



**THE MANIFESTATION AND POTENTIAL OF CONSTRUCTIVE
JOURNALISM IN SOUTH AFRICAN DIGITAL NEWS**

Author:

Barbara Fölscher-Kingwill

Thesis presented for the Degree of DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in the Department of Film and Media Studies

UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN

February 2023

Supervisor: Professor Herman Wasserman

The copyright of this thesis vests in the author. No quotation from it or information derived from it is to be published without full acknowledgement of the source. The thesis is to be used for private study or non-commercial research purposes only.

Published by the University of Cape Town (UCT) in terms of the non-exclusive license granted to UCT by the author.

ABSTRACT

This study aimed to establish the manifestation of constructive journalism, and the perceptions and attitudes of journalists and editors towards the form, in South African digital news. Qualitative content analysis was applied to a sample of 134 articles on the topic “evictions” (written during South Africa’s first Covid-lockdown in 2020) from three online news outlets varying in editorial approach. Semi-structured interviews with a purposively selected sample of journalists and editors followed.

The findings show that the most distinctive principles of constructive journalism were largely absent in the articles. Yet, interviewees recognised a role for the form to be introduced alongside watchdog journalism. Views ranged from supporting constructive journalism as a necessary and valuable approach that would strengthen watchdog journalism, to seeing constructive journalism as a “nice to have” in the overall news cycle. In some of the outlets, constructive journalism has recently been included in output, even if not labeled as such. The contrast between the findings from the two datasets indicates a shift in how some journalists have started thinking about the information needs of audiences and ways to address those. Journalists showed acute awareness of the effects of relentless negative news on audiences.

The findings reveal that industry pressures posed significant challenges in the implementation of constructive journalism, but that certain of those challenges are also opportunities. One proposition was that newsrooms collaborate to tackle big-issue projects through creating joint investigative/constructive teams. Some journalists had difficulties with a clear conception of constructive journalism, but found it noteworthy to see constructive journalism as an additional step in the overall news cycle, not necessarily replacing their monitorial role. The interviewees wanted to learn more about expanded interviewing techniques proposed in constructive journalism to add complexity to conflict reporting.

The study enriches understanding of the applicability of constructive journalism in developing democracies, and shows that the form can add nuance and complexity to the current practices of watchdog journalism that dominate South African news reporting. The risks of constructive journalism being misinterpreted or manipulated by partisan media requires of journalists to adhere to the rigorous journalistic norms proposed in constructive journalism.

DECLARATION

I, Barbara Fölscher Kingwill, declare that *The Manifestation of and Potential of Constructive Journalism in South African Digital News* is my own work, that it has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other university and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by complete references as confirmed by Turnitin.

Signed:

Signed by candidate

Date: (04 February 2023)

CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	2
DECLARATION	3
LIST OF TABLES.....	6
LIST OF APPENDICES	7
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	8
1.1 BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT	9
1.1.1 <i>Constructive journalism</i>	10
1.1.2 <i>The South African media context: Monitorial vs development journalism</i>	11
1.1.3 <i>Why digital news?</i>	14
1.1.4 <i>Research problem</i>	15
1.2 STATEMENT OF PURPOSE AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS	16
1.3 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS	16
1.3.1 <i>Sampling</i>	17
1.3.2 <i>Data analysis</i>	18
1.4 ASSUMPTIONS	18
1.5 RATIONALE AND SIGNIFICANCE	19
1.6 WORKING DEFINITIONS	19
1.6.1 <i>Constructive journalism</i>	19
1.6.2 <i>Solutions journalism</i>	19
1.6.3 <i>Monitorial journalism</i>	19
1.7 OUTLINE.....	20
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK.....	21
2.1 INTRODUCTION.....	21
2.2 MONITORIAL (WATCHDOG) JOURNALISM: THEORY, JOURNALISTIC PRINCIPLES AND CHALLENGES.....	22
2.2.1 <i>Theoretical foundation</i>	22
2.2.2 <i>Practical application: Challenges and criticism</i>	23
2.3 CONTEXTUAL FACTORS INFLUENCING SOUTH AFRICAN ONLINE NEWS	24
2.3.1 <i>Economic and structural factors</i>	24
2.3.2 <i>Normative factors</i>	25
2.3.3 <i>Factors arising from an increased focus on citizens' lived experiences</i>	30
2.3.4 <i>Summary: Contextual factors</i>	36
2.4 CONSTRUCTIVE JOURNALISM	36
2.4.1 <i>Development and conceptualisation of constructive journalism</i>	36
2.4.2 <i>Precedents and related forms of journalism</i>	39
2.4.3 <i>Theoretical underpinning</i>	40
2.4.4 <i>Criticism and responses in extant literature</i>	44
2.4.5 <i>Existing research</i>	46
2.4.6 <i>Defining constructive journalism principles for this study</i>	50
2.4.7 <i>Summary</i>	51
CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY.....	53
3.1 INTRODUCTION.....	53
3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY	53
3.2.1 <i>Relevance of research focus</i>	53
3.2.2 <i>Rationale for qualitative design and analytical methods</i>	54
3.3 SAMPLING.....	55

3.4 DATA COLLECTION	58
3.4.1 <i>Methods of data collection</i>	58
3.4.2 <i>Developing the interview guide</i>	58
3.5 DATA ANALYSIS	59
3.5.1 <i>Dataset 1: Qualitative content analysis</i>	59
3.5.2 <i>Dataset 2: Qualitative interview analysis</i>	60
3.5.3 <i>NVivo</i>	60
3.6 ENSURING QUALITY	61
3.7 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS	61
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS	62
4.1 INTRODUCTION.....	62
4.2 PRESENCE OF CONSTRUCTIVE JOURNALISM PRINCIPLES IN ONLINE REPORTING ON EVICTIONS	62
4.2.1 <i>Theme 1: The principle “When investigating important societal problems, include coverage of possible solutions in the overall news cycle, staying critical, investigative and factual” largely absent in sample</i>	63
4.2.2 <i>Theme 2: The principle “Place the issue in its relevant, broader context” partially present in sample</i>	71
4.2.3 <i>Theme 3: Textual evidence of the principle: “Expand journalistic interviewing to cover nuance and complexity” in operationalised form largely absent in sample</i>	74
4.2.4 <i>Theme 4: The principle “Strengthen connection and co-creation with audience” indirectly and partially present in sample</i>	78
4.3 JOURNALISTS’ AND EDITORS’ PERCEPTIONS OF AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS CONSTRUCTIVE JOURNALISM IN DIGITAL NEWS	81
4.3.1 <i>Theme 5: Role for constructive journalism to be introduced alongside watchdog journalism recognised</i>	81
4.3.2 <i>Theme 6: Features of constructive journalism already practised</i>	85
4.3.3 <i>Theme 7: Motivations for support of constructive journalism</i>	86
4.3.4 <i>Theme 8: Operational and conceptual challenges to implementation of constructive journalism seen as interlinked and substantive, but not prohibitive</i>	90
4.3.5 <i>Theme 9: Polarisation inevitable, but can be mitigated</i>	99
4.3.6 <i>Theme 10: Closer connection with audiences necessary, but social media’s role controversial</i>	103
4.3.7 <i>Theme 11: Suggestions for building constructive journalism praxis</i>	106
4.4 SUMMARY.....	110
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION.....	112
5.1 INTRODUCTION.....	112
5.2 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS	112
5.2.1 <i>Manifestation of constructive journalism principles in article sample</i>	112
5.2.2 <i>Perceptions and attitudes of journalists and editors towards constructive journalism in online news</i>	116
5.3 CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY	130
5.3.1 <i>Industry contribution</i>	130
5.3.2 <i>Academic contribution</i>	131
5.4 LIMITATIONS AND CONSIDERATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH	134
5.5 CONCLUSION	135
REFERENCES	137

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Summary of article types, length and authors	57
Table 2: Theme, sub-themes and categories of the manifestation of Principle 1 in the sample	63
Table 3: Theme, sub-themes and categories of the manifestation of Principle 2 in the sample	72
Table 4: Theme, sub-theme and categories of the manifestation of Principle 3 in the sample	74
Table 5: Theme, sub-theme and categories of the manifestation of Principle 4 in the sample	78

LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendix 1: DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION OF INTERVIEWEES	152
Appendix 2: CONTENT ANALYSIS CODE BOOK	154
Appendix 3: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS WITH EDITORS AND JOURNALISTS.....	161
Appendix 4: PRE-INTERVIEW INFORMATION PAGE ON CONSTRUCTIVE JOURNALISM	163
Appendix 5: INFORMED CONSENT FORM	164

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Journalism practitioners and theorists worldwide are searching for ways to address the considerable challenges the industry faces in the 21st century. Societal changes, such as the pervasive growth of digital information technology in public and private life, the globalisation of ideas, the fading of traditional hierarchies of authority (Hermans & Drok, 2018, p. 681), and ongoing global economic crises unleashed through the Covid-19 epidemic (Vollgraaff, 2020), are putting journalism under severe pressure to re-invent itself, both globally and in South Africa.

The impact of a fast-changing interconnected world on traditional news media is seen in shrinking newsrooms, declining circulation and falling revenue (Hermans & Drok, 2018, p. 684). Journalism's monopoly position as news supplier has been lost, due to an abundance of innovative digital platforms providing an overflow of information (Hermans & Prins, 2020). Moreover, the somewhat passive news audiences of the past have been replaced by active news consumers – citizens who use news on their own terms (Hermans & Prins, 2020, p. 1065). Perhaps most significantly, the societal shifts have coincided with diminishing levels of trust in the traditional institution of journalism, a trend that is causing mounting concern and intense self-examination in the profession (Mast, Coesemans & Temmerman, 2018, p. 494). As a result, new forms of journalism have emerged aimed at a closer relationship with the public. Among these movements, constructive journalism has gained significant prominence.

Against this background, this study aimed to examine the possibilities and challenges of constructive journalism within the context of South African online news. The purpose of the research was to explore which constructive journalism principles, if any, were present in the reporting approach of a sample of online news articles on evictions during the first five months of South Africa's 2020 Covid-19 lockdown. Second, the purpose was to explore the perceptions and attitudes of journalists and editors towards constructive journalism in South African online news.

It was anticipated that the study could enhance understanding of the extent to which constructive journalism may offer practitioners some norms and guidelines to help them add more nuance to South African news reporting. Media scholars call for approaches beyond the currently dominant form of monitorial journalism practised in mainstream news (De Beer et al., 2016; Garman & Malila, 2017; Wasserman, Chuma & Bosch, 2018). While the current monitorial framework has led to many successes, it favours an elitist approach in the way it is practised (Wasserman et al., 2018). This has often meant overlooking the voices of the poor and marginalised, and foregrounding conflict and violence in reports on contentious issues such as service delivery protests, student funding and evictions (Wasserman et al., 2018). Constructive journalism, on the other hand, is a relatively new, but maturing, public-focused framework that aims to report on both conflict and collaboration, to include multiple voices and perspectives, and to go beyond the mere reproduction of problems by asking future-oriented questions about possible solutions and ways to get there (Hermans & Drok, 2018, p. 686).

It was also anticipated that the study could contribute to a better understanding of the applicability of constructive journalism to developing democracies, as called for in journalism literature internationally, since most previous research on the emerging form has focused on the contexts of mature democracies of the Global North (Mast et al., 2018).

In this study, two rounds of empirical research were conducted, producing two datasets. First, qualitative content analysis was employed, using a purposive sampling method, to establish which

constructive journalism principles were present in a sample of articles on evictions during South Africa's first Covid-19 lockdown period in 2020. The topic of evictions was chosen as a point of focus because of its prominence on the news agenda, typically exposing conflicting views on important issues of land and housing. The Covid-19 lockdown brought these post-apartheid challenges into sharp relief. The content analysis of the articles was followed by interviews with journalists and editors about their perceptions and attitudes towards constructive journalism in South African online news. Qualitative interview analysis was employed to analyse the transcripts. More details about the methodology will be provided in Chapter 3.

This chapter continues with an overview of the context and background that frame and motivate the study. This is followed by a description of the problem, the statement of purpose and the research questions. A discussion of the research approach and the researcher's assumptions follows. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the proposed rationale, the significance of the research and working definitions of key terminology.

1.1 BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

In the Global North, an enduring bias towards negativity in mainstream news has been identified as one of the factors contributing to the loss of public trust, audiences and revenue experienced by traditional news outlets (Bennett, 2016; Fletcher & Park, 2017; Hermans & Drok, 2018, p. 685). There is little dispute that bad news and conflict are primary values in news selection and presentation in mainstream media (Harcup & O'Neill, 2017, p. 1482). Scholars across disciplines argue that this results in a skewed portrayal of reality to audiences in the current 24/7 news society (Hermans & Gyldensted, 2019, p. 538; Pinker, 2018; Rosling, Rosling & Rönnlund, 2019). Negatively framed stories have been shown to contribute to negative affect, avoidance of news and reduced intentions to take positive action to address issues (Baden, McIntyre & Homberg, 2019, p. 1940; Bennett, 2016; Patterson, 2016). The search for news norms and practices to counterbalance such a negative bias and incomplete view of the world led to the emergence of the new movement of constructive journalism (Bro, 2018, p. 504; Mast et al., 2018, p. 494). Since its inception at the end of the millennium's first decade, constructive journalism has grown significantly as a practice and research field in the Global North. However, little is known about its applicability in developing contexts and there are calls for empirical studies to address this gap (Rotmeijer, 2019).

In South Africa's post-apartheid democracy, scholars have called for alternative normative frameworks for journalistic practice beyond the currently dominant form of monitorial (watchdog) journalism, following the example of liberal, mature democracies (De Beer et al., 2016; Wasserman et al., 2018). The style of monitorial journalism manifesting in editorial choices and journalistic practices currently is criticised as being largely elitist, foregrounding conflict and violence and disregarding the voices of the poor (Wasserman et al., 2018). Additionally, there is a need to think about the value of monitorial journalism if it's being practiced in an environment of collapsed government and has little effect on power, as is currently the case in South Africa. How can journalism adapt to serve society better if its exposure of government's failure to address huge societal problems does not lead to remedial action?

Constructive journalism is an umbrella term for approaches that aim to investigate both problems and solutions to important societal issues, and to include multiple perspectives and voices in a non-polarising approach (Hermans & Gyldensted, 2019; 'What is constructive journalism?', 2022). Since this form has not been empirically researched in South African journalism, its potential for addressing some of the challenges faced by current forms of monitorial journalism is unknown. It is also not known in which ways an exploration of constructive journalism's manifestation in South African online

news, and of journalists' and editors' perceptions and attitudes towards constructive journalism in online news, could contribute to knowledge of the form's applicability in developing contexts.

1.1.1 Constructive journalism

Constructive journalism is an umbrella term covering several applications intended to supplement, rather than replace, traditional monitorial journalism practices (Hermans & Gyldensted, 2019, p. 538). Constructive journalism was defined by one of its founders, Cathrine Gyldensted, as an approach applying positive psychology techniques to news processes to create productive and engaging coverage, while holding true to journalism's core functions (McIntyre & Gyldensted, 2018, p. 663). Positive psychology is defined by the International Positive Psychology Association (IPPA 2023) as "the scientific study of what enables individuals and communities to thrive". The discipline's seminal scholar, Martin Seligman (2019, p. 491), argues that positive psychology's tenets align with journalism's central values and should be applied to enhance the profession in the 21st century.

Whilst staying critical, investigative and factual, constructive journalism aims to investigate both problems and efforts to find solutions to produce more inclusive, comprehensive reporting on reality (Hermans & Drok, 2018; Hermans & Gyldensted, 2019; Nölleke, 2019). In the United States, a similar story-telling approach, solutions journalism, is aligned under the constructive journalism umbrella (Lough & McIntyre, 2021). Solutions journalism is described as complementing and strengthening reporting on problems by investigating and explaining, in a critical and clear-eyed way, credible responses to widely shared problems ('What is solutions journalism?', 2022).

Constructive journalism has gained ground globally as a news philosophy, practice and research field, with more and more organisations laying claim to practising the form (Bro, 2018; Mast et al., 2018, p. 494). The BBC, *The Guardian*, *The New York Times*, *The Economist* and the Danish Broadcasting Corporation are some of many media outlets that have embraced the practice, either in sections of their output or as broader guiding normative model. Increased interest in constructive journalism has given rise to conferences, webinars, a special issue in the 2018 volume of the journal *Journalism*, training in media companies, as well as semester courses, masterclasses, and fellowships at a number of journalism schools. Yet, after more than a decade of growth, there is agreement among theorists that the emerging framework's empirical foundation needs further development (Aitamurto & Varma, 2018; Mast et al., 2018; McIntyre & Gyldensted, 2017). Scholars are asked to continue refining constructive journalism's position along related and divergent types of journalism (Bro, 2018; Mast et al., 2018, p. 493), to examine how constructive journalism can better serve the needs of the audience (Hermans & Prins, 2020, p. 1078) and to add to limited studies about the applicability (or not) of the framework in post-colonial and developing democracies around the world (Rotmeijer, 2019).

Existing research has largely focused on the mature Western democracies of the Global North. Studies include the tracing of constructive journalism's theoretical roots and defining principles (Hermans & Drok, 2018; Mast et al., 2018; McIntyre & Gyldensted, 2018), the impact of constructive journalism (or the closely related solutions journalism) on audiences (Curry & Hammonds, 2014; Curry, Stroud & McGregor, 2016; Kleemans et al., 2017; Lough & McIntyre, 2021; McIntyre & Sobel, 2017), and the educational outcomes (Thier, 2016) and visual elements of constructive story techniques (McIntyre, Lough & Manzanares, 2018).

In media debates, constructive journalism has elicited critical interpretations as constituting good-news stories or 'fluff' (Mast et al., 2018, p. 3), as journalism that risks identification with advocacy or activism (Bro, 2018, p. 13), as journalism in danger of losing autonomy through its concern with the

impact of news, and as journalism in danger of becoming uncritical and unaccountable (Bro, 2018). Outside the Global North, the manner in which the form has been claimed to be used by state-run Chinese media to increase China's so-called 'soft power' in Africa (Marsh, 2016) has been especially controversial. Chinese media reporting practices have been criticised as over-optimistic (Zhang & Matingwina, 2016, p. 21), as propagandistic and lacking in editorial independence (Wekesa, 2017) and as failing to hold African leaders accountable or to express any criticism towards China (Marsh, 2016, p. 185). The appropriation of the normative form of constructive journalism to describe the journalistic style of state-led Chinese media in Africa should thus be seen as flawed, since, as Zhao and Xiang (2019) noted, the framing approach of Chinese-media articles in Africa often lacks objectivity and independence – norms that are encapsulated in the definition of constructive journalism.

A limited number of further studies have begun to investigate potential challenges or advantages of constructive journalism in developing democracies outside northern Europe and the United States. The studies include the narration of Ebola by Western and Chinese media (Zhang & Matingwina, 2016), journalists' perceptions of the form's potential in Croatia (Kovacevic & Perisin, 2018), the use of constructive journalism techniques in the Caribbean (Rotmeijer, 2019), the views of Rwandan journalists about their role in the reconstruction of the country (McIntyre & Sobel, 2018) and an evaluation of the extent to which constructive practices are incorporated in two Chinese publications' coverage of South Africa aimed at an international audience (Jenkins, 2021).

No empirical research has been done on the manifestation of constructive reporting approaches in South African media aimed at local audiences, or on journalists' perceptions and attitudes towards constructive journalism in the post-apartheid media context. Anton Harber's pronouncement at the 2014 World Editors' Forum in SA, that news could only be constructive if you wanted a "sleepy, complacent society" (Tullis, 2014), may well be an example of what Mast et al. (2018, p. 494) identified as "ill-informed interpretations" of constructive journalism, reducing it to "sunshine news". Herman Wasserman's more nuanced opinion held that it was important that constructive journalism be clearly separated from notions of uncritical journalism, especially in developmental democracies where governments often put pressure on journalists to refrain from criticizing them (Tullis, 2014).

Since 2014, much work has been done to address some of these criticisms through studies aimed at enhancing the conceptual clarity of constructive journalism's guiding principles (Hermans & Drok, 2018; McIntyre & Gyldensted, 2017) and delineating differences and similarities with other forms prioritising the concerns of the public, such as civic/public journalism (Hermans & Drok, 2018), peace journalism (McIntyre & Gyldensted, 2017, p. 25) and action journalism (Bro, 2018). The positioning of constructive journalism vis-à-vis the relatively new practice of engaged journalism (Crittenden & Haywood, 2020), in this study, will add to this process of conceptual clarification and the clarification of similarities and differences.

It is not known what the possibilities and challenges of constructive journalism are in South Africa, but the complexities of the country's post-apartheid media environment offer fertile ground to extend our understanding of constructive journalism's applicability outside mature Western democracies. As Wasserman argues (2020, p. 464), the South African case is a good example of how normative theories are linked to their historical, political and social contexts.

1.1.2 The South African media context: Monitorial vs development journalism

The global pressures of declining print media circulation, shrinking newsrooms and dwindling revenue are – with some exceptions – evident in the South African media environment as well (Wasserman, 2018, p. 46). Additionally, the country's specific historical and contemporary political, social and

economic realities, together with its positioning in ongoing geopolitical shifts, have been important drivers in media debate and industry changes (Wasserman, 2018, p. 46). The media has played an important political and social role since the end of apartheid, but its role has been contested. Media practices remain rooted in a historical understanding of journalism's position in society and towards the government (Wasserman, 2018, p. 169). The media itself bears the characteristics of the continuing severe socio-economic inequalities of South African society; thus, its orientation to audiences is shaped by apartheid's legacy in terms of language, race and class, and remains contentious (Wasserman, 2018, p. 169). Additionally, the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) grouping of emerging states, and particularly the growing relationship between China and Africa, have provided a geopolitical lens through which the South African media's role in the democratic era is viewed and debated (Wasserman, 2018, p. 169).

Although the arrival of democracy in South Africa brought constitutional guarantees of freedom of expression which have allowed the media much greater liberty to act as a robust watchdog of political power than pre-1994, it has often led to tensions between the media and government (Wasserman, 2020, p. 463). The South African media has closely followed the model of mature liberal democracies, where watchdog journalism is associated with the so-called fourth estate role of the media, charging journalists to act as independent, neutral watchdogs, holding those in power to account (Christians et al., 2009). Yet, South African journalists operate in a context that is heterogeneous, contested and diverse, resulting in diverse and contested understandings of notions such as freedom and independence, citizenship, and the democratic role and responsibilities of the media (Wasserman, 2018, pp. 13, 18).

On the one hand, watchdog journalism is widely recognised as essential in holding political and economic power to account in post-apartheid South Africa through investigative reporting on corruption and malfeasance, especially since the start the Zuma years in 2008 (Wasserman, 2020, p. 464). Investigative journalism – which is one aspect of watchdog journalism, according to Kovach and Rosenstiel (2014, p. 170) – has more than once been credited with playing a critical role in bringing the country's democracy “back from the brink”, through exposures of bribery and exploitation, undermining of the Constitution, corporate dishonesty and “state capture” (Harber, 2020).

On the other hand, monitorial journalism stands accused of emphasising conflict and negativity, reflecting the perspectives of the political and economic elite, and disregarding the voices and plight of disenfranchised groups (Friedman, 2011; Wasserman & Garman, 2014; Rao & Wasserman, 2015, p. 653). There is recognition of room for normative correctives to the “adversarial, aggressive watchdog approach” (Tullis, 2014) and calls for frameworks that offer alternatives to the dominance of monitorial journalism modelled on Western liberal individualism (Wasserman et al., 2018). In its exercise of the watchdog role, the media is often accused of being event-driven and sensationalist, and not aligning with the realities of the African continent (Garman & Malila, 2017).

Malila (2019, p. 104) argues that the watchdog role in the South African context should go further than exposure of corruption and mismanagement of public resources, by adding the depth required for real accountability. Her research on education reporting in the Eastern Cape revealed that citizens were left information-poor and lacking the knowledge to effectively hold public officials to account. She makes the case for a shift in the understanding of watchdog reporting to include analysis of causes, contexts and the resources available to address social problems like service delivery. She calls on journalists to reconsider not only their conceptualisation of watchdog journalism, but also the value of thematic (rather than episodic) reporting, to enable real socio-political change (Malila, 2019, p. 104).

Drawing on the work of post-colonial feminism and political theory (Bickford, 1996), Dreher (2009, p. 445) highlights the importance and productive possibilities of a shift from the politics of voice to the concept of “listening across difference” in media studies. Wasserman (2013) and Garman and Malila (2017) propose the notion of “listening” as an ethical alternative to the current dominant framework of monitorial journalism. Citing human dignity as a protonorm (Christians & Nordenstreng, 2004) for journalism, Wasserman (2013, p. 78) argues that to treat all people with dignity means taking their stories seriously and letting them know that their voice matters. Aligning with Couldry (2009), Bickford (1996) and Dreher (2009), Wasserman (2013, p. 78) emphasises that voice involves both speaking and listening, and makes the case for journalists to embrace both the ethics of listening and caring – even if it implies values of commitment, compassion and immersion, which are regarded with scepticism “in the liberal-individualist journalistic mantra of professionalism and detachment”. Garman and Malila (2017, p. 14; also see Wasserman, 2013, p. 75) contend that the simple adoption of a relentlessly critical watchdog role – while seen as necessary by most black South Africans – has alienated many of those black South Africans who see the media as in fact playing the role of political opposition. They propose a temperance or enhancement of the investigative imperative of monitorial journalism with an active programme of listening to the voices and perceptions of those affected by the actions of government (Garman & Malila, 2017).

The boundaries of monitorial journalism came under further scrutiny in a study gaining the perspective of a broad spectrum of journalists and editors about the importance of the media’s watchdog vs developmental roles in the country’s developing democracy (De Beer et al., 2016). In recognition of the social accountability role of the media, participants and researchers envisioned a nuanced normative journalism model in the context of contemporary South Africa that does not see the media’s monitorial and developmental roles as binary opposites – as traditionally viewed in liberal and developmental media theory (De Beer et al., 2016, pp. 35, 49).

Development journalism adheres to the idea that journalists may aid national development through fulfilling roles of social intervention, national development and educating people (Kalyango et al., 2017). Controversial aspects of the form, such as threats to freedom of expression, self-censorship and pressure on journalists to help the government achieve its development goals, unlocked heated societal and academic debate in South Africa (Fourie, 2002). It exposed conflicting viewpoints between the media and government about the meaning of freedom of speech and responsibility (Wasserman, 2010), public interest vs national interest (Wasserman & De Beer, 2005) and the ways in which the media itself had to transform (Harber, 2004; Wasserman & De Beer, 2009). These debates continue to this day.

If constructive journalism is seen as akin to development journalism, as has been inferred in studies in Croatia (Kovacevic & Perisin, 2018) and the Caribbean (Rotmeijer, 2019), constructive journalism’s position has to be clarified vis-à-vis the broader debates about the developmental vs monitorial roles of journalists in South Africa (De Beer et al., 2016; Rodny-Gumede, 2017) and contextual imperatives that have an impact on how journalism roles and norms are interpreted. For instance, any exploration of more constructive approaches must take cognisance of the critical role of monitorial journalism in rooting out corruption and corporate malfeasance in South Africa.

Apart from development journalism and the ethics of listening and care, post-apartheid normative media debates offer further prominent features that could add to knowledge about constructive journalism’s possibilities and challenges outside Western democracies. Articulating the concerns of post-colonial theory, scholars have appealed for the inclusion of factors resulting from the legacy of the country’s past (Rodny-Gumede, 2015b; Wasserman, 2006), such as enduring (largely race-based) socio-economic inequalities, fragmented audiences and unequal access to the public sphere and

mainstream news media (Rodny-Gumede, 2015a; Rodny-Gumede, 2015b; Wasserman, 2006; Wasserman, 2015). Similarly, “ubuntu”, an African concept that is typically translated from isiZulu and isiXhosa as “humanity towards others” (Christians, 2004, p. 235), sparked discourses about the importance of communal values in traditional African culture, and the possibility of ubuntu’s public service ethos as a suitable alternative for South African journalism (Blankenberg, 1999; Chasi & Rodny-Gumede, 2016; Christians, 2015; Fourie, 2008).

The question arises whether constructive journalism – with its aim of giving a more comprehensive picture of reality through greater inclusion of voices and perspectives, available resources and possible solutions to social problems, while staying true to journalism’s core functions (Hermans & Gyldensted, 2019, p. 536; McIntyre & Gyldensted, 2018, p. 662) – could offer additional, rigorous journalistic guidelines for practice to South African journalists, allowing greater nuance in the practice of monitorial/watchdog journalism than is currently the case. This shift is indeed called for by media theorists. A study exploring these issues could add to the empirical foundation of constructive journalism globally, especially in beginning to address the paucity of constructive journalism research in developing democracies.

The door to further research on the combined qualities of monitorial journalism and solutions journalism (a technique of constructive journalism [Lough & McIntyre, 2021, p. 194]) has already been opened by Walth, Dahmen and Their (2019). They brought together investigative (watchdog) and solutions journalism in a new reporting approach for journalistic impact. Having presented a baseline understanding of such an approach, the authors argue that many journalists have not yet seen the benefits of integrating the qualities of both methodologies, and called for more research (Walth et al., 2019, p. 188).

1.1.3 Why digital news?

There are different types of challenges faced by the South African media that have put constructive journalism on the agenda. One is the socio-political context, which has given rise to contestation of watchdog journalism and calls for more nuanced forms of journalism. The other is the industry/practice context, where – as in the rest of the world – digitisation has set in motion fundamental changes in business models and practices. These industry shifts are an essential part of any rethinking of media frameworks and journalistic roles (Wasserman, 2018, p. 152).

The Covid-19 pandemic has accelerated the structural decline in South African news media, resulting in significant downscaling of print-media operations within the first three months of lockdown (Vollgraaff, 2020). At the same time, the pre-existing growth in the users of online news platforms was given an extra boost by the pandemic (Vollgraaff, 2020). Moreover, mobile phones (with their access to digital news) are considered as probably the most important media platform in Africa today (Wasserman, 2018, p. 155).

Digital news is seen as the journalism format most in flux, where the profession’s place in society continues to evolve as it is challenged by the new forms of access and engagement digital media offers (Hermida, 2016, p. 90; Owen, 2016, p. 26). Carpentier (2003, p. 438) argues that the enabling of active citizen engagement through new media technologies can be used to make journalists ‘gate-openers’ rather than the traditional ‘gate-keepers’, through the combination of top-down corporate media production structures with more fluid, bottom-up participation. It is also in digital media that the role of emotion in journalism has emerged as a determining factor shaping the news agenda (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2016, p. 137). It is asserted that insight into the specific ways in which emotions function is essential to chart the new media landscape (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2016, pp. 137–138). With its

foundation in positive psychology, constructive journalism has a central concern with the emotional impact of news (Baden et al., 2019, p. 1958). Thus, considering all the factors mentioned above, digital news media was chosen as appropriate field for the empirical focus of the study.

“Evictions” was identified as the theme of the online articles in the purposively selected sample (this theme will be discussed in more detail in Section 1.3.1), since eviction-related issues around land and housing are an important and polarising subject to all social, political and economic groupings, known to evoke heated and sometimes violent reactions. It was assumed that a polarising theme, triggering high emotion, would allow exploration of constructive journalism’s potential to facilitate productive thinking towards overcoming those divisions. Some of South Africa’s most pressing challenges have played out in the arena of evictions during the first five months of the Covid-19 pandemic, such as the country’s deep (mostly race-based) historical and structural inequalities, the frustration and desperation of the marginalised poor (let down by non-delivery on post-apartheid promises), unequal access to sources of power, and the relationship of citizens to state institutions of governance and law enforcement, to name but a few.

1.1.4 Research problem

Research gaps in both international and South African journalism literature have given rise to this study. In South Africa’s post-apartheid democracy, media scholars call for alternative normative frameworks for journalistic practice, beyond the currently dominant form of monitorial journalism in the liberal mould of mature democracies (De Beer et al., 2016; Wasserman et al., 2018). The potential of constructive journalism to begin to address this need has not been empirically researched in the country’s media. In journalism literature internationally, a need is identified for further development of the empirical foundation of constructive journalism (Bro, 2018; Mast et al., 2018; McIntyre & Gyldensted, 2018), especially in developing democracies outside the Global North, where research on constructive journalism is limited (Rotmeijer, 2019).

Thus, various questions arise: Which constructive journalism principles are present in South African online news reporting currently? What would the perceptions and attitudes of South African journalists be about the possibilities and challenges of constructive journalism in the post-apartheid media context, where a liberal style of monitorial journalism dominates, but is contested? What would the potential be of constructive journalism – with its aim of producing more inclusive, comprehensive reporting on reality and exploring future possibilities and our way to get there (Hermans & Gyldensted, 2019) – to begin to address some of the challenges monitorial journalism faces? What would the potential of constructive journalism be specifically in online news, where traditional journalism norms and roles are challenged most (Hermida, 2016, p. 90; Owen, 2016, p. 26)? And in which ways could an exploration of constructive journalism’s potential in South African online news add to the literature about of the form’s applicability in developing contexts?

The research problem is as follows: It is unknown which constructive journalism principles manifest in South African digital news reporting, and what journalists’ and editors’ perceptions and attitudes are towards constructive journalism in the context of South African online news. The dominant liberal monitorial (watchdog) reporting style in South Africa is accused of foregrounding violence, disregarding the voices of the disenfranchised, and lacking analysis of causes, contexts and resources available to address social problems (Malila, 2019; Wasserman & Garman, 2014). Scholars call for more nuanced journalism forms beyond the current presentation of watchdog journalism (De Beer et al., 2016). Constructive journalism offers guidelines on how to take monitorial journalism further, through critical investigation of possible solutions to improve social problems, through the inclusion of diverse voices, and through rigorous contextualising of news. It is important to explore in which

ways, if any, this emerging framework could complement the current style of monitorial journalism. And it is important to contribute to knowledge about the applicability of constructive journalism in developing democracies, like South Africa, through this exploration.

1.2 STATEMENT OF PURPOSE AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The purposes of this study are to explore the manifestation of constructive journalism in South African online news reporting, and to establish journalists' and editors' attitudes towards the framework in digital news.

To pursue these aims, the following questions were addressed in an empirical research component:

RQ1: Which constructive journalism principles are present in digital news reporting on evictions during the first five months of the Covid-19 lockdown period?

RQ2: What are the perceptions and attitudes of editors and journalists towards constructive journalism in online news?

1.3 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

To consider the research questions in this study, a qualitative research design was followed and two methodologies used for two sets of data. Qualitative content analysis – defined as a research method that uses a set of procedures to make valid inferences from text (Weber, 1990, p. 9) – was used as methodology for dataset 1 and qualitative interview analysis for dataset 2. The research was conducted in a natural setting and it aimed to understand social action in terms of its specific context (Babbie & Mouton, 2015, p. 309), in this case the context of digital news reporting in South Africa.

To explore the perspectives of South African journalists and editors towards constructive journalism in online news, a two-step process was required. Owing to scant acknowledged practices of constructive journalism in South African news reporting, it was deemed necessary to first get an indication of the manifestation of constructive reporting approaches in a sample of news articles through a thematic content analysis. Then journalists and editors – involved in the creation and editorial decisions of such articles – were interviewed to gauge their views on these approaches and qualitative interview analysis applied to interview transcripts. In this single-researcher study, the scope of empirical focus was narrowed down to digital news.

To address RQ1, exploring which constructive reporting approaches were present in eviction reportage during the first five months of the country's Covid-19 lockdown period, a sample of articles from three digital news platforms (News 24, GroundUp and Daily Maverick) was examined through thematic content analysis (Kondracki, Wellman & Amundson, 2002; Miles, Huberman & Saldaña 2020). A typology of constructive journalism principles was deducted from the literature and operationalised as initial codes for the thematic content analysis. The unit of analysis was each article in a purposive sample.

Addressing the second research question, semi-structured interviews were conducted with journalists and editors who were involved in the creation and editorial approach of the selected articles. The interviews were aimed at gaining insight into the journalists' and editors' perceptions and attitudes towards constructive journalism. The interviews were semi-structured around a series of questions and prompt points designed to ensure that all participants cover the same material. A transcription of each interview was the unit of analysis for the qualitative thematic analysis.

1.3.1 Sampling

Purposive sampling was used, adhering to Babbie and Mouton's (2015) recommendation to use one's own judgement of what and who would suit the research aim best. The data deemed necessary to fulfil the research purpose were textual data from online news articles and transcribed interview responses from media practitioners involved in the creation of articles and editorial decisions related to these. The criteria for the choice of media outlets producing digital news reports were aimed at sources that would produce rich data, staying in line with qualitative research convention (Babbie & Mouton, 2015). News reports from News24, Daily Maverick and GroundUp, outlets that differ in approach, were identified as most suitable for the content analysis. The aim was not to give a full representation of the field of digital news reporting, but rather to choose a sample that would yield potentially rich data. It was preferable that the sample included both longer and shorter forms of news reports in the overall news cycle, since such variation allowed inferences to be made about forms of reporting lending itself more/less to constructive journalism approaches.

The three selected outlets represent a range of points on the spectrum of reporting styles and editorial approaches. News24 (which forms part of Media24, a subsidiary of the listed company Naspers) is the country's largest online news platform and is the most trusted, according to the Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2020 (Newman et al., 2020). According to the editor of News24, the outlet built credibility on the back of sustained investment in breaking news (Basson, 2020). News24's general news feed mixes political, lifestyle, sports and other news with advertising and partner content. Daily Maverick has distinguished itself as an independently owned, private digital news company with no affiliation to any other media group, mainly funded through donor funding, advertising and voluntary contributions by readers ('Maverick Insider: FAQ', 2022). It emphasises its relationship of trust and engagement with readers and states that its purpose is to concentrate on quality, accuracy and the building of an environment of confidence through good journalism. It has a grant-funded investigative unit (Scorpio) and distances itself from commercial online practices to lure readers/users, such as the use of algorithms to determine news content ('Maverick Insider: FAQ', 2022). GroundUp is an independent non-profit company, making community-centred articles available to news publications for republication. GroundUp's stated aim is for its stories to make a difference, to report news that is in the public interest and to place an emphasis on the human rights of vulnerable communities ('About GroundUp', 2022).

In selecting a suitable topic for the sample of articles for the study, it was important to identify a theme that highlighted an important societal problem in South Africa, and a theme that would typically cause polarisation and strong or violent reaction. The reasoning is that the dominant form of watchdog reporting stands accused of foregrounding violence and conflict and deepening polarisation in the coverage of divisive topics. A sample chosen from such a theme could enable exploration of constructive journalism's potential to facilitate productive thinking towards overcoming those divisions, and its potential to examine both problem and possible solutions critically. Further criteria were recency and frequency of reporting on the theme, and that the topic affected most sectors of society, cutting through fault lines of race, gender, age, income and education level. The subject of evictions encapsulates some of the most important themes of post-apartheid society: issues of social and structural inequality, inequality of access to power and resources, the marginalisation of the voices of the poor and the relationship between citizens and the state institutions of governance and law enforcement. During South Africa's first strict Covid-19 lockdown period, the topic of evictions flared up as a highly contentious issue across all media platforms.

Initial searches, using the search engines of the three news platforms, revealed 153 articles about evictions from 26 March 2020 to 31 August 2020. These articles were scrutinised and detailed criteria

for inclusion in or exclusion from the sample were developed and motivated, until a final number of 134 articles for the sample was decided upon.

The sample of interview candidates was selected according to the breadth and frequency of their involvement in the creation of the articles (journalists) and the editorial approach of the news organisations in the sample (editors) and their depth of experience in the online news environment. A table is provided listing the titles and further details of each interview candidate (Appendix 1).

1.3.2 Data analysis

Thematic content analysis (Kondracki et al., 2002; Miles et al., 2020) was employed as the main method to analyse the articles in the first sample to address RQ1. To address RQ2 (and parts of RQ1) qualitative interview analysis was used to analyse the responses of media practitioners.

The flexibility of thematic content analysis, typically combining data-driven and concept-driven categories into themes (Kondracki et al, 2002; Schreier, 2014), suited this study. Initial themes may simply emerge inductively from the data, or may have been identified a priori (Given, 2008). For analysis of the articles, a typology of four constructive journalism principles, gleaned from literature, were operationalised as initial codes. This initial a priori coding frame was developed further through an inductive and iterative process. The researcher allowed the data to sink in over time, as recommended by Given (2008), allowing layers of meaning to emerge and refining themes, sub-themes and categories, until the framework was considered stable.

To analyse the responses of journalists and editors interviewed in the second sample (addressing mainly RQ2), qualitative interview analysis was employed, allowing themes to emerge inductively as the researcher immersed herself in the transcripts. Because of the moderate amount of interview data, the researcher chose to work with print-outs of transcripts and of themes and sub-themes tables in the first and last stages of analysis, since it enabled a closer feel to the material. After initial handwritten notes on the hard copies of transcripts (resulting from repeated readings of each transcript), the software tool QSR NVivo was used during coding.

QSR NVivo (licenced to UCT) was used comprehensively in the first content analysis because of its suitability for coding and analysing huge data sets of textual data. The functionalities of the programme assist in streamlining the organisation and reduction of data.

