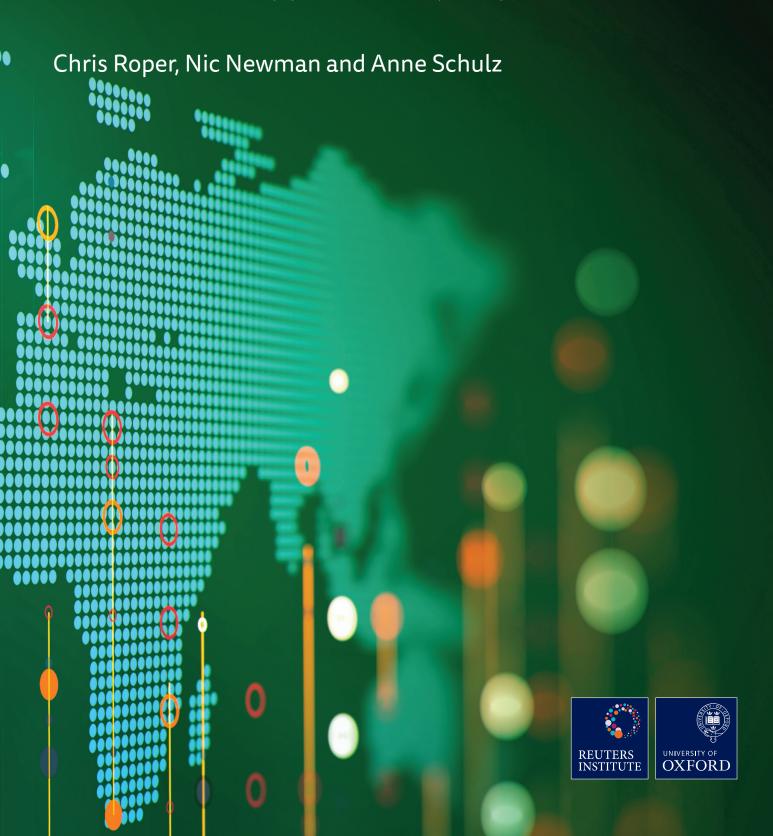
# Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2019

South Africa Supplementary Report





## Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2019

### South Africa Supplementary Report

CHRIS ROPER, NIC NEWMAN AND ANNE SCHULZ

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Surveyed by





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### **Foreword**

Professor Rasmus Kleis Nielsen
Director, Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism (RISJ)

The mission of the Reuters Institute is to explore the future of journalism worldwide, and the inclusion of South Africa in this year's *Digital News Report* is an important further step towards delivering on that mission. With support from our many partners, our report already has wide international reach (covering 38 markets in 2019), but this is the first year we have been able to include a country in Africa.

This stand-alone report on South Africa supplements the main Digital News Report and aims to go into greater detail with the data in ways that we hope will be useful for discussions of news and media as well as decision-making in South Africa, where national elections have just taken place in May and a new government is being formed.

The media context for this period of political change, our research suggests, is one of eroding trust in news and where 70% of our South African respondents say they struggle to separate fact from fiction online.

More encouragingly, we are also seeing important investigative reporting, innovative journalism, and journalistic collaborations, including ways in which some South African journalists and media organisations are fighting back against corruption, state capture, and various forms of misinformation.

Despite numerous problems with outlets being captured by powerful political and/or commercial interests, embarrassing lapses in editorial oversight, and instances where proprietors have used news media to attack independent journalists, a majority of our respondents still say that South African media help hold politicians and businesses to account.

While limited in its focus to English-language South African internet users, and thus not representative of South Africa more widely, we hope this report can be a first step towards contributing empirical insights on news and media habits. As audiences turn to digital media, where advertising tends to go to international technology companies rather than local publishers, intensifying the pressures on existing business models, this is becoming especially important.

We are hugely grateful to all the different sponsors and partners involved in the *Digital News Report*, and in particular the Open Society Foundations whose support made it possible to include South Africa. We are also grateful to our polling company YouGov, who helped our research team to analyse and contextualise the data.

