



# Namibia's Media: Facing the Digital Challenge

By Dietrich Remmert





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# Introduction

Internationally, the print media industry is undergoing a far-reaching transformation as a result of rapid economic, technological and political changes over the past decade.

Since the early 2000s, more than half the jobs in the US news industry have disappeared; and while online news provision has created employment it has not been enough to replace the lost newspaper jobs.<sup>1</sup> This trend has been replicated around the world - although to varying extents and sometimes with different dynamics at play. But this ongoing transformation is not just about job losses. Journalism's ability to hold powerful leaders and entities to account is being undermined. Newsrooms have been closed or decimated and the capacity for investigative journalism has been diminished.

While not facing the same doomsday scenarios as the print media, the television sector has also faced disruption from the digital revolution. Almost instant online video from a variety of sources means that some consumers no longer wait for formal television news while Over The Top (OTT)<sup>2</sup> offerings like Netflix are providing increasingly stiff competition. Traditional radio stations also face the possibility of losing audiences to news content provided by social media or by integrated media companies providing news across multiple platforms that might include audio and video. Both print and broadcast are seeing advertisers increasingly shifting to exclusive online options such as social media or finding other innovative ways of utilising their ad spend.

In many ways this on-going digital revolution has been positive; significantly more people are now able to affordably and quickly access vast amounts of information and media via internet platforms around the world. This growth in media through internet access has been underlined by extensive investments in telecommunication infrastructure and the pervasive spread of mobile handsets. Africa in particular has experienced the world's highest growth in internet users from 2012 to 2017.<sup>3</sup>

However, digitalisation has also significantly disrupted and eroded long-established sources of income for media houses. Marketing and advertising revenue – the primary source of income for many media operations - is shifting to online platforms and their associated technology companies.<sup>4</sup> Print media - specifically newspapers and magazines - have been especially hard hit by this trend. In addition, newspaper circulation figures have declined in most regions of the world over recent years,<sup>5</sup> resulting in falling sales revenue and further decreasing print's attractiveness for advertisers.

This report will focus on the sustainability of national media in the face of increasing digitalisation, international competition and poor economic conditions. It can be argued that Namibia's media has not yet undergone a comprehensive and far-reaching transformative disruption process brought about by digitalisation. However, this does not mean that local media houses can be complacent with regards

<sup>1</sup> In January 2001, the US newspaper industry employed 411 800 people. In September 2011, that number was 173 709. See: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/jul/17/news-industry-revenue-declines-biggest-threat-to-journalism>

<sup>2</sup> A media distribution practice that allows a streaming content provider to sell audio, video, and other media services directly to the consumer over the internet via streaming media, bypassing telecommunications, cable or broadcast television service providers.

<sup>3</sup> UNESCO, 72-3.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 77.

to this phenomenon. Indeed there are strong indications, as this report will argue, that digital media and related challenges are already transforming Namibia's media landscape. This study therefore aims to take a closer look at the experiences, challenges, responses and future outlook of Namibian media houses.

## Defining Digitalisation

The term digitalisation is ambiguous and often used interchangeably with 'digitisation' and 'digital transformation'. However, the terms have different meanings depending on the context and industry or field of study they are utilised in.<sup>6</sup> Arguably, the most straightforward definition available is for the term digitisation which from a technological perspective broadly refers to "the process of converting information into a digital (i.e. computer-readable) format."<sup>7</sup> As mentioned in the introduction, this technological innovation has had profound impact on human society and activities as a whole. This disruptive, transformational process can be described as the 'digital revolution' or the third industrial revolution.<sup>8</sup> This paper is specifically concerned with the effects that the digital revolution is having on the media landscape and by default how technological change is transforming consumers' media usage, habits and options. In this study digitalisation is defined as the ongoing, disruptive changes brought about by digitisation and will be used interchangeably with the term digital revolution.

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## Scope of this Report and Methodology

It can be argued that the financial sustainability of media is one of the central challenges to journalism in democratic societies. Namibia has not been exempted from this disruptive transformation of the media environment brought about by digitalisation.

This report will focus on the issue of sustainability within the Namibian media landscape. Arguably, this theme is an under-researched area in Namibia - especially when compared to other press freedom issues. For example, much attention over recent years has been centred on legal and practical aspects around access to information.<sup>9</sup> Yet over the same period Namibia-based media, in particular print and broadcast media, have seen their businesses come under increasing economic pressure. This report will focus on the print media in the country as well as giving some attention to the broadcasting landscape. The report's research is of an exploratory nature and relies primarily on information gathered during in-depth, semi-structured interviews conducted with local media business representatives, media practitioners and academics. A total of nine people were interviewed and information sourced from six members of the Editors' Forum of Namibia (EFN) at a forum meeting. In addition, this study has utilised national, regional and international reports and research documents on the subject matter to inform the discussion. In this regard specific attention has been given to research focusing on media

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.forbes.com/sites/jasonbloomberg/2018/04/29/digitization-digitalization-and-digital-transformation-confuse-the-m-at-your-peril/#714473712f2c>

<sup>7</sup> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Digitization>

<sup>8</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Digital\\_Revolution](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Digital_Revolution)

<sup>9</sup> See for example: Smith Jana-Mari, "Press freedom slide a wakeup call", *Namibian Sun*. April 27, 2018. 3. Links Frederico, Fikameni Ndeshi & Hasheela Michael, *Access Denied: Access to Information in Namibia*. Institute for Public Policy Research. n. d.

sustainability and media developments in Southern Africa. The research was conducted from March to May 2018.

It should be noted the research prioritised sourcing opinions and experiences from the business side of media houses to ensure that media sustainability issues came to the fore. The business component of media houses' refers to the advertising, marketing and sales departments among others and is not directly involved in content generation and editorial decisions. Five of the nine people interviewed directly during this study have had experience working as journalists. Moreover, this research report is concerned with media houses that are focussed on news coverage. Clearly, digitalisation is also affecting media outlets primarily concerned with entertainment and leisure journalism.<sup>10</sup> However, while these themes provide their own value in the media arena, news and coverage of public interest issues are arguably more central to press freedom.

Unfortunately, there is a dearth of publicly available statistical and financial data on the media environment in Namibia. As a result, this report may be limited by its heavy reliance on qualitative information. However, where possible, quantitative data has been included. Finally it should be acknowledged that the complex themes of media sustainability and digital transformation are characterised by rapidly shifting trends which are ongoing and difficult to predict. Therefore, this research will not be able to offer a clear and decisive way forward. Instead the aim of this report is to provide a broad analysis of the issues and a list of solution-orientated suggestions to enhance and deepen the discussion on this vital topic both within the national media and without.

## Defining Press Freedom

The closure or downscaling of newspapers and the financial pressures on broadcast news reporting are having a damaging effect on media freedom. Quality journalism, which by definition includes investigative reporting, is becoming harder to sustain, let alone develop and expand. Inevitably, this weakens democracy as a whole. While authoritarian regimes are most commonly blamed for violating media rights, it could be argued that sustainability challenges will ultimately pose just as much of a threat to press freedom.

These developments have significantly impacted on press freedom worldwide, often in negative ways.<sup>11</sup> Press freedom as conceptualised by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) is a holistic term grounded in human rights. As a concept, it therefore encompasses not just the media but people and society in general:

“...press freedom and the right of access to information are corollaries of the general right to freedom of expression and opinion ... press freedom covers the freedom of all individuals or institutions to use media platforms in order that their expression may reach the public.”<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Rhodes University, 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. May 2018. 10-1.

<sup>11</sup> UNESCO, World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development: 2017/2018 Global Report. 2018, 13-4.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 20-1.



Since press freedom is such a broad concept it requires the establishment and maintenance of a number of components, including media freedom, independence and pluralism, among others. All of these components need to be present in strength in any country to guarantee press freedom for citizens. In other words, the overall national environment in which the media operates should be conducive and supportive. Journalists should be able to work without undue legal restrictions and the general public should have access to and be able to freely choose between a wide range of media. Finally, media workers and citizens should have the freedom “to express [themselves] publicly without political or commercial interference”.<sup>13</sup>

This emphasis on ensuring an overarching free, supportive and conducive environment for media was specifically detailed in the Windhoek Declaration. The Declaration was drafted and agreed to by African journalists meeting in Windhoek in 1991<sup>14</sup> and consequently endorsed by UNESCO’s general conference later that year.<sup>15</sup> According to an essay by Gwen Lister, founder and former editor of *The Namibian*, the participants at the seminar that gave rise to the Declaration strongly felt that media practitioners in Africa had to publicly affirm that a free and independent press was crucial to the continent’s democratic and economic development.<sup>16</sup> Still today, the Windhoek Declaration is seen as a crucial marker for promoting and defending press freedom on the continent.<sup>17</sup>

### Info Box 1: Crucial Components of Press Freedom

#### Media Freedom

Media freedom is primarily concerned with the legal and regulatory environment in which media houses and journalists operate. Ensuring the existence of media freedom requires its active protection “both in law and practice.”<sup>18</sup> A supportive legal framework would include laws addressing transparency and freedom of information, as well as freedom of expression. Conversely, media freedom can be threatened if the above-mentioned laws are not in place. Moreover, legal restrictions that target the media, journalists and the work they produce (such as censorship and outright bans) undermine media freedom. UNESCO’s definition of media freedom only allows for legal restraints on freedom of speech and expression if these are clearly in the public’s interest and proportionate in terms of the information or opinion being restricted. Hence a blanket or unspecified restriction on the freedom of expression is not permissible. Increasingly, comprehensive media freedom is also associated with a right to privacy and confidentiality for citizens and media workers. This means that the anonymity of journalists’ sources should be protected and that society should be free from undue surveillance, data collection and excessive security regulations.<sup>19</sup>

#### Media Independence

Media independence encompasses the operations of media houses with regards to editorial independence. Media independence can only be guaranteed and sustained if journalists and especially editorial staff can freely decide on the content which is to be reported on. Thus content

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>14</sup> Karklins Janis, Foreword, in *Media in Africa: Twenty years after the Windhoek Declaration on press freedom*. Berger Guy, (Ed.) 2011, 6.

<sup>15</sup> UNESCO, 21.

<sup>16</sup> Lister, Gwen, *The State of the Media in Namibia*, in *Working for Social Democracy in Namibia*, FES, 2014. 89.

<sup>17</sup> Maina Henry, *The Impact of the Windhoek Declaration*, in *African Free Press: Your free paper for freedom of the press*. May 2016. 17

<sup>18</sup> UNESCO, 23.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.



generation for the media should be free from “outside political or commercial interference.”<sup>20</sup> This component of press freedom is therefore, to a large extent, determined by how media houses are internally structured as well as what type of national regulations and/or self-regulatory systems are in place that affects editorial independence. In addition, the extent to which journalistic ethics are adhered to and valued by society are important markers for media independence. High ethical standards in media reporting and information literacy can improve not only trust in the media, but also a sense of appreciation of the importance of press freedom within a society.<sup>21</sup>

### Media Pluralism

Press freedom is in part dependent on the existence of a large number and variety of media outlets. This pluralism gives rise to “choice for media consumption and production”<sup>22</sup> which ensures that citizens have access to a multitude of information and sources across various media platforms. In this way the media becomes more representative – reflecting views and information from diverse social and interest groups, including those which are often marginalised.<sup>23</sup> It is important to note that media pluralism doesn’t only refer to a large number of media outlets but also the availability of a wide range of different content. In general, it can be argued that media pluralism can contribute to a more open, transparent and accountable society. However, a pluralistic media environment is highly dependent on economic, regulatory and technological aspects. Limited ownership, a poorly regulated market and indifference from government, among others, can undermine media pluralism.<sup>24</sup>

## Media Environment in Namibia

In Namibia, as elsewhere, press freedom remains crucial to peaceful and democratic development.<sup>25</sup> However, the global disruptive transformation of the media poses serious challenges to the furthering and deepening of press freedom and the democratic dispensation, both in sub-Saharan Africa and beyond. Indeed, progress towards both democratisation and press freedom has stalled in the region. And a number of countries have seen a reversal of gains in media freedom.<sup>26</sup> This trend is in part reflected internationally. In its most recent global overview of press freedom and media development, UNESCO observes that media freedom has come under considerable strain worldwide - noting that, according to the latest Gallup polls across 131 nations, respondents in many countries perceive a decline in media freedom.<sup>27</sup> The report summarises further:

“Trends show that media independence is weakening and the professional standards of journalism are being eroded by economic forces on the one hand and lack of recognition by political actors on the other.”<sup>28</sup>

Overall, Namibia internationally enjoys a reputation for guaranteeing a high level of media freedom –

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 23-4.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 70.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 77.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 23 & 70.