1.4 ASSUMPTIONS

This study was based on the assumption that positioning constructive journalism within the post-apartheid media context could shed light on the applicability of the emerging framework in a complex developing democracy such as South Africa's, where the role of the media in relation to the government, the public and democracy itself remains contested. Furthermore, it was believed that an exploration of more recent concepts arising in South African media theory, such as the ethics of listening and care, could possibly enhance understanding of how the principles of constructive journalism could be applied. It was foreseen that the topic of evictions, with its associations of high emotion, would offer a suitable terrain to explore the absence or presence of constructive journalism principles in reporting style. Lastly, it was anticipated that the perceptions of journalists and editors active in the field would offer relevant insights about the possibilities and challenges of constructive journalism in digital news.

1.5 RATIONALE AND SIGNIFICANCE

The rationale for this study emerges from overlapping needs identified in South African and global media research. In the contested space around the role of the media and journalists in South Africa's post-apartheid society, there have been calls for more nuanced reporting approaches than the current form of liberal monitorial (watchdog) journalism based on the mature democracies of the West that dominates mainstream news. While development journalism and the ethics of listening and care have been explored as alternatives to narrow or aggressive expression of liberalist watchdog journalism, the potential of the emerging form of constructive journalism have not been researched in South Africa in this regard. At the same time, international media theorists have identified a need for enhancement of constructive journalism's empirical foundation, especially with regards to its applicability in developing democracies outside the Global North. Hence, exploring journalists' perceptions about the possibilities and challenges of constructive journalism in online news – based on the findings of a content analysis of the manifestation of constructive journalism principles in a sample of online news articles and the perceptions of journalists and editors about the potential of the form in online news – can begin to address the overlapping research gaps identified in South African and global media theory.

New insights emerged from the positioning of constructive journalism in relation to watchdog journalism, development journalism, the ethics of listening and care, and related ideas that have steered post-apartheid media debates to date. The insights of journalists and editors about the possibilities and challenges of constructive journalism in South African online news enriched the understanding of constructive journalism's applicability in environments outside mature Western democracies. As a new addition to South African and African normative and empirical journalism debates, this study shows that constructive journalism offers principles for a more inclusive, yet rigorous, addition to the current form of monitorial (watchdog) journalism practised in South Africa's digital news media. It suggests new options for processes and production of news that could offset some of the harmful impacts of the pervasive negative bias in news on readers.

1.6 WORKING DEFINITIONS

1.6.1 Constructive journalism

Constructive journalism is an umbrella term for journalistic approaches that go further than exposing and describing serious societal problems, by including – in the overall news cycle – critical, investigative and factual coverage of developments and progress, and constructive responses to challenges (Bro & Gyldensted, 2021; Van Antwerpen, Turnbull & Searston, 2022; 'What is constructive journalism?', 2022).

1.6.2 Solutions journalism

An evidence-based reporting approach that covers credible responses to social problems ('What is solutions journalism?', 2022), solutions journalism is considered a branch of the broader umbrella of constructive journalism (McIntyre & Gyldensted, 2017).

1.6.3 Monitorial journalism

The premise of monitorial/watchdog journalism is that the press serves as an independent counterweight to powerful interests, informing the public of important issues and holding power to account by asking probing, penetrating questions at every level (Nieman Foundation, 2010; Palmer, Toff & Nielsen, 2020).

1.7 OUTLINE

In **CHAPTER 1**, introducing this study, the research gap surrounding constructive journalism in international and South African context was described against the backdrop of journalism as an industry under strain. A need was established for empirical studies on more nuanced forms of journalism than the current liberal style of watchdog journalism (based on mature northern democracies of the West) that dominates mainstream news. The applicability of constructive journalism has not yet been researched in this regard. The choice of online news as empirical focus was motivated. After providing some background on key issues of contention in the post-apartheid media environment, an outline of the research methods was provided. The research purpose and problem were described, and research questions were formulated to address the specific problem.

CHAPTER 2 critically discusses extant literature on constructive journalism, monitorial journalism in the South African context, development journalism and other contentious themes of the post-apartheid media debates. Underlying theories of social responsibility and social accountability, post-colonial theory, and the ethics of listening and care are discussed in relation to their positioning vis-à-vis constructive journalism. The theoretical underpinning of constructive journalism is drawn from media studies, psychology, cognitive linguistics and other disciplines. The chapter includes discussion of extant constructive journalism literature and concludes with a conceptual framework of constructive journalism principles enhanced by their reading within the South African media context. This framework informs the empirical part of the study.

CHAPTER 3 gives an overview of the research design and methodologies used, describing the relevance of the research focus and the rationale for choosing a qualitative research design. It discusses the decision to obtain and analyse two datasets in response to the research questions: thematic content analysis as methodology for the first dataset (a sample of news articles from three outlets) and qualitative interview analysis as the methodology for the second dataset (transcribed interviews with a sample of journalists and editors involved in the creation of articles and editorial decisions regarding these). The chapter gives an overview of sampling strategy, data collection and application of the two analytical methods used to arrive at a consecutive, but integrated picture of findings, expressed in themes. Chapter 3 concludes by addressing issues of quality assurance and ethical considerations.

CHAPTER 4 describes and discusses the findings of the analysis of the two datasets: the context analysis of a sample of online news articles and the qualitative analysis of transcripts of interviews with journalists and editors. Findings emerging from the content analysis of articles are expressed in Themes 1–4. Findings emerging from the qualitative analysis of interviews are described in Themes 5–11. Throughout the chapter, analysis draws on insights from the study's literature review.

CHAPTER 5 concludes the study. This chapter draws conclusions in relation to the original research aim, giving a summary of the findings of the two research questions and drawing on insights from the study's literature review where pertinent. It describes the contributions to the industry and to academic discourse on constructive journalism and South African media studies. Limitations and suggestions for future research are discussed, before a final conclusion.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The purposes of this study are to explore the manifestation of constructive journalism in South African online news reporting, and to establish the perceptions and attitudes of journalists and editors towards constructive journalism in digital news. To carry out the research, a critical review of current literature was completed.

The defining principles, underlying theories and journalistic challenges of constructive journalism (and monitorial journalism) were examined from a theoretical and an applied, contextual perspective in media theory internationally and in South Africa. Monitorial (watchdog) journalism, with its long and established history in journalism scholarship, was used as analytical starting point to gain insight into contextual factors impacting the South Africa's digital news environment.

The delimiting time frame employed to examine global scholarship inspired by constructive journalism was 2014 to the present, which marks the approximate start of constructive journalism as a movement in the Global North. The historical, socio-political and cultural complexity of the South African online news context called for scrutiny of local media theory and societal debate from the beginning of the post-apartheid era: 1994 to the present.

A two-step empirical process was required to address the two research questions. As a reminder, the questions discussed in Chapter 1, are:

RQ1: Which constructive journalism principles are present in digital news reporting on evictions during the first five months of the Covid-19 lockdown period?

RQ2: What are the perceptions and attitudes of editors and journalists towards constructive journalism in online news?

The literature review was organised according to key constructs in these questions, namely 'contextual factors impacting the South African online news' and 'constructive journalism principles'. To address RQ1, a thorough understanding of both constructive and monitorial journalism principles was a prerequisite, due to the central role of monitorial journalism in the South African media context. The concept of 'journalism principles' in this study is understood as comprising the practical application and motivating belief of journalism guidelines, similar to Christian et al.'s (2009, p. 119) interpretation of journalism roles. Insights into the contextual factors impacting South African online news are necessary to address both RQ1 and RQ2.

The review starts with an overview of the theoretical assumptions, journalistic principles (2.2.1), practical implications and some of the challenges associated with monitorial (watchdog) journalism from an international perspective (2.2.2). This overview sets the scene giving rise to the emergence of constructive journalism.

The South African perspective of monitorial journalism's practical implications and challenges is the starting position of an analysis of structural, socio-economic, historical and political factors impacting South Africa's digital news context in the second part of the review (2.3). Focal points, drawn from post-apartheid media theory and debates, include development journalism, post-colonial theory and the more recent ethics of listening and care, all of which highlight demands on the role of the media that are specific to the country's position as a developing democracy. Discussion extends to the

consideration of factors arising from digital news research internationally, which is viewed as relevant to South Africa's online news context.

The third part of the review (2.4) sheds light on constructive journalism's distinguishing features, drawing on scholarship of the form's conceptualisation and development (2.4.1), and a brief overview of the delineation in the literature of constructive journalism's similarities with and differences from preceding public-focused forms of journalism (2.4.2). A positioning of constructive journalism vis-à-vis the emerging form of engaged journalism adds a new component to the literature. This is followed by a discussion of constructive journalism's theoretical underpinning (2.4.3), criticism and responses from literature (2.4.4) and an overview of existing research (2.4.5). The section culminates in a working definition of constructive journalism for this study and a typology of principles for practice, based on a synthesis of preceding work (2.4.6). This typology lays the foundation for empirical work to address research questions.

This introduction gave an outline of the structure of the literature review and conceptual framework of the study. In the first section, theoretical underpinning, principles and challenges of monitorial journalism principles are deliberated.

2.2 MONITORIAL (WATCHDOG) JOURNALISM: THEORY, JOURNALISTIC PRINCIPLES AND CHALLENGES

2.2.1 Theoretical foundation

In their critique and development of Siebert, Peterson and Schramm's (1956) classic normative theories of the press, Christians et al. (2009) describe four core normative roles fulfilled by journalism, namely a monitorial, a facilitative, a radical, and a collaborative role. 'Role' in this sense is understood as comprising the tasks that journalists carry out, and the value and importance attached to them (Christians et al., 2009, p. 119). The monitorial (watchdog) role is rooted in classical liberal theories about the relationship between state and press (Siebert et al., 1956); it refers to the media as Fourth Estate: a neutral and objective actor watching the powers that be and holding them accountable (Christians et al., 2009, p. 128; Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2014, p. 171).

The role of watchdog has become an important journalism norm worldwide and is claimed by many journalists as central to their professional identity (Palmer et al., 2020, p. 1974). In global media theory it is seen as an essential part of journalism's primary purpose of "providing citizens with the information they need to be free and self-governing" (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2014, p. 17). Authors use 'investigative journalism' as an alternative to monitorial or watchdog journalism, often emphasising that journalists must draw attention to social problems and hold elected leaders and others in authority answerable to the people they serve (Walth et al., 2019, p. 178). Christians et al. (2009, p. 128) argue that it's not only the journalism industry itself, but also audiences, various clients and their sources, who see the role of watchdog as central to what journalists should be doing. In this way, monitorial journalism can be deemed a starting point, or canvas, from which other forms of journalism (including constructive journalism) can be explored.

In the Global North, society has profited from the main tenets of monitorial journalism in many ways, notably when the press has acted as a proxy for the public – asking penetrating questions at all levels – as recommended by the Nieman Foundation (2010). Internationally, such journalism has strengthened electoral accountability during political campaigns, legal accountability through tracking the application of the laws that govern society, and managerial accountability through scrutiny of the actions of corporations (Norris, 2014, p. 527).

However, watchdog journalism's standing as credible Fourth Estate is increasingly uncertain in contemporary journalism. Journalists' ability to stay true to the demands of the strictures of the monitorial role is weakened by an array of challenges, both normative and operational, challenges that are interlinked with the broader network of trials faced by contemporary journalism in general (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2014, p. 189).

2.2.2 Practical application: Challenges and criticism

Media literature reveals several themes in criticism of monitorial journalism, including concern about the impact of its apparent negative bias (McIntyre & Lough, 2019); the form's perceived contribution to the loss of audiences, revenue and public trust (Bennett, 2016); its contribution to trends of news avoidance (Palmer et al., 2020); a lack of credibility in the true independence of some practitioners (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2014); and questions about the suitability of Western-liberal watchdog journalism in developing societies (Hanusch & Uppal, 2015).

On the global front, the dominance of the media's watchdog role in news selection and presentation, and the resulting bias towards negative news (Harcup & O'Neill, 2017, p. 1482), has been pinpointed as contributing to the loss of revenue and audiences experienced by many mainstream news platforms (Bennett, 2016). Constructive journalism scholars argue that the abundance of negative and conflict-driven news resulting from watchdog-style journalism in our 24/7 news world has also contributed to decreasing levels of public trust (McIntyre & Lough, 2019). These scholars argue for a broadening of the interpretation of watchdog journalism, to allow for a more complete view of reality than what is conventionally created through conflict-focused monitorial reporting (Hermans & Gyldensted, 2019).

In the hyperconnected world brought about by large-scale digitisation of communication, news itself struggles to generate revenue, causing the shrinking of newsrooms and of resources available for the in-depth work investigative reporting requires (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2014, p. 189). Concurrently, opportunities created by digital communications have encouraged the creation of large financial combines on national and international level, where journalism plays a small part in an overall financial portfolio (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2014). The chase for new revenue models in these corporate conglomerates has led to news companies acting in ways that suggest they no longer believe in watchdog principles (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2014, pp. 3, 171). Accordingly, many journalists may profess to believe in the watchdog ideal of independence, but in reality practice what Kovach and Rosenstiel (2014, p. 171) call "faux watchdogism", pandering to the interests of their publishers, rather than really serving the public.

There is deep concern among media scholars about the decline of the watchdog function due to economic pressures on news organisations, but studies indicate that not all sections of the broader public necessarily share these sentiments (Palmer et al., 2020, p. 1975). While research shows that journalists across countries continue to believe in watchdog principles (even if the levels of endorsement differ) (Hanitzsch et al., 2011), some audience studies show that the public disapprove of overtly negative and aggressive watchdog tactics (Costera Meijer & Bijleveld, 2016), while others show that news avoiders see the watchdog ideal as irrelevant at best, and at worst, "actively complicit with a distant and self-serving political and economic establishment" (Palmer et al., 2020, p. 1974). Palmer et al. (2020) argue that watchdog-sceptical attitudes indicate a weakness in the news media's relationship to the public. The Reuters Digital News Report 2020 confirms this trend: 32% of respondents from over 30 countries said they actively avoid the news. Nearly 60% of these said it was because it had a negative effect on their mood; others described feeling powerless to change events (Newman et al., 2020).

While the reasons for increasing trends of disengagement from news cannot be reduced to a single factor, the loss of public trust in the role of journalism and journalists in society is seen as one of the biggest threats to the profession (Bennett, 2016; Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2014). Watchdog journalism's ability to be an effective trigger of accountability depends on audiences trusting news organisations' motives and journalists' ability to remain independent (Palmer et al., 2020).

In developing societies outside the Global North, contested understandings of journalistic independence have been a key theme in discourses about the tensions between development journalism vs Western approaches to journalists' monitorial role (Hanusch & Uppal, 2015; Nyamnjoh, 2005; Wasserman, 2006). Development journalism is understood to call on journalists to serve as agents of social change and support government development goals in the societies they serve (Hanusch & Uppal, 2015; Kalyango et al., 2017). In societies marred by historical political turbulence, such as Indonesia (Pintak & Setiyono, 2010), Pakistan (Pintak & Nazir, 2013), Egypt (Ramaprasad & Hamdy, 2006) and Tanzania (Ramaprasad, 2001), there is considerable evidence of journalists supporting development journalism goals, albeit with regional differences (Hanusch & Uppal, 2015, p. 560). However, these journalists also recognise the need to monitor that those in power adhere to the development process and do not abuse development journalism goals for their own purposes (Hanusch & Uppal, 2015). The South African context shows a similar mix between development journalism and Western watchdog ideals embraced by journalists (discussed in 2.3.2).

Staying with monitorial journalism as analytical departure point, the structural, historical, political and socio-economic factors impacting the South African online news environment – relevant in the addressing of both research questions – are discussed next.

2.3 CONTEXTUAL FACTORS INFLUENCING SOUTH AFRICAN ONLINE NEWS

To fulfil the research purpose of exploring the manifestation of constructive journalism in South African online news reporting, and perceptions and attitudes of journalists and editors towards constructive journalism in online news, prominent features of the post-apartheid media environment are extracted from the literature. The interplay of contextual factors is analysed from a normative and empirical perspective.

South African journalists operate in an emerging democracy that is complex, diverse and fractured, an environment in which media regulations, ownership, norms and practices continue to be contested and developed as an integral part of transformation (Wasserman, 2010, p. 249). The issues revealed through these debates are multifaceted and interlinked. Contextual factors most relevant to the contemporary digital news environment (in relation to the study's purposes) are loosely grouped under three themes: economic and structural factors (2.3.1), normative factors (2.3.2), and factors arising from an increased focus on citizens' lived experiences.

2.3.1 Economic and structural factors

The consequences of the large-scale digitisation of communication for global media, such as loss of revenue, shrinking newsrooms and dwindling print media, are also evident (with some exceptions) in the South African media context (Wasserman, 2018, p. 46). The Covid-19 pandemic brought further print media cuts and encouraged the growth of digital news platforms (Vollgraaff, 2020). The country's news organisations have embraced digital publishing, with most newspapers having online versions and some publications existing exclusively online (Wasserman, 2020, p. 455). In 2020, 90% of the urban population used online platforms, including social media (Newman et al., 2020, p. 160).

Nevertheless, despite the growth in online news platforms and consumption, the monetisation of online news models remains a challenge – just one of a myriad of challenges identified in the Satchwell Report (Harber, 2021), the 329-page report released by a commission of inquiry under retired judge Kathy Satchwell into ethical challenges facing South African journalism. This report, based on input from 167 individuals and the study of more than 100 documents, paints the most recent picture of an industry beset by interlinked financial, procedural, regulatory and value-based problems (Harber, 2021). Overall, a chain effect is described, set in motion by revenue challenges created by income-gobbling FANGs (Facebook, Amazon, Netflix, Google): in an environment of enormous pressure to break stories ever faster amidst competing mis- and disinformation narratives fuelled by social media, the resources for professional development and training and for effective exercise of editorial and sub-editing checks and balances continue to dwindle (Harber, 2021). In Tolsi's (2020) view, the FANG chain effect and the decimation of human and financial resources over two decades have led to traditional investigative journalism being replaced by "click-bait pile-ons" and the detachment of journalists from real communities.

In the transition from the apartheid state to democracy, the media became a site and instrument of transformation (Steenveld, 2004, p. 94). In 1997, the newly-formed South African Editor's forum held a workshop to flesh out a new paradigm for journalism in the transitioning country (Thloloe, 1997). Recommendations included empowerment of African voices and storytelling, closer connection to the country's diverse audiences and democratisation of media ownership. In the years that followed major structural shifts in media ownership, editorial staffing and the regulatory environment were aimed at redressing apartheid legacies of unequal access to media and information, reducing white elitist interests and influence, and enabling a self-regulation system governed by ethical codes (Wasserman, 2010, p. 241). Yet, despite the efforts to democratise access to the media's political-economic power, the media's role remains circumscribed by the powerful economic interests of conglomerates (Wasserman, 2020). Tolsi (2020, p. 169) states that a lack of transformation means that the "concentrated and toxic nature of ownership in South African media" continues to thrive "without concern for journalism ethics or the consequence of managements' intrusion into the newsroom". The Satchwell report identifies owners' interference in editorial decisions and the abandoning of self-regulatory systems as posing a significant threat to media independence (Harber, 2021).

Accordingly, the interlinked chain of problems caused by structural and financial pressures on news should be considered significant and continuing influencing factors in the South African online news environment. In sum, they are:

- the shrinking and juniorisation of newsrooms
- pressure to produce news at great speed to stay competitive
- lack of training, time and financial resources for in-depth investigative reporting.

Yet, the significant economic and structural pressures are only some of the factors that continue to impact the post-apartheid online media environment. In the transitional context of South Africa's emerging democracy, media debates often reflect wider concerns about the challenges of the democratic process, citizenship, socio-economic conditions and media responsibilities (Wasserman, 2018; Wasserman, 2020, p. 453). The contestations reveal further impacting factors to the digital news environment.

2.3.2 Normative factors

Following years of repression under apartheid, journalists were keen to take full advantage of constitutional guarantees of media independence post-1994, and embraced their role as monitors of

power with vigour (Wasserman, 2010). However, it soon became apparent that the dominant liberal style of watchdog journalism, modelled on the practices of mature democracies, would lead to ongoing and heated debates between media and state.

From a conceptual perspective, differences are seen as arising from two opposing positions about the meaning of media freedom and responsibility (Steenveld, 2004, p. 92). One position is linked to discourses informed by Western libertarian ideas loyal to Siebert et al.'s (1956) "four theories of the press", emphasising the media's freedom from governmental intervention and the individual's right to information as cornerstones of watchdog journalism (Steenveld, 2004, p. 92; Wasserman, 2006, p. 76). The second position is linked to discourses focused on communitarian interests, African cultural values and the media's obligations in terms of redress and transformation of society's inequalities (Steenveld, 2004, p. 92; Wasserman, 2006, pp. 76, 82).

From a normative perspective, some of the key factors influencing reporting in the South African digital news context are the vital role of watchdog journalism in the emerging democracy; criticism of mainstream media as anti-government; threats to media freedom; perceptions of mainstream news as unrepresentative of different publics and their interests; appeals for a journalism reflecting African culture and values; assessments of watchdog and development journalism as compatible; and criticism of watchdog journalism as being event-driven, sensationalist and foregrounding conflict and violence.

The vital role of watchdog journalism in the emerging democracy

On the one hand, the success and importance of watchdog journalism to monitor and hold those in power to account since the arrival of democracy has been widely acknowledged. In 2010, Reporters without Borders (2010, in Norris 2014) ranked South Africa 38th out of 178 nations worldwide in terms of press freedom. Norris (2014, p. 538) highlighted South Africa as a society with "above average" press freedom, where a plurality of media outlets and the flourishing independence of journalists generate the transparency which encourages clean government. Norris based this argument on South Africa's high score in econometric cross-national analyses conducted in 2010, showing a correlation between press freedom and control of corruption.

On the other hand, while the benefits of journalism's monitorial role in post-apartheid society are not disputed, the efforts of vigilant watchdog journalists did not result in "clean government", as envisioned by Norris (2014, p. 538). Since the start of the Zuma years in 2008, investigative journalism has become an increasingly critical mechanism to expose corruption: reports on "state capture", undermining of the Constitution, exploitation and bribery, and corporate malfeasance have dominated headlines in the third decade of democracy (Harber, 2020; Wasserman, 2020, p. 463).

A belief in the necessity and proven value of watchdog journalism to expose corruption and abuse of power can thus be understood as a prominent factor impacting the country's online news context. Nevertheless, since 1994, in a search for normative frameworks responding in a more nuanced way to the post-apartheid media context, scholars have proposed several alternative approaches. Development journalism, post-colonial theory, and the ethics of listening and care gained prominence at different times in the post-apartheid era, highlighting demands on the role of the media that are specific to the country's position as developing democracy. These alternative frameworks give helpful perspectives on key challenges of the dominance of unmitigated liberal watchdog journalism in post-apartheid South Africa.

Criticism of mainstream media as anti-government

True to the media patterns revealed in other emerging democracies with histories of strife (Hanusch & Uppal, 2015), the ideas of development journalism came under the spotlight in South Africa in the first decade post democratisation. Conflicting viewpoints about whether the media should play a critical 'watchdog' role or be more supportive of the new government's development goals (as prescribed in development journalism [Kalyango et al., 2017]) revealed the lack of consensus about the meaning of media freedom and responsibility (Wasserman & De Beer, 2009).

Although there was wide recognition that press freedom was linked to certain responsibilities for the media, the idea that this meant a kind of self-censorship, or that 'responsibility' could become a smokescreen for government pressure on journalists to toe the line, led to some resistance from the industry and opposition politicians (Wasserman, 2010, pp. 246, 247). At the same time, voices from government and civil society urged the media to fulfil their responsibilities as democratic institutions towards nation-building (Wasserman, 2010).

Political leaders accused the media of overly negative and 'irresponsible' reporting, sabotaging the government's goals 'in the national interest' (Fourie, 2002, p. 18; Wasserman, 2006, p. 79). The media countered by emphasising their fidelity to serving the 'public interest' (Wasserman, 2006, p. 79). Among many voices in the industry, the Media Institute of South Africa stated that government-defined 'national interest' was too restrictive in relation to news gathering and could have political connotations. They argued that the 'public interest' provided a wider and sounder base which might override 'national interest' (Duncan, 2003, p. 6).

The underlying tensions of the public interest vs national interest debate have continued to impact journalism over three decades. An important feature is the criticism that mainstream media's critical, government-focused watchdog stance constitutes an 'alternative power centre' to the government (Blankson 2007, p. 20). Scholars argue that, while necessary, the merciless criticising of government actions has led to the alienation of many black South Africans, who see this watchdog role as constituting a political opposition (Garman & Malila, 2017, p. 14).

Threats to media freedom

The controversial aspects of development journalism – such as threats to freedom of expression, self-censorship and pressure on journalists to help the government achieve its goals – remain relevant in the contemporary news context. In fact, a growing intolerance for media criticism among the political elite and an increase in political interference and attempts to capture the news agenda for political gain have raised renewed concerns about the free flow of information in the public sphere (Wasserman, 2020, p. 455). In recent years, issues such as the passing of the so-called Secrecy Bill and continued criticism of the media's self-regulatory system stand out as unresolved threats to media freedom (Wasserman, 2020).

Combined with the aforementioned unease about owner-driven commercial interference in newsrooms, concerns about political threats to media freedom thus remain a significant feature of the media environment. The lack of training and resources for in-depth investigative journalism is seen as particularly unfortunate, since the hard-won freedom is squandered for short-term commercial benefit (Wasserman, 2010, p. 245).

The concept 'public interest' opened important and recurring points of contention in debates about the media's freedom and responsibilities in the divided and unequal post-apartheid South African

society. Which 'public' does the media represent? Whose interests? Who can participate in the public sphere?

Perceptions of mainstream news as unrepresentative of different publics and their interests

In 2006, senior editor Mathatha Tsedu highlighted that the 'public' whose interests the media claimed to represent was only that part of society who had access to the media and knew how to articulate their views (Wasserman, 2006, p. 79). This criticism persists to this day: the interests of the majority of poor black citizens are excluded by a mainstream news agenda which continues to serve the sectional interests of a largely white elite, who are attractive to advertisers (Friedman, 2011; Wasserman, 2020, p. 453).

Shifts in the post-apartheid regulatory media environment were intended to balance the commercial media sector's perspective of society through public and community media platforms (Wasserman, 2020, p. 453). Yet, these efforts to allow a broader range of publics and their interests to be served by the media have been hampered by political interference and mismanagement (in the case of the public broadcaster, the SABC), and funding problems and organisational inefficiencies (in the case of community media) (Wasserman, 2018, p. 169). In the range of audiences feeling excluded from main media's agenda, the youth stand out (Garman & Malila, 2017; Malila et al., 2013). Young people follow the news, but they report that it lacks relevance to their daily lives and does not fulfil their information needs (Malila et al., 2013, p. 427).

There have been several attempts to motivate greater inclusion of voices in the public sphere through alternative conceptions of audience interests and representation. Rodny-Gumede argues that the interests and publics excluded from the dominant news agenda should be determined through a post-colonial lens (Rodny-Gumede, 2015a). This view acknowledges the role of historical, political, cultural and socio-economic legacies of the post-colony and argues that the media should provide these audiences – discounted on the grounds of race, ethnicity and socio-economic inequality – access to the public sphere (Rodny-Gumede, 2017, p. 13). Rodny-Gumede states that such an understanding of the media's social responsibility would counter the influence of the Western-liberal interpretation of social responsibility (emanating from the 1947 Hutchins Commission on freedom of the Press in the US) on journalistic practices in the post-colonial, post-apartheid context (Rodny-Gumede, 2017, p. 13).

Appeals for a journalism reflecting African realities and cultural values

Much of the criticism of the Western-liberal media ethic is that its focus on individual rights limits the press's ability to fulfil its responsibilities towards redressing past imbalances (Wasserman, 2006, p. 82). An alternate ethic of social responsibility, based on the community consciousness of African cultural values, has often been proposed as more applicable to South Africa (Wasserman, 2006, p. 82; Wasserman, 2021, p. 108).

Drawing on the communitarian philosophy of *ubuntu*, scholars suggested a journalism that would encompass human dignity and respect, aid nation-building, represent the will of communities, and see journalists as active participants in their communities, rather than detached observers (Blankenberg, 1999; Chasi & Gumede, 2016; Fourie, 2008). There are however, warnings that the notion of *ubuntu* is too abstract to employ as journalistic framework, and that 'community' is difficult to define in the contemporary media context (Rodny-Gumede, 2015a, p. 123). Cultural essentialism, the stifling of free speech, and exclusions based on group were flagged as further potential problems of the indigenisation of media ethics (Wasserman, 2021, p. 124).

Yet, tensions between normative conceptions of media freedom and responsibility have not remained absolute in the decades since democratisation. Through empirical studies questioning media professionals about local interpretations and applications of normative principles, frameworks that were previously thought to be diametrically opposed are shown to be more compatible in practice than in theory (De Beer et al., 2016; Wasserman, 2021, p. 103).

Assessments of watchdog and development journalism as compatible

De Beer et al.'s (2016) study challenges the traditional roles described by developmental and watchdog media theory and the perception that journalists cannot be development and watchdog journalists at the same time. When questioned about the importance of the media's developmental vs watchdog role in the country's developing democracy, a broad spectrum of journalists and editors indicated that they did not see these two roles as binary opposites (De Beer et al., 2016, p. 35). In recognition of the social accountability role of the media, participants pointed to the importance of supporting national development by ensuring people know as much as possible about development projects, including critical examination of the government's execution of the task at hand (De Beer et al., 2016, p. 48).

The authors envisioned that a more nuanced normative journalism model in the context of contemporary South Africa – as expressed by the views of study participants – still had to be developed (De Beer et al., 2016, p. 49).

Nonetheless, in practice, ingrained news processes and the demands of the 24/7 news cycle continue to result in mainstream representation of events from a liberal – often elitist – watchdog perspective (Wasserman et al., 2018).

Criticism of watchdog journalism as being event-driven, sensationalist and foregrounding conflict and violence

Wasserman observes pre-existing divisions and tensions often increase the likelihood for violence in transitions to democracy (Wasserman, 2021). In post-apartheid South Africa, this phenomenon is especially evident in conflict and protests on issues such as service delivery, evictions and study fees. The media's portrayal of these events is criticised for foregrounding and sensationalising violence (Wasserman et al., 2018). According to Wasserman et al. (2018, p. 383), this communication "from above" is the result of mainstream media's allegiance to Western liberal individualism, which sees rational deliberation as the preferred mode of democratic communication and understands violent protest as a deviation from it. The authors argue that civic protests constitute a form of communication "from below", giving marginalised voices, who feel excluded by the mainstream media, access to the democratic public sphere. Aligning with Voltmer (2016), Wasserman et al. (2018) contend that the highlighting of violence may intensify pre-existing tensions in communities and deepen social polarisation.

In his call for new media approaches to situations of conflict, Wasserman highlights that people's struggles for recognition are deeply influenced by the media's ways of covering violent protest – it impacts how they see their place in the world and how they navigate their lives, and it is also the place from which they derive their fears (Wasserman, 2021, p. 7). Drawing on "human dignity" as a protonorm for media ethics, Wasserman argues that the media could represent many situations of conflict in ways that can be "productive and communicative" to democracy (Wasserman, 2021, p. 3). Central to this argument is a growing understanding among media scholars that journalism ethics should be developed within culture and in response to citizens' lived experiences.

2.3.3 Factors arising from an increased focus on citizens' lived experiences

In media debates, South African journalists habitually appeal to the frame of professionalism, encoded in liberal professional codes of mature democracies, to defend what they regard as responsible journalism. This stance, with its orientation towards distance and neutrality, is criticised as unresponsive to the polarised and unequal post-apartheid society. Malila et al. (2013) showed that this stance favours elitist perspectives, found to be not relevant to the daily lives of marginalised citizens. Wasserman cautions that criticism of the limitations of Western-liberal professional codes in transitional African settings does not mean that journalism standards should drop (Wasserman, 2021, p. 211). Rather, it highlights the need to develop ethical guidelines in response to local conditions, histories and challenges (Wasserman, 2021, p. 124).

Zelizer (2017, p. 211) concurs that a productive, viable media ethics requires an approach to journalism that is "porous, relative, less judgmental and more flexible" than static professional approaches. Wasserman (2021, p. 132) regards such an approach as particularly suitable to democratising African contexts, where the roles and responsibilities of journalists are still being (re)negotiated as part of ongoing social and political shifts and conflicts. Willems and Mano (2017, p. 4) argue that a practice-oriented analysis of media culture means to understand how citizens experience such changes, how they relate to others and how they imagine the future.

Key to a journalism ethics renegotiated "from the bottom up" is to understand it as an interpretive community, constituted by a shared web of journalists', media practitioners', and media consumers' meanings and interpretive horizons (Zelizer, 2017, p. 211). In striking alignment from the South African context, Garman (2005, p. 199) contends that journalists should see themselves as part of such interpretive communities to help refocus "journalism's place in a wider world of culture and dissemination of social meanings".

A journalism ethics developed in response to citizens' lived experiences is proposed as particularly important in contexts of deep inequality and social division, such as South Africa's, where interpretations of and responses to events may vary greatly (Wasserman, 2021, p. 128). Knowing how various local publics interpret media ethical principles such as human dignity, non-violence and truth-telling will lead to better insights into how these ethical values function in the reality of existing mediated public spheres (Wasserman, 2021, p. 129).

Influencing contextual factors arising from an increased focus on citizens' lived experiences include calls for the media to contribute to the restoration of citizens' right to human dignity; proposals for the empowering of citizens through the ethics of listening and care; appeals for more contextualised, thematic reporting to provide citizens with in-depth information; calls for citizens to be seen as active participants in meaning making; the growing momentum of an 'emotional turn' in digital journalism; and the 'silent majority' to be conceived of as 'engaged listeners' in digital news.

Calls for media to contribute to the restoration of citizen's right to human dignity

Cross-cultural empirical studies by Christians and Nordenstreng (2004) identified "sacredness of life" as a central "protonorm" that has cross-cultural reference and universal validity. As a subset of this central norm, the three linked principles of human dignity, truth-telling and non-violence can be used to guide ethical norms across cultures and contexts (Christians & Nordenstreng, 2004). Of these principles, the notion of human dignity presents particular challenges in the South African media context.

While the media has played a key role in creating a symbolic awareness of human dignity as the recognition of equal rights and respect for difference (Wasserman, 2021, p. 109), there has often been tension between the two constitutionally guaranteed rights of freedom of expression and the right to human dignity (Wasserman, 2020, p. 461). Mainstream media have prioritised the watchdog principle of freedom of expression, but they are consistently criticised for failing to contribute enough to citizens' right to human dignity and the healing of society (Wasserman, 2020, p. 461).

On the one hand, it can be argued that the pressures under which journalists work in South Africa – where reports on conflict and violence are regular features of the news-gathering – can easily lead to erosion of human dignity (Wasserman, 2021, p. 109). Like elsewhere in the world, the 24/7 news cycle favours “spectacle above complexity and technological explanations above social and political ones” (Wasserman, 2021, p. 109). Yet, given South Africa's history of human rights abuses, there is a particular obligation on its media to contribute to the restoration of human dignity.

Furthermore, from an ethical perspective, the protonorm of human dignity has overriding implications for the principles of truth-telling (central to watchdog journalism) and non-violence. Wasserman (2021) argues that truth-telling as a moral value exists in service of the overarching protonorm of sacredness of life – as described by Christians and Nordenstreng (2004) – and cannot operate on its own. Truth, seen in this way, is in the service of life, and should ultimately promote human dignity and avoid undue harm (Wasserman, 2021).

Equally, if a commitment to non-violence guides the way the media engages with situations of conflict in democratisation, respect for the sacredness of life stays paramount (Wasserman, 2021). In Wasserman's (2021, p. 116) view, conflict reporting should focus on “finding ways to confirm people's human dignity and offer solutions to help de-escalate the conflict”. Christians and Nordenstreng (2004) contend that the principle of non-violence demands that journalists pay particular attention to the vulnerable and emphasise ways in which resources could be shared to prevent conflict and promote healing.

Thus, if media ethics is to be the starting point of a shift in journalistic frameworks in a conflicted, democratising society like South Africa's, the restoration of human dignity stands out as an important guiding principle, a principle that also points to a concern with a positive impact of news on citizens. Yet, in such transitional contexts, the media cannot merely rely on symbolic methods to contribute to the restoration of human dignity of citizens, but should apply structural and material means as well (Wasserman, 2021, p. 109). This implies a more activist, interventionist role for the media that would link “symbolic respect for difference with demands for political intervention into the material aspects of people's lives” (Wasserman, 2021, p. 109).

The South African context gives rise to reporting on many types of violence, both overt and epistemic. Wasserman (2021, p. 110) argues that the restoration of human dignity in a range of situations of violence and conflict is more likely when journalists reflect on their own positioning and their reactions to what they see. He contends that such a stance would transform journalists from detached observers into “witnesses who recognize their own humanity in the faces of those they report on” (Wasserman, 2021, p. 110).

One of the ways in which the restoration of human dignity, truth-telling and non-violence can be moved from abstract ethical norms to empirical practice, and in which journalists' conception of their role in South Africa's democratising context can be broadened, is through the ethics of listening and care.

Proposals for empowering of citizens through the ethics of listening and care

If the rethinking of journalism frameworks advances from an ethical perspective, conceptions of the norm of truth-telling open different ways of looking at the watchdog cornerstone of 'objectivity'. Zelizer (2017) argues that journalists could contribute to community-building and social cohesion, if they view their ethical responsibility toward the truth as relating not to a purely positivistic understanding of "objective" facticity and rationality, but rather to story-telling and interpretation. In a similar criticism of South African journalists' ardent application of liberalist understandings of independence and objectivity, Wasserman (2013; 2021, p. 114) and Garman and Malila (2017) draw on the work of Bickford (1996) and Dreher (2009) to propose a journalistic framework built around an "ethics of listening" as a way to enable truth-telling that is contextual, meaningful and rich, rather than merely "factual". By being committed to dignity, justice, equality and respect for all human life, such a framework is seen as incorporating the various dimensions of the ethical protonorm of the sacredness of life, with a distinct call to action (Wasserman, 2021). Instead of presupposing a passive role for the media as simply a "mirror" or observer of events, a journalism based on the ethics of listening includes an element of intervention, imposing an ethical obligation on the media to contribute to de-escalating violence or finding solutions (Wasserman, 2021).

As an active, rather than passive, ethical strategy, the ethics of listening engenders a journalism oriented to relationships rather than detachment, and particularly aims to include marginalised voices (Wasserman, 2021). More importantly, active listening requires of journalists to listen to the narratives and interpretations of others reflectively, questioning their own assumptions and inner responses to the narratives and interpretations of others, taking their stories seriously and letting them know their voice matters (Wasserman, 2013).

To listen in this way acknowledges that voice involves both speaking and listening, as argued by Gilligan (1993), Couldry (2009) and Lipari (2010). Gilligan's (1993, p. xvi) understanding of feminist values inherent to an ethics of care proposes that to have a voice is to be human, but that speaking is an intensely relational act that depends on being heard. Human dignity, she believes, is grounded in listening (Gilligan 1993, p. xiii). Lipari's (2010) description of listening as a *dwelling place*, from which a person's hospitality to the other and world is offered, echoes this belief. Wasserman (2013) makes the case for journalists to embrace the ethics of care as part of listening, even if it implies values commitment, compassion and immersion – values that are anathema to conventional liberal-individualist journalistic understandings of professionalism and detachment. Hayashi (2017) argues that a journalism based on the ethics of care would bind people together and provide publics with a more comprehensive picture of the world. In reference to South African journalists' disconnection from the communities they report on, Tolsi (2020, p. 170) makes a similar plea for journalists "to start caring about people around them".

Hamelink (2016) states that active listening empowers those who are listened to, enabling them to discover new possibilities and choices. Such listening changes journalists' relationship to citizens by treating them as constituents of the aforementioned interpretive communities, rather than as consumers of meanings handed down to them (Goins, 2018). By including listening as good professional practice, according to Costera Meijer (2016), journalism may become a more constructive field of communication. As a normative concept, listening can guide journalists toward changing their relationship with audiences-as-receivers to audiences-as-partners, -interlocutors and -co-creators of news (Wasserman, 2021).

Engaging with citizens in this way implies a radical overturn of power relations between journalists and their publics (Oelofsen, 2020; Wasserman, 2021). Journalists have to relinquish their claim to

authority over truth, instead recognising that truth is constructed in a dialogical process that doesn't shy away from difference but engages actively with the views from the other side (Votmer, 2016).

Wasserman positions a journalism based on the ethics of listening and care as an alternative, or even radical, framework distinct from the normal conventions of watchdog journalism (Wasserman, 2021). He also cautions that listening in this way does not imply an uncritical acceptance of people's claims or stories on face value, but that critical media should hold their monitorial role in balance with their orientation as caring listeners (Wasserman, 2021).