## Methodology

This study has been commissioned by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism to understand how news is being consumed in a range of countries including South Africa. Research was conducted by YouGov using an online questionnaire at the end of January/beginning of February 2019.

- Samples were assembled using nationally representative quotas for age, gender, region.¹ The data were also weighted to targets based on census/industry accepted data. It is important to note, however, that the survey is only representative of the English-speaking population of South Africa. English is the lingua franca in South Africa and the main language of government and media, even though less than 10% of South Africans speak it as a first language. In this report we are not able to cover the richness of media consumption in South Africa's other ten official languages.
- As this survey deals with news consumption, we filtered
  out anyone who said that they had not consumed any
  news in the past month, in order to ensure that irrelevant
  responses didn't adversely affect data quality. This category
  averaged around 3% and was 4% in South Africa.
- We should note that online samples will tend to underrepresent the consumption habits of people who are not
  online (typically older, less affluent, and with limited formal
  education). In this sense it is better to think of results as
  representative of online populations which use news at
  least once a month. In South Africa this is just over 50% of
  the overall population, though the proportion is likely to
  be higher with English speakers. In some other countries
  in our survey this figure can reach 99%. These differences
  mean we need to be cautious when comparing results
  between South Africa and other countries.
- It is also important to note that online surveys rely on recall, which is often imperfect or subject to biases.
   We have tried to mitigate these risks through careful questionnaire design and testing. On the other hand, surveys are a good way of capturing fragmented media consumption across platforms (e.g. social media, messaging, apps, and websites), and tracking activities and changes over time.
- A fuller description of the methodology, panel partners, and a discussion of non-probability sampling techniques can be found on our website along with the full questionnaire (digitalnewsreport.org).

Country		Final sample size	Internet penetration
Africa			
ATTICA	South Africa *	2009	54%
Europe		2009	54%
Larop	UK	2023	95%
	Austria	2010	88%
_	Belgium	2008	94%
	Bulgaria*	2018	66%
	Croatia	2009	91%
	Czech Republic	2023	88%
	Denmark	2011	97%
Ħ	Finland	2009	94%
_	France	2005	93%
	Germany	2022	96%
	Greece	2018	70%
	Hungary	2007	89%
П	Ireland	2013	93%
П	Italy	2006	92%
	Netherlands	2026	96%
	Norway	2013	99%
	Poland	2009	78%
0	Portugal	2010	78%
T	Romania	2004	74%
<b>#</b>	Slovakia	2045	85%
*	Spain	2005	93%
T	Sweden	2007	97%
ā	Switzerland	2003	91%
C-	Turkey*	2074	68%
\meri	•		
	USA	2012	96%
•	Argentina	2006	93%
<b>(</b> )	Brazil*	2013	71%
*	Canada	2055	90%
*	Chile	2004	78%
(8)	Mexico*	2015	65%
Asia Pa			
#	Australia	2010	88%
\$	Hong Kong	2056	87%
•	Japan	2017	93%
(•	Malaysia *	2101	78%
<b>(</b> :	Singapore	2033	84%
<b>*•</b>	South Korea	2035	93%
*	Taiwan	1005	88%

Source: Internet World Stats (http://www.internetworldstats.com). Please note that in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Greece, Mexico, South Africa and Turkey our samples tend to be based more around urban areas, which should be taken into consideration when interpreting results. \* These countries have lower internet penetration so results may not be comparable for some measures.

# Authorship and Research Acknowledgements

**Chris Roper** is chief engagement strategist and deputy CEO for Code for Africa, and a director of the African Network of Centres for Investigative Reporting. He has served as editor-in-chief of the *Mail* & *Guardian* in South Africa, and of Africa's largest publisher 24.com.

**Nic Newman** is Senior Research Associate at the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. He has been lead author of the *Digital News Report* since 2012 and writes an annual report on future media and technology trends. Previously, Nic was a senior executive with the BBC and part of the team that launched the BBC News website.