<sup>25</sup> Wasserman Herman and Benequista Nicholas, Pathways to Media Reform in Sub-Saharan Africa: Reflections from a Regional Consultation. December 2017. 2.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>27</sup> UNESCO, 13-4.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 11.

consistently performing very well in global press freedom surveys. However, a recent decline in media freedom rankings is a cause for concern. According to the latest Reporters Without Borders press freedom index of 2018 Namibia lost its top ranking in Africa to Ghana and dropped two places globally to 26th place.<sup>29</sup>

## Media Sustainability

The issue of media sustainability in essence concerns the continuous financial viability of media operations. It goes without saying that media houses, especially private and commercial media, are dependent, like other businesses, on generating a regular income from their products to cover production costs and other expenses - and if possible create a profit. Non-profit and state-owned media face fewer economic pressures than their commercial counterparts. Nevertheless, they also depend on securing regular finances such as state subsidies or other sources of funds. The recent aggressive drive by the Namibian Broadcasting Corporation (NBC) to improve on the collection of annual TV licences fees indicates that the pressure to bring in revenue also affects state-owned media.<sup>30</sup>

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It should be noted that media markets differ considerably across the world. Scholars have sought to characterise “media system models” to understand and compare the economy of the media. Traditional print and broadcasting media, especially in the West, have relied for their revenue on a mix of sources encompassing commercial, social, political and state finances. Emphases placed on different sources by respective media system models have shaped different media markets; hence the United Kingdom and North America are dominated by large commercial media houses. In comparison, many countries in northern Europe, such as Germany, Austria and Denmark, have a market where both commercial media and media “tied to organised social or political groups” coexist with limited involvement from the state.<sup>31</sup> Therefore, while the issue of financial sustainability for media houses is deemed a global concern, there are marked differences between the changes and responses that media markets in different regions of the world undergo.<sup>32</sup>

Media sustainability is also an important issue for overall press freedom since a media outlet that is under considerable financial pressure is far more likely cut back on journalistic capacity, and curtail reporting that might negatively impact advertisers and other revenue-providers whether commercial or government backers. Furthermore, a lack of resources can impact greatly on the level and scale of quality reporting that a media organisation can conduct.

## Media outlets: Print and broadcasting

Namibia, despite being a small and sparsely populated nation, has a fairly diverse and pluralistic media environment, at least in terms of the number of local media houses in print, radio and broadcasting.

<sup>29</sup> Smith Jana-Mari, “Media freedom plunge irks gov”, *The Namibian Sun*. May 3, 2018.

<sup>30</sup> likela Sakeus, “Police and NBC licence operation starts today,” *The Namibian*. September 27, 2017.

<sup>31</sup> Cage, Julia, *The Economics of the African Media*, in *The Oxford Handbook of Africa and Economics*, Volume 2: Policies and Practices. Monga Celestin and Lin Yifu Justin (Eds). August 15, 2015. 7 - 8.

<sup>32</sup> UNESCO, 77 - 9.

Like many other sub-Saharan African countries<sup>33</sup>, the overarching trend in the country since independence has been a marked increase in media outlets, especially in radio but also print and TV. The growth of commercial and community radio stations over recent years is particularly noteworthy. Indeed, the Communications Regulatory Authority of Namibia (CRAN) expressed concern in the past about the large number of existing broadcasting outlets as well as the number of applications for licences; querying the sustainability of broadcasters especially in the northern and central coastal areas.<sup>34</sup>

In terms of print media there are currently five daily newspapers available of which four are longstanding and well-established publications. There are even more weekly newspapers, including small regional publications<sup>35</sup> catering to specific language groups.<sup>36</sup> The majority of print publications are operated as commercial businesses, while the government owns three newspapers: one daily and two weeklies, one of which – the *Southern Times* – is a joint venture with NamZim Newspapers Pty (Ltd) based in Zimbabwe. An outlier in this collection of predominantly commercially- and government-owned local newspapers is the daily *The Namibian*, which is owned by the Namibia Media Trust.<sup>37</sup>

In its 2016 annual report, CRAN states that it has to date issued 28 broadcasting service licences for both radio and TV broadcasters. The report noted that five licence applications were still under consideration.<sup>38</sup> In terms of licensing, CRAN only regulates commercial and community (essentially NGO-based) broadcasters and not the government owned Namibian Broadcasting Corporation (NBC).<sup>39</sup>

A study conducted by the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) and the Namibian chapter of the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA Namibia) in 2015 lists 30 radio stations including 10 NBC language service stations. The study also listed 10 commercial and 10 community radio stations, the latter of which included an online station operated by the state-owned Namibian College of Open Learning, a distance education institute.<sup>40</sup>

## Media Business: A challenging undertaking

The media business – especially those media houses that concentrate on news and public interest issues as opposed to entertainment – cannot be considered as straightforward commercial enterprise that provides products or services to customers in exchange for payment. Instead, most private media houses generate their revenue from “dual markets” meaning they “[sell] their product to individuals while also participating in the advertising market, which sells access to their audience to a wide variety of buyers.”<sup>41</sup> This adds significant complexity to the business model since media houses have to cater to two vastly separate clients. The challenges of digitalisation have placed further pressure on the dual markets model especially as advertising revenue is falling away.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>33</sup> Balancing Act, The Sub-Saharan African Media Landscape: Then, Now and in the Future, August 2014. 5.

<sup>34</sup> CRAN, Annual Report 2014/15, n. d. 33.

<sup>35</sup> FES & MISA Namibia, African Media Barometer: Namibia 2015, 2015. 28-9.

<sup>36</sup> Links, Frederico, Obstructed View: An assessment of the impact of media ownership and management on freedom of expression and access to information in Namibia, n. d. 11.

<sup>37</sup> FES & MISA Namibia, 28-9.

<sup>38</sup> CRAN, Annual Report 2016, n. d. 16.

<sup>39</sup> Interview with Mr Mwyia, Nico, NBC, Windhoek. May 28, 2018.

<sup>40</sup> FES & MISA Namibia, 30.

<sup>41</sup> Rhodes University, 21.

<sup>42</sup> UNESCO, 80.

The dual markets business model that most media houses are built on is further complicated by the fact that media businesses need to ensure that their commercial operations do not create undue interference to guarantee the production of quality journalism. In other words, journalists should be free to do their work without having to be concerned about their reporting having a potentially adverse effect on the media houses' relationship with business clients. This principle is known as 'editorial independence', and is both a core aspect of media independence and crucial to the practice of journalism. The level of media independence in any environment is determined by 'outside' regulatory aspects as well as factors 'inside' the media environment and individual businesses such as self-regulation initiatives and internal operational structures, among others (See Info Box 1).

In practice, the strict separation of the business and editorial component of media houses is highly difficult to achieve, as is acknowledged in a 2018 UNESCO report:

“Media organisations exist in highly interconnected structures of government, political and economic interests, and professional activity. Complete independence is rare (if not impossible), but remains a mission-critical aspiration, and the extent to which media institutions are able to enjoy autonomy remains an integral part of a functioning media system.”<sup>43</sup>

It is therefore inevitable that the running of media houses brings with it a considerable amount of built-in tension and a high potential for conflict - perhaps more so than in many other industries. Disagreements over operations within media businesses are often multifaceted and involve a wide range of considerations. For example, a seemingly minor dispute between editorial staff and the advertising department regarding the publication or broadcasting of a critical story concerning an important advertising client could potentially involve the business owner, shareholders and the journalist staffers. Moreover, the debate could move from purely economic considerations to the realm of politics if, for example, the advertising client is a state owned enterprise (SOE) with close connections to senior politicians.<sup>44</sup>

This potential for conflict – which, it should be remembered, is a continuous factor in media houses' operations - coupled with the dual markets business model underlines the fact that print and broadcast media are particularly challenging businesses. Many of the respondents spoken to as part of this report alluded to a range of difficulties faced by local media houses. Notably, many difficulties were associated not with digitalisation, but were rather attributed to Namibia's media environment and overall economic situation.

For example, the chief executive officer, Stefan Hugo and Cyril Lowe, chief operations officer of *One Africa TV* noted that Namibia due to its small population size constituted a very limited market for media products.<sup>45</sup> Albe Botha, group chief executive officer of Namibia Media Holdings (NMH), made a similar statement stating furthermore that, due to Namibia's open economy, local print and TV businesses had to compete with a wide range of outside media products particularly from South Africa. As an example, he noted that around 400 South African magazine titles are regularly available on sale

<sup>43</sup> UNESCO, 109.

<sup>44</sup> A good recent real life example of such a complex situation is dramatised in the 2017 movie “The Post”, set in the early 70s, which tells the story of the Washington Post newspaper's editorial team trying to publish critical stories concerning classified documents on the US involvement in Vietnam.

<sup>45</sup> Interview with Mr Hugo, Stefan & Mr Lowe, Cyril, One Africa TV, Windhoek. April 26, 2018.

locally.<sup>46</sup> Tileni Mongudhi, acting editor of the *Southern Times* (a government-owned weekly newspaper), said that Namibian media houses, especially newspapers, have always faced significant capital and human resources constraints, forcing them to operate on a “shoestring budget.”<sup>47</sup> Wolfram Jauss, the managing director of the printing company WordPress Namibia, spoke at length about risk, characterising the national media business as an “unforgiving industry”. In his opinion, and especially with regards to the newspaper business, financial success depended on the production of quality journalism – which in turn required highly dedicated, hardworking and experienced management in both editorial and financial departments.<sup>48</sup>

One further issue should be highlighted here. Cage argues that it is a fallacy to simply compare the Western newspaper media with the media landscape in sub-Saharan Africa. Her argument hinges on the observation that many of the African countries in the region do not have newspaper businesses that can strictly be described as mass circulation, since the newspaper industry on the continent has never been able to appeal to a broad base of the population as have newspapers in Europe.<sup>49</sup> This can, in large part, be attributed to distribution barriers and a lack of disposable income among a majority of the population. It therefore follows that newspaper businesses in Africa often cater for a much smaller and wealthier segment of the population.<sup>50</sup> This matters since, according to Cage, most newspapers are by default more susceptible to corruption and agenda-driven reporting due to the small advertising revenues, limited sales and high operating costs.<sup>51</sup> To some extent then, the newspaper industry can be characterised as weak in Sub-Saharan Africa and thus possessing a much lower resource and capacity base than comparative media operations in the West. The resulting lower resource and capacity base contributes to the weakness of the media in sub-Saharan Africa. Furthermore, it can also be argued that newspapers primarily represent the views of higher income groups and elites since these segments of society make up the majority of the readership. The value, and indeed the protection, of an independent media is therefore particularly pertinent in Africa, where inequality and elitism remain firmly entrenched.

From all these responses it can be theorised that local commercial media operations can be a rather risky and challenging business, a perception that certainly holds true prior to the challenge of digitalisation. Also of note during the data collection period was the perception among many respondents that the extensive uncertainties around both digital media itself and how the industry can adapt to receding and changing revenue flows had created considerable challenges in the planning and investment process.

