by the commercial printing division.

73. SENS, "CAXTON & CTP Publishers and Printers Reviewed Provisional Results for the Year Ended 30 June 2020."

Broadcasting



Private commercial radio

The radio sector in South Africa, as represented by listed private sector radio company AME, appears also to have encountered adverse business conditions in the year to end-March, though less than the print sector. AME reported, "Low business confidence and challenging trading conditions placed further strain on our resources." Overall, revenue for the financial year was flat and operating profit was down by 8% year-on-year, after adjusting for an unusual gain in the previous year. For its key radio station, Algoa FM, AME stated "Poor trading conditions since May 2019 combined with the cancellation of advertising from March 2020, due to the COVID-19 virus, resulted in lower than anticipated profitability for the year."

Most of the private commercial radio sector is unlisted, and financial information is closely guarded. Major radio group and web news producer Primedia, as noted above, when announcing the start of retrenchments at the group reportedly blamed a "challenging economic environment in South Africa,

rapid technological change and new entrants in the media sector," aggravated by the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdown.[74]

Yet – and this is a common paradox of media during the Covid-19 crisis – demand for some media shot up.

74. Reporter, "Primedia Group Starts Retrenchment Process."

A survey of 20 commercial South African radio stations during the first six weeks of the lockdown found that listenership was up 36% during the lockdown.[75] And the radio sector demonstrated social responsibility by using its power to inform the public about the pandemic. The South African commercial radio stations broadcast around 73 000 Public Service Announcements during the lockdown "in all 9 provinces in 7 of South Africa's official languages."[76]

Television

South Africa's listed AME is small, owning a few radio stations, In TV, eMedia Holdings does own the only real competition to the TV service of the public broadcaster, the free-to-air channel E-TV. The biggest media company listed on the JSE is Multichoice, but its focus as a satellite broadcaster is on entertainment rather than news, though it does carry news channels.

The results that are available show some of the damage wrought by the advertising famine during the Covid-19 crisis first stage. For instance, in its May 29 statement of results for the year ended March 31, eMedia Holdings reported an adjusted profit of around R236-million, almost double the figure for the previous year - but needed to account for an around R2-billion "impairment of goodwill" from the effects of the pandemic. "This negative impact which will be felt in the first half of the 2021 financial year, given the continued lockdown and slow restart to economic activity, has been factored into the results being published presently." What eMedia Holdings is looking at is advertising losses in "some key industries such as fast foods, alcohol and the motor industry" and "the negative impact on the exchange rate" which presumably will make buying overseas content for its channels more expensive.

The South African public broadcaster shouldered its responsibility as the dominant source of news for many citizens by interrupting its schedules – with concomitant decline in ad revenue – to air presidential announcements on the Covid-19 crisis and regulations in terms of the state of emergency to deal with it.

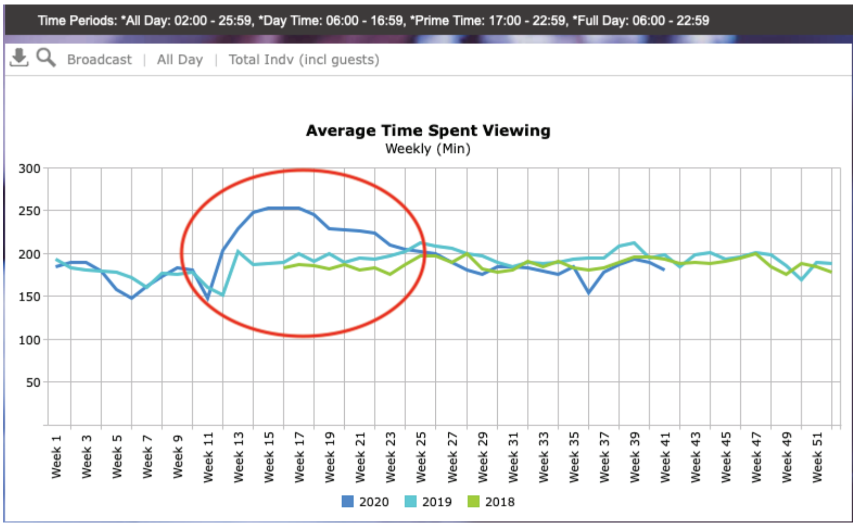
TV viewing like radio listenership was up. A comparison of viewing of the two free-to-air stations, private commercial e.tv with one channel and State-owned SABC with three, a week before the national disaster declaration and a week after when people started to work from home showed a big increase. Overall average weekly ratings of SABC and e.tv, all adults 15+, was up around 28%.[77] News viewing particularly rose with the two biggest news programmes, the Xhosa nightly news bulletin (up60%) and Zulu news bulletin (up 40%) soaring.[78] The increase in audience for the two news bulletins was stellar though less impressive when March as a whole is compared to February. The Xhosa news bulleting rose 32% and the Zulu news bulletin rose 34%.[79]

The rise in TV viewing around the lockdown period and subsequent levelling off can be seen in Figure x, drawn from figures from AGB Nielsen Media Research (Pty) Ltd via the Broadcast Research Council of South Africa. The graph shows a 40% increase in viewing time from week 10 to week 15, more or less coinciding with

75. NAB, "Rising to the Contagion - South Africa's Commercial Radio Sector Response to the Covid-19 Pandemic" (National Association of Broadcasters, July 2020), https://www.nab.org.za/uploads/files/NAB_CRC_COVID- 19_Report Rising_to_the_Contagion.pdf.
76. NAB.
77Rumney, "SANEF'S COVID 19 Impact on Journalism Report (Interim)."
78Rumney, 15.
79Thinus Ferreira, "TV RATINGS. The Coronavirus Lockdown in South Africa Leads to a Record TV Ratings Surge in March 2020." Blog, TV with Thinus (blog), April 9, 2020, http://teeveetee.blogspot.com/2020/04/tv-ratings- coronavirus-lockdown-in.html.

March and then high viewership continuing through April before starting a gradual decline in May back to levels of previous years.

