THE DIGITAL DISRUPTION OF JOURNALISTIC IDENTITY AT THE SOUTH AFRICAN BROADCASTING CORPORATION (SABC)

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Abstract

This research investigates changes in journalistic identity with the introduction of online journalism practices in the *SABC* newsrooms. The study is a qualitative analysis of in-depth interviews with 6 *SABC* journalists. It focuses on *SABC* journalists who embrace a professional identity. Participants were selected from all three of the *SABC* newsrooms: Television, Radio and Digital News.

The research reveals that *SABC News* journalists are - due to digital production workflows - increasingly pressured to work on their own in the field, with additional responsibilities and fewer resources, while taking on editorial duties and managing corporate and personal social media accounts. As the roles of *SABC* journalists become digitally disrupted and blur with those of technicians, editors and marketers, I ask how this might in turn disrupt journalistic identity.

The interviews reveal how these *SABC* journalists have always understood their identities and values in opposition to those of corporate *SABC* leadership. While they, the journalists, sometimes allowed editors to change their stories, this was not done without resistance; it was a strategic compromise, since they understood the greater balance of their work to serve the public. However, this notion of being separate from the corporate identity has been disrupted through digital and social media, as it

conflates their identity with the *SABC* brand. Journalists experience this acutely through 'trolling'. Yet, conversely, some are also able to retain a sense of an independent professional identity through a direct relationship with the public on social media.

Another key finding was that digital media disrupts the centrality of primary journalistic research or 'legwork', and instead, journalists increasingly spend time on the selection and repackaging of user-generated content. As some journalists are allocated more deskwork they experience a loss of status among their colleagues. The diminished role of journalists' primary research, or eye-witness testimony, has created tensions in journalistic identity and what it means to be a 'real' journalist. Despite their concerns for the danger of reporting in the field in South Africa, *SABC* journalists considered such verification work crucial to their identity and what it means to be a journalist.

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Glossary of Terms

ANA: Africa News Agency

ANC: African National Congress

BBC: British Broadcast Corporation

CNN: Cable News Network

CMS: Content Management System

DTT: Digital Terrestrial Television

EFF: Economic Freedom Fighters

IBA: Independent Broadcasting Authority

ICASA: Independent Communications Authority of South Africa

IMP: Independent Minded Professional

PSB: Public Service Broadcast

SAA: South African Airways

SABC: South African Broadcast Corporation

Chapter 1: Introduction

There has been considerable discussion about the idea of "digital disruption" of newsrooms (Lough et al. 2017; Deffor 2015; Jordaan 2013; Witschge & Nygren 2009; Pavlik 2000), news routines (Anderson 2011; Bright & Nichols 2014; Bunce 2015; Loosen & Schmidt 2012; Jordaan 2013; Witschge & Nygren 2009), journalistic genres (Thorsen & Jackson 2018), economic models of journalism (Wahl-Jorgensen et al. 2016; Thurman 2011), and the journalism industry as a whole (Pavlik 2000). This study specifically considers the digital disruption of journalism routines, and explores how this might translate into shifts in journalistic identity. By reframing the digital disruption literature, I will show how the boundaries have blurred between the roles undertaken by journalists in the workplace and those previously reserved for other professionals such as technical crews, editors, and "the suits", or marketers and advertisers. The study focuses on exploring journalistic identity in three *South African Broadcasting Corporation* (*SABC)* newsrooms, including television, radio and digital journalists. It particularly focuses on how digital technology has disrupted journalists' routines at the *SABC,* and how this might result in a shift in the identity of the journalists. Journalistic ideals have been shifting since the new millennium to become more "ambivalent" or "liquid", embracing seemingly inconsistent ideals such as a watchdog role and customer service (Koljonen 2013: 141). With the advent of digital media technologies, journalists' relationships with audiences have become more tangible, arguably contributing to the disruption of what it means to be a journalist (Anderson 2011; Bright & Nichols 2014; Bunce 2015; Loosen & Schmidt 2012). To understand journalistic identity, several

approaches are used in this study. Firstly, the study conceptualises journalistic identity through global notions of professional values in journalism, where such notions of professionalism may vary in terms of the sense of responsibility towards the public, for example, varying between broad notions of public interest in the mainstream press, and more dedicated understandings of public service within public broadcasting. Secondly it situates journalistic identity as emerging from the local institutional context of the news organisation, and its values and routines. While other studies have adopted either a professional or an institutional approach to journalistic identity, I argue that using both concepts in tandem is necessary in order to understand how professional values may be understood differently in different institutional contexts. This draws on Waisbord's (2013) argument that, while there may be agreement on naming professional values, their interpretation differs radically among journalists, particularly in emerging democracies in the Global South.

This study considers the research question from the perspective of the field of Journalism Studies where I examine how journalistic identity has been framed by using both digital disruption literature and journalistic identity literature as the theoretical framework for this study. Mabweazara (2010) finds that institutional and professional influences within news production have consequences for how journalists deploy new technologies in their routines. My research question explores this from the opposite perspective, where I investigate how new digital routines might in turn influence the institutional and

professional cultures of the newsroom and so disrupt journalistic identity, focusing particularly on those *SABC* journalists with an independent mindset.

The *SABC* is an important institution, as the South African public service broadcaster (PSB) with a mandate to fulfil: with objectives to help create a national identity and facilitate social cohesion. The broadcaster has recently embraced a focus on digital migration of content from its broadcast services, which has impacted journalists from the processes of traditional media of television and radio. I worked as an *SABC* journalist in its online newsroom from 2014 to 2019, providing me with detailed experience observing this process from within.

In this chapter, I will consider the normative role journalists ought to play in a public broadcaster. This will be contrasted with the realities faced by journalists, as I examine the recent history of the *SABC,* and how each historical era influenced the type of journalist the broadcaster was able to recruit. An overview will provide the context for the range of journalists currently employed at *SABC,* with divergent values that are arguably rooted in these historical periods. Then, I will outline the recent disruptive political events at the broadcaster that dominated the work environment of all my participants, which further highlights the institutional culture in this period. I then describe the broader global context of how digital technology has become an integral part of media production, situating the transformation of South African media within this broader international context, and focusing on the introduction of digital technology at *SABC*. Here, I foreground the tensions that emerged between the different *SABC* divisions, particularly between the newly

established digital newsroom, and the established radio and TV newsrooms, respectively. In the first chapter, I at first aim to provide an overview of how everyday routines of journalists at the *SABC* were affected, where a more detailed analysis takes place in Chapter 2.

Public service broadcast (PSB) journalists have a primary mandate to serve the public. In fact, the public broadcaster's overall mandate is to include content that provides information, education, advice, or entertainment to the public, without trying to benefit financially from it. The public broadcast content of the *SABC* includes radio, television, and new (digital) media, aims to provide the public with information to make informed political decisions (Arndt 2007: 2). The role of a public broadcaster such as the *SABC* in South Africa has been critical, especially in the nineties, during its political transition to formal democracy (Barnett 1998). Decades of apartheid has left the country with the need to remodel a national identity. Alongside this imperative, public broadcasters are also expected to promote local culture to build, solidify, and fortify a sense of national identity (Fourie 2004: 5). PSB is seen as a key medium of the public sphere and "crucial to the transition to democracy and the on-going process of democratisation" (Horwitz 2001: 175). The *SABC* is required to provide all citizens with the information needed to participate in the building of democracy (Sibanda 2016). A public broadcaster is furthermore in a position to promote civic consciousness and "re-socialise both masses and elites to the new democratic rules of the game" (Gunther & Mughan 2000 cited in Arndt 2007), a role that is

particularly important in South Africa, given that the *SABC* is still one of the most important sources of information for most citizens.

News and current affairs play a prominent and crucial role at a public broadcaster to facilitate balanced and high-quality information in a democratic and free society (Orgeret 2006). Public broadcast journalists often consider service to the public as a fundamental part of their journalistic identity (Carpentier 2005; Deffor 2015: 203). Editorial independence and public accountability are described as the fundamental building blocks of public service broadcasting (Deffor 2015). Journalists are in a position to help consolidate democracy, but they can also contribute to its destruction by broadcasting support of non-democratic forces (Hamada & Saodah 2020). There is always danger that individual journalists may be co-opted or pressured by political or economic powers when they are faced with an institutional culture hostile to PSB values such as independence and public accountability (Arndt 2007: 4).

In the next section I consider how the *SABC* transformed from a state broadcaster into a public broadcaster, and show that political forces pushing the broadcaster to regress towards this state broadcaster role still remain at play, even though their power has fluctuated over time.

1.1 Historical shifts at the *SABC* and the recruitment of journalists

The *SABC* rose out of the ashes of a former State broadcaster with the fall of apartheid in the 1990s. Prior to this, from its inception in 1936 by Lord John Reith (Director General of the *British Broadcasting Corporation* - *BBC*), the *SABC* mainly functioned as a voice for both the Union and later apartheid governments. Operations consisted mainly of radio broadcasting (Draisma 1999), with the introduction of television broadcasting in 1976. Since the *SABC* monopolised both television and radio during this time, the implications of a state-controlled *SABC* were far-reaching. Television channels were racially segregated and content broadcast was distorted in order to serve a white national identity and culture. This means that a majority of the journalists recruited were white, with the black journalists acting as mere translators of the apartheid propaganda. Journalists were told what they were allowed to cover and threatened with a fine or lengthy jail term should they not comply (Jackson 1993: 145). In the 1980s, the South African economy demanded more black skilled labour to serve the apartheid state, leading to further black urbanisation and the *SABC*'s recognition of black audiences. So, it was in 1981 that a second *SABC* TV channel was introduced, which serviced African languages Zulu, Xhosa, Sotho and Tswana, whereas the main TV channel was divided evenly between English and Afrikaans. Instead of recruiting black journalists, the *SABC* employed black translators from the various language groups, and the English news bulletin was translated into the other languages (Jackson 1993).

In the early 1990s, once it was clear that the democratic transition was inevitable, various efforts were made to transform the *SABC* into an increasingly representative broadcaster, accountable to the entire nation. The *SABC* now had to adapt to a new role, that of serving a public consisting of an entire nation of which it had previously been ignorant towards (Currie & Markovitz 1997; Teer-Tomaselli 1995). In March 1993, the Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA) Act was passed by Parliament, which legislated the regulation of broadcasting in the public interest, with the purpose of ensuring a diversity of views to represent the South African society as a whole. In this changing environment, the *SABC* was required to shift its identity and its role in its move from state to public broadcaster (Ngwenya 2015: 100). The *SABC* made efforts during that time period to recruit progressive journalists who were vocal in their critique of the apartheid government. Examples include the poet Antjie Krog and anti-apartheid activist journalist Pippa Green hired by *SABC* Radio news, as well as outspoken Max Du Preez, former editor of the anti-apartheid newspaper *Vrye Weekblad*, by *SABC* TV News (Goodman et al. 2009).

The *SABC* embraced the values of public broadcasting in the early years of the new democracy during the Nelson Mandela era (Du Preez 2003), however by the middle of the Mbeki era, they had moved away from these values and the public broadcaster was thrown into a novel crisis (Skinner 2011). Factionalism within the *ANC* over economic policy spilled over into disputes at the *SABC*. Some of the controversies include the appointment of the *SABC* board, headed by Khanyi Mkhonza. The *ANC* MPs drafted an initial shortlist, which was tampered with, allegedly, under pressure from then president, Thabo Mbeki

(Skinner 2011). Dali Mpofu, a former advocate and member of the ruling party, was appointed CEO of the *SABC*. Control over content with biased agendas increased, as certain political analysts and commentators were banned from *SABC* broadcasts. with the order emanating from Snuki Zikala, then Managing Director of News and Current Affairs (Timberg 2006). From late 2007, the *SABC* experienced problems surrounding governance, as political battles in the ruling party began to play themselves out at the broadcaster (Skinner 2011), where the institution faced financial challenges amidst these controversies. Another contributing factor to the broadcaster's financial difficulties was the 2008 financial crisis (Amadeo 2020), with a huge negative impact on the South African advertising industry. Jacob Zuma was sworn into presidency in May 2009, and by the end of that same year, the SABC found itself R700m in deficit (Kruger 2009). With the transition to a Zuma presidency, the appointment of Hlaudi Motsoeneng as Chief operating officer of the *SABC* came into effect in 2011, due to a longstanding relationship between the two (Serrao & Chabalala 2016). With the subsequent emergence of the *Economic Freedom Fighters* (*EFF*) and the growing critique launched against the presidency, the *SABC* was accused of recruiting journalists from a mainly ANC background (Nicholson 2018). The *SABC* was during this time viewed by its staff and outsiders as reverting to a state broadcaster role reminiscent of that which it played prior to democratic transition.

1.2 The recent political climate at SABC

In May 2016, under the leadership of Hlaudi Motsoeneng, the *SABC* instituted local content quotas and announced the ban of broadcasting violent protests on its news programming

(Germaner 2016). These two controversies played out over the two years prior to the interviews conducted for this study.

In 2016, in the wake of massive student protests known as the *Fallist* movement, a wave of protests surrounding service delivery engulfed South Africa. The *SABC* then announced that it would stop broadcasting protests and footage showing destruction of property (Khoza & Lindeque 2016). The *SABC* dismissed allegations that the decision to ban violent protests was an act of propaganda, and instead argued that coverage of the unrest would incite further violence (Qukula 2016). What followed in July of 2016 was a purge of news managers who failed to adhere to this directive from the public broadcaster. The journalists fired became known as the "*SABC 8*" (Nicolson 2016). *SABC* journalists who retained their jobs started implementing stricter self-censorship in their work, which continued with limited news coverage on current events by the public broadcaster itself. *SABC* journalists were also particularly quiet on social media platforms and only a few journalists openly protested against the ruling (Tromp & De Wet 2016). A successful online crowdfunding initiative was launched by the broader community of South African journalists to provide funds for the *SABC 8* (Van Zyl 2016). A great deal of the campaign was pushed through social media platforms *Facebook* and *Twitter,* where the public could engage with the journalists, as well as show their support for the *SABC 8*. During this time, a majority of *SABC* journalists remained silent. Finally, following pressure by civil society groups, the *Independent Communications Authority of South Africa* (*ICASA)* ordered the *SABC* to reverse its policy ban on violent protests. The *SABC 8* were only reinstated after challenging their dismissal in the Labour Court. At the end of July 2017, the *SABC*

embarked on a review of its editorial policy of its 2004 Editorial Policies. *ICASA* rejected a 2013 review, finalised in 2016, on the grounds that the amendment made by the *SABC* board of its editorial policies was invalid in terms of the Broadcasting Act No 4 of 1999 (Bratt 2017). Later in October, the *SABC 8* filed an application with the Constitutional Court to seek a parliamentary investigation to probe its own decisions around the recent events at the *SABC*. By October, Parliament's Portfolio Committee convened an ad hoc commission of inquiry into the *SABC* board's fitness to hold office. By December, all *SABC* board members resigned and in the same month, the Western High Court ruled that Motsoeneng's appointment was unlawful.

After years of maladministration, censorship, and corruption, further economic disasters continued to plague the public broadcaster. In 2017, the *SABC* announced that it was in a financial crisis. Then acting CEO James Aguma blamed the financial loss on Motsoeneng instituting local content quotas in 2016, which resulted in a loss of audience and revenue. The *SABC*'s funding comprises 81% advertising revenue and less than 3% government subsidy, with sponsorships (5%), and licence fees (11%) making up the remainder (Gerber 2017). In total, *SABC* Radio lost R29 million and Television lost R183 million while *MetroFM*, *Good Hope FM* and *SABC 3* lost substantial audiences during 2016 (Gerber 2017). By October 2018, after another change of governance at the public broadcaster, then CEO Madoda Mxakwe announced that the *SABC* was technically insolvent and unable to fulfil financial obligations. As a result, the public broadcaster was determined to retrench 981 of their 3377 permanent staff, and 1200 of their 2400 freelance journalists (Mabasa 2018). This announcement was met with confrontation by *SABC* staff and unions, who

threatened to down tools. In an attempt to save their jobs, *SABC* staff wore black on Fridays, and embarked on a lunch-hour picket to demand a new funding model. The mood within the public broadcaster was sombre, and employees unwilling to join the protest were threatened by their co-workers. As a journalist working at the *SABC* during this time, I observed the lack of motivation amongst staff unsure about their future at the public broadcaster and even heard managers joking that staff suicide might save them financially. These recent events provide the context within which social media and other digital media routines at the *SABC* receive discussion below.

1.3 Digital media and South African journalism

Dramatic technological advances over the past quarter century have transformed the practice of journalism (Friedrichsen & Murschetz 2019). New forms of media have been shaped with the arrival of the digital revolution. The University of Florida's Journalism Department launched the first online journalism web site in 1993. About a year later, the UK's *Daily Telegraph* launched the *Electronic Telegraph* with the online publication following the rhythm of print publishing by publishing once a day (Siapera & Veglis 2012). By 1996, most news organisations had an online presence, where journalistic content was repurposed and consumed in different ways due to its online presence. Over the next two decades, technology advanced the capabilities of the internet and a new shift was witnessed towards the participatory web and social media. Legacy media organisations such as the *BBC* and *Cable News Network* (*CNN*) followed and were quick to replace online static sites with new sites to include multimedia and interactivity (Siapera & Veglis 2012). From 2000,

a vast majority of Western journalists used the internet as part of their daily routine (Deuze 2003). Increasingly, the public contributed a flood of information and multimedia, which appeared in blogs and news sites across the world. The live reporting of events such as the Mumbai attacks in 2008, the Iranian elections in 2009 and the Occupy Wallstreet Movement in 2010 through *Facebook* and *Twitter*, cemented the relationship between journalism and social media (Siapera & Veglis 2012).

In South Africa, *The Mail & Guardian* and *The Financial Times* were notable as two newspapers that went online in the mid-1990s. By 1996, most South African newspapers were produced on desktop publishing systems (Drijfhout 2007) and newspaper circulation in South Africa increased alongside its move to online (Bosch 2010). Generally, in South Africa, digital journalism is simply repurposed for the online space from original content intended for print, video, or audio (Bosch 2010). Soon after the *Mail & Guardian's* online launch, there was a surge of online publishing, up until 2000. The sites soon lost profitability, as newspapers were merely transferring content online to text-heavy sites with advertisers not interested in internet audiences at the time (Berger 2004). Interestingly, unlike trends in the developed world, print continued showing growth in South Africa as evident in the examples of *City Press* and *The Daily Sun*, who between 1992-1996, respectively doubled newspaper sales, with a significant number sold of over 300 000 daily (Drijfhout 2007). This growth in newspaper circulation was short-lived. By 2008, overall circulation of daily newspapers in the country declined by 5.5% annually (Jordaan 2013).

Community media felt the brunt of the decline as it led to dozens of community papers closing down in 2015-2017 (Dugmore 2018).

While newspapers were suffering, social media was thriving in South Africa (Jordaan 2013) and between 2009 and 2011, attitudes towards social media changed within the journalism sector (Newman et al. 2011:17). In 2012, it was confirmed that social media platforms *Facebook* and *Twitter* had become pathways to news (Mitchell et al. 2012) and most news organisations started creating pages on *Facebook* and *Twitter* to adapt to the fragmented audience online. South Africa had around 5.3 million *Facebook* users and 2.3 million *Twitter* users by August 2012 and 80% of people who were established online accessed the internet from their mobile devices (World Wide Worx 2012). Considering that South Africa had a population of about 50 million at the time, this meant that only a small minority had access to the internet (Jordaan 2013).

By 2016, *Facebook* was used by a quarter of all South Africans (tripled in growth to 14 million users), while *Instagram* (image sharing social network owned by *Facebook*) was growing at the fastest rate of any social network in the country, completely outpacing *Twitter* with its slow rise to 7.7 million (World Wide Worx 2016). Most significantly, 85% of users accessing *Facebook* did so from their mobile devices, making it clear that the mobile phone has become the primary form of accessing social media (World Wide Worx 2016). This picture of connectivity for the citizens of South Africa increased dramatically by 2019 as more than half of the population now had access to the internet and mobile subscriptions (based on SIM card purchases) were nearly double the population at 170%

penetration. *Facebook* has grown to 23 million South African users and *Instagram* to 4 million (We are Social 2019).

The digital disruption of the news industry has fundamentally changed the economics of the South African news industry, making it challenging for traditional news organisations to survive without responding to the online space (Sewchurran & Hofmeyr 2020). New technologies and large multinational social media platforms are now attracting audiences away from local content and reducing income for news organisations (Dugmore 2018). A casualty of this is the closure of *The Times* newspaper on 15 December 2017. It was replaced with a digital-only edition, *Times Select*, in a bid to adapt to the current times. *The Post* newspaper also closed down after only 18 months and the rebranded successor of the politically compromised *New Age* closed in less than 12 months. It is not only print media needing to reinvent itself, but established TV and radio stations are also struggling to retain their audiences. Echoing global trends, audience numbers lost by print are reflected in roughly matching new audience numbers for online news sites, with journalism consumption itself declining as the media mix grows more complex and varied (Dugmore 2018). The loss of audiences has put news organisations under great economic pressure and can be seen to have affected the fundamental nature of journalism, with the retrenchments of senior staff and newsrooms becoming younger, and far more inexperienced, to fill the gaps. Consumption of news in print continues its steady decline, with no newspapers indicating a convincing route into a sustainable digital future (Roper et al. 2019). The online news space is currently dominated by digital-only brand, *News24*. Their content is specifically designed for digital consumption. Their success is a consequence of its parent

company's (*Media24*) early adoption to the potential of the internet (Roper et al. 2019), most notably their acquisition of controlling shares in the Chinese organisation *TenCent,* who own the giant social media platform *WeChat*. While commercially viable journalism models are becoming scarcer in South Africa, there has been an important shift towards philanthropically funded journalism and crowd-funded journalism (Dugmore 2019). Examples of independent digital-only players who are successful online include *Daily Maverick*, *New Frame*, *Daily Vox*, *GroundUp* and a*maBhungane*.