## Media Advertising: a crowded and competitive market

Respondents consulted as part of this study offered different opinions and experiences regarding sustainability challenges for the Namibian print media. Representatives from print media houses acknowl-

<sup>46</sup> Interview with Mr Botha, Albe, NMH, Windhoek. April 23, 2018.

<sup>47</sup> Interview with Mr Mongudhi, Tileni, *Southern Times*, Windhoek. April 16, 2018.

<sup>48</sup> Interview with Mr Jauss, Wolfram, WordPress, Windhoek. May 17, 2018.

<sup>49</sup> Cage, Julia, 8-10.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 12-3.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 11-2.



edged that the international trend of digitalisation was making itself felt across the country's newspaper landscape. However, the predominant perception was that current economic pressures experienced by print businesses were the result of the economic recession Namibia officially entered at the end of 2016.<sup>52</sup> Botha from NMH noted that considerable cuts in government expenditure caused a negative ripple effect across the economy resulting in many businesses limiting their spending. He stated that in terms of advertising trends observed by NMH it seems that smaller local businesses were predominantly affected by Namibia's economic recession. By comparison, large multinational companies had actually increased advertising expenditure with NMH seeing a "year on year growth" of around 10 percent. Mongudhi echoed Botha's opinion. He noted that government funds for the *Southern Times* as well as *New Era* have been reduced with the former experiencing budget cuts of 30 percent in 2017 and 40 percent in 2018. It is difficult to establish to what extent the Namibian print media is financially dependent on advertising sales. It is, however, safe to assume that many privately-owned newspapers rely on advertising revenue to a great extent to cover operations and generate profit. Revenue from daily newspaper sales, while still important, generally contributes much less to a newspaper's coffers than advertising income. Cage notes that in most sub-Saharan African countries, the advertising market is extremely narrow, further observing that:

"...only long-established newspapers with a high-enough circulation and a constant identifiable readership can capture the few advertising resources."<sup>53</sup>

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There are, however, indications that Namibia's advertising industry is fairly well developed and competitive. This perspective is held by industry representatives, who note that there are a number of locally established advertising agencies in Namibia that have to compete among each other as well as with freelancers and South African based agencies, all within a small market. However, the industry is under economic pressure with advertising agencies competing fiercely for business and clients focused on cutting costs.<sup>54</sup> Despite efforts from both advertisers and clients, marketing budgets have undoubtedly been negatively affected by the country's recession. A recent survey among businesses and state-owned enterprises (SOEs) by Team Namibia found that 60 percent of respondents had reduced their marketing budgets.<sup>55</sup>

To some extent, Botha's view aligns with Cage's take on the region's advertising market, when he states that the country's current print media market is overcrowded especially with regards to weekly newspapers. Moreover, he notes that pre-recession advertising contained "a lot of wastage", such as birthday messages for senior government officials, and that such high levels of advertising sales were not sustainable. Hugo, from One Africa Television, shares Botha's view that the Namibian media market is suffering from an oversupply of media outlets without a corresponding supply of advertising revenue.<sup>56</sup> Over recent times, he argues, the media market has become "very fragmented" thereby splitting advertising revenues across a wide range of media outlets.

Botha's and Hugo's views imply that the number of print media titles prior to 2016 was not sustainable, especially when factoring in the drop in advertising sales during the economic downturn. The dimin-

<sup>52</sup> Shejvali, Nangula and Weylandt, Max, 3 Years of Geingob: Harambee at Halftime. Democracy Report. Institute for Public Policy Research. April 2018. 6.

<sup>53</sup> Cage, 10.

<sup>54</sup> Media Update, "Advertising in Namibia: Big opportunities and challenges", August 7, 2017. <https://www.mediaupdate.co.za/marketing/141221/advertising-in-namibia-big-opportunities-and-challenges>

<sup>55</sup> Team Namibia, "Press Release: Businesses have cut marketing budgets", April 5, 2018.

<sup>56</sup> Interview with Mr Hugo, Stefan & Mr Lowe, Cyril, One Africa TV, Windhoek. April 26, 2018.

ishing advertising revenue in Namibia has already led to the downsizing of some media operations and related job losses. *The Namibia Economist* newspaper shut down its print edition at the end of 2016, moving its reporting online and retrenching 12 staff. It was stated that the decision to go exclusively digital was based on a substantial growth in the newspaper's website readers.<sup>57</sup> The weekly newspaper, *The Villager*, followed *The Namibia Economist* by becoming an online-only publication in October 2017. An article in the newspaper stated that falling circulation and advertising sales had prompted the move to go digital.<sup>58</sup>

Overall it seems that the Namibian broadcast media share many of the challenges regarding perceptions of media sustainability as their print media counterparts. However, there were two particular differences broadcast media representatives highlighted. Firstly, respondents felt that NBC radio and television stations were unduly advantaged with regards to the advertising market. Hugo and Lowe from One Africa TV argued that the NBC's substantial government subsidies, existing infrastructure and TV licence fees posed significant and unfair market competition for private broadcasting operators. They stated that the NBC's fairly secure revenue streams enabled it to offer lower advertising rates with which commercial operators simply could not compete. The One Africa TV representatives therefore felt that the Namibian government and regulator had failed in creating an equitable business environment for broadcasting media in the country, thereby placing the ideal of a pluralistic and diverse media at risk.<sup>59</sup>

Hugo and Lowe's views were partially shared by other broadcasting business representatives. At a recent EFN meeting, several representatives of the broadcast media expressed similar views with regard to the advertising market in the country being unfairly skewed to the benefit of the NBC. Overall, it was felt that CRAN had little understanding of the economic pressures that private radio stations experienced as well as the working of the country's advertising market.<sup>60</sup>

## Digitalisation: defining the challenges

Respondents gave notably divergent replies with regards to quantifying the threat that the digital revolution is posing to local media outlets. It was notable that some respondents primarily attributed the current poor business environment to Namibia's recent economic recession starting in 2016<sup>61</sup> and downplayed the negative impact of digitalisation. Some radio station representatives seemed to be more concerned about possible advertising regulatory measures.<sup>62</sup> Jauss felt that print businesses were under pressure from both the economic slowdown as well as digitalisation. However, he<sup>63</sup> as well as Botha stated that print was still very relevant in Namibia's media market, arguing that most of the country's consumers still preferred physical newspapers.<sup>64</sup> Some respondents voiced concern that digitalisation and the resultant revenue shortfalls for traditional media houses would inevitably lead to a quality loss of locally produced media content.<sup>65</sup> Conversely other interviewees like Mongudhi, felt that newspaper businesses in Namibia had always struggled to generate quality content.<sup>66</sup>

<sup>57</sup> Nakashole, Ndama, "Economist retrenches 12 in digital move", *The Namibian*. December 7, 2016.

<sup>58</sup> *The Villager*, "The future is here. It is digital", October 2, 2017.

<sup>59</sup> Interview with Mr Hugo, Stefan & Mr Lowe, Cyril, One Africa TV, Windhoek. April 26, 2018.

<sup>60</sup> EFN, Executive Committee Meeting, April 17, 2018.

<sup>61</sup> The World Bank, Namibia, 18 September 2017. <https://data.worldbank.org/country/namibia>

<sup>62</sup> EFN, Executive Committee Meeting, April 17, 2018.

<sup>63</sup> Interview with Mr Jauss, Wolfram, Wordpress, Windhoek. May 17, 2018.

<sup>64</sup> Interview with Mr Botha, Albe, NMH, Windhoek. April 23, 2018.

<sup>65</sup> Interview with Mr Hugo, Stefan & Mr Lowe, Cyril, One Africa TV, Windhoek. April 26, 2018.

<sup>66</sup> Interview with Mr Mongudhi, Tileni, *Southern Times*, Windhoek. April 16, 2018.



There is clear evidence that the international trend of digitalisation has begun to also impact on the Namibian media environment over recent years. It should be emphasised that the disruption of traditional media houses from digitalisation can be broadly seen as twofold. Firstly the digital revolution as mentioned in the introduction is rapidly transforming the overall media environment by fundamentally altering what, where, when and how people access content. Secondly, traditional media houses have seen their dual markets business model increasingly erode as more and more audiences conveniently access content, predominantly for free online, and advertisers re-direct their budgets to digital advertising.

Naturally, traditional media have sought to respond to these challenges by seeking ways to adapt to the changing media landscape, analysing behaviour from consumers and trying to protect their existing business models, and/or opening up new forms of revenue generation. Thus, for example, most newspapers have invested in and expanded their online presence and are increasingly incorporating social media platforms.<sup>67</sup> This transformation is also evident in local print media with publications such as the *Namibian Sun* and the *Allgemeine Zeitung* sourcing and publishing readers' comments from Facebook on specific news stories. *The Namibian* publishes a regular daily column "From the Twitter-sphere" with Twitter messages.

However, a number of respondents were critical of media houses' responses, in terms of both responses to digitalisations, and the overall improvement of content. Two academics from the Namibian University of Science and Technology (NUST), whose work focuses on communication and media, Hugh Ellis and Emily Brown, argued that newspapers needed to become more innovative and explore a range of possible reporting options, concepts and media platforms. This, they argued, could both improve and diversify reporting.<sup>68 69</sup> In addition, Brown felt that most Namibian media houses carried out too little research and planning with regards to developing relevant media content and strategies.<sup>70</sup>

In some aspects this view was supported by media representatives. Mongudhi stated that media houses needed to conduct comprehensive market research to gain a thorough understanding of their audiences, while also taking a bold approach when it came to innovation.<sup>71</sup> Botha stated that NMH already undertook detailed analysis of their readership – mostly using online data – to establish trends and interests. He emphasised that said data was not sold to a third party, and used only to improve and guide content generation.<sup>72</sup> Similarly, Christof Maletsky the acting editor of *The Namibian*, stated that the newspaper was taking a closer look at data from their online offerings to understand how they could better meet the needs of their audience. The paper also closely monitors hardcopy circulation figures in order for sales to be optimised.<sup>73</sup>

In terms of the quality of journalism, media houses stated that this remained an important feature of their respective newspapers operations. Botha stated that NMH offers more in-depth, analytical content, specifically on the economy, through their bi-monthly 'Business 7' insert. While this had improved reporting quality, he noted that it had not yet generated an adequate financial return.<sup>74</sup> Maletsky shared his staunch belief that quality journalism was at the heart of *The Namibian* and in his opinion constituted a crucial factor of remaining competitive and profitable. He stated further that

<sup>67</sup> UNESCO, 69 & 77.

<sup>68</sup> Interview with Mr Elis, Hugh, NUST, Windhoek. April 17, 2018.

<sup>69</sup> Interview with Ms Brown, Emily, NUST, Windhoek. April 19, 2018.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Interview with Mr Mongudhi, Tileni, *Southern Times*, Windhoek. April 16, 2018.

<sup>72</sup> Interview with Mr Botha, Albe, NMH, Windhoek. April 23, 2018.

<sup>73</sup> Interview with Mr Maletsky, Christof, *The Namibian*, Windhoek, May 16, 2018.

<sup>74</sup> Interview with Mr Botha, Albe, NMH, Windhoek. April 23, 2018.



the paper boasted its own dedicated investigative unit.<sup>75</sup> Notably, Mongudhi argued that giving government-owned media houses more commercial and editorial independence could potentially result in a more sustainable and higher-quality publications.<sup>76</sup> Indeed, a number of media representatives emphasised that digitalisation and online media were to be seen more as an opportunity than a threat. Most media representatives acknowledged the importance of generating quality content regardless of the medium used. However, overall it remains decidedly unclear how and if media houses will be able to strike an acceptable balance for consumers between offering quality content and profitability.