Figure 1: Covid-19 Television Viewing Dashboard, South Africa



[Source: AGB Nielsen Media Research (Pty) Ltd]

Community media

Community media was hard hit, with an organization representing the community radio sector pleading in June for R25-million in relief for the claimed 200 community radio stations in South Africa.[80]However, in May, the Media Development and Diversity Agency, already announced a further R10-million in Covid-19 relief funds for community radio stations and community and small

commercial publishers, after a first phase in March and April that saw an initial R10-million disbursed in R45 000 packages to "116 community broadcasters and 115 community and SCM publications".[81]

Community radio – potentially or actually important to media diversity – in South Africa appears to rely largely on advertising,[82] even though the stations are structured as Non-Profit Organisations based mostly in geographic communities which should, in richer countries, contribute to the running of the stations – as corporations do in the U.S. for the local non-profit public radio stations that represent public broadcasting. Community radio stations

in South Africa have been categorized as mostly survivalist and best seen as "struggling small, medium

80Glenda Nevill, "Community Radio Calls for COVID-19 Relief," The Media Online (blog), June 25, 2020, http://themediaonline.co.za/2020/06/community-radio-calls-for-covid-19-relief/.
81Cheryl Langbridge, "MEDIA STATEMENT MDDA" (Media Development and Diversity Agency, May 25, 2020).

82South Africa's three-tier broadcasting system distinguishes between community radio, the State-owned SABC's radio stations and the commercial radio sector, and license conditions require non-profit status, but at least some community stations are clearly profitable.

and micro enterprises".[83] This description would encompass community media in other African countries too. A study of selected radio stations in Uganda and Zambia, termed "proximity" stations, but which fall into the broad category of community stations, found, "Almost all proximity radios face challenges of staff quality, high turnover, difficulties attracting advertising and sponsorship, and difficulties paying their personnel."[84] A separate report by the researchers on the impact of Covid-19 on the eight radio stations in Uganda and Zambia surveyed found resilience, though sources of ad revenue such as hotels, breweries or seed companies, had come under pressure. Promises of government aid had not materialized in Uganda, but some had been forthcoming in Zambia. Only one of the stations, Mama FM, was sustained by donor aid.[85]

83. Frans Krüger, "SA's Rich Bag of Big, Small and Eclectic Community Radio Stations - Wits University," Wits University, February 16, 2020, http://www.wits.ac.za/news/latest-news/opinion/2020/2020-02/sas-rich-bag- of-big-small-and-eclectic-community-radio-stations.html.
84. Mary Myers and Nicola Harford, "Local Radio Stations in Africa: Sustainability or Pragmatic Viability?" (Center for International Media Assistance (CIMA), June 2020)
85.Mary Myers, Nicola Harford, and Martin Ssemakula, "Local Radio Stations in Africa Prove Resilient amid Covid-19,"Center for International Media Assistance (blog), May 19, 2020, https://www.cima.ned.org/blog/local-radio-stations-in-africa-prove-resilient-amid-covid-19/.

Covid 19 and Media Freedom

Assaults, harassment, detentions

IFEX stated in mid-April that since the declaration of states of emergency or states of disaster in Africa reports of threats, intimidation and assaults have surged. On the International Press Institute Tracker, Zimbabwe recorded the highest number in Africa, 12 incidents since the start of the lockdown.

South African journalists were declared to be performing essential services and therefore allowed to move freely during the lockdown. Yet Johannesburg freelancer Yeshiel Panchia was harassed on the way back from covering a local story by a policewoman who disputed his essential worker status.[86]

On the first day of South Africa's Covid-19 lockdown police fired a rubber bullet, which luckily missed, at reporter Azarrah Karrim while she was recording with her camera. She had identified herself as media. On the same day police stopped photographer Tacey Adam filming, despite her protestations.[87] South African police reportedly assaulted and charged journalist Paul Nthoba after he photographed them during a COVID-19 lockdown.

Writer and columnist, Ismail Lagardien had his jaw broken in October by a brick thrown through the window of his car while covering a violent protest in Kleinmond east of Cape Town about the arrest of people on abalone poaching

86. Courtney Radsch, "Freelance Journalists Risk Lives and Livelihoods amid COVID-19 Pandemic," Committee to Protect Journalists (blog), April 23, 2020, https://cpj.org/2020/04/freelance-journalists-risk-lives-and- livelihoods-a/.
87. Jonathan Rozen, "OPINIONISTA: We Need Journalists to Be Our Window on a Wider World, Especially during Lockdown," Daily Maverick, April 2, 2020, https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/ opinionista/2020-04-03-we-need- journalists-to-be-our-window-on-a-wider-world-especially-during-lockdown/.

charges. It is unknown if Lagardien was targeted because he was operating as a journalist, but SANEF has expressed concern about a number of assaults on, and robberies of equipment from, journalists, this year, noting media professionals were often victims of opportunistic criminals, militia and security personnel.[88] Sometimes journalists find themselves in the figurative crossfire between authorities and citizens. Their professional appearance in public as they attempt to interview or merely find out what is happening make journalists vulnerable. In July rocks were thrown at the car and head of News24 journalist Jenni Evans covering protests in Khayelitsha in Cape Town. She was injured and her phone was stolen.[89] A Cape Town freelance journalist, Jacques Marais, described in great detail how police threatened, abused and prevented him covering police heavy-handed treatment of citizens in a lockdown story in Masiphumelele Township.[90]

Abuse of law

Angela Quintal, the CPJ's Africa Program Coordinator noted in May: "The Covid-19 pandemic has given many governments across Africa the cover of a legitimate global health crisis to try to opportunistically control the press and the public's right to know."