Despite some innovative examples, circulation remains limited, as South Africa still has one of the highest costs of connectivity in Africa, and there has been no action to dismantle the effective duopolies in mobile telephony, which results in South Africans having access to a diminishing range of verified news (Dugmore 2018). Although we have entered an era of news media that is more representative and responsive to ordinary South Africans, local news organisations do not fully understand the disruptive power of digital technology, and how it impacts on supply and demand for information (Dugmore 2018). The still-wide digital divide means that more than half of all South Africans remain unable to access the internet regularly; and with high unemployment rates and high costs of mobile data, users are forced to access social media sparingly (Dugmore 2018). This shows the relevance and importance of the *SABC* as a public broadcaster, where citizens still rely on traditional platforms such as radio and television to obtain their news. In an attempt to retain these audiences, the *SABC* is working towards migrating their content more and more to the digital space. The next section will talk about the introduction of digital technology in

public broadcasting in general, and specifically at the online newsroom at *SABC News*. It will then discuss the history of digital migration and online convergence.

1.4 The introduction of digital technology at the *SABC*

Worldwide, public service broadcasters have been forced to contend with a rapidly evolving broadcasting landscape combined with ideological, technological, and financial shifts (Skinner 2017). Before the digital revolution, television was limited to a few national analogue terrestrial services dominated by PSBs, but new technologies enable audiences to access a plethora of content, anywhere, anytime, and available on multiple devices (Kaltenbach & Joux 2012; Mendel 2011). The international landscape of digital media in broadcasting is significantly different, as unlike South Africa, they adhere to the international treaties governing the adoption of Digital Terrestrial Television (DTT) from analogue in the digital migration processes. With the advent of digital technology, visuals could be reduced to binary data and this data further compressed by algorithms (Berger 2010). There are many benefits of DTT, including an increase in the capacity of broadcast transmission networks, provision of better signal quality, support of HD and interactivity, but mainly DTT provides opportunities for broadcasters to address challenges posed by pay-TV operators and the internet (Plum 2014).

The *SABC* ventured into digital satellite broadcasting in 1995, and adopted its online news platform in 2000. Initially, the development of the web platform was slow (Deffor 2015:58). The *SABC*'s *Digital News* division was founded in 1999, when the old *New*

Media unit was transformed into *SABC Digital News* and re-launched its digital presence in 2011 (Minnaar 2017). As an online news producer for the *Digital News* division during 2014 to early 2019, I witnessed significant technological developments during this time.

Digital News was tasked with leading the development of a standardised look and feel on social media for *SABC News*. Training was rolled out continuously through the 2000s and 2010s by staff members from *Digital News* for various news departments, shows, programming and even individuals to start uploading their content to their relevant social media portals. Methods of best practice were also shared throughout these training sessions (Minnaar 2017). During this time, the *Facebook* and *Twitter* profiles for different *SABC News* regions were created (Minnaar 2017) and *Digital News* played a pivotal role in training journalists in the maintenance of the social media pages and distribution of content on these pages. More importantly, *SABC News* started experimenting with different language pages on social media (Minnaar 2017) so as to try and fulfil its mandate in reaching South Africans in all its official languages. This proved successful in reaching different markets by use of their native tongue. In 2015, the *SABC Indaba Facebook* was launched (Minnaar 2017) and by November 2019, it had nearly 600 000 followers. Just prior to the financial crisis in 2017, when most training came to a standstill, additional training was sourced for *Digital News* staff to upgrade their existing online skills. Such training then expanded to include a *Digital News* staff member (myself) deployed alongside an outside media training company to train *SABC* traditional media staff (working in television and radio) in content creation with their mobile phones. I observed that, at first, this was met with resistance from older journalists in Radio and Television

News. The main reason being that it was noted to be that they were not being paid to do multiple jobs, for example, to both film and then write about a story. The younger generation were more accepting of the training, as they were arguably already tech-savvy, with an existing online presence in their personal capacity.

SABC News is considered one entity, yet the three newsrooms: *Digital*, *Radio* and *Television News* are physically distanced from each other, resulting in social cohesion being generally lacking between the three *SABC News* departments. In the Auckland Park building known as TV Park, where the heart of *SABC News* operates from, the newsrooms are divided by floors. *Digital News* sits on the first floor, *Radio News* on the second floor and *Television News* on the third floor. It is rare that the three platforms will collaborate on any stories or, if they do, it is short-lived. *Television* and *Radio News* would insert their stories into the information system storage units: *Quantel* and *Dalet* and *Digital News* online producers would then access the stories from these units to repurpose the content for www.sabcnews.com. The *Digital News* department also streams content from *Television News* and *Digital News* video editors clip interesting news clips for digital consumption on *YouTube*.

It is common for *Radio News* journalists to work with a cameraperson to also file a *Television News* story and vice versa, but rarely to collaborate with *Digital News* journalists. The overall feeling among *Digital News* journalists, and something I experienced myself, was the feeling of being undermined and not taken seriously as “real journalists”, due to mainly repurposing content from *TV* and *Radio News*. There is some

exception to this departmental divide. During major news events such as the national or municipal elections, a select few are chosen from each of the newsrooms to attend the election results centre. Here, all three departments work together efficiently as they are constantly in each other's space, sharing resources. Collaboration between *Radio*, *TV* and *Digital News* increases significantly with these events but soon dissipates on return to the Auckland Park building.

Unfortunately, as of early 2017, due to the financial crisis at the *SABC*, *Digital News* was excluded from many news events in that year. *Digital News* was now forced to rely heavily on *TV* and *Radio News* journalists for content to repurpose to the website. *TV News* and *Radio*- journalists were instructed to live tweet from events but these instructions were not always followed. In every *Digital News* morning meeting, we were told which Radio or TV journalist to monitor, to include not only multimedia to text-based stories, but also regular updates. Many times, we had to wait until *TV* or *Radio News* packaged their insert before we could update the website.

SABC News mainly utilises four third-party social media platforms (*Twitter*, *Facebook*, *YouTube* and *Iono.fm*) to distribute content and *YouTube* and *Iono.fm* for video and audio distribution and for social media. *Twitter* is the most active, with 1 070 541 followers versus the *SABC News Facebook* page that has 784 361 followers (SABC News 2018). The platforms (*YouTube*, *Iono.fm*, *Facebook* and *Twitter*) are used very differently by *SABC News* staff. The *YouTube* channel is mainly a depository for content from *TV News* and similarly *Iono.fm* serves as a depository for *Radio News* stories, whereas *Facebook* and

Twitter offer more options of sharing content in different ways due to their being a social networking service.[1] In addition, *Facebook* gives audiences new capacities too, the audience now has a voice to express their needs and preferences and can 'talk back' to journalists who create or curate the news. For example, *SABC Digital News* producers utilise *Facebook* for unique *Facebook Lives,* where real time engagement occurs as people comment on the feed. Journalists can ignore the comments appearing on their mobile phones (which they are using to live broadcast from over the mobile internet) or choose to engage and answer questions from the audience should it arise.

The improved *SABC* online news site launched in December 2017. *SABC Digital News* migrated their Content Management System (CMS) that hosts www.sabcnews.com from a very slow *Websphere* (IBM) system to an upgraded *WordPress* CMS. Since 2017, when *Television News* broadcasts a big news event, *Digital News* often streams this live on *YouTube*. The streams are now highlighted at the top of the homepage. The only downside of migrating to the new system is that nearly 2-3 years' worth of articles already published disappeared from the internet. Notably, this included the disappearance of articles about the 2016 controversies at *SABC.*

[1] Notably, *YouTube* is a video sharing website, and *Iono.fm* posts audio.

Years in the making, *SABC News* introduced its new mobile tool, the *SABC News app*, in April 2019. This was done in an attempt to expand its distribution platforms ahead of the national elections. The app was developed in collaboration between the *SABC Digital News* and Technology divisions. It provides breaking news and updates as well as live streaming of the *SABC News Channel 404* and live listening of the 19 *SABC* radio stations. Despite the push by the public broadcaster to combine its platforms in a technological manner, it still physically segregates its newsrooms with the result of *Television News*, *Radio News* and *Digital News* working in silos.

1.5 Outline of Thesis

This chapter explored the role of public broadcasting by using the *SABC* as context. It showed the prominent role that public broadcasters have in creating a national identity, but also argued that the institution can be used for government propaganda. It briefly investigated the recent history of the *SABC* to help give context to more recent controversies in 2016. The main controversies (ban on violent protests and introduction of local quotas) were discussed in more detail, as these had had a significant impact on the *SABC* journalists interviewed in this study. The chapter then discussed the history of digital technology within journalism, and further highlighted the changes made by public broadcasters to adapt to the introduction of such digital technology. The digital landscape of South Africa was explored to highlight the growth of social media and mobile usage in the country. Despite the digital divide, proof of audiences for *SABC Digital News* remained

solid. Finally, this Chapter focused on the introduction of digital technology at the *SABC* with a focus on its Digital, Radio and Television newsrooms.

Chapter 2 investigates the first framework of theoretical concepts stemming from the key ways in which digital disruption has affected newsrooms globally. It then explores the disruptions caused by the introduction of such digital technology to journalism routines and how mainstream news outlets are increasing efforts to adapt to these new technologies. It identifies the key digital disruptions of journalistic genres, conventions, and institutional cultures. It argues that digital convergence has resulted in the convergence of various job descriptions and roles into a new set of expectations for the digital journalist. This new job description converged various routines and roles previously expected to be the domain of other technical, editorial, and marketing staff. Such convergence has created certain stress and arguably disrupted journalistic identities. The chapter concludes by showing how we have shifted from medium-based categorisation of news to focussing on platforms.

Chapter 3 outlines the second set of literature and main theoretical debates that underpin the concept of journalistic identity, and then goes on to consider the digital disruption of journalistic identity. It explores the two main approaches to journalistic identity used in this research, viz. professional journalistic identity and institutional identity. It examines how the *SABC*'s institutional culture is frequently in tension with professional journalistic values as the institution goes through organisational shifts of identity. It then moves to

summarise the digital disruption and its possible impacts on journalistic identity by highlighting how it has disrupted the relationship between the journalist and the public.

Chapter 4 discusses the qualitative research methodology used to explore journalistic identity, and motivates why it was appropriate for a study of shifting journalistic identity with the digital disruption of the *SABC* newsroom. It focuses on the challenges of the research and the difficulties of conducting the research as an insider researcher. Becoming aware of the extent of shared implicit assumptions and how this limited the data led to a need for re-interviewing candidates to explicitly verbalise interpretations of their experiences. The research is focused on a sample of journalists from each of the *SABC* newsrooms, including *Television*, *Radio,* and *Digital News*.

Chapter 5 presents the findings related to the participants' journalistic identity and shows how digital disruption has placed journalistic identity under particular stress. The findings thus highlight how journalistic identity at the *SABC* has been disrupted through digital media. An important finding related to institutional culture at the *SABC* shows how these journalists make sense of their journalism at *SABC* as a strategic compromise.

Chapter 6 sets out the key finding of digital media's disruption of the centrality of primary journalistic research or "legwork" and how replacing this with repackaging user generated content has created tensions in terms of journalistic identity, and what it means to be a "real" journalist.

Chapter 7 recapitulates the digital disruption that played a role in shaping the *SABC*'s Independent Minded Professional (IMP) journalists identity, and concludes the study. It argues that the IMP's identity is already under pressure in an institution filled with controversy, it obtained valuable insights into how they perceive the digital disruption as yet a further strain to their professional values. By questioning their professional sense of identity within a global context, it showed the complexities behind their identity and how further strain is placed on this sense of self and understanding of the vocation as a journalist with the advent of digital technology. With research on the decline in their journalistic routine due to the digital disruption, deskbound journalism is not perceived as "real journalism" by these candidates, placing further strain on their identity. The chapter discusses how these journalists are driven by characteristics of high competence, becoming complacent and self-censoring their professional values to fit the organisational culture. These journalists use their professional identity to justify their complacency by working under a higher purpose in serving the public. They find coping under these organisational stresses makes them better journalists than their peers, who they perceive not to face as much strain on their professional values. It will lastly show a reluctance to adapt to newer technologies. There is clearly pressure on journalists to learn multiple technical digital skills, blurring the role of the journalist with the jobs previously done by technical staff. The question remains as to whether the journalist now identifies as a skilled professional, or rather as an exploited worker?

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature on Convergence

This chapter will reconsider the literature on digital disruption, that is, not in terms of collective concepts such as newsrooms, industries, or news genres, but focusing particularly on how such disruptions affect individuals. This chapter discusses the ways in which digital disruptions have affected the professional responsibilities and routines of journalists, or more colloquially, the digital disruption of journalism as a job. Firstly, this chapter defines digital disruption as emerging from convergence. New digital formats allow for different media to be repurposed with the consequence of news media organisations increasingly witnessing a convergence of practices (Larrondo et al. 2016). Due to convergence, we have shifted from medium-based categorisation of news to focusing on platforms (Kaltenbrunner & Meier 2013). The bulk of the chapter then sets out to highlight how journalists' responsibilities and routines have been disrupted due to these new platforms, and their associated digital practises. Firstly, it considers the blurring of boundaries between journalists and technicians, which has created urgency for journalists to have a certain level of digital literacy. Then, it describes how journalists are increasingly taking on an editorial role, where they are required to make decisions about content authored by others. Finally, it sets out how the responsibilities and routines of journalists have blurred with that of the publisher, where a journalist now increasingly requires a marketing sensibility. This close association with the publisher may result in journalists

being targeted in a personal capacity on social media where attacks are launched on the publisher.

2.1 Media Convergence, platforms and increased pressure on journalists to perform

The fundamental concept needed to understand digital disruption of journalism is media convergence (Herbert 2000: 14), a phenomenon enabled through new digital formats that allow different media to be repurposed and migrated across platforms (Singer 2004; Tan & Mei 2011). News media organisations are increasingly witnessing a convergence of practises, policies and to a certain extent, content (Deffor 2015: 93). Media convergence is therefore seen as a key influencer of the digital space, as it has become the framework in which institutional arrangements, principles, practices, and products are examined, with the result that all digital storytelling techniques have roots in a convergence culture (Deffor 2015: 34).

Digital platforms are online businesses that facilitate interactions between suppliers and consumers (ITIF 2018). The digital platform enables a data-driven world and has become a new technology-enabled business model that accelerates the reach of new markets (Perez 2010). Examples include a news website, which offers a self-service user experience as well as different social media platforms that facilitate exchanges between multiple groups of people who don't necessarily know each other. Due to the demands of the digital platform on news production and distribution processes, mainstream news publishers are

increasingly engaging in efforts to adapt to these new digital technologies (Nel & Westlund 2012: 744). To reach the ever-growing audience online, corporate structures now include digital platforms in campaigns to promote a given brand (Flew 2011). These changes have impacted on journalistic practices, deadlines, and accuracy and, arguably too, on the identity of journalists as they adapt to survive the changes at an institutional level forced upon them by digital disruption.

Besides technology, convergence is also shaped by cultural influences including the institution's internal working cultures and subcultures (Deffor 2015: 93). It is important to be attentive to the challenges that most journalists face in their daily work practices and in the wider organisational culture. These contexts shape decision-making processes, and news coverage, which also have implications for how journalists might deploy new technologies in their work routines (Mabweazara 2010: 19). Convergence has resulted in public broadcasters tending to increase the task obligations of online journalists by merging departments and newsrooms, which generally results in a reduced workforce and thus necessitates the use of outsourced content (Thurman & Lupton 2008; Thurman & Myllylahti 2009).

With the disappearance of fixed deadlines in a 24/7 digital space, pressure on journalists to keep up with the continuous news cycle has increased (Karlsson 2012). This new deadline cycle then becomes problematic when journalists simultaneously try to adhere to traditional ethical and quality controls, once the benchmark of news stories published prior to or outside of the digital format (Deffor 2015: 41). There are growing concerns surrounding the

looming sense of immediacy that may overload a journalist's capacity, given the expectation of frequent story updates (Deffor 2015: 42). Fast paced narratives and edits can lead to a cycle of destructive instant news production (Pavlik 2000), where news is both inaccurate and untrustworthy (and where journalists do not follow the same research protocols) in a bid to publish the story first. Journalists are now expected to perform multiple tasks across platforms and at incredible speeds, requiring significant talent and skill in order to avoid error (Harper 1998). The pressure to update stories with accuracy and immediacy is not unique to online journalists, but it is exacerbated as there are no fixed "transmission spots or print deadlines" (Deffor 2015: 42); every new second now represents a novel deadline. With the media environment characterised by speed and immediacy (Kautsky & Widholm 2008), the consequences are inaccurate and careless reporting (Callahan 1999). In turn, the digital platform also presents positive opportunities, as errors can be corrected more easily than in print or broadcast (Callahan 1999; Harper 1998).

In an age of instant communication, getting the story first and getting it right are two journalistic values that are often at cross purposes (Kolodzy 2013: 24). Scholars have called for quality and accurate reportage in journalists' reporting online to be valued as much as speedy outputs (Pavlik 2000; Kolodzy 2013). There have always been deadlines within journalism, but the online space has now rendered deadlines to mere minutes apart, with reporters racing against their competitors to be the first to break a story at any time and on multiple platforms (Hirst 2011), thereby often beating traditional live news mediums such as radio, and especially television. In a study measuring the quality of online news stories,

content with substance measured against generic content scored highest on the list of determinants (Gladney et al. 2007). A similar study with related results concluded that traditional journalistic ideals and news reporting standards of accuracy and reliability are still valued by audiences (Trench & Quinn 2003). However, these two studies are not clear regarding the question of which the audience would prefer (Deffor 2015: 31) and there is no clear conclusion over whether high-speed news is preferred to in-depth reporting (Pavlik 2000). The influence of "technological change, tight budgets and perceived shifts in audience interest" has had a definite influence on the quality of news online (Anderson & Egglestone 2012: 924).

Thus, convergence culture is lowering the overall quality of news content by expecting the same number of journalists to serve additional new practices for multi-platform and multimedia news production (Ursell 2001). Platforms are also replacing medium-specific storytelling but digital is still an extension of traditional media and not a replacement (Odun & Utulu 2016). For example, in the past, an audio story was only broadcast on radio. Now, it may be part of an interactive story online, enhanced with technological, social or collaborative interactive features.

2.2 Blurred roles between journalists and technicians

To be able to repurpose content on multiple platforms, there is pressure on journalists to learn multiple technical digital skills, blurring the role of the journalist with the jobs previously undertaken by technical staff (Hirst 2011: 85). The question then is as to

whether the journalist now identifies as skilled professionals or rather an exploited worker? For most scholars (Jenkins 2004; Erdal 2009; Herkman 2012) convergence is more than the merging of media and technology, and is shaped by socio-cultural, economic, and institutional considerations. The resources available to an institution will determine the choices for training of journalists to enable them to work across units and platforms. News storytelling on a digital platform may present a particular challenge to journalists who remain currently employed in the traditional platforms of print, television, and radio (Gordon 2003; Fenton 2010; Siapera & Veglis 2012). Online news storytelling makes traditional forms of storytelling increasingly redundant, especially the inverted pyramid form (Pavlik 2000). There is an increased emphasis on journalists having additional technical skills, such as photography, video editing, and basic levels of coding. This stands in contrast to the past routines of journalists working mainly as writers, researchers, and fact checkers. Where, in the past, journalists were always out in the field collecting stories and building relationships with sources, journalists are now increasingly forced to be desk-bound behind a computer so as to work through the digital space with the necessary technical skills to be able to do so.

Journalists working in the online space need to be visual storytellers, even if it is not their preferred method in which they identify in telling stories. Multimedia production requires greater technological resources, and higher levels of digital skill sets (Georgi 2015: 26). This arguably has an impact on socialisation within the newsroom, as the relationship between camera operator and reporter is lost, due to the journalist now operating as both. This can lead journalists to operate in isolation, becoming lone agents in spaces where

teamwork was once the default position, radically changing the institutional culture (American Press Institute 2013). Platforms such as *YouTube*, *Facebook* and even *Twitter* are better suited to this visual technique (Hurlburt & Voas 2011), and significantly important in the digital age. Invariably, collective online journalistic practices are directly impacted by the breadth and quality of individual skill sets, as well as the organisational capacity of the workplace (Deffor 2015: 113).

Increasingly, journalists have become more data driven in their work (Bunce 2015) in the sense that they either use data scraping and analysis for investigative work or monitor conversations and reach of content through analytical tools. For example, the digital skills journalists are now expected to master include a basic knowledge of coding and, as such, these digital skills bring a new level of 'creativity' or inventiveness to storytelling that has never existed, endemic to a digital platform (Deffor 2015: 20). Scholars (Kawamoto 2003; Thurman & Lupton 2008; Thurman & Myllylahti 2009) are divided on the question of whether journalists learning new skill sets for online multimedia publishing ought to acquire converged skills or specialise in their strengths and capitalise on their core functions (Deffor 2015: 35). Innovation is a process embedded in everyday newsroom practises and is a crucial asset to the survival and sustainability of the media industry (Weiss & Domingo 2010). Scholars have claimed that journalists tend to resist change (Franklin 2009), and embrace a "tradition of scepticism towards new technologies" (Jones & Salter 2012: 3). Online news media often fails to effectively utilise the multimedia potential that the space offers (Thurman & Myllylahti 2009) due to journalists who may not

wholeheartedly want to adapt, and are observed to be “locked in their ways” (Thurman & Lupton 2008: 443).