In fact, globally, many media houses have embraced digitalisation enthusiastically, seemingly envisioning the potential benefits that electronic information-disseminating mediums could bring to journalism. In a recent book excerpt, academic and media observer Dan Kennedy relates how US-based newspapers began experimenting with digital technology to carry and distribute content as far back as the 1980s.<sup>77</sup> It should be emphasised that the disruption and transformation of the global media landscape by digitalisation should not and cannot be exclusively viewed negatively. Naturally, this complicates any analysis of the digital impact on media. In many ways the digital revolution has provided journalists with a wide range of opportunities with regards to sourcing information, disseminating news and other stories, and engaging with audiences. On the other hand, digitalisation has also made the journalism profession more challenging and, to some extent, pits journalists against media houses.<sup>78</sup> This aspect will be explored in a later section of this report.

### Info Box 2: Rapid changes in media consumption habits

A crucial development of media consumption driven by digitalisation is not only that it allows consumers to better control their media use in terms of what, where and when to access:

“...but also [involves] a shift to consuming media in smaller and smaller chunks, and in hunting and pecking at great speed, instead of watching or listening to a long bulletin or publication full of news.”<sup>79</sup>

Thus consumers are increasingly likely to only access a few stories from newspapers or TV stations, rather than reading a newspaper from cover to cover or watching an entire news bulletin. These stories are accessed online via social media platforms, digital media or search engines – mostly for little or no monetary gain for the respective media outlet. Internationally, this growing trend is disrupting long held beliefs around branding and the power of brands – instead an individual news story or feature unit is gaining in economic importance.<sup>80</sup> This “unbundling” of aggregated media and news content has led to some Western media observers and theorists arguing that journalists need to become more “entrepreneurial” and build their own personal brand. Others have noted that journalists should re-package content in innovative ways to ensure that stories remain relevant to consumers and to generate revenue.<sup>81</sup> As a matter of fact, this evolution, spurred on by digitalisation, has already led to new formats and experimenting with presenting content and engaging with consumers. This complex unbundling process is still on-going and it is difficult to predict what other transformations it will bring to the media business and the journalist profession.<sup>82</sup>

<sup>75</sup> Interview with Mr Maletsky, Christof, *The Namibian*, Windhoek, May 16, 2018.

<sup>76</sup> Interview with Mr Mongudhi, Tileni, *Southern Times*, Windhoek. April 16, 2018.

<sup>77</sup> Kennedy, Dan, Excerpt: ‘The Return of the Moguls’, June 4, 2018. <https://www.poynter.org/news/excerpt-return-moguls>

<sup>78</sup> Marius Dragomir, Marius & Thompson Mark, *Mapping Digital Media: Global Findings*, Introduction, July 2014. 12-3.

<sup>79</sup> Rhodes University, 22.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 7, 22.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 22 & 23.

In Namibia indications are that most traditional media houses still make adequate profit from ‘bundling’ and selling content to consumers as well as providing a medium for advertising clients to reach customers. However, as this study will suggest, this is changing - perhaps faster than media houses anticipated. A further tentative trend that should be of particular concern for local journalists and advocates of press freedom is observed in a research study by Rhodes University. This comprehensive, current and highly informative study looks at media sustainability and digitalisation in South Africa. It speaks to many issues affecting media also in Namibia and is thus of particular value for this study. The Rhodes University study identifies the following trend:

“In many countries, the number of people just ‘not that into news’ seems to be increasing as time spent on social media overall increases each year, with only some of that time given over to news consumption.”<sup>83</sup>

The pervasiveness of digital media and the inordinate amount of choice that it offers to consumers, coupled with changing user behaviour, could result in an overall lowering of interest in and consumption of news, current affairs and journalism as a whole. While there is a lack of detailed data about media consumption Namibia, the news consumption figures from traditional media by Afrobarometer<sup>84</sup> indicates a recent decline especially concerning those who consume traditional media relatively regularly daily and a few time per week numbers (see Graphs 1, 2 & 3). For example, Afrobarometer respondents reported a slight decrease in consuming news from radio and television in 2017 compared with 2014.

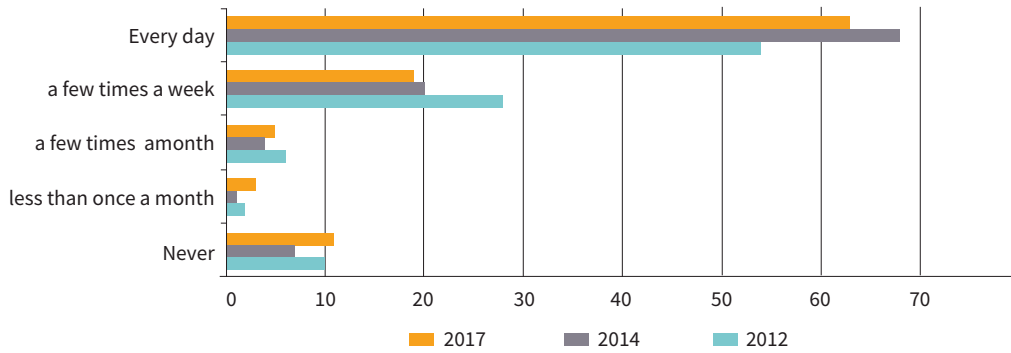
Furthermore, a decline in both the media offerings and consumer numbers of critical and analytical newspaper journalism due to challenges caused by digitalisation could result in many Namibians losing access to balanced and objective reporting. This is a particular concern when it comes to lower-income consumers whose access is largely limited to NBC radio stations that are notably biased in favour of the government.<sup>85</sup> Considering that the numbers of regular newspaper readers are already low in the country and that many private radio stations focus on entertainment it is likely that the access to diverse, local and independent news outlets is already severely limited for many citizens especially in rural areas.

<sup>83</sup> Rhodes University, 3.

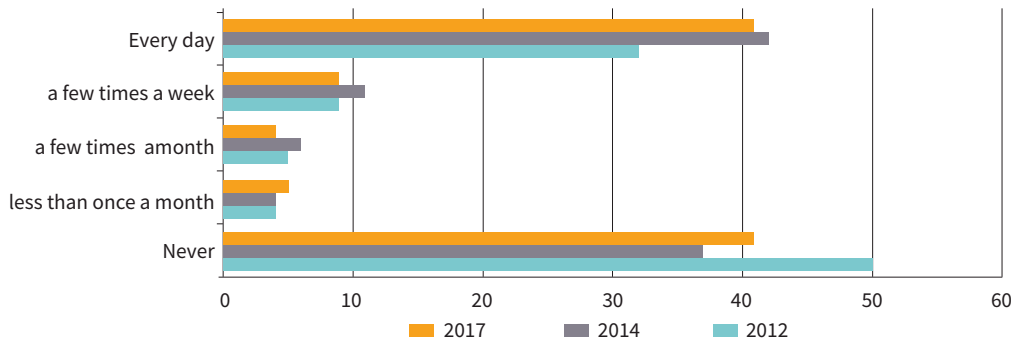
<sup>84</sup> The Afrobarometer is a pan-African, impartial perception survey that collects analyses and publishes data of citizens’ attitudes on democracy, governance and a range of socio-economic topics. The survey project aims to provide consistent and quality opinion data to policymakers, researchers and the public at large. Currently the survey is conducted in 36 African countries. For more information see: [www.afrobarometer.org](http://www.afrobarometer.org)

<sup>85</sup> IFES & MISA Namibia, 48-9.

Graph 1: How often do you get news : from the radio?



Graph 2: How often do you get news : from television?



## Traditional media: Struggling to make money from digital

As noted previously, Namibian newspapers have already sought to utilise digital mediums for their benefit. However, simply providing content for digital platforms does not guarantee media houses a new source of revenue. The growing online presence of local media, coupled with the existing information flood from international internet sources, might give the impression that most media houses and even newspapers should be thriving. However, the crucial issue for media businesses is that most have so far failed to reap the financial benefits of their investments in online media.<sup>86</sup> Unlike physical newspaper copies that are sold for profit, online content generates little financial benefit for print media as many consumers expect to access for free. The second and main source of revenue for media, advertising and marketing, has also been dwindling, with increasing numbers of advertising clients and agencies being drawn to online advertising since 2013/14.<sup>87</sup> Moreover, media houses have failed to capture a decent share of digital advertising revenue with their online products. Instead, large technology companies such as Google and Facebook have reaped most of the financial benefits due to the rapid global growth in digital advertising. While internationally, revenue from digital advertising has roughly doubled over five years from 2012 to 2016<sup>88</sup> it should be noted that:

<sup>86</sup> WAN-IFRA, Financially Viable Media in Emerging and Developing Markets, May 2011. 8.

<sup>87</sup> Rhodes University, 13.

<sup>88</sup> UNESCO, 80.

“...Google and Facebook between them, have garnered at least 50% of all Internet advertising revenue worldwide...”<sup>89</sup>

The preferential shift by advertisers towards digital ads is also reflected in the significantly declining revenue from advertising in print media international with a 27 percent drop from 2012 to 2016.<sup>90</sup> Technology companies have achieved this dominance due to their ability to collect unprecedented amounts of data over online platforms from consumers. These companies also use algorithms to essentially predict behaviour from individuals. This makes it possible to collate highly detailed information on users regarding gender, personality, spending capacity and habits, social networks and so forth – data that is highly valuable as it allows advertisers to tailor messages to a wide range of consumer sub-groups in ways that were not possible with traditional media.<sup>91</sup> Consequently:

“Facebook has built a mammoth advertising business, with sales of around [U]\$40bn in 2017, by gathering detailed information about users’ identities and behaviour online and then selling access to them. Facebook tracks users not only on its services, including its eponymous social network and Instagram (which it owns), but across the web.”<sup>92</sup>

With regards to Namibia, almost all respondents from media houses as well as observers and academics acknowledged that revenue in the media business from advertising sources had dropped over recent years. However, very few interviewees expressed concern about advertising clients and agencies shifting their budgets to digital ads. Instead, respondents in general attributed poor advertising sales to the country’s economic difficulties. Botha from NMH rejected outright the notion that digitalisation posed a current challenge to the business. He did, however, admit that generating revenue from NMH’s online offerings was still a work in progress.<sup>93</sup> A similar opinion was also expressed by the acting editor of *The Namibian*, Maletsky, who stated that the digital advertising industry was not a large concern to the paper.<sup>94</sup>

Hugh Ellis from NUST felt that digital advertising was likely not yet a major factor in the Namibian advertising and marketing market. However, he offered a more cautious note regarding the sustainability of newspapers than most media representatives. He attributed the discontinuation of *The Villager* and the *Namibia Economist*’s print editions, at least in part, to economic pressures arising from digitalisation. He further stated that, especially in the case of the latter newspaper, the fact that news content that could be accessed free-of-charge online must have been detrimental to sales of the printed copy of the paper. Ellis, in this regard, emphasised the newspapers’ overt reliance on a small, mostly urban, middle and upper class readership who would be more likely to access ‘free’ daily news content online from websites and social media platforms. In comparison, he is of the opinion that Namibia’s large print media houses, such as *The Namibian* and the NMH newspapers, are better placed to meet challenges emanating from digital growth, primarily due to their larger size, appeal to a wider audience and having readerships that include sizeable numbers of people who have limited or no access to the internet. Nevertheless, he did state that to his knowledge *The Namibian* newspaper currently received a considerable proportion of their online traffic from social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook – which could impact negatively on the paper’s digital ad revenue.<sup>95</sup>

<sup>89</sup> Rhodes University, 13.

<sup>90</sup> UNESCO, 79.

<sup>91</sup> Rhodes University, 13-4.

<sup>92</sup> *The Economist*, “Facebook and democracy: The antisocial network”, March 24 – 30, 2018. 39.

<sup>93</sup> Interview with Mr Botha, Albe, NMH, Windhoek. April 23, 2018.

<sup>94</sup> Interview with Mr Maletsky, Christof, *The Namibian*, Windhoek, May 16, 2018.