In sum, it is proposed that in polarised, unequal and contested democratising contexts, a journalism proceeding from the ethics of listening and care could make a substantive contribution to the human dignity, agency and well-being of citizens (Wasserman, 2021).

The importance of the impact of news on citizens in the normative imagination of journalists receives further impetus through Malila's (2019) contention that the media has fallen short of its social accountability role by failing to provide citizens with adequate information to become actively engaged in public life.

Appeals for more contextualised, thematic reporting to provide citizens with in-depth information

Malila (2019) makes the case for journalists to expand their understanding of watchdog journalism to go beyond the exposure of corruption and mishandling of public funds, by supplying citizens with the information they need to hold officials to account. Aligning with Hadland (2015, p. 64), Malila (2019) emphasises that providing citizens with relevant, timely and accessible information is a prerequisite for the media to perform its monitorial role successfully. Her wide-ranging research on education reporting in the Eastern Cape showed that citizens were left information-poor, lacking the knowledge necessary to understand where the problems were in public administration and to demand accountability from office-bearers (Malila, 2019, p. 103). Stories were found to be event-driven, and lacking in analysis and context, resulting in citizens being unable to enact their right to social accountability (Malila, 2019, p. 104).

Citing Peruzzotti and Smulovitz (2006, p. 10), Malila (2019) highlights that social accountability depends on organised, interested sectors of civil society and media organisations that are able to exert influence on public and political systems. The media's failure to provide citizens with adequate, in-depth information is interpreted as a shortfall that prevents citizens from performing any kind of social responsibility monitoring (Malila, 2019, p. 94).

Malila concludes that in order for citizens to carry out their right to social accountability, watchdog journalists need to understand public administration and be able to analyse causes, contexts and resources available to address social problems (Malila, 2019, p. 94). Moreover, journalists are urged to consider the value of thematic (rather than episodic) reporting, to enable real socio-political change (Malila, 2019, p. 104).

Calls for citizens to be seen as active participants to meaning making

The literature reveals different approaches to understandings of 'citizens' and their relationship with journalists and news. Yet, a central concern emerges: How can all the citizens of the country's diverse and unequal society be served and engaged meaningfully by the media?

Rodny-Gumede (2017, p. 19) proposes that new technology and digital media platforms offer larger numbers of citizenry the potential to participate in what could be a more inclusive public sphere. Wasserman (2018, p. 83) points out that while the legal *status* of citizenship is guaranteed in the South

African constitution, the *practice* of citizenship is not. He argues that journalists should see the facilitation of the practice of citizenship in the mediated public sphere as their ethical duty (Wasserman, 2018, p. 83), while calling elsewhere for a view of media ethics that is open, participatory and dynamic (Wasserman, 2021, p. 129). Willems and Mano (2017, p. 4) highlight that such a shift towards an ethics of participation and inclusivity requires that African publics are seen as users with agency who engage with media texts and platforms to actively make meaning and also increasingly to co-create news. Thus, it can be argued that journalists are ethically bound to embrace the concept of citizens as active participants in meaning-making in digital news.

New digital technologies (especially mobile phones) have led to the rise of citizen journalism, challenging conventional understandings of who journalists are, what journalism is, and where control of the production, content and distribution of news lies (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2017, p. 98). Along with what Waisbord (2013, p. 203) called citizen journalism's "assault on professionalism", it brought along a greater emphasis on citizens' "subjective and emotional discourses and ways of knowing" (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2016, p. 134). Research on user-generated content shows that audiences tend to value unrehearsed, uncensored citizens' contributions, such as videos, as more authentic than professional content (Wahl-Jorgensen, Williams & Wardle, 2010) – adding further impetus to calls for citizens to be seen as active co-creators of news.

Within the normative conventions of objective journalism, emotion is regarded as a deviance from Habermasian (1989) ideals of the public sphere as a site for impartial, rational discussion of matters of common concern (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2016, p. 130). However, there is a growing recognition in media discourse that emotional expression may be an important positive force in enabling new forms of citizen identification and engagement, rather than necessarily undermining the rationality of the public sphere (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2016, pp. 132, 136).

Growing momentum of an 'emotional turn' in digital journalism

While there is scant research on the relationship between emotion and audience engagement in South African journalism studies, the subject has gained prominence in journalism scholarship internationally. In this arena, scholars identify a pressing need to investigate the role of emotion in how audiences engage with news (Choi, Lee & Ji, 2020; Wahl-Jorgensen, 2016; Wahl-Jorgensen, 2017). Barnes (2016, p. 184) makes the case for a shift away from the perception of audiences as purely rational, in order to be able to examine journalism for what it does rather than in terms of what it should do. She argues that considering emotion's role in deliberative discussion and debate offers an expanded understanding of how audiences use online news sites.

Referring to the large body of work tracing of the ways in which news organisations have responded to the dynamics of social sharing (Hermida, 2016, p. 81), Wahl-Jorgensen (2016, p. 138) argues that the porous line between audiences and journalistic practices, and between legacy and social media, obligates journalism scholars to regard emotion as a central factor in shaping the news agenda. She highlights that the increasing prominence of audience contributions allows clashing epistemologies of 'emotional' audience content and conventional 'objective' journalism to sit alongside each other – rather than the latter being privileged in news content hierarchies (Wahl-Jorgensen 2016, p. 133). Wahl-Jorgensen (2016, p. 140) observes that while the heated debates around these shifts show that the "emotional turn" in digital journalism is not complete, scholars have the urgent task of understanding how these changes shape people's views of the world.

In South Africa, the role of emotion has mostly been linked to the use and evocation of emotion in conflict and violence reporting (Wasserman, 2021) and to criticism of social media reporting premised

on the attention economy, leading to the spread of sensationalist and false news (Tolsi, 2020, p. 162). Indirectly, the calls for a journalism guided by the restoration of human dignity and by the ethics of listening and care (Wasserman, 2013, p. 78; Wasserman 2021, p. 110) afford emotion more prominence in the thinking and behaviour of journalists and their audiences than previously acknowledged in the rationalist approach of liberal watchdog journalism.

An examination of social media news reporting falls outside the scope of this study; however, research on the role of emotion in audience engagement on social media remains relevant, since – as Choi et al. (2020, p. 1017) argue – people increasingly interact with news in more engaged ways, particularly on social media. Bosch (2017, p. 221) contends that social media discussions should not be seen as detached from traditional news platforms, as they often set mainstream news agendas. Yet despite the fact that most local news organisations actively operate multiple social media pages to secure more engaged news audiences, and the recognition that the architecture of social media is premised on a neuroscientific understanding of the role of emotions in human behaviour (Tolsi, 2020), the link between audience engagement and emotion has not been a journalism research focus in South Africa.

Tolsi (2020, p. 163) argues that social media “cynically use unethical ‘persuasive’ design to hook our brains’ dopamine pathways and manipulate our time, ideas, vulnerabilities, the political, the personal”. He contends that social media is designed to reinforce social siloes, ramp up prejudices, and spread sensational and fake news (Tolsi, 2020, pp. 160, 164). Instead of investigating, he says, journalists’ “survivalist” response to the social media machine is to appeal to emotion, anger and outrage (Tolsi, 2020, p. 163). Yet, as Tolsi and many other scholars and practitioners acknowledge, for news to spread and gain traction in audiences’ imaginations and minds, journalists need the internet and social media (Tolsi, 2020, p. 161).

There is clear validity in the criticism of social media’s commercially motivated application of research on the role of emotion in human behaviour, but is this not a case of throwing the baby out with the bath water? Against the background of increasing global scholarly focus on the impact of news on audiences, can online news platforms afford *not* to give serious attention to knowledge emerging from social sciences, psychology and neuroscience on the role of emotion in how information is processed?

‘Silent majority’ to be conceived of as ‘engaged listeners’ in digital news

Barnes argues that an overemphasis on audiences’ visible and ‘loud’ contributions to news websites neglects ‘silent’ practices, where engagement with news can be “a highly involved internal process” (Barnes, 2016, p. 179). In an interesting extension of Wasserman’s call for journalists to bring the ethics of listening into their practices, Barnes (2016, p. 183) aligns with Couldry (2009, p. 582), Crawford (2009, p. 525) and Costera Meijer (2016, p. 557) to propose ‘listening’ as a fundamental and active practice of media consumption. Costera Meijer (2016, p. 558) states that listening should be included as an analytical category and as good professional practice for both journalists and academics.

Citing Van Dijck’s (2009) research, which suggests that 89% of online users are ‘silent’, refraining from leaving comments or actively producing content, Barnes (2016, p. 184) shows that comments and other audience contributions are ‘heard’ by the silent majority, who form a sense of attachment and engagement with the news through the practice of ‘listening’. She proposes that the term ‘engaged listeners’ describes this majority, who are part of online communities forming around news, even if their emotional and personal reactions to content are internalised (Barnes, 2016, p. 184).

2.3.4 Summary: Contextual factors

Factors that influence the South African digital news context were drawn from literature and delineated in three sections: economic and structural factors (2.3.1), normative factors (2.3.2) and factors that arise from an increased focus on citizens' lived experiences (2.3.3). While the studies referred to in the last section were not conducted locally, their implications for global online audiences can reasonably be considered valid for the South African online news context. The studies show a recognition of the importance of the impact of news in the networked digital world, the key role of emotion in that impact, and the obligations for journalists and scholars to include 'listening' as a fundamental concept in media practices and scholarship.

The exploration of contextual factors is followed by a review of the literature on 'constructive journalism', the second construct drawn from the research questions, as organising guideline.

2.4 CONSTRUCTIVE JOURNALISM

Turning to the relatively new, maturing framework of constructive journalism as analytical starting point, this section begins with the development and conceptualisation of the form (2.4.1). Next, a brief overview of precedents and related forms of journalism is added to by an examination of constructive journalism vis-à-vis the emerging form of engaged journalism (2.4.2). The theoretical underpinning of constructive journalism is explored in Section 2.4.3, criticism and responses in Section 2.4.4, and an overview of existing research in Section 2.4.5.

The review culminates in a working definition of constructive journalism, and a typology of principles for practice, drawn from the literature (2.4.6). This typology will be operationalised in the empirical work of the study. A review summary follows (2.4.7).

2.4.1 Development and conceptualisation of constructive journalism

As the developing form of constructive journalism expanded and matured over recent years, the language used to define the framework also shifted in focus. Constructive journalism originated from within journalism's own ranks at the end of the first decade of the millennium (Bro, 2018). Earlier studies emphasised that the emerging framework aimed to expand the boundaries of journalistic practice by applying positive psychology techniques to avoid a negativity bias in news and produce more inclusive and comprehensive reporting on reality, while holding true to journalism's core functions (Hermans & Drok, 2018; Hermans & Gyldensted, 2019; McIntyre and Gyldensted, 2017).

While all of these elements are still relevant, recent discourse gives prominence to the understanding of constructive journalism as an umbrella term for journalistic approaches that go further than exposing and describing serious societal problems, by including – in the overall news cycle – critical, investigative and factual coverage of developments and progress, and constructive responses to challenges (Bro & Gyldensted, 2021; Van Antwerpen et al., 2022; 'What is constructive journalism?', 2022). The call is for this 'constructive' orientation to play a role in the selection and production of stories ('What is constructive journalism?', 2022).

The umbrella concept of constructive journalism speaks to what the news should be like to portray the world more accurately by adding "missing pieces to conventional journalism" ('What is constructive journalism?', 2022). It adds a dimension to the description of news by asking questions about future possibilities and ways to get there (Hermans & Drok, 2018, p. 686). This does not mean that it seeks to replace monitorial journalism, according to proponents, but rather that it goes further than merely informing citizens about social problems while holding power to account; constructive

journalism also seeks perspectives about what can be done about a problem (Hermans & Drok, 2018, p. 686).

Haagerup (2014), who is considered (with Gyldensted) as one of the founding members of the movement, and Aitamurto and Varma (2018, p. 698), argue that constructive journalism adds a new normative role, namely a 'constructive role', to Christians et al.'s (2009) taxonomy of roles of journalism described earlier. Constructive journalism's distinctive feature, according to Aitamurto and Varma (2018, p. 698), is offering a vision of how society can move forward. Haagerup (2022) proposes that constructive journalism calls for a cultural shift in the role, goals and focus of journalists: after fulfilling their traditional roles of investigating evidence critically, the constructive journalist will then act as facilitator, looking for a way beyond the problem.

Hermans and Drok (2018, p. 688) emphasise that the principles of constructive journalism are consistent with pleas for a kind of journalism that responds to the needs of citizens in the new networked era (Deuze & Witschge, 2017). Constructive journalism is said to approach audiences primarily as socially competent citizens by providing context, by including a diversity of sources and perspectives, by empowering people to make self-substantiated decisions in their lives and by strengthening collaboration and co-creation of news with citizens (Hermans & Drok, 2018, p. 688). Together with constructive journalism's public-, future- and solution-oriented perspectives, an action-oriented perspective affords journalists a mobiliser role, acknowledging their active role in the construction of a mediated reality (Hermans & Drok, 2018, p. 688).

The sequential distinction in the operationalisation of constructive journalism stands out. The form is described as adding an additional layer to the news cycle as it is known today: "from breaking news, to investigative journalism to constructive journalism" ('What is constructive journalism?', 2022). Haagerup says this does not mean that all stories must be constructive all the time, but that it is about a mindset and a concrete set of tools (Haagerup, 2021). For instance, according to Haagerup, in the case of a major bomb blast, questions such as "Now what?" and "How do we avoid this happening again?" may only happen on Day 3 after the blast, following the traditional breaking news and investigative questions on Day 1 and 2 (Haagerup, 2021).

Solutions journalism is a prominent constructive journalism technique that has gained significant traction in the US, Western Europe, Africa and elsewhere. It is defined as "rigorous journalism that investigates and explains, in a critical and clear-eyed way, how people try to solve widely shared problems" ('What is solutions journalism?', 2022). Its clear focus, to report on "workable responses to societal problems with emphasis on evidence, insights and limitations" (McIntyre Hopkinson & Dahmen, 2021, p. 8) has produced a large body of research and training that has added to the development of theory and practice under the constructive journalism umbrella. In 2022 four new solutions journalism hubs were established at US universities. The Solutions Journalism Network (SJN) has worked with more than 500 news organizations and 20,000 journalists worldwide (SJN, 2023). In response to increasing evidence of large-scale news avoidance worldwide, SJN's co-founder, David Bornstein, argued that solution investigation must move to the core of news, that society needs "all hands on-deck" at this moment in history. According to Bornstein (2022), solutions journalism strengthens journalists' ability to hold power to account: "It sharpens the teeth of the watchdog, because it takes away excuses. You can't say, 'We can't do better'."

The interviewing technique "Complicating the Narrative" (CTN), introduced to the Solutions Journalism Network by Ripley (2018), has specific relevance for this South African study. CTN uses techniques from mediation and conflict resolution to teach journalists to overcome the inclination to

create lean binary narratives that entrench polarisation, to use sources from divergent groups and to “cover issues more thoughtfully, with the aim of revealing deeper truths and finding solutions” (Dame Adjin-Tettey & Garman, 2021, pp. 2–3). Dame Atjin-Tettey and Garman (2021, p. 1) highlight the potential of CTN for highly polarised African societies, where the media is often accused of deepening political, social and economic divisions rather than helping to build consensus to solve societal problems. The authors propose Ripley’s reporting tips, based on CTN, as a way for journalists operating in divided societies to feature nuanced and contradictory sides of issues rather than simply presenting two sides (Dame Adjin-Tettey & Garman, 2021, p. 2). The tips are: 1) Amplify contradictions; 2) Widen the lens; 3) Ask questions to get people’s motivation; 4) Listen more and better; 5) Expose people to other perspectives; and 6) Carefully counter confirmation bias (Dame Adjin-Tettey and Garman, 2021). CTN’s call to journalists to listen “in a way that challenges [them] to acknowledge [their] preconceived notions and biases and helps [their] sources feel heard and understood” (Ripley, 2018) aligns strikingly with proposals in the literature for empowering of citizens through the ethics of listening and care (Bickford, 1996; Dreher, 2009; Garman & Malila, 2017; Wasserman, 2013; Wasserman, 2021).

To date, there is no single clear definition for constructive journalism. Bro and Gyldensted (2021, p. 40) caution that this lack of agreement on clear lines of demarcation about what constructive journalism is and is not poses a risk to the sustainability of the movement. They warn that the form may suffer the same fate as public and action journalism, where definitional elusiveness led to the eventual demise of the movements. Rosen (2006) and Hermans and Drok (2018, p. 683) argue that public/civic journalism arrived too early, at a moment when the mass-media model was still profitable and the transition to a networked information model had not really begun. Rosenberry (2021, p. 18) contends that while civic/public journalism’s lack of a unifying definition and vocabulary was a weakness, the idea of connecting closely with communities has evolved into new forms of public-focused journalism in the 21st century. Nevertheless, there is broad agreement among scholars that for constructive journalism to fulfil its potential in the new networked era, greater conceptual clarity and theoretical embedding is needed (Hermans and Drok, 2018, p. 688). This need is highlighted in a recent study of media practitioners’ views of constructive journalism’s benefits and application during the Covid-19 pandemic (Van Antwerpen et al., 2022). The sample was drawn from four continents and the journalists all had an interest in constructive journalism. The study reveals that journalists varied in their understanding of the approach (particularly concerning social change) and in the techniques they used. Aligning with Hermans and Gyldensted (2019), Van Antwerpen et al. (2022) call for further development and testing of constructive techniques, to aid journalists in adapting constructive journalism to contexts and events.

Bro and Gyldensted (2021) describe McIntyre and Gyldensted’s (2018) earlier proposed guidelines as a six-entryway framework for constructive journalism: 1. Solutions focus; 2. What now? (facilitate a future orientation); 3. Constructive interviewing; 4. Factfulness (Are we looking at progress or setback?); 5. Depolarising debate formats; and 6. Co-creation with the public.

The Constructive Institute identifies three pillars as broad ‘pathways’ to the constructive approach, allowing for flexible journalistic forms “where journalists can innovate with their content and offer more for their audiences” (‘Three constructive approaches’, 2022). The pillars are: 1. Focus on solutions – do not only expose problems, look for possible solutions; 2. Cover nuances – strive for the best obtainable version of the truth, see the world with both eyes; and 3. Promote democratic conversation, engage and facilitate debate, including people in the community.

In their comprehensive study of meta-discourse on constructive journalism, Aitamurto and Varma (2018, p. 709) argue that scholars reduce the framework’s potential to stimulate social progress by

claiming that it is primarily an enhanced monitorial press, when, in fact, constructive journalism moves practitioners beyond impartial detachment about the future towards actively seeking evidence that persistent problems need not continue. Yet this interpretation seems to point to a conceptualisation of monitorial journalism as the more important part of constructive journalism, which is not evident in the literature. Extant research shows that a 'both-and' approach is favoured by most authors; that constructive journalism aims to see the world "with both eyes" (Haagerup, 2014, p. 111) or, put differently, that it strives to report on both setbacks and progress with an equally critical approach (McIntyre & Gyldensted, 2018, p. 665). In a study on constructive journalism's application during the Covid-19 pandemic, media practitioners emphasise that such a critical approach in solution investigation must include clear distinction between knowledge, fact and opinion (Van Antwerpen et al., 2022). Study participants added that journalists had to be rigorous in providing evidence of solution perspectives, especially when experts held opposing views (Van Antwerpen et al., 2022).

2.4.2 Precedents and related forms of journalism

Constructive journalism is preceded by a range of journalism movements that have sought a closer connection to the public than the role assigned to journalists by liberal monitorial journalism. It is notable that back in 2009, Christians et al. (2009) were seeing modifications to monitorial journalism that they thought of as legitimate roles for journalism, namely facilitative, radical and collaborative. The roots of the different forms of journalism discussed here can be traced back to that formulation. As mentioned, previous authors have highlighted the form's similarities with public/civic journalism, which reached its zenith in the nineties in the US and which aimed at strengthening the relationship between journalists and citizens and inspiring greater participation in democratic structures (Hermans & Drok, 2018, p. 680). Peace journalism proposes new ways of reporting on war and conflict, by focusing on non-violent responses and analysis, and on the consequences of conflict (Adebayo, 2017; McGoldrick & Lynch, 2016, p. 628). Action journalism (Bro, 2018, p. 509) describes journalism that focus on combatting concrete and acute societal problems, ascribing an active role to journalists in helping to build support for causes. Constructive journalism draws on ideas from each of these (and other) preceding frameworks, but it is distinguished by its intention to offer productive future-facing perspectives (Hermans & Drok, 2018, p. 688). Aligning with Aitamurto and Varma (2018, p. 700), it is argued that these movements have laid the foundation for contemporary constructive journalism and its ideal of social progress.

This study aims to expand the existing knowledge about constructive journalism and similar public-focused movements by positioning it vis-à-vis the emerging movement of engaged journalism (Crittenden & Haywood, 2020; Wenzel & Nelson, 2020). Engaged journalism describes interactive, collaborative and participatory journalistic practices that approach audiences as active users and co-creators of news (Schmidt & Lawrence, 2020, p. 519). These practices are aimed at bringing the public into the early stages of news production and building relationships with communities, rather than simply tracking "engagement" metrics for commercial objectives (Schmidt & Lawrence, 2020, p. 519). The literature of engaged journalism is often interpreted as an update of decades-long research on participatory journalism (Wenzel & Nelson, 2020, p. 516), a term that scholars have used to explore ways in which audiences become involved in news rather than only through news (Peters & Witschge, 2015, p. 25; Schmidt & Lawrence, 2020, p. 519). Engaged journalism creates "on-ramps for public participation to transform how journalists inform and relate to their communities" (DeVigal & Louis, 2021, p. 111).

Although engaged journalism does not emphasise a solution-/future-oriented outlook, as constructive journalism does, it can be argued that the movement falls within the constructive journalism umbrella, in the sense that it gives specific focus to elements of constructive journalism principles, namely the

seeking of multiple perspectives, the building of trusting relationships between journalists and the public and, especially, the aim of collaborating and co-creating with audiences.

The research about the barriers and facilitators to adopting engagement journalism (Brannock Cox & Poepel, 2020) and journalists' attitudes towards and challenges faced in the co-creation of news (Schmidt & Lawrence, 2020) could provide insights into possibilities/challenges of constructive journalism's aim of co-creation of news with audiences.

2.4.3 Theoretical underpinning

To date, the theoretical foundation of constructive journalism has mostly been conceptualised in terms of media, psychology and cognitive science theories, some of which are discussed here. Scholars agree that the conceptual underpinning of constructive journalism needs further development (Aitamurto & Varma, 2018; McIntyre, 2019). This study will extend the existing underpinning from the cognitive sciences in the literature, with a more specific focus on insights from cognitive linguistics.

Media theory

Constructive journalism scholars state that both approaches are grounded in the social responsibility theory of the press and its precursor, the 1947 Hutchins Commission, which declared that journalists are obliged to consider society's best interests in all news-making decisions (Siebert et al., 1956). These scholars concur that journalists have a critical duty to report on threats to society, as underlined by Lasswell's formative 1948 article, which identified surveillance of the environment and disclosure of threats as a core function of communication (Lasswell, 1948 in McIntyre, 2019). Yet, McIntyre and others assert that through reporting on both problems and progress in society, journalists would adhere to a fundamental goal of journalism identified by seminal authors Kovach and Rosentiel (2014, pp. 9, 29), namely to portray the world accurately through balanced and comprehensive coverage, going further than merely informing people of problems. Kovach and Rosentiel (2014, p. 29) argue that journalists can no longer distance themselves from what citizens can do with the information they are given, as was the case in older news models, when the news spoke for itself. They state that the purpose of the news is to help people self-govern, but providing information is only the beginning; "News must also be about solving the problems that confront individuals and the community" (Kovach & Rosentiel, 2014, p. 29). Acknowledging important lines between advocacy and news, the authors argue that helping solve problems is different from advocacy (Kovach & Rosentiel, 2014, p. 29).

The Constructive Institute highlights that journalism is a key filter between reality and the public perception of reality ('Why we need to rethink journalism', n.d.). A central tenet of constructive journalism is that traditional journalism skews audiences' perception of reality through an overload of negative news – with erosive effects on society (Hermans & Gyldensted, 2019). Constructive journalism proponents point to numerous studies showing that a negative bias in contemporary 24/7 news leads to negative affect, compassion fatigue, news avoidance and reduced intentions among audiences to take positive action to address issues (Baden et al., 2019; Bennett, 2016; Patterson, 2016; Roper, Newman & Schulz, 2019). In the US, a wide-ranging survey identified reading, watching or listening to the news as a leading cause of societal stress ('The burden of stress in America', 2014). The Reuters Digital News Report 2020 confirmed that 32% of respondents from 30 countries actively avoided the news. The majority of respondents cited negative effects on their mood and feelings of powerlessness to change events as main reasons for news avoidance (Newman et al., 2020). (While specifics about the effects of news on mood and motivation are not included in the Reuters 2019 Digital Supplement Report on South Africa, the research showed that 47% of respondents thought the news was too negative and not relevant to them [Roper et al., 2019]).

Interdisciplinary and cognitive linguistic research

Interdisciplinary research, such as the work of Steven Pinker (2018) and Swedish physician and academic Hans Rosling (Rosling et al., 2019), is used by constructive journalism scholars as theoretical underpinning for the notion that audiences are given a skewed portrayal of reality by classical news journalism and that it has a negative impact on individual and societal level. To this end the Constructive Institute provides resources such as Gapminder, an independent non-profit fighting global misconceptions with rigorous data, based on Rosling's work. Rosling (Rosling et al., 2019, 104) argues that audiences have an overdramatic worldview, because the media taps into people's fear instinct to grab their attention. Rosling (Rosling et al., 2019, p. 212) uses data to show that stories of gradual improvement – even when occurring on dramatic scale – don't make the mainstream news. Pinker (2018, p. 41) concurs, pointing out that peace and progress take long, and that positive and negative news unfold on different timelines.

Further examination of Pinker's arguments offers important insights from the field of cognitive linguistics into the significance of words and linguistic processes in the impact of news. While empirical examination of the links between thoughts, emotions, and linguistic concepts and processes falls outside the scope of this study, the specifics of such links could extend understanding of existing theoretical assumptions about the impact of a negativity bias in news on audiences. As an interdisciplinary branch of linguistics, cognitive linguistics views linguistic behaviour as an integral part of general cognitive abilities that allow mental processes such as reasoning, memory, attention and learning (Ibarretxe-Antuñano, 2013).

Pinker (2018, p. 41) draws on cognitive linguistics to illustrate how the nature of news interacts with the nature of cognition to make audiences think the world is worse than it is. Aligning with linguistic scholars Boroditsky (2011), Chomsky (2017) and Feldman Barrett (2017), Pinker (2018) asserts that linguistic processes pervade the most fundamental domains of thought, and that humans construe their subjective realities through intuitive linguistic choices. Pinker compares the brain's hierarchical conceptual system to a linguistic computer, ploughing through hundreds of "doomed fragments" of interpretation (based on previous experience) within milliseconds, before it ploughs ahead with a "probably correct" guess (Pinker, 1994, p. 154). Because frequent events have stronger memory traces, the frequency of negative news distorts people's view of the world, creating a mental bias – what Kahneman (2011) calls the 'availability heuristic'. When a memory turns up high in the results list of the mind's search engine, people overestimate how likely it is in the world (Pinker, 2018, p. 41). Pinker (2018, p. 42) argues that journalistic habits and cognitive biases bring out the worst in each other, explaining why heavy news-consumers can become mis-calibrated and stressed as dramatic stories pile up in their minds. Pinker (2021) asserts that such mindset problems can be mitigated through exposure to the language and visual images from newsfeeds also focusing on what is going right. This is an important observation – from the viewpoint of cognitive linguistics – for constructive journalism and for the purposes of this study, which examines the potential of constructive journalism in the South African online news context.

Pinker's view about the potential of more positive newsfeeds' language and images to mitigate the effects of overexposure to negative news can be seen as theoretically supported by Feldman Barrett's (2017) research about the linguistic origin and building of emotions in the brain's hierarchical system. Feldman Barrett (2017, p. 105) asserts that the brain meshes new concepts with existing concepts to create one's first instance of a new concept of emotion. She demonstrates that the more verbal options (words) one's brain has to categorise and predict shades of emotions, the better it can be incorporated into behaviour (Feldman Barrett, 2017, pp. 180–181). In this way, the linguistic building of emotional granularity can help a person to cultivate emotional well-being (Feldman Barrett, 2017,

p. 181). This insight highlights, on a granular and neuroscientific level, how the words used in news reports – and the frequency of their use – can become part of the internal vocabulary of audiences' thought patterns and affect their emotional state.

The power of metaphor is an important feature of the linguistic mechanisms of cognition that has received some attention in certain areas of media studies, and is only recently entering the literature on scholarly research on constructive journalism. Atanasova (2022) analysed the use of metaphors to report the synergistic effects of climate change and Covid-19 in *The Guardian* (online) and Positive News – outlets committed to solution-oriented journalism. The study concluded that public interest in climate change was maintained through elaborating the synergistic effects between Covid-19 and climate change through "Movement and Green metaphors" rather than "War metaphors" (Atanasova, 2022, p. 384).

In his study on the use of metaphor in financial journalism, O'Mara-Shimek (2016, p. 245) calls for a closing of the gap between metaphor theory and journalism praxis, and for the development of core journalism standards to advance the ethical quality of metaphor use in reporting to serve news consumers' needs better. O'Mara-Shimek (2016, p. 245) highlights that despite evidence in cognitive linguistics, discourse analysis and framing studies – demonstrating the effects of metaphor use in financial news reporting on readers' understanding of economic realities and their subsequent behaviour – these advances are not reflected in the policies of news editors and reporters.

Although an analysis of metaphors also falls outside the scope of this study, a brief exploration of this aspect of cognitive linguistics can further extend the understanding of the existing theoretical underpinning of constructive journalism based on cognitive science theories. The increasing prominence of metaphor in media studies is important for constructive journalism because of the latter's central concern with the manifestation of a negativity bias in mainstream news and the unintended negative consequences of this on the well-being of audiences.

The ground-breaking work of Lakoff and Johnson (2003) argues that metaphors both reflect conceptual structures and processes and shape how people think, even when they are unaware of it. Recent research informed by neuroimaging experiments largely supports Lakoff and Johnson's view, showing that metaphors really do reflect underlying conceptual representations, although perhaps not always (Thibodeau, Matlock & Flusberg, 2019, p. 6). These studies demonstrate how people integrate new information with prior knowledge and how metaphorical systems can generate new thinking (Thibodeau, Hendricks & Boroditsky, 2017, pp. 852, 861). The link to cognitive journalism is that if metaphorical systems are that pervasive in human thinking and communication, it can arguably be assumed that metaphor plays a central role in the linguistic mechanisms creating a negativity bias in the news and determining the impact of the news in the thought processes of audiences.

Thibodeau, Hendricks and Boroditsky (2017, p. 852) argue that linguistic metaphors' covert systematicity gives it significant power in how we understand experiences across domains, for instance when we think about cancer as an "enemy". Metaphor-framing studies support this claim, showing how people's thought processes and behaviour are affected by the metaphorical framing of issues (Flusberg, Matlock & Thibodeau, 2018; Thibodeau et al., 2019). Researchers highlight that it is often the emotional valence conveyed by a metaphor, rather than the structure knowledge, that is its most salient feature (Thibodeau, Crow & Flusberg, 2017). For instance, Flusberg et al. (2018) show how calling for a *war* (as opposed to a *race*) against climate change leads people to regard climate change as more urgent, and to express a greater willingness to enhance their conservation behaviour. This distinction about the salience of a metaphor's emotional valence is particularly important for constructive journalism scholars and practitioners, as it further supports the notion that the proven

ubiquity of metaphor in communication (Thibodeau et al., 2019) can reasonably be expected to be a constitutive factor in the impact of the emotional valence of news on audiences. Furthermore, metaphorical valence framing is shown to be most effective when metaphor appears early on in the transfer of information, rather than at the end (Thibodeau, Crow & Flusberg, 2017). This finding from cognitive linguistics can arguably be seen to add to the theoretical underpinning for the solutions journalism framing guideline stipulating that the solution must be the most salient information of the story, and “not tacked onto the end” (McIntyre, 2019, p. 21).

Existing conceptual underpinning from psychology, framing and cognitive literature

Since its inception, constructive journalism scholars have drawn on positive psychology’s “well-being model” of the world as theoretical starting point for arguments in favour of more precise and comprehensive reporting on reality (McIntyre & Gyldensted, 2018). The International Positive Psychology Association (IPPA 2023) defines positive psychology as “the scientific study of what enables individuals and communities to thrive”. The discipline’s seminal scholar, Martin Seligman, attests that people experience “learned helplessness” when overexposed to negative views of human nature interpreted through a ‘diseased model’ of the world (Maier & Seligman, 1976). This phenomenon can be countered by examining humankind through positive psychology’s ‘well-being model’ of the world (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

McIntyre (2020, p. 41) emphasises that while the goal of constructive (and solutions) journalism is not to produce solely positive stories, positivity is a by-product of such reporting. Drawing on cognitive appraisal theory, she asserts that constructive news stories are likely to make people feel positive, since news about progress is innately more positive than stories focusing on disaster (McIntyre, 2020, p. 41). Cognitive appraisal theory recognises that people’s thinking and emotions are inextricably interconnected most of the time, and that people’s emotions arise from their cognitive appraisal, or immediate evaluation, of stimuli (Ellsworth & Scherer, 2003, p. 572). Appraisal processes mediate the significance of events for the individual’s well-being; it specifies the interweaving of cognition and emotion that results when information is viewed in the light of motivation (Moors et al., 2013, p. 123).

McIntyre (2019, p. 21) asserts that potential solutions in news stories can also be conceptualised in terms of the psychological theory of coherent positive resolution. Pals (2006, p. 1082) defined coherent positive resolution as “the construction of a coherent and complete story of a difficult event that ends positively, conveying a sense of emotional resolution or closure”. ‘Resolution’ in this sense refers to a sense of narrative completion that releases a person from the emotional grip of an event and allows them to move forward, rather than an objective solution to problems (Pals, 2006, p. 1082).

The problem–solution frame identified in the news framing literature (Cappella & Jamieson, 1996) is proposed as particularly relevant to solutions journalism, where the solution has to be presented as the most salient information of the story, and not tacked onto the end (McIntyre, 2019, p. 21). Entman (1993, p. 52) defined framing as “to select some aspects of perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation”. McIntyre (2019, p. 21) argues that evidence from framing studies showing the emotional impact of negatively/positively framed stories confirm that solution-framed news might positively impact readers’ attitudes and engagement.

Constructive journalism scholars (McIntyre & Gyldensted, 2018) contend that positivity resulting from constructive news has meaningful effects, because – according to Fredrickson’s (1998; 2001) broaden-and-build theory – positive affect is connected to enhanced attention, cognition and action. Simply put, Fredrickson (1998; 2001) shows that negative emotions tend to narrow one’s thoughts, while

positive emotions tend to broaden one's thoughts – allowing individuals to think more inclusively and creatively and to consider more options when deciding how to act. Further, the broaden-and-build theory asserts that positive emotions build intellectual, social and physical resources that can be stored and applied when necessary. Over the long term, these resources can undo the effects of negative emotions and protect health (Fredrickson et al., 2000). Based on this theory, constructive journalism proponents suggest that audiences could experience the full range of positive effects described above when exposed to articles with a constructive approach. These assumptions are examined in Section 2.4.5.

2.4.4 Criticism and responses in extant literature

Since its inception, constructive journalism has faced central criticisms from scholars and media practitioners. Critiques include denunciations of the form as 'fluff' or 'happy news' about insignificant issues (Baden et al., 2019; Mast et al., 2018, p. 494), as advocacy journalism, as journalism that will make citizens complacent (Harber in Tullis, 2014) and as journalism in danger of becoming uncritical and unaccountable and losing its autonomy (Bro, 2018, p. 516; Wasserman in Tullis, 2014).

Haagerup (2014, p. 111; 2021) and other proponents dispute the equation of constructive journalism with 'feel-good', trivial news. They argue that constructive journalism covers important societal issues in a more complete way, to give audiences a more balanced view of the world. Haagerup (2021) clarifies, "You need a well-documented and important problem to be constructive about." The editor of *The Guardian's* "Upside", Mark Rice-Oxley (2022), stressed that defining the significance of a problem is key before covering solutions. Haagerup contends that critics are often unaware of the sequential understanding of the news cycle that is part of the constructive mindset, which sees constructive journalism as an additional step that has been missing from news coverage of society's problems (Haagerup, 2021).

Researchers respond to comparisons of constructive journalism with advocacy/activist journalism by defining what the form is *not*. The Constructive Institute states it is not "activism in any shape or form", "advocating one solution over another" or "giving in to false equivalence/balance" ('What is constructive journalism?', 2022). Separating solutions journalism (as a technique of constructive journalism) from the notion of advocacy, McIntyre and Lough (2019, p. 1561) draw on Janowitz's (1975) thesis that advocacy journalists 'must participate' in the advocacy process by advocating for those who are denied powerful spokesmen – which is not within solutions journalism's mandate. Wenzel et al. (2018) argue that solutions journalism is distinct from advocacy journalism in that it heavily emphasises the objective goals and ethical rigours of news journalism to give factual reports of solutions to audiences so that the latter can make up their own minds. These arguments are strengthened by the perspectives of media practitioners participating in Van Antwerpen et al.'s (2022) investigation of the benefits and application of constructive journalism during the Covid-19 pandemic. The journalists interviewed emphasised the need to present audiences with different viewpoints and to make sure the highest quality of evidence is presented, especially when experts hold opposing viewpoints (Van Antwerpen et al., 2022, p. 514).

At the 2014 World Editors' Forum in South Africa, Harber said constructive journalism would lead to a complacent and sleepy society, rather than active engaged citizens (Tullis, 2014). He said disruptive, discomfiting journalism challenges citizens to think, and is therefore truly constructive. Harber's view does not take the full definition or operationalisation of constructive journalism, as discussed above, into account. Several stances in the literature are in opposition to Harber's view. Mast et al. (2018) highlight that the idea of engaging citizens actively – in the sense of offering perspectives or resources that the public could act upon, or actual participation and co-creation in stories – is central to the aims

of constructive journalism. These aims are shown to be fulfilled in solutions journalism practice and studies, showing that the form strengthens audience engagement and trust, as highlighted by Bornstein (2022). Furthermore, the worldwide trend of news avoidance revealed in the Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2022 (Newman et al., 2022) shows us how news consumption patterns – in a watchdog-dominated global media environment – have changed over the last few years. If one applies these recent global trends to South Africa, where watchdog journalism also dominates, it can be argued that this pattern raises questions about Harber's claim that disruptive, discomfiting journalism challenges citizens to think.

The association of constructive journalism with notions of being uncritical and unaccountable, and of a journalism in danger of losing its independence, derive from constructive journalism's focus on solutions and its interest in the impact of news on audiences (Bro, 2018). Wasserman (in Tullis, 2014) argues that it is especially important for constructive journalism to be clearly separated from such notions in the context of new democracies or African countries, where there has been a problematic demand for uncritical, 'positive' news that supports rather than criticises post-colonial governments. Wasserman cautions that a positive style of reporting can be used to undercut the accountability role of the media by obscuring critical viewpoints, as is sometimes done by Chinese media in Africa.

The risk of obscuring the seriousness and complexity of climate problems through solutions journalism has also been raised by climate journalists. At a Twitter Space organised by the SJN, journalists cautioned against solution-focused reporting leading to a misrepresentation of complex narratives, especially in the developing world, where public relations stories are sold as solutions, or soft once-off innovations can be presented as big features (Edwards, 2022). Co-founder of the Oxford Climate Journalism Network Wolfgang Blau (2022) argued that major news organisations who practice constructive climate journalism recognise the importance of creating climate literacy and competence among audiences. Blau contends that it's a mistake to understand constructive journalism as sugar-coating problems. He suggests that talking about a 'package of constructive methods' instead of a new school of journalism would help journalists understand the systemic change proposed by constructive journalism. The systemic change in the industry is urgent and essential, according to Blau, to address the biggest story of our era. The argument is that if audiences cannot look ahead, how can they develop ways of thinking to address problems (Blau, 2022)?

Proponents of constructive journalism distance themselves from "positive news", emphasising that they portray both the good and bad of the world and remain critical, investigative and factual in their approach (Haagerup, 2021; Hermans & Gyldensted, 2019; McIntyre & Lough, 2019). This rigour is applied to investigate solutions critically, examining evidence of the impact of responses and limitations and barriers (Meyer, 2021). The technique of solutions journalism can include reporting on responses that are only partially working, or not working at all, as long as useful insights are produced ('What is solutions journalism?', 2022). The investigative aspect of solutions journalism is further supported by the findings of Walth et al. (2019, p. 186), which show that solutions and investigative journalism share the characteristics of identifying social problems and seeking the causes of these problems, even if there is presently little crossover in reporting pathways.