**Anne Schulz** is a Research Fellow at the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. Her doctoral work focused on populism, media perceptions, and media consumption. She is interested in questions surrounding news audiences and digital news.

The authors are grateful to the Open Society Foundations whose support made it possible to include South Africa, as well as to our polling company YouGov. The analysis and presentation has been conducted independently by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. Our work on this report has benefited from the advice and input of the wider Reuters Institute research team, in particular Richard Fletcher and Antonis Kalogeropoulos, two of the authors of the main annual Reuters Institute Digital News Report.

# 1. South Africa's

# Media Scene

With 2019 an election year in South Africa, the country's media have been invigorated by the ending of ex-president Jacob Zuma's years of corrupt misrule and the 'New Dawn' promised by his successor Cyril Ramaphosa. Highprofile investigative journalism played a significant role in this change, burnishing, to some extent, the image of journalism among citizens. News24, Daily Maverick, and the amaBhungane Centre for Investigative Journalism were some of the many news outlets that helped uncover the corrupt relationship between former president Jacob Zuma and the Guptas, a family implicated in the process that South Africans are terming 'state capture' (the systematic misuse of state funds for personal enrichment, which some sources are quantifying as R1.5 trillion over the last four years).2

The economic situation has not been as positive, with several rounds of retrenchments at most large media houses. Tiso Blackstar, one of the country's biggest media companies, whose titles include the Sunday Times and Business Day, shut down their tabloid newspaper Sunday World, and announced that they were retrenching staff across publications including the Sowetan, Business Day, The Herald, and Daily Dispatch. Media24 closed down its local version of the Huffington Post after only 18 months, and the independent Afro Voice newspaper (the rebranded successor of the politically compromised The New Age) closed after less than 12 months of existence. The national broadcaster, SABC, said in late 2018 that it was going to cut its number of permanent employees by 981, and freelancers by 1,200. Pushback from trade unions has led it to abandon this process, but it's uncertain how viable this position is, given that the organisation has required billions of rands in government bailouts to continue operating.

The South African Editors Forum (SANEF) has expressed concern about the implications of 'declining numbers of media institutions, publications and the shrinking numbers of journalists'3 for both independent reporting and the quality of public debate. A more optimistic note was struck with the launch of Newzroom Afrika, a new 24-hour news channel taking the place of the disgraced ANN7, a news channel previously owned by the Guptas and forced to close for political and economic reasons.

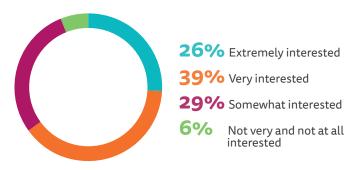
The past year also saw 28 media companies, including the SABC, Tiso Blackstar, Media24, and the Mail & Guardian, ordered to pay fines of varying amounts after being found guilty of anti-competitive behaviour for colluding on offering discounts and payment terms to advertising agencies.4

#### **STATISTICS**

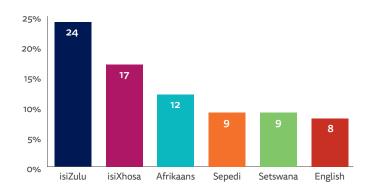
Population	57m
Internet penetration	54%



#### **INTEREST IN NEWS**



#### POPULATION BY LANGUAGE MOST SPOKEN AT HOME



Note. 21% speak other languages. Data via Statistics South Africa 2016: https://wazimap.co.za/profiles/country-ZA-south-africa/

https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2019-03-01-state-capture-wipes-out-third-of-sas-r4-9-trillion-gdp-never-mind-lost-trust-confidence-opportunity/

https://sanef.org.za/sanef-perturbed-by-job-losses-in-the-media-industry/

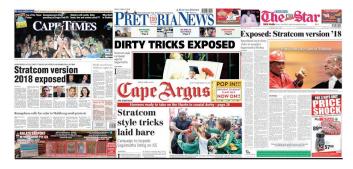
https://mg.co.za/article/2019-01-04-00-who-runs-sas-media-is-a-black-and-white-issue