<sup>95</sup> Interview with Mr Ellis, Hugh, NUST, Windhoek. April 17, 2018.

Based on financial statements published in the latest available annual report from CRAN (2015/16), broadcasters in Namibia generated roughly N\$600 million in total revenue for that year.<sup>96</sup> While this is a large amount when taken at face value, it is spread across nearly 30 licensed broadcasters. The data is slightly dated and it is highly conceivable that the total revenue has significantly decreased since then due to the country's economic recession. It should also be noted that the estimated revenue figure for the broadcasting industry excludes the operations of the NBC. The latest financial figures that could be sourced for the NBC stem from Auditor-General's report which states that the SOE generated a total income of just over N\$62 million for the financial year 2011/12.<sup>97</sup>

Like other media representatives, Hugo and Lowe from Africa One TV also acknowledged the impact the poor economic situation had on their broadcasting business, which includes the free-to-air Africa One TV station and the radio station 99FM. However, notably, they were the only representatives to voice considerable concerns regarding the potential threat that digital advertising posed not only to their media house but to Namibia's media industry as a whole. Lowe for example noted that advertising placements from the public sector had been severely reduced. Moreover, both representatives felt that digitalisation was increasingly becoming a major challenge to their broadcasting company's business model. They attributed this to two major changes which were disrupting the country's media market. Firstly, the rapid increase in media outlets in Namibia has substantially widened the media market without a corresponding increase in consumers. This means that Namibia's already limited audience has been further split into smaller segments across a wide range of media. Secondly, the increasing flow of local advertising money towards digital advertising has come at the expense of local media houses' revenue.

Apart from existing radio and TV stations such as those offered by the NBC, Hugo noted that their broadcasting stations also had to compete with digital radio and TV services being streamed online. He argued that the shrinking of audience size per media outlet made most media houses less attractive from an advertising point of view, hurting the industry as a whole. Hugo argued that, in his view, the current plethora of local media outlets - both print and broadcast - were unsustainable given the small market.

The fragmentation of the media market is a trend that has also been observed in other African countries and is expected to continue. Increasingly TV and radio audiences are fragmenting into "vernacular or topic-based niche stations," with only a few broadcasters capturing a reduced national mass audience.<sup>98</sup> It is clear that media audiences in Namibia have fragmented significantly given the amount of media outlets that have been established over recent years. For example, a considerable number of private entertainment-focused radio stations have emerged in the Namibian media market. However, it is much harder to validate if and how media offerings from digital streaming services are affecting local media businesses. At least with regards to content, some respondents acknowledged that online media posed challenges. Thus for example EFN members from commercial radio stations stated that media houses had to work on improving their news coverage since international news outlets were providing detailed news and analysis at a rapid pace which could be quickly accessed online.<sup>99</sup>

In South Africa the dominant digital satellite pay-TV provider Multichoice has not seen an overall loss of

<sup>96</sup> CRAN, Annual Report 2016, n. d. 25.

<sup>97</sup> GRN, Report of the Auditor-General on the Accounts of the Namibian Broadcasting Corporation for the financial year ended 31 March 2012, December 2015. 43.

<sup>98</sup> Balancing Act, 5-6.

<sup>99</sup> EFN, Executive Committee Meeting, April 17, 2018.



paying viewers. However, according to a recent and in-depth study by Rhodes University in South Africa, they are losing subscribers for their premium products and only gaining customers for their cheaper offerings.<sup>100</sup> It can be surmised that customers, particularly wealthier consumers, are increasingly forgoing pay-TV offerings and turning to online media offerings such as the streaming service Netflix. Both the increasing turn by customers towards online offerings, and the shift of advertisers' budgets towards digital content to the benefit of multinational tech companies, would reflect the international trend. There is no data on similar trends in Namibia. Nevertheless, there are broad indications that Namibians' media access and usage habits over recent years are indicative of a growing preference for digital media and content at large. The next two sections will explore these aspects of the Namibian media landscape.

## Media usage in Namibia

According to local MediaMetrics media surveys conducted by Vision Africa, Namibians are increasingly accessing television, with 42.9 percent of respondents reporting that they “watched TV yesterday” in 2016 - a considerable increase compared to only 27.5 percent in 2012. Similarly, respondents who listened to the radio – the most widespread and easily accessible media in Namibia - the previous day increased from 64.5 percent in 2012 to 80.3 percent in 2016.<sup>101</sup> Thus, leaving aside the impact of current economic difficulties, it can be argued that television and radio in Namibia are doing well when it comes to attracting audiences. Strangely however, the National Housing and Income Expenditure Survey (NHIES) figure for ownership or access to radio sets by Namibian households has fallen from 83.3 percent in 2009/10 to 69.3 percent in 2015/16 - a decline of 14 percentage points over six years (see Table 1). Most local radio stations can also be accessed via OTT services or via a radio application over most cellphones, which could account for the discrepancy between access to radio sets and the consumption of radio broadcasts.

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Despite the positive figures, owners of local radio stations should be wary. Digitalisation enables consumers to access a range of digital radio offerings from around the world, including via smartphones. Hugo from Africa One TV notes this development significantly amplifies competition for local broadcasters. He further expressed concern that digital streaming services are not regulated in Namibia and, as such, are not compelled to pay the regulatory fees imposed on other media businesses, such as broadcasting licences.<sup>102</sup> In the West, on-demand digital audio offerings, particularly podcasts – which can be quickly and conveniently downloaded and listened to - are becoming increasingly popular, especially among young people.<sup>103</sup> Consuming media in motor vehicles, a domain dominated for a long time by traditional radio broadcasters, is also being disrupted by new technologies, such as the continually improving online connectivity in vehicles. Indeed one theory holds that podcasts are especially popular in the US and Australia because those are areas “where people spend a lot of time in their cars.”<sup>104</sup> Many Namibians often travel extensively over weekends and during holiday periods. It is thus not inconceivable that a similar appetite for online audio content could take off in the country.

Local newspaper businesses are clearly struggling to keep their dual business model in profit. All inter-

<sup>100</sup> Rhodes University, 22.

<sup>101</sup> Vision Africa, MediaMetrics: A Vision Africa Product, Presentation document, 2016. 17.

<sup>102</sup> Interview with Mr Hugo, Stefan & Mr Lowe, Cyril, One Africa TV, Windhoek. April 26, 2018.

<sup>103</sup> Newman, Nic with Fletcher, Richard, Kalogeropoulos, Antonis, Levy, A. L. David and Nielsen, Kleis, Rasmus, Reuters Institute: Digital News Report 2018, n. d. 54.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 29 & 54.

viewees of this study from the print media did to some degree acknowledge that their media houses' ability to generate revenue had come under pressure, particularly since the economic downturn in 2016. However, none of the respondents were willing to publicly release circulation figures for their respective publications; only Maletsky acknowledged that *The Namibian* had seen a concerning decline in newspaper sales in recent times.<sup>105</sup> The latest publicly available circulation figures for local print media, which are themselves estimates apart from *The Namibian*, stem from the FES/MISA Media Barometer from 2015. The study notes that, for example, *The Namibian* and *New Era* have a print run of around 40,000 per edition with the former paper printing an additional 20,000 on Fridays. In comparison, the Afrikaans daily *Republikein* has a reported daily print run of around 20,000.<sup>106</sup> These circulation figures are undoubtedly outdated and may be considerably lower due to current factors such as the poor economic climate.

**Table 1: Ownership & Access Households Communication Equipment in percentage**

Source:	NHIES 2009/10	NHIES 2015/16
<b>Radio</b>		
Owns	71.7	45.6
Access	11.6	23.7
Total	83.3	69.3
<b>TV</b>		
Owns	38	42.5
Access	10.1	11.8
Total	48.1	54.3
<b>Fixed Landline</b>		
Owns	32.7	4.9
Access	23.6	9.1
Total	56.3	14
<b>Cellphone</b>		
Owns	78.8	93.3
Access	9.4	2.5
Total	88.2	95.8
<b>Computer</b>		
Owns	11.5	18.7
Access	7.3	9.2
Total	18.8	27.9
<b>Internet Connection*</b>		
Owns	5.9	15
Access	7.4	8.2
Total	13.3	23.2

\* Coded as 'Internet aerial/dish' in NHIES 2015/16

*The Namibian* is considered by many local media practitioners and observers to be by far the best-selling newspaper in the country and boasts a strong and recognisable brand. This assessment is substantiated by Vision Africa's media survey data from 2012-2016 which indicates that the newspaper is read by considerably more consumers than any other local daily in Namibia. For example, in 2016,

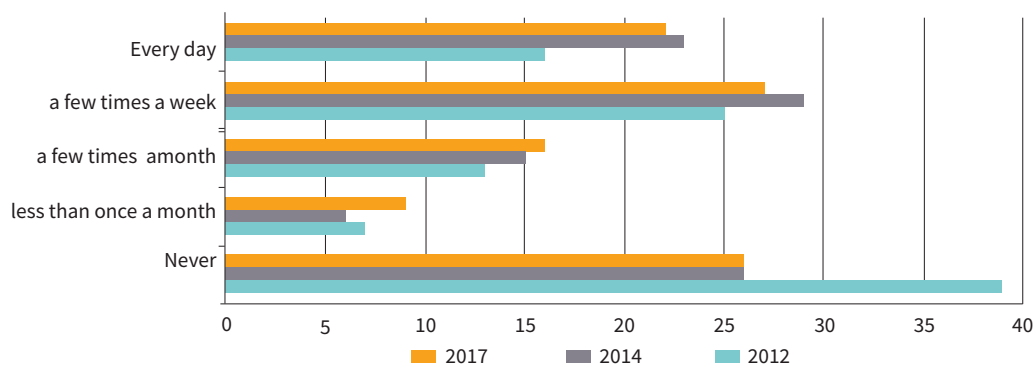
<sup>105</sup> Interview with Mr Maletsky, Christof, *The Namibian*, Windhoek, May 16, 2018.

<sup>106</sup> FES & MISA Namibia, 29.

an estimated 243,000 people read *The Namibian* on a daily basis in comparison to 107,000 for *New Era* and 63,000 the *Republikein*.<sup>107</sup> That a representative of the most-widely read newspaper in Namibia voices his concern about falling circulation numbers should be of grave concern to the country's newspaper businesses as a whole.

Moreover, MediaMetrics data also indicates that there has been a marked decline in people reading a daily in 2016 compared to the previous four years. To illustrate, from 2015 to 2016 the total number of people reading a daily newspaper dropped by slightly more than 10 percentage points – considerably more than in previous years.<sup>108</sup> Data collected in Namibia by Afrobarometer indicates that slightly fewer respondents got their news from newspapers – both “every day” and “a few times a week” – in 2017 than they did in 2014. However, the information also shows that there was an overall increase of people sourcing news from papers on a monthly basis from 2012 to 2017 (see Graph 3). However, it is highly unlikely that an increase of monthly readers can replace losses from sales due to decreasing daily newspaper readers particularly for dailies.

Graph 3: How often do you get news: from newspapers?



One particular aspect emphasised by respondents could be deemed an important ‘breathing-space’ for traditional media houses and could in some way account for the lack of concern regarding digitalisation among the majority of media representatives. Hugo, Botha and Ellis all separately noted that cost of internet data in Namibia still remained fairly high and continued to pose a significant access barrier for a large part of the population. Botha stated that 80 percent of NMH’s readership still made use of print copies, and that they had noted that online users were very conscious of the cost of data – preferring at most only very short video clips. Furthermore, he observed that prices for Namibian print newspapers were very competitive from an international perspective.<sup>109</sup> Ellis noted that in Namibia there was still a strong preference among many readers to read physical newspapers.<sup>110</sup> Information from Research ICT Solutions does to some extent support this view, noting that Namibia had dropped down to rank 29th out of 52 countries in Africa with regards to the cost of prepaid data in 2018. The cost of 1GB of data in the country was estimated at approximately N\$91.<sup>111</sup> However, it is unclear how long the cost of data will act as a barrier to widespread online access. Competition among the nation’s telecommunication companies is spurring a range of offers for cheaper internet access including broadband. Thus, for example, it is noteworthy that Paratus Telecommunications significantly cut the costs of

<sup>107</sup> Vision Africa, 23.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>109</sup> Interview with Mr Botha, Albe, NMH, Windhoek. April 23, 2018.