Wagemans, Witschge and Harbers' (2018, p. 563) study (among others) illustrate that journalists are already marrying "different, commonly-deemed incompatible practices and values". They challenge the binary distinctions at the heart of conceptualisations of journalism perpetuated in constructive journalism discourse (as evident in the criticisms described above). Wagemans et al. (2018, p. 564) argue that the diverse contexts within which journalists work demand a more complex understanding of "'neutrality' versus 'engagement', 'subjectivity' versus 'objectivity' or 'informing' versus 'activating' the audience".

2.4.5 Existing research

Existing research has largely focused on the mature Western democracies of the Global North. Apart from the literature on conceptualisation and delineation with related forms of journalism, a limited number of studies have explored aspects of constructive journalism in societies outside mature Western democracies. In fact, Lough and McIntyre (2021) showed that only five percent of constructive and solutions research is focused on Africa.

Developing contexts

The manner in which constructive journalism has been claimed to be used by state-run Chinese media to increase China's so-called 'soft power' in Africa (Zang & Matingwina, 2016) has caused considerable controversy.

Zhang and Matingwana (2016) argue that constructive journalism is used (albeit inconsistently) by Chinese media in Africa as a counterweight to Western media's overly negative reporting on Africa and Sino–African relations. Yanqui and Matingwina (2016, p. 97) note the importance of separating constructive journalism from positive news, and Zhang and Matingwina (2016, p. 21) acknowledge the scholarly criticism of Chinese media reporting as over-optimistic. However, in their claim that Chinese media use constructive journalism in Africa, the criteria they use for constructive journalism are flawed. They describe "the hero narrative, whereby the story of an individual or group of people who fight and win against the odds is narrated" as a constructive journalism technique (Yanqui & Matingwina, 2016, p. 97), whereas the hero narrative is specifically excluded by the Constructive Institute.

Marsh (2016, p. 185) contends that although Chinese media's use of constructive journalism elements in African reportage does diverge from the norms of Western coverage, this framing of events fails to hold African leaders accountable or to express any criticism towards China. Zhao and Xiang (2019, p. 358) highlight that Chinese media's constructive journalism practices do not distinguish themselves clearly from positive journalism.

The notion that the appropriation of constructive journalism to describe the journalistic style of state-led Chinese media in Africa is problematic is strengthened by Jenkins' (2021) study examining the extent to which the *China Daily* and the *South China Morning Post* use constructive journalism to cover South Africa. The findings show that only a small percentage of articles can be classified as constructive. The articles reveal tendencies to promote specific agendas or obscure criticism of important subjects, thus falling short of the constructive journalism criteria (Jenkins, 2021, p. 40). Jenkins (2021, p. 37) highlights that these findings deviate radically from Zhang and Matingwina's (2016, p. 28) findings, which showed that 62% of *China Daily's* coverage of Ebola was constructive.

In studies where local media in developing contexts were interviewed about constructive journalism's use or potential in their respective countries, several challenges to unmitigated implementation of the form were revealed. Rotmeijer (2019) found that although constructive journalism was practised to enhance social stability on the island of St Maarten in the Caribbean, journalists were severely constrained by local political, economic and socio-cultural power structures and feared speaking out. Rotmeijer (2019, p. 614) contended that, rather than a constructive role, the media should play a disruptive role to break entrenched power structures. However, it could be argued that the media practitioners interviewed for this study might have used too limited an interpretation of constructive journalism if they are not able to cover both problems and solutions in society rigorously. The same could be argued about the conclusions drawn in a Zimbabwean-based study evaluating the state-controlled newspaper *The Herald's* perceived use of constructive journalism approaches during the

Covid-19 pandemic (Tshabangu & Salawu, 2021). The authors conclude that a crisis-ridden country like Zimbabwe needed disruptive rather than constructive journalism, because the deployment of constructive principles did not result in the intended outcomes. They said readers were “furious” about constructive news, seeing it as propagandistic and serving the interests of the political elites (Tshabangu & Salawu, 2021, p. 488). Again, it is argued that what is perceived as constructive journalism in this study does not take full account of constructive journalism’s principles of remaining independent, critical and investigative when investigating problems and solutions. The monitorial duty to hold authorities to account is part of the news cycle as seen by constructive journalism (‘What is constructive journalism?’, 2022). Therefore, if journalists of the state-controlled *The Herald* are not able to remain critical of authorities and independent, they cannot be said to be practising constructive journalism.

Journalists in Croatia (Kovacevic & Perisin, 2018) had a positive impression overall of ideas related to constructive journalism, but many said that implementation would be difficult. Against the background of Croatia’s communist past, war and post-war history, and the role of journalism at the time, interviewees were concerned about the misuse of the constructive journalism to promote ideology (Kovacevic & Perisin, 2018, p. 759). The term “constructive” was identified as problematic because of unfavourable connotations. Interviewees also pointed to differences in mindset, political influences, and newsroom routines as the main obstacles to implementation.

A similar study in Egypt and Tunisia examined journalists’ views of constructive journalism’s potential role and challenges in these transitional societies after the political uprisings of the Arab Spring (Allam, 2019). Interviewees viewed the idea of constructive journalism as ‘vital’, but saw political power structures, private ownership, and the possible negative connotations of the term “constructive” as the main challenges to implementation. Constructive journalism’s potential role to regain audience trust and engagement, fight terrorism, serve the public interest and revive the economy of mainstream media were identified (Allam, 2019, pp. 1273, 1290). Interviewees emphasised the growth of social media as a striking opportunity to improve journalism. They proposed an integrated strategy between the mainstream media and social media platforms, based on the concept of “constructive/interactive”, as an implementation model suitable to the Arab media context (Allam, 2019, p. 1290).

In a study limited to English-speaking interviewees, Rwandan journalists said that they often used constructive journalism techniques in stories that foster hope, healing and resilience, and they believed this reporting style contributed to the country’s post-genocide reconstruction (McIntyre & Sobel, 2018). Promoting peace and unity was seen as vital – the findings revealed that this role often superseded traditional journalism role functions (McIntyre & Sobel, 2018, p. 2126).

In South Africa’s fragile post-apartheid democracy, no empirical research has been done about the presence or absence of constructive reporting principles in media aimed at local audiences, or on the perceptions and attitudes of media practitioners regarding constructive journalism’s potential in the post-apartheid media context.

In 2015, Gyldensted presented a series of constructive journalism training workshops to journalists of the former Times Media Group, on the invitation of Paddi Clay, the group’s training manager at the time. In personal communication with Clay (2019, 25 Feb.), it was established that despite initial enthusiasm among interns and some journalists, and isolated implementation of constructive journalism ideas (i.e. by *The Herald* in Port Elizabeth), efforts were not sustained, owing to a lack of buy-in from editors and subsequent changes in ownership structures.

The Bhekisisa Centre for Health Journalism is the one local outlet practising solutions journalism in some of their in-depth, evidence-based investigations into health and social justice issues. Editor-in-Chief Mia Malan (2022) cautions that solutions journalism for the health sector requires time, resources and specific skills: research skills to search journals and other documents to find evidence; critical thinking skills to determine what works and what doesn't; interpersonal skills to find powerful case studies to illustrate the problem and solution you're writing about; and advanced writing skills – preferably narrative writing skills and the ability to translate jargon and science into everyday language.

Impact studies on constructive journalism

Empirical research on the impact of constructively framed news on audiences is in its infancy (Baden et al., 2019; McIntyre, 2019). Many news outlets in the US and Europe practising constructive (including solutions) journalism give anecdotal reports of the impact of these practices on their audiences. These effects include increased online traffic, a more positive tone in reader comments (Hammonds, 2016), increased page views and shares, growth in circulation (Noack et al., 2013) and the growth of a culture of mutual listening amongst readers ('What is constructive journalism?', 2022). However, scholars emphasise a need for more empirical evidence of the impact of negative/positive news framing on affective and behavioural audience responses (Baden et al., 2019).

Numerous interdisciplinary studies illustrate that negative news stories can have unintended negative societal consequences. Among audiences, negative news can lead to cynicism and political apathy (Kleinnijenhuis, Van Hoof & Oegema, 2006), learned helplessness and compassion fatigue (Maier & Seligman, 1976) and mental health issues such as stress, depression, worry and anxiety (Baden et al., 2019; Bodas et al., 2015). Journalists who are frequently exposed to violent images through user-generated content are also at risk of suffering from depression and post-traumatic stress disorder (Feinstein, Audet & Waknine, 2014).

Studies on the audience effects of constructive journalism span across print, broadcast and online media. Most studies are experimental or quasi-experimental in design and test variables such as affect, interest, engagement, behavioural intentions, perceived self-efficacy and online behaviour. Rusch et al. (2021, p. 2227) caution that impact research has to be viewed with a degree of sophistication, since many studies are setting-dependent and inconclusive.

Overall, the most persistent finding is that constructive journalism stories counteract negative worldviews by fostering positive affect and reducing negative affect (Baden et al., 2019; Kleemans et al., 2017; McIntyre, 2015; McIntyre & Sobel, 2017; McIntyre, 2019; McIntyre, 2020; Meier, 2018; Rusch et al., 2021). Drawing on Frederickson's broaden-and-build theory (2001), scholars suggest that increased positive emotions triggered by constructive journalism stories could have further positive effects on motivation and behaviour (McIntyre & Gyldensted, 2018). To date, the testing of these assumptions has delivered mixed results.

In a study examining the effects of constructive news on Millennials' emotions and online engagement, Hermans and Prins (2020, p. 1064) found that reading constructive news elicited lower levels of negative and higher levels of positive and inspirational emotional responses. Millennials' online behaviour was also partly affected: they 'liked' this news more frequently. The authors argue that constructive journalism may be a viable strategy to attract a younger news audience, especially when the story topics are relevant to their lives (Hermans & Prins, 2020, p. 1078).

Curry and Hammonds (2014) illustrated that solutions reporting is more informative, generates more interest and higher self-efficacy towards a potential remedy, and greater intentions to act in support

of the cause. These results should be viewed with caution, since external validity was threatened because participants were not randomly assigned (McIntyre, 2019, p. 28). A follow-up study found that online users would stay on a solution story webpage longer, but would leave the page more frequently (Curry, Stroud & McGregor, 2016). However, the finding of an increase in topic interest and a willingness to actively participate in the solving of problems could not be fully confirmed in later studies (McIntyre, 2015; Meier, 2018). McIntyre and Gibson (2016, p. 304) suggest that a “silver-lining story” – highlighting a positive outcome of a negative event – may present a viable way for news to maintain the monitorial function of negative news, yet also reap the affective benefits of positive news.

The findings of “the first true experiment testing solutions journalism” revealed that reading solution information reduced negative affect, and increased favourable attitudes toward both the news article and toward possible remedies to the problem presented in the story (McIntyre, 2019, pp. 20, 29). However, solution information did not cause readers to feel more confident in their ability to contribute to a solution, nor did it impact their behaviour or intentions to act (McIntyre, 2019).

On the other hand, Baden et al. (2019, p. 1954) illustrated that the more solution-oriented a story was framed, and the more positive it made readers feel, the more likely they were to report motivation to take positive actions. Conversely, reading catastrophically framed news stories led to lower motivation. In a recent investigation into how news consumers are influenced by social media exposure to constructive journalism, Overgaard (2022) found that constructive social media posts – as compared to negative posts – led to higher levels of self-efficacy, positive affect, and perceived news credibility. Media practitioners interviewed in Van Antwerpen et al.’s. (2022, p. 516) study of journalism professionals’ perspectives on the benefits and applications of constructive news reporting during Covid-19 said that reporting solutions provided people with information instilling hope or practical guidance and increased their awareness of alternative approaches.

The commercial impact of constructive journalism is less clear. The literature shows a strong preference for constructive rather than negative news, and there is considerable industry evidence in the Global North that audiences want more constructive news (Baden et al., 2019; Rusch et al., 2021). In Denmark and Germany some broadcasting outlets responded by increasing constructive content, resulting in notable growth in ratings (Rusch et al., 2021, p. 2225). In the US, some news outlets report financial success due to the publishing of stories evoking positive emotions (Sillesen, 2014). The Huffington Post decided to increase its overall constructive content when traffic to their Good News section increased by 85% in one year (Baden et al., 2019, p. 1955). At the “Listen Louder” 4th Global Constructive Journalism Conference in June 2022, editors from a range of platforms contended that it is initially challenging to make the changes necessary to incorporate constructive journalism in editorial approach and output, but that it is ultimately worthwhile (‘Why constructive journalism is being adopted by journalism leaders as an editorial strategy’, 2022). Editors agreed that readers do not want more content, but rather better content, and that it pays to channel resources into fewer but more in-depth stories. The executive editor of *The Times*, Jeremy Griffin (2022), said that the editorial change to include solutions journalism was good for business, since it improved reader engagement, which improved subscriptions.

However, financial constraints loom large in the challenges facing the media internationally and in South Africa. The lack of strong evidence that constructive journalism enhances profitability will undoubtedly affect media owners’ and editors’ attitudes towards the form. Editorial decisions are increasingly informed by the “click” behaviour of online consumers. Yet, consumer behaviour is multifaceted, and people do not always choose to consume the news they prefer (Swart, Peters & Broersma, 2017). Baden et al. (2019, p. 1955) argue that a disturbing tension exists between

commercial drivers which lead to click-based editorial choices, favouring “an alarmist tone in news reporting”, and ethical concerns favouring more solution-focused framing. The issue, according to Baden (2015), is that this ethical dilemma is obscured by the accepted convention that negative news *is* news. Baden et al. (2019, p. 1955) highlight that click behaviour does not account for those who avoid negative news and accordingly do not register their preferences. They suggest that using click behaviour to determine the type of news that is commercially successful may well be a limited and short-term approach.

An announcement by a senior executive of the influential advertising conglomerate GroupM at a panel discussion of the “Listen Louder” 2022 Global Constructive Journalism Conference (Papadatos Fragkos, 2022) shows some truth in Baden et al.’s (2019) prediction above. Papadatos Fragkos revealed that Group M Worldwide was implementing a shift in strategy at all affiliated advertising agencies to cluster big clients’ advertising next to quality journalism. This shift in strategy was motivated by Group M’s research showing that advertisements placed next to quality journalism are 30% easier to remember and more likeable to the audience (Papadatos Fragkos, 2022). The financial impact of constructive journalism, which positions itself as in-depth, quality journalism, could be positively affected by this strategic change in the global advertising industry.

Finally, it is worth noting that Wagemans et al. (2018) illustrate that the concept of “impact” in journalism is multi-layered and diverse, and is influenced by the diversity in historical, social, political and economic contexts of journalists. They challenge researchers to embrace “the on-going, context-specific, and diverse process” of journalism conceptualisation, rather than advancing from fixed conceptual frameworks based on a traditional/alternative divide (Wagemans et al., 2018).

2.4.6 Defining constructive journalism principles for this study

Based on the different nuances of constructive journalism’s conceptualisation in the literature, the review concludes with a working definition and principles for this study conducted in the South African media-context.

Working definition: While staying committed to the core values of being critical, investigative and factual, constructive journalism aims to avoid a negativity bias in news by covering problems and solutions to important societal issues to produce more inclusive, comprehensive reporting on reality (Hermans & Drok, 2018; Hermans & Gyldensted, 2019). We saw earlier that different schools of thought propose slightly different but overlapping guidelines for constructive journalism. This study combined guidelines from McIntyre and Gyldensted’s (2018) proposed six-entryway framework for constructive journalism, and the Constructive Institute’s three pillars as broad ‘pathways’ to the constructive approach, to formulate four overarching principles for practice.

The principles for practice, to be used as a foundation for empirical work, are the following:

1. When investigating important societal problems, include coverage of possible solutions in the overall news cycle, staying critical, investigative and factual.
2. Place the issue in its relevant, broader context.
3. Expand journalistic interviewing to cover nuance and complexity.
4. Strengthen connection and co-creation with the audience.

2.4.7 Summary

This review examined scholarship on constructive journalism and on the operational and normative context within which the potential of constructive journalism in South African online news was to be explored. The literature reveals contextual factors impacting local online news to be complex and interlinked, arising from both international and local circumstances.

On the one hand, the severe financial and structural pressures faced by South African media mirror the seismic shifts in the media industry globally due to large-scale digitisation and economic crises. Impacting factors include the juniorisation and shrinking of newsrooms, pressure to produce news faster to stay competitive in the 24/7 news world, and a lack of training, time and financial resources for investigative reporting. Additionally, other important features of media scholarship and practice internationally were shown to impact the South African online news context. These features include a new recognition of the importance of the impact of news on audiences in the networked digital world, the key role of emotion in that impact, the necessity of seeing citizens as active participants in the news process, and the obligations for journalists and scholars to include 'listening' as a fundamental concept in media practices and scholarship.

On the other hand, many factors impacting South African media emerge from economic, structural, socio-political, historical, cultural and ethical dynamics that reflect the broader concerns of the developing post-apartheid democracy. These factors are often reflected in critiques of the Western-liberal watchdog journalism approach, favoured by South Africa's mainstream media.

Although watchdog journalism has led to many successes, it also faces challenges. The approach followed by mainstream media is criticised as being unrepresentative of South Africa's different publics and cultural values; as anti-government and too aggressive; as event-driven, polarising and foregrounding conflict and violence; and as failing to give citizens contextualised, in-depth information about important issues.

The literature on constructive journalism reveals a movement that has grown rapidly as a research field, a practice and a journalism training subject in just over a decade. While there is no consensus among scholars on a clear definition for the framework, there is agreement that constructive journalism is an umbrella term for different techniques of reporting that cover both problems and solutions to important societal issues critically in the overall news cycle. Much work has been done to delineate constructive journalism's similarities to and differences from related public-focused journalistic forms. The extant theoretical underpinning of constructive journalism is drawn from media theory, psychology and cognitive science. Current research is extended and given more granularity through insights from cognitive linguistics.

A review of existing impact research showed broad evidence that constructive journalism stories counteract negative worldviews by fostering positive affect and reducing negative affect among audiences. Research on other variables, such as effects on behaviour or intentions to act, is inconclusive.

Constructive journalism research in developing contexts is limited. Studies reveal trends of support among journalists for the ideas of constructive journalism, but reservations about its practical operationalisation, especially in post-conflict societies. Scepticism among journalists is mostly related to fears of political interference and loss of journalistic independence associated with notions of constructive or solutions reporting. This view represents one of the central critiques of constructive journalism in media scholarship. The form is accused of being "happy news" about insignificant societal issues, of being activist or advocacy journalism and of being uncritical and unaccountable.

Constructive journalism proponents argue that critics often have a limited understanding of the principles of constructive journalism, which includes being critical, investigative and factual, covering both problems and solutions to important societal issues in the overall news cycle.

This study aims to add to knowledge of the applicability of constructive journalism in developing contexts. A typology of constructive journalism principles, deduced from the literature, will be operationalised to conduct the empirical part of the study. A discussion of the research methodology follows.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The aim of this study is to explore the manifestation of constructive journalism in South African online news reporting and to establish journalists' and editors' attitudes towards the normative framework of constructive journalism in digital news. This chapter gives an overview of the research design and methodologies used. Two research questions were addressed empirically:

RQ1: Which constructive journalism principles are present in digital news reporting on evictions during the first five months of the Covid-19 lockdown period?

RQ2: What are the perceptions and attitudes of editors and journalists towards constructive journalism in online news?

The chapter starts off with a discussion of the research design and methodology (Section 3.2). Thereafter, the sampling approach (Section 3.3), data collection (Section 3.4), data analysis (Section 3.5) and quality assurance (Section 3.6) are discussed. The chapter concludes with ethical considerations (Section 3.7).

3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.2.1 Relevance of research focus

An empirical study on the manifestation of constructive journalism in post-apartheid digital news reporting, and the attitudes and perceptions of journalism practitioners about the framework, can address the research gaps identified in journalism literature. As discussed in more detail in Chapter 1 and Chapter 2, internationally there are calls for more research on the applicability of constructive journalism in developing democracies (Rotmeijer, 2019). In South Africa, challenges to the dominant liberal style of journalism in post-apartheid mainstream media has resulted in calls for more nuanced reporting frameworks (Wasserman et al., 2018). There has been a discussion of what a normative framework would look like that is appropriate for the South African context, a framework that supports democracy but also contributes to the rebuilding of society (De Beer et al., 2016) and the recognition of cultural values (Chasi & Rodny-Gumede, 2016), human dignity and citizens' need to be heard differently (Wasserman, 2021). An exploration of constructive journalism, with its emphasis on inclusivity and critical evaluation of solutions and options for the future, could offer some of the nuance called for. The views of journalists and editors about the applicability of constructive journalism in South Africa's developing democracy have not been sought before and could contribute to international discourse on constructive journalism.

Digital news is an important research area due to the large-scale digitisation of news in recent years, the downscaling of print-media operations, the strong uptake of mobile technology (with access to digital news) among South African news audiences (Wasserman, 2018, p. 155) and the emphasis on digital news as the journalism platform most in flux (Hermida, 2016, p. 85).

"Evictions" has been a prominent news topic since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic and typically exposes conflicting views on the important issues of land and housing in post-apartheid South Africa. Against this background, the theme's specific relevance for an exploration about constructive journalism is discussed further in Section 3.3 on sampling.

3.2.2 Rationale for qualitative design and analytical methods

To address the research aim, a qualitative research design was followed, with qualitative content analysis (QCA) and qualitative interview analysis as the main methods. These methods of analysis embrace the philosophical assumptions of the qualitative paradigm by recognising that a text is open to subjective interpretation, reflects multiple realities and is context-dependent (Creswell, 2013, pp. 19–21; Given, 2008).

Given (2008, p. 2) defines content analysis as the intellectual process of categorising qualitative textual data into clusters of similar entities, or conceptual categories, to identify consistent patterns and relationships between themes or variables. As a method, content analysis is intrinsically a-theoretical, but it started in the 1900s as a quantitative method, primarily to describe the quantity (frequency) rather than quality (meaning) of content contained in textual data in communication research (Hsieh & Shannon, 2018, p. 393). Qualitative content analysis has gained prominence as a method to interpret data by identifying codes and common themes (manifest content) and constructing underlying meanings (latent content) (Hsieh & Shannon, 2018, p. 393). In quantitative content analysis, the coding process is only the starting point for a subsequent statistical analysis of data.

Qualitative content analysis's concern with the meaning and interpretation of symbolic material, and with the influence of context in determining meaning (Schreier, 2014, p. 175), makes this method appropriate for an exploration of constructive journalism in the post-apartheid online news environment. With only one example of explicitly acknowledged practices of constructive journalism existing in local news reporting (by the specialised Bhekisisa Centre for Health Journalism), it was considered necessary to determine the manifestation of constructive journalism approaches in a sample of online news articles through content analysis first. This was followed by qualitative interviews, seeking journalists' and editors' views about constructive journalism's applicability in post-apartheid online news, and a qualitative analysis of the interview transcripts.

Key characteristics of qualitative content analysis is that it is systematic and flexible, and reduces the amount of data. Data are condensed by selecting aspects of meaning relating to research questions and assigning successive parts of the data to an efficient number of categories of a coding frame (Schreier, 2014, p. 171).

The method is systematic in that it requires examination of every part of the material for relevance to the research question – thus counteracting the risk of a narrow lens based on the researcher's assumptions. It is also systematic in that it requires a certain sequence of steps, and the repetition of coding steps, regardless of the material and exact research question (Schreier, 2014, p. 171). The method is flexible in that it typically combines data-driven and concept-driven categories (translating into "themes") within a coding frame to ensure a valid description of the material (Schreier, 2014, p. 172). Furthermore, initial themes may simply emerge inductively from an analysis of qualitative data, or may have been identified a priori (Given, 2008, p. 2).

The flexibility in the initial coding method described above is important, since both deductive and inductive approaches were used in the analysis of the first dataset, as will be explained below. A deductive approach is usually associated with quantitative content analysis, where frequencies of preselected categories or values associated with particular variables are produced (Given, 2008). Conversely, a qualitative approach to content analysis is typically inductive from the start, allowing themes to emerge from the data through an iterative process (Given, 2008). However, as Kondracki et al. (2002, p. 225) contend, inductive and deductive methods are not mutually exclusive and it is often useful to apply both.

Most of the information required to address the first research question – exploring which constructive journalism principles manifested in eviction reporting during the country’s first Covid-19 lockdown – was obtained through the content analysis of a sample of articles from three digital news platforms (News24, GroundUp and Daily Maverick). The unit of analysis was each article in a purposive sample. To start off the analysis, a typology of constructive journalism principles, deduced from the literature, was operationalised as initial codes. This initial concept-driven coding frame (deduced from prior research) was developed further through an inductive and iterative process, combining data- and concept-driven progressions to refine sub-categories. The researcher immersed herself in the data over time, as recommended by Given (2008), allowing layers of meaning to emerge, revisiting categories identified previously, resolving contradictions, and combining or dividing them until the framework was considered stable.

To address RQ2 (and parts of RQ1 not fully addressed in the first content analysis), semi-structured interviews were conducted with journalists who produced the articles and editors who were involved in the editorial approach of the selected articles. Interviews were aimed at gaining insight into the journalists’ and editors’ perceptions and attitudes towards constructive journalism in online news.

The qualitative analysis of the second dataset (interview transcripts) followed a purely inductive approach from the start, allowing themes to emerge from the data and continuing to revise and refine the themes through an iterative process. The unit of analysis was transcripts of each interview.

3.3 SAMPLING

Purposive sampling was used, following Babbie and Mouton’s (2015) recommendation to use one’s own judgement of who and what would suit the research aim best. Textual data from online news articles and transcribed interview responses were deemed suitable to fulfil the research purposes. Staying in line with qualitative research convention, the criteria for sample selection were aimed at sources that would produce rich, maximum diversity of data to address research purposes (Babbie & Mouton, 2015). The selection of publications for analysis was thus not intended to achieve full representation of online news outlets, but rather to select three organisations that represent a range of points on the spectrum of reporting styles and editorial approaches. From these publications a purposive sample of stories was drawn for coding.

News24 (which forms part of Media24, a subsidiary of the listed company Naspers) is the country’s largest online news platform and is the most trusted, according to the Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2020 (Newman et al., 2020). According to the editor of News24, credibility was built through sustained investment in breaking news (Basson, 2020). News24’s general news feed combines political, lifestyle, sports and other news with advertising and partner content. Daily Maverick is an independently owned, private company, funded mainly through advertising and voluntary contributions by readers (‘Maverick Insider: FAQ’, 2022). It has no affiliation with any other news group and places emphasis on its trust relationship with readers. Its stated purpose is to build an environment of confidence through good journalism, focusing on quality and accuracy. It has a grant-funded investigative unit (Scorpio) and distances itself from commercial online practices used to lure readers/users, such as the use of algorithms to determine news content (‘Maverick Insider: FAQ’, 2022). GroundUp is an independent non-profit company, making community-centred articles available to other news publications for republication. GroundUp’s stated aim is for its stories to make a difference, to report public interest news and to underline the human rights of vulnerable communities (‘About GroundUp’, 2022). The three selected news outlets thus represent different points on the spectrum of editorial approaches and target audience: one commercial (News24), attracting the largest, across-the-board audience with its focus on breaking news and an in-depth

news offering to paying readers; one independent, (mostly) donor-funded (Daily Maverick), focusing on in-depth news, analysis and opinion; and one smaller and community-focused (GroundUp), a non-profit working closely with reporters and freelancers embedded in communities, making their articles available for republication.

The selection of “evictions” as the topic for the purposive sample of articles was based on the criterion of identifying a theme that highlights an important societal problem in South Africa – a theme typically causing polarisation and strong or violent reaction. Knowing that the dominant form of liberal reporting on divisive topics stands accused of increasing social polarisation by foregrounding violence and conflict, articles about “evictions” could reasonably be expected to enable an exploration of constructive journalism’s potential to facilitate productive and critical thinking towards reducing or overcoming those divisions. Further criteria were that the topic was linked to key contextual factors journalists must consider when working in the post-apartheid environment and that the topic featured regularly on the national news agenda.

Evictions flared up as a highly contentious issue across all media platforms during South Africa’s first, stringent Covid-19 lockdown. The topic of evictions is linked to the pervasive problem of structural and economic inequality, because it was the “brutally blunt tool” used by colonial and apartheid governments “to manipulate and engineer the demographic, political, social and economic landscape of the country to the benefit of a racial elite” (Du Plessis, 2005, p. 126). Eviction is thus a highly emotive topic within the social and historical context, affecting mostly the marginalised poor, even if people are being evicted in more recent times for a variety of reasons and a range of ideological justifications. Du Plessis (2005, p. 126) argues that the continuation of the practice is astounding, given the widespread awareness of the catastrophic consequences of forced removals on the lives and livelihoods of millions across generations in South Africa.

Muller’s (2013) analysis of the legal-historical context of forced urban evictions and black land tenure highlights why the topic of evictions continues to divide society. In the South African doctrinal tradition, private property ownership was regarded as superior to all other conflicting interests, and owners could enforce this right against others by means of *rei vindication*, without taking the personal circumstances or housing needs of occupiers into consideration. The common-law right to evict was buttressed by legislation ensuring the security and stability of individual owners through the exercise of discriminatory and arbitrary state power (Muller, 2013, p. 369). The impression of ownership as an absolute and individualistic right that can be enforced without consideration of the personal circumstances and housing needs of occupiers has thus endured among many land- and property owners. This continues to deepen divides between the (mostly poor and black) homeless and (traditionally white, middle-class) property owners, despite legal reforms such as the right of access to adequate housing enshrined in section 26 of the Constitution and the Prevention of Illegal Eviction from and Unlawful Occupation of Land Act 19 of 1998.

The issue of evictions also polarises poorer communities, causing conflict between residents or beneficiaries who are waiting for allocated, still-to-be-developed housing, and those who illegally occupy allocated land/or unfinished developments. During the Covid-19 lockdown this practice and subsequent evictions increased dramatically, often resulting in violent clashes between interest groups. Violence caused by municipalities’ eviction of inner-city dwellers in efforts to drive urban regeneration and protests against landlords’ use of eviction as a method to recover unpaid rents, rates and utility bills are further examples of societal conflict linked to evictions (Du Plessis, 2005, p. 127).

For the most part, reporting on eviction-related problems followed a binary pattern in mainstream news, with the representation of two opposing viewpoints on problems in articles. Thus, it made sense

to explore the manifestation and potential of constructive journalism – with its aim of investigating possible solutions in a way that offers a fuller and more complex picture of reality – as a framework that could provide more nuanced reporting on a subject such as evictions. The three selected publications, with their range in editorial outlook, were likely to approach “eviction” stories from different angles, yielding a diversity of data.

Analysis of photographs, videos, titles of photographs and videos, reader comments and social media content fell outside the scope of this text-based study. Visual content was discussed only if referred to in the text of articles. Social media content such as tweets were considered if included or referenced in the text of articles. The diversity of the data was enhanced further by searching across all news sections of the outlets to make sure that different author categories and lengths and types of articles (breaking news, opinion, letters, etc) were included. These variables offered interesting points of comparison for analysis. The difference in focus between the three platforms can be seen in Table 1, with the Daily Maverick’s focus on in-depth news discussion and opinion evident in the proportion of its articles devoted to this type of content: 40% of its articles fall in this category, compared to 23% of GroundUp’s articles and 17% of News24’s articles.

Table 1: Summary of article types, length and authors

News platform	Types of articles	Number	Average length	Authored by
News24	News	52	2 pages	Journalists
	Opinion/Op-ed	7	3 pages	Govt officials, journalists, researchers, executive director Action Group, members of the public
	News discussion (more context, analysis)	4	2–4 pages	Journalists
Daily Maverick	News	24	1–2 pages	Journalists
	Opinion/Op-ed	11	3–4 pages	Academics, researchers, legal advisors, executive director Action Group, journalists, editor
	News discussion	5	2–3 pages	Journalists
GroundUp	News	24	2 pages	Journalists
	News discussion	5	3 pages	Journalists
	Opinion/Op-ed	2	3 pages	Researchers, executive director Action Group

The interview candidates for the second qualitative analysis were selected purposively according to the breadth and frequency of their reporting of articles (in the case of journalists) or their involvement

in the editorial approach of the three news outlets (in the case of editors). The final sample size was eight, including two editors (News24, GroundUp), one associate editor (Daily Maverick) and five journalists (spread over the three organisations) (see Appendix 1). In the process of securing interviews with journalists, the severity of contextual pressures that most journalists work under became apparent. Of the twelve journalists who were approached over a three-month period, eight agreed to do an interview. However, several breaking-news journalists gave up after they had to cancel appointments repeatedly due to work pressures. The final sample of three editors and five journalists provided sufficiently rich information for the study and data saturation was reached. However, as will be discussed in Chapter 5, the interview sample size can be considered a limitation and follow-up studies with larger samples are recommended. Participants' length of experience in journalism ranged from 2 to 34 years (Appendix 1).

3.4 DATA COLLECTION

The methods used to collect datasets from online news articles and in-depth interviews and the development of the interview guide are discussed in this section.

3.4.1 Methods of data collection

Initial searches of the term "evictions", using the search engines of News24, Daily Maverick and GroundUp across all news sections, revealed 153 articles about evictions between 26 March 2020 and 31 August 2020 (the first five months of the Covid-19 lockdown). These articles were scrutinised and criteria for inclusion in or exclusion from the sample were developed. Nineteen articles were excluded on the basis that evictions-related issues: 1) constituted a negligible part of textual article content; and/or 2) concerned countries other than South Africa.

The final sample included 134 articles: 63 from News24, 40 from Daily Maverick and 31 from GroundUp. Some GroundUp articles also appear on the News24 and/or Daily Maverick platform. It was decided to count and re-analyse the repeated articles under each platform, since the articles were seen as part of the content that each platform's respective (and presumably different) audience was exposed to over five months. The double, or sometimes triple, analysis of these articles provided good opportunities to test consistency in this single-coder content analysis.

Interviews were conducted with five journalists and three editors who were involved in the reporting of articles and the editorial approach of the three news organisations. Interviews of approximately 60 minutes were conducted and recorded between 14 June 2022 and 23 August 2022, online via Zoom or in person. The interviews explored media practitioners' perceptions and attitudes towards constructive journalism in online news.

3.4.2 Developing the interview guide

The process of designing the semi-structured interview guide corresponded roughly with the interlinked stages suggested by Kallio et al. (2016). This process showed that semi-structured interviews offered the depth and flexibility to elicit rich descriptive answers (Kallio et al., 2016). The researcher used comprehensive previous knowledge of constructive journalism gained through the literature and the findings of the first content analysis to develop a semi-structured framework for the interview (Turner, 2010). The main themes covered the main content and followed a progressive logical order, as recommended by Kallio et al. (2016). The questions were open-ended and aimed to elicit spontaneous, in-depth and unique answers from each participant (Kallio et al., 2016; Turner, 2010). Follow-up questions or verbal prompts were either predesigned to clarify the main theme or

to funnel discussion back to the study purpose, or spontaneous and aimed at expanding on a participant's particular point (Kallio et al., 2016, p. 2962).

To refine the guide, in keeping with the subjective and emergent design process of qualitative study (Creswell, 2013; De Vos et al., 2005), two rounds of pilot interviewing were conducted with two journalists during May 2022. This enabled the researcher to remain iterative and refine the guide as she proceeded (Babbie & Mouton, 2015, p. 289). The interview guide can be seen in Appendix 3.

During the trial period and actual interviews, the researcher reflected consistently in a research journal before and after each interview to overcome challenges. A key step was to develop an information page about constructive journalism to be sent to participants before the interviews to ensure a consistent level of understanding of the study's framework for the concept (Appendix 4).

3.5 DATA ANALYSIS

3.5.1 Dataset 1: Qualitative content analysis

In the analysis of the first dataset (articles), eight steps of qualitative content analysis were followed as recommended by Schreier (2014, p. 176), namely: 1) Deciding on the research question/s; 2) Selecting material; 3) Building a coding frame; 4) Segmentation; 5) Trial coding; 6) Evaluating and modifying the coding frame; 7) Main analysis; and 8) Presenting and interpreting the findings.

The first dataset was divided into "chunks" of ten articles each (Step 2) to start building a coding frame one chunk at a time across the diversity of sources, until all data was analysed (Schreier, 2014, p. 177).

The application of Step 3, "Building a coding frame", started deductively with codes derived a priori through the operationalisation of a typology of constructive journalism principles, as per the literature review. As the close reading of the texts proceeded, one chunk at a time across sources, the first main codes were added to and refined in a data-driven way.

After developing the structure of the coding frame, categories were defined – including name, description and positive examples assembled under NVivo Node "Quotes" (Schreier, 2014, p. 179). Next, the structure of the frame was revised by collapsing some subcategories into one and reconsidering the category level of others. Once the framework was stable, it was expanded from the twenty articles of each outlet, to include all 134 articles of the sample.

Segmentation (Step 4) means dividing material into units that fit exactly one sub-category in the coding frame. The coding units varied from single sentences to multiple paragraphs, depending on the description of the category or sub-category. The goal of segmentation is to enhance coding consistency as an important criterion in multiple-coder content analysis, and it's closely related to meeting the requirement of mutual exclusiveness in developing the coding frame (Schreier, 2014). However, consistency is handled less strictly in thematic content analysis than in the quantitative form, since thematic criteria for segmentation involve the interpretation of both manifest *and* context-dependent latent meaning, which falls less easily into mutually exclusive units. Furthermore, since there is overlap in constructive journalism principles identified a priori, mutual exclusivity was not found to be meaningful in the segmentation and coding of main categories in the first content analysis (discussed further in Section 3.6).

Trial coding (Step 5) of the coding frame during the pilot phase was conducted on 20 articles of each outlet – 60 in total. During Step 6, evaluating and modifying the frame, small adjustments were made to the descriptions of sub-categories, but overall the frame was found to be sufficiently comprehensive and reliable. At this stage the Code Book was finalised. The Code Book can be seen in

Appendix 2, including details about the number of articles a sub-theme appears in and number of references. The main analysis (Step 7) of all the material proceeded. As required, no changes were made to the coding frame in this phase (Schreier, 2014, p. 183).

In the final step of the content analysis, findings were interpreted and written up (Step 8) according to four main themes, sub-themes and categories to be suitable for answering RQ1. In the presentation specific reference to authors or context of articles was provided where pertinent to the findings. These findings were applied to inform the interview guide and themed findings of the second part of the empirical research, namely qualitative interviews with media practitioners involved in the creation and editorial decisions of the articles in the first sample, and the analysis of the interview transcripts.

3.5.2 Dataset 2: Qualitative interview analysis

Qualitative analysis of interview transcripts generally vary in terms of how codes and themes are derived (Turner, 2010, p. 759). In this study, after transcribing the interviews verbatim, the researcher printed out copies of each interview, reading through it twice and noting on paper initial thoughts that emerged from the data. The transcripts were then imported to NVivo and coded in an inductive, data-driven way through further development of initial handwritten notes into themes and sub-themes. The themes were generated and refined in a concept- and data-driven way as the researcher's understanding of different levels of meaning of the texts increased. At this point the researcher printed out the quotes illustrating themes and sub-themes, and worked with the original hard copy of transcripts to feel closer to the material as themes and sub-themes were further collated and refined. Six themes emerged from the interviews. The numbering of these themes (Themes 5–11) follow on consecutively from the first content analysis, since the samples and findings of the two datasets are linked.

Journalists' and editors' views were often presented in longer quotes of a few sentences to give an accurate representation of the nuance related to contextual differences between the three places of employment and attitudinal differences between editors and journalists. In line with recommendations on editing of quotes in qualitative interview analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 251), major hesitations and repetitions in participants' responses were edited out in the report and unnecessary detail was removed, indicated by the signal [...].

3.5.3 NVivo

The software tool QSR NVivo (licenced to UCT) was used because of its suitability for coding and analysing huge data sets of textual data. The functionalities of the program assisted in streamlining the organisation and reduction of data. The software enabled the researcher to keep an audit trail to enhance confirmability, showing that the findings are a product of a systematic inquiry rather than researcher biases (Babbie & Mouton, 2015, p. 278).

During the analysis of the two datasets, NVivo assisted with efficient comparison between identified categories of data, and in collecting quotes to illustrate codes and to use in the writing-up of the findings (Given, 2008). The researcher continued to work on NVivo for the final development of themes for the first content analysis. The consolidated text units of the most important themes, sub-themes and categories of the interview transcripts were printed out to enable a closer "feel" and familiarity with the data as the findings developed over several months. For the final development of themes in the analysis of the interview transcripts, themes were created and finalised in tables using Microsoft Word.

3.6 ENSURING QUALITY

Validity and reliability are key to robust content analysis (Given, 2008; Kondracki et al., 2002; Schreier, 2014). The researcher followed an NVivo qualitative content analysis training process with a UCT consultant and a pilot testing phase to ensure reliability, as proposed by Kondracki et al. (2002, p. 226). Single-coder reliability was verified by recoding the same subset of the data sample to confirm that coding decisions remained stable over the first months of analysis. The researcher also went back to participant transcripts to repeat this process after completion of the analysis. Additionally, the GroundUp articles that were repeated in all three samples were triple-coded in the main coding phase, resulting in close-to-identical coding each time.