At the end of May, Reporters without Borders (known as RSF) observed:

Since launching Tracker-19, which logs press freedom violations linked to the Covid-19 epidemic, RSF has registered more than 30 arbitrary arrests of journalists in sub-Saharan Africa. Six of them have been in Zimbabwe, which is proving to be one of the most hostile environments, to the point that the High Court issued an order on 20 April forbidding police to harass or detain journalist in the course of their work. Two Zimbabwean journalists were arrested and detained in May, ostensibly for breaking Covid-19 lockdown rules by entering a hospital to interview members of the opposition "who were being treated for injuries sustained after being abducted and tortured by suspected security agents.[91]

The arrest and detention of journalist Hopewell Chin'ono after he revealed Covid-19 procurement fraud within the Health Ministry hit the headlines outside the country, drawing unfavorable attention to the administration of President Emmerson Mnangagwa. As it happens, Chin'ono sees his falling out of favour with the government caused by an attempt to reform State-controlled Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation – something the government clearly opposed – rather than the Covid-19 revelations as such.[92] Chin'ono was arrested and his bail hearing delayed but others

88. SANEF, "SANEF Condemns Attack on Writer & Columnist Ismail Lagardien in Kleinmond's Abalone Protest » SANEF | Protecting Media Freedom," SANEF | Protecting Media Freedom (blog), October 7, 2020, https://sanef.org.za/sanef-condemns-attack-on-writer-columnist-ismail-lagardien-in-kleinmonds-abalone- protest/.
89. Coalition for Women in Journalism, "South Africa: News24 Reporter Jenni Evans Attacked on Ground. Protests in and around Cape Town," The Coalition for Women in Journalism, July 23, 2020, https://womeninjournalism.org/cfwij-press-statements/south-africa-news24-reporter-jenni-evans-attacked- on-ground-protests-in-and-around-cape-town-should-not-lead-to-violence-towards-journalists.
90. SANEF, "SANEF AND SAFREA CALL ON LAW ENFORCEMENT MEMBERS (SAPS, METRO POLICE AND ARMY) TO STOP THEIR HOSTILITY AND HARASSMENT OF JOURNALISTS » SANEF | Protecting Media Freedom," SANEF | Protecting Media Freedom (blog), April 10, 2020, https://sanef.org.za/sanef-and-safrea-call-on-law- enforcement-members-saps-metro-police-and-army-to-stop-their-hostility-and-harassment-of-journalists/.
91. Columbus Mavhunga, "Zimbabwe Detains 2 Journalists for Breaking COVID Lockdown Rules | Voice of America - English," Voice of America, May 23, 2020, https://www.voanews.com/africa/zimbabwe-detains-2- journalists-breaking-covid-lockdown-rules.
92. Ranga Mberi, "The Symbol of a Disillusioned Zimbabwe -Journalist Hopewell Chin'ono Backed President Emmerson Mnangagwa When He Succeeded Robert Mugabe. Now He's in Jail." The Continent, August 8, 2020, 17.

have had worse treatment. It is argued that the abduction and torture of 22-year-old journalism student Tawanda Muchehiwa and others is part of a pattern of human rights abuse that has reared its head in the country[93] and a clampdown on freedom of expression reminiscent of or worse than the rule of President Robert Mugabe.[94] The assaults and arrests in South Africa have also been seen as representing a deeper problem of an uncaring and corrupt government.[95]

Outside of Zimbabwe and South Africa, other countries which are the focus of this research seem not to have experienced the same level of harassment of journalists during the Covid-19 lockdowns – or they have not been documented.

Remarkable was that in Zambia the government cancelled the license of private television network Prime TV "ostensibly over the station's refusal to carry government ads on COVID-19 free of charge" though the accusation is that the real reason was the station's critical stance towards the government and perceived sympathetic attitude to the opposition.[96]

Right at the start of the state of disaster in South Africa, the CPJ expressed concern about the South African government's gazetting of regulations that criminalise disinformation about the pandemic, although they "allow for prosecution only of malicious falsehoods about COVID-19". The CPJ's Quintal saw the regulations as a bad precedent for other countries, setting back South Africa's pro-press freedom laws.[97] The regulations were no idle threat, and in April a man was arrested and charged for circulating "a misleading video clip on COVID-19 test kits" in terms of the new regulations.[98]

The CPJ pointed to the joint statement by the UN Special Rapporteur for the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression David Kaye, and his counterparts in the Americas and Europe. The statement on combating false Covid information, in the carefully worded and diplomatic language of multinational bodies, condemned criminalisation of dis- and misinformation and pleaded instead of governments rather providing reliable information.[99]

Would this injunction were heeded. Illustrating how outlying "fake news" laws can be misused, the Zimbabwe government charged Lovemore Zvokusekwa at the end of April for circulating a letter by President Mnangagwa falsely purporting, according to the president, to extend the lockdown. The charge was for "'Publishing or communicating false statements prejudicial to the state as defined in section 31 (a) (i) of the Criminal law (Codification and reform) act Chapter 9:23'" and the crime attracted a 20-year jail sentence. As it happened the letter turned out to be true. Zvokusekwa was detained for

93. Kudzai Mashininga, "The Brutal Abduction That Was Caught on Camera," The Continent, September 12, 2020.
94. Fidelis Mbah, "Zimbabwe Activists Decry 'Unprecedented Clampdown' after Arrests," Al Jazeera, August 8, 2020, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/8/8/zimbabwe-activists-decry-unprecedented-clampdown- after-arrests.
95. Jacques Marais, "Covid-19 Personal Experience: SANDF and Police's Violent Easter Gift to Masiphumelele," Daily Maverick, April 10, 2020, https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2020-04-10-sandf-and-polices-violent- easter-gift-to-masiphumelele/.
96Ilkka, "Growing Press Freedom Violations in Africa amid COVID-19."
97. CPJ, "South Africa Enacts Regulations Criminalizing 'Disinformation' on Coronavirus Outbreak," Committee to Protect Journalists (blog), March 19, 2020, https://cpj.org/2020/03/south-africa-enacts-regulations- criminalizing-disi/.
98. Phumla Williams, "Government Welcomes Arrest of Suspect Who Peddled Fake News on Coronavirus COVID-19 Test Kits | South African Government," South African Government, April 7, 2020, https://www.gov.za/speeches/government-welcomes-arrest-suspect-who-peddled-fake-news-coronavirus- covid-19-test-kits-7.
99. CPJ, "South Africa Enacts Regulations Criminalizing 'Disinformation' on Coronavirus Outbreak."

a month.[100]It must be noted that the Zimbabwean government has not relied solely on Covid-19 misinformation to suppress freedom of expression. According to lawyers, around 60 people have been charged with insulting the president since Mnangagwa took power after the 2017 coup.[101]Among recent victims was a freelance journalist, Godfrey Mtimba, allegedly for "reporting on a vehicle chase in which police officers were pursuing opposition youth leaders."[102]