## 2. Journalism in South Africa

South Africa enjoys a high level of press freedom, ranking 31 on the World Press Freedom Index, but this position is threatened by a number of recent attacks on independent journalism. This has included the harassment of journalists, and especially female journalists, both online and in physical political fora. Perhaps the most egregious recent example was the publishing of a journalist's mobile number on Twitter by the leader of the populist Economic Freedom Fighters party, which led to threats of violence and death.<sup>5</sup>

A recent report by NGO Right2Know revealed that journalists, and especially those working on state capture, corruption, and mismanagement of state security agencies, were targets of state and private-sector spying.<sup>6</sup>

The large Independent Media group, whose owner has repeatedly dictated the editorial line of his publications,<sup>7</sup> ran a crude series of front-page stories in its papers, labelling some of South Africa's most prominent journalists as 'Stratcom agents' – a reference to an apartheid era government propaganda agency. SANEF condemned this attack on respected journalists as 'disgusting and unacceptable'.<sup>8</sup>



In a sense, this growing animosity towards independent journalists is a response to the effective investigative work that has been done on stories that dominated the headlines. These ranged from investigations into business corruption, as with the Steinhoff collapse and Regiments Capital illegalities, and the exposure of the myriad tentacles of state capture and government corruption.

#### SOUTH AFRICA'S POSTION IN PRESS FREEDOM 2019

Country	Global Position	African Position
Namibia	23	1
Ghana	27	2
South Africa	31	3
Burkina Faso	36	4

Note. Data via Reporters Without Borders Press Freedom Index 2019: https://rsf.org/en/ranking.

A welcome innovation, especially given that transparency helps to dispel accusations of a 'media agenda', has been a rise in reputable news outlets being transparent about how their evidence-based reporting works. AmaBhungane, for example, have created an Open Newsroom, where they list stories they are working on, and they also make their evidence dossiers available. There is still a lot of work to be done to introduce more diversity into journalism coverage, and the emphasis on the big stories means that limited attention is paid to more localised investigations.



https://mg.co.za/article/2019-03-07-what-the-eff-malema-what-about-democracy

<sup>6</sup> https://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/News/state-security-agencies-and-privaté-sector-spied-on-journalists-right2know-20180704

https://www.biznews.com/undictated/2019/04/15/media-capture-iqbal-surve
 https://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/News/sanef-slams-independent-media-groups-stratcom-smear-of-journalists-20180420

# 3. TV, Radio, and Print Consumption

Consumption of news in print continues its steady drop into the abyss. Figures for Q1 2019 show newspaper circulation declining by 5% year on year. Daily newspapers were the biggest losers, with a 10.5% drop, but weekly newspapers were almost as badly affected, with a 7.9% decline year on year. It's an even starker picture when we look at newspapers with the biggest losses: the weeklies <code>SundaySun(-28%)</code> and <code>City Press(-21%)</code>, and dailies <code>Daily Dispatch</code> and <code>Son(-18% each).9</code> Data for the last ten years show a 49% drop in circulation for newspapers. No newspapers have a convincing route out of the print mire into a sustainable digital future. Attempts at paywalls and subscription models by the likes of <code>Mail & Guardian</code> and <code>Business Day</code> appear to show disappointing numbers, while most digital advertising revenue is still largely going to the big social media and search platforms.

