

Lockdown: why the media provides a critical service in times of crisis

 By [Gayle Edmunds](#)

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President Cyril Ramaphosa announced a 21-day national lockdown with a comprehensive breakdown of measures to curb and contain the worst impact of Covid-19 on the population and industry alike.



Credit: Kaboompics.com on [Pexels](#).

Yet uncertainty prevails, and citizens are now grappling with new questions: What does a lockdown really mean? Can I still take my dog for a walk? Who will go shopping for my elderly parents? Does my job fall under critical services?

In a time of crisis, the first casualty is accurate, useful and usable information. News offers a service to all South Africans that has never been so important.



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Primary skill of journalists

The primary skill of journalists is to take information, decode it, and then reassemble it in a meaningful way. The most important element of journalists' reports is that they answer the all-important "so what?" question. Why does this information matter to me, to my family and my community?

In a democracy, a fearless and efficient press is key to holding power accountable and ensuring people get the accurate information they need to make decisions about their lives. Editors are the curators of credible and accurate information, they are beholden to their readers, society at large and the press council to deliver news that is true.



The short to medium-term impact of the Covid-19 outbreak on the SA media environment

Chris Botha 18 Mar 2020



The coronavirus has seen a global interest in news skyrocketing, with a reported 50% surge in news site traffic worldwide between March 9 and 15, as infection rates soared globally. The International News Media Association (INMA) reports a 121% increase in articles published on the virus by news organisations in the same week, with a massive spike in subscription and engagement.

Now is the time to support ethical, expert reporting as we face the consequences of the rapidly spreading pandemic. It is necessary for us all to get credible, up-to-date and accurate information to larger numbers of South Africans in a brand-safe environment. Our news brands are on hand to help you communicate effectively with your customers during this uncertain and rapidly changing time.

Social media, a valuable tool

According to Statista, currently just short of 68% of South Africans have access to the internet. That's well short of the kind of coverage we need to get the message out during this time, and this figure doesn't take into account whether those people have internet coverage at home or if many are using their access to it at work to get connected.

The digital population in South African in January 2020 was 36,54 million internet users, of which 34,93 million were mobile internet users. This means that online-only isn't reaching the most marginalised in our communities or those who prefer to take the time out to read content in more depth and process that information outside of the 15-minute news cycle that is rapidly stressing out citizens. Newspapers have a critical and impactful role to play in relaying information to all South Africans.



Media effectiveness during Covid-19

Jane Ostler, Kantar 23 Mar 2020



According to Statcounter, only 18,04% of South Africans are on Twitter and 41,38% are on Facebook with media darling Instagram clocking up a paltry 10,3% of South Africans and YouTube only 2,35% of South Africans. These percentages are from February 2020. Social media is a valuable tool in every brand's box, including our own, but it is no use in isolation.

ABOUT GAYLE EDMUNDS

Gayle Edmunds is the special projects editor at Ads24.

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