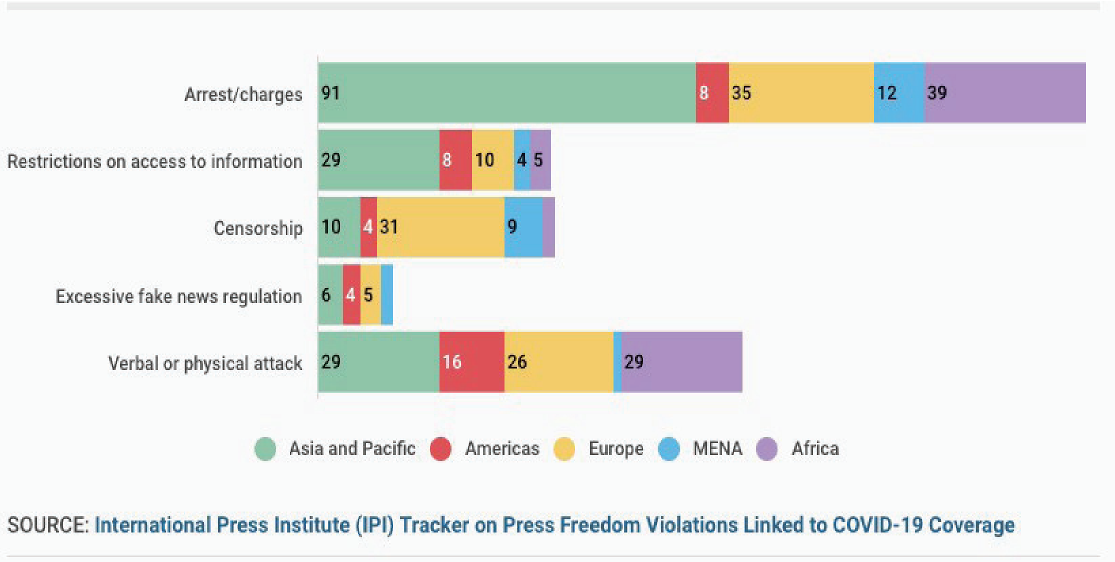
The arrests of journalists and the violence they have been subjected to must be put into context. First, in Africa, the hostility towards journalists and independent journalism can be seen against a background of repression of political protest and resistance to accountability. In South Africa, greater violence has been visited on members of the public than journalists, who are at least afforded some protection by publicity they can count on and solidarity among media professionals. This includes killing of a teenager whose Downs syndrome impeded his ability to communicate with police, an incident that caused widespread outrage and was seen as highlighting police brutality and disregard for the law and the basic human rights.[103]

Second, attacks on and arrests of journalists have become more common globally as populist politicians riding the wave of authoritarianism use the media as a handy target for mobilisation. In the US, for example, where denigration of the media has characterised the presidency, more than 300 incidents of arrest, assault, often by police, and damage to journalists' equipment were recorded during the unrest surrounding the Black Lives Matter protest.[104] Even in a Western country like the Netherlands, a beacon of tolerance, attacks on journalists have been on the rise.[105]

It is notable that Africa is by no means the worst offender in the International Press Institute Tracker on Press Freedom Violations Linked to COVID-19 Coverage (Figure 2).

100. Thandekile Moyo, "Zimbabwe (in) Ruins: Censorship in Zimbabwe: When Fake News Is True and 'Official' News Is Fake," Daily Maverick, April 28, 2020, https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2020-04-28- censorship-in-zimbabwe-when-fake-news-is-true-and-official-news-is-fake/.
101. Farai Mutsaka, "Zimbabwe Government Abuses Critics, Allege Rights Groups," Washington Post, September 15, 2020, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/africa/zimbabwe-government-abuses-critics-allege-rights- groups/2020/09/15/4067bde6-f72a-11ea-85f7-5941188a98cd_story.html.
102. CPJ, "South Africa Enacts Regulations Criminalizing 'Disinformation' on Coronavirus Outbreak."
103. Ziyanda Stuurman, "Police Brutality in South Africa Exposed Once Again," The Mail & Guardian (blog), August 28, 2020, https:/mg.co.za/opinion/2020-08-28-police-brutality-in-south-africa-exposed-once-again/.
104. David Smith, "'Denigrated and Discredited': How American Journalists Became Targets during Protests," the Guardian, June 8, 2020, http://www.theguardian.com/media/2020/jun/08/us-journalists-media-protests- donald-trump.
105. Jon Henley, "Dutch State Broadcaster Pulls Logo from Vans after Attacks," the Guardian, October 16, 2020, http://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/oct/16/dutch-state-broadcaster-nos-pulls-logo-vans-attacks.

Figure 2: COVID-19: Number of Media Freedom Violations by Region



In a new era of post-colonial awareness, we should guard against Afro-pessimism and unconscious bias about developments in the region. A passionate argument has been put forward that developing rather than developed countries have exceeded expectations in handling the Coronavirus itself.[106] Given the enormous economic and social challenges that news organisations in the region face at the best of times their resilience during this extraordinary upset of economies and societies caused by the pandemic should be recognised.

106. Indi Samarajiva, "The Overwhelming Racism of COVID Coverage," Medium (blog), September 27, 2020, https://medium.com/indica/the-overwhelming-racism-of-covid-coverage-78e37e4ce6e8.

Innovation in the face of adversity

Resilience and renewal

Most studies of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the news media paint a bleak picture. Yet an examination of news media in the region shows surprising resilience and innovation. Several new publications have been launched and existing publications have been forced, perhaps belatedly, to adjust rapidly to a new environment. Closure of news outlets and consolidation through mergers and acquisitions may occur. Yet these are not necessarily to the detriment of media pluralism and diversity, since the disappearance of news outlets sometimes leaves the media ecosystem better off. The closure of supposedly independent The New Age newspaper and the ANN7 channel, formerly owned by the key architects of State capture corruption, the Gupta family, come to mind.[107]

Some State-owned media in the region could be replaced by effective PR departments.

The crisis has also compelled companies involved in news to restructure operations. In South Africa, For example, Caxton & CTP closed at the same time as shutting its magazine publishing and distribution divisions, its CD and DVD replication plant. Media24, as already noted, drastically reduced the print distribution of its tabloid Sun newspaper.