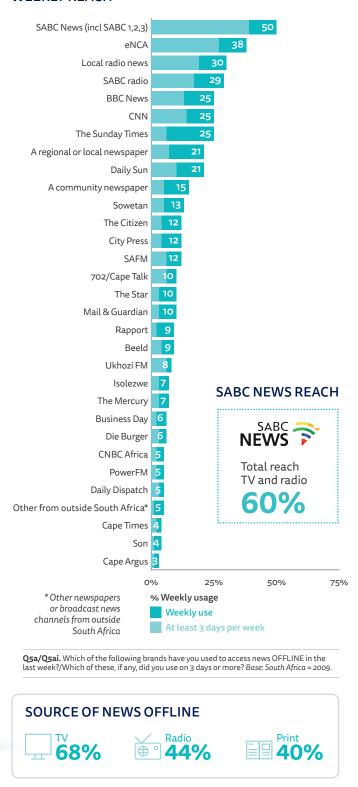
Television news is experiencing something of a shake-up with Newzroom Afrika entering the market and the national broadcaster, the SABC, tightening its editorial standards under a new board chosen to oversee a decisive break from the mismanagement of the last few years. The SABC news channels are first on our survey's top offline brand list in terms of reach

The majority of the biggest radio stations tend to be those with programming in indigenous languages, like the isiZululanguage Ukhozi FM and the isiXhosa-language Umhlobo Wenene (numbers one and two respectively). South Africa's community radio sector is large, with over 200 stations and a weekly listenership of around 8.3m people – 25% of radio's regular adult audience. This is in some ways a corrective to the lack of local journalism by national news organisations who tend to focus on the big issue stories. The reach enjoyed by community radio stations doesn't always translate into revenue and expansion, though, and many lack skills and resources.



24-hour channel Newzroom Afrika launched in May 2019 (Inauguration coverage)

### RADIO, TV, AND PRINT CONSUMPTION – WEEKLY REACH



South Africa has one of the most diverse and independent digital news sectors in Africa. The online news space is dominated by a digital-only brand, News24. This success is partly a consequence of its parent company's early adoption of the potential of the internet and prescient attention to mobile delivery platforms, but also a testament to News24's focus on making news that is designed for digital consumption timelines and attention spans. 70% of our English-speaking sample access News24 online at least once a week – one of the highest reach levels seen anywhere in our global survey. Eleven of the top 15 local sites measured by IAB South Africa are news sites, but this healthy penetration doesn't translate into significant digital revenue.

There are a number of small, fiercely independent digital-only players, like Daily Maverick, Daily Vox, GroundUp, New Frame, and amaBhungane, which rely on some combination of donors and crowdfunding. AmaBhungane has been particularly successful when it comes to crowdfunding, with it listed as the single biggest source of revenue in 2017 and 2018.

#### **SOURCE OF NEWS ONLINE**

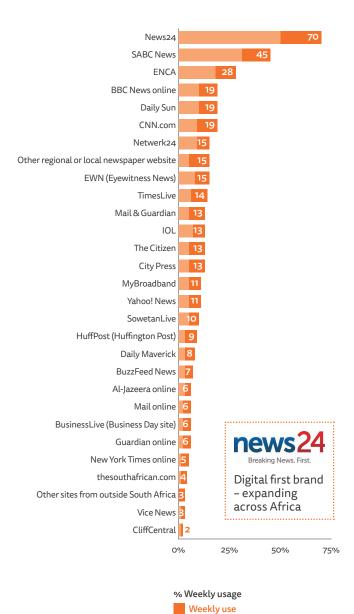
Online (incl. social media)

Social media 72%

Blogs 13%



#### ONLINE NEWS CONSUMPTION - WEEKLY REACH



At least 3 days per week

**Q5b/Q5bi.** Which of the following brands have you used to access news ONLINE in the last week?/Which of these, if any, did you use on 3 days or more? Base: South Africa = 2009.

## 5. Trust in the News

There is a strong tradition of highly trusted, independent media in South Africa, but this is increasingly under threat. Trust is being eroded by a combination of unethical business practices, shoddy journalism, and escalating misinformation affecting critical national elections.

The Sunday Times weekly newspaper, long one of the country's most trusted news brands, was forced to apologise for lapses in journalistic rigour and the publication of several false scoops, and had some of its journalism awards withdrawn. Despite this, it still sits at number 6 on the list of trusted news brands.