Conversely, it can be argued that the digital convergence of media has caused a decline in the creativity of news (Deffor 2015: 6) as content is syndicated from one platform to the next (Cooke 2005; Reich 2011). However, scholars (Czarnecki 2009; Dupagne & Garrison 2006; Kolodzy 2013) argue that creativity is not tied to a single platform, and highlight that the ability to tell a good story transcends any single arena. Researchers (Massey 2004; Mitchelstein & Boczkowski 2009) agree that online news is an embodiment of all the forms, elements and skills associated with print, radio and television, in a converged manner. Journalists are seen to be evolving to be more than just storytellers, due to the combined effects of digital technologies and media convergence (Deffor 2015: 7). This new form of storytelling is the result of content adapted to the new behaviours of the audience in a rapidly changing cultural ecosystem (Hougat 2014).

Some journalists uphold that the online platform gives them more space to be creative as they are not restricted to any rigid formats, but others disagree, and prefer the stability that characterise practises from traditional platforms (Thurman & Myllylahti 2009). This then, largely depends on who is considering the particular affordances of the digital space, and their perspectives towards it; an individual journalist is determined by their particular abilities as to whether it is an opportunity or challenge (Deffor 2015: 43). Different techniques are increasingly featured in digital storytelling, and how they are operational differs from one institutional context to the other (Deffor 2015: 34), but whether or not they

are embraced is decided by the journalistic decision-making and institutional capacity (Thurman 2011).

The uptake of new technologies and skills training was found to be low within established journalistic corps in Europe (Trench & Quinn 2003; Mitchelstein & Boczkowski 2009). However, in another study, also focused on European newsrooms, the exact opposite was found, where "editors are keen to embrace new technologies, which are seen as being part of the future of news" (Thurman & Lupton 2008: 439). This shows that the adoption and adaptation of new technologies and techniques is context-specific (Deffor 2015: 41). Keeping up with technological development is vital, as it shapes journalism practices (Weiss & Domingo 2010) and decisions by key players such as journalists and managers, who in turn are motivated by economic, socio-political, and cultural conditions (Deffor 2015: 23). The question remains as to how journalists make sense of these additional responsibilities of mastering technical skills and genre conventions in terms of their primary role of reporting the facts or what Kovach and Rosenthiel (2001) call their role as verified truth-tellers.

There is a valid concern that there is, in effect, a dilution of journalism (Braun & Gillespie 2011) due to these pressures, which have witnessed a departure from professional practice of journalism where more time could be spent verifying sources and facts (Deffor 2015: 42). In addition, journalists now have a greater freedom to practise their trade with the ability to choose their medium (Mitchelstein & Boczkowski 2009) and are, furthermore, no longer limited by stringent time frames associated with broadcast, nor the space limitations

of traditional print media. These disruptions enable new forms of creativity to adapt their story-telling to suit the online space. The new choices for integrating different types of media then allow for a re-examination of how different news-making and distribution processes may be integrated and collaborations set up between various units (Deuze 2004: 140). In an ethnographic study of four Spanish online newsrooms, reporters assert that they do not work for a specific platform, but in the general field of news (Mitchelstein & Boczkowski 2009), and that they now see themselves operating beyond the constraints of the platform, which shows that they have a "broader outlook to just what it is they do in the news production function" (Deffor 2015: 39). Journalists are thus now expected to embrace a much broader sense of competencies and master a range of technical skills across different media.

2.3 Blurred roles between journalists and editors

New digital formats allow for the same story to be repurposed across different media. This means that journalists now spend considerable amounts of time engaged in mundane repurposing of content from other platforms, in contrast to the traditional role of journalists actively seeking out stories (Deuze 2003). They increasingly take on tasks more in line with the role of an editor or sub-editor (Hirst 2011: 85). Another reason propelling journalists to increasingly take on an editorial role (Ferrer-Conill & Tandoc Jr. 2018), is that they tend no longer to be first on the scene to report on a story, but rely on citizens as sources for eye-witness content (Fisher 2018). While journalists will source content from the audience, it is still subject to the editorial standards of the media organisation (Jones &

Salter 2012), where editors and even journalists now have to edit or select content based on their ethical, moral, and practical values (Deffor 2015: 29).

The line between producers and consumers of news have increasingly become blurred as mainstream journalists are no longer the sole news providers. This is due to citizen journalism, a widespread phenomenon disrupting many of the established journalistic norms (Deffor 2015: 22). The shifting of legwork to screen work has led to problems of disinformation and difficulty in building trust when there is no physical or face-to-face contact (Tendai 2013: 122). On the positive side, journalists are able to reach more sources than they previously could when they were still constrained by factors such as distance. This new way of interacting with sources could, however, prove difficult in investigative journalism, where sources need to be nurtured, and where trust needs to be built.

The digital journalist now increasingly has the same functions as the news editors of both traditional broadcast and print platforms (Kolodzy 2013), and frequently curates user-generated content based on audience preference and not professional news values (Jones & Pitcher 2015). The agenda-setting role of mainstream news media is increasingly becoming irrelevant (Deuze & Paulussen 2002: 243). This is due to the blurring of front and back stages in news making (such as who tells the story, the journalist or the audience) due to the immediacy of news online (Karlsson 2011). Journalists are thus no longer the sole gatekeepers of news, as they are forced to source content from the audience (Deuze 2003; Franklin 2009; Deffor 2015: 7). An example might be that a non-journalist is at the scene of an unfolding newsworthy event and is posting visuals of the event that then

becomes the primary news footage that defines that event (Deffor 2015: 7). Not all scholars agree, with some arguing that a fair amount of gatekeeping practices are still in place (Hermida & Thurman 2008), and that mainstream news journalists retain their gatekeeping function (Hudson & Temple 2010). Regardless of this, journalists now have to do more than just tell people the necessary facts of a story and what happened, but have new monitorial and dialogical roles (Deuze 2003) where they monitor public conversation and curate it in their storytelling. This editorial role arguably creates additional stress for journalists, since editors normally have more experience, and a thorough knowledge of the institution and its values. This might become an especially daunting task for younger journalists.

Is the online journalist now more of a curator than a fact finder and storyteller, and what does this mean for their identity as journalists? While digital platforms enhance opportunities for information gathering and sharing, these new avenues create challenges for the journalists' enactment of newsgathering and performance in news making (Eldridge 2017). For example, in 2011, the uprising of the Arab Spring took place in complex, evolving media ecologies where people recorded visuals every day and used social media to document events as they unfolded. Here, a large amount of user-generated content was distributed online and used by mainstream media outlets in their coverage (Hänska-Ahy & Shapour 2012).

The culture of citizen journalism has seen the shift from "individual expression to that of community involvement" (Czarnecki 2009: 7), causing a disruption in journalism as

“audiences are brought into the newsmaker/editor loop in the digital domain” (Deffor 2015: 28). Engagement with the audience is vital, even more so for the moderation and validation of the information received (Deffor 2015: 40). Journalists now require more time and skills because the digital space has created an archive of unlimited data. This creates a challenge for journalists processing all this digital data, while simultaneously competing with amateurs working online (Conboy & Eldridge 2015), and yet, somehow seeking verification of the validity of these reports from the very audiences providing them.

Adding to the workload of authenticating, it has also become much easier to manipulate videos and photos due to software development (Thomson et al. 2020: 7). This demands advanced skills to be able to verify the authenticity of visual sources (Shen et al. 2019). There are cases where disinformation is spread widely across social media and the question arises as to whether journalists ought to challenge such inaccurate stories by reporting on citizen journalism itself (Franklin 2014). Is it unprofessional to do so, pandering to the exploitation of the sensational tastes of the public or, alternatively, is it unprofessional not to present the true facts to the public? Some researchers claim that in the future, the responsibility of news reporting will shift completely to the consumers (Trench & Quinn 2003), however, it is important to note that it is arguably not the quantity of citizen journalists that matter, but the quality of their journalism (Hirst 2011: 22). Currently, the role played by consumers in news production is not significant enough to guarantee this shift (Deffor 2015: 40).

The editorial role of the digital journalist also extends to responsibility for making strategic editorial decisions about what kind of platforms to publish their content on when practicing their craft (Deuze 2005). Before, editors and sub-editors would decide where stories would be published, but now individual journalists are tasked with choosing what social media platform they will post content on in order to address the need to effectively engage with a diverse news consuming audience who is fragmented and disparate (Tewksbury & Rittenburg 2009; Boczkowski & Mitchelstein 2010; Gandour 2016). With digital convergence journalists therefore face additional pressure to take on editorial roles that include repurposing content, selecting and vetting content, making decisions about the media format to use for a story and choosing a distribution platform on which to share it.

2.4 Blurred roles between journalists and commercial publishers

The final part of this section argues that as newsrooms become digital, journalists are increasingly taking on the commercial responsibilities of the publisher. It seems journalism now requires a marketing sensibility (Chari 2013: 128). This section explores this seeming contradiction within the values of professional journalism and then explores how the age of instant communication has shifted journalistic routines towards this sensibility. Finally, it examines how journalists struggle to best represent themselves and their institutions and argues that by interacting directly with audiences on an individual level, journalists themselves may now become the focus as they obtain recognition, and sometimes even celebrity status (Olausson 2017). To attract the maximum views, journalists now require a

keener sense of their audience, and their preferences, in order to help them decide what platform to publish on and when (Gulyas 2013; Canter 2015; Olausson 2017a). This proves to be a sizable contradiction. In the past, the division between journalist and marketer or publisher in the commercial sense was sacrosanct (Cornia et al. 2018). This was a standard norm to ensure that journalists were primarily concerned with the relevance and truthfulness of their stories as a social good, as opposed to a profitable and popular product (Salter 2008). It seems journalism now requires a marketing sensibility, where there is a question as to whether they are indeed taking on the role of marketers, and so breaching what was previously considered an absolute "Chinese Wall" between journalism and the business of publishing (Cohen 2002). This could mean that journalists are more focused on their story ratings (Hirst 2011: 146) than their or their institution's reputation online (Molyneux & Holton 2015). This is because digital platforms provide the journalist with instant feedback on who and how many people are interacting with what content (Deffor 2015: 25).

By using social media, journalists are increasingly operating and developing reputations on an individual level and many scholars (Verweij & Van Noort 2013; Olausson 2017a; Lough et al. 2017) argue persuasively that journalists working in the digital space struggle with ways in which to best represent themselves, their organisation, professional work, and their profession. A journalist will rely on the ideology that plays a significant role in shaping their professionalism (Deuze 2005; Pang 2010: 199). Before social media, journalists' identities were invested in the news organisation that employed them, but now online engagement enables a celebrity-type status with the public (Collings 2014; Jones & Pitcher

2015; Olausson 2017b). In this digital age, a journalist's personal integrity could also easily be publicly questioned or their alleged personal biases "revealed", thus public assessments now play a strong role in how journalists view their image (Örnebring 2009; Hampton 2010). Social networks distort the lines between personal and professional as the journalist achieves celebrity status (Daniels 2014) and the reputation of the institution is put at risk when the audience confuses the journalist's view with that of his or her institution (Jones & Pitcher 2015). This happens because journalists publish content on their own social media accounts and become brands in their own right (Hedman & Djerf-Pierre 2013; Olausson 2017b). The two brands blur as the journalist's social media posts are highlighted and shared by the institution's corporate social media accounts.

Social media has not only enabled fame, but has conversely made personal abuse or "trolling" of journalists more public and frequent (Meyer & Carey 2013; Waisbord 2020). Trolling may be particularly difficult to reconcile with a journalistic identity rooted in public service. A majority of journalists use their personal social media accounts for work, blurring personal and professional online identities (Deuze 2007; Daniels 2014; Olausson 2017a), so that audiences conflate the organisation's view with that of the journalist (Jones & Pitcher 2015). Digital newsrooms now mean that journalists shoulder the responsibility to attract audiences to their content (Cornia et al. 2018). This includes making decisions on content and distribution based on attracting maximum views, and exposes journalists to individual public scrutiny, whether through celebrity fame or trolling that destroys personal reputation.

2.5 Conclusion

The chapter has shown how the profession of journalism has experienced a profound digital disruption. It demonstrated that it is not only newsroom routines that have been disrupted, but the very definition of what it means to be a journalist has been disrupted as various roles from elsewhere in the newsroom have converged into changing roles for the digital journalist. In particular, it has shown how direct access to the public and frequent interaction with the audience is changing journalism as a profession. Such changing roles include journalists taking on a range of technical roles demanding new skill sets to utilise and even access information from digital resources, journalists taking on an editorial role and journalists adopting the role of publisher, which requires a keen marketing awareness. As the demands of the journalism profession keep changing, this raises questions as to how all these new roles and responsibilities might in turn disrupt journalistic identity. The next chapter will consider the concept of journalistic identity, and how it emerges from both professional values and institutional cultures. It will consider how these might be disrupted due to the digital disruption of journalism as a profession.

Chapter 3: Review of the Literature on Journalistic Identity

This chapter is divided into four sections, so as to map the development of the concept of journalistic identity. The first two sections explore abstract notions, debates, and arguments around journalistic identity that predate the digital age, focusing on two approaches, namely professional and institutional journalistic identity. Both approaches are explored as previous research at *SABC* suggests that while some journalists align themselves strongly with international professional values of journalism, the institutional culture of the *SABC* also plays a powerful role in shaping practices and values that resonate better with shaping the identity of other journalists (Arndt 2018). The third section focuses on the existing literature on the *SABC* through the lens of journalistic identity. It will argue that there is no unified institutional culture at *SABC,* as employees have conflicting ideas about what the institution stands for, creating an organisational contradiction. Finally, the fourth section considers how the relationship between journalists and the public is central to the literature on journalistic identity, and explores digital disruptions of this relationship between journalists and the public.

The weight of the institutional and professional influences at play in the internal workings of news production have consequences for how journalists deploy new technologies in their professional routines (Mabweazara 2010: 11). However, my interest is the inverse of Mabweazara, where I examine how new digital routines might in turn influence the institutional and professional cultures of the newsroom and so disrupt journalistic identity. I

examine how journalistic identity has been framed in two ways: by either a global sense of professionalism, or a local institutional context. For public broadcasting journalists, the concept of professional identity is particularly driven by the notion of public service (Lowe & Stavitsky 2016). The section on professional journalistic identity therefore concludes with consideration of what is meant by public service, and how this has affected the identities of public broadcast journalists. The section on institutional journalistic identity shows that journalists may strongly identify with the culture of their institutions. It demonstrates that there is no unified institutional culture at the *SABC* and that this organisational contradiction promotes constant negotiation over perceptions of journalistic identity within the institution.

3.1 The concept of professional journalistic identity

In journalism, the concept of professionalism serves to separate the producers from the product (Aldridge & Evetts 2003) and provides journalists with their sense of identity (Witschge & Nygren 2009). Scholars who emphasise professional journalistic identity argue that journalists form their identities through their alignment to professional journalistic values such as public responsibility and objectivity (Carpentier 2005; Deuze 2005; McDevitt 2006; Merrill 1974). Internationally, journalists are understood to have identities driven by autonomy, constructed around the notion of professionalism (Johnstone et al 1979; Plaisance & Deppa 2009) and values like freedom, equality, and solidarity are considered universal (Park & Curran 2000: 15). Journalists thus define their identity in

terms of a professionalism represented by universal notions of truth, fairness, journalistic ethics, and routines (Carpentier 2005: 7).

A study on South African and Namibian journalists shows, however, that these journalists don't always perceive themselves as independent, rather, they often consider it their duty to take on a similar role as to what an opposition political party would take on to hold the government in check (Wasserman 2010). This draws into question some of the above claims regarding the universal nature of the values that underpin professional journalistic identities. Waisbord (2013: 199) explains that when one considers journalism beyond the Anglo-American perspective, interpretations of professional values are actually quite dynamic, even though the actual journalism values produced globally may be quite similar.

Professional identity has an internal dimension based on internalising values but identity also has an external dimension in relation to other groups (Nygren & Stigbrand 2013: 3). For journalists, their responsibility to the public, in the service of public interest, is an important relationship that defines their identity and it is framed by traditional values of journalistic storytelling such as fairness, objectivity, and independence (Mari 2014). Public interest is defined as those interests that serve the public, their safety, and democracy in general. Media working within the public interest should be ruled by the same norms, values, rights, and obligations that governs the rest of society. Despite its importance, promoting the public interest should not cause social problems (McQuail 2000: 142), for example vigilante action, where the journalist becomes involved in illegal activities instead

of following bureaucratic procedures. Public broadcasters ought to act as a check on government and corporate interests, as it is the right of the public to be informed on all matters of public interest (Arndt 2018: 36). Furthermore, coverage ought to include a diversity of information and expressions, and journalists should respect the juridical system, as well as individual and human rights (McQuail 2000: 144). Serving the needs of the public is central to the idea of public service broadcasting (Sylvertsen 2003). While journalists deem this relationship with the public to be important, it generally does not involve much direct interaction between them and the public, but rather a sense of journalists as protectors of public interest (Mari 2014: 10).

One of the news values defining whether an event is newsworthy is whether the issue is relevant to the public (Harcup & O'Neil 2009). Journalists are socialised to adopt these values of relevance and public interest in the newsroom, because the vocation requires a journalist to be able to immediately assess the newsworthiness of a story (Harrison 2006). The journalistic skill of determining newsworthiness allows journalists to maintain a relationship with the public where they act in their interest, while still allowing them to implement professional values of objectivity and independence. It is this responsibility towards the public, framed by objectivity and autonomy, that shapes the attitudes journalists hold towards the profession (McDevitt 2006; Merrill 1974).

Since a journalist's professional reputation is the product of continuous public scrutiny, the importance of this relationship with the public serves as an inhibitor of politicisation (Arndt

2018: 222). A journalist's relationship with the public is, however, not only framed defensively in terms of protecting a relationship, but is also fundamentally altruistic and based on public service, which in turn gives meaning to their work. This is because journalists understand their relationship as professionals to be based in asking important questions on behalf of the public, and this understanding helps give meaning to their work and enables them to justify its importance (Hanitzsch & Vos 2017; Aldridge & Evetts 2003; Zelizer 1993). In addition, Waisbord (2013: 10) argues that this professional identity is produced through boundary construction to differentiate themselves from other public commentators such as politicians. For journalists, this is primarily done through emphasis on their independence from political and commercial interest. The *BBC* model of public broadcasting highlights not only such independence but also the notion of balance in their political reporting, which shows that besides the freedom from outside interests, they share with commercial journalists, they also take on the responsibility of representing the nation as a whole (Waisbord 2013: 35).

Public broadcasters are obliged not only to protect the public interest through their news coverage, but they have a much broader mandate to promote the public good (Arndt 2018: 35). They should also play a role in integrating divided societies as they are in a position to promote civic consciousness (Haynes et al. 2004). PSBs have the additional responsibility to help build a national identity and re-socialise citizens as well as political elites in a burgeoning democracy (Gunther & Mughan 2000: 412). In public broadcasting, while the journalists may also identify as professional, the notion of public service in addition to

serving the public interest creates an added need for responsiveness towards the audience (Carpentier 2005: 6). Scholars agree that public broadcasters ought to educate the public, as well as encourage participation and integrate fragmented societies by guaranteeing representations of diversity (Emdon 1998; Raboy 1998; Barnett 1999; Born & Prosser 2001; Jakubowicz 2004; Volčič & Zajc 2013;).

Thus, public broadcast journalists extend their professional identity beyond the notion of public interest in order to include public service. This identity is defined by their relationship with the public, as they are constantly negotiating public interest by determining the newsworthiness of a given story. Public service broadcasting therefore demands a much more active responsibility in terms of shaping society and promoting social harmony. This creates certain tension with their professional journalistic values of objectivity, particularly in situations of conflict.

3.2 The concept of institutional journalistic identity

In contrast to the focus above on professional values, and how this might form the basis of journalistic identity, other scholars see journalistic identity as developing primarily around institutional cultures of media houses, where journalists identify with the culture of their institutions (Schlesinger 1990; Deuze 2005; Schein 2010). These researchers argue that local contexts, such as the organisational culture of the workplace, shapes the nature of the journalist's identity (Breed 1955; Shoemaker & Reese 1996; Schudson 1997; Cottle 2003; Zelizer 2004; Hanitzsch 2007). Here, identity is conceptualised as built and communicated

through organisational interpersonal relationships, and refers to the manner in which all members of an institution think of themselves and the institution itself (Gioia 2003; Nord & Strömbäck 2004: 21).

Historically, institutional approaches to journalistic identity were developed in the field of sociology of news, and here, the fundamental concern is to understand the ways in which the outputs of journalism are shaped. The defining elements of institutional culture are disputed within the literature (Sackmann 1991; Brown 1995; Cooper et al. 2000), but there has been some agreement that institutional values and beliefs constitute its key features (Denison 1996; Tepeci 2001). Values, beliefs, and meanings are shaped according to a specific institution. A "dominant occupational ideology" exists but this is "interpreted, used and applied differently among journalists across media" (Deuze 2005: 445). This institutional approach sees journalistic identity not as constructed around universal journalistic values as discussed in the previous section, but rather, around a very particular set of localised institutional values.

Institutional culture may help to explain why one news organisation operates in completely different ways than another (Schein 2010: 14). For example, Cowling (2017) shows how organisational culture constitutes journalistic identity at *The Sowetan* newspaper, and questions the notion that there is a broad universal journalism culture in South Africa or on the whole. She emphasises the importance of local contextual newsroom socialisation in creating identity in journalism. Cowling (2017: 15) highlights the way in which the shared enthusiasm for "township culture" within *The Sowetan* organisation creates a shared

understanding among journalists of the newspaper's role in the community and its relationship with readers. Embedded in the organisations' culture, it was of utmost importance for *The Sowetan*'s reporters to always do their reporting as if in servitude to the community. This close relationship between journalists and the community is shown by the publication's routine practice for readers to physically walk into the newsroom to communicate with the newspaper.