New products

Launching a new news product during a crisis may seem strange, but that is exactly what has happened in Zimbabwe and South Africa. In Zimbabwe, Newshawks launched in October, “a new multichannel investigative journalism

107. Anton Harber, “The New Age Experiment: Government’s Attempt to Control the Media Has Done Industry No Favours,” The Media Online (blog), July 9, 2018, //themediaonline.co.za/2018/07/the-new-age-experiment- governments-attempt-to-control-the-media-has-done-industry-no-favours/.

project (thenewshawks.com)". The board of new outlet comprises Zimbabweans with a record of standing up for press freedom and its articulation of its principles is impressive, encompassing clearly stated ideas of professionalism and ethics.[108] The articles published at launch are equally impressive in, for instance, multi-sourcing and tackling hard subjects such as the accuracy Zimbabwe's inflation rate. On inflation, Newshawks, for example has published an opinion piece that finds Zimbabwe is not suffering hyper-inflation, a surprising idea that might be dismissed coming from a slavishly pro-government news organisation.[109] What the crisis appears to have achieved here is to make the founders of this publication think hard about what exactly journalism is supposed to achieve and how it is supposed to do so.[110]

Another notable entrant in the Zimbabwean space is 263 Chat, which typifies a disruptive online startup, and is now around eight years old. Its main innovation is to have an e-paper circulated on WhatsApp. The founder, Nigel Mugamo, explains the e-paper was launched "three years ago in November before the coup-not-coup" because many younger people in Zimbabwe have limited access to data, and for them, "WhatsApp is actually the internet". He claims the e-paper is circulated for free to more than 43 000 subscribers, which he says is double the circulation of the four major publications

in Zimbabwe. The organisation has plans for an SMS news service, for which it will charge, but for now relies on advertising, both on its website and e-paper, and a range of multimedia services. Mugamo says the ambition of the newspaper is telling the truth in a "highly polarized, highly politicized environment". He adds, "We're trying to amplify different voices from different communities".[111]

The WhatsApp circulation of another innovative product, The Continent, published in partnership with South Africa's independent Mail & Guardian, was sparked by 263 Chat's e-paper. The Continent publishes articles about Africa, generally written by journalists in those countries. The launch issue on 18 April 2020 stated: "We cannot deliver a physical newspaper to you, which is why we have chosen this unusual format – so we can reach you instantly, wherever you may be confined. The Continent is designed to be read on smartphones and shared on social media platforms like WhatsApp and Facebook."[112] The newspaper won the 2020 World Association of News Publishers (WAN-IFRA) Best News Website or Mobile Service award. The Judges noted: "Placing the Continent on WhatsApp represents the bold thinking which these desperate media times call for - it not only exploits an existing digital advantage but also responds to a peculiarly African opportunity, i.e. the widespread use of WhatsApp among communities sharing information under severe government restriction. For a cross-border product, there couldn't have been a more suitable platform."[113] The Continent, being an e-paper edition created from scratch rather than an exact reproduction of the newspaper pages in a format such as PDF or e-book which can be distributed

108. "The NewsHawks Have Landed," accessed October 17, 2020, https://thenewshawks.com/the-newshawks- have-landed/.
109. Mpofu, "Hanke Queries Zim Inflation Statistics," October 16, 2020, https://thenewshawks.com/hanke- queries-zim-inflation-statistics/.
110. "The NewsHawks Have Landed."
111. Media Sustainability in Eastern and Southern Africa Webinar.
112"Welcome to the Continent," The Continent, April 18, 2020.
113. Nick Tjaardstra, "Winners Announced for the African Digital Media Awards 2020," World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers, September 8, 2020, https://www.wan-ifra.org/press- releases/2020/09/08/winners-announced-for-the-african-digital-media-awards-2020.

online, has a simplified form with much shorter articles and an unfussy, unambitious layout (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Example of layout of The Continent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Feature

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Glitter gluttons: Illegal gold-mining goes all the way to to the top. (Photo: Stephen Tsorotsi)

Inside Zimbabwe's illicit gold trade

The precious metal is one of the country's most valuable natural resources. But only a small, politically-connected cabal benefits.

Stephen Tsoroti and Ankita Anand

Nestled between scenic mountains, Mazowe, 38km north of Harare, is a modest, nondescript town. Gold has been dug from the surrounding areas for more than a century, with activity rising and falling along with the gold price.

In 2018, the area was besieged by more than 100,000 artisanal miners from all over the country, all scraping the earth for any sign of the precious metal.

It is hard, difficult work. Felix Mauto, 25, is from Madziva, a small town northeast of Mazowe.

"We heard about the gold rush and came here with my brother and two friends," he says. "We have been working in the tunnels at Jumbo Mine shafts at night. In order to get into the shafts, we pay the police a fee of US$20, and another $20 when we get out of the mine collieries. Sometimes our ancestors smile on us and

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we get the ore that gives good money. It's hard work in the shafts, a lot happens there, but what else can we do? We need money; there are no jobs back home."

On a good day, Mauto could make up to US$120. But the big money goes elsewhere – all the way to the top.

A murky business

Details about how the gold trade in Zimbabwe works, and who profits, are scarce. Every now and then, however, legal proceedings shed some light on a murky world that implicates some of the country's most senior officials.

In 2003, for example, current president Emmerson Mnangagwa – he was the speaker of Parliament at the time – was accused of receiving eight million Zimbabwean dollars from an illegal gold miner.

The allegations emerged during the prosecution in the high court of Mark Mathew Burden, who was accused of trading in gold without a licence.

That was nearly two decades ago, but a detective with the Zimbabwe Republic Police says not much has changed over the years.

He has asked us not to publish his name, but says he used to be stationed at the Mines and Mineral Marketing headquarters in the Msasa Industrial Area and Harare International Airport.

"The illicit dealings have been happening over the years," he says. "The actors are 'big people' who are 'untouchable'."

He claims the gold-smuggling cartels include politicians at the highest levels in the government: "At airports, you can receive a phone call from these big people ordering you not to search their bags when they come through. Fail to conform, you are either transferred or [framed] for smuggling out contra."