Construct validity was ensured by testing that the variables addressed the research questions and making a proper distinction between material believed to be different (Kondracki et al., 2002, p. 226). However, in the first content analysis, the criterion of “mutual exclusivity” was not fully applied in the assignment of data to categories, since some of the principles of constructive journalism are not mutually exclusive. As an emerging framework considered to be an umbrella form including different techniques, the principles derived from the literature describe different aspects of journalistic practice which may be represented in one piece of text. So, for instance, the requirements ‘being critical’ (main category “CRITICAL”) and ‘placing issues in its relevant context’ (main category “CONTEXT”) were often present in the reporting style of the same textual segment.

Triangulation was achieved through linking the findings of the two parts of empirical research addressing the two research questions. In the analysis of the second dataset, the findings of the first dataset were at times confirmed and at other times contradicted, providing a triangulated and rich picture of the potential of constructive journalism in South African online news.

3.7 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The guidelines of the UCT Code for Research involving Human Subjects were followed and ethical clearance gained after joint completion of the CFMS form by the researcher and supervisor.

An initial email was sent to possible participants, giving them an overview of the intention and scope of the research project. The email contained an initial informal invitation to do an online or in-person semi-structured in-depth interview with the researcher on a voluntary basis, at a date that was mutually convenient. In a follow-up to those who agreed to do the interview, UCT’s Ethical Clearance form was sent to participants. The purpose of the interview; the planned duration and the ethical standards that would be followed in terms of anonymity, data management and protection; and next steps in the process were explained (Appendix G). It was stipulated that recordings and transcriptions would be destroyed three months after conclusion of the study. During the study, recordings of interviews were safely held in Dropbox in the cloud, with password-protected access limited to the researcher/transcriber. Participants were given a choice to waive the condition of anonymity and allow their names to be used, also in future publications. All but one journalist gave permission for their names to be used.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter the research findings are presented in themes and analysed. The aim of the study is to explore the manifestation of constructive journalism in South African online news reporting, and to establish journalists' and editors' attitudes and perceptions towards the framework in digital news. The findings are analysed in accordance with the two research questions:

RQ1: Which constructive journalism principles are present in digital news reporting on evictions during the first five months of the Covid-19 lockdown period?

RQ2: What are the perceptions and attitudes of editors and journalists towards constructive journalism in online news?

The findings of RQ1 (Themes 1–4) were drawn from a sample of news articles on three online news platforms, using the typology of four constructive journalism principles extracted from the literature as a guideline. Through the content analysis, an overall picture emerged of the presence/absence of constructive journalism principles in the text of articles.

The findings of RQ2 (Themes 5–11) were drawn from qualitative analysis of interviews with a sample of journalists who were involved in the creation of the articles and editors involved in the editorial approach of the three news organisations. The findings of the content analysis carried out previously informed the interview guide and the analysis of participant responses, resulting in an integrated picture of themed findings between the two sets of data.

The chapter ends with a summary of findings and analysis.

4.2 PRESENCE OF CONSTRUCTIVE JOURNALISM PRINCIPLES IN ONLINE REPORTING ON EVICTIONS

As mentioned in Chapter 3, the analysis of the sample started off with a deductive application of four constructive journalism principles (drawn from the literature) to establish their presence/absence in the reporting style of the sample articles. The first high-level findings were followed by an inductive analysis of *how* the presence/absence of the principles manifested in the sample. The content analysis revealed patterns which then suggested themes and sub-themes emerging from the data.

The sample was analysed to establish the presence of the following principles for practice, as identified at the end of the literature review (Chapter 2 in Section 2.4.6):

Principle 1: When investigating important societal problems, include coverage of possible solutions in the overall news cycle, staying critical, investigative and factual.

Principle 2: Place the issue in its relevant, broader context.

Principle 3: Expand journalistic interviewing to cover nuance and complexity.

Principle 4: Strengthen connection and co-creation with audience.

The manifestation of each principle applied to the sample is discussed consecutively in themes. In each case the high-level findings, set out in the main themes, are followed by more detailed analysis, set out in sub-themes and sub-theme categories. The discussion of each principle is introduced with a summary table of themes, sub-themes and categories.

4.2.1 Theme 1: The principle “When investigating important societal problems, include coverage of possible solutions in the overall news cycle, staying critical, investigative and factual” largely absent in sample

Before discussing Theme 1 in more detail, a summary table of the theme’s sub-themes and categories is provided.

Table 2: Theme, sub-themes and categories of the manifestation of Principle 1 in the sample

Theme 1: The principle “When investigating important societal problems, include coverage of possible solutions in the overall news cycle, staying critical, investigative and factual” largely absent in sample	
Sub-themes	Categories
Theme 1A: Critical problem-investigation dominated	
Theme 1B: Conflict and violence foregrounded	• Violence reporting considered necessary • Conflict presented in lean, binary narratives • War metaphor detected
Theme 1C: Solution-reporting neglected	• Solutions covered superficially • Forward-looking approach revealed in opinion pieces • Critical solution-investigation the exception
Theme 1D: Frequent focus on violation of human dignity	

This first principle means that constructive journalism addresses important societal issues and that coverage of both problems and solutions follow the journalistic norms of being critical, investigative and factual. Most articles lacked any kind of solution coverage whatsoever – investigative or otherwise. The investigation of problems predominated.

The obligation for journalists to remain critical, investigative and factual when covering both problems and solutions to important societal problems is an important measure of constructive journalism (McIntyre & Gyldensted, 2018, p. 665). Much of the criticism of constructive journalism stems from misconceptions of the form as unaccountable and uncritical “happy” news (Baden et al., 2019); thus, proponents emphasise the importance of the critical investigation of possible solutions as a foundational principle.

Further analytical distinctions of the finding represented in Theme 1, namely that the first principle was mostly absent in the sample, are set out in sub-themes and categories of how that absence manifested; that is – what was present in the reporting?

Theme 1A, “Critical investigation of problems dominated”, is discussed in the section that follows. Under Theme 1B (“Conflict and violence foregrounded”) three sub-theme categories were found.

Three subtheme categories were also found under Theme 1C (“Solution-reporting neglected”). Theme 1D looks at “Frequent focus on violation of human dignity”.

Theme 1A: Critical problem-investigation dominated

Investigating societal problems and holding power to account are important norms associated with watchdog journalism worldwide – an approach claimed by many journalists as central to their professional identity (Palmer et al., 2020). In post-apartheid South-Africa, watchdog journalism dominates in news reporting and is seen as a vital mechanism to expose corruption, exploitation and corporate malfeasance in the third decade of democracy (Wasserman, 2020). Against this background, it is not surprising that most articles in the sample displayed ample critical investigation of eviction-related problems. This trend held true across all three platforms, and in all types and lengths of articles, written by both journalists and non-journalists.

To illustrate: many authors highlighted the failure of government to address the broader housing crisis and landlessness of citizens adequately, for example:

The apartheid state institutionalised black landlessness and the post-apartheid government has failed in its attempts to implement a successful land reform policy. The perspective that reduces land to a commodity, without paying sufficient attention to these contested conceptions of land justice, has failed South Africans.

(News 24, 22/07/2020)

Yet the author stopped short of investigating solutions to the problem highlighted – a trend that dominated in the sample. Further examples of such purely problem-focused reporting, lacking any additional solution focus, included articles investigating the suffering and poverty of evictees; giving detailed and factual descriptions of opposing arguments in court cases; holding politicians to account for inaccuracies and hypocrisy in statements; and exposing violent behaviour towards evictees and holding security forces accountable.

Quoted examples of critical problem-investigation will be limited in this chapter (despite appearing in most articles), since this is an feature that overlaps with monitorial journalism and that is expected to be present in South African news reporting dominated by monitorial journalism. It is not the distinctive feature that sets constructive journalism apart, namely the call to go further than investigating problems by also adding critical, forward-looking solution coverage.

Theme 1B: Conflict and violence foregrounded

Under Theme 1B, focusing on the representation of conflict and violence in the sample, three categories emerged: “Violence reporting considered necessary”, “Conflict presented in lean, binary narratives”, and “War metaphor detected”.

Category: Violence reporting considered necessary

In the literature, mainstream news has been criticised for being event-driven and foregrounding violence unnecessarily (Wasserman et al., 2018). The prominence of violence in news reports is said to risk intensifying pre-existing tensions in communities and to deepen divisions (Votmer, 2016). Yet, in this study’s sample, the highlighting of violence in critical problem reporting should be considered necessary from an ethical point of view, since it often described the effects of violent behaviour by eviction forces against citizens and their belongings. For example:

It is demeaning and humiliating for a breadwinner, be it a man or a woman, to watch while the homes that they have built, are destroyed with such hate and violence.

(Daily Maverick, 20/06/2020)

Category: Conflict presented in lean, binary narratives

The literature shows that the media stands accused of deepening social and political divisions through an inclination to simply present two sides of an issue, rather than initiating a process of inquiry with the aim of looking for solutions (Dame Adjin-Tettey & Garman, 2021). Journalists are cautioned not to entrench polarisation by merely rehashing opposing views of problems with no exploration of the motivations and experiences that shaped views, or of opposing sides' understanding of opposing views (Dame Adjin-Tettey & Garman, 2021).

The sample revealed a repetitive pattern of allegation and counter-allegation in much of the reporting on eviction-related conflict and violence, displaying a tendency towards lean, binary narratives lacking the nuance and complexity called for by proponents of solutions and constructive journalism ('What is constructive journalism?', 2022; 'What is solutions journalism?', 2022). Such a lean representation of conflict was especially evident in reports of violence by eviction forces against evictees, for instance:

Zamisa said: "I was shocked to find live ammunition because I thought the officials were using rubber bullets only to disperse the residents [...] I also saw one of the Law Enforcement officers pulling out his handgun and quickly putting it back when he realized I was recording," alleged Notywala." [...] But Mayco Member for Safety and Security JP Smith denied that live bullets were used (a photo of the round was sent to him). "We don't have weapons to fire such rounds. [It was] either a plant or discharged by SAPS."

(GroundUp, 12/04/2020)

In News24 articles a further trend emerged, namely that of pitting the statements of political parties against each other; this could lead to the media being used as a space for political disputes, as cautioned against by Dame Adjin-Tettey and Garman (2021). For instance, the tensions between the African National Congress (ANC) opposition in the Western Cape and the governing Democratic Alliance (DA) were evident in phrases that became familiar and possibly unengaging as they were re-reported in similar ways throughout the sample. For example, an ANC quote would predictably be followed by a quote from a DA city official:

"The City of Cape Town had no right to demolish your shacks under these current conditions facing our country. What has happened here is shocking and disgusting," said Sotashe and promised to raise the matter with the national government.

To be followed by:

Booi said it must be made clear that no evictions were taking place and only incomplete, unoccupied and illegal built structures are being removed [...] The City has to act fairly and recognise all of the other communities who have been waiting patiently for the delivery of services.

(News 24, 16/04/2020)

In contrast, in one of very few examples where not only problems but also possible solutions were investigated critically, an opinion article displayed deeper insight and complexity in reporting on eviction-related violence. Discussing the dilemma of eviction officers habitually being placed in

ethically and psychologically difficult positions by the City, this report introduces a fresh, nuanced and non-binary approach to the description of the problem:

The destruction of people's homes, whether temporary and located on land owned by others, is inherently a violent act. Such a situation brings out the worst in human nature and some officers use unacceptable levels of force. That some of these officers may empathise with the evictees, but are tasked with perpetrating violence on them, appears not to be considered in the Mayor or the broader public's condemnation of the officers.

(GroundUp, 06/07/2020)

Category: War metaphor detected

While detailed linguistic analysis of metaphors fell outside the scope of this study, it was noticeable that militarised language, suggesting a metaphor of war, emerged in the reporting of eviction-related conflict. This became evident in the words and phrases used by journalists and spokespeople. For instance, journalists wrote:

Red Ants in all-out war on the poor

(Daily Maverick, 22/04/2020)

The notorious Red Ants paramilitary forces [...] reports of the SANDF lurking in the shadows, as if this was a coup of some forgotten Latin American swampland [...] hundreds of men armed with bars, bats and guns, enough firepower to take down Jason Statham.

(Daily Maverick, 22/04/2020)

This is a war against poor residents [...] in their fight with the clan [...] a long-running battle ...

(News24, 14/08/2020)

A sustained attack on the city's most vulnerable residents [...] the great fear of another state massacre ...

(Daily Maverick, 28/04/2020)

The reported statements of city officials often contained words and phrases suggestive of war, for example:

eThekweni municipality spokesperson Msawakhe Mayisela said: "It should be noted that the City will not win the war against land invasion alone.

(News24, 02/07/2020)

The mayor of Cape Town stated that the city was "under siege with illegal land invasions", and that this was a "form of sabotage and terrorism" *(Daily Maverick, 17/04/2020)*. Commenting on the mayor's use of language in an opinion article, the co-authors said the city was "weaponising words to win its battles" *(Daily Maverick, 17/04/2020)*. The authors described the problematic and emotive effect of the term "land invaders" to describe unlawful occupiers of land and remarked that "foreign armies invaded", not citizens. Highlighting the impact of language on readers, the authors argued that this language use criminalised and dehumanised occupiers in the eyes of the public.

The evidence of an underlying war metaphor in eviction-related conflict reporting has relevance to this enquiry into constructive journalism, because of the framework's concern with the effect of a negative bias in news reports on people's emotional state and their ability to engage productively with

thinking about possible solutions to societal problems. Pinker (2021) highlights how the words used in news reports can become part of the internal vocabulary of audiences' thought patterns and affect their emotional state. Additionally, Lakoff and Johnson's (2003) ground-breaking argument that underlying linguistic metaphorical structures can shape people's thoughts and behaviour is largely supported by recent neuroscience (Thibodeau, Hendricks & Boroditsky, 2017). Metaphor framing studies (Flusberg et al., 2018; Thibodeau et al., 2019) confirm these findings further. In other words, the literature shows that underlying metaphors in the language used by news reports are likely to have an influence on audiences' thought patterns about issues, and affect their emotional state and behaviour. The harmful effects of the unwitting use of metaphoric language of war is also a theme featuring often in peace journalism (Adebayo, 2017).

Notably, the problem-focused articles quoted above did not go further to investigate solutions. These articles' language use stood in contrast to the linguistic choices of a small group of articles that included solutions – without steering away from the same problems. Engaging with problems through including words and phrases like “trust”, “transparency”, “compassion” and “embrace this complex situation” can reasonably be expected to have a different effect on thought patterns, emotions and behaviour than the militarised language of war. For instance:

De Vos said that the dignity of the poor should be paramount and that “elements of grace and compassion should infuse the formal structures of the law and therefore also the behaviour of those who enforce the law.”

(Daily Maverick, 03/07/2020)

We need to embrace this complex situation. [...] We have to accept that urbanisation is not going away any time soon. The metros, including Cape Town, will continue to experience high migration, particularly in the aftermath of the pandemic. We have to systematically address the housing crisis. And it will need new forms of relationships, participation, transparency and trust in order to do so.

(Daily Maverick, 27/07/2020)

Now that we've looked at the themes describing how the absence of critical solution investigation in most of the sample manifested in mainly problem-focused reporting, let's look at the themes describing the ways in which solutions were covered in the sample – even if it received scant attention.

Theme 1C: Solution-reporting neglected

The first Principle was found to be largely absent due to the absence of critical investigation of possible solutions. Most articles lacked any kind of solution coverage, and in the small group of articles that mentioned solutions, the approach fell short of constructive journalism guidelines. Under Theme 1C – “Solution-reporting neglected”, three Categories were found: “Solutions covered superficially”, “Forward-looking approach revealed in opinion pieces” and “Critical solution-investigation the exception”.

Category: Solutions covered superficially

Some articles included surface coverage of possible solutions to problems, without giving serious attention to the suggestions. Examples of this kind of superficial mention of solutions appeared in articles of varying length across all three platforms, mostly in the category of news or news discussion, and written mostly by journalists.

For instance, in the example below, “improved access to decent housing” can be seen as a possible solution to evictions and its problematic consequences, but the suggestion is merely mentioned in passing, without further investigation:

The real injustice of the eviction is not simply that force was used inappropriately. It is rather that the City decided to use public resources to embarrass and harass a resident, instead of providing improved access to decent housing.

(News24, 19/04/2020)

Examples of such superficial coverage of possible solutions were found regarding possible remedies to problems of evictions, containing Covid-19, and violent or dehumanising behaviour against evictees or protesters (See Appendix D for a summary of problems and possible solutions reported). Although this kind of solution coverage does not align with constructive journalism principles, it is meaningful to highlight in which ways this style of reporting (following the monitorial approach dominating in South African news) fell short of the guidelines for constructive journalism.

Surface coverage of possible solutions to evictions included demands for a moratorium on evictions, the seeking or granting of court orders to limit evictions or gain redress for evictees, demands for the government to build new houses for evictees, and the announcement/provision of temporary alternative housing for evictees. In most cases, the reporting did not go further than the mere repetition of announcements. For example:

The city of Johannesburg has agreed to provide temporary shelter to the Lakeview residents whose shacks were demolished by the Red Ants last week.

(News 24, 07/08/2020)

Owing to the lack of further investigation into the details, evidence and limitations of this solution offered, the reporting did not show the rigour in solutions coverage called for in constructive journalism, namely using the best available evidence to explain and investigate solution approaches in a critical and clear-eyed way (‘What is solutions journalism?’, 2022).

The same trend emerged in the way solutions were mentioned to the eviction-related problem of containing Covid-19. The suggestions, which were merely mentioned, included demands for authorities to improve living conditions, calls for community health workers to be sent to informal settlements, and demands for dignified shelter for Covid-19 cases. In none of the few articles where such surface coverage was present were suggestions expanded on in practical terms by looking at evidence and limitations. For instance, in the example below, Rent Strike’s suggestions for dignified accommodation for all shack dwellers who test positive for Covid-19 were not investigated further in a critical, reality-based way, taking into consideration the demographic realities and accommodation shortages in the South African urban context:

Rent Strike demands [that] all residents in shack dwellings testing positive be given safe and dignified accommodation in which they can self-isolate, where necessary appropriate buildings may be requisitioned for this purpose.

(Daily Maverick, 31/05/2020)

Similarly, in the next example, a demand for “decisive action” from national government as a solution to address violent behaviour by security forces against evictees is merely stated – without elaboration or investigation of limitations:

The national government needs to take decisive action against the brutal forms of policing that are increasingly generating anger and turning people against the state.

(News 24, 03/04/2020)

Reported in this way, the demand for “decisive action” from national government is not likely to be regarded as a convincing solution proposition to police brutality by readers, given the track record of ineffectiveness of such statements in the political context of the third decade of democracy in South Africa.

Category: Forward-looking approach revealed in opinion pieces

In a few opinion articles, possible solutions to eviction-related problems were covered in a forward-looking, longer-term approach (as stipulated in the first principle of constructive journalism listed in Chapter 2), introducing constructive thinking around enduring underlying challenges. These articles did not necessarily offer outright solutions, but aligned with what McIntyre (2019, p. 17) calls “a more productive style of reporting that might present at least a partial remedy” to an increasingly frustrated audience who may have given up on a seemingly impossible problem.

Most of these forward-looking articles addressed key long-term issues of housing and land. The examples appeared across the three platforms, written largely by non-journalists (researchers, legal experts, the executive director of Action Group) and were 3–4 pages – longer than the 1–2-page average of articles in the sample. The finding that non-journalists were responsible for most in-depth journalism investigating possible solutions to enduring housing and land problems is illustrative of economic and structural pressures on the media industry – causing juniorisation of newsrooms and a lack of training, time and financial resources for in-depth investigative reporting (Harber, 2021).

The most prominent solution trends suggested in opinion articles were legislative and other measures to ensure citizens can exercise their constitutional right to adequate housing; more humane, sustainable responses to the housing needs of the poor; systematic management of urbanisation; secure tenure to be offered on well-located public land; and faster release of government land.

For example, in contrast to the superficial solution coverage cited in the category “Solutions covered superficially” above, which merely called for “improved access to decent housing” (News24, 19/04/2020), the opinion piece quoted below offers specific and forward-looking solutions, backed up with relevant context:

Fifth, government must expedite the release of the land it owns for housing development. From large military owned parcels to social housing sites in Cape Town, it has taken decades to transfer land between spheres of government. The release of land needs publicly available delivery timeframes.

(Daily Maverick, 27/07/2020)

Category: Critical solution-investigation the exception

Very few articles included critical investigation of possible solutions to eviction-related problems. The obligation placed on journalists in constructive journalism is to investigate not only the efficacy and evidence of impact of a solution response, but also the limitations (‘What is solutions journalism?’, 2022).

In this sample, the few examples of critical investigation of solutions to eviction-related problems appeared in articles of different lengths and types on all three platforms, written by both journalists and non-journalists. Examples included the investigation of obstacles to systematic large-scale

housing solutions; the risks and limits to alternative accommodation offered as a housing solution for evictees or homeless people; and the risks related to the solution of water tanks to contain Covid-19. To note:

Although water tankers had been dispatched, they were worried that some tanks had been placed right next to rotting piles of uncollected rubbish posing a health hazard. They also had not been told whether or not the water was safe to drink or was just for handwashing.

(Daily Maverick, 01/04/2020)

Theme 1D: Frequent focus on violation of human dignity

In the last of the sub-themes deriving from Theme 1 – that the first principle of constructive journalism (as identified for this study) was largely absent in the sample – approaches to human dignity are discussed.

The media's duty to contribute to the healing of society and the restoration of human dignity in South Africa is a prominent theme in the literature (Wasserman, 2020). Human dignity was frequently reported on in the sample – mostly in description and commentary on how people's right to dignity was violated in eviction-related conflict (as noted in the category "Violence reporting considered necessary" of Theme 1B, discussed earlier in this chapter). Wasserman (2021) argues that conflict reporting should include finding ways to confirm people's dignity and offer solutions to help de-escalate conflict. Yet, while the conflict reporting in this sample discussed the denigration of human dignity, articles largely fell short of offering credible solutions to de-escalate violence. This finding raises concerns that the repetition of citizens' impaired dignity could cause secondary trauma for those suffering already.

An example of the reporting on human dignity that followed a controversial incident in July 2020 offers interesting insights. Widespread outrage dominated news reports after a video of a naked man being dragged from his shack by eviction forces in Khayelitsha went viral. Similar reports across platforms repeated the shock and condemnation of community members, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), politicians and other commentators for days and even weeks after the event. For instance:

How could an innocent man be forced out of his home, naked, in the middle of a bitter winter and in the height of a global pandemic, before seeing it demolished? Online outrage emphasise the culpability of the City's governing party, the DA, or exceptionalise Cape Town as a heartless or anti-poor city.

(News24, 02/07/2020)

"We're claiming that it amounts to torture in terms of the Act, and cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment," said the lawyer, Sherylle Dass, commenting on Qolani's eviction.

(News24, 02/07/2020)

Commenting on the shock and outrage prompted by the arrest, Professor Ebenezer Durojaye of the Dullah Omar Institute for Constitutional Law, Governance and Human Rights [...] said the excessive force used was unconstitutional and disproportionate [...] Government, he added, had failed on two fronts; respecting Qolani's human rights and the government's international obligation to realise the right to adequate housing.

(Daily Maverick, 03/07/2020)

SAHRC said their actions were a “clear violation of the right to human dignity, the right to freedom and security of the person – particularly the right not to be subjected to or be treated or punished in a cruel, inhuman or degrading way among numerous other human rights violations.”

(News24, 09/07/2020)

News reports also included city officials’ disapproval of the eviction officers’ conduct and an apology. Unfolding solution responses, reported on as the story developed, included the suspension of four officers, the announcement of an independent investigation by the City, legal action taken by Bulelani Qolani, the man who had been dragged from the shack, and an eventual court case that found in his favour.

One opinion article, written by a researcher for GroundUp and republished on News24, investigated not only problems surrounding the incident, but also possible solutions. This approach, fully aligning with constructive journalism principles, made productive links between the restoration of human dignity and housing solutions. The author writes:

That the land Qolani and others illegally invaded was earmarked for a water infrastructure upgrade project to service Khayelitsha sadly fails to address the causes of land invasion and casts aspersions on the prioritisation of projects. [...] More impetus should be directed at both the planning and implementation phases of government projects to enhance turnaround time and quell insidious protests that cast aspersions on the state’s effectiveness. Partnerships with business champions in the private sector and government to create sustainable human settlements and improve service delivery should be solicited and implemented to restore Qolani’s dignity and human rights for all.

(GroundUp, 06/07/2020; News24, 06/07/2020)

It was notable that this article, written four days after the incident occurred, also aligned with Haagerup’s view that all stories need not be constructive all the time, and that constructive journalism does not replace monitorial journalism, but adds an additional layer to the news cycle as it is known today: “from breaking news, to investigative journalism, to constructive journalism” (‘Constructive journalism in summary’, 2022).

4.2.2 Theme 2: The principle “Place the issue in its relevant, broader context” partially present in sample

This study is rooted in the South African post-apartheid media context, as explored in the literature review (Section 2.3). The “relevant, broader context” referred to in Principle 2 includes the immediate context within which events played out, the recent past and previously reported context, and the South African historical, socio-economic, legal, political and cultural context of eviction-related issues. In constructive journalism, the broader context of an issue also refers to using factual data to relativise issues globally, or to show where else a specific solution has been tried, and what the results were (‘What is constructive journalism?’, 2022).

Discussion of Theme 2 is introduced by a summary table of the theme’s sub-themes and sub-theme categories.

Table 3: Theme, sub-themes and categories of the manifestation of Principle 2 in the sample

Theme 2: The principle “Place the issue in its relevant, broader context” partially present in sample	
Sub-themes	Categories
Theme 2A: South African contextualisation mostly present	• Interests of disenfranchised represented in socio-economic, political and legal contextualisation • Conflict and violence contextualised • Historical context neglected • In-depth information to empower citizens in local contexts lacking
Theme 2B: International contextualisation mostly absent	

The second principle manifested with regards to many of the current South African contextual factors identified in Chapter 2 (Section 2.3) but was absent with regards to others. This absence was also largely seen with regards to relativising issues globally, as called for in constructive journalism.

Further analysis of how the partial presence of Principle 2 manifested in the sample is set out in the sub-themes and categories. Under Theme 2A (“South African contextualisation mostly present”), four sub-themes were found. Theme 2B discusses “International contextualisation mostly absent”.

Theme 2A: South African contextualisation mostly present

Scholars call on journalists working in the South African context to consider the need to represent the interests of all the country’s publics, especially those previously discounted on the grounds of race, ethnicity and socio-economic inequality (Rodny-Gumede, 2017); reflect African values and culture (Chasi & Rodny-Gumede, 2016); place issues within the bigger picture, historically, of post-colonial and post-apartheid legacies (Rodny-Gumede, 2015a); and provide citizens with enough in-depth information to hold office-bearers accountable (Malila, 2019).

The ‘Context’ principle manifested strongly in terms of the immediate and recent-past context of events and issues. Relevant context related to violent incidents, court cases, problematic areas, repeat evictions, and socio-economic and social justice inequality was provided in many articles. Often such contextualisation aligned with contextual factors highlighted by Rodny-Gumede (2017) and Chasi & Rodney-Gumede (2016) mentioned above. (For detailed representation of “CONTEXT” themes with examples, see Code Book, Appendix 2.)

Under Theme 2A, four categories emerged: “Interests of disenfranchised represented in socio-economic, political and legal contextualisation”, “Conflict and violence contextualised”, “Historical context neglected” and “In-depth information to empower citizens in local contexts lacking”.

Category: Interests of disenfranchised represented in socio-economic, political and legal contextualisation

Throughout the sample, the interests of previously discounted publics were well represented in detailed accounts of the context of extreme poverty of living conditions, and the anger and suffering experienced by evictees. The accounts appeared across all platforms, in articles of different lengths

and types, written mostly by journalists. This indicates that there is an increase in attentive listening to the voices of poor and marginalised citizens, as called for by Garman and Malila (2017). For instance:

One of the occupiers, Novisisanani Thinta, said she could no longer afford to pay rent. She is chronically ill and unable to work. She survives on her disability and children's grants. She has been on the housing waiting list since 2013. She said in the first demolition on 9 March, law enforcement officers threw "my blanket, some clothes and my chair in the fire."

(GroundUp, 09/07/2020)

Category: Conflict and violence contextualised

Frequent contextualisation of conflict and violence in the reporting approach of many articles (varying in length, type of article and authors) highlighted the complexities of eviction-related conflict. The prevalence of violence against evictees was mentioned earlier, yet violence against security forces and public violence was also contextualised. For instance:

The Western Cape government last week said it condemned the "violent and destructive protests and land invasions ... which have resulted in injuries to our citizens, damage to property, and which will impact government's ability to provide key services to our most vulnerable residents going forward."

More extensive analysis of the contextualisation of conflict and violence, and the limitations of the presentation of conflict and violence in the reporting, will follow in the analysis of interviews and Chapter 5.

(News24, 01/07/2020)

Category: Historical context neglected

Very few articles showed a reporting approach focused on placing issues within the broader historical context of South Africa's colonial and apartheid past, as called for in the literature (Rodny-Gumede, 2017). The articles that highlighted historical context were longer opinion or news discussion pieces (written by researchers, an editor and a journalist) and one citizen letter to the president. An example:

While the term "land invader" is still widely used by government officials and in the media, it is a loaded term, reminiscent of the apartheid-era legal order. The apartheid government's legal framework systematically drove black people off their land and limited their ability to secure tenure particularly in urban spaces.

(Daily Maverick, 17/08/2020)

Category: In-depth information to empower citizens in local contexts lacking

Malila (2019) argued that journalists need to understand public administration and be able to analyse causes, contexts and resources available to help solve social problems. Aligning with Kovach and Rosenthal's (2014) appeal to provide "citizens with the information they need to be free and self-governing", Malila (2019) called for more thematic reporting to empower citizens with the knowledge needed to understand where the problems are in public administration. In several articles in the sample, the provision of legislative and regulatory context related to eviction issues gives citizens valuable data, but the articles lack in-depth information to empower citizens in a local context – as appealed for by Malila (2019). Citizens' questions about eviction-related issues are often merely stated, without being followed up with deeper enquiry. For instance:

“Why can’t the municipality build houses for farmworkers there?” she asked.

(Daily Maverick, 04/08/2020)

If a constructive journalism approach had been followed, the enquiry would likely have gone further, to include more detailed information for the farmworker community and to provide information about resources to help solve their specific problems (‘What is constructive journalism?’, 2022).

Theme 2B: International contextualisation mostly absent

Very few articles contextualised eviction-related issues internationally to allow for a bigger picture, as recommended by constructive journalism proponents (‘What is constructive journalism?’, 2022). The rare occurrences of international contextualisation in the sample were in longer opinion or news discussion pieces, written by both journalists and non-journalists. For instance:

Countries like Spain and states in the USA like New York State, as well as numerous cities including San Francisco and Los Angeles, have banned evictions. In Los Angeles, 63% of the city’s four million residents are in rented accommodation and would be vulnerable to being evicted if unable to keep up payment of rentals.

(GroundUp, 30/03/2020)

The lack of international contextualisation seen in most of the sample means that problems are localised and that people are prevented from comparing international solution responses.

4.2.3 Theme 3: Textual evidence of the principle: “Expand journalistic interviewing to cover nuance and complexity” in operationalised form largely absent in sample

In this study, and drawing from the literature, the constructive journalism principle “Expand journalistic interviewing to cover nuance and complexity” is interpreted as an obligation to expand the range of sources interviewed, as well as expanding the practice of interviewing through constructive journalism techniques.

To introduce discussion of Theme 3, a summary table of the theme’s sub-theme and categories is provided.

Table 4: Theme, sub-theme and categories of the manifestation of Principle 3 in the sample

Theme 3: Textual evidence of the principle “Expand journalistic interviewing to cover nuance and complexity” in operationalised form largely absent in sample	
Sub-theme	Categories
Theme 3A: Lack of textual evidence of nuance and complexity	• Binary pattern revealed in choice and arrangement of news sources • Opinion pieces included broader range of sources and perspectives than news • Scant evidence of nuance and complexity of narrative sought through expanded interviewing techniques

To expand interviewing in a constructive way means expanding the range of sources and using techniques to get beyond the first layer of people's responses to the 'what/when/who/why' of issues. Under the constructive journalism umbrella, scholars propose various but similar methods to expand journalistic interviewing, all aimed at creating more nuanced and accurate portrayals.

This study aligns with Dame Adjin-Tettey and Garman's (2021) proposition that the technique "Complicating the Narrative" (CTN) (Ripley, 2018) stands out as a viable interviewing approach to counter various forms of polarisation in severely divided societies (such as South Africa). CTN sets the tone for complexity by ensuring that divergent groups of sources are used and that details are included that do not fit the usual narrative (Dame Adjin-Tettey & Garman, 2021).

Journalists' actual practices of interviewing could not be analysed through textual analysis of the sample; this aspect was explored further in interviews with journalists. However, lines could be drawn between what was present in the articles and the kind of information journalists were seeking through interviews. In other words, in as far as the text of articles could be seen as the product of journalists' interviewing of sources, a finding about the operationalisation of Principle 3 could be reached.

In reaching the finding represented in Theme 3 – that textual evidence of Principle 3 in operationalised form was largely absent in the sample – the constructive journalism methods referred to above were considered. The range of sources consulted in the articles and the information attributed to those sources were analysed. Under Theme 3A – "Lack of textual evidence of nuance and complexity" – three categories emerged.

Theme 3A: Lack of textual evidence of nuance and complexity

Analysis of article content revealed that the expression of nuance and complexity – as understood under the umbrella of constructive journalism practices and techniques – was neglected in the sample. In news articles nuance and complexity in content was hampered by a limiting binary pattern emerging in the choice and arrangement of sources. Authors of opinion pieces consulted a broader range of sources and more nuance emerged in perspectives, but overall, there was scant evidence of the kind of complex narrative described as the aim of expanded and constructive interviewing techniques such as "Complicating the Narrative" (Ripley, 2018). Under Theme 3A, three categories arose: "Binary pattern revealed in choice and arrangement of news sources", "Opinion pieces included broader range of sources and perspectives than news" and "Scant evidence of nuance and complexity of narrative sought by expanded interviewing techniques".

Category: Binary pattern revealed in choice and arrangement of news sources

The identification of sources throughout the sample showed that most news articles, across all platforms, included the perspective of at least four sources. A binary pattern emerged in the choice of sources and the way perspectives were arranged to represent two sides of an argument or eviction-related issue.

One side would typically be the views of community members, evictees and community organisations/lawyers – often telling an accusatory story of anger, helplessness and suffering caused by the decisions and actions of municipalities, eviction forces or provincial government. The other side would typically be statements defending or explaining eviction decisions or actions, from local and provincial government office-bearers, their lawyers, the police or cities' eviction forces. (In this sample the perspective of the national government about eviction challenges – largely expressed in contradictory statements of Minister Lindiwe Sisulu – seemed to change according to political expediency.) The overall effect of eviction news reporting was one of the same opposing views, often expressed by the same people, being reported over and over. The validity of views is not disputed

here – they give a clear impression of the seemingly irresolvable nature of the challenges underlying eviction-related conflict – but the engagement of readers may be influenced by such a repetitive approach to most stories.

For instance, the view of an evictee in Johannesburg:

“These are not shacks. These are people’s homes. I am going to die for this property, my home. Because when they take my home, they might as well kill me,” Molatoudi said. “Where must we go?”

And the city’s response:

“These people have come here illegally; soon there will be a service delivery protest because there is no water, electricity, and that’s not planned for, and government will be accused of being incompetent; of not caring and all that,” Maile said.

(News24, 17/08/2020)

Reading through the articles over a five-month period, it would not be unreasonable to conclude that the reporting approach could create a sense of “more of the same”, possibly hardening pre-existing attitudes among readers, interviewees and communities about eviction-related matters, as discussed by Dame Adjin-Tettey and Garman (2021).

[Category: Opinion pieces included broader range of sources and perspectives than news](#)

On average, longer opinion articles across all platforms (written mostly by non-journalists, but also by journalists in some cases) included more and more varied perspectives than news articles. Issues were also presented in a more nuanced way than in news reporting, often backed up by research.

A GroundUp opinion article offering seven solution proposals on how to manage Cape Town’s surge in occupations, authored by the executive director of a development action group, exhibits the benefits of non-journalists possibly having time and resources available to represent a broad range of perspectives in a considered way. The complexities underlying the increasing problem of occupations during Covid-19 lockdowns were sketched, representing the views of city officials and different spheres of government, landlords, tenants and backyarders, and institutional structures such as the Rental Housing Tribunal – all without creating a binary opposition between views. Good research was evident in the historical and legislative perspectives. Having given evidence of a range of contributing factors to the problem, the author’s proposals – such as the one below – are bound to create more impact with readers:

The blame games between different spheres of government results in mixed messages and confusion. The Constitution and legislation are clear, and the political messaging has to be consistent with that. We have to stop speaking down to citizens, but rather build relationships with them. The development model needs to move beyond ‘government as the delivery agent’ to relationships that build people’s agency and choices.

(GroundUp, 27/07/2020)

Again, these findings point to the compromised position of newsrooms due to economic and structural pressures on the news industry (Harber, 2021). This sample shows that news journalists, who are under constant pressure to produce news at great speed to stay competitive, habitually fall into binary “he said/she said” reporting. The media is often criticised for this kind of reporting, which is said to entrench polarisation (Dame Adjin-Tettey & Garman, 2021). The media has a duty to create room for different stakeholders to express their views on issues of public interest (Dame Adjin-Tettey &

Garman, 2021), but the sample shows that audiences are largely left with the mere presentation of opposing viewpoints, without information and nuance to help build consensus to solve social problems.

Category: Scant evidence of nuance and complexity of narrative sought through expanded interviewing techniques

The lack of exact criteria for the expression of ‘nuance and complexity’, often called for under the constructive journalism umbrella, can on the one hand be seen as a weakness in the defining of the form. On the other hand, it allows for context-specific interpretation of nuance and complexity – as is exercised in this study’s analysis of South African articles.

With reference to African countries “where people are brutally divided along ethnic, political and religious lines”, Dame Adjin-Tettey and Garman (2021, p. 1) highlight the potential of the CTN technique (Ripley, 2018) to help journalists overcome the inclination to create narrow two-sided narratives that entrench polarisation on contentious issues. As discussed in the literature review (Chapter 2, Section 2.4.1), the authors specifically refer to journalist Amanda Ripley’s reporting tips based on CTN (Ripley, 2018), which appeal to journalists to complicate narratives by asking questions to 1) Amplify contradictions; 2) Widen the lens; 3) Unearth deeper motivations; 4) Listen more and better; 5) Expose people to other perspectives; and 6) Carefully counter confirmation bias (Dame Adjin-Tettey & Garman, 2021).

While the application of some of these techniques could not be explored textually (and were explored further in journalist interviews), analysis of the sample revealed very little evidence of the kind of destabilisation of two-sided narratives aimed for through techniques like CTN. For instance, there was no indication in the texts that interviewees were specifically exposed to and asked to reflect on the other side’s position, or that contradictions in the usual binary narratives were amplified to counter confirmation bias.

However, there were signals that some narratives were the product of deep listening by journalists (Tip 4 above) and the identification of the deeper motivations and values of interviewees (Tip 3 above). Such an example is Pauli Van Wyk’s description of the devastation felt by evictees in the aftermath of the brutal demolishment of their shacks. The presentation of interviewee Kolossa’s listing of his few (destroyed) physical objects below alludes to the deeper meaning symbolised through these objects; for Kolossa it’s about the primary value of belonging and rootedness, and the fierce sense of longing for a ‘home’. Van Wyk writes:

I have so many questions, but Kolossa insists, willing me to focus on the “crime scene” at his feet. It took many hours to dig that pit toilet.

“Look.” He speaks over my questions. “This was my food cupboard. I had potatoes in here.” The cupboard is on its back in the Cape Flats’ dirty, powdery white sand, a single door left on its hinges.

One by one he points to and identifies the things he loves which made his life worthwhile, now lying ruined at his feet.

(Daily Maverick, 19/07/2020)

4.2.4 Theme 4: The principle “Strengthen connection and co-creation with audience” indirectly and partially present in sample

The analysis of Principle 4’s manifestation in online news was limited by the sample scope of this single-researcher study, which only looked at the main body of articles, and excluded social media, reader comments and visual material such as videos and photographs. This limitation is significant, since the public’s interaction with online news has grown significantly through visual contributions and social media (Choi et al., 2020). The perceptions and attitudes of journalists and editors towards strengthening connection and co-creation with audiences were explored further in interviews.

Nevertheless, despite the limitations of the scope of the sample analysed, interesting findings about the manifestation of Principle 4 did emerge, confirming pervasive arguments in the literature about the importance of audience/user contributions to online news.

Before discussing Theme 4 in more detail, a summary table of the theme’s sub-theme and categories is provided.

