

SA journalists expect increase in use of online platforms

Following the ECCO International Communication Network international survey, conducted last year to determine the role of journalists within the current changing media landscape, Reputation Matters, the South African member of the ECCO network, asked South African journalists for their viewpoint on the future of journalism in the country.



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The rapid pace of technological innovation is the driving force behind the ever-evolving media landscape, especially following the rise of the internet. The 2015 survey explored the effect of this technological change on media and what journalists believe the future will look like.

The survey was targeted mainly at editors, freelancers or writers and heads of departments at South African media outlets. The opinions of additional respondents such as publication owners, content managers, producers, radio hosts, programme managers and social media managers were also included in the study. The survey asked over 200 South African media industry professionals their opinion on the matter.

The study indicates that the changing media landscape contributes toward an increased workload for journalists, more budget cuts, lower job security within the industry and less time available to conduct research. Daily and weekly newspapers are expected to decline strongly, while tabloids and magazines share a similar fate. Despite the constant change, traditional television and radio should remain stable. In contrast to the other media platforms, 83% of the respondents expect a dramatic increase in the use of online platforms (blogs, social media, news portals and Internet broadcast media).

With the resulting decrease in print media sales, media professionals expect revenue to come from online subscriptions and advertising, as well as sponsorship. Respondents showed little confidence in paywalls (pay-per-article), crowdfunding or public funding revenue models. To address the financial issue, some media professionals suggested that media houses should diversify their product offering (to support the new digital generation) or generate income streams internationally. Collaboration is a suggested solution by offering consumers bundled subscriptions to various media outlets.

“We see that most media professionals agree that turning to blogging is an option, as many already have blogs, but they are not convinced that it would be a viable or sustainable income stream – readers would not want to pay for content when so much is already free online,” says Regine le Roux, md of Reputation Matters. “It also takes time to establish a blog and for its popularity to grow.”

Several media professionals indicated that they are concerned about the standard of journalism and dropping levels of credibility as anyone and everyone becomes an expert ‘journalist’ – one respondent went as far as to say, “The blogspace is crowded with morons.”

“The study shows that the media still value PR agencies and the news tips and press releases that they offer. Just over half of the respondents (52.3%) indicated that the role of PR agencies have become a lot more important over the last five years. With that said, 71% of the respondents indicated that they still rely a lot more on personal contacts and that one-on-one engagement has grown in importance.”

Most of the respondents write for both online and print media and branch into radio and television, podcasts, newsletters, social media, blogs and quarterly print editions of online content etc. Some commented that one can no longer view newspapers and magazines as a print medium with online content but rather that it is the other way around.

The advent of social media has changed the media landscape largely because of its immediacy. Anyone using social media becomes a daily ‘news’ reporter. Because of this, publishing houses will need to investigate different business models, even different types of reporting, to adapt to the online market.

“It is obvious that the online space presents not only challenges to traditional print media, but also great opportunities. The media that adapts the best in terms of its business model and product offering will be the ones that thrive,” concludes le Roux.

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