Cowling (2017: 12) emphasises that the journalistic practices and news values of journalists socialised at *The Sowetan* were different from those of journalists coming from other newsrooms. Journalists who did not conform to the norms and values of *The Sowetan* journalists did not fit in and were seen as outsiders. For example, in general, lunch was bought from a woman out of her parked car outside of the newsroom, with the food on offer typical township specials that include chicken feet and cooked sheep's head. In this case, lunch choices may be an expression of institutional values. Here, the choice of the sheep's head may be understood as a symbolic choice, indicating that these journalists are not placing themselves above others in the township, and demonstrating institutional values of African humanism, based on a collective identity that foregrounds recognition of others, and a relationship of care and service to the community. A *Sowetan* staff member commented in Cowling's (2017: 10) study that she lacked credibility and was not treated equally, because she didn't enjoy the same cultural activities as the majority of *The Sowetan* journalists. Cowling (2017) demonstrates how organisational culture is entangled in journalism practice and critiques the idea of a broad universal journalistic identity, instead showing the significance of newsroom socialisation in creating journalistic identity.

When people work side by side in an institution, they are socialised into particular values as they interact with each other in a social system. As a result, people's conception of reality may become embedded within the institutional fabric (Ngwenya 2015: 45). Cowling (2017: 15) therefore argues that there is not one occupational standard with a few variations, but that multiple versions of journalism exist that may be incompatible with each other.

This interpretation of journalistic identity as determined by the very particular dynamics of an institution is therefore quite different from the professional approach to journalistic identity that considers journalists as developing an identity in relation to global norms of the profession. Despite these tensions between the two approaches, both receive analysis here. Recent studies of the *SABC* have focused on the importance of institutional culture in shaping journalistic routines and values (Arndt 2018; Ngwenya 2015). Yet these same studies have shown that despite the strength of the institutional culture some journalists at *SABC* are still very much concerned with global professional journalistic values such as independence, and Arndt (2018) specifically mentions a subsection of journalists who define themselves primarily in terms of professional journalistic values, as outlined in the next section. In this study, I have focused on this subgroup, and I am particularly interested in how they negotiate the tensions between professional and institutional values. As Wasserman (2010) has shown, professional journalistic identity might not look the same all over the world, as journalists might interpret values differently. Similarly, journalists embracing professional journalistic values within an institution that might be hostile at times to some of these values and impose a strong institutional culture, could produce very

different forms of journalistic identity and journalistic values. Professionalism thus interlinks with institutional culture, as it can be seen as an on-going negotiation between the organisational demands for the institution and the occupational identity developing among journalists themselves (Örnebring 2009). The next section discusses how these tensions between professional journalistic values and institutional practices dominated newsroom culture at the *SABC* in recent years.

3.3 Tensions between professional journalistic values and policies of the public mandate of the *SABC*

The *SABC*'s institutional culture is frequently at odds with the professional journalistic values they describe in their official documents. The *SABC* has become implicated in complex power relations between politicians, civil society, internal hierarchies amongst staff and advertisers which influences the key processes that shape staff understandings (Ngwenya 2015: 5). Yet the editorial policies subscribe to equality, diversity, and transparency (SABC Editorial Policies 2004), where the *SABC* as a whole is meant to play a critical watchdog role (Ngwenya 2015). Patterns of behaviour, such as self-censorship, manifest in a highly politicised environment stand in conflict with professional norms (Arndt 2018). As a public service broadcaster, the *SABC* ought to serve the interests of the public (Deffor 2015; Born & Prosser 2001) in accordance with the *South African Constitution and Broadcasting Act* and its subsequent amendment (1999; 2002), which legally requires it to do so. However, externally driven factors such as commercialisation and politics contribute to the *SABC*'s organisational identity shift, which inevitably leads to

changes in how staff members perceive themselves and one another (Ngwenya 2015: 28). The tension between a public service duty and adopting a market sensibility has existed as far back as to 1994 (Teer-Tomaselli 1995: 581), and has remained into the 2010s (Deffor 2015: 54).

This has affected management strategy, with greater consideration given to commercially viable programming streams (Teer-Tomaselli 1995: 581), therefore skewing programming in favour of the market (Deffor 2015:54). The *SABC* lost significant audiences in 2016/2017, where some of this has been attributed to former COO Hlaudi Motsoeneng's 90% local content policy, and his interference in news editorial policy and coverage as discussed in Chapter 1. However, the *SABC* has a mandate to deliver quality news to its audience with the highest standards of journalism.

The relationship of power within the institutional culture leads to oppression and self-censorship of *SABC* journalists, as it shapes the domination that structures the world of *SABC* staff and therefore their subjectivity (Ngwenya 2015: 1). The values these journalists use to construct subjectivity shapes how they reproduce power matrices in the public broadcaster, since their conception of identity is firstly determined by their own life experiences and secondly, by the larger political economy (Ngwenya 2015). Many *SABC* journalists have, in recent years, consistently behaved in ways that have come into conflict with the *SABC*'s mandate. Adverse effects included uncritical news reporting, stifling of creativity, low quality coverage, and journalists disengaged from their professional roles (Arndt 2018: 348). However, the *SABC*'s organisational culture is not homogeneous, and

journalists within the same environment behave in divergent ways, proving that there is a considerable space for agency and resistance towards politicisation (Arndt 2018: 349). The working environments for *SABC* journalists influence how they interpret their professional roles, as this can inhibit or interfere with the individual's performance of tasks (Ngwenya 2015: 201). Professional values in journalism have been critiqued, mainly for not being sufficiently democratic in terms of journalists not engaging or consulting the public around representing their priorities and views of society (Waisbord 2013: 152). Waisbord (2013) sees nothing wrong with journalism that represents particular political ideals in order to represent the perspectives of diverse audiences. However, in fragile democracies, he cautions that media institutions are generally characterised by patrimonialism where they become vehicles not for political ideas but for corrupt individuals (Waisbord 2013: 154). In this context, professional journalistic values are essential to establishing an independent journalistic knowledge production site through which political and commercial interests can be held accountable.

At the *SABC,* there is no unified institutional culture as staff have conflicting ideas in terms of what the institution stands for, who it serves, what its goals are, and what the interests of its stakeholders are (Ngweyna 2015: 143). However, Arndt (2018) found that *SABC* journalists agreed to a shared identity about the role of the institution, but they positioned themselves very differently towards their duties. This led Arndt (2018) to map out four main subcultures at the *SABC,* namely: Partisans, Independent Minded Professionals, Black Old Guard, and White Old Guard. Such organisational contradiction fosters mixed attitudes and ambivalent identifications, which creates a source of conflict (Esposito & Williams

2010) and promotes inconsistent perceptions of identity within the institution. However, due to journalists being routinely exposed to conflict in their work, newsrooms will generally define conflict as a predictable and expected occurrence (Bantz 1985). It is also possible for contradicting values and belief systems to co-exist within institutional culture, and even within an individual (Born & Prosser 2001), where organisations are often rife with conflict (Rodrigues 2006). An organisation's culture is itself the site of disagreement between competing explicit and implicit discourses that are constantly shaped by the individuals of the organisation while impacting on them in turn (Arndt 2018: 68).

3.4 Digital disruption and its possible impacts on journalistic identity

As shown above, in the past, professional journalistic identity was based both on newsroom socialisation into accepting universal values and an abstract notion of the journalists' obligations to the public (Deuze 2005), while institutional journalistic identity was based on internalising the institution's culture through constant interaction with peers (Breed 1955). Now, with the digital revolution, as social media disrupts the previously distanced and abstract relationship of the journalist with the public, and as new digital newsroom practices disrupt previous hierarchies of journalist's socialisation, this might arguably also disrupt the formation of journalistic identities. Chapter 2 discussed the key digital disruptions and how they might influence journalistic responsibilities and routines or the disruption of journalism as a job. The digital newsroom at the *SABC* is still a separate entity from the television and radio newsrooms and all three are regarded to still be working in silos. Despite the primary responsibility for repurposing content for digital platforms falling

on the digital newsroom, radio and television newsrooms have also been disrupted by the online space, as these newsrooms and their journalists have been commanded to maintain an online presence.

How might technology disrupt journalistic values? Various scholars agree that there is interplay between technology and socio-cultural values (Cottle 2003; O'Halloran & Smith 2011; Pauwels 2012; Mackay & Ivory 2014). In other words, journalists are subject to contradictions emanating from conflicts between their professional values, institutional cultures and the constraining or liberating factors of new technologies all at the same time (McNair 1998). Journalistic practises are changing due to shifting audience expectations, coupled with technical requirements demanded by the online space (Ytreberg 2001; Mackay & Ivory 2014; Hirst 2011). Innovations in media technology and changing audience characteristics have been the key drivers of change within the global developments in the arena of journalism (Franklin 2009). In the past two decades new digital technologies have disrupted the practices of news journalism (Pavlik 2000; Witschge & Nygren 2009; Jordaan 2013; Deffor 2015; Lough et al. 2017), thereby arguably disrupting journalistic identity through changing the professional routines and values on which such identities are based. Pavlik (2000) proposes that changing technology influences journalism in at least four broad areas: how journalists do their work; the content of news; the structure or organisation of the newsroom; and the relationships between or among news organisations, journalists, and their many publics. These technical changes not only disrupt the established professional status and practices of journalists, but also remove professional control that previously existed (Witschge & Nygren 2009), such as news

editors and editors as gatekeepers selecting stories according to personal definitions of that which is newsworthy and of public interest, without the engagement of the public in that regard. The previous chapter has described how digital routines have disrupted the boundaries between journalists and technicians, between journalists and editors and between journalists and commercial publishers, blurring their responsibilities and routines. Such disruptions could arguably have a significant impact on journalistic identity.

In particular, new digital technology disrupts the relationship with the public, which in turn affects journalistic identity. Journalists' professional use of social media to interact with the public influences the processes and cultures of news selection and presentation in newsrooms (Jordaan 2013). Researchers who explored journalists' use of social media to brand themselves and their organisations found that a majority maintained professional online identities (Lough et al. 2017; Olausson 2017a), but arguably, the minority who did not might have a significant impact on future trends.

Journalists are not only socialised by the newsroom, but also by constant interaction with the audience/public. As described above, in the past journalists conceptualised the public abstractly through the notion of public interest and did not face constant direct interaction with their audience. Several scholars (Anderson 2011; Loosen & Schmidt 2012; Bright & Nichols 2014; Bunce 2015) have shown that digital journalism routines now create a direct two-way relationship with the audience who are now able to engage directly with journalists and other citizens within the public domain. This online arena (*Facebook* and *Twitter*) provides an accessible platform for journalists to personally engage their audience

(Anderson 2011). It may produce celebrity journalists, distinguished more for who they are than for what they are reporting on (Shepard 1997; Olausson 2017b), such as *SABC* journalist Stephen Grootes from radio, who has a huge following and social media presence. As audience members become more interested in the celebrity reporter's opinions, rather than the facts, this may challenge universal journalistic values, such as objectivity, which form the bedrock of professional journalistic identity and the broadcaster's relationship with the public (Deuze 2005; Carpentier 2005; Olausson 2017b). The digital media era is characterised by participatory journalism, and the inclusion of media from citizens (Kautsky & Windholm 2008; Hirst 2011), also known as citizen journalism. Online creates a space for the journalist to connect and engage directly with the journalist. This is important for this study, because as the *SABC*'s broadcast audience shrinks, the online audience grows and is increasingly channelling their frustration with its misuse of power into online abuse of journalists (Gqubule 2018).

3.5 Conclusion

This chapter mapped the development of the concept of journalistic identity, showing how journalistic identity has been described through what has been presented as two quite distinct opposing approaches. The professional journalistic identity approach argues that journalistic identity is built on global universal values. Yet Wasserman's (2010) study shows that this is not necessarily true, and that journalists may embrace a sense of professional identity, while holding values informed by local context. The institutional approach highlights the importance of institutional culture, and argues that routines and

practices have an impact on shaping values. One may therefore use this idea to argue that digital disruptions of journalistic routines and responsibilities, as documented in the previous chapter, might therefore also lead to a disruption in journalistic values. For this reason, the disruptions to journalistic responsibilities and routines set out in the previous sections might impact on journalistic values and identity. Journalistic identity at the *SABC* has particularly shown how both institutional culture and professional values might impact on journalistic identity.

Cowling's (2017) study argues how organisational culture constitutes journalistic identity and how this identity differs depending on a local institutional context. Therefore, to understand the complexities of identity, the professional values journalists hold need to be taken into consideration. Thus, the integration of both approaches will be undertaken in this analysis. Like Wasserman (2010), I am interested in how professional journalistic identity might be somewhat different across differing contexts, and question the universal nature of professional identity that is commonly assumed. This is why the focus of this study is on journalists who consider themselves driven by professional journalistic values at the *SABC*. In particular, the relationship with the public promoted by social media practices such as trolling, may disrupt identity, and present particular challenges, with such journalists struggling to assert a sense of independence from outside influence, as well as a separate identity from that of their institutional leadership.

Chapter 4: Tailoring a Methodology and Methods for exploring Journalistic identity at the *SABC*

This chapter describes the research methodology and methods used for this qualitative study. The chapter presents numerous aspects of the method, such as the sampling used to select the journalists best suited to answer the research question, and how participants were recruited. Here, I discuss how I came to focus on a subgroup of journalists at the *SABC* who match Arndt's (2018) classification in her set of four types of *SABC* staff, as 'independent professionals'. Much of this section is concerned with my position as insider researcher, due to the time I had spent at *SABC* as a colleague of the participants in previous years. Being an inside researcher presented particular challenges in the research process. Only in my analysis of the data did I realise that due to my shared world view with the participants, much of my shared assumptions were not reflected in the interviews, but were simply assumed as a given between myself and the participants. In the methods section, I focus on semi-structured interviews as a method, and how these drew on my close reading of *SABC* social media on *Twitter* and *Facebook*. Finally, I reflect on the ethical aspects of this research and the ethical challenges of conducting a study at an institution that had recently victimised journalists.

4.1 Research methodology

Qualitative research involves an interpretive and naturalistic approach to its subject matter by attempting to make sense of phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to the

researchers (Denzin & Lincoln 1994). It is therefore located in the interpretive tradition. The interpretive tradition is important for this study, as it aims to understand the social lived reality of individuals (Babbie & Mouton 2001). Within this perspective, social actors' interpretations involve entering into societal norms, where meaning operates and is found within the contexts of the interpreter (Berger & Luckman 1966). This study aims to explain changes in journalistic identity with the introduction of new online journalism practices in the *SABC* newsroom. It particularly focuses on how, with the advent of digital media technologies, the role of journalists has been changing, as they are forced to embrace new responsibilities and routines. It further shows that relationships with audiences have become more tangible, arguably further disrupting what it means to be a journalist (Anderson 2011; Loosen & Schmidt 2012; Bright & Nichols 2014; Bunce 2015). The *SABC* is a public broadcaster that presents particularly interesting dynamics around journalistic identity, due firstly to the very unusual and particular ways in which professional and institutional journalistic identity plays out, particularly in the tensions that journalists who embrace professional values at the *SABC*. Secondly, the *SABC* has been part of a rapid and extensive move to digitisation, which has the potential to further disrupt identities and allow these tensions to emerge in a more acute form. As identity is constructed through meanings related to how one understands the relationship of oneself to others, emerging from a number of intersecting discourses (Stuart Hall 1989), the research question is therefore best studied through qualitative approaches that foreground issues of meaning. This study therefore utilises the interpretive tradition to understand shifting

journalistic identities in the *SABC* newsrooms and how these are related to the introduction of new online journalism practices.

4.2 Positioning of Researcher

My time at the *SABC* extended from 2014 to 2019 as a news producer for its digital newsroom. Insider research can be described as research which is conducted in an area of focus where the researcher is also a member (Brannick & Coghlan 2007; Mercer 2007). As a *SABC* journalist at the time, and thus an insider researcher, I recognised that power relations impacted on the research. For that reason, I only set out to recruit participants who were peers at the same level in the hierarchy of the organisation. I was initially hoping to recruit a range of different journalists, based on Arndt's (2018) classification of *SABC* staff, but despite my best efforts I was only able to recruit one type of journalist, the independent minded professional (IMP), who like myself, share professional values and beliefs about journalism such as reporting objectively without editorial interference. The participants I approached outside of this subculture said they feared repercussion by the institution, or were not interested in participating. I however realised that working with the subculture of IMP journalists was probably more productive for the study, as there were valuable insights that I could make due to having experienced the subculture first-hand within the institution. Researchers (Conant 1968; Oakley 1981; DeVerteuil 2004) argue that an insider researcher would have an advantage if the study is about culture and way of life of a certain community; this is due to understanding the participants more thoroughly as the participants and the researcher would share many common values or experiences. Focusing

on this particular subculture may also reveal the most interesting tensions between professional and institutional influences on journalistic identity as opposed to the white and black old-timers, or the new highly politicised journalists, who arguably have journalistic identities that are more exclusively constituted by former and current institutional forces and not as nuanced and complex as the IMPs studied.

The study took into consideration that insider research challenged the positivist stance that research should be objective due to its high level of subjective involvement (Workman 2007). At first, despite our shared subculture, it was challenging even to talk to the IMP journalists, as there was a general distrust of colleagues within the *SABC* after the events of 2016. Some of the participants were outspoken during the turbulent times and others were not, I formed part of the latter group. However, I was able to convince them of my integrity in protecting sources (and so in protecting the participants) due to my former reporting of violent crimes, where keeping community members anonymous was vital. It was clear we subscribed to the same professional values, which built trust. I also considered that my need to continue professional relationships after the research period might also have led to possible distortions in my writing of the study, as Mercer (2007) cautions. I luckily avoided encountering such complexities as prior to these interviews I resigned from the *SABC.* The participants were informed that I would no longer be involved with the public broadcaster shortly after the interviews. However, I am acutely aware of the possible limitation of being an insider, as I would not be entirely objective as I place myself in the same subculture as these IMP journalists, but arguably this awareness of my own journalistic identity also gives me more recognition of my own biases. This complex relationship of being involved

as a reflexive researcher is best described by understanding the complex relationships between who we are, what we know and how we know (Hertz 1997; Rennie 1998).

4.3 Sampling

The research focused on a sample of journalists from each of the *SABC* newsrooms including *Television-*, *Radio-* and *Digital News*. A majority of the sample stemmed from the traditional platforms of television and radio with two from the digital newsroom. Journalists working within the digital newsroom arguably already have a digital orientation and I suspected that the biggest shifts in identity would be found in traditional platforms as these journalists have only more recently begun utilising the digital space for their work.

I initially set out to interview a range of *SABC* journalists that represented the four different subcultures Arndt (2018) describes. I experienced difficulties in doing so, as I am known to be an IMP, and I was unable to convince journalists from outside of these groups to agree to interviews. We did not share the same values and identity and they distrusted me and refused to engage. Due to insider research existing in a continuum that is dependent on the closeness of the researcher to the subject being researched (Mercer 2007; Trowler 2011), the positioning of the researcher depends on the aspects of this insider perspective, which is aligned or shared with participants (Chavez 2008). What I learnt from this experience is that I share an identity with the participants, and due to its complexities and stresses placed on it, I myself wanted answers to the questions asked in this research paper. While I was interested in these IMP journalists, I wanted participants who had also been exposed to the

SABC's institutional culture for some time. The reason for this was that I was also considering institutional values and their influence on journalistic identity in this study.

Therefore, special consideration was given to ensure that all the journalists have been working in the vocation for over five years and that they were present during the period of heightened controversy during 2016. Another consideration was to obtain a diversity of race in candidates to compare their journalistic identity and understand whether there are overarching values shared despite having different cultures and experiences moulded by South Africa's raciliased history. I then sourced journalists matching these requirements from the traditional newsrooms (TV and Radio) as well as Digital. For a qualitative study, a smaller sample often produces richer findings and more possibilities. Samples in qualitative research tend to be small so as to support the depth of analysis that is fundamental to this form of inquiry (Sandelowski 1996). Arguably, as the independent professionals have faced particular challenges in the institution over the past few years, and have experienced the most political tension in maintaining their journalistic identities, they are the most interesting group to study. They present a particularly unusual type of journalist with an identity based in professionalism, but based in an institution that has often not maintained or honoured these values. Here, the digital disruption of their routines and the digital disruption of their relationship with the audience would happen at a time when their journalistic identity was already under great stress. Their unusual position, immersed both in an institutional culture that does not necessarily speak to professional values, while trying to maintain such values themselves, have provided a basis for me to apply literature from both the professional and the institutional approaches to journalistic identity,

approaches that are normally considered in opposition to each other. I was therefore able to develop a conceptual lens for studying such professionals in hostile institutions by combining an institutional and a professional approach.

4.4 Journalist participants

The journalists interviewed were all between 25-45 years old. They joined the *SABC* at different times but all of them have worked for the public broadcaster for over five years with one exception who left during the editorial interference in the 2016 era, but returned with the change of management. The remaining five all stayed throughout 2016 to 2018 when the interviews were conducted. All the journalists had similar views in terms of how they identify with professional values as a journalist with a strong theme of wanting to serve the public observed from their interviews. This sample matches the key features in Arndt's (2018:283) classification of the IMP subculture. The participants were racially diverse, consisting of black African, white, coloured and Indian journalists, with four females and two males interviewed. The participants work for the three big newsrooms of the *SABC*, consisting of *Digital News*, *TV News* and *Radio News*.

Addison[2]

Addison is mixed race with strong roots in the coloured community. In her thirties, she joined the *SABC* when it was under Motsoeneng's leadership. She works in the TV

[2] All names are pseudonyms to protect the identity of the journalists and ensure anonymity.

newsroom, but started her journalism career in Print Media outside of the *SABC*. Her stories in print mainly focused on exposing social injustices and she regularly received threats from the subjects due to the nature of her investigative work. During her time at the *SABC*, her journalism shifted to softer stories with a lifestyle angle, but her hard news themes from her print media days are still clearly seen in the themes of her work.