Table 5: Theme, sub-theme and categories of the manifestation of Principle 4 in the sample

Theme 4: The principle “Strengthen connection and co-creation with audience” indirectly and partially present in sample	
Sub-theme	Categories
Theme 4A: Audience connection strengthened through citizen video discussion	• Social media set news agenda • Emotion triggered through audience contributions a central factor shaping the news agenda

As we saw in the literature review (Chapter 2, ‘Calls for citizens to be seen as active participants to meaning making’ in Section 2.3.3), increasing pressure on journalists to strengthen co-creation and connection with the audience – also through social media – is a critical and controversial part of the evolving nature of journalistic roles and boundaries in the digital era. In an environment where news narratives are fuelled by unmitigated audience content through social media, journalists have to break stories ever faster, while at the same time lacking the resources for rigorous investigative journalism (Harber, 2021). In Tolsi’s (2020) view this has led to a “survivalist” response to the social media machine, where instead of investigating, journalists appeal to emotion, anger and outrage. Yet, despite the contestations, there is broad agreement among media practitioners that for news to spread and gain traction in audiences’ minds and imaginations, journalists need the internet and social media (Tolsi, 2020).

Analysis of this study’s text-only sample revealed evidence of the growing prominence and influence of audience contributions in online news, and the ways in which it strengthens connection to the public.

In Theme 4 it was found that the application of the principle “Strengthen connection and co-creation with the audience” could be considered partially and indirectly present in the text of articles through the authors’ discussions of citizen video content and the prominence given to society’s reaction to that content. Further analysis of Theme 4 is set out in the sub-theme “Audience connection strengthened through citizen video discussion” and two categories.

Theme 4A: Audience connection strengthened through citizen video discussion

While citizen videos included in articles or referred to in hyperlinks were not analysed in the study, the impact of the inclusion of this user-generated content can be seen in the main body of several articles. The main topic of discussion in these articles was the content of citizen videos. The videos often motivated journalists to strengthen connection with the audience by seeking and portraying their reactions to the videos.

Under Theme 4A, two categories emerged: “Social media set news agenda” and “Emotion triggered through audience contributions a central factor shaping the news agenda”.

Category: Social media set news agenda

There are strong arguments in the literature that citizens must be seen as active participants to meaning making and that new technologies offer large numbers of the citizenry the opportunity to be co-creators of news (Rodny-Gumede, 2017; Willems & Mano, 2017). Recent research has shown that social media is becoming the technology of choice to engage with news for a growing number of people in South Africa (Newman et al., 2020). Additionally, Bosch’s (2017) work shows that social media discussions often determine the main news agenda.

Evidence from this study’s sample confirms Bosch’s assertion. In the example below, the discussion of the video mentioned earlier – of Bulelani Qolani dragged naked from his shack – shows that the video first went viral on social media, before it started dominating the news agenda on the online platforms of the sample the day after the incident. To note:

The City of Cape Town is in the process of suspending four law enforcement officials who were caught on camera manhandling a naked man in Khayelitsha.

The video went viral on Wednesday after the naked man, who was in the process of bathing, was seen being dragged from his shack and wrestled to the ground by officers.

The man finally escaped from officers and dashed back to his shack, which was partially torn down.

(News24, 02/07/2020)

The sight of City of Cape Town law enforcement officials dragging a naked Bulelani Qholani from his shack in Khayelitsha has prompted deep shock and outrage across South Africa.

The images, circulated widely on social media, have a direct link back to apartheid era humiliation of black people captured in photographs.

(GroundUp, 03/07/2020)

The impact of citizen videos in the creation of news in this example cannot be underestimated. For weeks after the ‘naked man’ incident and other controversial eviction and demolishment incidents, different videos posted on social media by eyewitnesses were referenced in news articles – in effect operationalising scholars’ call to see citizens as active participants in meaning making and the co-creation of news (Rodny-Gumede, 2017; Willems & Mano, 2017). The importance of citizen participation in news is illustrated below:

To defend its conduct, described as “constitutionally and legally abhorrent”, the City of Cape Town told its citizens that it had effected “no evictions” and had only demolished “unoccupied and incomplete structures”.

Their dilemma, in part, will be to explain away the video footage of Khayelitsha residents and journalists on the scene showing fully built and occupied structures complete with couches, stoves, cupboards and pit toilets.

(Daily Maverick, 09/07/2020)

Category: Emotion triggered through audience contributions a central factor shaping the news agenda

Increased use of new digital technologies (especially mobile phones) has given rise to the growing prominence of unrehearsed 'emotional' audience content in online news, often sitting alongside conventional 'objective' journalism in news hierarchies (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2016). In several articles in the sample, especially on News24, these clashing epistemologies were given equal prominence at the beginning of articles.

Research on user-generated content shows that audiences value uncensored citizens' contributions, especially videos, as more authentic than professional content (Wahl-Jorgensen et al., 2010). Some scholars contend that the growing prominence of emotional audience content in online news and social media leads to the erosion of journalistic norms and, eventually, the spread of sensational and false news (Harber, 2021). Others call for more attention to emotion as news value, since it gives an expanded understanding of how audiences use online news sites (Barnes, 2016). Wahl-Jorgensen (2016) argues that the porous line between audiences and journalistic practices obligates journalism scholars to regard emotion as a central factor in shaping the news agenda.

Descriptions of the first video of the Bulelani Qolani incident referenced earlier in this chapter (Theme 1D: Frequent focus on violation of human dignity) and of another video sent to GroundUp by an eyewitness to the incident (referenced below) reveal two ways in which emotion comes into play: the emotional content of the video itself and the emotional content of journalist and audience reaction, triggered by the videos. The (described) emotion displayed in the videos (including the example below) and the emotion contained in commentators' and members of the public's expressions of outrage and shock (Theme 1D: Frequent focus on violation of human dignity) support the argument that emotion should be regarded as an important factor shaping the news agenda.

We have been sent a new video. It shows a clearly upset Qolani standing completely naked in front of his shack with his ID in his hand shouting at law enforcement. Witnesses told GroundUp that he was doing this to show law enforcement officers who he is or that he is a South African citizen.

At the end of the six-second video, a man, presumably a fellow resident, attempts to calm Qolani or usher him into his shack. At this point Law Enforcement officers are at least a couple of metres from Qolani.

As far as we can tell, the video was filmed before the one showing Qolani being dragged out of his home by law enforcement officers, because his shack was being destroyed in the second video.

(GroundUp, 09/07/2020)

The textual analysis of articles in the sample revealed that the four principles of constructive journalism used for this study were largely absent (Principle 1), partially present (Principle 2), largely absent in textual, operationalised form (Principle 3), and indirectly and partially present (Principle 4). We will now move on to the findings of the qualitative interview analysis, exploring journalists' and editors' attitudes and perceptions of constructive journalism in South African online news. The four

principles of constructive journalism and their suitability to the South African context will be explored through a different lens in the second dataset.

4.3 JOURNALISTS' AND EDITORS' PERCEPTIONS OF AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS CONSTRUCTIVE JOURNALISM IN DIGITAL NEWS

In response to RQ2, the second round of themed findings of this study resulted from a qualitative analysis of interviews with journalists who produced the articles analysed above and editors involved in the editorial approach of the three news outlets in the sample. Since the samples and findings of the study's two datasets are interlinked, the numbering of themes follows on from the first round of findings to avoid confusion.

Theme 5 represents the range of support some participants expressed for constructive journalism to be appended to watchdog reporting. Theme 6 describes examples of constructive journalism seen to be present in the organisations' current output, as noted by participants. In Theme 7 the motivations for (some) participants' receptiveness to constructive journalism are described. Theme 8 (with its four subthemes) represents the significant operational and conceptual challenges to constructive journalism's implementation in South African digital news that emerged in interviews. Theme 9 describes participants' views of journalism's potential role in contributing to polarisation through conflict reporting and their responses to constructive journalism proposals of how polarisation can be mitigated. Theme 10 follows on with participants' views of the constructive journalism principle of strengthening connection with audiences and including them in the co-creation of news. Finally, Theme 11 represents the practical suggestions of how constructive journalism could potentially be implemented that arose in interviews.

A few methodological notes are important to the presentation of the findings. The final purposive sample included two editors (News24 and GroundUp), one associate editor (Daily Maverick) and five journalists. Although it was a satisfactory sample size, the difficulties in engaging journalists must be noted, since it is evidential support of the pressure journalists work under, which is an influential factor in the findings. Of the twelve journalists who were approached over a three-month period, eight agreed to do the interview, but several breaking-news journalists gave up after ongoing last-minute cancellations due to daily work pressure.

The final sample provided rich information for the study. Respondents' views were often presented in quotes of a few sentences to give accurate representation of the nuance related to differences between the three places of employment and sometimes attitudinal differences between editors and journalists. Participants' length of experience in journalism ranged from 2 to 34 years, and all but one of the journalists agreed that their names may be used (See Appendix 1).

The Interview Guide (Appendix 3) and the analysis of the transcripts were informed by the findings of the content analysis. The aim of questions was to gain insight into the news practitioners' views on the potential of constructive journalism in South African online news from a normative and operational perspective. Participants were sent a brief information page on constructive journalism a few days before interviews to ensure a consistent level of knowledge of the concept as starting point (Appendix 4).

4.3.1 Theme 5: Role for constructive journalism to be introduced alongside watchdog journalism recognised

It will become clear in the overall description and analysis of themes that journalists had different interpretations of constructive journalism vis-à-vis watchdog journalism and that, for some

participants, these understandings changed over the course of interviews. As seen in the discussion of the history of watchdog and development journalism in this study's literature review (Chapter 2, Section 2.2.2), journalists indicated that they saw the two frameworks as complementary, rather than mutually exclusive (De Beer et al, 2016). In the same vein, three viewpoints about watchdog journalism vis-à-vis constructive journalism emerged at first from this study's interviews. They are: constructive journalism and watchdog journalism seen as mutually exclusive (this viewpoint was temporary and changed over the course of interviews), constructive journalism seen as a "nice to have" in the overall news cycle, and constructive journalism seen as a form that will support and strengthen watchdog journalism.

Firstly, it is important to note an overall viewpoint emerging throughout the interviews: journalists regarded their responsibility to inform the public of critical problems and to reveal abuses of power – as prescribed by watchdog journalism – as a cornerstone of their societal role:

It's the essence of the job. You don't get journalism without holding power to account. Journalists should shine a light on the truth, especially on things that are hidden. [...] You inform and people have to decide, based on what you write, how they will organise the structure of their life.

(Pauli Van Wyk, senior investigative journalist, Daily Maverick)

The affirmation of watchdog journalism's central role is in line with the finding in the content analysis that critical problem-investigation dominated in the sample of articles (Theme 1A: Critical problem-investigation dominated). Interviewees were unanimous in their acknowledgement that watchdog journalism contributed to "bringing the country's democracy back from the brink", as described by Harber (2020) in the literature. For example:

The Gupta Leak investigation had a fundamental impact in the fact that Jacob Zuma is no longer president and that we had the Zondo commission. [...] There are those big ticket cases where you feel immense joy that our investigation actually led to things being bettered.

(Adriaan Basson, editor, News24)

Judge Zondo acknowledged that, repeatedly: If it wasn't for the journalists, if it wasn't for the exposés, we wouldn't know what we know.

(Ferial Haffajee, associate editor, Daily Maverick)

We are uncovering what has gone wrong, we are assisting authorities to make better decisions, and we're highlighting those unscrupulous individuals who are supposed to lead us. That's how it [watchdog journalism] is helping us forward.

(Jason Felix, senior parliamentary journalist, News24)

Participants from GroundUp indicated that the outlet's focus on investigating and describing (human rights) abuses would remain unaltered, even if real change resulting from exposés was sometimes not evident. Senior journalist James Stent said the pace of actual change depended on the size of the problem: "It's like turning an oil tanker. Something like Prasa, it's piece by piece." GroundUp editor, Nathan Geffen, said a journalist's job should remain simply going out there and getting the news, reporting abuses as fairly and accurately as possible:

It's a valuable role [watchdog journalism] where there is a reasonable chance that those abuses will be addressed because of putting them into the public domain, but I'm also a bit

worried that we're living in a time in South Africa where state institutions are so weak and corrupt that often I feel we're recording things for prosperity, not to get them fixed.

(Nathan Geffen, GroundUp)

A notable theme of concern emerged from the interviews about the lack/slowness of real socio-political change to take the country forward, despite what Haffajee called "the stoppers placed in the way of State Capture, and therefore state failure, by the media". For most participants, this is one of the factors leading them to question whether their watchdog role is enough.

I've always understood journalism as a method to change, to reshape the societies that we live in. I do see the watchdog element as vital, but what I have appended to it now – an understanding of the different needs that we meet in society. And increasingly inspiration and information are becoming as important. One as the other.

(Ferial Haffajee, Daily Maverick)

Haffajee's view aligns with constructive journalism's aim, which is to 'go beyond merely reproducing the problem; it should include reducing problems by making clear what can be done, how things can improve and how people might contribute to this' (Hermans & Drok, 2018, p. 687). Haffajee said constructive journalism was difficult to implement, but needed to be introduced to journalism culture, describing it as follows:

Excellent and must do, because we can't simply stop at exposé. Because you hit exposé-fatigue, and because I think one of those audience needs, or reader needs or societal needs, is to tell me: What's going to happen now?

(Ferial Haffajee, Daily Maverick)

Equally, News24 editor Adriaan Basson stated that while his newsroom would keep focusing on breaking news and exposing problems, it is not enough: "We are increasingly realising that we can do much more. And help people make informed decisions."

Two senior News24 journalists gave these views of the lack they experience in journalism:

I would say journalism is in a hibernation phase. It might have played a massive role three, four, five years ago, but now it's just kind of trying to keep the wheels spinning.

(James de Villiers, senior journalist, News24)

Yes, there were some successes, but I think if we were genuinely helping the South African public, there would be more outrage and there would be a bigger opposition to what is happening currently. I don't think we're getting it right currently.

(Jason Felix, News24)

There was a range in the level of urgency with which News24 and Daily Maverick journalists and editors expressed support for the ideas and implementation of constructive journalism to be appended to watchdog journalism (in the overall news cycle). The strongest scepticism, from a normative and operational perspective, came from GroundUp participants, especially at the start of their interviews (discussed later in this chapter in Theme 8C: Broad definition of constructive journalism a challenge and opportunity).

For the donor-funded Daily Maverick, with their voluntary subscription model, including an approach to include solution coverage is an intentional editorial decision.

The entire Daily Maverick pivot assumes that offering solutions to people is a good business model. So the Daily Maverick later this year entirely focuses on fixing the country, webinars often have that focus, we have our Home Affairs project, I try to do Johannesburg for the Daily Maverick on the same model. So we're betting the house on that.

(Ferial Haffajee, Daily Maverick)

Van Wyk agreed that constructive journalism has a necessary role to shift mindsets and add to the journalism culture of our era. The Daily Maverick editorial decision to focus on themes of accountability and how to fix things would give readers information they need:

Which includes giving hope, and ensuring that people can understand the world and their role in the world and how they can help, right?

(Pauli van Wyk, Daily Maverick)

According to Haffajee, there is evidence of general support among editors for journalism to play a bigger role in helping to fix the country:

I don't think South Africa's editors as a body are at all opposed to this idea. Even last night we went to SANEF to an engagement with the Presidency: very solution-focused, very honest, straight talking. We have the benefit of engagement and I think we can build on that.

(Ferial Haffajee, Daily Maverick)

The News24 editor's support for the ideas of constructive journalism and their implementation was more reserved: "Certainly we have to go there, but I think we are in the infancy of this concept." Basson said the realisation of the necessity to also "show another side of things" came organically from the within the newsroom. Journalists asked to also write about people's efforts to keep society going because "it's so dire out there".

That challenged me and our editors into the way that we defined what is newsworthy, because again, I was schooled in that newsroom where it bleeds it leads you know. And I think although I don't think we should move away from there, I think we should at least say "and" ... "and what" you know.

(Adriaan Basson, News24)

Basson cited crime reporting as an example of an intractable problem that could be reported less negatively:

We have to tell people there was a hijacking in Durban you know, where someone was killed. But can we also tell the story of police officers, who try their best every day? Who tried to prevent the hijacking. Or who saved the child from being abducted ... And those are still very newsworthy stories.

(Adriaan Basson, News24)

News24 journalists were less reserved in their support for an editorial shift to include constructive journalism. Felix believes constructive journalism should and will play a much bigger role in how journalism moves forward:

I think constructive journalism is the future. That's where we move to, *The New York Times* is an example of that, the London *Times*, many other major newspapers are examples of that. The world is moving towards that [...] It will take a mind-shift, but I don't think it is impossible.

In Felix's view, constructive journalism would benefit society as a whole:

So the sooner we tell people, this is the problem, but this is how you can look at fixing it, the sooner we give them the options and the possibilities of how to fix whatever is wrong, the better for all of us. Not just us as media companies, but the better for us as a country.

(Jason Felix, News24)

De Villiers (News24) and a Daily Maverick journalist (who wishes to remain anonymous) said they loved the concept of constructive journalism and wanted to see more of it. De Villiers believes that there is "a hunger and major market" for constructive stories, as "overall there is a deep desire for something to happen" in the country.

Theme 5 represents the range of recognition and support participants expressed for constructive journalism to be appended to watchdog reporting in the overall news cycle. Before we turn to the motivations participants gave for these views (Theme 7) and challenges to constructive journalism (Theme 8), a brief look next at the ways in which some of constructive journalism's principles were seen to be already present in the three news outlets' offerings (Theme 6).

4.3.2 Theme 6: Features of constructive journalism already practised

Most participants were introduced to the concept of constructive journalism through this study and the pre-interview information page. Throughout the interviews they recognised that some constructive journalism principles were already being practiced in parts of the organisations' output, even if it had not been labelled as such. (In the examples given, it becomes apparent that understanding of constructive journalism is inconsistent and sometimes partly incorrect, an important challenge that will be discussed in Theme 8C: Broad definition of constructive journalism a challenge and opportunity.)

Basson saw constructive journalism as already present in several ways:

It's something we've tried at News24 over the past few months, is to highlight people, the stories of people who are making things work. You know we labelled it Good News – but that is often so misunderstood.

He said News24's collaboration with donor-funded news providers like AmaBhungane, GroundUp and Bhekisisa enabled the in-depth research that constructive journalism requires.

There is definitely a space for those longer, well-researched pieces and I am very happy for the relationship that we have with them, because we have the largest footprint by far in terms of the publication, so I can give their journalists a platform which they don't have, to give them the exposure.

Lastly, Basson pointed to the presence of constructive journalism in opinion pieces. This aligns with findings in the content analysis, namely that more forward-looking articles (Theme 1C: Solution-reporting neglected) and a broader range of sources and perspectives (Theme 3A: Lack of textual evidence of nuance and complexity) were found in opinion articles. Basson said:

Where I like the solution stuff is often in our opinion section, where we often ask our contributors to write about, for example, how do you fix the Hawks, how do you fix corruption

in South Africa, how do you fix prosecutions? We often have those kind of thought experiments almost, in our opinion pages about fixing the economy, fixing the criminal justice system.

(Adriaan Basson, News24)

Felix highlighted that in-depth and explanatory articles were often available to paying subscribers, where solution perspectives on enduring problems were investigated:

We take a broad look at what has been written in the week or the month and then we say this and this is what you can do to overcome and to fix this, this is how whatever topic can improve, for instance load shedding.

(Jason Felix, News24)

Felix said they often consulted local and international experts on how energy solutions are found in other countries (a strategy proposed by constructive journalism). Daily Maverick reporters also do forward-looking summaries to finalise a series of stories, according to Van Wyk (Daily Maverick), without necessarily labelling it as constructive journalism: “Sometimes we have the label Age of Accountability. Looking at what should happen for accountability to happen.”

Geffen (GroundUp) recognised that Covid-19 created opportunities to investigate solutions, which could be seen as constructive journalism. However, as revealed in the content analysis of articles written during the first Covid-19 lockdown (Theme 1C, Solution-reporting neglected), little evidence was found of solutions covered according to the rigours of constructive journalism.

On the other hand, GroundUp journalist Stent highlighted that he already used many of the practices suggested in constructive journalism to bring richness, nuance and complexity to stories:

Whether it’s using data, talking with lawyers or scientists or whatever it is, when I introduce that to a story it makes it stronger. That can often pre-empt a solution in the reader’s mind, because it often comes from their willingness to read deeply, to follow links, to access information to more knowledge. And if we give readers more opportunities to do that, they’re going to be in a better position to do that.

(James Stent, GroundUp)

4.3.3 Theme 7: Motivations for support of constructive journalism

The motivations that emerged for journalists’ support for constructive journalism showed participants’ awareness of South African audiences being deeply affected by increasing societal problems. The interviews revealed a sense of recognition by journalists that the psychological and practical effects of economic, political, climate and health crises faced by society had intensified since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic.

In the overall theme of some journalists’ reasons for supporting a role for constructive journalism in online news, four sub-themes emerged:

- Theme 7A: Needs expressed by audiences
- Theme 7B: Societal negativity
- Theme 7C: News avoidance
- Theme 7D: Politicians’ empty promises

Theme 7A: Needs expressed by audiences

An important sub-theme that emerged was the identification by journalists of an urgent societal need to find solutions for the serious problems South Africans face. Through public and on-the-job engagements, Daily Maverick participants often experience an expectation from audiences that the media should help them find solutions.

So one of my jobs at the Daily Maverick is audience engagement, and honestly, that comes up so often. What do we do with this? You know, what is going to happen now? How do I think this through?

(Ferial Haffajee, Daily Maverick)

If I speak at events, people want to know: Tell me what should we do, change, what can I as an individual, teacher, doctor, CA ... what can I do? Apart from paying my taxes. How are we going to fix the problem?

(Pauli Van Wyk, Daily Maverick)

Referring to eviction-related reporting during Covid-19, a Daily Maverick journalist said communities wanted more:

With communities it's difficult repeatedly writing about evictions ... the fact that it was illegal to evict people, but it's still happening ... and then it's like OK but what's the solution? As a reader as well, that's what I enjoy in stories.

(Daily Maverick journalist, anon)

Haffajee highlighted the needs of readers revealed through the Daily Maverick's Home Affairs project, where readers were invited to share their stories and thoughts on how the problems at the troubled department can be fixed, which were then published.

People were desperate to tell us their Home Affairs stories, desperate for help. Birth certificates, death certificates, trying to close accounts [...] Every stage of life was so severely impacted by Home Affairs that they really saw us as "You can help us, help us find solutions for this". For me is so integral to what our function in society is.

(Ferial Haffajee, Daily Maverick)

The Daily Maverick's Home Affairs project and Haffajee's view of journalism's role in society are illuminated by the constructive journalism literature's proposal that audiences are approached as socially competent citizens to be empowered to make self-substantiated decisions in their lives through strengthening collaboration and co-creation of news with audiences (Hermans & Drok, 2018). Furthermore, Haffajee's view of journalism's function in society concurs with Zelizer's (2017) and Wasserman's (2021) calls for a journalism ethics developed in response to citizens' lived experiences. Zelizer (2017) argues that key to a journalism ethics renegotiated "from the bottom up" is to understand it as an interpretive community, constituted by a shared web of journalists', media practitioners' and media consumers' meanings and interpretive horizons.

Theme 7B: Societal negativity

We saw in this study's literature review (Chapter 2) that numerous interdisciplinary studies illustrate how negative news stories can have unintended negative societal consequences: it can lead to compassion fatigue and learned helplessness (Maier & Seligman, 1976), cynicism and political apathy

(Kleinnijenhuis et al., 2006), and mental health issues such as stress, depression and anxiety (Bodas et al., 2015).

The interviews of this study revealed that journalists are aware of some of these societal consequences in South Africa too. Participants expressed a sense of distress about the volume of negative news audiences are exposed to and the effect on societal mood.

As noted earlier, Basson (News24) experienced “a pivotal moment in my own thinking” when his newsroom described their own experiences of societal negativity. Basson stated: “We definitely think about our role a lot, we talk about the impact we have, whether we perpetuate a very negative climate.”

Felix stated that it’s journalists’ duty to continue fulfilling their watchdog role of exposing problems, but he was adamant that constructive journalism needs to be introduced alongside this, to balance the intensifying effects of relentless negative news:

It’s having a bad impact on South Africans and you can feel it, it’s tense everywhere. It feels as if literally every article you read, it’s not good news. I mean more and more people are killed in taverns recently, children are dying, GBV is increasing – it seems as if you can’t get a break.

It is interesting that Felix described the effect of current watchdog journalism on citizens as leaving them feeling hopeless and conditioned to accept things:

It’s the general feeling of hopelessness that just spills over to everyday life [...] You get the sense that we’ve just been conditioned, we just accept all of this. And we feel there’s nothing that we can do about these things.

(Jason Felix, News24)

This observation contrasts with Harber’s thesis that it was constructive journalism, not watchdog journalism, that would produce complacent citizens (Tullis, 2014).

Theme 7C: News avoidance

Felix’s description of the impact of negative news on audiences (in Sub-theme 7B above) echoes the reasons given by more than a third of respondents from 30 countries for actively avoiding news, as reported in the Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2021 (Newman et al., 2021). Nearly 60% of news avoiders said news had a negative effect on their mood and left them feeling powerless to change things.

South Africans were not included in the sample for the Reuters 2021 report, but there are South African studies showing that young people specifically feel the news lacks relevance to their lives and fails to fulfil their information needs (Malila et al., 2013). Additionally, a supplement to the Reuter’s Report in 2019 showed that 47% of a (largely urban-based) sample of news consumers in South Africa found the news “too negative” (Roper et al., 2019).

Participants in this study expressed concern about the reported increase of news avoidance worldwide. Yet, while Geffen called the trends reported by the Reuters Institute worrying, he doubted the validity of the research:

I don’t know if things are different now to the way it used to be [...] I’m also a little sceptical about the third of people who say they actively avoid news. Do they really? They’re probably

getting snippets of news here and there. God I find the news depressing, it doesn't mean I avoid it!

(Nathan Geffen, GroundUp)

Van Wyk said she noticed exceptional negativity in society, but she argued that the negativity in news was reality-based and should not lead to news avoidance. She called news justifiably negative:

It's a function of where we are as a country [...] I too feel that I don't want to read about the rape, or 21 people dying in a shebeen, or Eskom, but we are not living in Switzerland where there are children running over a hill with a helium balloon on the front page.

(Pauli Van Wyk, Daily Maverick)

Notably, some journalists said they felt disillusioned themselves and could identify with news avoiders:

If I wasn't a journalist I would also not be reading the news. It's just so much doom and gloom. [...] Also feeling powerless, like reading an article about someone whose house just burnt down for the fourth time – and then that's it. There's no indication how you can like help for better housing or do something. I can see why you would avoid it.

(Daily Maverick journalist, anon)

De Villiers said many journalists want to leave journalism because they feel frustrated with “chasing the hamster wheel all the time”. He argued that doubling up on breaking news when the digital era came along and chasing clicks to try and retain audiences did not help society forward. He said the skills constructive journalism needs are being lost. De Villiers described the effects of his own frustration:

I don't necessarily feel fulfilled anymore and I don't see the impact that I would like to see. I'm disillusioned with media in South Africa. I'm also at a place where I can read a Twitter headline and be OK with it. I don't really need to go and read the article anymore. Unless – and this is interesting to me – unless the article provides some kind or form of plan. On how to get out of it.

(James de Villiers, News24)

Haffajee and Felix interpreted the growing trend of news avoidance reported by the Reuter's Institute as a call for journalism to change:

That report is telling us people want their journalism to be different. We have to find ways of doing things, of drawing them back in, making them feel that this is a place where you can get information to live a better life. That's the task of the moment.

(Ferial Haffajee, Daily Maverick)

People just don't want to hear anymore, engage anymore. So news avoidance is almost a survival, it's a last ditch. And that is bad and the only thing we as journalists can do is to almost force them with better journalism to say read this article and take note of it.

(Jason Felix, News24)

There is considerable concern in the literature about media owners increasingly pushing for editorial decisions to be based on the “click” behaviour of online consumers (Baden et al., 2019). Participants

contended that the race for clicks means stories that need to be told in South Africa are not being told:

Everything is treated as an exclusive story but it's more of a clickbait, and getting more readers and numbers, instead of actually giving South Africans and news readers and listeners a quality product that take things forward and make people understand and influence their decisions in their daily lives.

(Jason Felix, News24)

Felix cited the coverage of 21 young people dying in a tavern as an example of reporting that was not taking society forward:

I think in the matter of the 21 young kids who died in the tavern, we just reported on what has happened. None of us has taken it forward to look at how could this be prevented, by doing X, by doing Y.

(Jason Felix, News24)

Theme 7D: Politicians' empty promises

Finally, Felix said society can no longer rely on politicians to implement the changes that are necessary. He observed that "quite frankly politicians don't know what they're talking about sometimes", yet one sees politicians and celebrities dominating the news.

Often we hear what politicians are going to do and what their plans are, but the implementation thereof is almost non-existent.

For this reason, Felix believed, "constructive journalism should happen and how it should happen is collectively" (discussed in Theme 11, Suggestions for building constructive journalism praxis). He said the industry has a long way to go to adopt constructive journalism as part of the overall message and culture of news, but he argued that the reliance on politicians to oppose what was happening in the country should change and journalists should help create an independent ecosystem:

It can't be a political party, because a political party is part of the ecosystem that is at times the problem. We need an independent ecosystem to take these things forward and just really tackle the problems we have. And I don't think we as journalists have done enough to do that, to start that. If I'm really honest with you I don't think we've done enough.

(Jason Felix, News24)

Themes 5 to 7 focused on support for constructive journalism among participants, constructive approaches already present in the three organisations' output, and the reasons given for the support expressed. Theme 8 deals with an important category of the findings: challenges to the implementation of constructive journalism.

4.3.4 Theme 8: Operational and conceptual challenges to implementation of constructive journalism seen as interlinked and substantive, but not prohibitive

Throughout the interviews, participants revealed their own experiences of an industry facing a myriad of problems, as described in the literature (Harber, 2021; Wasserman, 2018). Global economic crises and the chain effect triggered by income-consuming FANGs have caused interlinked financial, structural and value-based challenges for journalism (Harber, 2021). Basson summarised the current working environment for journalists:

South African journalism is under tremendous pressure, not only because of a changing business model and changing consumer landscape, but also because of the pressures journalists are under, in terms of media freedom, threats against journalists, and also one of the largest media houses have now been captured by a political faction of the governing party.

(Adriaan Basson, News24)

The overall theme that emerged was that industry pressures and participants' difficulties with conceptual clarity regarding constructive journalism pose many challenges to the implementation of the form, but that some of those challenges are also opportunities.

In Theme 8, four sub-themes emerged:

- Theme 8A: Newsrooms shrinking and financially poorer as they battle for consumer attention
- Theme 8B: Juniorisation and lack of skills in newsrooms
- Theme 8C: Broad definition of constructive journalism a challenge and opportunity
- Theme 8D: Risk of manipulation of constructive journalism by partisan media

Theme 8A: Newsrooms shrinking and financially poorer as they battle for consumer attention

An overall view arose from the interviews that the ever-increasing pace of the news cycle and competition for consumer attention were notable factors contributing to newsrooms' battle to ensure long-term financial viability.

It is a tricky time, there is a lot of change and flux and trying to find models to make newsrooms financially sustainable is not easy. Very few have got it right and a lot of news publications are going out of business [...] I'm not sure what the solutions are in the long run.

(Nathan Geffen, GroundUp)

The financial constraints are felt by journalists in their personal capacity too:

Personally my biggest frustration would be the lack of resources – and income. When I started out it wasn't such a problem but as I get older and my commitments change, that's starting to weigh down quite heavily on me.

(James de Villiers, News24)

A theme that emerged from the interviews is that journalists see the lack of resources as an obstacle to potential operationalisation of constructive journalism, even if the concept sounds good. Basson said:

I'm not sure that it's very practical at this point in our industry. We barely cover the basics of what happens in politics, the courts, on the roads, on the crime beat, health education, in climate now ... we barely cover what's happening there every day.

(Adriaan Basson, News24)

The perception that constructive journalism might require too many additional resources to make it a practical consideration for newsrooms is a view often raised in journalism discourse. However, this contention was countered by the views of editors from a range of platforms at the "Listen Louder" 4th Global Constructive Journalism Conference in June 2022, as discussed in this study's literature review (Chapter 2, 'Impact studies on constructive journalism' in Section 2.4.5). The editors said that while initial changes to incorporate constructive journalism in editorial approach and output could be

challenging, it was ultimately worthwhile ('Why constructive journalism is being adopted by journalism leaders as an editorial strategy', 2022). Editors agreed that readers do not want more content, they want better, and that it pays to channel resources into fewer but more in-depth stories. The executive editor of *The Times*, Jeremy Griffin (2022), said that the editorial change to include solutions journalism was good for business, since it improved reader engagement, which improved subscriptions.

A further viewpoint arising in the current study was that the lack of funding in journalism has resulted in smaller newsrooms covering smaller regions.

We are too small, we are losing a lot of regional reportage. We are OK in the major metros, but the media is very thin in the rest of South Africa [...] That worries me because it means that we don't have eyes and ears in places where millions of South Africans still live and work.

(Adriaan Basson, News24)

In Africa, one of the ways in which constructive (and solutions) journalism is shown to be especially effective is in local coverage (Meyer, 2021). The absence of eyes and ears on the ground in South African local communities, as described by Basson, could thus be a potential challenge to effective implementation of constructive journalism. On the other hand, if participants' ideas of collaborative, project-based constructive journalism (discussed in Theme 11: Suggestions for building constructive journalism praxis) prove to be do-able, there may be an opportunity for journalists to extend geographical news coverage at local level.

Interviewees emphasised that the lack of time in an average journalist's day would make it difficult for the in-depth approaches of constructive journalism to be introduced.

I understand the constraints daily news journalists work under. You can't expect them to do social media, a bit of visual journalism and then to write up something – there simply isn't sufficient time for them to do the research around a topic.

(Ferial Haffajee, Daily Maverick)

Felix added that journalists often don't have the time to get hold of suitable experts to create relevant context for stories as constructive journalism proposes:

Also a lot of journalists, we need the context of what the problem is and many of them are so stressed and overworked that we don't get to a point where we can actually get to an economist or energy experts. That [requires] more time, a day or two. I think we're getting there but we're still far away, it's still a work in progress.

(Jason Felix, News24)

The literature shows that the growth of social media and innovative digital platforms, all vying for consumer attention, means journalism no longer has a monopoly on supplying news (Hermans & Prins, 2020). As Stent noted, journalism is in the middle of an "attention crisis" that is an integral factor to the loss of audiences and financial challenges: "The great looming shadow is that news media is one place where attention gets drawn to across the spectrum." Stent said he sympathised with audience behaviour swayed by online mechanisms because of his own experience of time spent online:

The attention thing is unbelievable. I am vastly different. I can barely finish a book nowadays, where I used to read constantly. Like it's not positive media that I consume. It's the same loop of websites that don't really give me much. And half of those are news websites.

Stent's description of feeling manipulated aligns with the Tolsi's (2020) criticism of social media's "cynical" use of neuroscientific understanding of the role of emotions in human behaviour to hook users. Stent said:

We've seen it with Facebook, it's an active goal of these platforms to get dopamine responses, to get you coming back to a platform. There is something mad going on with our attention being manipulated and shifted. It feels epoch defining.

(James Stent, GroundUp)

It follows from the picture painted above that constructive journalism will equally be challenged by the attention crisis. Yet, the crisis could arguably also be seen as an opportunity for new approaches such as constructive journalism to attract audiences through innovation, as contended by Newman (2022). Newman (2022) said audiences are asking for approaches that give them a sense of hope and agency – journalism that gets to the roots of issues they're trying to solve.

Theme 8B: Juniorisation and lack of skills in newsrooms

Participants continued to describe the corrosive effects of shrinking funding for newsrooms. They highlighted the juniorisation of newsrooms and a lack of specialised skills as further obstacles to the potential implementation of constructive journalism.

Solutions would require specialist knowledge and not all journalists have specialist knowledge. We don't have mid-level specialists, specialising in courts, education, health. We don't have senior journalists specialising in investigative journalism and other specialisations. And that is really, really necessary along with young journalists that churn out the ambulance chaser stuff.

(Pauli van Wyk, Daily Maverick)

Van Wyk said all journalists needed time and experience to build up their skills. She regretted that funding for professional development and training was not available to help young journalists grow:

Now from the moment you put your foot into the newsroom you're confronted with all these news stories and expected to know what bias, partisanship and reporting on politics is [...] Younger journalists must take on more and higher impact stories than what they're ready for. So journalists are getting less but the risks that they take are more and the mistakes that they make can be more severe.

(Pauli Van Wyk, Daily Maverick)

Van Wyk's view that 'solutions' call for specialist skills is supported by Mia Malan, editor-in-chief of The Bhekisisa Centre for Health Journalism, which practices solutions journalism as part of their output. Malan (2022) says rigorous solutions journalism on health matters works best if you're able to bring science, policy and on-the-ground lessons together. This process requires research, critical thinking, interpersonal and advanced writing skills (see Chapter 2, 'Developing contexts' in Section 2.4.5).

Basson (News24) argued that critical thinking is the first requirement for all journalists and, while research skills are important, "not every journalist wants to sit for days on a story. Some of them want to do three to four stories a day and start fresh tomorrow". In contrast, Haffajee found the lack of

research skills in today's newsrooms "hugely challenging", even though she understood the constraints journalists worked under.

In my experience research was an absolute essential. There was no way that you were going to get a piece out if it was not deeply read, deeply researched according to numerous sources, formed a full picture of something. We have to find way to give people the time to do that.

(Ferial Haffajee, Daily Maverick)

Stent said his research skills in the newsroom gave him a distinct advantage, but he did not learn it through journalism training:

I'm leaned on quite heavily to do the more research-intensive stuff. Which comes from my background of doing that at quite a high level [...] I'm fortunate that I had a decade of working experience before I started being a journalist.

(James Stent, GroundUp)

According to Felix, most journalists do not have the data research skills necessary for constructive journalism.

People need to be trained on data journalism. How to read financial statements, how to humanise numbers and data [...] understanding how companies work, understanding the Companies Act, reading policy documents. Reading the numbers of the City of Cape Town ... you've got to take the figures in front of you and make it a story.

(Jason Felix, News24)

Felix's recognition of the need to train journalists in data research skills is supported by Malila's (2019) view of what is needed to provide citizens with the information they need to hold officials to account. Finding that citizens in the Eastern Cape were left "information-poor" about the causes and remedies to education problems, Malila (2019) concluded that journalists must understand public administration and be able to analyse causes, contexts and resources available to address social problems.

Some study participants argued that research skills were not the only skills lacking in the industry, challenging the implementation of constructive journalism. Stent questioned whether most journalists got even the first step of watchdog journalism right:

The first part, the identification and description of the problems, is in a very poor state. We haven't even got that first step right [...] There's a shortfall – often as a result of having too few people in a newsroom, shifting people around beats, huge underinvestment in the actual resources required in a newsroom – like experienced editors. People lose the thread of a story. When encountering government spend, they are bewildered by it because they haven't had the time to properly understand the depth of a topic.

(James Stent, GroundUp)

Stent also questioned whether journalists had the skills to choose wisely when it came to giving voice to experts about possible solutions. He cited several examples of "bad reporting" where journalists failed to identify experts they quoted, or the interests of those experts. He stated that expert opinion was valuable, but "it's something you have to learn how to balance."

Geffen was more vocal about the lack of skills in the industry. Whereas he concluded at the end of his interview that constructive journalism could have a role to play in South African online journalism, he started off with strong views about the impossibility of introducing constructive journalism when “journalists are by and large not the most highly skilled people in society; a lot of them struggle to just get the basic craft of journalism right”. Geffen continued that many journalists think they know more than they do:

I do worry that thrusting this additional responsibility upon them is a step too far for the actual abilities of the vast, vast, vast majority of journalists. I don't say this in a disparaging way. I think we've got to be very careful – different people have different roles to play in society, and the primary role of a journalist is to just get the story right. If you're now saying it's getting the story right and to propose how to get society right ... you know, there's nothing in their training or their intellectual make-up that's special, that suggests that journalists would be good at that, or editors for that matter.

(Nathan Geffen, GroundUp)

Theme 8C: Broad definition of constructive journalism a challenge and opportunity

Scholars argue that the lack of one clear definition of constructive journalism to date is a risk to the sustainability of the movement (Bro & Gyldensted, 2021). Indistinctness in lines of demarcation also resulted in the form being criticised as ‘sunshine’ or positive news, activism or advocacy, and journalism in danger of losing its independence (Bro, 2018; Tullis, 2014). Similar criticisms arose from this study's interviews.

The responses of interviewees revealed that the concept of constructive journalism was not easily grasped or accepted by journalists first exposed to the definition of the form. All participants read the same pre-interview information page (Appendix 4), yet some displayed a good understanding of constructive journalism principles while others started off with misinterpretations and gained a clearer idea during the course of the interview. Geffen remarked in a few pre-interview remarks that the concept was new to him and that the meaning of constructive journalism was “foggy to me, very abstract”, leaving him sceptical about the form. Concluding his interview, he said:

I think now that I understand a bit better what you mean, I think there is perhaps a role for it [constructive journalism].