<sup>110</sup> Interview with Mr Ellis, Hugh, NUST, Windhoek. April 17, 2018.

<sup>111</sup> Ngatjheue, Charmaine, “Paratus cuts data prices by 80%”, *The Namibian*, April 25, 2018.



its prepaid data bundles by over 80 percent in April 2018, meaning that for Paratus customers 1GB would cost just N\$15.<sup>112</sup>

There is some evidence in Namibia that, as Cage argues, newspaper businesses in Africa are underdeveloped and do not strictly fall into the mass-media category due to limited and concentrated readerships. Media-Metrics data from 2016 indicates that the predominant readership of the four large dailies – *The Namibian*, *Republikein*, *New Era* and *Namibian Sun* – fall into the upper half of the population's income brackets.<sup>113</sup>

Most newspapers in Namibia have also invested in building up and expanding their online presence and offering digital products – both in an effort to stay current and to utilise the advantages that digitalisation offers. For example, *The Namibian* recently began publishing an e-paper – an exact copy of the daily hardcopy targeting specific clients who may be unable to regularly access physical newspapers such as farmers.<sup>114</sup> NMH in turn has moved towards a more holistic concept whereby the content generated is shared across all platforms and mediums available. Botha notes that NMH's newspapers have worked hard over recent years to build up a strong online following.<sup>115</sup> These efforts to be digitally relevant have undoubtedly required financial and human resources. It is however unclear if these undertakings will be to cope with further technological developments and changing consumer preferences; it is also not certain if they will generate enough revenue to compensate for falling print sales and advertising.

## The growth of internet use in Namibia

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It can be argued that Namibian citizens' use of online media and content is still marginal and limited. Furthermore, online use by many Namibians is constricted due to limited bandwidth access as well as high data costs – the latter issue has also been cited as a big impediment to rolling out e-learning initiatives in Namibia. Anecdotal evidence and experts' experiences also suggest that there is a widespread lack of ICT literacy skills among the general population.<sup>116</sup> Hence, it can be reasoned that digitalisation currently poses a minor but growing threat to local media houses' business models. But international experience has shown that circumstances can and do change rapidly to the detriment of traditional media businesses. For example, survey and company data from sub-Saharan Africa illustrates that Facebook became the mostly widely used social media platform within five years (2010-2014) despite starting from a negligible user base.<sup>117</sup>

There is very limited quantitative data publicly available regarding Namibia's media landscape, especially with regards to sustainability and digitalisation. A similar situation prevails with regards to economic and market information of relevance or related to the media industry. Thus, for example, this study was unable to assess the current monetary value of the country's marketing and advertising industry. However, surveys at the national level do offer limited information, particularly with regards to media access. Statistics from the NHIES from 2009/10 and 2015/16 document Namibian households' ownership or access to communication equipment. Among others households have slightly increased their access to TV over four years whereby 54.3 percent now own or can have access to a TV set (see Table 1). This

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Vision Africa, 33, 7, 41 & 45.

<sup>114</sup> Interview with Mr Maletsky, Christof, *The Namibian*, Windhoek, May 16, 2018.

<sup>115</sup> Interview with Mr Botha, Albe, NMH, Windhoek. April 23, 2018.

<sup>116</sup> Konjore, J. Mervyan, Remmert, Dietrich and Jamela Thubelihle, Report on the mapping and scoping exercise to support the integration of ICT in the education sector in Namibia, Unpublished draft document. Prepared by Measure Value for UNICEF and MoEAC, August 2017. 31-2.

<sup>117</sup> Balancing Act, 12.

correlates with the MediaMetrics findings that there has been a considerable rise of citizens watching television over recent years.

Also of note is the rapid decrease of fixed phone lines among NHIES surveyed households – dropping from 56.3 percent in 2009/10 to just 14 percent in 2015/16. Concurrently, Namibian households are increasingly embracing cellular telephones as the primary communication medium of choice, evident in the findings that nearly 96 percent of households in the country owned or had access to a cellphone in 2015/16, up from an already impressive 88.2 percent in 2009/10. Similarly, mobile service providers in the country have both greatly benefitted and contributed to this development by considerably expanding and upgrading the local network. According to the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), 95 percent of people in Namibia were covered by a mobile-cellular 2G network in 2016, and 3G and 4G/LTE network coverage for the Namibian population has also improved in recent years as seen in Table 2.<sup>118</sup>

Namibia became the second country in Africa to offer 4G/LTE network access when the Mobile Telecommunications Limited (MTC) launched the 4G/LTE in May 2012.<sup>119</sup> 4G/LTE especially is significant with regards to internet connectivity as it offers “ultra-broadband” online access, and thus enables users to make use of services such as gaming, mobile TV and video conferencing.<sup>120</sup> Indeed the progress report of the Harambee Prosperity Plan (HPP) published at the end of 2017 states that national broadband coverage had increased to 72.8 percent.<sup>121</sup> What is also remarkable is that around 57 percent of respondents in the 2017 Afrobarometer survey indicated that the cellphone they owned or had access to is an internet-enabled smartphone.<sup>122</sup> It can therefore be argued that a considerable number of Namibians possess at the very least the tools to easily and conveniently access digital media. The last two NHIES’s also indicated a low but steady growth of internet connections and computer access among citizens. For example more than a quarter of Namibians or 27.9 percent own or have access to a computer/laptop (see Table 1).

**Table 2: Mobile network coverage by population percentage**

Technology	2014	2016
2G	95%	95%
3G	37%	53%
4G/LTE	N/A	39%

Increasingly, Namibians are accessing and making use of the internet to consume news and other media content. This is a growing trend, as evidenced by comparative Afrobarometer findings from rounds five, six and seven (see Graphs 4 & 5). In 2017 42 percent of respondents accessed the internet every day or a few times a week - more than double the figures from 2012. Furthermore, in 2012 only 17 percent of respondents sourced their news online daily or multiple times a week. However, by 2017 this figure increased to 39 percent. As noted above, respondents’ answers since 2012 indicate that the percentage of Namibians sourcing their news from traditional media is stalling or outright declining, however it cannot yet be determined if this is a continuing trend.

<sup>118</sup> Konjore, J. Mervyan, Remmert, Dietrich and Jamela Thubelihle, 30.

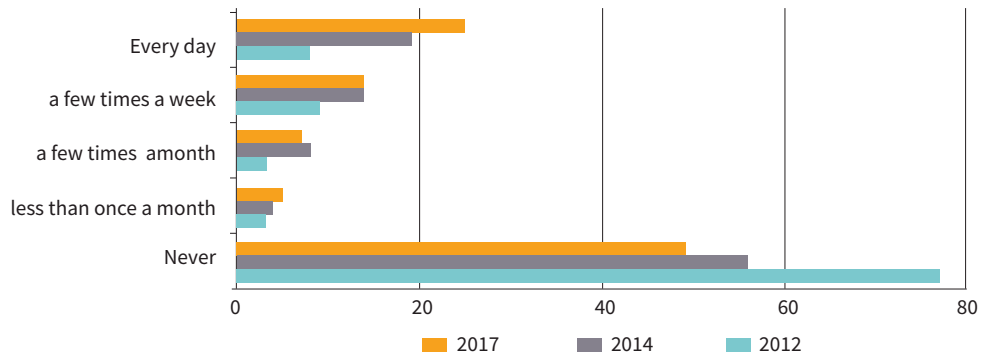
<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> Sherbourne, Robin, Guide to the Namibian Economy 2017, Institute for Public Policy Research. October 2016. 379.

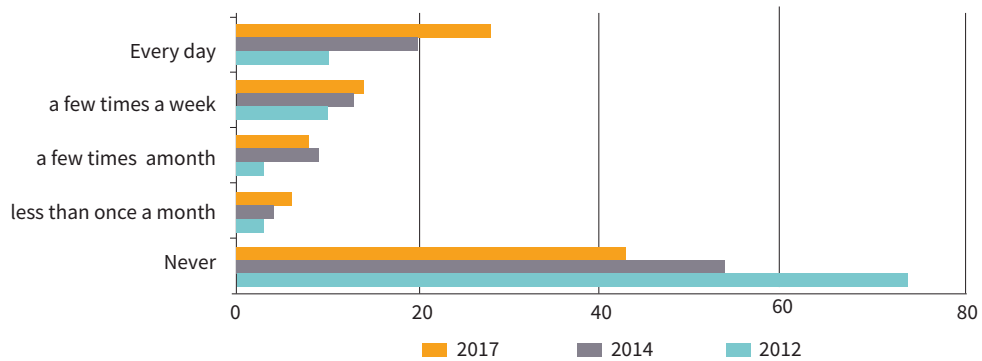
<sup>121</sup> GRN, Progress Report on Key Harambee Activities and Outcomes, December 13, 2017. 9. <http://www.op.gov.na/documents/84084/572904/HPP+Year+End+Statement+2017/214d11ab-d787-4854-be66-37760bc32429>

<sup>122</sup> Personal communication, Weylandt, Max. Detailed Afrobarometer Round 7 data. May 29, 2018.

Graph 4: How often do you get news : from the internet?



Graph 5: How often do you use the internet?



Social media platforms, as mentioned previously in this study, are very much at the international forefront of disrupting traditional media businesses, particularly newspapers. A survey predicting media and technology trends in 2018, published by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, states that 44 percent of media publishers show “high levels of concern about the power and role of platforms.”<sup>123</sup> It is notable that the survey sought views from nearly 200 publishers, among them senior staff including CEOs and editors from both traditional and digital media houses from 29 countries.<sup>124</sup>

In Namibia, as in many other sub-Saharan countries, social media platforms have become increasingly popular. Ellis from NUST noted that many young urban dwellers had become very comfortable accessing news online. His take is substantiated by recent statistics from the latest Afrobarometer survey from 2017. Overall 40 percent of respondents said that they accessed news a few times a week or on a daily basis from social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. This is a sizeable number of Namibians, especially in comparison with other media use figures from traditional media such as newspapers and TV. The responses also bear out the perception that younger citizens in particular make use of social media in Namibia. Thus, when disaggregating the answers by age group, nearly 72 percent of the respondents accessing news on social media a few times a week or daily were between 18 and 35. In contrast, the same age group with the same user habits only made up 65.5 percent of newspaper readers.

<sup>123</sup> Newman, Nic, Journalism, Media and Technology Trends and Predictions 2018, n.d. 12.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 4.



## Journalism & Digitalisation

As already alluded to in this study, the process of digitalisation also has a profound disruptive effect on the conduct and profession of journalism itself. Naturally, any transformative change within the media industry will also affect the people it employs. However, digitalisation has and continues to have specific consequences for journalists which, in many ways, can place the profession's principles of fair and accurate reporting at odds with the business of media. At the same stage the digital revolution has provided journalists with a number of benefits.