Mieke

Mieke is a white journalist in an Afrikaans newsroom. She joined the *SABC* in her early twenties as an intern, a couple of years before Motsoeneng took leadership. Her stories have strong activism themes and she is consumed with telling stories that try to help her fellow human beings. She was promoted to the position of news producer, but she has become frustrated by the change in role, as her work now consists mostly of deskbound duties as opposed to reporting. She often feels demotivated but on the rare occasion when she is afforded the opportunity to produce an original story, she makes sure that the story receives as much coverage as possible on both traditional and digital platforms.

Neo

Neo is a Zulu journalist who started his career as a young intern under the leadership of Solly Mokoetle. Now in his late thirties, he works in the Radio Newsroom. He constantly

talks about his need to serve the rural black community with his stories. He often finds himself at odds with news editors on story ideas and pitches. He looks up to the veteran *SABC* journalists and often fights with news editors who do not maintain his standards of reporting on issues pertaining to the black community. He believes that more uplifting stories should be told, shifting away from a focus on black victimhood.

Sahuri

Sahuri is of a mixed race with strong ties to the Indian community. She joined the *SABC* just prior to Motsoeneng's leadership, and has worked in the traditional platform's newsroom as well as the digital newsroom. She is particularly concerned with objectivity in stories and mostly conducts journalism with an activism theme in her narratives. Sahuri has been with the *SABC* on and off, and refers to the institution as an ex-lover who you just can't get rid of. She resigned ahead of the heightened conflict in 2016. Sahuri then returned when the *SABC* board started to change as she hoped that things would improve.

Patti

Patti is a white journalist with strong ties to the English community. Patti joined the *SABC* in her twenties just prior to Motsoeneng being appointed. She has worked across all the different platforms at the *SABC*. She describes herself as politically apathetic at times, but

when she reports on stories, the themes consist of solution driven pieces geared towards South Africans who face socio-economic problems.

Les

Les is a mixed-race journalist with strong ties in the Western Cape coloured community. He joined the *SABC* TV Newsroom under Solly Mokoetle. Now in his forties, he is extremely vocal about wanting to make a difference in people's lives through his journalism. He started his journalism career by writing exclusive 'horror' exposés challenging injustices for newspapers and digital journalism platforms outside of the *SABC*. He says he feels less like a journalist at the *SABC*. He is often at loggerheads with *SABC* management and complains of being bullied by colleagues in the newsroom.

4.5 Methodology

Once the participants were confirmed, a careful study of their personal social media accounts was conducted. I took careful note of whether or not they posted in a personal capacity or in a professional capacity as a journalist. I also observed *SABC News*' online platforms, how participants' news stories were represented on SABC News platforms and how they interacted with it. The journalists' social media accounts were observed a month prior to their interviews, back-tracing all available posts and comments online. I analysed how they represented themselves online and interacted with members of the public. Insights gleaned from this close reading of the social media posts were used as a basis for asking questions during the semi-structured interviews. These two methods were used to

enable a basic triangulation. By using several different methods into the investigation of a phenomenon, confidence in conclusions can be increased (Bryman 1988), as triangulation can further provide a fuller picture (Fielding & Fielding 1986).

Semi-structured interviews were chosen as the method is flexible and allows for unanticipated responses and issues to emerge through the use of open-ended questioning (Tod 2006). Previous research by Ngwenya (2015) and Deffor (2015) into the dynamics of the *SABC* similarly used semi-structured interviews successfully to unpack complex ideas. Open-ended questions provided the opportunity to identify ways of understanding the topic. To obtain richer data, the interview schedule only guided the interview process, while follow up questions enabled reflecting on the participant's personal experiences (Bridges et al. 2008). This method did have its challenges. Establishing rapport and trust was the first hurdle. All participants stressed anonymity, especially when they found out that I would be leaving the *SABC*. Five out of the six interviews were conducted in the *SABC* Auckland Park offices. A quiet setting was found where all participants were ensured privacy. The location of these interviews was carefully chosen away from security cameras in a noisy section of the building where it would be perceived by others simply as two colleagues on a break. Special equipment was used to record the interview and was paused when other colleagues passed by to greet or address individual work. The sixth interview was outside of the *SABC*. This is due to the participant being too fearful to answer questions about the public broadcaster within its walls.

An understanding was established prior to the interview in which I explained the purpose of and argued the worth of studying identity as a whole. A good rapport aids the processes of responses in which they communicated freely and willingly (Jacob & Furgerson 2012). The semi-structured interview and prior analysis of their social media accounts provided a high validity as first-hand detailed accounts of their online actions could be measured against their previous online output. Follow-up questions proved pivotal, as the concern of interviewing trained journalists as research subjects became apparent. Their answers were initially diplomatic and objective, but with probing questions empirically based on their actual observations and experiences, they tended to open up more. What helped was conducting these interviews after the dissolution of editorial interference, since the journalists interviewed were more outspoken about it. Not only did they trust me as a researcher but they felt obliged to tell the truth about their experiences from that time.

4.6 Ethical Considerations

Initially, I wanted to include screenshots of social media in the study, but having access and observing some of the participants' private accounts, I removed it due to concerns about anonymity. Special care was taken in the representation of the journalists interviewed in this study. Participants were approached in the hallways of the *SABC* and asked in person whether they would be willing to answer questions for this research. The reason for this physical approach was to avoid a paper trail of their involvement in the research. The SABC infrastructure and network of workstations is not trusted as the institution has full

access to all accounts on the machines. The interviews were just under two hours and recorded by use of a smartphone, protected by an encryption service.

To ensure the anonymity and confidentiality of all participants, in quoting online interactions, special measures such as selective editing of wording and generalising was taken (Sweeney 2002). I obtained permission from the corporate structures to conduct these interviews. This was given freely, as new senior management expressed a commitment to transparency and independence. Since middle management at *SABC* has, however, remained very similar, the realities of the culture of fear prevail (Ngwenya 2015). Therefore, the method of focus groups was not chosen as participants may have been reluctant to answer honestly should other colleagues be present. As a researcher, I would not have been able to guarantee that they would have respected their peers' anonymity and confidentiality.

4.7 Analysis

The interviews were transcribed and a thematic analysis was conducted. This involved coding the data before identifying key theme branches: the professional, institutional and digital. These three broad divisions created a framework for interpreting the participants' perceptions and motivations and to understand their identity as journalists. Within these I identified various sub themes such as: compromise, resistance or embracing the broad divisions in tension on identity, where I would interpret various interview snippets according to themes that were immediately apparent to me from listening to the journalist's

words. For example, a quote from Les stating “It cost us our jobs, it cost people their livelihood and everything you see on *Twitter* isn’t necessarily true”, I would identify as a resistance to the digital causing tension in professional identity. I would then try to interpret why they are saying this. Here, Les is frustrated by the changes created by the digital disruption as the platforms do not adhere to the values in which his identity is based on embracing truth and accuracy due to the anonymous nature of content creation by users. However, when I actually considered others reading my findings, I realised that an outsider would not necessarily see any evidence for this interpretation in the actual words on the page. This is how I realised, in the analysis, that much of the interviews relied on shared assumptions between myself and the journalists, that came from our shared membership of this subculture and the institutional culture. When I realised this, I arranged follow-up interviews to ensure I would ask the journalists to explicitly state what they meant in their statements, and how this related to their understanding of their role at the *SABC*, assuring a much clearer meaning of their experiences and observations. It was necessary to find ways to get the participants to express these assumptions, while knowing that I shared these experiences, in an exercise of eliciting what they consider an obvious shared understanding, while maintaining a natural flow in the interview. The advantages of being an insider, however, outweighed the challenges, as the pre-existing knowledge helped formulate this research. The advantage of insider research is that no orientation around the research environment or participants was required (Greene 2014), due to pre-existing knowledge of the context of the research (Bell 2005). Unlike outsider researchers, insiders are able to blend in without disturbing the social setting (Aguiler 1981), and thus access the field

"more quickly and intimately" (Chavez 2008: 482), which proved to be the case in this collection of these interviews.

I completed a further set of transcriptions and then coded these thematically in the same method. I then used this set of interviews alongside the previous material to make the interpretations clearer.

4.8 Conclusion

These research methods enabled me to gather in-depth experiences from the candidates, which I could then analyse to understand how they make sense of their identity. By interrogating their professional understanding of journalism and their sense of identity within the larger institution I was able to gather rich data to understand the complexities behind their identity. I was able to show just how much, with the advent of digital technology, further strain was placed on their sense of self and of their vocation as a journalist.

Chapter 5: Not "bound to the institution" – how the digital disrupts an independent identity

5.1 Introduction

The findings in this chapter and the next specifically focus on *SABC* journalists who one may characterise as IMPs, based on the system to classify journalistic subcultures of the *SABC* as mapped out by Arndt (2018), the group of journalists subscribing to professional journalistic values. This study asks how digital media has placed notions central to the IMP journalist's identity, such as professional values and public service, under particular stress. It examines how digital disruption has played its role in reshaping and disrupting their identity in this subculture.

The findings are divided into two themes underpinning the candidates' journalistic identity. The first theme outlined in this chapter explores how digital and social media disrupt a longstanding ability of many *SABC* journalists to conceptualise their journalism at *SABC* as an ethical strategic compromise, where certain concessions are made to their editors to serve the greater good. The findings show that instead of seeing professional values as absolute and applicable to every story, these journalists conceptualise their identity holistically, on the basis of the net sum of their work having journalistic (and therefore public) value. This provides an explanation as to why the journalists stayed with the *SABC,* despite compromising their independence at times, due to a highly politicised newsroom.

They were therefore able to still base their own identity in professional journalistic values while differentiating themselves from their employer. Due to the tensions with their employer over many stories, which other journalists working for independent publications did not have to endure, they in fact considered themselves comparatively more dedicated to professional journalistic values than their peers at other institutions. *SABC* journalists use a notion of professionalism particular to public service broadcasting to resist the competitive individualism often promoted through social media platforms. Thus, they emphasise a different professional journalistic identity from journalists in the commercial media. Even though these journalists value public service, they do not take the opportunity to engage fully with their audience online, and rather, often see the process as a nuisance. The findings show how this direct access to the audience paves the way to negative feedback and response, which can lead to continuous online harassment, known as trolling.

As I outline in this chapter, this identity of these journalists based in maintaining professional values that are in tension with the institutional leadership, has however become particularly difficult for these *SABC* journalists to sustain as digitalisation has increased.

5.2 The strategic compromise

The first theme that emerged from the interview data was how these *SABC* journalists have always understood their work as making strategic compromises with management in order to continue to serve the public. In this section, I will show that this strategic compromise

was constructed not only as noble and difficult, but as temporary, as the participants were in an active struggle with editors. Reports of journalists engaging in similar compromises have been reported in other settings, such as Terje Skerdjal's (2008) research on Ethiopian journalists. Journalists' professional values often come into conflict with the political or profit priorities of their news organisation (Shoemaker & Reese 1991; Soloski 1989: 209). Self-censorship is widespread in African media, where journalists compromise their content to steer clear of inciting social or political tension caused by a perceived external pressure (Skjerdal 2008: 185; Obuya & Ong'ondo 2019). In Skjerdal's (2008) article about journalists working in state media, the author concludes that the journalists reveal a widespread passive acceptance in their self-censorship as they differentiate themselves from the system they work for and consider their work as developmental journalists in the mould of Chinese journalism. This mould is sustained by a responsibility to the public, sans independence (Skjerdal 2008: 200). Waisbord (2013) argues that while it might make the media more interesting if they promoted diverse ideological agendas of different parties, unfortunately in weak democracies, media outlets are generally not committed to protecting ideas, and they tend to rather be focused on protecting a powerful corrupt individual. In the case of the *SABC*, these individuals were Jacob Zuma and Hlaudi Motsoeneng, as Sahuri highlights below. All participant responses are cited verbatim.

> Sahuri: I ended up leaving the *SABC* because the Hlaudi tenure did scare me. At that point, I didn't see a future for the organisation. Having left and watching what was happening during that time, I felt really bad for the people who were employed at the *SABC*, knowing that there is a lot of people who are hardworking, but kind of like the whole *SAA* thing, you can have a whole bunch of really good pilots and air hostesses but if the organisation seems to have a board that is rotten, everyone else is tarnished by it. There is a time where I also felt tarnished by it for having worked here, like,

> ‘why would you even consider it?’ It automatically made you a poor quality journalist for some reason, just for having stepped foot here, which is not the case.

Sahuri reports the perception that an association with the *SABC* “automatically makes you a poor quality journalist”, which she states is not the case, but that nonetheless, as a journalist you are “tarnished” by its reputation. In her comparison of the *SABC* to *South African Airways* (*SAA*), where journalists are compared to the pilots and air hostesses, we see how Sahuri focuses on the skill and hard work of *SABC* journalists, but also how she considers them central to the organisation, and management and the board as the rotten unproductive side of the organisation that does little besides tarnish its reputation. Through Sahuri’s juxtaposition of reputation and actual practice in her quote, she shows that the public’s notion of *SABC* journalists as sharing the values of their management is superficial and simplistic. It reveals that The *SABC* journalist’s notion of professional journalism is much more contested and oppositional, where journalists pride themselves on regularly taking a very different position on values from their employers. Sahuri’s comparison to *SAA* is valuable, because if the public do not question the professional skills of the pilots and their ability to fly despite the bad reputation of their management then why do they question *SABC* journalists and their ability to report on the truth?

Unlike the rest of the participants, Sahuri left the *SABC* during 2016, only to return shortly after the change of board. Sahuri made the decision to leave the *SABC* as the institutional culture came in major conflict with her individual journalistic identity of serving the public and dedication to as Kovach and Rosenthiel (2001) puts it as being a certified truth teller. Sahuri decided not to compromise to retain her reputation, unlike her colleagues, who

stayed, as she realised South African ideas about professionalism in journalism align with conventional notions of interpreting professional journalistic identity (Johnstone et al. 1979; Carpentier 2005; Deuze 2005; McDevitt 2006; Plaisance & Deppa 2009), where the values of independence and objectivity are considered absolute and universal. But in her recognition that this "tarnishing" is unfair, Sahuri implicitly recognises, as noted in Waisbord (2013), that the picture is more complex than receives recognition. Patti was acutely aware of how they as *SABC* journalists were viewed by commercial independent professional journalists and struggled to justify herself as a journalist with integrity and values.

> Patti: I stopped trying to defend the institution, at this point I try to hear them out and then I try to explain to them that they might be a bit ignorant in their opinion. […] I think once you get into conversation with these people, they see you as a journalist and as for who you are as a person rather than someone who is bound to an institution.

Patti's comment reveals that professional journalists in South Africa from commercial media institutions have a very particular conception of what it means to be a professional journalist. They cannot conceptualise a journalist being professional if they work for an institution which does not consistently practice such professional values on an editorial level, believing that journalists have to be aligned to the values of their institution, and the institution needs to have impeccable values in order for these journalists to be respected. These journalists from commercial media institutions therefore have an absolute notion of professionalism, where a journalist's allegiance to the profession is expressed through the choice of their employer, and working at a place like *SABC* is seen as a lapse in professionalism. Patti is making it explicit that other journalists ought not associate her

with the *SABC* as an institution. She discusses that once those journalists got to know her, they would realise she is also a journalist like themselves, and not "bound to an institution", suggesting that before such a discussion, she would be seen as a non-journalist, a person who has no independence and no knowledge of formal professional values. In making this statement, Patti suggests that *SABC* journalists are even more committed and independent than other commercial journalists, who have the luxury of an employer who shares their values. This shows that the ideal of a heroic journalist with high moral standards is difficult to maintain in real life, where the institutional culture does not support these values. We see this position elaborated even more passionately in Mieke's statement.

> Mieke: The *SABC* makes people very, very strong. It's a very harsh environment, really it is. You work under a lot of stress, people are leaving, there are constant fights […] where most of our people were suspended. You learn to know people for who they are, and you learn to know why people do what they do. If things were perfect you would never see that, because now if people are scared or under pressure they show their true colours, and only when you see true colours, you are constantly forced to question yourself and ask, 'why am I here?'

Mieke's quote emphasises journalism as a calling, specifically in her reference that you "learn why people do what they do" and that such difficult circumstances reveal their "true colours", i.e. their motivations and values. There is no space for self-interest in such a climate, one needs to have a commitment to something. One can relate this notion of journalism that is value based and understood as a mission to the broader culture of public service (Carpentier 2005). Mieke perceives to be working under some higher internal purpose that links to social justice activism and the public broadcaster is able to fulfil this purpose of "why you are here", due to its access to a diverse and far reaching audience.

This aligns with scholars who show that public broadcasters should educate the public, encourage participation and integrate fragmented societies by guaranteeing diversity (Emdon 1998; Raboy 1998; Barnett 1999; Jakubowicz 2004; Volčič & Zajc 2013; Born & Prosser 2001).

Mieke is still able to produce news stories that are deeply meaningful to her, and through which she feels a strong sense of achievement and purpose. She dismisses the stresses of constant tensions with her seniors in this institutional culture as she believes she is conducting an essential service for the public. For Mieke, this abuse of power is perpetuated by narcissistic individuals or bad apples and this needs good people, good journalists, like Mieke to confront it by exposing it. Mieke has absorbed this individualised notion of public service journalism in her journalistic identity, where she considers herself akin to a superhero, wielding storytelling as her special power. Despite the *SABC* leadership being at odds with her journalistic identity, she manages to find ways around orders to still fulfil her purpose in telling stories that serve the public. As mentioned in Chapter 3, The *SABC*'s institutional culture is frequently at odds with the professional journalistic values they describe in their official documents. As a public service broadcaster, the *SABC* should serve the interests of the public (Deffor 2015: 53; Born & Prosser 2001) in accordance with the *South African Constitution* and *Broadcasting Act* and its subsequent amendment (1999; 2002), which legally requires it to do so. However, externally driven factors such as commercialisation and politics contribute to the *SABC*'s

organisational identity shift, which inevitably leads to changes in how staff members perceive themselves and each other (Ngwenya 2015: 28).

5.2.1 Self-censorship and the strategic compromise

In 2016, the *SABC* announced that it would stop broadcasting protests and footage showing destruction of property. This presented a particular difficulty for the IMP journalists by having to adhere to the institution's rules instead of reporting on issues considered public interest. Neo paints a picture of the culture of fear and self-censorship that journalists had to submit themselves to in that particular period of time, and a sense of endurance that reveals a hope that the institution will withstand this period and revert to promoting professional journalistic values again.

> Neo: When we were still under Hlaudi, we were still a bit restricted, and it felt a bit awkward as well as you had to verify and check, 'am I allowed to do this, am I allowed to do that?' And naturally as any other journalist you would be allowed to (do) something like that but in our case you had to think about saving your job at the same time, and not say something that is going to make you look anti-Hlaudi, or trying to nail him on the cross for something; so it was tricky, but we managed, and we got over it.

Here we can see how Neo walks a fine line in terms of negotiating such a compromise, as he acknowledges engaging in self-censorship and omissions to preserve his job. Neo is using notions of objectivity and balance, which is commonly associated with the professional values of journalism, to negotiate editorial interference, while still maintaining himself as a journalist. This relates to Waisbord's (2013) argument that professional identities are particularly important in corrupt media outlets, to preserve some space for

journalists to create independent accounts free from interference by others. Neo is further able to satisfy this truth teller aspect of his identity with access to digital portals. He is committed to the notion of truth in his journalism, focusing on situating himself in opposition to those who spread disinformation and rumour. The notion of public responsibility is a key professional journalistic value around which journalists shape their identities (Merrill 1974; Carpentier 2005; Deuze 2005; McDevitt 2006) and it is for this reason Neo decided to stay at the *SABC* in the time of uncertainty in 2016.

> Neo: People need to know that they can trust me, people need to know that if it's coming from my page, that it's the truth and not a rumour, for instance, so how the public views me is very important, because you need to be trustworthy and known for reporting on facts only.

Therefore, Neo reveals how he is still able to maintain a sense of himself as a professional journalist, who has admittedly compromised to some extent in engaging in some self-censorship on some stories. Yet, he justifies this as a strategic compromise as he is still able to resist not actively making untruthful statements and to champion various causes and dispel rumours through his direct relationship with the audience through social media.

5.2.2 Struggling with SABC Editors over stories

Below Neo reports respecting the views from the public much more than he does those of his editor.

> Neo: My relationship with the public is more important because my integrity is more important. My editor can easily tell me to file something or let this go, or do this, or do that, but I think how I am viewed by a journalist matters mostly to me.

Neo's comment above shows that the fear of speaking out against editors during diary meetings meant that his initial ideas for news stories were never birthed, as he had to "file something" or "let this go" . There is a sense that journalists are often forced to adopt an imposed interpretation of a story, despite the facts. Ngwenya (2015: 160) refers to it as a culture of conformity at the *SABC,* where the environment forces staff to comply at all times. *SABC* editors are often complicit in aligning themselves with the institutional management against journalists and professional journalistic values. This is very different from other journalistic institutions, where editors tend to play an important role in socialising journalists into professional identities and principles (Tuchman 1978). Journalists in this study define the constant assault on their independence as particularly stressful and describe it through violent metaphors of struggle, illustrating that these journalists are actively negotiating these pressures. Addison talks about it as people digging in their claws.

> Addison: There was a time when I felt like, do I really want to do this anymore but journalism is not a job for me, it's who I am, but when you are vulnerable like that people dig in their claws […] Obviously we can't be naïve and say that we don't have media houses or individuals pushing their own agendas, trying to cause a rift. We worked for *SABC* in a time where they pushed their agenda so we can't be naïve to that but most of us want to do the right thing.