This account is echoed by none other than Zimbabwe's prosecutor-general, Kumbirai Hodzi.

Much to the displeasure of the ruling

Worth its weight: An artisinal gold miner loads up a grinding, separating and sorting machine. (Photo: Bloomberg)

The e-paper is a high-tech product and can have varying degrees of skeuomorphism. At the other end of the tech spectrum is the print newspaper or magazine, a product of the industrial age involving capital-intensive equipment in a manufacturing and distribution operation. The common wisdom is that the migration online of newspapers is inevitable. Hence the news that South Africa's trailblazing, digital-only Daily Maverick news platform was to launch a weekly print edition, Daily Maverick 168 (the number of hours in the week), was met with some amazement.114The Daily Maverick, born in 2009, has partnered with retail chain Pick n Pay to distribute the magazine, with a cover price of R20.00 but freely available to shoppers with loyalty cards of the chain, on Saturday mornings. Daily Maverick 168 officially launched on Saturday September 26.115

Publisher and CEO Styli Charalambous says the first lesson in the organisation's success was that overcoming a sense of victimhood was important in realising that innovation and experimentation was the only way for the organization to succeed, but they "lacked the methodology and the concepts

114. T. M. O. Reporter, "Daily Maverick 168: Renowned Digital Publisher to Launch Print Title," The Media Online (blog), August 6, 2020, http://themediaonline.co.za/2020/08/daily-maverick-168-renowned-digital-publisher- to-launch-print-title/.
115. Daily Maverick, "Editorial: The Next Generation: Daily Maverick 168," Daily Maverick, September 25, 2020, https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2020-09-25-the-next-generation-daily-maverick-168/.

behind product design thinking and launching new products in a much more structured way that was going to de-risk and make them more successful, give them a greater chance of success at least."

Realising that the organisation needed a clearer vision of revenue sources, they formulated the "326 formation" of revenue. This represents three main revenue streams, philanthropy, commercial activities, and reader revenue, and within each of those, two sub-streams. Charalambous notes that news organisations will have different revenue choices, but for the Daily Maverick, the sub-streams were, foundations and individuals under philanthropy, advertising and events under commercial activities, and under the membership programme, recurring support (as opposed to a subscription model) and once-off contributions.[116] Recurring donations of R150 or more per month in terms of the Maverick Insider membership qualify donors to receive R100 back in UBER vouchers.[117]

The decision to launch a print edition was on the back of the membership programme. With 14 000 loyal members, Charalambous said, the Daily Maverick knew it had a good chance of achieving a circulation figure of 25 000, especially thanks to the innovative distribution model, a figure higher than titles with a 100-year history. "Membership has now become sort of the driving force behind so many of our initiatives and activities because it embodies two concepts that I think are important for publishers to adopt and to really lean into if they are to be sustainable. And that is data-driven audience-centricity."

No other news organisation in South Africa in the region, to my knowledge, has adopted the membership model, as advocated by the Membership Puzzle Project,[118] in quite the same way. This is not to say that "membership" as a concept separate from subscription and involving more than a transactional relationship has not been practiced. The amaBhungane news organisation has for some time had individual supporters willing to donate to the non-profit investigative organisation, as well as foundational donors. AmaBhungane has a policy of capping donor funds to 20% of total operating expenditure, while aiming for 29% of operational spending to come from smaller public donations. It hit 26% in the most recent financial year.[119]

Most resilient have been non-profit organisations. Professor Anton Harber has remarked on this surprising development:

We are in the extraordinary position where philanthropically funded journalism appears to be more sustainable than the traditional advertising-driven model. This is an inversion of what we always accepted as reality. We are caught in a bind: we need citizens to value us enough to pay for our services in some form, but we don't have the resources to produce the journalism that would show that value. We first have to recognise that this is a national and societal problem, not just a media one, and then we can tackle it.[120]

There is little doubt that at present the non-profit model has produced and is producing extraordinary journalism in the region. And

116. Media Sustainability in Eastern and Southern Africa Webinar.
117. Daily Maverick Team, "Maverick Insider," Daily Maverick, n.d, https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/insider/.
118. "The Membership Puzzle Project," The Membership Puzzle Project, accessed March 22, 2020, https://membershippuzzle.org.
119. Stefaans Brummer, amaBhungane, October 20, 2020.
120. Anton Harber, "Journalism Makes Blunders but Still Feeds Democracy: An Insider's View," The Conversation, September 17, 2020, http://theconversation.com/journalism-makes-blunders-but-still-feeds- democracy-an-insiders-view-146364.

the inversion Prof Harber refers to is that donor funding is regarded as fickle and often having strings attached. One way of avoiding this diversifying revenue streams, as Daily Maverick aims to do, or the amaBhungane approach of limiting funding from any one donor, and by reaching out to the public. Nonetheless, the question must be asked about the limits of the non-profit model for funding, not the investigative journalism that for-profits find difficult to afford, but the ordinary coverage of public and private life that has been the mainstay of newspapers, not grand corruption but "politics, prices and princes"; court reporting, local government and governance, crime, finance and inflation. And while donors have come forth to put money forward for journalism, the demands of society in general in the time of Covid-19 economic upheaval are enormous.

The same problem faces those who proffer government subsidies in some form as at least part of the answer. Guy Berger of UNESCO points out that resistance to government funding of journalism has faded as the financial problems of news media have intensified:

"The debate about the necessity of non-commercial funding the media comes about as Covid has shaken up our ideas of what's possible. Even in the US, those who used to oppose any idea of public funding and who were firmly in favour of liberal media development, are now ready to accept some form of intervention may be necessary, and are recognizing that public funds for public service media such as NPR are critical.