In many developing nations particularly digital media has become an important source of information. Furthermore, a global survey analysing media and journalism within the context of digitalisation notes that:

“...digital media enhanced the interaction between the editorial team and readers, making it easier for reporters to learn about customers’ reading habits and interests.”<sup>125</sup>

The growth in digital media outlets globally has also resulted in the publication of more alternative viewpoints, as well as “international investigative journalism collaborations.” Thus, for example, journalists from different media houses and in different countries can effectively cooperate on investigative stories that cross state boundaries. Given the disconcerting rise of online ‘fake news’ and a general glut of unverifiable information, more emphasis is being placed on journalistic education and professional standards within the industry which has given rise to a notable expansion of online resources for media workers, among other benefits.<sup>126</sup>

While few journalists were interviewed for this study, some Namibian respondents did mention positive aspects with regards to digitalisation and journalists’ work. For example Botha noted that digitalisation had given NMH newspapers the opportunity to engage with readers daily on a 24 hour basis. He further stated that data generated from users’ activity on the media house’s online platforms enabled the organisation to generate content that was relevant to them.<sup>127</sup> An EFN member from the broadcasting industry noted that their radio station is making an effort to incorporate information from social media to enrich their reporting.<sup>128</sup>

While digitalisation can and does benefit and enrich journalism in many ways, it has proven to have a negative impact on the journalistic profession within established media houses. As their dual-business model has come under increasing financial pressure, media businesses across the globe have responded by cutting costs. In the media industry, an effective way to limit spending while retaining respectable levels of content production and revenue is consolidating various media outlets under a single media corporation. In this way media houses can achieve economies of scale and economies of scope. The latter concept means the ability to produce content and share it across multiple mediums and platforms, saving on costs related to generating separate content for each media out-

<sup>125</sup> Chan, Ying, Journalism and Digital Times: Between Wider Reach and Sloppy Reporting, in Marius Dragomir, Marius & Thompson Mark, Mapping Digital Media: Global Findings, July 2014. 108.

<sup>126</sup> UNESCO, 16.

<sup>127</sup> Interview with Mr Botha, Albe, NMH, Windhoek. April 23, 2018.

<sup>128</sup> EFN, Executive Committee Meeting, April 17, 2018.

let.<sup>129</sup> By placing separate media operations under one roof a media company can lower costs by, for example, having one large advertising department for all media products as opposed to each media having a separate advertising section – in this way realising economies of scale. Signs of these business practices are also evident in Namibia. For example, Africa One TV also owns and operates the radio station 99FM, and the newspapers under NMH feature a number of inserts that are placed in all papers such as *'Market Watch'* and *'Business 7'*.

While these practices are completely acceptable from a business perspective, they can and do negatively affect journalists' work and the quality of content. Moreover, since media house mergers or consolidations are current trends that affect much of the general media industry, this could result in decreased media independence and pluralism – severely impinging on or compromising press freedom in a country. Globally, media independence – the ability of journalists to pursue and publish critical, independent and objective content – is under intense pressure.<sup>130</sup>

One clear example of the pressure on journalism globally is the deteriorating working environment for media workers. The incisive media study from Rhodes University states that:

“Journalism careers are already much more contingent and precarious than they were before, and they demand a far wider range of skills than in the past. Journalists globally, including in South Africa, are being required to work faster, complete more stories with fewer resources and in less time, than just five years ago.”<sup>131</sup>

Apart from financial pressures on media houses impacting negatively on journalists, the rise of digital media has also greatly contributed to the workload. Media workers are expected to possess skills such as shooting and editing video, managing social media accounts and updating website information.<sup>132</sup> Furthermore, media businesses are becoming more likely to cut resources for important journalism, such as support for costly investigative reporting. At the same time, the business side of editorial management has an incentive to minimise, if not completely expunge critical reporting that could hurt business revenue.<sup>133</sup> A scenario like this could, in an extreme case, result in uncritical reporting on the activities of major advertising clients instead of critical (but necessary) coverage.<sup>134 135</sup>

The unfortunate result is that media independence suffers significantly, as issues of public interest receive uncritical or no coverage, while the traditional 'watchdog role' of independent media outlets vis-a-vis national commercial and political powers is impeded.

Media plurality and the diversity of reporting is also diminished, as newsrooms have less staff and resources to cover stories, and broadcasting stations forgo costly local coverage by, for example, buying access to lower-cost, international syndicated news reports instead. In South Africa, local relevant reporting has been hit severely as:

<sup>129</sup> Rhodes University, 16.

<sup>130</sup> UNESCO, 15.

<sup>131</sup> Rhodes University, 7.

<sup>132</sup> Chan, Ying, 110.

<sup>133</sup> Rhodes University, 52-3.

<sup>134</sup> UNESCO, 106.

<sup>135</sup> Wasserman, Herman and Benequista, Nicholas, 14.

“...local and community media is increasingly losing the struggle to survive. Dozens of community papers have closed in 2015-2017, some after many decades of publishing.”<sup>136</sup>

In Namibia there are clear indications that, as local media houses have come under economic pressure over recent years, journalists’ working conditions have worsened. When the *Namibian Economist* closed down its print operation at the end of 2016 to publish exclusively online, the paper also retrenched a number of journalists. At roughly the same time, One Africa TV made redundant a number of media staffers.<sup>137</sup> For a number of years, staff at the government-owned broadcaster NBC have threatened or engaged in strikes in a bid to improve their working conditions.<sup>138</sup> <sup>139</sup> A recent newspaper article highlighted the difficulties under which many local journalists are working, including low wages and lack of benefits. Furthermore, the article quoted various newspaper editors who agreed that journalists and their work were not valued in today’s society as they were in Namibia’s past.<sup>140</sup>

In terms of quality journalism in Namibia, there are worrying signs that ethical and independent journalism and reporting standards have declined over the past years. It should be noted that this drop in quality is perceived and thus very difficult to quantify. Nevertheless, this opinion is not an isolated observation and can be associated with a number of tangible trends. For example, a number of respondents noted with concern that many senior and experienced journalists in Namibia had left their profession over recent years, either to retire or to pursue other careers.

Ellis from NUST felt that the general lack of experienced staff and adequate editorial oversight at newspapers had resulted in recent examples of poorly researched, single-source and in-accurate stories being published.<sup>141</sup> His colleague Brown expressed concern that many mid-career journalists still utilised very traditional news reporting styles, thus neglecting to prioritise critical analysis and often ignoring female sources and minorities.<sup>142</sup> Mongudhi echoed the opinions of the NUST academics, stating that to his knowledge many media houses lacked well-qualified staff, and noting further that the *Southern Times* was under-staffed and possessed only limited capacity.<sup>143</sup> Speaking directly of daily challenges emanating from newspapers’ drive to expand online, Jauss expressed concern that local journalists were increasingly pushed to generate large amounts of content as opposed to focusing on quality. This fixation on quantity coupled with a lack of mentorship from senior journalists and limited editorial management could lead to the erosion of media houses’ quality and hence credibility – impacting negatively on Namibia’s press freedom.<sup>144</sup>

Not all challenges facing journalists and their work are necessarily directly connected to the phenomenon of digitalisation. Indeed, many issues are rather related to changes within the media industry overall. However, traditional media businesses are struggling to generate adequate revenue from journalism in the face of digital disruption, and journalists are often the ones that pay the price.

<sup>136</sup> Rhodes University, n. p.

<sup>137</sup> Nakashole, Ndama, “Economist retrenches 12 in digital move”, *The Namibian*. December 7, 2016.

<sup>138</sup> FES & MISA Namibia, 57.

<sup>139</sup> *New Era*, “NBC workers protest, threaten news blackout”, October 17, 2016.

<sup>140</sup> Kahiurika, Ndanki, “We are overworked, underpaid – journalists”, *The Namibian*. May 3, 2018.

<sup>141</sup> Interview with Mr Elis, Hugh, NUST, Windhoek. April 17, 2018.

<sup>142</sup> Interview with Ms Brown, Emily, NUST, Windhoek. April 19, 2018.

<sup>143</sup> Interview with Mr Mongudhi, Tileni, *Southern Times*, Windhoek. April 16, 2018.

<sup>144</sup> Interview with Mr Jauss, Wolfram, Wordpress, Windhoek. May 17, 2018.

### Info Box 3: Graveyard for Magazines

Namibia's local media also includes a small number of magazines such as Prime Focus, a publication centred on business news and showcasing local entrepreneurs and officials. It is notable that the stories carried on Prime Focus's website are severely outdated with the latest from early 2017.<sup>145</sup>

From a business perspective, local magazine publications have a history of performing very poorly in terms of circulation as well as advertising sales. Little concrete information is available on this topic. However, numerous local magazine ventures started in the past often tend to fold after a few issues. Namibian magazines face extensive and diverse competition from mostly South African based magazines, many of which are well established in Namibia's market, and have a significant advantage in terms of economics of scale. In contrast, local magazines cater for a small audience, compete for limited advertising revenue with larger Namibian media houses, and are encumbered by high production and distribution costs. That being said, South African magazines have also seen significant declines in sales over the past years.<sup>146</sup>

Apart from demonstrating the overall financial pressures on local media businesses, Namibia's magazine industry shows that, particularly for small businesses, a lack of capital and resources can mean that even successful media ventures are vulnerable and susceptible to collapse. Gwen Lister, founder and former editor of *The Namibian*, notes that the country can be deemed a "graveyard for magazines" given how many of the magazine businesses launched over the years are no longer in print.<sup>147</sup>

## A Note on Commercial and Business influence on the Media

This study was unable to ascertain exactly to what extent media houses' business considerations influence or even compromise editorial independence. Understandably, this is a highly sensitive topic and very few respondents of this study were willing to address this issue in any detail. Most interviewees from the business side of media houses insisted that their respective media outlets had internal structures in place to guarantee editorial independence. Nevertheless, allegations of business concerns taking precedence over editorial decisions are not uncommon in Namibia's media landscape. Participants in the FES/MISA Media Barometer of 2015 were of the opinion that both journalists and editors often practice self-censorship as a result of the "fear of losing advertising."<sup>148</sup> Incidents of clients pulling advertising with specific newspapers due to perceived unbalanced or critical reporting have been documented.<sup>149</sup> An EFN member from the private broadcasting industry did admit that news selection did take into account advertising clients of the station, while a newspaper representative stated that the recent decision to allocate more advertising space to the front pages was simply implemented and not discussed with the editorial team.<sup>150</sup>

<sup>145</sup> <http://www.primefocusmag.com/>

<sup>146</sup> Rhodes University, 32.

<sup>147</sup> Personal communication, Lister, Gwen, NMT, Windhoek. April 4, 2018.

<sup>148</sup> IFES & MISA Namibia, 61.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>150</sup> EFN, Executive Committee Meeting, April 17, 2018.





One trend that can be observed in Namibia is that smaller newspaper publications in particular have become susceptible to taking a specific editorial stance, given the personal commercial and political interests of the media house owners. This issue is also a concern in other African nations, where media businesses weakened by financial difficulties are deemed to be more vulnerable “to capture by powerful or wealthy elites.”<sup>151</sup> There is fairly clear evidence that certain print titles have adopted a certain editorial stance and favoured specific reporting angles related to factionalism within the ruling party SWAPO.<sup>152 153</sup>

From a business perspective, such papers could be deemed a threat to other more independent media houses due to the increased competition for limited advertising revenue. While most media respondents did acknowledge the existence of these ‘agenda-driven’ newspapers, few expressed concern about them. Perhaps more worrisome in this regard is that the mere existence of such newspapers undermines journalistic standards, media independence and press freedom in Namibia. Undoubtedly, larger media houses in the country can rely on greater capacity and more resources, as well as management who are cognisant and protective of journalistic standards. Nevertheless, national trends around digital content, internet and media use outlined earlier in this study strongly suggest that financial pressures on traditional media businesses will continue to rise. This will invariably lead to more tensions within respective media operations, and both business and editorial management will increasingly be confronted with very difficult choices.

## Future Media Landscape Scenarios in Namibia

Even though respondents from media houses interviewed during this study may have underplayed the disruptive forces of digitalisation, Namibia’s media landscape is continuing to change. Given this study’s analysis, some scenarios of the future media landscape are sketched out here. It should be noted that these scenarios are speculative, but should not be discounted if global trends continue to have a bearing on Namibia’s media. The scenarios are listed from the best to the worst case below.