Addison here paints a picture of the journalists at *SABC* vs the institution. While Arndt has mentioned four types of journalist subculture, Addison seems to see most *SABC* journalists

as committed to professional values or as she puts it “most of us want to do the right thing”. Addison has a background in exposing social injustices through her story telling, arguably due to her upbringing in a poorer coloured community, where she witnessed traumatic events throughout childhood. Addison can’t see herself in another profession other than journalism, as she says that she “lives and breathes journalism”.

Addison gave many examples of how she restricted herself during the very difficult period of 2016. In some instances she would omit negative angles in her stories surrounding the *SABC* or just completely focus on any other story that did not involve the *SABC* at all. Her interview revealed that she has always perceived restrictions to what *SABC* journalists could and couldn’t write about, it just wasn’t as evident to her at the time. When asked whether she spoke out during 2016 Addison replied, “No. I suppose I was scared. I wasn’t as brave.” Ngwenya (2015: 134) explains that journalists at *SABC* are able to maintain a sense of their professionalism and independence as they do not feel responsible for any biases in their work because their editors carry the responsibility for changing their stories and making the final decisions about what will air. In my own experience, journalists at the *SABC* suggest stories in diary meetings, or are assigned stories by their editors. The journalists then write the story and hand it over to the editor, who will generally make changes without involving the journalist, but the journalist may query the changes. It is in such meetings with editors to query changes where journalists like Addison confront how the *SABC* “pushed their agenda”. This can be a bruising experience, where it feels like the “claws” she refers to above; Addison stressed that she wanted to not only protect her job but also avoid conflict at all costs. Journalists like Addison thus suffer censorship and

self-censorship through their interactions with people in editorial roles. The manifestation of politicisation has become characteristic of the *SABC*'s organisational culture and in turn undermines the independent journalism the *SABC* is mandated to deliver (Arndt 2018: 25).

5.2.3 A temporary compromise

In terms of the institutional culture, it is important to understand it not only as politically biased, but also as institutionally dysfunctional. In this way it is subject to the patrimonialism that Waisbord (2013) discusses, in service not to political ideals but to protecting individuals and serving personal interests through corruption, as Mieke highlights.

> Mieke: Gross mismanagement, corruption, nepotism and the general operational dysfunction aside - I believed the public broadcaster to be resilient enough, that it would ultimately self-correct. The high levels of political interference and the associated culture of fear at the *SABC*, couldn't possibly pacify everyone... Right?

Mieke's usage of "pacify" shows how she perceives the culture of the *SABC* as an institution of oppression and how journalists are quelled to silence by the authorities that manage above them. She sees *SABC* journalists who do not speak out against injustice as pacified, but she believes that the *SABC* will "self-correct" with ideals that the journalists will eventually start to speak up with the freedom to report on stories with independence from editorial influence. Here, Mieke reveals that journalists also justify their position in the organisation by foregrounding possibilities for change and the temporality of management decisions. Part of the notion of a strategic compromise and how journalists at

SABC justify their position is by emphasising its temporary nature and foregrounding hopes for change.

In a compromised democracy, such as that of the Hong Kong state in China, journalists maintain their professional identity and integrity through daily strategies of resistance to minimise self-censorship (Lee & Chan 2009: 131). The *SABC* management know they wield considerable political power as their audience overlaps with the constituency who vote the ANC into power, and they are thus able to influence perceptions of government performance with this key demographic (Arndt 2018: 173). The *ANC*'s popular support was built on the hopes of the impoverished black population for a better life and the delivery of services and infrastructure to this constituency (Beinart 2001). IMP journalists like Mieke know that such stories are politically important to serve institutional allegiances, but also present an opportunity to tell important stories that will serve the public, and so align with her own journalistic identity. Part of how journalists justify working for the *SABC* is by emphasising their ability to make a difference and serve the public. It is an on-going negotiation between aligning the organisational demands of the institution and the occupational values of the journalists (Örnebring 2009).

5.3 Digital practices and maintaining a notion of independence from the media outlet

This section will show how the journalists whose professional values, which are in tension with the institutional leadership, are even further stressed as digitalisation has increased.

This is because they are now required to interact with the audience through social media aligned with the *SABC* brand. Yet at times it is also feedback from the public through this same social media that allows them to sustain a sense of meaning through their work and an accountability to the public as opposed to the corporate body. As social media increases stress on their journalistic identity, questioning their allegiance to their employer versus the public, or questioning whether their journalism primarily serves their own celebrity versus that of the public good, the findings show that these *SABC* journalists respond in a characteristic manner for their institutional culture. They tend to remain passive and their behaviour is characterised by indecision, withdrawal, and avoidance of conflict.

5.3.1 Social media and developing a direct relationship with the public, without the institution

Social media now creates a direct relationship between the journalist and their audiences. As shown in Chapter 2, this direct access to the public and frequent interaction with the audience is changing journalism as a profession as journalists are socialised by this constant interaction with the public. Mieke is able to empower her sense of professional identity of truth telling by the support received from the public and peers outside of the institution during the turbulent 2016. Neo is able to uphold his sense of professionalism by taking into consideration how his audience will receive his reportage, due to the two-way relationships that social media has created with the journalists. A journalist's integrity can easily be questioned or their alleged biases called out online, thus public assessments now play a strong role in how journalists understand their image (Örnebring 2009; Hampton

2010). Arndt (2018: 222) shows that the importance of the relationship between the public and journalists serves as an inhibitor of politicisation since a journalist's professional reputation is the product of continuous scrutiny. Neo used the online space to provide him with a platform where he could adhere to these professional values "let the public decide who is right and wrong". Neo mostly uses *Twitter* and *Facebook* to communicate to the public on social media. On *Twitter* he mostly publicly posts serious news angles and engages with his audience. On *Facebook*, he markets himself with glamour shots, and there is little to no hard news on his personal page. In the public's eye he is a serious news journalist, but in private online spaces he portrays himself as quite the opposite. The public influences the processes of news selection in the journalists' professional use of social media (Jordaan 2013; Olausson 2017b). This motivates Neo to still communicate stories despite heightened conflict that are in line with his professional values by stating "your job is not to say who is wrong and who is right, your job is to give out the facts".

> Neo: Being a journalist comes first, and whether that means getting into trouble with the *SABC* or anyone else for that matter, just getting the facts right always comes first [...] Digital is a very welcome addition to the journalism family, and I think if we just go back to our fact checking and the fundamental values of journalism we could work hand-in-hand with no hiccups.

Neo tries to align his professional values to still be able to tell his stories or viewpoint online. "Digital is a very welcome addition" shows that he has embraced the online space as a journalist, as long as one adheres to the professional values he understands journalists should have. Mieke explained that negotiating with difficult bosses was worthwhile as she was able to create publically minded stories and then solidify this notion of herself as a

"real journalist" through social media. On social media platforms, Mieke is able to interact with an appreciative public, who are grateful for her raising important issues relevant to their lives. Social media in this instance allows journalists like Mieke to maintain a notion of herself as having separate goals from the institution. This identity rooted in public service emerges from this online relationship with the audience.

5.3.2 Social media and its potential to turn journalists into celebrities

Social media has the potential to connect and disconnect as well as associate and dissociate. It can focus the attention of the journalist as a person, moving attention away from their stories as they become the story. This is due to journalists struggling to best represent themselves and their institutions. By interacting directly with audiences on an individual level, journalists themselves may now become the focus as they obtain recognition. For journalists whose identities are rooted in their truth telling and legwork of verification, this can be particularly uncomfortable. Mieke stressed that she didn't want to fall into what she calls the pitfalls of celebrity journalism as you have to "always remember why you are doing what you are doing". Journalists are socialised by constant interaction with the public who are now able to engage directly with journalists and other citizens within the public domain (Anderson 2011; Bright & Nichols 2014; Bunce 2015; Loosen & Schmidt 2012). This online arena may produce celebrity journalists, distinguished more for who they are than for what they are reporting on (Shepard 1997; Olausson 2017b). This may challenge the universal journalistic values such as objectivity, as audience members become more interested in the celebrity reporter's opinions than the facts (Deuze 2005; Carpentier 2005).

For Mieke, it will be “very easy to derail” her professional values of how she perceives a journalist should be.

> Addison: It’s a personal thing; I think if you really want to be like that (celebrity journalists) it’s cool. I respect their work, but I think it shouldn’t just be about that big name, because then you lose the essence of journalism, it becomes you, it becomes your brand, and then you lose the point of journalism [...] I would actually love to learn more about digital so that I as a person and journalist can grow. If I want to spread my wings, I need to know how digital works, not just write for digital platforms but how things work.

Like Mieke, Addison justifies her position not to market herself through her work as a journalist, as she believes that she will then lose the essence of what it is to be a journalist even though she has strong notions of serving the public. Addison believes that celebrity journalism is the same equivalent as owning a brand. Instead of the credibility that should go with the name of a journalist, she believes that the digital platforms have watered down journalism as a whole. This could arguably stem from her fear of the unknown as she is proficient in traditional media but lacking in digital media as a by-line or signoff by a journalist who normally serves as a guarantee of testimony to state that what has been reported is truthful.

5.3.3 Trolling and the conflation of journalists and the institution

Serving the needs of the public is central to the idea of public service broadcasting yet I have observed many colleagues outright refuse to work the social media channels due to the fear of consequences by posting online. A majority of *SABC News* journalists use their personal online accounts for work output, creating potential conflict with the institution due

to the ease of access created by the digital space enabling monitoring by management. Daniels (2018) shows that the social network blurs the line between personal and professional. This blurring may make journalists very wary of the audience's ability to conflate the organisation's view with that of the journalist (Jones & Pitcher 2015). Meanwhile, the *SABC* is following international trends of increasingly using web analytics to guide online news production (Anderson 2011; Loosen & Schmidt 2012; Bright & Nichols 2014; Bunce 2015), putting further pressure on journalists to attract audiences.

In terms of the digital disruption, this direct access to the audience paves the way to negative feedback and response, which can lead to continuous online harassment known as trolling. This disrupts the idea of public engagement when the audience becomes a hostile public.

> Patti: Usually, when the audience doesn't agree with whatever news angle you are running with, that is when you will get personally attacked. At the end of the day they forget that editors often assign stories to us and it is our job. We get paid to do it. Even me, sometimes I don't agree with the actual story, but I'm stronger and more informed for looking into it so at the end of the day it's a win-win situation […] Our audience loves doing that. They will tell you if what they think you are reporting on is bullsh*t, they will personally attack you and your family, so you need a thick skin. Trolling is a side effect of this digital space, so if the heat is too hot in the kitchen, get out.

By saying that "they (public) forget that editors often assign stories to us and it is our job," Patti is showing that her trolling from the public normally occurs when the audience fails to dissociate you from your publisher, in her case, the *SABC*. Editors will assign stories and she is allowed to refuse to do a story, but she can't say no to all the story assignments, as it forms part of her responsibilities. Patti explains that the trolls will personally attack you

and use your family to unsettle you psychologically. Trolling has a negative impact on Patti, but she sees it as a normal part of the job as a journalist by saying that "if the heat is too hot in the kitchen, get out". She has embraced digital reporting and points out that a majority of her negative responses also roots from reporting on traditional media platforms. The online space just makes it easier for the audience to access her as she states that "trolling is a side effect of this digital space". Social media networks' can be a minefield for online harassment, but journalists are unable to abandon them because they have become so essential for their work (Meyer & Carey 2013; Waisbord 2020). Before social media there were filtering systems that would protect journalists to some extent (Binns 2017). For example, newspapers would often refuse anonymous letters as a matter of public policy (Cox 2006; Reader 2006) and the audience were not able to directly access the journalist (Binns 2017). Trolling undermines strategic compromise, as journalists are so firmly associated with their employer they can no longer sustain the notion that has been so much part of their professional identity up to now that they are separate and in an adversarial role with their employer. However, moderators and curators in the online space need to have a strong constitution (Carroll 2011), as Patti argues.

> Patti: Initially, I cried myself to sleep at night because nobody likes harsh words or criticism, but it took me all of a few months and the thick skin just kept on building. I kept it all in, and I can't be upset with people for having their feelings […] It makes me feel like what I do is just a job and that's another personal problem of mine. I need to understand that when I feel passionate about something or not, it's not the same across the board.

People would call the newsroom to raise their concerns about stories repurposed online, which in Patti's case made her question her abilities as a journalist as she says that "it

makes me feel like what I do is just a job". While public service journalism expects an engagement around the sharing of information and representing an issue from the point of view of marginalised people, the engagement with the audience here seems quite different. The audience is engaging with the journalist not as their representative or their voice but as someone to be criticised and called out. Neo has similar experiences with the audience as Patti and explains that trolling has had a negative impact on his journalism output.

> Neo: Yes it does, because you doubt yourself, am I even doing this in the right way, should I have rephrased that bit, what could I have done differently or better to have avoided this situation but unfortunately some people are only on the internet to look for the wrongs and never the rights.

Like Patti, online harassment seeds doubt in Neo's reporting abilities. So much that he ends up questioning his reporting, forgetting to a certain extent that there are people out there trying to impose their own agendas on journalists. Journalists are targeted in acts of trolling in deliberate attempts to mislead or endanger the journalist or alternatively, an example is where inaccurate information is fed to the journalist to diminish the credibility of the journalist (Ireton & Posetti 2018: 109). Online journalists and the audience are mutual performers seeking content immersion that will allow them to play with their identity (Markham 1998).

I witnessed first-hand that public unpopularity of the institution had resulted in journalists adopting particular digital strategies so as to avoid engaging with local online audiences, such as colleagues I observed using *Facebook* tools to target their stories to global niche

audiences instead, or those who outright refused to work the social media channels due to the abuse experienced online.

Due to the misuse of power at the *SABC*, the public vented their frustration and mistrust online towards *SABC* journalists as they were seen as representative of the institution which was held captive by political interference from its leadership. Just how beholden are *SABC* journalists to their institutional leadership when external disruptions lead to negative consequences such as harassment from the public? The South African public frequently harass *SABC* journalists online (Gqubule 2018), and this may become difficult to reconcile with a journalistic identity rooted in public service.

The public are unaware that journalists may face potentially traumatising situations and in turn put up emotional defences as part of everyday tasks of reporting. Journalists have always had to be tough and face criticism, but with social media and its ability to target individuals personally, this animosity is directed personally instead of at the institution. This makes it harder for journalists to maintain a sense of public service as digital platforms disrupt their identities due to unchecked allegations having the ability to spread rapidly and in turn unfairly tarnish the reputation of a journalist. There is a thick skinned culture in newsrooms where journalists and editors gain bragging rights through refusing to submit to any authority but that of their own kind (Binns 2017). This tough-mindedness has value in preserving the neutrality of stories, but comes at a cost of stress to the journalist (Reinardy 2009). Journalists have to find ways to respond to attacks online (same as offline) while trying not to damage their institution online. Sahuri says that the best way to

respond is to keep calm, state your case, and move on. As a journalist, she says that she knows some people are out there with their own agendas to provoke a bad reaction from you.

> Sahuri: Don't drink and tweet. Maintaining a professional attitude would be that even if someone was trolling you, you don't turn around and call them names or any sort of derogatory term, and I wouldn't overly engage with hostile users. State your case and move on because that person is out with an agenda and they want to elicit a really bad reaction from you. That is one of maintaining a professional identity online, just don't engage after a certain point, obviously don't use foul language and check yourself.

Sahuri has more experience in the online space due to working full-time in the digital newsroom. Above she contrasts herself from those "out with an agenda", so highlighting her sense of herself as an independent professional. Social media creates a space that encourages more accountability by the journalist operating in the online space, but it also creates a chilling effect where journalists doubt themselves as displayed by Patti and Neo.

5.3.4 The crisis period and journalists meeting online fear and solidarity

The tempestuous 2016 era heightened the potential impacts of digital media. It showed that it could create spaces of danger, which not only put jobs and reputations at risk, but also created spaces of solidarity. This was seen not only between *SABC* journalists, but also between themselves and other journalists from outside of the *SABC* and the public. After the suspension of the *SABC 8*, outside journalists were extremely vocal in their support for *SABC* journalists, who were unable to uphold their professional values during the time in fear of suspension from the public broadcaster.

During the heightened controversy people from outside the *SABC* were actively searching for *SABC* journalists online to gain some insider information about the situation. Neo was very aware that the public can access his profile online at any time and that he needed to be careful to maintain his reputation as independent while also holding onto his job. Neo would therefore comment on the *SABC* situation through facts that were already in the public domain. He explained that "if you don't say anything, you then look and seem like someone supporting what's going on". He made an attempt to keep his social media accounts as active as possible, not necessarily by writing commentary himself, but by reposting relevant reports. Not all journalists were up to walking the fine line of creating such a carefully curated social media presence.

> Addison: My employers would have been upset if I spoke out against them. That's another thing that makes a journo feel vulnerable, that people dig in and you just need to sit back because your employers prohibit you from saying or defending yourself because they're only thinking of their brand [...] I don't speak openly about the *SABC* online. I guess I'm just scared I'll lose my job.

On the other hand, 2016 also showed how access to digital portals helped support the journalist's at the *SABC*'s primary identity of public service and truth telling due to this new found relationship with not only the audience, but also peers in the industry outside of the *SABC*, as Mieke explains.

> Mieke: When I heard that they (*SABC 8*) weren't suspended anymore, I put a tweet up from the corporate account to say yes guys, they are coming back to work tomorrow. The (outside) media houses picked it up and it was great to see that, but at first, I was really frightened to see this happen and I think that is why I chose not to really be vocal on my personal pages because everyone was keeping such a close eye on you.

It is evidently clear that Mieke felt more confident (with her activism driven identity and need to serve the public) to gamble her job security by supporting the *SABC 8* due to the public backlash. No matter how frightened she was of the consequences of speaking out, she used one of the *SABC*'s corporate *Twitter* accounts, knowing that if she was suspended or reprimanded for it, she could rally the public to her side as the issue was so topical on social media. Interestingly, she chose not to be active on her personal pages because "everyone was keeping such a close eye on you" but arguably she found more meaning in utilising the *SABC*'s account due to its extensive reach.

> Mieke: The moment you go outside and people realise who you are, it changes something subconsciously, people know me and that's a very dangerous space. You have to always remember why you are doing what you are doing and to go back to what you're doing and why because it's very easy to derail.

Mieke remaining silent on her personal pages shows that she is acutely aware of it as a "very dangerous space". Despite interference in news editorial policy and a climate of fear among *SABC* journalists (Merrington 2017) challenging the ideals of professionalism (Ngwenya 2015), digital media has enabled *SABC* journalists to reaffirm their professional identity. Senior *SABC* journalists distributed an open letter to COO Hlaudi Motsoeneng via social media (Herman 2016) and journalists from outside of the *SABC* started a successful online crowdfund for *SABC* journalists that were fired for speaking out against the decision to censor protests (Van Zyl 2016). As a *SABC* journalist during this time, it provided me with sound affirmation to see the online messages of support from journalists with shared values from all over South Africa.

5.3.5 Online rebranding and the chance of a fresh online identity

The current period in the *SABC*'s history presents a particularly interesting time for this research as digital transformation is continuing, while the period of political interference and fear that has alienated audiences from the broadcaster seems to be in flux sustained over a period that began with 2016's interference in the news policy to the mid-2018, where the *SABC* has completely rebranded its entire News Division with the *#BlackIsHere* campaign. Its new slogan "Independent and Impartial" may arguably be an attempt to rebuild the trust between the institution and its audiences. It is precisely this kind of institutional shape shifting or fluidity in 'rebranding' themselves in the advent of digital transformation that contributes to upending the traditional journalist's identity at the institution.

SABC News journalists are furthermore becoming increasingly isolated in the field, with additional responsibilities and fewer resources due to digital production workflows, while also taking on editorial duties, managing both corporate and personal social media accounts. Social media has the potential to connect journalists not only with the public and with the new brand of the *SABC,* but also with one another. It will not help them resist the increased workload they are given, instead, I argue that it will help them push to advance their digital skills so as to keep up with their peers who have already mastered the online space.

Chapter 6: Journalistic Identity and Boots on the Ground

This chapter sets out the second theme from the findings which considers how the digital disruption of journalistic routines and practices have not only changed what journalists do, but also how they think of themselves. Journalists base their professional identity in their obligation for telling the truth, which is rooted in an epistemology built on rigorous methods of verification (Kovach & Rosenstiel 2001). Such methods are often based on primary research or "legwork", and rely on journalists' own judgement as they participate in documenting events in eyewitness accounts, evaluating the interests of various sources, and confronting contradictions on the spot in impromptu in-person interviews, where they also evaluate body language. If legwork increasingly falls away due to digital disruption, this means journalists may come to question their identity as certified truth tellers (Kovach & Rosenstiel 2001). As I show in this chapter, entitled *Boots on the ground*, with the decline of legwork, or primary journalistic research due to citizen produced digital media, *SABC* journalists question what this means for their authenticity, or being a "real journalist". With digital media resulting in an increasingly deskbound editorial role for journalists who sift through secondary sources of user-generated media, some *SABC* journalists have struggled to integrate this new role into their identity as journalists. This tension has emerged both in the "traditional" newsrooms of TV and radio, where journalists worry about the reduction of time available for legwork, but also in the digital newsroom, where journalists primarily engage in repackaging content, and thus worry about their ability to truly claim an authentic reliability. Yet journalists from the digital newsroom

consider themselves more in touch with the technical skills central to the future of journalism. Digital media thus tends to exacerbate struggles over journalistic identity and what it means to be a journalist in the twenty-first century, and at the *SABC*. Despite this idealisation of legwork, journalists consider such physical interaction with the public to be exceptionally dangerous in South Africa compared to the case in developed countries. Arguably the digital disruption makes journalism safer in South Africa. This could possibly have an impact on journalistic identity as South African journalists might no longer base their identity in masculine metaphors of "tough newshounds" or proud members of the "bang-bang club" (Matloff 2011), who like their predecessors, are trained to be at home in violent spaces.