(Nathan Geffen, GroundUp)

Some participants expressed caution about the risks involved in a lack of clear parameters. Van Wyk, who also said elsewhere that constructive journalism was a necessary part of journalism, nevertheless said the lack of parameters could lead to advocacy journalism:

I think constructive journalism should be more narrowly defined [...] We're talking about a range of things, that can also be caught under the umbrella of constructive journalism. But it's such a wide term and if there are no parameters you're going to move into advocacy and into “fixing” something.

(Pauli van Wyk, Daily Maverick)

At times during their interviews both Stent and Van Wyk (mis-)interpreted the role of a constructive journalist as being a policy maker or an activist:

It might be quite appealing to be told that you might propose solutions at the same time as describing the problem, but how do you know that you're adequately positioned to be proposing things? Do you know where to look? It's an extraordinary thing to be a policy maker, incredibly difficult.

(James Stent, GroundUp)

It's not a journalist's job to move society forward. A journalist's core job is to inform. You are not government, you are not supposed to be an activist and if you start being an activist journalist that's a slippery slope to being partisan and biased [...] Also, doing a forecast of something is not traditionally what South African journalists do about something, and it opens you up for making mistakes, which we definitely don't want to do because we are already under pressure.

(Pauli van Wyk, Daily Maverick)

De Villiers, who consistently supported the implementation of constructive journalism, nevertheless voiced a similar (partial) mis-interpretation:

I don't want to put in people's mouths what they should believe afterwards. I'm always petrified, petrified to write opinion on many subjects because I am so afraid that it's going to jeopardise my journalistic career [...] I think, to investigate solutions, it's safer to ask someone that researches it, to ask an expert for their view, than actually yourself saying: This is what I found.

(James de Villiers, News24)

Van Wyk's opinion was that even using the views of experts when exploring people's efforts to find solutions was too risky:

Because where do you draw the line? When you offer a view how something can change for the better it's always perception. Which expert do you choose? Because for every expert that you choose you'll have a different view.

(Pauli van Wyk, Daily Maverick)

The instability of interpretations of the meaning of constructive practices shown above illustrates the challenges posed by a lack of agreement on a single definition and precise parameters for the umbrella concept of constructive journalism. As mentioned earlier, some of the reporting cited by participants as examples of constructive journalism were also partial misinterpretations, such as the "Good News" stories on the News24 platform. Haffajee stated:

I'm very glad that this kind of study is developing that understands constructive journalism as not "good news journalism", because I think that died an early death. It can feel like false equivalents, like project writing. I'm very glad there is methodology and method happening that's a little more substantive and impactful.

(Ferial Haffajee, Daily Maverick)

In his consideration of constructive journalism's meaning, De Villiers highlighted frequent misinterpretation of what 'hope' means in journalism:

When people speak about hope in journalism they tend to speak about "feel-good" stories. Which annoys me so much. I get so mad when I see another "feel-good" story on News24, I

just want to throw up. Because it always feels forced. Because I don't think hope is about highlighting the feel-good stories. Hope is very much engaging with the topic and finding: What can come out of this?

(James de Villiers, News24)

And yet, Haffajee argued that good-news stories were a useful start and could be used to develop towards more complex constructive journalism:

There is a room for inspiring, role-model stories, there is room for things that are working stories, clearly people want to know about that. So if we can build on that, to tell these stories almost as a matter of a category of journalism.

(Ferial Haffajee, Daily Maverick)

Haffajee's view here illustrates an important point for constructive journalism's application in developing contexts outside the mature democracies in Western Europe and the US, namely that the lack of an exact prescription of how constructive journalism should be operationalised can also be seen as an opportunity to innovate practices in context-specific ways.

It was noted in the literature review (Chapter 2, Section 2.4.4) that Wagemans et al. (2018) challenge the binary distinctions at the heart of conceptualisations of journalism that are perpetuated in constructive journalism discourse (as evident in some participants' responses above). The authors contend that the diverse contexts within which journalists work demand a more complex understanding of "'neutrality' versus 'engagement', 'subjectivity' versus 'objectivity' or 'informing' versus 'activating' the audience" (Wagemans, et al., 2018, p. 564). However, it is argued here that there must be a caution and caveat to context-specific innovation in developing contexts where watchdog journalism's role remains as urgent and vital in defending democracy as has been illustrated over the past decade in South Africa (Harber, 2020). If constructive journalism is indeed appended to watchdog journalism locally, journalists should take extra care to adhere to the journalistic (watchdog) norms of staying investigative, fact-based and critical, as called for by constructive journalism proponents across the board (Hermans & Drok, 2018; 'What is constructive journalism?', 2022).

To this end, the content analysis findings discussed in Theme 1C (Solution-reporting neglected) revealed that superficial references to possible solutions in articles fell short of the rigour required according to constructive journalism principles. Haffajee highlighted the risk of journalists misinterpreting constructive journalism as an easy add-on to reporting habits:

I think if it means two calls to some NGO person who is always in the media, it's not constructive journalism. And sometimes people think that is constructive. It's actually really boring. Constructive journalism is something more challenging. It means talking to many sources [...] making sure you've got the right person, not just to the available civil society leader – quickly. It's detailed and depth, knowing your stuff. Yourself having gone through white papers, understanding policy, making sure you're talking to the right people. So that what you finally have is a work of such authority and heft it can't be ignored.

(Ferial Haffajee, Daily Maverick)

The instability of perceptions about the meaning of constructive journalism revealed above is evidence of a view expressed by participants themselves, namely that in the watchdog-dominated industry, mindsets and news processes are ingrained. The shifts that constructive journalism require would be challenging:

The ethos of newsrooms is still very much geared towards breaking bad news. And the sensational and shocking that will make the audience sit up [...] That obviously is still a cornerstone of our watchdog function. But it does require a re-treading almost of the philosophy of a newsroom.

(Ferial Haffajee, Daily Maverick)

It's the legacy of journalism in the country, how we thought journalism needs to be done. So I do think it's kind of a revelatory moment that needs to come, that people understand there is something different.

(James de Villiers, News24)

Participants recognised that the challenge to shift mindsets also had a bearing on audiences:

I think you've got to bring various audiences round to the idea, and you have to learn to tell it in compelling ways. Because it's not always the stuff that gets the highest read. So you wonder sometimes: Is it even working? Are human beings primed for sensation and for information that simply updates them, but not that which helps solve society's crises?

(Ferial Haffajee, Daily Maverick)

Basson identified a habit of binary thinking in the media and society as a problematic mindset that needs to change. Basson related this challenge to the coverage of evictions – an observation that supports the content analysis finding that conflict was presented in lean, binary narratives in sample articles (Theme 1B: Conflict and violence foregrounded):

In South Africa we have a lot of binary thinking – who is the good guy in the story and who is the bad guy. I think life is much more complicated than that, so the people who are evicted, and the homeless, one has to understand it's not a simplistic issue, it's so multi-layered. There are good reasons why the city wants to move people, there are good reasons why these people are on the streets. So I think, you know, stories like that probably need more than a binary approach.

(Adriaan Basson, News24)

Theme 8D: Risk of manipulation of constructive journalism by partisan media

We saw in the introduction to Theme 8 and in the literature (Wasserman, 2020) that threats to media freedom remain a significant feature of the South African media environment. Journalists continue to see their independence threatened, particularly by intimidation and threats from a faction of the ruling political party, and by ongoing attempts by these political forces to capture the news agenda.

We saw how the New Age and ANF7 became massive propaganda tools for State Capture – aided of course later by Bell Pottinger, but in and of themselves. The Independent Group is a classic example of now a completely partisan force, which I believe the editorial control board is right from the RFT faction.

(Ferial Haffajee, Daily Maverick)

The theme of alarm and concern about the significant Independent Media Group's capture by a faction of the ruling party arose throughout interviews. This development is seen to erode post-apartheid gains in press freedom and trust in the media:

The capture of Independent Media by Iqbal Survey had a terrible impact on the media landscape. It's an incredible threat to our integrity and the normal trust people have in the media.

(Adriaan Basson, News24)

With their journalistic independence already threatened in this way, it is understandable that some participants expressed scepticism towards a journalistic form which (they believed) could slip into advocacy or activism, or be manipulated for political gain. In the literature review (Chapter 2: 'Developing contexts' in Section 2.4.5) it was noted that there is significant scholarly criticism of the Chinese state-run media's conceptualisations and applications of constructive journalism, and especially of the way it is used to increase China's so-called 'soft power' in Africa (Zang & Matingwina, 2016).

Participants emphasised that the example set by Chinese media's use of constructive journalism was a warning to South Africa:

It's absolutely critical to have a free press and I think constructive journalism can be manipulated. You mentioned how it's used in China – I wouldn't want to live in a society like that.

(Nathan Geffen, GroundUp)

In the media contexts of the developing world, another source of potential manipulation of constructive journalism is identified in the literature, namely the public relations (PR) industry, which has been found to often sell PR stories as solutions (Edwards, 2022). Haffajee contended that the proliferation of PR consultants posed a significant risk to people's trust in the media, since it's not always easy for audiences to distinguish the origin of stories:

We probably now have multiple more PR practitioners than we have journalists. And that can swing a narrative. For me that's almost our bigger problem than partisan media.

(Ferial Haffajee, Daily Maverick)

In Theme 8, conceptual and operational challenges to the implementation of constructive journalism in the South African digital news environment were discussed and interpreted through the literature. Theme 9 follows with a specific focus on participants' views on the potentially polarising effects of conflict reporting in South Africa and their views on constructive journalism's proposals for how to mitigate such polarisation.

4.3.5 Theme 9: Polarisation inevitable, but can be mitigated

In the post-apartheid literature, the media has often been accused of deepening social divides through the foregrounding of conflict and violence (Wasserman et al, 2018). Moreover, as seen earlier, the content analysis showed that eviction-related conflict was largely presented in lean, binary narratives which could potentially increase polarisation (Theme 1B: Conflict and violence foregrounded).

When asked if they thought journalists contributed to polarisation in the country, the overriding view among participants was that it was inevitable that journalists contributed to polarisation through conflict reporting.

Whatever you write can always only anger a certain group of people. So yes, they [journalists] do.

(Pauli Van Wyk, Daily Maverick)

Participants were interested to hear that eviction-related conflict was found to be largely told in lean, binary narratives in both breaking and in-depth articles in the study sample (Theme 1B: Conflict and violence foregrounded). Haffajee said she agreed that it was true:

I think it's because we don't have specialist reporters. Journalists go into a situation and all they have available to them is the conflict model, a 'this side/that side' story. In fact, if you had, for the eviction example, land specialists, if you had metropolitan specialists, if you had housing specialists, then you would have a very different texture to reporting.

(Ferial Haffajee, Daily Maverick)

The lack of resources and the pressures journalists worked under emerged as main causes cited by participants for the trend of binary, repetitive reporting of conflict. Geffen's) view was that conflict reporting in South Africa has always followed a binary, adversarial model:

To just to get a report with a 'he says/she says' report – there's value in that, because you can see there is this issue and conflict and there's different views to it. Yes, the news report hasn't resolved who's perhaps telling the truth and who's not, but that can perhaps come later in a more in-depth report or analysis by somebody who actually has expertise in the area [...] And I actually think that's fine – that's just the way it works.

(Nathan Geffen, GroundUp)

Felix disagreed, saying that multi-layered issues such as evictions required more complex and balanced coverage in the news.

I think that where journalists get it wrong is that they believe that balancing the story is getting Malusi Booi's reaction and getting the community lawyer or so. That's not balancing the story. It's not. It's pitting the one side against the other. You're creating more problems than actually solutions.

(Jason Felix, News24)

Haffajee said journalists often approach situations with fixed ideas of sources, arranged on two sides of a battle:

Let's take the sphere of political reporting. I think you have a great number of journalists contributing to this model by seeing politics as a gladiatorial battle. I think it's something that we have to watch very carefully, that you have balance, many sides to a story.

(Ferial Haffajee, Daily Maverick)

It is interesting that the phrases participants used to describe journalists' practice of the conflict model, such as "gladiatorial battle" and "pit one against the other" mimic the militarised language of the metaphor of war, linking to the finding of an underlying metaphor of war emerging in binary conflict reporting in the article sample (Theme 1B: Conflict and violence foregrounded). It would be reasonable to argue that this is an example of how the phrases and words used by journalists become part of the lexicon and thought process of readers (in this case fellow journalists).

To illustrate with a few details from the literature review (Chapter 2, 'Interdisciplinary and cognitive linguistic research' in Section 2.4.3): Pinker (2018) aligns with linguistic scholars Boroditsky (2011), Chomsky (2017) and Feldman Barrett (2017) in his assertion that humans construe their subjective realities through intuitive linguistic choices of the words most available to them. Pinker (1994, p. 154) compares the brain's hierarchical conceptual system to a linguistic computer, ploughing through hundreds of "doomed fragments" of interpretation (based on previous experience) within milliseconds, before it ploughs ahead with a "probably correct" guess. Because frequent events have stronger memory traces, the frequency of negative news distorts people's view of the world, creating a mental bias – what Kahneman (2011) calls the 'availability heuristic'.

Thus, the examples of phrases from interviewee responses cited above ("gladiatorial battle" and "pit one against the other"), are likely to be the intuitive split-second choices of linguistic concepts most available to the interviewees to describe the way journalists write about conflict between opposing sides. To follow Pinker's thesis, those concepts (phrases) could be available as first choices in their cognitive process because of the frequency they've seen it written, heard it and or even seen it in images in news. Therefore, the actual words and phrases journalists use, and the underlying metaphors employed when writing stories, are of the utmost importance to the valence of the impact of their story on audiences. Yet it is argued here that this is an aspect of journalists' work that they are currently largely unaware of.

Adding to the theme of journalists' role in polarisation, Felix said the adversarial model is easily manipulated by partisan media:

In the case of Independent Newspapers they made it clear on whose side they are. They pit one side against the other side. By creating this divide between those who have and those who do not have. Between the government of the day and the people it's supposed to serve. That's completely wrong.

(Jason Felix, News24)

An Independent Group title was also criticised for deepening polarisation around xenophobia:

Times Live has been doing this readers' poll about if foreign-owned shops should be closed. And I think that poll in this political climate deepens xenophobia.

(Daily Maverick journalist, anon)

De Villiers and Felix said the media often fixate on extreme viewpoints and language to foreground the drama of situations. Following the ingrained conflict model, journalists look for the most adversarial quotes to catch the attention of readers.

The biggest problem with this society is [that] the one who makes the loudest noise gets the most attention. Because in the "loud-hailing" voices get lost, information gets lost, stories get lost.

(Jason Felix, News24)

De Villiers emphasised that polarised views often become entrenched in periods of conflict because journalists want to "brand" people:

For example, when we speak to Herman Mashaba we're just going to see that he's xenophobic and he's harsh and brash. And because we assume that, we also force them to take that position. And it becomes a hard line because of the media's approach [...] So often people are

represented as one-dimensional, as static people. People are grey. And there can be multi-faceted layers to people. Also, we can change our mind. We are not static people.

(James de Villiers, News24)

In the literature, calls to revisit or improve journalism's "template" of conflict reporting is a prominent theme (Newman, 2022; Wasserman, 2021). Under the constructive journalism umbrella, two interlinked practices from mediation and conflict resolution stand out as suggested methods for journalists to acquire to mitigate polarisation, namely deep listening and asking different questions (Ripley, 2018; Heinrichs, 2022).

Participants were asked for their views about the potential of these skills to be incorporated in journalistic practice in the South African environment. On the whole, the reaction was positive, ranging from mildly interested (Geffen, Van Wyk), to interested and wanting to learn more (Basson) to very interested and seeing the acquisition of specialised questioning and listening skills from conflict resolution and mediation as something with significant potential value for the industry (Felix, Haffajee, De Villiers, anonymous Daily Maverick journalist).

Felix said these skills would be particularly valuable in African contexts:

For us as African journalists, having the kind of knowledge and insight that comes from conflict resolution and mediation will improve the work we do and our line of questioning –how we could deal with conflict better, what options we can explore [...] You need voices to just sort of de-escalate things, bring it back to a level where all of us understand. And we can take it forward and say: Listen here, this is actually the problem, this is what went wrong, this is how we can fix it.

(Jason Felix, News24)

Some participants commented that all journalists have to listen deeply, that it was a return to "first principles" (Haffajee, Daily Maverick). Yet, Haffajee added that the abundance of press conferences constant time constraints meant opportunities to practice deep listening were relatively rare.

Referring to one of her articles on evictions in the sample (see Theme 3A: Lack of textual evidence of nuance and complexity) Van Wyk confirmed the study's finding that her work indicated deep listening when she wrote about a man's distress at losing his home and dignity. Van Wyk emphasised that deep listening requires being on the scene:

Because it is not only a matter of ear, it is also a matter of body language and an eye. You cannot be behind your computer or over the phone to really listen. You've got to stand there next to him [...], you have to deep[ly] listen to what is he trying to communicate about his life. He wants someone to listen, he wants to be heard. He tried to grab my senses and say: View this, witness this, can you see what happened here? [...] And knowing that this person has no power. You are actually their only power. How sad is that? Talking to a journalist is the only power they have. I felt very emotional afterwards.

(Pauli van Wyk, Daily Maverick)

Van Wyk's description of her role in making the evictee feel heard (through listening and reporting) is illuminated by scholars' call for a journalism that gives a more comprehensive picture of the world by drawing on the ethics of listening and care, as discussed in this study's literature review (Chapter 2, 'Proposals for empowering of citizens through the ethics of listening and care' in Section 2.3.3). The concepts of active listening and care are inherent to approaches proposed in constructive journalism

(‘What is constructive journalism?’, 2022). Gilligan’s (1993, pp. xiii, xvi) understanding of an ethics of care proposed that human dignity is grounded in listening and that speaking is an intensely relational act that depends on being heard. Furthermore, Van Wyk’s description of the active nature of the way she listened to an evictee can be seen as an enactment of what Wasserman (2021) called ‘an element of intervention’ that is included in a journalism based on an ethics of listening. Wasserman (2021) argues that such an approach to journalism imposes an ethical obligation on the media to contribute to de-escalating violence or finding solutions. Van Wyk’s statement about the journalist being the evictee’s only power aligns with Hamelink’s (2016) thesis that active listening empowers those who are listened to, potentially enabling them to discover new possibilities and choices. Finally, Wasserman (2021) stated that listening can guide journalists toward changing their relationship with audiences-as-receivers to audiences-as-partners, -interlocutors and -co-creators of news – a view that speaks further to concepts also proposed in constructive journalism.

De Villiers, who was keen to learn more about the techniques used in mediation and conflict resolution, described how his own interviewing praxis includes deep listening and asking different questions to form real connections with people. Aligning with the solutions journalism techniques proposed by Ripley (2018), he emphasised the importance of exposing audiences to the details that don’t fit the narrative created through people’s “loud statements” in the media:

You’ve got to get behind statements, the story is incomplete. You’ve got to reveal underlying motivations and beliefs, life experiences that shaped this view. And then, as we understand the life experience, we can add the research in there.

(James de Villiers, News24)

4.3.6 Theme 10: Closer connection with audiences necessary, but social media’s role controversial

Constructive journalism encourages journalists to strengthen connections with the audience, facilitate democratic debate and include people in the community to co-create news (McIntyre & Gyldensted, 2017; ‘Three constructive approaches’, 2022). In Theme 10, participants’ views about these approaches are discussed. A focus on social media fell outside the scope of this study, but participants’ views about the role of social media in journalistic practices to connect with audiences will be included here.

Overall, editors and journalists agreed that they needed to strengthen engagement and inclusion of audiences in news processes. Basson said News24 had already started creating opportunities to link more directly with the public, specifically with subscribers:

When we have live webinars or seminars we give our subscribers chance to give us questions, so we get their questions and we spend lots of time speaking to their questions in these webinars.

(Adriaan Basson, News24)

Felix argued that the more readers feel included, the bigger News24’s successes would be. The way to do that, he believes, is through open forums on important issues:

I think the best way to engage readers is to bring them together, even if it’s online. Inviting guests and the ANC, Eskom and whoever else. Then we write stories about it. That makes people feel included and gives them agency.

(Jason Felix, News24)

A Daily Maverick journalist was keen to co-create on news stories with people living in different circumstances and communities than her own:

The way they see things and understand things are going to shape how they understand whatever is happening. If I've never lived in that community I shouldn't let biases I might have influence whatever I'm trying to do. With that kind of engagement you're not just blinded by whatever the newsroom and your colleagues are saying.

(Daily Maverick journalist, anon)

The practices described by participants above are informed in several ways by the literature. The participants' views confirm findings from the content analysis (Theme 4A: Audience connection strengthened through citizen video discussion), namely that citizens are seen by authors of articles as users who engage with media platforms to actively make meaning, as called for by Willems and Mano (2017). Furthermore, the way the anonymous Daily Maverick journalist describes the need to be aware of your own biases when engaging and co-creating with communities aligns strikingly with principles of constructive journalism ('What is constructive journalism?', 2022). Finally, one can argue that the practices described above imply an acknowledgement that journalists have to relinquish their claim to authority over truth and a recognition that truth is constructed in a dialogical process that engages actively with the views from the other side, as Voltmer (2016) argued.

The scope of this study does not include detailed discussion of the growing spectre of fake news in journalism and the challenges it poses to participants' identification of journalism's primary responsibility to "shine a light on the truth" (Van Wyk, Daily Maverick). Yet, it is worth mentioning in this context that the idea of relinquishing journalists' authority over truth through active co-creation with the public was an unappealing proposition to the editor of GroundUp. Geffen favours traditional "letters to the editor" as the best way to represent audience views:

We have a Letters to the Editor mechanism on our website, and there's a filter. Just as everything that our journalists write doesn't get published because there's an editor that either rejects or accepts it – even more so for Jo Blog who thinks his opinions on some or other matter on which he has absolutely zero expertise.

(Nathan Geffen, GroundUp)

Basson pointed out that the comments section at the bottom of articles is known to draw extremes, but when he interacts there with readers the quality immediately lifts.

So we encourage specifically columnists to engage with readers on that platform, so that it is not just a shouting match.

(Adriaan Basson, News24)

Nonetheless, all the journalists interviewed said they avoided interacting on comments as far as possible because – like social media – it quickly becomes toxic:

I do think comments and Twitter don't bring out the best in us. I think it forces people into hard positions because it is so aggressive and so brash. Social media kind of accentuates that.

(James de Villiers, News24)

Participants' views of using social media to connect more closely and to co-create with audiences were mixed. Their opinions also depended on the platform and type of audience contribution they referenced.

On the one hand, participants acknowledged that stories often break first on social media and frequently went on to determine the news agenda, as evidenced in the findings of the content analysis (Theme 4A: Audience connection strengthened through citizen video discussion). The vital role of citizen videos (such as that of Bulelani Qolani being dragged naked from his shack) and the potential of citizen videos to strengthen connection with audiences (Theme 4A: Audience connection strengthened through citizen video discussion) were equally acknowledged by interviewees.

On the other hand, participants highlighted that they avoided Twitter and Facebook because of the negativity of comments.

I hate Facebook. That should be banned from society.

(James de Villiers, News24)

On Twitter you've got bots and people who just sit there and complain the whole time. And add nothing constructive.

(Jason Felix, News24)

Strong reactions arose in interviews as journalists criticised the trend of colleagues in the industry taking sides on issues on Twitter, thereby compromising their ability to be seen as objective when reporting on the issue further. Participants' disapproval of journalists on Twitter reached its zenith in Geffen's views:

A lot of them find themselves to be in the public eye, and the result is their egos puffing up like balloons and they then become prima donnas on Twitter. Strongly worded opinions, taking hard positions. It is vacuous, superficial and dangerous. It doesn't contribute to the betterment of public discourse or help society at all [...] I truly think that Twitter, especially, is a complete and utter scourge on journalism.

(Nathan Geffen, GroundUp)

Yet, the interviews also revealed the potential of social media to be used as a "tool for good" by connecting and co-creating with audiences. Haffajee's approach in Johannesburg is an example of effective innovation, using constructive journalism principles:

I'll tell you one example of how I am trying to use technology to do that. I have this great interest in the state of Johannesburg. And I have a slot on 702 called "Fix my Joburg" and I use social media a lot to engage the community of Johannesburg.

For example, street lights and women's safety. I ask questions like: "How do you experience the city? How do you experience street lights being off?" And I literally got thousands of responses. So I can map those, I know what the story is, I then went to Council, found their side of it. Yesterday I had a lady who is getting out – it's called the Safety App, where you can pin where things are off. It's extremely early days, but for me that's the part I find most interesting and exciting about that work.

(Ferial Haffajee, Daily Maverick)

When one looks at the overall analysis of both datasets up to this point (presented in Themes 1–10), a dichotomy is noticeable. We saw that articles in 2020 showed little evidence of constructive journalism principles. Yet, two years later, some of the journalists and editors (involved in the reporting of the articles and the editorial approach of the three organisations) expressed support for a role for constructive journalism to be established in online news. It can reasonably be argued that

the difference between the lack of constructive journalism principles found in the 2020 articles (dataset 1) and the support for the approach expressed in some journalist and editor interviews in 2022 (dataset 2) points to the effects of significant societal changes in South Africa and across the globe since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic. Interviewee responses showed a growing awareness of a country and world plagued by critical problems, and an awareness that “overall there is this deep desire for something to happen” among audiences (De Villiers, News24). This growing societal awareness of the urgency to do something about the problems faced by humans across the globe may thus account for the “pivot” towards including solution coverage in the Daily Maverick’s approach (Haffajee, Daily Maverick) and the beginning of shifts in the News24 newsroom in response to audience needs.

Additionally, the interview findings showed that the broad definition of the umbrella term ‘constructive journalism’ is not easily fully understood by journalists when they are first exposed to the concept. It seems that an entrenched watchdog mindset tends to lead to the initial misperception that constructive and watchdog journalism are mutually exclusive. Some participants commented at the end of interviews that they understood the concept better. The overall theme that emerged at that point was a recognition by journalists that there is a role for constructive journalism in online news. There was variation in the level of conviction and detail with which this view was expressed, and challenges to constructive journalism were largely seen as significant but not prohibitive. GroundUp participants thought the lack of basic journalistic skills in the industry made successful implementation of constructive journalism unlikely.

Finally, in Theme 11, we turn to some participants’ suggestions of how constructive journalism could potentially be implemented.

4.3.7 Theme 11: Suggestions for building constructive journalism praxis

Suggested methods are drawn from participant responses. Overall, a picture emerges of the potential of constructive journalism in South African online media. The picture is one that factors in multiple contextual challenges to constructive journalism’s implementation and continues to support the vital role of watchdog journalism in news. It shows some participants’ proposals of how a shift in the country’s journalism culture towards including solution coverage can be started collectively. The picture points to practical ways in which business models can be adapted and journalists can play a bigger role in taking society forward – some of these already in progress, and some revealing innovative thinking on how newsrooms could collaborate on specific projects.

An important trend is that the sequential nature of constructive journalism, as explained by the Constructive Institute (‘What is constructive journalism?’, 2022), is a key factor in participants’ views of how the form could be implemented. For most participants it was significant to realise that constructive journalism is not meant to be practised on all stories all the time, and not meant to be added to the practices of time-pressured breaking-news journalists, but rather to follow in the period afterwards. Equally important was the understanding that the form should be seen as a mindset and a specific set of tools that can be context-adapted, provided the rigours of principles are followed (Haagerup, 2021).

It will take a mind shift, but I don’t think it is impossible. It’s just moving away from the normal reporting where it’s just: This happened. We can still say this happened, but at least tomorrow we have a bigger thing to say: Listen here, this is what happened, this could have happened

and this is how it can go. And we give readers an enriching article that does more than tell them just what happened.

(Jason Felix, News24)

Aligning with comments by Basson (see Theme 8C), Van Wyk said an important part of the change in mindset that journalism needs is that journalists should trade less in villains and heroes:

Good people do bad things. Bad people do good things. You have to as a journalist then go and look at what was wrong and what was right in the bigger context of things and describe it in that way. Life is not binary; we cannot describe it as if it is.

Van Wyk highlighted that journalists should consider layers of context when practising constructive journalism:

Constructive journalism should be a way of seeing and using the circles of context that there are. Context revolves around a person, a community, a country and a globe. If you don't understand those concentric circles of context you need to do some reading before you write.

(Pauli van Wyk, Daily Maverick)

Participants recognised that audiences' mindset about what constituted news would also need to adjust. Haffajee emphasised that journalists will have to learn to tell constructive stories in compelling ways – as also argued by Malan (2022) (see 'Developing contexts' in Section 2.4.5 of the literature review).

It demands that we think very carefully about the storytelling method of this, so that it almost feels like investigative. And you mustn't even know that actually you're reading a piece of constructive journalism. You need to append it to the investigative aspect of it.

(Ferial Haffajee, Daily Maverick)

Constructive journalism aims to give people more options regarding thinking patterns around problems that seem insurmountable. The underlying question is: If audiences can't look ahead, how can they develop ways of thinking to address problems? ('What is constructive journalism?', 2022). Basson cited crime as a problem that seems insurmountable in South Africa. He added that how to cover crime has been a major "grappling" of his career, because all South Africans are affected, and people's worldviews are influenced by the crimes they see reported. He said using constructive journalism techniques could improve crime reporting:

I would certainly like to explore more of these conflict resolution type things – you've piqued my interest now so I'm going to read about it a bit more to see how we can perhaps include it [...] Maybe in the Cape Flats, there's almost like a low-level war again in places like Bonteheuwel. To maybe cover it with a conflict resolution expert or someone and see how can we tell stories in a way that can also give some hope.

(Adriaan Basson, News24)

The suggestion that constructive journalism should be implemented collectively in the industry was given substance by three participants. Basson, Felix and Haffajee independently proposed that a collective effort between news organisations was a realistic approach to establish constructive journalism in the South African context. Basson (News24) said he loved the existing blended model where corporate mainstream titles like News24 can combine forces with donor-funded organisations

such as Bhekisisa, GroundUp, AmaBhungane and others, to give the public more in-depth, well-researched pieces. He said this could be an effective way to grow constructive journalism.

Felix had a more pro-active approach in mind:

You need to have a summit and all come together and say: Listen guys, let's change our approach ... and say constructive journalism is going to be our thing in almost everything we do. If not almost everything, the big topics, like your load shedding, your failing economy, like your state-owned enterprises, like what's happening in Parliament or those kind of things, because those kind of things have a big impact on people's day-to-day lives. That's how I think constructive journalism should happen, it should happen collectively.

(Jason Felix, News24)

Haffajee proposed that newsrooms combine forces to tackle a few chosen projects on big issues through an interwoven investigative–constructive approach:

I think there has to be a consciousness and then choice about what you're going to focus on. We're going to have to learn from how the media did the Gupta Leaks, where three really big newsrooms got together and put their people together to do it. We have to use that model to choose a couple of big choice things of social impact. And I think that's how you can hopefully shift a journalism culture.

As seen throughout this study's findings, the lack of financial resources is at the root of many challenges to the implementation of constructive journalism. Haffajee's next statement could therefore be seen as a potential game-changer for the prospects of constructive journalism in South Africa:

There's lots of funding available for 'great projects'. And if we frame them as a mix of investigation and solutions, so that you can almost create teams for a short while, but with dedicated focus to do this, it would change the landscape. Then should you have impact, you can do it again and again. So that you keep building up this body of specialisation. But you need to give it time.

(Ferial Haffajee, Daily Maverick)

Several journalists highlighted that the implementation of constructive journalism is going to require a top-down approach.

I don't know that journalists on the ground can make that change because of the demands on their work. It's not going to become a viable solution unless someone at the top realises that there needs to be a focus on this.

(James de Villiers, News24)

Haffajee said that editors also have to be included in constructive journalism praxis:

That kind of work is going to have to be threaded into investigative units. And that would mean bringing the editors on board. You can do that these days with a webinar following investigations. How do we take this forward, what can we do about that? We already saw that a lot as the Zondo Commission reports came out – to think about how you can deal with all the recommendations in the report.

Haffajee said when a methodology that works is found and displayed, it can be taken up more widely:

You have to show success, and then success breeds success. If it is recognised as being impactful. There should be a showcase effect that more people will start doing that. But I think such a cultural shift is going to take a while.

Haffajee cited the Daily Maverick's Home Affairs project as an example of successful innovative praxis that could be taken out wider:

I know the Home Affairs had a lot of interest and for next steps I'm going to suggest that we have to find partners, maybe GroundUp and the SABC, or ENCA with whom I have a close partnership, to do all these Home Affairs stories, so that you really build significant momentum and a can-do spirit around Home Affairs.

Moreover, Haffajee noted the collapse of municipalities as an example of a serious problem where a combined team of newsrooms could connect more closely with citizens to address challenges as they develop:

If you can catch the collapse of municipalities earlier, not only when the auditor general's report comes out, I think you can really play a big and different role in being the eyes and ears of a community.

We saw earlier that some participants' support for the implementation of constructive journalism was measured and provisional. When Haffajee was asked what she thought overall about the potential of constructive journalism for South African online media, she had this to say:

I think it could be absolutely invaluable, because we are about to enter a terrain of completely new governance. For me 2024 is going to be as big as 1994 – in the kind of shift we're going to have to explain, report and engage on. And I think as coalitions become the key form of governance, media is going to have to make sure that the country is running well and that political parties don't become so absorbed in coalition management that they forget that they serve us.

Haffajee added that South Africans are going to see new leaders all across the country and journalists would have to learn to constructively engage with these new leaders, as she is learning to do in Johannesburg (which is coalition-governed) in her "Fix my Joburg" work (Theme 10: Closer connection with audiences necessary, but social media's role controversial).

It is really a way to do a new kind of journalism. But it's going to take some praxis to make that the culture.

(Ferial Haffajee, Daily Maverick)

Finally, Basson said the practical implementation of constructive journalism as part of their subscription-focused business model was an attractive option:

I can already see subscription model is our future. We have to increasingly build relationships with our readers and convince them through our journalism why they should pay us to read our content [...] At the moment we can see they definitely pay for the stuff where we put in more time, more research, more investigations, deeper analysis. That's the type of content that converts subscribers, not the quick fast reporting. And if constructive journalism or solutions journalism is part of that mix: absolutely, I'm happy to explore that.

Basson said income from subscriptions would have to replace reliance on advertising, because:

Advertising is not going to sustain quality journalism. According to my knowledge, 90% plus digital advertising is going to Facebook and Google. We are really getting the crumbs.

(Adriaan Basson, News24)

However, as shown in the literature review ('Impact studies on constructive journalism' in Section 2.4.5), a recent shift in strategy was announced by the world's biggest advertising conglomerate, Group M, to place advertising next to quality journalism rather than sensation-seeking journalism (Papadatos Fragkos, 2022). This shift may well trigger a more positive financial outlook for quality journalism across the board, which could make organisations like News24 less dependent on paid subscriptions.

4.4 SUMMARY

In this chapter the findings of the analysis of two datasets are presented and discussed in consecutive themes. Themes 1–4 represent findings about the manifestation of constructive journalism principles in a sample of articles on evictions produced by three online news outlets (News24, Daily Maverick, GroundUp) over the first five months of South Africa's Covid-19 lockdown in 2020. Themes 5–11 represent the perceptions and attitudes of journalists and editors towards constructive journalism in online news.

The themes that emerged from the content analysis of articles written during South Africa's first Covid-19 lockdown (Themes 1–4) largely show an absence of some of the most important elements of constructive journalism principles. As can be expected in a media context where watchdog journalism plays an essential role to uphold the country's fragile democracy, critical investigation of eviction-related problems dominated in this sample, with scant attention paid to forward-looking solution coverage. The fact that constructive journalism's most distinctive principle, namely "When investigating important societal problems, include coverage of possible solutions in the overall news cycle, staying critical, investigative and factual", did not manifest in the articles indicates that journalists and editors were either opposed to, uninterested in, or ignorant of the aims of constructive journalism in 2020.

However, in 2022, the perceptions and attitudes of journalists and editors towards constructive journalism in online news paint a different picture. Themes 5–11, emerging from a qualitative analysis of interviews with the sample of journalists who produced the 2020 articles and editors involved in the editorial approach of the three outlets, reveal various levels of recognition of and support for a role for constructive journalism in online news. Moreover, these themes give an indication of some swing towards the inclusion of constructive approaches already taking place alongside watchdog journalism in two of the outlets (Daily Maverick and News24). Significant challenges to the implementation of constructive journalism also arose from the interviews. Nonetheless, taking those challenges into account, some participants gave practical suggestions of how constructive journalism could potentially be implemented in online news.

In the study's final section, Chapter 5: Conclusion, further analysis and the significance of the findings will be discussed.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents a summary of the findings, the contributions of the study to industry and academic discourse, considerations for further research and a conclusion. The purposes of the study were to explore the manifestation of constructive journalism in South African online news reporting, and to establish journalists' and editors' attitudes towards the framework in digital news. The study set out to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: Which constructive journalism principles are present in digital news reporting on evictions during the first five months of the Covid-19 lockdown period?

RQ2: What are the perceptions and attitudes of editors and journalists towards constructive journalism in online news?

To address RQ1, a content analysis was conducted on a sample of 134 articles from the online news outlets News24, Daily Maverick and GroundUp. To address RQ2, a qualitative interview analysis was conducted exploring the responses of eight participants selected from all three news outlets in the article sample: five journalists who produced some of the articles, and three editors involved in the editorial approach of the news organisations.

The next section of this chapter presents a summary of how each of the research questions were answered, linking insights from the content analysis of the articles to the interview responses of journalists and editors in order to arrive at a synthesis of the findings. Where pertinent, references from literature are drawn from this study's literature review (Chapter 2).

5.2 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

5.2.1 Manifestation of constructive journalism principles in article sample

To explore the presence of constructive journalism principles in the article sample, four constructive journalism principles were drawn from the study's literature review. To answer RQ1, the manifestation of each of these principles, as discussed in Themes 1–4 of the findings (Chapter 4), is summarised under concluding headings, namely:

- Rigorous solution coverage largely absent as binary reporting emerges
- Contextualisation lacks in-depth information to empower citizens in local contexts
- Scant evidence of nuance and complexity in narratives
- News agenda often shaped by audience contributions and emotions triggered.

Rigorous solution coverage largely absent as binary reporting emerges

In Theme 1 (see Chapter 4) it emerged that the first foundational principle of constructive journalism identified in this study, namely "When investigating important societal problems, include coverage of possible solutions in the overall news cycle, staying critical, investigative and factual" (also see Section 2.4.6), manifested as largely absent in the sample. Critical investigation of problems dominated. Although there was superficial reference to possible solutions in some articles and some opinion pieces explored forward-looking perspectives, the sample showed almost no rigorous investigation of solutions options to the problems investigated.

In post-apartheid South-Africa, where watchdog journalism is an increasingly vital mechanism to expose corruption, exploitation and corporate malfeasance (Harber, 2020), it is not surprising that this form of reporting dominates. This finding is supported by an overall viewpoint emerging from the interviews: journalists regard their responsibility to inform the public of critical problems and to reveal abuses of power – as prescribed by watchdog journalism – as the essence of their societal role (Chapter 4, Theme 5: Role for constructive journalism to be introduced alongside watchdog journalism recognised).

Yet, the literature shows that media scholars call for alternative normative frameworks for journalistic practice in South Africa, beyond the current form of monitorial journalism in the liberal mould of mature democracies (De Beer et al., 2016; Wasserman et al., 2018). Scholars have noted that when watchdog journalism becomes the only mode of reporting on social issues, it tends to lack nuance and complexity and risks becoming elitist, disregarding or marginalising the interests of the disenfranchised (Friedman, 2011; Rao & Wasserman, 2015). The first part of this criticism was found to be supported through a theme of binary conflict reporting emerging from the analysis of the articles. (Findings about the second part of this criticism, concerning the disregard of disenfranchised communities, will be discussed in the next section's consideration of Theme 2.)

The reporting of eviction-related conflict and violence across all three news outlets displayed a tendency towards lean, binary narratives with repetitive patterns of allegation and counter-allegation. This way of reporting was found to largely lack nuance and complexity, leaving readers with no forward-looking perspectives to stimulate more complex and productive thinking about the societal problem, as proposed in constructive journalism. Furthermore, it emerged that the choice of sources in the article sample also leaned towards a simplistic binary pattern, arranged predictably in a 'he said/she said' format (Chapter 4, Theme 3A: Lack of textual evidence of nuance and complexity).

The challenge posed by binary reporting as a technique deeply embedded in journalism practice is an important finding. It is used to frame, control and regulate complexity to report fast and is shown to inflame conflict between opposing parties. As reported in this study's literature review (Chapter 2, Section 2.4.1), constructive journalism proponents argue that this kind of binary reporting of conflict contributes to the increasing challenge of polarisation in societies across the globe ('What is constructive journalism?', 2022). This viewpoint is backed up by prominent themes in the South African literature (Chapter 2, 'Criticism of watchdog journalism as being event-driven, sensationalist and foregrounding conflict and violence' in Section 2.3.2), where the conflict model stands accused of deepening pre-existing societal divisions (Wasserman, 2021). The theme is picked up in findings from the interviews with editors and journalists. Overall, there was a recognition in the interviews that this technique inevitably results in journalists deepening polarisation through the way conflict is reported (Chapter 4, Theme 9: Polarisation inevitable, but can be mitigated). Although the point was made that binary conflict reporting in breaking news has always existed and has value, the stronger theme was that the binary mindset as part of ingrained reporting habits needed to change. It was said that journalists often approach situations with pre-set ideas of sources arranged on two sides of a battle. Time-pressured reporters were said to fixate on extreme viewpoints and look for the most adversarial quotes to catch the attention of readers in an overcrowded, competitive digital information environment (Chapter 4, Theme 9: Polarisation inevitable, but can be mitigated). Referring to the content analysis of eviction-themed articles written in 2020, journalists recognised retrospectively that complex issues such as evictions call for more than the binary approach revealed in the findings (Chapter 4, Theme 8C: Broad definition of constructive journalism a challenge and opportunity).