"I think the world is open now for a bit more of a social democratic approach to media development and maintenance of what exists. The problem with state support, however, is that you are only going to be looking at fighting over a share of the overall tax pool."[121]

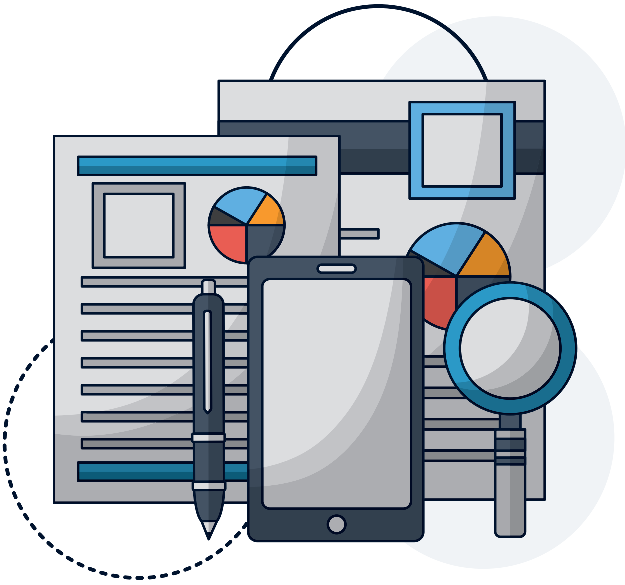
The answer he looks for is somehow to use some of the extraordinary revenues the internet giants manage to extract to support local media, as has been proposed, for example, in Australia. Will that be enough?

News media will be under more pressure than before to diversify revenue streams, but too much emphasis on this can distract from the focus of the organisation: is the website or newspaper or radio or TV station an event-organiser or a place where journalism happens? The alternative revenue stream can take over the whole organisation. South Africa has its own example in Naspers, which has morphed over time from a big media house with a small internet business to a big internet business with a small media house. The South African Media24 subsidiary, though large in South Africa, is a small part of Naspers multi-billion-rand international operations.

Finally, while non-profits are insulated to some extent from the kind of disaster that the disappearance of advertising has been, the for-profit model has its merits. The Mail & Guardian has been in business as a commercial operation with a clear public interest mission for it would not continue, however, without the support of the kind of investor that has the mandate to take the long-term view that investing in independent media requires. MDIF

121. Berger, Interview with Guy Berger, director for Freedom of Expression and Media Development, Unesco.

Findings



Much publicity has been given to the abuse of power visited on the news media as a result of the Covid-19 crisis, and indeed journalists have had their lives and their livelihoods endangered by the crisis and heavy-handed and malicious enforcement of regulations. The use of law to try to combat disinformation or misinformation also threatened freedom of expression and freedom of information. Moreover, governments have relied on a top-down, one-way channel of communication. To quote Zoe Titus of the Namibian Media Trust:

I am really concerned about the broader implications for independent journalism and media freedom down the line, because people are not as critical of what is happening. And looking at the bigger picture, they are not fearful of the fact that this might become the new normal.[122]

The financial threat may be more serious. All the countries in the region face a withered media ecosystem.

The research it is hoped illustrates the enormous blow that has been dealt, particularly to the private, independent news media in the Southern African region, news organisations that were often operating in a legislatively and financially hostile environment before the crisis that exacerbated the situation and made rapid the migration from print to the online environment. The migration online cuts costs drastically but also decreases potential ad revenue, making the search for reader revenue urgent, whether it he from membership or from donor funding.

Reader revenue through subscription or membership seems in doubt for most countries in the region, with the exception perhaps of Botswana, Namibia and Lesotho, because of high levels of poverty. Indeed, the notion of

122. Titus, Zoom interview Covid-19 impact Zoe Titus.

news as a public good has especial force where many citizens cannot even because of lack of access to the internet and poverty get their news from the web. The obvious answer, the public broadcasters, is ruled out until state media really become public broadcasters rather than extensions of the state, and the same applies to state media on other platforms and captured media. It is true that a majority of the population in the region must get their news from broadcasters, radio or TV, so focusing on the press or its modern equivalent might seem perverse. But independent newspapers generate news which cannot be ignored by broadcasters. The enthusiasm for cracking down on private news media still in evidence in the region shows that the independent news still plays its role of "afflicting the comfortable".

Internet access and its cost, not examined in great detail here, is decreasing, in some countries more than others. Mobile phone prices have plunged, and new forms of distribution such as e-papers increase access.

Yet in an era of extreme financial pressure, media capture promises to reverse the gains of press freedom by making advertising even more dependent on political support. This also applies to the journalists, whose new depths of salaries must make brown-envelope journalism seem like a necessityrather than a choice. The need for donor funding, judiciously applied, is greater than ever. This encompasses organisations that support journalists as well as news organisations. In South Africa the South African National Association of Journalists as well as the South African Freelance Association have supplied monetary support for journalists[123] as well as providing advice services, such as advising on what paperwork was needed for journalists to move around freely during the lockdown period.[124] Donor funding can also help organisations, and should be employed to help organisations navigate the murky waters when migrating online. This is one

It is remarkable that an online-only, hybrid commercial-donor funded news organisation can more easily start a newspaper than for-profit newspapers can profitably and easily move online. It is worth noting that none of the publishers in the region or the world can afford to shut down their print publications entirely.

At the same time, the Covid-19 crisis should bring with it greater realization that the business of the media is business. In the days of geographical news monopolies, routines and ways of working developed which separated the audience form the journalists and freed, in fact prohibited, media practitioners from involvement in the business side of the news. Financial exigencies have caused the Chinese wall between editorial and commercial to crumble, especially for the small, nimble start-ups such as 263 Chat we value for their propensity for and ability to experiment. Being business-like does not mean pursuing click-bait practices and the newspaper equivalent of heightened sensationalism at all costs that cannot be ethically justified. And as has been illustrated vividly in South Africa by the SARS Rogue Unit scandal examined by Prof Anton Harber, bad journalism driven by the profit motive can boost the corrupt and damage the reputation of the news organisation.[125]

What being businesslike does mean is the focus on the audience and the use of the information about the audience provided by data in the digital environment as urged by Styli Charalambous of Daily Maverick. The data must in turn, most

123. Kate Skinner, Information of SANEF media relief fund, Phone interview, August 7, 2020.
124. Kate Skinner, SANEF and Covid-19, September 17, 2020.
125. Harber, "Journalism Makes Blunders but Still Feeds Democracy."

journalists would agree, be balanced by the public interest nature of journalism and journalists' practical knowledge of the field, their "gut instinct". It is clear that at least some of the problems of "news fatigue" come from a mismatch of what the audience want and the journalists provide. This is a tricky area that the metamorphosis of news organisations changing their model to focus on reader revenue face as they move to the web, especially since most journalism has a mission inform as well as entertain. A good example from the U.S. is the Christian Science Monitor, the subject of a detailed case study that looks into the challenging changes in perspective that changing business models brings.[126]

Aside from the business side, the evidence is that the problems of journalism in much of the world stem from the way journalism is seen by the public. The observations of civil society activist Mark Heywood point us to the need to engage as journalists and journalism institutions:

As in the US, Covid-19 has merely accelerated a crisis in the media that was already there.Stemming this crisis will require journalists and organisations like SANEF to reach out to communities, and civil society to show the

possibilities and the importance of their craft.But to do this successfully, the media will also need to rethink itself and engage in its own process of introspection.