The findings show that many *SABC* journalists are conflicted as to what extent they can call themselves journalists, due to the majority of their work now stemming from behind a desk and not out in the field. It will first focus on deskbound journalism. It will show how journalists interviewed feel more redundant, due to the new practises that digital platforms have added to their workload. The next section will explore how digital media again aggravates struggles over journalistic identity. Despite this emphasis on legwork journalists consider journalism in South Africa to be exceptionally dangerous compared to developed countries.

6.1 Bound to the desk thanks to digital

From my own observations, journalists at the *SABC* have become more deskbound due to the access of content from the digital space. Journalists at the public broadcaster are increasingly vocal (in the corridors) about being denied access to the field as managers encourage them to work from the office. For example, if a story breaks online surrounding a protest, content will be sourced from social media platforms for publication and broadcast. In the past, a journalist and a cameraman would be sent to the field to report on the story. Now, the *SABC News* online portal or individual journalists will make a call-out online for more material from the public. For example, every year, *SABC News* requests photos from parents to show their children heading back to school to portray multimedia content in their online articles and within video packages destined for TV. The journalist then needs to make use of online tools (such as reverse image search) to verify the validity and reliability of the content. Les feels that this makes him less of a journalist, as he is no longer "first on the scene" to publish a story, and now relies on citizens as a source for content. This has an impact on his identity as a journalist. He goes so far as to comment that his role in society has been taken away from him due to the digital disruption.

> Les: Digital took all of us by surprise, because we were still in the field, chasing stories, and then it just became kind of like everyone can be a journalist with a smartphone. So, everyone can take pictures and videos so the photographer became redundant. All the important things that made a newspaper and newspaper became redundant. There's something really special in what we try to do every day working as journalists, but social media just blindsided us and took our jobs away. It cost us our jobs.

Les feels “redundant” because the vocation of journalism has changed with the introduction of digital. This has impacted on his identity as he has lived through newspapers closing down due to the impact of digitalisation throughout his career.

> Les: I’m too shy to post a link to a story that I’ve done, I've never posted anything that I’ve done. I feel I need my anonymity. Sometimes, when people ask me what I do, I don’t always feel like telling them what I do, because then they want to give you stories, or what they think is a good story, and I’m just like: ‘leave me alone’.

Throughout his interview, Les expressed his insecurity, saying that he feels less capable due to not having the additional skills required to navigate the digital space. He felt that his core values as a journalist meant less in a changing environment. Digital had disrupted his sense of competence, due to the new two-way methods of communication that ensured that the public now had direct access to the journalist. Les made it clear that he wanted to serve the public, but ironically for surveillance capitalism, does not want to engage with the public about his service. The new digital environment has forced journalists to consider what defines what they do and how they think about the field and its core values (Deuze 2005 cited in Ferrucci & Vos 2017). The way newsrooms have employed technology and innovations to connect journalists to the digital world meant that with the change, they would be forced to adapt their identity and professionalism to these new methods (Pavlik 2000; Deuze 2003; Boczkowski 2004). Keeping up with technological development is vital, as it shapes journalism practices (Weiss & Domingo 2010).

6.2 Research, repurpose and repeat

New digital formats allow for stories in one type of media to be repurposed into many other media, with the consequence that news media organisations increasingly witness a convergence of practices (Herbert 2000; Singer 2004; Tan & Mei 2011). The *SABC* produces an immense amount of news material on a daily basis for its *Television* and *Radio* platforms. Previously, these would only have been broadcast, but this content is now repurposed to its online platforms. My interviews show that there is clear hostility from journalists about having to repurpose content onto different platforms, instead of creating new original content. Journalists like Sahuri find it a dull process to repurpose content for online. She says that the *SABC*'s systems and processes make it a tiresome and tedious job. It is clear that the nature of the *SABC*'s digital disruption has forced more editorial tasks on journalists. It has affected their identity and left them feeling more demotivated. In the past, especially in print journalism, editorial subbing work may have been considered a promotion, as a journalist would have more control over how to portray the story through the headline, shape the story angle and its impact. At the *SABC*, however, those who do such repurposing, like Sahuri, do not have the same control over shaping the story as her subbing colleagues in print media and merely have to repurpose the story with the exact same angle to suit the online platform. The journalists I interviewed experienced this focus on digital repurposing not only as a dull demotion from the real work of journalism, but also as a source of danger that placed them at the mercy of an overzealous public eager to find fault. In terms of their journalistic identity, their relationship as servants of the public was disrupted as they now felt at the mercy of the public. While Mieke was annoyed by her

managers forcing her to do repurposing as an additional task, her main concern was as to how a basic mistake made on social media could have a much more dramatic impact on the journalist who would have to face a flood of backlash online, as well as the offline repercussions from managers.

> Mieke: The core values of journalism in the way I use it, are the same. It has to be true, it has to be just, and it has to be fair. It is a bit more difficult, because if you make one mistake, it snowballs. I hate social media, I hate it so much.

The snowballing Mieke is referring to above, are the serious repercussions that making a mistake on social media may have. Once a mistake is made, viewers and listeners would immediately reprimand the journalist in online engagement and correcting the mistake would not make a difference. Due to digital's archive nature, the mistake could be screen-grabbed and sent to *SABC* managers, who could enforce further action, which might lead to concrete disciplinary action. The audience was now indeed able to directly engage with the journalists in the digital space (Anderson 2011; Loosen & Schmidt 2012; Bright & Nichols 2014; Bunce 2015) but these new forms of interaction could not only disrupt the established professional status and practices of journalists but also remove professional control mechanisms (Witschge & Nygren 2009). An example would be getting the numbers wrong during the voting process of an election. The public would often see it as a malicious act by the journalist to propagate an agenda of a certain political party, even though it might have been mere human error. Sahuri explains below how a simple mistake in the selection of an appropriate image, from stock images or archives, to illustrate online copy could result in public condemnation.

> Sahuri: Sometimes it can be a bit scary, because obviously your audience can lambast you if you get something wrong, or if they do not feel it's a true reflection of what's happening. There was a story about a huge accident on the N3 and the image used was of a general car crash that happened somewhere else and people on Twitter complained bitterly about it saying that the *SABC* is lying, that is not even the right location, then we had to change the image of the article because people were unhappy on how that story was being reflected. The direct access and engagement with audiences is good, but sometimes it can be a bit intimidating.

The journalist might attempt to delete an accidental statement online, but they cannot delete the screen grabs taken by the audience of their mistake. Normally, a statement would be made to publish a formal retraction. In 2015, exactly this happened on the main online *Twitter* portal of *SABC News*. After an accidental tweet was sent out, which included profanity, the public broadcaster tried to delete it, but instead was forced to apologise online as screen grabs of the tweet from other users went viral (Ferreira 2015).

Journalists in *SABC* newsrooms are not only repurposing their own content, but also content from outside news syndication agencies. Les was deeply unhappy with this move to repurpose syndicated content on *SABC* online platforms, as he felt it was making journalists lazier. He explained that now journalists at the *SABC* would just copy-paste content from news agencies, instead of sourcing and creating their own content. Even though the *SABC* had been using news agencies (such as *Reuters*) to enrich their content with an international perspective even before the launch of their digital platforms, Les explained that this was no longer the case. He lamented that journalists used news agencies such as *Africa News Agency* (*ANA*) purely because it was there. These shortcuts arguably disrupted journalistic identity as journalists would no longer constantly be immersed themselves in practices that

foregrounded their important role as “certified truth tellers" (Kovach & Rosenstiel 2001), as they were no longer able to do the legwork themselves. This diminishing role in gathering primary evidence therefore undermines the certainty that they are reporting facts and truth to the public, and might in turn diminish their sense of public service. Instead of the journalists acting as reporters, they often fulfil a more editorial role, taking on the role that sub-editors would traditionally take on in a print newsroom. However, instead of using such editorial knowledge in the content, syndicated copy means that no fresh angles are explored in local stories. *SABC* journalists have access to the local stories, but they rather opt to repurpose syndicated content than use legwork to verify the facts. This is why Les is hostile towards repurposing content from outside agencies.

> Les: It cost us our jobs, it cost people their livelihood and everything you see on Twitter isn’t necessarily true, it all needs to be verified, but many times because our journalists are so lazy, they steal news from other agencies or media houses and rewrite the copy in such a way that they can never recognize it as their own. I’m talking about the *SABC*. It was a massive hit when *ANA* fell through, as we have to update every bulletin with a fresh sentence.

Africa News Agency or *ANA* is a content syndication service where journalists have no control over the type of content received in terms of the agenda set by the initial story. Les explains that it was a “massive hit” as journalists are “so lazy”, in other words, do not want to put the work in to source original content. Les further explains that without access to news agencies, it is normal to plagiarise from other online news sites such as *News24* upon instruction from a manager. He says that they do not consider it a story if it is not published by another mainstream media outlet first.

> Les: It makes me feel rotten, that I'm not worth being called a journalist, because you're f*cking plagiarising, and we don't plagiarise and we would never do that, but I was put in that position and I couldn't exactly say no.

Les' concept of what defines being a journalist coincides with the findings from a large survey of American journalists by Kovach and Rosenthiel (2001), who describe journalism as the discipline of verification. What is happening at *SABC* as Les outlines above, is that the journalist's identity as a truth teller is undermined by the new digital practises. Journalism can be understood as a research method where the journalist needs to engage with primary sources, as the role of journalism requires fact checking to establish the truth (Kovach & Rosenstiel 2001). My participants, like Les above, argue that journalists ought to be producing original content, instead of continuously repurposing content from other reporting, which can lead to plagiarism. Journalists now have access to a broad range of content posted by audiences and newsmakers on social networks (Hermida 2012). This can result in plagiarism (deliberate or accidental), which is a common occurrence, and often the penalties for plagiarism are either moderate, or almost non-existent (Davis 2012). The digital convergence of media has furthermore caused a decline in the creativity of news (Deffor 2015:6), because content is syndicated from one platform to the next (Cooke 2005; Reich 2011). These practices arguably disrupt a journalist's sense of public service, as he or she is unable to verify the facts and the truth of what they are delivering to the public. Journalists, like Les, condemn plagiarism. However, when using information from other media houses, these journalists tend to consider attribution optional, especially if they are under pressure to produce content, following international shifts in journalism practice

(Lewis & Zhong 2013). Lewis and Zhong (2013) argue that these shifts away from attribution originate from a climate of austerity or do-more-with-less atmosphere that has emerged due to convergence, and conclude that this has decreased commitment to traditional journalistic principles among journalists.

6.3 Why should I leave my desk?

Les explained that even though journalists are afforded the opportunity to go out, they often decide not to, as it would require more effort. As mentioned, journalists are increasingly forced to be behind a computer to work in the digital space with the additional technical skills needed to do so adding pressure and stress to the profession. Before the digital disruption, journalists were always out in the field collecting stories and building relationships with sources. Now, they need to adapt to learning new skills to remain relevant in ever-changing newsrooms due to the digital disruption. Neo feels a cogent sense of threat from the growth of user generated content.

> Neo: People are now gathering their facts from the internet, where a newsmaker can tweet a statement and automatically we assume that this person is telling the truth, so we're going to report on that and that can be a little disruptive in the process of journalism. So yeah, it has affected it in that way and I don't know how we could manage it, as it seems a lot of journalists are more interested in what's happening online than actually leaving the office and going to look for stories.

Neo explained that such online interaction did not allow journalists the opportunity to actively interrogate statements. For example, official government press releases would no longer always involve a face-to-face news conference, but simply be published online on

their platform. When a journalist tried to follow up with a telephonic interview or one-on-one interview, the authorities were unresponsive. This, Neo explained, forced the journalist to only use the online statement without interrogating the facts. Such practices clearly undermine the role of the journalist as certified truth teller.

On the other hand, there are journalists like Mieke, who are forced to work from the desk, who want to go out on stories, but who do not have the opportunity to do so as she needs to stay and repurpose stories or "work the desk" on her programme. During my tenure at *SABC* I noted that positions for journalists at the *SABC* increasingly required certain journalists to be deskbound to repurpose content for the online space. As she spent her days repurposing content for social media and sourcing stories online and telephonically, Mieke increasingly became more frustrated, and hostile towards the online space. She felt that she could not identify as a "real journalist" by not working out in the field. She described a hierarchy at the *SABC* Newsrooms, where journalists afforded the opportunity to go out on stories were held in higher esteem. She could not envision a growth path for journalists like herself to develop and learn from sitting behind a desk.

> Mieke: You watch them [journalists going out into the field] and you almost feel trapped, and ask yourself whether or not you are really a journalist. Because we're sitting in the office the whole time and within my team we debate whether we are journalists, we say we're just glorified telephone people picking up phones, calling people, you're not sitting out there where the sweat is, where the blood is, you're not there when something great happens, like a peaceful protest and that does make the experience different. They call it desktop journalism. That is a sin, because you cannot grow to become a journalist in that space.

Being a young journalist with strong roots in activism, Mieke's portrayal of what a journalist should be is idolised by her own perceptions of the stereotypical journalist who saves the day by their reportage on the ground. Journalism is sometimes described as the first draft of history. The new digital practises have seen journalism become more administrative, collating and choosing other people's reports, instead of doing the legwork so they can be there to witness grand historical events. This disruption of legwork has rippled out to disrupt journalistic identity. Mieke is primarily concerned that she is no longer witnessing history and is not part of something bigger than herself. Admittedly, journalists are defined by a blurred and imagined portrayal of the journalistic field and the profession generates stereotypes (Underwood 2013:163). Narratives of journalistic identity reflect a journalistic field that wavers between professionalised and de-professionalised forces and identities are often based in the anti-hero, who opposes elite notions of professionalism (Eldrige 2017).

> Mieke: I was on the digital beat for a week, and it killed my soul and it killed someone else's soul who was working on it, because you don't feel like you're actively calling people or actively doing a story, because we were only tweeting, putting stuff on Facebook, and uploading content. It's not like you do a story and then you can make it deeper, because we don't have a digital structure, because we don't have the capacity; and if you don't have the structure or passion for it, it's not going to work, and that's why it's not working there. We want to be TV/Radio journalists, we don't want to sit here tweeting about things. It's not that we don't understand the importance of it, but we also understand that TV and Radio in South Africa is really powerful and our job first and foremost is to get a programme on air and that's where our passion lies. So, it's a bit of a conflict.

Mieke believes in valuing the specialised skills that journalists have built up in radio and television. When she talks about "actively doing a story", she is referring to the skills of

analytical interviewing, being able to look the subject in the eye, and changing questions to suit the answers while noting the source's cues in real time. This then proceeds into taking the interview and structuring broadcast stories by writing for the ear and thinking visually in terms of story. She opposes assumptions from the digital era that all journalists need to embrace the multiple skill sets required to work in digital. Rather, she believes, like Coddington (2019), that the less-appreciated conventional reporting skills that journalists built up over many years, including extended experience in editorial and ethical judgement, are unjustly equated with the newfound digital skills of amateurs, who are ignorant of the true extent of the labour reliable journalism requires (Coddington 2019). Mieke's reluctance to embrace digital skills might also be because journalists tend to see engaging with the public as outside of the scope of their jobs (Santana 2011; Loke 2012). This is because they feel they have fulfilled their duty through reporting factually and thoroughly verifying the facts and thus do not need the public's input for further verification. In the context of public broadcasting and its emphasis on public service (Zelizer 1993; Aldridge & Evetts 2003; Hanitzsch & Vos 2017), Mieke's primary understanding of herself serving the public is somewhat contradictory, as she is reluctant to engage with them on social media. Mieke doesn't, however, see engaging with the public on social media as public service. Instead, she described this new digital practice as an additional, annoying step, which gave the public the power to judge her as a "bloodthirsty journalist", instead of them considering her to be on their side and contributing constructively to her storytelling. The pressure from *SABC* management towards digital engagement not only exhausts Mieke by increasing her daily duties, but also opens her up to public scrutiny. Monitoring,

moderating, and responding to online comments from the audience provides greater potential for engagement with the public than in the pre-digital age (Nielsen 2012), but in turn it also increases journalists' duties (Chen & Pain 2016). Some journalists might embrace the engagement as they see its value or believe that their employers expect it (Singer 2005; Chen & Pain 2016), but for Mieke and her colleagues, that has nothing to do with the essence of public service journalism.

> Mieke: It was very irritating, because people where I work have the attitude, we're not here to tweet, we're not here to load a story online, we're here because we want to make a difference and we want to do good stories and now someone is frustrated, forcing them to tweet.

There has always been an acknowledgement that journalism consists of both legwork and deskwork. In the past, sub-editors would be the older, experienced mentors working from the desk to guide the younger journalists out in the field. This has arguably all changed with the observed juniorisation of the *SABC*'s newsrooms. Digitalisation has made it easier for journalists without experience in the field to source and write stories from behind a screen. Mieke explained that her hostility to being deskbound was due to the attitudes of fellow *SABC* journalists, who considered these journalists who produce digital output as subordinate. Mieke expanded that this has even resulted in certain digital practices being terminated within newsrooms at the *SABC,* as journalists simply refused to make it a standard operating procedure. Within the newsrooms, traditional media is seen as "king", a meaningful important activity, and digital repurposing is simply a tedious activity that just has to be done. This sentiment can be understood through Kovach & Rosenstiel (2001) argument that verification is journalism's most essential, valued method, and there is no

such verification involved in the repurposing of content for online platforms. Digital journalists would be more valued if it was orientated to engaging with sources, checking facts and uncovering evidence, instead of as, at the *SABC*, it was seen as simply repurposing content. The digitisation of journalism and commercial pressures on reporting budgets have resulted in more journalists working in front of their computers and consequently, digitisation cannot improve the quality of journalistic performance (Paulussen 2012).

6.4 Martyr vs. Hero

The *SABC* journalists interviewed all perceived journalism in South Africa to be exceptionally dangerous. Some of the journalists interviewed had even suffered mental health issues because of it, but despite this, these journalists have not embraced the opportunity to sit in front of a desk. They wanted to be out in the field as they felt they were able to accomplish better storytelling there.

Les compared his role as a journalist to being just as important as that of an emergency worker. He perceived the profession (especially in South Africa) to play an important role in helping minorities who often fail to have a platform to voice their dire circumstances. Arguably, it is Les' identity as a public service journalist that drives this perception. While scholars argue that journalists around the world share a universal understanding of professionalism (Weaver 1998; Hanitzsch & Vos 2017), there are variations in the degree to which professional norms have evolved in different countries and systems globally

(Waisbord 2013; Rodny-Gumede 2015). Where some journalists see themselves as neutral, emphasising qualities like speed, accuracy, and accessibility as key determinants of their professionalism, others see themselves as having an advocacy role and as participants in politics (Hallin & Mancini 2004: 251). The *SABC* journalists all fall within the latter category and this is indeed part of the definition of the subculture of the Independent Minded Professional at SABC (Arndt 2018).

Sahuri explained that South Africa journalists are faced with particularly dangerous situations, due to working in a developing country, as opposed to a western country. Increasingly, however, journalists all over the world are engaged in a dangerous profession (Cottle et al. 2017). Instead of emerging only in particular regions, threats rather stem from geopolitical changes and loss of neutrality for journalists, as they are no longer perceived as trusted intermediaries (Wahl-Jorgensen et al. 2016). While South Africa has a high level of press freedom, its 31st ranking on the *World Press Freedom Index* is threatened by a number of recent attacks on independent journalism, including the harassment of journalists both online and in the physical world (Roper et al. 2019). For example, in 2018, journalists in KwaZulu-Natal were intimidated by the police, threatened by political parties and leaders, attacked by members of the public, and harassed online. Meanwhile, incidents of police intimidation of journalists, including assault, verbal abuse, and manhandling, continue to be reported (Finlay 2018). Like Sahuri, Les also saw himself as operating differently from a Western journalist. For him, South African journalists were able to overcome more obstacles and hazards in the volatile environment in which he worked.

The perception of the *SABC* journalists in this study might have ignored the increasing threats faced by journalists all over the world, but as noted, it is important to recognise that South African journalists are indeed facing more danger through their reporting of stories in recent years. Sahuri describes the threatening situations South African journalists are faced with even as cadet reporters.

> Sahuri: You're covering very heavy stories from the moment you enter the newsroom as a young reporter or intern. Very rarely is there psychological support. Some organisations have it, not all of them do and not all editors will encourage you to go speak to somebody.

Journalists like Sahuri will endure such extreme conditions as they are driven by a need to serve the public, no matter what. Sahuri fears that without her reporting, these stories will be left untold. In essence, the media defines which events are crucial (Popović & Popović 2014:1) and play an important role in the formulation of public opinion by broadcasting a diversity of views (McQuail 2000). It is this formulation of public opinion that Sahuri holds onto dearly through her work. Due to their important role as the information channel to the public, journalists experience many dangers and risks that leave them vulnerable to the negative impacts of trauma (McMahon 2008). In an earlier study cited in McMahon (2008), McMahon (2004) shows that journalists rated reporting on mass casualties to be one of the most stressful events to cover. This is closely followed by reporting on injured and dead children (McMahon 2004). Literature shows that this stress is consistent with the stress experienced by emergency service workers, who are significantly affected by large scale

events or events involving children (Werner et al. 1992). Addison's experiences have made her reassess her romanticised childhood dreams about journalism.

> Addison: As a kid I had this glorified idea of journalism but it's actually dirty, you have to get your hands dirty.

Like Addison, Neo's initial understanding of what it meant to be a journalist and the kind of person it would turn him into has shifted. He explains how the practices of journalism in South Africa have left him feeling immune to empathy. By stating that journalism is "dirty", she means that it will affect you profoundly emotionally. She did not understand that she would be affected emotionally by the disturbing content of everyday life.