Meanwhile Independent Media, one of the country's largest media groups, has had the integrity of its news products severely compromised by its owner's interference in editorial policy, as well as its inability to pay back a questionably acquired loan of over R1 billion to SA's Public Investment Corporation.<sup>10</sup>

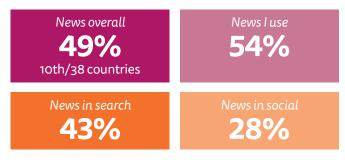
The state broadcaster, the SABC, is only the fourth most-trusted brand, as a result of a protracted and damaging period of government interference and near-catastrophic financial

mismanagement. On the positive side, it appears to be turning a corner with the appointment of a new, relatively apolitical board.

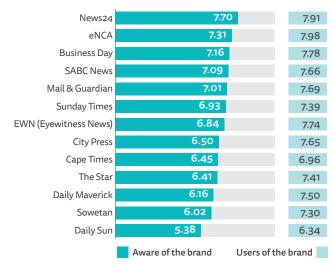
The website News24 has a strong reputation for trust built on the back of investments in breaking news. Tabloid newspaper the *Daily Sun* is widely used but less well trusted.

Despite relatively high overall news trust scores, almost three-quarters (70%) of our South African sample say they struggle to separate fact from fiction online – one of the highest figures in our international survey. In the run up to the general election in May, misinformation on social media exploded, with news brands becoming targets as well as sometimes unwitting amplifiers. There has been a growth in organisations training media and civil society to combat misinformation, and platforms such as Google and Twitter also allocated resources to help. Meanwhile the Independent Electoral Commission partnered with the NGO Media Monitoring Africa to produce a system for reporting misinformation.<sup>11</sup>

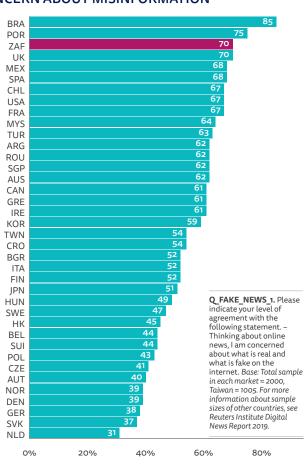
#### **DIFFERENT TYPES OF TRUST**



#### NEWS BRAND TRUST SCORES (0 - 10)



#### **CONCERN ABOUT MISINFORMATION**



<sup>10</sup> https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2019-02-18-jeff-bezos-and-iqbal-surve-the-amazon-and-the-amazing-ego/

<sup>11</sup> https://www.real411.org/learn

### 6. Social Media

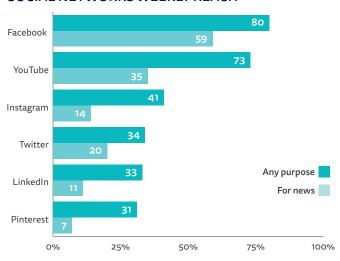
South Africans are some of the heaviest users of social media and messaging in the world. In terms of general use, almost nine in ten (88%) use WhatsApp weekly, with eight in ten (80%) using Facebook. South Africa is the only country in our survey where WhatsApp users outnumber Facebook users, and the private nature of these networks has often made it harder to spot and counter political or other types of misinformation. AfricaCheck has started a new initiative to identify false and bogus claims and distribute fact-checks via voice notes, which can be easily shared in WhatsApp.

South Africans love to share news, with 36% using messenger

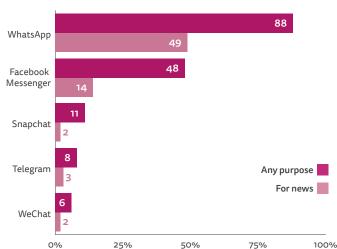
apps and 40% using social networks like Facebook. Almost four in ten (39%) comment on news via social media or via news websites.