The media is a web. For the colony to survive, it needs internal solidarity between its parts. The overall project cannot progress if all the parts are not functioning, or if certain parts are rotten. One of the lessons we should learn from the US is that it is not sufficient for democracy that parts of the media are strong (the papers that occupy what Nelson calls the "Boston- Washington corridor") while community newspapers and radio stations are collapsing.

Ultimately therefore, the protection and promotion of the profession of journalism is a political project. Yes, it must be objective and fair, accountable and transparent. It must abide by its ethics. But it is not neutral. If we look back through history, we will find that the media was always connected to advancing democracy. This is what is at stake.

It has taken a global pandemic with local repercussions for the question of who pays for journalism and how to be given serious attention. It would be a pity to waste this opportunity now to solve some of the existential crises that have been decades in the making.

126. {Citation}

Recommendations

It is clear that money and political will are the two big problems, problems that the Covid-19 crisis has underlined. They are linked, in the sense that strong pro-media freedom bodies are needed to lobby for independent media, not captured by the public or private sector.

Judicious and greater funding of media institutions and outlets is called for. In future crisis situations, including pandemics, civil society must be better prepared to resist erosion of basic freedoms under the guise of protection of the society. For journalism, capacitation and support of organisations that represent media solidarity have shown their importance.

The relief fund for journalists in South Africa and the lobbying on behalf of journalists and journalism has come from two organisations, SANEF and SAFREA. SANEF has also been at the forefront of trying to examine the impact of the crisis in a timely fashion on the news ecosystem. MISA has been a vital part of supporting media freedom and freedom of expression across the region since the mid-1990s. Others, too, have arisen and may arise to monitor and support the news media in the region in what is proving, as the research shows, to be a troubling time for journalists and their organisations. Part of whatever money can be raised from foundation donors and corporations should strengthen institutions that can impress on government and society in the region the absolute necessity of sustainable and viable news media, as measured by DW Akademie's Media Viability Indicators.

In the past, newspapers could rely on patient billionaires with a public conscience, but reliance on such largesse can also mean a form media capture. The realization now is that support and even rescue funds might have to be forthcoming for commercial operations – as the South African state-supported Media Development and Diversity Agency has already done for small commercial publishers in South Africa. The need for a regional fund, insulated from outside pressure, should be on the table. The international Media Development Investment Fund, operating in the impact investment field, is a replacement for those perhaps mythical billionaires, and has been instrumental in keeping the Mail & Guardian independent.

Donor-funded organisations have proved their worth in buttressing media independence. Donor money also can bring with it accusations of foreign meddling in local affairs and is subject to the whims of the donors. It needs to be carefully managed, and news organisations need education in this as well as in running a business in the new era. Some of the jargon and the language of news media business in the internet age open up new conceptual areas for journalists not used to thinking of journalism products, retention rates, and the technicalities of data measurements such as unique browsers and page views. Money needs to be found not for journalism training necessarily, though I would argue that the lack of business journalism in the main news is a serious gap, but in the business of journalism and that this is something all journalists need to contemplate.

What donor funding does not achieve is creation of organisations with a capital base and a sense of ownership, two things that from my own experience I think has helped the Mail & Guardian, formerly the Weekly Mail, news organisation survive the disappearance of funding for what was called "alternative" news media in the 1980s. Other alternative publications such as Vrye Weekblad closed their doors. A company enables the sale of equity to raise capital. As a company, The Weekly Mail could sell a stake to the UK Guardian group (hence the name Mail & Guardian). A strong capital base is also important in protection of news organisations against strategic lawsuit against public participation (SLAPP) legal suits or law fare. In the straitened circumstances news media find themselves in the region, a lack of capital could mean a winner-takes-all consolidation, reducing media plurality. State-owned organization can turn to the state for recapitalization and where the state is major or only shareholder, it is incumbent on the state to set aside such money. Donors must consider funding for-profit media and all media must look at hybrid models that allow donor funding in emergencies.

Perhaps a regional fund for journalism could be set up after careful consideration of how to insulate it from political pressures, with a mandate for enhancing financial sustainability, including looking at trusts. The trust model of ownership has proved effective in Namibia not in Zimbabwe. Trust ownership was used for the English-language press during apartheid as well. Local trusts could mobilize State funding, donor funding, individual donations to support media. The key is total transparency. Transparency is also needed in state funding of media, and here the push should be for greater transparency and accountability of budgets, especially on spending. South Africa often comes in the middle of various ratings and rankings of countries but excels in budget transparency, being right at the top of the Open Budget Index.[127] All countries in the region need to improve their transparency and accountability on state spending. This is particularly pertinent to the way media is funded by the state, since state funding of media should be equitable rather than a means of control through skewed advertising or other support. The use of advertising as a means of supporting media is not justifiable anyway, because government advertising should be justified on the grounds of achieving state goals such as, for example, job advertising to find the right person for the job.

Contributions to a properly independent body which could then decide on funding according to a formula could be an option. However, one argument against state funding is that it does not make space for startups providing media plurality at the organizational level and experimentation creating diversity at the audience level. The Dutch government devotes money specifically to innovation and is an idea worth pursuing.[128]

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John Mukela	IJ Hub	Zambia
Kate Skinner	SANEF	South Africa
Hoosain Karjieker	Mail &Guardian	South Africa
Guy Berger	UNESCO	Multilateral
Teldah Mawarire	Internews	Regional
Stefaans Brummer	amaBhungane	South Africa
Zoe Titus	Namibia	Namibia

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