1. While Namibia’s independent and traditional media undergoes further consolidation, an improved economic climate sees local media houses invest and increasingly experiment with innovative formats, drawing in more consumers. Media businesses are able to stem the loss of advertising revenue and garner at least some new streams of revenue, including from online sources. There is a slight improvement in journalists’ working conditions and an overall rise in public appreciation of quality media reporting. Some journalists and media workers are able to utilise online platforms and formats to such an extent that they are no longer dependent on employment from the traditional media industry. The country’s high international press freedom score is maintained and journalistic standards are enhanced.
2. Local newspapers and broadcasters primarily seek to preserve their dual-business model by aggressively courting advertisers, streamlining and cutting operation costs, and buying up other media

<sup>151</sup> Wasserman Herman and Benequista Nicholas, 5.

<sup>152</sup> Insight Namibia, “Credibility on the Line: is Namibia’s media being undermined by SWAPO politicking?”, February 2017. 10-1.

<sup>153</sup> Links, Frederico, 19-20.



outlets to achieve economies of scale and scope. Only limited investment is directed towards new online formats and quality journalism. Employment conditions for media workers are mediocre. Newsrooms are made up of mostly inexperienced and poorly motivated staff. Large private media businesses are still able to remain profitable, but editorial independence declines. Severe internal disagreements among business and editorial managements become commonplace and place greater strain on operations, leading to a decline in trust of the media among citizens. State-owned broadcasters provide news and other media for most of the population. Namibia sees a decline in press freedom.

3. Most local and independent media houses fail to adequately prepare for the growing trend of digitalisation, and there is an overall disinterest in and hostility towards innovative, online media formats. While economic conditions improve, increasing advertising revenue is captured by digital advertising and cheaper state-owned media outlets. A number of media houses have to close down, and many remaining private media businesses compromise their editorial impartiality to ensure business success, or are captured outright and propagate their owners' political and commercial interests. Working conditions for journalists deteriorate significantly. Quality and critical journalism becomes increasingly scarce. State-owned and entertainment-focused private broadcasters dominate the airwaves. Poorer sections of society have very little access to balanced news sources. Namibia sees a marked decline in press freedom.

## Assessment of possible new business approaches for Media Sustainability

Suggested Potential New Business Models	Assessment & Comments
<p><b>Synergy &amp; Cooperation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Share content and resources, such as printing presses, to cut costs.</li> <li>• Syndicate news relevant to regional audiences. Independent, investigative media units share content with various media houses.</li> <li>• Guard against infringement of editorial independence through sharing information. Present a united front to threats to press freedom.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some of these aspects already apply in the Namibian context such as sharing printing presses and content.</li> <li>• Concern that synergy could impinge on pluralistic reporting and 'kill' newspapers' individual identities.</li> <li>• Synergy can only go so far – media houses still have to cater for differing tastes and preferences among consumers.</li> <li>• Media networking and cooperation do not necessarily address the lack of revenue streams.</li> </ul>

<p><b>Subscription Type Models</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Include online print media ‘pay-walls’ and ‘time-walls’ and TV stations with access only for subscribers.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Namibia’s market is very small &amp; subscriptions might not be adequate to cover operational costs.</li> <li>• Many observers expressed scepticism about this being an acceptable method for Namibians.</li> <li>• Concern from customers regarding privacy &amp; data usage of media houses.</li> <li>• High internet data costs &amp; limited connectivity may limit Namibians access to paid services.</li> <li>• Many Namibians still lack financial services such as bank accounts to access such services.</li> <li>• International data suggests it is very challenging to retain individual subscribers in the long-term.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Request for Donations / Crowdfunding</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Online platforms seek donations for specific creative and journalistic projects.</li> <li>• Media outlets request donations from readers/viewers to support media product.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Small size of Namibian market may be a drawback. Unknown if Namibian media would attract enough international interest and support.</li> <li>• Can be a highly insecure revenue stream.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Donor Funding</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Source and rely on donor funding (international and local) to sustain free media.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Danger of donor dependency and potential of compromising editorial independence.</li> <li>• Questions around long-term sustainability.</li> <li>• Some international research suggests that donors active in media work are more focused on journalism &amp; media freedom than supporting media business and management.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Vertical &amp; Horizontal Market Integration</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Media houses utilise economies of scale by creating large media houses that encompass a range of media products as well as owning the production and distribution channels.</li> <li>• Could potentially also involve non-media businesses such as data analytics &amp; sales, and event &amp; conference hosting.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Small size of Namibian market limits growth.</li> <li>• Concern about impact on media plurality and diversity. Concerns about limited ownership of many media outlets and thus editorial independence.</li> <li>• Concern by customers regarding privacy &amp; data usage of media houses.</li> </ul>
<p><b>State / Legislation Support</b></p> <p>Media licence revenue is shared across various media outlets. Tax incentives help media houses. Strict regulation of government-owned media to ensure equitable advertising market for all media.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Difficulty in defining which media does really conduct public interest reporting. Why should media businesses be treated differently than any other business?</li> <li>• Lack of political incentive by government to ensure that media landscape is equitable in terms of advertising and marketing.</li> </ul>

## Discussion & Conclusion

As this study has sought to portray, the long-term sustainability of traditional media houses and quality, independent journalism in the face of growing digitalisation is a complex and multifaceted topic. Internationally, particularly in the West but also in Asia and South America, ongoing digital transformation is severely disrupting the media as users increasingly shift to online sources for news and other content. Overall, print media has borne the brunt of revenue loss and newspapers are increasingly seeing their dual-business model collapse. Broadcasting media outlets have so far weathered the digital disruption; however, there are portents ahead. For example, while TV news consumption remains widespread, it is declining especially among younger viewers.<sup>154</sup>

Namibia's media landscape, it can be argued, is still at the beginning of the digital disruption phase. Furthermore, there are additional issues that affect local media houses that are seen as highly disruptive in their own right. Thus, most local media representatives interviewed for this study were far more concerned about the effects of the country's poor economic situation on their respective media businesses rather than the imminent threat of digitalisation. This view also underlines the fact that there are many other interconnected challenges facing independent media houses in the country. Among others, these range from restrictive government regulations and limited skills among journalists, to a highly competitive advertising market and small population size.

Of particular concern in Namibia is the way that smaller and financially-stressed media houses can become vulnerable to capture by wealthy elites – with owners then using the media outlet to boost their business and political agendas. Contrary to many assertions from media respondents, there is ample statistical evidence that the digitalisation of information is becoming increasingly pronounced in Namibia. The telecommunication network is expanding both in coverage and capacity. Concurrently, data costs are decreasing and telecom providers are seeking to provide more affordable data bundles to gain or retain customers. Specific data on media use habits in Namibia is limited, but the Afrobarometer findings from 2017 regarding news sources and use of the internet should give local newspapers cause for concern. Perhaps local newspaper businesses will be able to sustain their dual-business model and even increase circulation numbers - which has happened in some countries, notably India.<sup>155</sup> Best placed to do so are arguably *The Namibian* and newspapers falling under NMH, which by local standards are well resourced and can rely on strong branding and many loyal readers. Nevertheless, if traditional media houses want to ensure their long-term survival, particularly as sources for credible and quality journalism, they will have to drastically innovate and shore up editorial independence. Crucially, such an undertaking will need highly visionary and competent leadership as well as investments in staff and technology.<sup>156</sup> With regards to the latter aspect particularly, it is questionable whether Namibia's traditional media outlets have the drive and capacity.

Overall, it seems that few local media houses have really dedicated significant resources, time and capacity to exploring how best to both utilise and integrate online digital media and mitigate the threat of digitalisation. With regards to newspapers, NMH has probably been most active in seeking to use digital platforms as well as trying to create a new revenue stream by implementing a pay-wall for its online offerings.<sup>157</sup> Internation-

<sup>154</sup> Newman, Nic with Fletcher, Richard, Levy, A. L. David and Nielsen, Kleis, Rasmus, Reuters Institute: Digital News Report 2016, n. d. 7-8.

<sup>155</sup> UNESCO, 77. See also: <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2017/05/despite-the-decline-of-printed-papers-theres-one-place-that-is-bucking-the-trend> Various reasons have been postulated for the growth of the print media in India - including improving literacy, slow growth in internet access and patchy internet services, and an old-fashioned fondness for printed news.

<sup>156</sup> Gray, Steve, "Some parting words about what our industry needs to do", World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers, December 14, 2017. <http://blog.wan-ifra.org/2017/12/14/some-parting-words-about-what-our-industry-needs-to-do>

<sup>157</sup> Interview with Mr Botha, Albe, NMH, Windhoek. April 23, 2018.



ally there is some very recent evidence that subscription-based pay wall models can be a viable business strategy.<sup>158</sup> However it is far from clear if Namibia's small market and limited readership can sustain such a model, or if it will even prove popular. The NBC has invested heavily in its digital 'NBC plus' application, with which it aims to compete on a regional and international basis with the likes of Multichoice and Netflix. This subscriber-based, digital application is essentially a streaming service for NBC TV channels. According to Nico Mwiya, the manager for new business and research at the NBC, NBC plus is targeted at regional and even international customers. Furthermore, NBC will be offering dedicated NBC plus channels for rent to other media outlets to distribute content.<sup>159</sup> This approach is extremely ambitious and it is questionable whether NBC can provide both sufficient and quality content to compete on such a level or will be able to attract independent media.

Besides the worries expressed regarding media houses' revenue streams, a further significant issue is the threat to quality, independent journalism in Namibia. Again, there are indications that journalism is coming under increased pressure with regards to digitalisation and the overall financial health of local media businesses. A number of observers already state that ethical reporting standards have slipped, and that editorial independence is being undermined consistently by business and political interests among the majority of Namibian media houses.<sup>160 161</sup> This does not bode well for the country's media independence and overall press freedom in the long run. While the three scenarios presented in this study are fairly simple, they do represent possible realities given the information presented in this report. From a press freedom perspective, only the realisation of the first scenario would be a positive development for Namibia and its democratic system. The remaining scenarios are realistic situations that should not be discounted by the country's media fraternity, business community and society at large. It is therefore imperative that local media houses start reflecting comprehensively and honestly in order to strategise how best to respond to challenges to the media industry, while continuing to guarantee editorial independence and quality journalism.

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<sup>158</sup> Newman, Nic with Fletcher, Richard, Kalogeropoulos, Antonis, Levy, A. L. David and Nielsen, Kleis, Rasmus, Reuters Institute: Digital News Report 2018, n. d. 22-3.

<sup>159</sup> Interview with Mr Mwiya, Nico, NBC, Windhoek. May 28, 2018.

<sup>160</sup> Insight Namibia, 10-1.

<sup>161</sup> Links, Frederico, 36.

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Globally, the media industry is undergoing a far-reaching transformation as a result of rapid economic, technological and political changes over the past decade.

The digital revolution has been positive in many respects: significantly more people are now able to affordably and quickly access vast amounts of information via internet platforms around the world. However, digitalisation has also significantly disrupted and eroded long-established sources of income for media houses.

Retrenchments in the traditional news industry have become commonplace while online news outlets have not created enough stable jobs to compensate for the escalating job losses. But this ongoing transformation is not only about journalists losing jobs. Journalism's ability to hold powerful leaders and entities to account has been undermined. Newsrooms have been closed and the capacity for investigative journalism has been diminished, while false reports and unsubstantiated claims often go viral via the Internet.

This report, produced by the Institute for Public Policy Research, the Namibia Media Trust, and the Hanns Seidel Foundation, looks at how these international trends are affecting Namibia. How far has digital disruption already impacted the Namibian media? What are the prospects for the future viability of the news industry in Namibia? And what will the impact of all this be on media freedom in a country that only recently was rated as having one of the best media environments in Africa?