The reliance on these networks has also increased in the last year. Over half our respondents (55%) say they have spent more time with WhatsApp, with only 8% spending less time (net +47). The equivalent figure for Facebook is +21 and for Instagram +12. By contrast South Africans say they are spending less time with Facebook Messenger (-5) and with Snapchat (-26).

#### SOCIAL NETWORKS WEEKLY REACH



#### **MESSAGING APPS WEEKLY REACH**





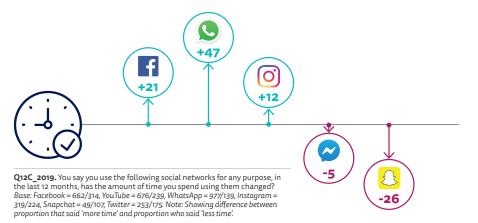


**53%**use **any** messaging app for news



95% use a Facebook owned app weekly

#### MORE TIME/LESS TIME SPENT WITH APPS IN THE LAST YEAR



36% SHARE NEWS via messaging



40% SHARE NEWS



via social (Facebook & Twitter)

39%



**COMMENT ON NEWS** 

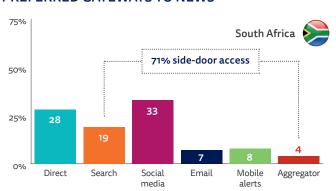
via social or website

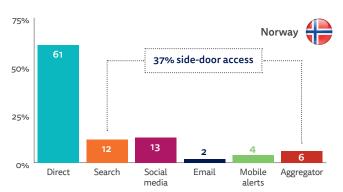
# 7. Gateways, Pay, and Attitudes to News

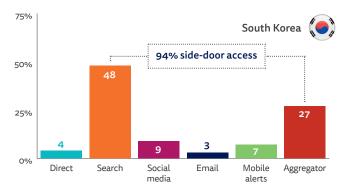
#### **GATEWAYS**

South African's preference for social media is also evident when looking at the main gateways to news. A third (33%) say they prefer to come across news via social media, ahead of direct access (28%) through a news website or app. Taken together, 71% of South Africans use a side-door access to news. Combining those relying on social media, search and some mobile news aggregators, more than half (56%) tend to see stories that are selected by algorithms rather than editors. South Africa lies somewhere between the direct access model we find in Norway and the distributed model found in South Korea where the majority prefer to access news through home-grown search engines and web portals.

#### PREFERRED GATEWAYS TO NEWS







#### **PAY**

Despite relatively high trust levels in the news overall, revenue for news media has been on a downward path for several years, with a 12% drop in ad spend last year for television, 5.6% for radio, and 7.7% for print. Although 16% of respondents claim they pay for online news, this figure will not be representative of South Africans as a whole, given our urban and highly educated online sample. The surge of goodwill engendered by the media's role in exposing the Guptas has led to an upswing in reader donations to independent publications like Daily Maverick and the investigative unit amaBhungane. But this is an uncertain

form of income, and with no sustainable revenue model available currently, South African media houses are facing a grim future.



16% (11th/38) pay for ONLINE NEWS

#### ATTITUDES TO NEWS MEDIA

South African news media are considered to do a relatively good job in keeping people up to date (73% compared with an all country average of 62%), as well as helping people understand the news (63% compared with an average of 51%). More than half of our sample say that the news does a good job in monitoring and scrutinising powerful people and businesses (53% compared with an average of just 42%).



Keeps me up to date 73%



Helps me understand the news

63%



Monitors and scrutinises powerful people and businesses

53%



Takes too **negative a view of events** 

47%



Agenda **feels** irrelevant

28%

## 8. Devices for Accessing News

The smartphone is the most popular device for accessing news among South Africans. More than three-quarters (76%) use this for news each week, with the majority (58%) saying smartphones are their main device. South Africans are much more likely to use cheaper Android smartphones (83%) than Apple devices (15%), compared with many European countries.