> Neo: I didn't notice this until about four years into journalism, where I realised that I'm becoming immune to death, I'm becoming immune to empathy and sympathising with people. Sometimes I want a story so bad that I don't care what's happened and that it's a tragedy, I need to get the story before 702 or any other radio station. We've become so detached, we see all of this stuff and it's about the rush to write it and get it out as quickly as possible, and you don't really give yourself time to say hold up, there was an accident and 20 people died, let me just digest that and then write the story. There was an accident on the N1, the first question, how many people died, so in that sense it has made me detached a lot and I'm not happy about it but it comes with the profession, the territory – it's like we can't afford to have a doctor who gets nauseated by blood… It's not something I'm proud of.

Neo compares the desensitisation of journalists to doctors due to the often graphic content journalists have to work with. With the online space, the access to this type of content has increased. Neo feels detached, arguably due to the trauma ignited by his vocation not being taken seriously by *SABC* managers. It is worthy to ask whether it is possible to just ignore and shelve constant experiences of death and violence like Neo makes mention of. Adding to this question, Addison explained that *SABC* managers don't take mental welfare

seriously and that there is a major stigma in newsrooms when journalists open up about their trauma. Journalists often style themselves as tough hacks, and this is part of why Neo, in the quote above, finds himself numbing emotions from the stories he has to cover. He even finds sympathising with the public he serves much harder than when he first started. Witnessing the aftermath of an event or hearing about it has the potential to cause significant post-traumatic stress (McMahon 2008). It is possible for someone to be affected by traumatic stress without physically being harmed or threatened (Figley 1999). Journalists like Neo might experience survivor's guilt in their work, as they try to make sense of their own survival when others are seriously injured or dead (Matloff 2004). Journalists often appear to be adapting, but mask their negative responses through professional detachment, which includes denial, numbing, or dissociation (McMahon 2008). This forms part of the cultural climate of journalists (Lyall 2005). Les agrees with Addison that his ideals of journalism did not reflect their reality. Through their experiences as journalists, these simplistic childhood ideas of journalists as heroic servants of the public became more complex. Not only would they become psychologically damaged through the process of reporting, but at times the public might not even recognise the importance of the work they do. The realisation became clear as he started working in the field.

> Les: I don't know what I was thinking, I thought I could change mind-sets, I could make them think differently about things and also that people will always want to talk with you as a journalist and boy was I in for a big surprise when I started to realise that people don't always want to talk to you.

Despite the job not aligning to their ideals, each journalist interviewed expressed that they would remain one. For the journalists interviewed, remaining true to the vocation was who

they were, a shared identity. Despite their difficulties they did not feel trapped by the profession, and would make the choice to become a journalist again.

> Patti: Some days less than other days, some days a lot more than other days. I don't see myself being anything else, I'm not anything else, this is what I am.

For the IMP journalist like Patti, journalism is not simply a vocation, but a way of life driven by a need to serve the public. The audience believes that society benefits from journalists who adhere to ethical roles and do not violate the expectations of social order (Reese 2001: 175) therefore, these IMP journalists are further driven to be better and benefit the society further as they hold them accountable. Journalism lays claim to having an orientation surrounding public service (Hallin & Mancini 2004) and the audience keeps them in check.

7. Conclusion

Journalism is considered as a space of competition and permanent innovation (Neveu 2016), this implies that its stability is exposed to the multiple changes that the profession has undergone in its history (Mellado & Hermida 2021). Thus, journalistic identity has never been static and has always been affected by new technologies. These findings address the question of how the introduction of new digital technologies has disrupted the Independent Minded Professionals (IMP) identity, who are one of the four journalistic subcultures of the *SABC,* as mapped out by Arndt (2018), and who subscribe to professional journalistic values. My research question investigates how new digital routines

might influence the institutional and professional cultures of the newsroom and so disrupt journalistic identity, focusing particularly on those SABC journalists with an independent mindset.

Journalistic identity at the *SABC* has particularly shown how both institutional culture and professional values might impact on journalistic identity. This narrow focus on the IMP subculture paid off with particularly rich findings due to their already internal conflicts with the institution and was further examined during a heightened controversy. With their identity already in stress due to their environment, this study obtained valuable insights into how they perceive the digital disruption as yet a further strain to their professional values. In a way, it strengthened their global sense of professionalism, as they emphasised that they needed to utilise this identity more, not only to gain a sense of themselves but to be able to satisfy their public service drive. Similarly to Ngwenya's (2015) findings, these journalists' professional identity is formed within the larger South African political economy. Their drive to be more independent and serve the public stems from an ideal to help uplift a developmental society. This speaks to Waisbord's (2013) work on the importance of media in fragile democracies to promote professional values. The IMP journalists interviewed will stay in an institution that comes into severe conflict with their professional identity, as this constitutes the trade-off they make to be able to serve and in so help develop the South African public.

Like Arndt (2018), I found that this subculture sees the *SABC* as something to be protected. This is rooted in their strong sense of professional values of serving the public, even if it

means they have to strategically compromise their work to a certain extent. Aligned with Ardn't (2018) description of the IMP subculture, these journalists showed characteristics of high levels of competence, but I argue that they have become complacent and even self-censored their work, due to the disruption of their professional values by the institutional culture. However, the support shown online for these journalists (from outside peers and the public) helped strengthen their professional values and sense of identity. Here, the digital disruption proved positive for these journalists in remaining true to their professional identity.

In contrast, by questioning their professional understanding of journalism and their sense of identity within a global context, it showed the complexities behind their identity and how further strain is placed on this sense of self and understanding of the vocation of a journalist with the advent of digital technology. Similarly, in a *SABC* study by Deffor (2015) the changes to adopt technology are found to be both internally and externally driven. The study discussed how journalistic routines and practices at the *SABC* have not only changed in terms of what journalists do in terms of routines and responsibilities, but also how they think of themselves. When it comes to external factors like Cowling (2017), I found that organisational culture is entangled in their journalism practice, but differently to her, I found that the idea of a broad universal journalistic identity is the main driver for this specific sub-culture of journalists that in turn influences the way that they operate. Ngwenya (2015: 45) argues that people's conception of reality may become embedded within the institutional fabric, but this data shows that it is exactly the reality of the institutional identity in conflict with their own professional identity that drives them.

This research has shown how technical competence has either been embraced or rejected as part of their professional identity. The journalists interviewed all feel the pressure to learn multiple technical digital skills and instead of identifying as skilled professionals they identify as an exploited worker. The findings show that they now spend substantial amounts of time engaged in what they feel is tedious repurposing of content from other platforms where they are also increasingly taking on an editorial role. This causes additional stress since editors normally have more experience yet they do not but are now tasked with selecting and vetting content. Furthermore, they are now also required to interact with the audience through social media aligned with the *SABC* brand, meaning that these journalists are additionally taking on a marketing role too and forced to align themselves closely with the corporate identity.

With legwork on the decline in their journalistic routine, the journalists interviewed question the authenticity of their identity as certified truth tellers. Despite having access to more digital tools online to verify and authenticate stories, the overall feeling by these journalists was that there was a dilution of primary verification skills due to the significant amount of deskwork they now have to undertake. My decision not to only look at the *Digital News* division, but all of the different newsrooms, enabled a more complex engagement with new digital routines. It showed that journalists working within the Digital Newsroom already have a digital orientation, and found that the biggest shifts in identity was found in traditional platforms due to these journalists "forced" to utilise the digital space for their work by the institution in a bid to keep up with the changing media

landscape. Deffor (2015) demonstrates how journalists respond to the demands of the organisation beyond merely adopting tools. I show how the digital disruption has converged the roles of journalists at the *SABC* with those of technicians, editors, and marketers. Journalists have to continuously adapt to the changing environment in order to persevere in their job, despite their reluctance to be more deskbound and adopting more skills in order to do so.

As shown by the interviews, online journalism comprises of more deskwork and less fieldwork (Pleijter et al. 2002, cited in Deuze 2005) and this can imply that the journalists are unable to sustain networks and contacts, however the journalist can create their own network of readers instead (Siapera & Spyridou 2012). The latter does not seem to be happening, as Phillips (2010) finds that working in online, journalists talk less to their sources and instead find themselves marooned in a desk-bound, cut-and-paste, administrative type of journalism. Shifts in production results in resistance to the adoption of innovative practices in the newsroom (Thurman 2008). Multiskilling and the increasing expectation of tasks impact the journalist negatively (Deuze 2004), and the increasing time pressure pushes journalism to be dependent on news agencies instead, where repetition of material in a news loop is observed (Quandt 2008). Desk-bound journalists also face pressures of efficiency, and tend to focus on a fraction of the information they have access to through wire service (Boczkowski 2009). Due to these changes, the professional and occupational identity of journalists has also changed (Siapera & Veglis 2012). There is an increase in tools that journalists have at their disposal to check information, yet they struggle maintaining standards of accuracy and verifiability (Singer 2011 cited in Paulussen

2012). Another concern is that the growing demand for multi-skilled journalists may be de-professionalising the workforce (Paulussen 2012). Technological infrastructure, especially in the developing world, where a lack of adequate resources is the norm, can also pose a significant challenge (Mabweazara et al. 2014; Ndangam 2008). At the *SABC*, Deffor (2015: 42) argues that their challenge lies in the human resource and not in the tools that they work with, which has a lot to do with the red tape experienced by journalists.

Their convergence of brand identity through social media also impacts on journalists' identity as it is more difficult to sustain the idea of independence when they are so closely associated with the institution. They experienced online harassment due to this association with the *SABC* particularly during the heightened conflict of 2016. Yet in turn by receiving support from outside journalists and public members during this time it also reassured their professional identity. The general observation shared by all the participants is that they see justified criticism online as a normal consequence, the same as the audience calling or writing letters to complain.

This deskbound role could also be due to the *SABC*'s financial problems, as Deffor (2015) shows how the economic context in which an institution operates must be considered to study how its journalists adapt to different aspects of technological advancement and work cultures. These journalists already show a distrust of the institution and this further instruction makes them feel less inclined to adapt to new technologies. This tension was shown by the findings of both traditional newsrooms (where time is limited for legwork) and the digital newsroom (where journalists primarily engage in repurposing content). The

journalists responded to their external changes of the media environment, in this case the heightened politicisation, by taking a compromised role and fearing the online space as one of repercussions from management. This combination of repercussion from management and fear of the unknown could be why these journalists are so reluctant to adapt to new technologies. The journalists from traditional media were found to be even more reluctant to embrace the digital but understood that they were required to do so to keep up with the changing environment. However, those interviewed from traditional media who already had a strong personal presence online were less reluctant to do so due to most likely having a better understanding of the digital landscape. The most significant developments since Deffor's (2015) study is not how the online platform shapes the approach to traditional platforms, but rather the reverse. Online journalists are heavily reliant on traditional platforms at the *SABC* for content, which in turn makes them feel less like journalists due to being more deskbound and forced to focus on the repurposing of content from traditional media. This deskbound role is not exclusive to the digital journalists as traditional journalists find their routines becoming more deskbound. Even though the IMP journalists recognised each other as real journalists in the past (Arndt 2018: 285), I found that the journalists expressed that the move to digital makes them feel less like journalists.

The data showed how these *SABC* journalists have always understood their work as making a strategic compromise in order to serve the public, and that they considered themselves primarily as public service journalists, who hold values in tension with those of their compromised institution. My study further explored how a new relationship with the audience due to digital and social media channels has shaped their identity. This

understanding has now been disrupted through digital and social media channels, which has made this idea of an independent adversarial professional identity more complex to sustain. Boundaries have blurred between the roles undertaken by journalists in the workplace and those previously reserved for other professionals such as technical crews, editors, and "the suits", or marketers and advertisers. Even though digital has allowed the journalist's relationship with the audience to be more tangible, I found that the IMP journalist is often more reluctant to engage with the public. They tend to still work in the old sense, by publishing or broadcasting what they deem important in order to fulfil their public service needs, with minimal reciprocity with the audience, despite what digital journalism allows. The journalists will trawl the online space to find interesting angles, but it is still their decision as to whether or not it meets their sense of newsworthiness in line with their professional values. Deffor (2015) stresses that there are techniques online to understand what the audience is consuming and how, but I argue that this changed role towards becoming technicians requires more skills and training to be able to do so and thus could lead to some reluctance from the journalists to adopt these. The data showed a tension in the journalists' relationship to the public, where even though they value the idea of public service, they often avoid engaging fully with their audience online. My findings thus come into conflict with Waisbord's (2013) critiques of professional journalistic values not placing sufficient emphasis on developing a democratic listening culture of engagement with the public.

Lastly, the research revealed how journalists nevertheless acknowledge the very dangerous nature of primary research through legwork in South Africa, which is known to be a

particularly violent society, in which journalists are increasingly unsafe on the streets. Here journalists might shift their sense of identity and replace the macho image of the tough journalist on the streets with the geek journalist. Arguably, retreating away from the streets to deskwork is safer. I initially asked whether desk journalism is really safer, given the increase in trolling, but found that the journalists interviewed were not too bothered about trolls, and shook it off as a given in working in the vocation. Despite the violence journalists face outside in the streets due to our high crime rates, journalists like Mieke would rather be in the field than 'safely' behind a computer. These tough-skinned viewpoints could be the reason why these journalists are so reluctant to work from the desk, even though the value of their journalism does not necessarily need to diminish. Deskwork is safer for these journalists, but there is a strong resistance to it, mainly due to it not satisfying their perceptions of what they understand a journalist to be. For them, the tough macho newshound on the streets is what makes a "real journalist", even though deskbound journalism can have successful results of storytelling and investigation. This viewpoint could also stem from fearing the unknown, with the journalists not equipped technically to be able to traverse the online space as they would the physical space. Rigorous evidence-based reporting is possible in digital journalism (UNESCO 2018), but arguably with the IMP's professional identity disrupted due to the institutional culture, the further disruption through digital, places more strain and leads them to be more reluctant than ever to adopt these new technologies. Convergence has resulted in public broadcasters tending to increase the task obligations of online journalists' routines and these IMP journalists perceive it as a necessary nuisance. They would rather want to follow the footsteps of their

predecessors who trawled the streets for a newsworthy beat, but they have acknowledged that it is wishful thinking to believe that they do not need to adapt to the online world. The uptake of digital might be slow on their behalf, but it is steadily undertaken as they acknowledge that it has to be done to remain a journalist in this ever-changing environment.

This study considered the research question by linking the theory about journalistic identity with the theory about convergence. The connection of these two fields of literature allowed me to theoretically engage with the field of Journalism Studies. While other researchers have considered convergence as impacting on organisations (Herbert 2000; Singer 2004; Tan & Mei 2011; Kaltenbrunner & Meier 2013; Larrondo et al. 2016), this research question considered convergence in relation to the individual journalist and how their role has been transformed, which I have argued must influence their identity in turn. Mabweazara (2010) shows how institutional and professional influences within news production have consequences for how journalists deploy new technologies in their routines. My research suggests that the inverse relationship is also possible, but as it was such a small sample of journalists studied, more research is required to explore this relationship further.

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Appendix

Interview Schedule

General Identity questions

So I'm going to start off by asking you about how you see yourself as a journalist and then from there I will move on to your everyday routines as a journalist and how the digital fits into it. I'm interested in how these new digital routines are changing the way people are thinking about what journalists should be like, if indeed they are.

What motivated you to become a journalist?

What does it mean to be a South African journalist?

Do you think being a South African journalist is different from a western world first world journalist? Explain.

Was your initial plan in life to become a journalist?

When did you start working as a journalist and for who and what medium?

How did your expectations align with the reality?

Do you separate the idea of being a SABC employee versus a journalist or does one come ahead of the other?

How long have you been working for the SABC? Tell me about your experiences at the SABC?

Do you share similar experiences with fellow SABC journalists? Can you tell me about a particular event, story or experience that highlights this?

Do you ever work together with other media houses when on a story where there are several other journalists, example political events such as Human Rights Day, Funerals or Elections?

Do you think SABC journalists operate differently than other media houses? Can you give me an example?

Question specifically for SABC journalists who have worked at other media houses: How does your experience at the SABC as a journalist differ from other media houses?

How do you think we relate to other journalists outside of the SABC in terms of a shared identity or a shared difference?

How do you relate to other journalists across the world? How do you feel with news reports of journalists being locked up for example Mahmoud Hussein from Al Jazeera English who is on trial in Egypt?

What do you believe is important about being a journalist?

What values do you try to uphold while working as a journalist?

Digital questions

Explain how working with digital has changed since you first started as a journalist.

Do you get feedback from your colleagues or management about your work output in the digital space? If yes, what are the kinds of work skills and behaviour that is valued?

How has digital journalism changed the kind of journalists that are valued, in terms of your direct experience? Please back up with examples.

How do you feel about how welcome your kind of journalist is in this increasingly digital space?

Has the implementation of a digital workflow had any impact on your work or the values you hold?

Comment on timeframes, deadlines, expected learning, skill levels expected in digital newsroom.

Are there instances where digital has disrupted your workflow? If yes, name examples.

Do you source stories from online?

If you do source stories online, which platforms do you use and how do you choose what platform to publish your story?

How does the kind of online platforms you choose relate to how you see yourself as a journalist?

Do you use your personal social media accounts to publish stories? Can you explain why?

Does it have anything to do with the kind of journalist you see yourself as? Or the kind of relationship you have with the SABC?

Tell me about your latest story. Who would read/watch/listen to it? Who would you want to consume?

Do you ever find the need to want to find out more about the people who consume your stories?

If yes, how do you go about finding out?

Have you ever interacted with users online? E.g. comments, live interaction? Can you share a story about that?

How important is it for you to serve the public, if at all?

Do you think it's as important for other journalists from outside of the SABC?

Does online interaction allow you to fulfil that responsibility? Compared to other journalists, for example say a SA newspaper journalist, how do you think your obligation to interact with the public online differs?

Do you respond to every person who sends you a personal tweet or social media post? Why?

Who are the people you would want to interact with when publishing your stories online?

Do you have a special online relationship with the public?

Do you receive any positive feedback from your audience?

What are your feelings about this direct access to the public as a journalist?

Should one maintain a professional identity online? If so, how do you do it? And what does this actually mean?

2016 divisions

You were working at the SABC In 2016 and I'm really interested in how the digital terrain and the politics of the time worked together to influence how you saw yourself as a journalist at the time, tell me about your experiences during this time.

How did you feel about the SABC 8 being suspended?

How did you feel when other media houses came to protest at the SABC in Auckland Park? How did you make sense of this in terms of understanding who you were as a journalist?

Did you speak openly about it through online platforms? Why?

Did you feel any animosity or support from journalists outside of the SABC when you were out on the field? How did you feel about this and understand it in terms of how you see yourself as a journalist? Tell me more.

Did you feel any animosity or support from your story subject matters when out on the field? Please give an example. How did this make you feel in terms of your values as a journalist and the relationship you think you should have with the public?

Was it business as usual on your social media platforms or did you receive support or trolling online during this time?

Do you think having social media made any difference to the political atmosphere around being an SABC journalist at the time?

How did you feel about the support from other journalists in South Africa during the suspension of the SABC 8 (example Adriaan Basson from News24 starting a crowdfund campaign)? To what extent was social media a factor in such support?

Do you still feel any animosity towards you as a SABC journalist when working on the field with independent journalists? How do you deal with this in terms of being a fellow journalist?

In general, have you ever been trolled online as a journalist?

If yes, what effect did it have on you? Did it make you think about your rights or your role as a journalist in society?

Does the negative response from the audience impact on your journalism output and how so?

Did you respond to this criticism at the time e.g. reply? If yes, was this useful to engage and clarify things? Do you feel you want to still reply now? Do you think it would have any effect if you did?

In the examples you gave, how do you think the people there saw your role as a journalist? Why were they unhappy and what did they expect you should be doing or saying? What kind of journalists do they want?

What should be done to make sure that the public knows the role journalists understand themselves taking up in relation to democracy? E.g. Do you think there should be any kind of effort made to educate ordinary South Africans on the role of journalists in a democracy? Or do you accept that these attitudes about journalists are inevitable?

Given the fact that we are the most unequal country in the world, some people argue journalism may shake things up in the details but upholds this status quo as it does not really talk about huge differences in wages and a society where the money still flows according to racial lines. So to what extent would you consider that these critics challenging journalists actually may have a point? Could you consider what they do useful to democracy?

Journalists sometimes style themselves as tough hacks, to what extent would you say that a focus on mental health and stress is important for journalists

What is more important, your relationship on the one hand with your audience/public or on the other hand your relationship with the SABC and your editor?

How do you feel about journalists who are really well known, like Steven Groottes for example? Is this something all journalists should aim for? How do you make sense of it in terms of your own idea of what kind of person you should be as a journalist?

How do you maintain the SABC brand online? Should you? Was this expected of journalists in the past in the pre-digital era?

Do you speak openly about SABC politics through online platforms? Elaborate.

New era?

How do you feel about the rebranding of the SABC with the #BlackIsHereCampaign?

Have you seen any evidence to support that the SABC is changing and can you share some stories as to yes or no?

How do you relate to these changes as the kind of journalist you would like to be?

There has been talk of Digital News collaborating with Radio and TV-News by the creation of one big newsroom. How would you feel about that? I'm interested that this digital convergence strategy seems to be packaged as part of the transformation of SABC. Why do you think this is? Is there something about the digital that makes people associate it with transformation?

Do you think it will ever happen? Would it be positive or problematic?

What, if any, new pressure do you now feel when presenting yourself as a journalist online?

Have you noticed any attitude shifts in terms of online audience commentary or behaviour towards you over the past year? Give me an example?

Do you still want to be a journalist?

If no, what made this change? Is it a particular story that you worked on or experienced you went through? What career or profession would you rather pursue and why?

Anything else you would like to add?