For very few, some older feature phones (2%) also provide basic access to the internet. Smartphones are most popular amongst younger news consumers, with older South Africans still showing a preference for computers. Tablets are less popular than in many other countries, with only 6% using these devices for news weekly.

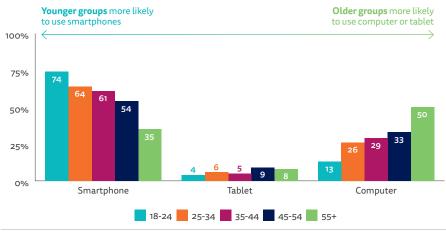
#### WEEKLY REACH FOR NEWS

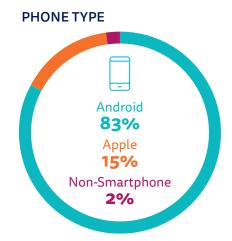






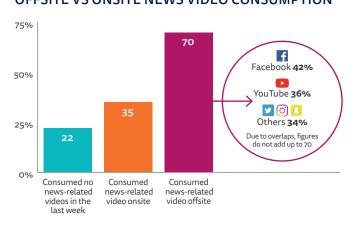
#### PREFERRED DEVICE BY AGE



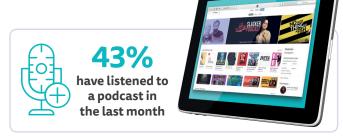


UK8b6\_5. You've said you use the following devices to access news in the last week, which is your MAIN way of accessing online news? Base: 18-24/25-34/35-44/45-54/55+: South Africa = 357/564/403/224/359.

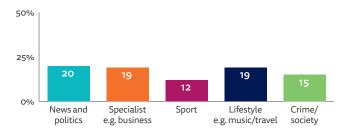
#### OFFSITE VS ONSITE NEWS VIDEO CONSUMPTION



 $\begin{tabular}{ll} \bf Q11\_VIDEO\_2018a. Thinking about consuming online news video (of any kind) over the last week, which of the following did you do? Base: Total sample: South Africa = 2009. \end{tabular}$ 



#### TYPE OF PODCAST LISTENED TO MONTHLY



### Conclusion

The news media in South Africa are in something of an interregnum. Interest in news, and more importantly, news that drives change in political and institutional policymaking, is at a high. With this comes an amplified scrutiny of journalism, with mistakes being seized on by people (from all parts of the political and business spectrum) intent on destabilising trust in the media. This increased oversight is an overwhelmingly positive thing, serving as it does to make the media more accountable. But it does provide fertile fodder for those eager to adapt the Trumpian 'fake news' strategy for local conditions, and for the bot farms that have already been deployed around some of the big news stories, such as the Gupta leaks.

The most troubling statistics in this survey, perhaps, are that overall trust in the news in South Africa is 49% (10th place in our 38 country survey), but also that almost three-quarters (70%) of our respondents say they struggle to separate fact from fiction online – one of the highest figures in our international survey. These two statistics can't comfortably exist side by side for long, and fighting disinformation and misinformation is going to be a critical if South African journalism wants to maintain its authority and impact.

Trust in media isn't just a factor in maintaining the press's role as an effective watchdog. It also speaks to the other major issue, the question of revenue. With newspaper circulation dying, broadcast revenue dropping, and journalism resources eroding, news is going to have to increasingly rely on subscription and membership models to sustain volume and quality. The imperative right now, in an environment in which this survey shows that 71% of South Africans use a side-door access to news, and where the social media and other technology giants are consuming the majority of digital revenue, is going to be rebuilding the ties between those that produce news and those who use it, and taking advantage of the digital world's sometime elision of those two.

## Selected RISJ Publications

Nic Newman with Richard Fletcher, Antonis Kalogeropoulos, and Rasmus Kleis Nielsen Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2019 (June 2019)

Felix M. Simon and Lucas Graves Pay Models for Online News in the US and Europe: 2019 Update (May 2019)

Joy Jenkins and Lucas Graves Case Studies in Collaborative Local Journalism (Apr. 2019)

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