In constructive journalism discourse, it is argued that approaches under this umbrella concept offer ways for journalists to resist the tendency to create lean, binary narratives (Chapter 2, Section 2.4.1).

Further analysis and conclusions about the theme of binary thinking in South African journalism, its effects on society, and constructive journalism's potential to mitigate polarisation are woven throughout the synthesis of findings in this chapter.

Contextualisation lacks in-depth information to empower citizens in local contexts

In Theme 2 of the findings (see Chapter 4), it emerged that this study's second constructive journalism principle, "Place the issue in its relevant, broader context", was partly present in the article sample. One of the ways in which a relevant, broader context of issues manifested was in how eviction stories of poorer, marginalised communities were told. In contrast to the criticism in the literature that these communities are neglected in news reporting (Rao & Wasserman, 2015), the content analysis of this sample showed that the interests of the disenfranchised were well represented in socio-economic, political and legal contextualisation of eviction issues.

However, it emerged that in-depth information to empower citizens in local contexts was lacking – a finding that resonates with Malila's (2019) research in Eastern Cape communities, as referred to in this study's literature review (Chapter 2, 'Appeals for more contextualised, thematic reporting to provide citizens with in-depth information' in Section 2.3.3). Whereas evictees' feelings of powerlessness and confusion about local government actions and administrative processes were often reported in this study's article sample, journalists did not go further to inform audiences about relevant governance processes and resources to help citizens to hold officials to account. In Theme 8 (Chapter 4, Theme 8B: Juniorisation and lack of skills in newsrooms), this finding is given further impetus through views arising from interviews that most journalists lacked the necessary research and data journalism skills to report knowledgeably about public administration and government spend.

Scant evidence of nuance and complexity in narratives

The manifestation of this study's third constructive journalism principle, "Expand journalistic interviewing to cover nuance and complexity", is represented in Theme 3 of the findings in Chapter 4. Drawing from the literature, the principle is interpreted as an obligation on journalists to expand the range of sources interviewed, and to expand the practice of interviewing through using techniques proposed in constructive journalism. The principle could only be explored indirectly, in operationalised, textual form in the articles, and was revealed to be largely absent in the sample. In the articles written in 2020, there was little evidence of nuance and complexity sought through an expanded range of sources and interviewing techniques. As mentioned earlier, the choice and arrangement of sources consulted about eviction issues largely followed a predictable binary pattern on two sides of an argument (Chapter 4, Theme 3A: Lack of textual evidence of nuance and complexity). However, it was notable that a broader range of sources and perspectives were present in opinion pieces than in news stories. This finding is strengthened through perspectives from interviews, where it emerged that editors encouraged a more diverse range of sources to be used in opinion articles (see Chapter 4, Theme 6: Features of constructive journalism already practised).

From the way stories were told in the sample, little evidence emerged of authors seeking nuance and complexity through the second element of "expanded interviewing" proposed in constructive journalism. This element encourages journalists to extend their interview practices to help them overcome the inclination to create narrow, two-sided narratives that entrench polarisation. As seen in this study's literature review (Chapter 2, Section 2.4.1), solutions journalism proponent Ripley (2018) encourages journalists to add complexity to stories through the practice of "Complicating the Narrative" (CTN). CTN uses two interlinked practices from the disciplines of mediation and conflict resolution, i.e. deep listening to interviewee statements for underlying values and motivations, and

asking different questions to unearth details that don't fit the narrative. With a few exceptions, little evidence emerged of diversion from expected eviction storylines or the choice of sources in the study's article sample (see Chapter 4, Theme 3A: Lack of textual evidence of nuance and complexity).

This finding is illuminated further in the interview findings. In Theme 9 (Chapter 4, Theme 9: Polarisation inevitable, but can be mitigated) varying levels of interest were shown by editors and journalists to learn more about constructive journalism interview practices transferred from mediation and conflict resolution.

News agenda often shaped by audience contributions and emotions triggered

This study's fourth constructive journalism principle, "Strengthen connection and co-creation with the audience", emerged as indirectly and partially present in the sample, as described in Theme 4 (Chapter 4). Since the scope of the sample excluded analysis of social media, reader comments and visual material, the exploration of this principle's manifestation was limited. However, important themes emerged from the main body of articles, confirming prominent arguments in the literature about the growing influence of audience contributions in online news, and the ways in which these contributions can strengthen connection to the public (see Chapter 2, 'Calls for citizens to be seen as active participants to meaning making' in Section 2.3.3).

The content analysis showed that audience connection was bolstered through discussions in articles arising from citizen videos that first went viral on social media (see Chapter 4, Theme 4A: Audience connection strengthened through citizen video discussion). Furthermore, it was shown that Twitter posts and videos sourced from social media at times determined the news agenda across all three news outlets in the sample. Finally, the content analysis revealed that societal emotions triggered by social media often remain a central factor shaping the news agenda for extended periods after a critical event.

This finding is supported by Bosch's (2017) work, which shows that social media discussions often determine the main news agenda. Moreover, the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism's recent research shows that social media is becoming the technology of choice to engage with news for a growing number of people in South Africa (Newman et al., 2020). The conclusion drawn from both these factors is that there are strong arguments for the suitability of this study's fourth constructive journalism principle to be incorporated in the country's online news practices.

The findings give rise to an important theme which warrants more extensive research than the scope of this study allows for, namely the role of emotion as a potential news value in the changing journalism landscape. Here, a few insights from the literature reviewed in the study (Chapter 2, 'Growing momentum of an 'emotional turn' in digital journalism' in Section 2.3.3) are nevertheless noted, since it gives further meaning to themes arising from the content analysis. The growing prominence of uncensored audience contributions and the societal emotions they evoke are seen by some scholars to lead to the erosion of journalistic norms and the spread of sensational and false news, especially on social media (Harber, 2021; Tolsi, 2020). Others call for the recognition of emotion as a news value (Barnes, 2016) and a central factor shaping the news agenda (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2016). Indirectly, the calls in the South African literature for a journalism guided by the restoration of human dignity and the ethics of listening and care (Wasserman, 2013; 2021) give more prominence to emotion in the thinking and behaviour of journalists and their audiences than previously acknowledged in the rationalist approach of liberal watchdog journalism. The conclusion drawn from the findings of the content analysis is that both negative and positive interpretations of the role of emotion in news are valid. Aligning with Wahl-Jorgensen (2016), it is argued that scholars have the

urgent task to understand how the “emotional turn” in digital journalism shapes audiences’ views of the world.

In journalist interviews, mixed reactions emerged to the call from constructive journalism to strengthen engagement and co-creation of news with audiences (Chapter 4, Theme 10: Closer connection with audiences necessary, but social media’s role controversial). Further interpretation of Theme 10 and conclusions about these reactions will follow in the section below.

5.2.2 Perceptions and attitudes of journalists and editors towards constructive journalism in online news

To address RQ2, semi-structured interviews were conducted during June to August 2022 with a sample of journalists who produced the articles in the content analysis sample in 2020 and editors who are involved in the editorial approach of the three news outlets (News24, Daily Maverick, GroundUp). The perceptions and attitudes of the interviewees towards constructive journalism in online news, arising from a qualitative analysis of the interview transcripts, are discussed in Themes 5–11 (Chapter 4) and further synthesised in the section below.

The two-year interval between the time the articles were written and when the journalists were interviewed emerged as a significant factor in the findings. Themes 1–4 largely showed an absence of some of the most important constructive journalism principles in the articles written in 2020, indicating that journalists and editors were either opposed to, uninterested in or ignorant of the aims of constructive journalism at the time. In contrast, in 2022 varied levels of recognition of and/or support for a role for constructive journalism in online news were expressed by journalists and editors purposively selected for the sample (as seen in Themes 5–11). Participants differed in the way they interpreted this role for constructive journalism and identified significant challenges to the implementation of the form. However, actionable and innovative methods were proposed to potentially implement constructive approaches alongside watchdog journalism, while at the same time overcoming some of the important challenges. Moreover, interview responses indicated that in some of the outlets (Daily Maverick and News24), there has already been a recent swing towards the inclusion of constructive approaches in output – even if it has not been recognised or labelled as such.

The difference between the lack of constructive journalism principles found in the articles written at the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 (dataset 1) and the recognition of/support for the approach expressed in interviews with journalists and editors in 2022 (dataset 2) can reasonably be attributed to the effects of significant societal changes in South Africa and across the globe over the most recent years. Interviewee responses revealed an acute awareness of audiences wanting something more than exposure of issues from journalism in an era when the country and world are plagued by deepening and critical societal problems.

The next section will show how RQ2 was answered, continuing with brief concluding headings summarising a synthesis of findings arising from interviews (Themes 5–11), findings from the content analysis, and insights from the study’s literature review (Chapter 2). The main sections are as follows:

- Recognition of a role for constructive journalism to be introduced alongside watchdog journalism in overall news cycle
- Strong motivation for support of constructive journalism from some interviewees
- Operational and conceptual challenges to implementation of constructive journalism seen as interlinked and substantive, but not prohibitive:

- Financial constraints and battle for consumer attention seen as challenge – and opportunity
- Juniorisation and lack of skills in newsrooms a challenge
- Broad definition of constructive journalism a challenge and opportunity
- Risk of manipulation of constructive journalism by partisan media or the PR industry
- Polarising binary conflict reporting model can be improved
- Stronger connection with audiences seen as necessary, but social media controversial
- Journalists' and editors' suggestions for building constructive journalism praxis.

Recognition of a role for constructive journalism to be introduced alongside watchdog journalism in overall news cycle

While journalists saw watchdog journalism as the cornerstone of their societal role and celebrated the media's successes in placing some barriers in the way of State Capture and therefore state failure, some participants perceived their watchdog role as no longer enough to help people make informed decisions during current challenging times. Overall, there was a recognition that constructive journalism had a role to play alongside watchdog journalism in the overall news cycle (Chapter 4, Theme 5: Role for constructive journalism to be introduced alongside watchdog journalism recognised).

There were differences in the interpretation of this appended role for constructive journalism, much of which resulted from journalists' difficulties with the broad definition of the form as umbrella concept. Each participant was sent a brief information page on constructive journalism a few days before their interview to ensure some consistency of knowledge about the form as starting point (Appendix 4). Yet, it became apparent in some of the interviews that the concept of constructive journalism was not easily understood or accepted by journalists first exposed to the definition of the form (Chapter 4, Theme 8C: Broad definition of constructive journalism a challenge and opportunity). In some of the interviews, watchdog and constructive journalism were initially misinterpreted as mutually exclusive, but these participants remarked at the end of interviews that they understood the concept better and saw a role for it to complement watchdog journalism in the overall news cycle. Nevertheless, participants from the community-focused, independent non-profit organisation in the study, GroundUp, did not see the complimenting role for constructive journalism as an urgent necessity for the outlet. They indicated that their sole focus on investigating and describing human rights abuses would remain unaltered, even if real changes resulting from exposés were sometimes not evident.

On the whole, in interviews conducted with journalists at News24 and Daily Maverick, the appending role for constructive journalism was recognised as a necessary addition to the overall news cycle to complement and strengthen watchdog journalism (Chapter 4, Theme 5: Role for constructive journalism to be introduced alongside watchdog journalism recognised). The realisation that audiences want more from news than a relentless focus on problems had already brought about changes in the two outlets' output. Respondents recognised constructive journalism principles in some of their existing output, even if it was not labelled as such (Chapter 4, Theme 6: Features of constructive journalism already practised).

As alluded to before, most participants were first introduced to the concept of constructive journalism through this study. It is important to mention here that in the participants' description of constructive approaches already practised, it became apparent that their understanding of constructive journalism was inconsistent and sometimes incorrect when compared to the definition of the term in the literature. This is a challenge that will be addressed further in discussion of Theme 8, later this chapter.

It emerged from the interviews that at News24 (the country's largest online news platform and part of Media 24, a subsidiary of the listed company Naspers), changes to include additional approaches in addition to the watchdog-driven exposure of problems came organically from within the newsroom. Journalists insisted that they wanted to write about people's efforts to keep society going and not only focus on breaking news about what was going wrong. Editors, typically schooled in the "If it bleeds, it leads" tradition, were challenged in the way they defined newsworthiness (Chapter 4, Theme 5: Role for constructive journalism to be introduced alongside watchdog journalism recognised). As a result, 'good news' stories are now part of the news offering. (The editor's identification of these stories as a shift towards constructive journalism is problematic, and the name is criticised by other participants, as will be seen later in this chapter, when Theme 8 is discussed). Additionally, other constructive approaches already present at News24 include the consulting of experts to evaluate solutions options to enduring problems for in-depth articles, and an increase in online webinars where audiences are encouraged to take part in discussion and debate with journalists and a panel of experts, exploring how some of the country's most serious problems can be overcome.

In the interviews of participants from the donor-funded Daily Maverick, which has a voluntary subscription model, it emerged that shifts in the outlet's output to include solution coverage was an intentional editorial decision (Chapter 4, Theme 5: Role for constructive journalism to be introduced alongside watchdog journalism recognised). The associate editor, Ferial Haffajee, said the entire Daily Maverick pivot assumes that offering solutions coverage to audiences is a good business model. To illustrate constructive journalism features already present, she described a number of examples: webinars focused on fixing the country; the outlet's Home Affairs project, where audiences' problems with the troubled department and their suggested solutions were invited and published; and the 'Fix my Jo'burg' project, which explores novel ways to co-create news with local audiences.

Strong motivation for support of constructive journalism from some interviewees

When some interview participants explained why they supported a role for constructive journalism to complement watchdog journalism, they revealed an acute awareness of the ways in which South African audiences were affected by increasing and multi-layered societal problems and government's lack of action to address those problems. Some of the main themes to motivate support for constructive journalism to be introduced were the needs expressed by audiences, societal negativity, news avoidance and politicians' empty promises (see Chapter 4, Theme 7: Motivations for support of constructive journalism).

Audience feedback through public and on-the-job engagements showed journalists that communities were often desperate for information from the media to help them find solutions to the serious problems they face. The view was expressed that responding to needs of audiences and providing them with information to make decisions to improve their lives was an integral function of journalism in society (Chapter 4, Theme 7: Motivations for support of constructive journalism).

The sensitivity and responsiveness to audience needs described above aligns with the call in the constructive journalism literature for audiences to be approached as socially competent citizens to be empowered to make self-substantiated decisions in their lives through the strengthening of collaboration and co-creation of news with the public (Hermans & Drok, 2018). Furthermore, the expanded view of journalism's function in society – described by Haffajee above – concurs with Zelizer's (2017) and Wasserman's (2021) calls for a journalism ethics developed in response to citizens' lived experiences. Zelizer (2017) argues that key to a journalism ethics renegotiated "from the bottom up" is to understand it as an interpretive community, constituted by a shared web of journalists', media practitioners' and media consumers' meanings and interpretive horizons.

The motivations for support of constructive journalism arising from this study's interviews continued to show journalists' responsiveness to the lived experiences of audiences. Participants recognised the exceptional negativity in society and were aware that the volume of negative news that audiences are exposed to contribute to feelings of hopelessness, anxiety and apathy (Chapter 4, Theme 7: Motivations for support of constructive journalism). This finding highlights the need to think about the point/value of the current form of watchdog journalism dominating mainstream news if it has no effect on power, yet has harmful effects on audiences.

Interviewees' description of the unintentional negative impact of news on audiences is aligned with the reasons given by more than a third of research respondents from 30 countries for actively avoiding news, as reported in the Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2021 (Newman et al., 2021). Nearly 60% of news avoiders said news had a negative effect on their mood and left them feeling powerless to change things. South Africans were not included in the sample for the Reuters 2021 report, but local studies show that young South Africans specifically feel the news lacks relevance to their lives and fails to fulfil their information needs (Malila et al., 2013). Moreover, a supplement to the Reuters Report in 2019 showed that 47% of a (largely urban-based) sample of news consumers in South Africa found the news "too negative" (Roper et al., 2019).

This study's interviewees expressed concern about the reported trend of news avoidance, but there were mixed reactions to it (Chapter 4, Theme 7: Motivations for support of constructive journalism). Some journalists said they themselves found the news depressing, but that didn't mean it should be avoided, since the negativity of news was reality-based. Others said they identified with news avoiders and felt disillusioned with the lack of impact resulting from their work. A strong theme emerged that the Reuters Report was telling the industry that people want their journalism to be different. Constructive journalism was seen as a way to draw people back in and make them feel that journalism could offer them information to live a better life. Journalists' responsibility to counter news avoidance in this way was described as the task of the moment (Chapter 4, Theme 7: Motivations for support of constructive journalism).

A final theme that arose as motivation for the establishment of constructive journalism in online news reporting is a recognition that society cannot rely on politicians to implement the changes that are necessary, yet politicians (and celebrities) are given prime position in current news reporting (Chapter 4, Theme 7: Motivations for support of constructive journalism). The view emerged that journalists should help create an independent ecosystem to really tackle the problems in the country and take things forward, and that a collective adoption of constructive journalism as part of journalism culture could help to start such a process.

In the consolidation of answers to RQ2 so far, the range of recognition/support expressed by journalists for constructive journalism to add to watchdog journalism in online news, their motivations for their views, and constructive approaches seen to be already present in some of the outlets were summarised. Practical and normative challenges to the implementation of constructive journalism emerged as an important part of the findings (Chapter 4, Theme 8). The following section summarises Theme 8.

Operational and conceptual challenges to implementation of constructive journalism seen as interlinked and substantive, but not prohibitive (Theme 8)

Throughout the interviews, journalists revealed their own experiences of the myriad of problems faced by the industry, as described in the study's literature review (Harber, 2021; Wasserman, 2018). Global economic crises and the chain effect triggered by income-consuming FANGs have caused

interlinked financial, structural and value-based challenges for journalism (Harber, 2021). In addition to the challenges of changing business models and a changing consumer landscape, South African journalism was described as under tremendous additional pressures due to threats against journalists, threats to media freedom, and the undermining of the industry's integrity by one of the largest media houses having been captured by a political faction of the governing party (Chapter 4, Theme 8D: Risk of manipulation of constructive journalism by partisan media).

The overall theme that emerged was that industry pressures and participants' difficulties with conceptual clarity regarding constructive journalism pose many challenges to the implementation of the form, but that some of those challenges are also opportunities.

Financial constraints and battle for consumer attention seen as challenge – and opportunity

Interviewees attributed most of the industry pressures they experienced to their newsrooms' battle to ensure long-term financial viability. They said lack of resources, the ever-increasing pace of the news cycle and competition for consumer attention contributed to relentless pressure on journalists to produce more news in less time.

A theme that emerged is that journalists perceive the lack of resources as an obstacle to the implementation of constructive journalism, even if the concept sounds good (Chapter 4, Theme 8A: Newsrooms shrinking and financially poorer as they battle for consumer attention). Editors in the sample said they barely covered the basics of daily news with the human and financial resources available. They argued that constructive journalism would probably require too many additional resources to make it financially viable.

This view is countered by the contentions of editors from a range of news platforms at the "Listen Louder" 4th Global Constructive Journalism Conference in June 2022, as discussed in this study's literature review (Chapter 2, 'Impact studies on constructive journalism' in Section 2.4.5). At this conference, editors agreed that it was worthwhile to channel resources into fewer, but more in-depth stories. They said readers do not want more content, but rather better content ('Why constructive journalism is being adopted by journalism leaders as an editorial strategy', 2022). The executive editor of *The Times*, Jeremy Griffin (2022), argued that while initial changes to incorporate constructive journalism in editorial approach and output could be challenging, it was ultimately good for business. Constructive journalism improved audience engagement, which improved subscriptions.

There was a strong recognition by this study's interviewees that the "attention crisis" gripping journalism currently is an integral factor to the loss of audiences and financial challenges. They echoed arguments in literature that the abundance of innovative digital platforms is a prominent theme in the literature, as mentioned earlier in the report (Chapter 1, 'Introduction'). In an environment with an abundance of innovative digital platforms providing an overflow of information, all vying for consumer attention, journalism's monopoly position as news supplier has been lost (Hermans & Prins, 2020). Recounting their own experiences of being swayed by online mechanisms, journalists in this study's sample described how they get caught in the same loop of websites daily (including news websites) that fail to give them satisfactory content.

Some journalists saw the "attention crisis" as a further challenge to the establishment of constructive journalism in the current environment, but others contended that, in fact, the "attention crisis" provided an opportunity for the kind of quality journalism embraced by constructive journalism. The view was expressed that if done properly, the detail and depth of reporting required by constructive journalism would produce work of such authority and heft that it could not be ignored (Chapter 4, Theme 8C: Broad definition of constructive journalism a challenge and opportunity).

An interesting connection can be made between the argument cited above about the value of quality journalism and the reason for a swing in advertising strategy announced at the “Listen Louder” 4th Global Constructive Journalism Conference by a senior executive of the world’s leading media investment conglomerate, GroupM (see literature review, Chapter 2, ‘Impact studies on constructive journalism’ in Section 2.4.5). It was revealed that GroupM Worldwide was implementing a shift in strategy at all affiliated advertising agencies to cluster big clients’ advertising next to quality journalism. This shift was motivated by GroupM’s own research, showing that advertising placed next to quality journalism is 30% easier to remember and more likeable to the audience (Papadatos Fragkos, 2022).

The financial impact of constructive journalism, which positions itself as in-depth, quality journalism, could be positively affected by this strategic change in the global advertising industry. The conclusion that can reasonably be drawn from this is that the global changes in advertising strategy could filter through to South African media, possibly influencing the news strategy of online platforms towards more in-depth quality stories to attract advertising, which could in turn create more opportunities for the establishment of constructive journalism.

[Juniorisation and lack of skills in newsrooms a challenge](#)

The theme of the corrosive effects of shrinking funding for newsrooms continued as journalists described the impact of the juniorisation of newsrooms. They highlighted a lack of proper training for young journalists and a shortage of specialised skills as further obstacles to the potential implementation of constructive journalism. The view emerged that solutions would require specialist knowledge and that the industry no longer had enough mid-level specialists or senior journalists specialising in investigative journalism and other fields. As reported in literature (Chapter 2, ‘Developing contexts’ in Section 2.4.5), Mia Malan (2022), editor-in-chief of The Bhekisisa Centre for Health Journalism, cautions that solutions journalism for the health sector requires time, resources and specific skills, namely research, critical thinking, interpersonal and advanced writing skills.

Interviewees highlighted data research as a specific area where a shortage of skills is experienced. Referring to the complexities of eviction reporting, it was recognised that most journalists needed to be trained in reading legislation, government policy documents, municipalities’ financial reports and so forth to be able to understand and report on complex societal issues, such as evictions, with depth (Chapter 4, Theme 8B: Juniorisation and lack of skills in newsrooms).

This finding provides striking support for the category that emerged during the content analysis that states that stories about eviction-related conflict tended towards lean, binary narratives in the sample of articles (Chapter 4, Theme 1B: Conflict and violence foregrounded). Moreover, the recognition of the need to train journalists in data research skills is supported by Malila’s (2019) view of the journalistic skills needed to provide citizens with the public administration information they needed to hold officials to account (Chapter 2, ‘Appeals for more contextualised, thematic reporting to provide citizens with in-depth information’ in Section 2.3.3).

There was further concern about a general lack of skills in the industry and the obstacle this presents for the implementation of constructive journalism. The view emerged that many journalists struggle to get just the basic craft of journalism right (Chapter 4, Theme 8B: Juniorisation and lack of skills in newsrooms). They were seen to lose the thread of complex stories because they often didn’t have the time to properly understand the depth of a topic. The reasons given for this were too few people in newsrooms, journalists being shifted around between beats, and the huge underinvestment in important resources required in a newsroom – like experienced editors.

It must be noted here that some of the industry pressures described by interviewees as obstacles to the implementation of constructive journalism were based on a misunderstanding that constructive journalism had to be exercised on all stories all the time. As seen in the literature review (Chapter 2, Section 2.4.1) the form is described as adding an additional layer to the news cycle as it is known today: “from breaking news, to investigative journalism to constructive journalism” (‘What is constructive journalism?’, 2022). One of the founders of constructive journalism, Ulrik Haagerup (2021), says this does not mean that all stories must be constructive all the time, but that it is about a mindset and a concrete set of tools. Thus, interviewees’ assumption that time-pressured daily news journalists would be required to follow the principles of constructive journalism is incorrect. At the same time, as seen in the literature (Chapter 2, Section 2.4.1), the challenge of smaller, under-resourced newsrooms without enough experienced editors and lacking the funding for professional development and training is a concerning reality, eroding newsrooms’ ability to produce quality, in-depth journalism (Harber, 2021).

Instability in understandings of what constructive journalism is and what it is not emerged as an important theme from the interviews. In the next section, findings about conceptual challenges to the implementation of constructive journalism are summarised.

Broad definition of constructive journalism a challenge and opportunity

In the literature (Chapter 2, Section 2.4.1), scholars caution that the absence of one clear definition of constructive journalism could threaten the sustainability of the movement (Bro, 2018). The lack of exact lines of demarcation has often resulted in criticisms of the form as ‘sunshine’ or ‘positive news’, activism or advocacy, and journalism in danger of losing its independence (Bro, 2018; Tullis, 2014). These criticisms were especially evident in earlier stages of the form’s development, when the broader industry was first exposed to the concept.

A similar trend emerged from the interviews in this study. Interviewees exposed to the concept of constructive journalism for the first time through their interview and pre-interview information page (Appendix 4) did not grasp or accept the approach easily. While all participants read the same information page, some displayed a good understanding of constructive journalism principles, while others started off with misinterpretations and gained a clearer idea during the course of the interview.

Interviewees raised the view that the concept needs to be more narrowly defined, that the range of aspects grouped under one umbrella concept and a lack of parameters was a slippery slope that could lead to advocacy journalism (Chapter 4, Theme 8C: Broad definition of constructive journalism a challenge and opportunity). A trend emerged among some journalists to (mis-)interpret constructive journalism’s call for critical investigation of possible solutions as journalists doing a forecast of the future, being activists or proposing their own choice of solutions like a policy maker.

Alongside this trend of (mis-)interpretations, a theme emerged of journalists’ fear of making mistakes. Some believed constructive journalism would open them up for making mistakes that would jeopardise their journalistic career. Some said that even using the views of experts when exploring people’s efforts to find solutions was too risky, because any view of how something can change for the better is always a perception and that could expose journalists who are already under too much pressure.

The interpretations of constructive journalism cited above are countered in the literature (Chapter 2, Section 2.4.4). Constructive journalism calls on journalists to stay critical, factual and investigative (as in watchdog journalism) when reporting on forward-looking perspectives and people’s efforts to find solutions, and it is stipulated that journalists should never attempt to define the best solution for a

problem (Bro & Gyldensted, 2021; Hermans & Drok, 2018; ‘What is constructive journalism?’, 2022). It can be argued that these norms do not leave room for advocacy or activist journalism, or journalists being forecasters of the future or taking on the role of policy makers. In solutions journalism, exact parameters are given on how to maintain an evidence-based approach when investigating credible responses to social problems. Reporting on limitations to solutions or solutions that don’t work is considered a valuable part of the form (McIntyre and Gyldensted, 2017; ‘What is solutions journalism?’, 2022).

The instability of understandings of the meaning of constructive practices shown above illustrates the challenges posed by a lack of agreement on a single definition and precise parameters for the umbrella concept of constructive journalism. As mentioned earlier in this section, some of the examples cited by respondents as constructive journalism were partial misinterpretations, such as the “good news” stories on the News24 platform. Some interviewees had insight into practices that were erroneously equated to constructive journalism, i.e. good-news journalism and feel-good-stories, and were positive about the development of more substantive and impactful methodologies in constructive journalism (Chapter 4, Theme 8C: Broad definition of constructive journalism a challenge and opportunity). It was highlighted that people frequently misinterpreted “hope” in journalism as feel-good stories, whereas hope was very much about engaging critically with a topic and finding what can come out of it.

Despite the criticisms of good-news stories in interviews, some said there is room for inspiring, role-model stories, because reader responses indicated that they want to know about that. It was proposed that these stories could be built on to develop praxis towards more complex constructive journalism (Chapter 4, Theme 8C: Broad definition of constructive journalism a challenge and opportunity). This view illustrates an important point for constructive journalism’s application in developing contexts outside the mature democracies in Western Europe and the US, namely that the lack of an exact prescription of how constructive journalism should be operationalised can also be seen as an opportunity to innovate practices in context-specific ways.

As reported in the literature review (Chapter 2, Section 2.4.4), Wagemans et al. (2018) challenge the binary distinctions at the heart of conceptualisations of journalism that are perpetuated in constructive journalism discourse (as evident in some participants’ responses above). The authors contend that the diverse contexts within which journalists work demand a more complex understanding of “‘neutrality’ versus ‘engagement’, ‘subjectivity’ versus ‘objectivity’ or ‘informing’ versus ‘activating’ the audience” (Wagemans et al., 2018, p. 564). However, in this study it is argued that there must be a caution and caveat to context-specific innovation in developing-country contexts, where watchdog journalism’s role remains as urgent and vital in defending democracy as has been illustrated over the past decade in South Africa (Harber, 2020). It is concluded that if constructive journalism is indeed appended to watchdog journalism locally, journalists should take extra care to adhere to the journalistic (watchdog) norms of staying investigative, fact-based and critical, as called for by constructive journalism proponents across the board (Hermans & Drok, 2018; ‘What is constructive journalism?’, 2022).

To this end, the content analysis findings discussed (Chapter 4, Theme 1C: Solution-reporting neglected) revealed that superficial referral to possible solutions in articles fell short of the rigour required in constructive journalism. Interviewees also highlighted the risk of journalists misinterpreting constructive journalism as an easy add-on to reporting habits. It was said that the detail and depth of constructive journalism is more challenging than making a call to some civil society leader who is always in the media, which journalists may think is constructive.

An overall theme emerging from interviews was the realisation that the implementation of constructive journalism would require a shift in mindset for both journalists and audiences and that shift needs to move away from a binary understanding of complex problems. Journalists recognised that mindsets and habitual news processes in the watchdog mould are ingrained and that the ethos of newsrooms is still very much geared towards breaking bad news. They said the addition of constructive journalism to watchdog journalism in the news cycle would require a re-treading of the philosophy of newsrooms – a task that was challenging and would take time, but was not seen as impossible (Chapter 4, Theme 8C: Broad definition of constructive journalism a challenge and opportunity; Theme 11: Suggestions for building constructive journalism praxis). Innovative proposals to begin such a process are discussed later in this chapter.

Journalists also recognised that various audiences also had to be brought round to the idea that they could be offered rigorous journalism that gave information to help solve society's crises. Further interpretation of findings and conclusions about the task of changing the mindset of audiences will follow later in this chapter.

Risk of manipulation of constructive journalism by partisan media or the PR industry

In the findings (Chapter 4, Theme 8D: Risk of manipulation of constructive journalism by partisan media) and in the literature (Wasserman, 2020) it is seen that threats to media freedom remain a notable feature of the country's media environment. Interviewees expressed concern and alarm about continued threats to the independence of journalists, particularly since the significant Independent Media Group's capture by a faction of the ruling party. They cautioned that this development eroded post-apartheid gains in press freedom and trust in the media.

With their journalistic independence already threatened in this way, it is understandable that some participants expressed scepticism towards a journalistic form which (they believed) could be manipulated for political gain. The literature review (Chapter 2, 'Developing contexts' in Section 2.4.5) highlighted criticism of China's state-run media's conceptualisations and applications of constructive journalism, especially of the way it is used to increase China's so-called 'soft power' in Africa (Marsh, 2016). Interviewees in this study cited China's controversial use of constructive journalism as a warning of how the form could be manipulated and they emphasised that a free press in South Africa is critical. Some participants saw an even bigger risk for the misuse of constructive journalism in the plethora of public relations (PR) practitioners in society. Aligning with arguments in the literature review (Edwards, 2022), interviewees said PR stories were often sold as solution stories, posing a risk to people's trust in the media, since it is not always easy for audiences to distinguish the source of stories.

In this section, findings about the operational and conceptual challenges to the implementation of constructive journalism in the South African digital news environment, and pertinent interpretations from the literature, were summarised. This is followed by a summary of the findings related to participants' views of the potentially polarising effects of conflict reporting in South Africa and constructive journalism proposals on how to mitigate such polarisation.

Polarising binary conflict reporting model can be improved

Earlier in this chapter, findings were summarised about the theme of a binary reporting style emerging from the content analysis of eviction articles and of interviewees recognising a binary mindset among journalists as part of ingrained reporting habits ('Rigorous solution coverage largely absent as binary reporting emerges'). Further findings about how this theme is seen in practice, including how binary reporting stops more nuanced understanding of the motivations and experiences of those portrayed

as “villains” in conflict stations. Proposals about how binary reporting habits could potentially be mitigated are consolidated below.

Participants attributed the trend repetitive two-sided reporting of conflict partially to the lack of resources (especially specialist reporters) and the pressurised working conditions of journalists. They said time-pressured journalists go into a situation and all they have available to them is an ingrained template of the conflict model, where sources with opposing viewpoints are set against each other and the drama of the situation is foregrounded to capture readers’ attention.

Adding to the theme of journalists’ role in polarisation, participants cited various examples of how polarisation is deepened through the journalistic habit of focusing on extreme viewpoints and the ‘loudest’ voices to make stories more eye-catching. Interviewees said polarisation often becomes entrenched because many journalists want to “brand” people, portraying them as one-dimensional, static people who are unable to change their mind. Interviewees described how this approach by the media forced public personalities into hard-line positions and fed into a process of confirmation bias with audiences. It is a view supported by Ripley (2018) and Dame Adjin-Tettey and Garman (2021), as seen in the literature review (Chapter 2, Section 2.4.1).

Calls to revisit/improve journalism’s “template” of conflict reporting is a prominent theme in the literature (Newman, 2022; Wasserman, 2021). Under the constructive journalism umbrella, two interlinked practices from mediation and conflict resolution stand out as suggested methods for journalists to acquire to mitigate polarisation, namely deep listening and asking different questions (Heinrichs, 2022; Ripley, 2018). The purpose of different questions and active listening techniques are to “cover issues more thoughtfully, with the aim of revealing deeper truths and finding solutions” (Dame Adjin-Tettey & Garman, 2021, pp. 2–3).

On the whole, interviewees’ views about the potential of these skills to be incorporated in journalistic practice in the South African environment and into their own praxis were positive. Their reactions ranged from mildly interested, to interested and wanting to learn more, to very interested and seeing the acquisition of specialised questioning and listening skills from conflict resolution and mediation as something with significant potential value for the industry (Chapter 4, Theme 9: Polarisation inevitable, but can be mitigated). In striking alignment with views from literature about the potential of these skills for highly polarised African societies (Dame Adjin-Tettey & Garman, 2021), interviewees highlighted that the skills would be particularly valuable in African contexts where it would improve journalists’ line of questioning to open up more options and would help them to explore how to deal with conflict better. It was said that voices were needed to de-escalate things in African contexts (Chapter 4, Theme 9, Polarisation inevitable, but can be mitigated).

In the interviewees’ discussions of deep listening skills, the response of Daily Maverick journalist Pauli van Wyk was particularly notable. Referring to one of her articles on evictions in the sample (see Chapter 4, Theme 3A: Lack of textual evidence of nuance and complexity), Van Wyk confirmed the study’s finding that her work indicated deep listening when she wrote about a man’s distress at losing his home and dignity.

Van Wyk’s description of her role in making the evictee feel heard (through listening and reporting) is illuminated by scholars’ call for a journalism that gives a more comprehensive picture of the world by drawing on the ethics of listening and care (Chapter 2, ‘Proposals for empowering of citizens through the ethics of listening and care’ in Section 2.3.3). The concepts of active listening and care are inherent to approaches proposed in constructive journalism (‘What is constructive journalism?’, 2022). Van Wyk’s description of the active nature of the way she listened to the evictee can be seen as an

enactment of what Wasserman (2021) called ‘an element of intervention’ that is included in a journalism based on an ethics of listening. Wasserman (2021) contends that such an approach to journalism places an ethical obligation on the media to contribute to de-escalating violence or finding solutions. Van Wyk’s statement about the journalist being the evictee’s only power is seen to align with Hamelink’s (2016) thesis that active listening empowers those who are listened to, potentially enabling them to discover new choices and possibilities. Finally, Wasserman (2021) argued that listening can guide journalists toward changing their relationship with audiences-as-receivers to audiences-as-partners, -interlocutors and -co-creators of news – a view that speaks further to concepts proposed in constructive journalism.

Stronger connection with audiences seen as necessary, but social media controversial

Constructive journalism encourages journalists to strengthen connections with the audience, facilitate democratic debate and include people in the community to co-create news (McIntyre & Gyldensted, 2017; ‘Three constructive approaches’, 2022). In Theme 10, it emerged that editors and journalists largely supported the notion that they needed to strengthen engagement and inclusion of audiences in news processes.

Earlier in this chapter (‘Recognition of a role for constructive journalism to be introduced alongside watchdog journalism in overall news’) examples are mentioned of opportunities already created at News24 and Daily Maverick to link more directly with the public. These include audience participation in live webinars with journalists, editors and panels of experts, which have become a regular feature of the media landscape. The Daily Maverick’s Home Affairs project and its associate editor Ferial Haffajee’s ‘Fix my Jo’burg’ project are innovative examples of constructive journalism in practice. Furthermore, interviewees’ description of the need to be aware of one’s own biases when engaging and co-creating with communities from different backgrounds aligns strikingly with the principles of constructive journalism as reported in the literature (‘What is constructive journalism?’, 2022). Finally, one can argue that the co-creating practices described by journalists imply an acknowledgement that journalists have to relinquish their claim to authority over truth and a recognition that truth is constructed in a dialogical process that engages actively with the views from the other side, as Voltmer (2016) argued.

The scope of this study does not include detailed discussion of the growing problem of misinformation in journalism and the challenges it poses to participants’ identification of journalism’s primary responsibility to “shine a light on the truth” (Van Wyk, Daily Maverick). Yet, it is worth mentioning in this context that the idea of journalists relinquishing authority over truth through active co-creation with the public was an unappealing proposition to the editor of GroundUp, Nathan Geffen. For this outlet, traditional letters to the editor, where there is a filter before publication, is favoured as the best way to represent audience views.

Although the analysis of social media falls outside the scope of this study, interesting themes emerged from journalists’ views about social media’s role in connection and co-creation with audiences. Attitudes were mixed and dependent upon the platform and type of audience contribution referenced. In the first instance, journalists acknowledged that stories often break first on social media and frequently went on to determine the news agenda, as evidenced in the findings of the content analysis (Theme 4A: Audience connection strengthened through citizen video discussion). The vital role of citizen videos and the potential of these videos to strengthen connection with audiences were equally acknowledged by interviewees.

On the other hand, participants expressed strong disapproval of the role of Twitter in journalism. They highlighted that they avoided Twitter and Facebook because of the negativity of comments. There was visceral criticism of the trend of colleagues in the industry taking sides on issues on Twitter, thereby compromising their ability to be seen as objective when reporting on the issue further. It was said that journalists with big egos did not help society at all and that their behaviour was “vacuous, superficial and dangerous”. Twitter was called a “complete and utter scourge” on journalism.

Yet, the interviews also revealed the potential of social media to be used as a “tool for good” by connecting and co-creating with audiences. As mentioned earlier, the ‘Fix my Jo’burg’ project is an example of effective innovation in the use of social media to engage with local communities to find solutions for issues such as street lights and women’s safety.

In the summary and consolidation of findings in this chapter so far, there is a tension between two of the main themes. On the one hand, a theme of support for a role for constructive journalism as adding to watchdog journalism in the overall news cycle arose from the interviews. On the other hand, a theme of considerable contextual challenges to the implementation of the form also emerged from the responses. In the final section of the summary a picture emerges of the potential of constructive journalism in online news, factoring in some of those challenges, as journalists’ and editors’ suggestions for implementation of the form are discussed.

Journalists’ and editors’ suggestions for building constructive journalism praxis

Findings from the interviews showed that the attitudes of journalists and editors towards constructive journalism in online news varied, from seeing an appending role to watchdog journalism for the form as a “nice to have” in the overall news cycle, to seeing constructive journalism as a valuable and necessary approach that will strengthen watchdog journalism. At the same time, a theme of significant practical and conceptual challenges seemingly standing in the way of the implementation of constructive journalism in online news also emerged from interviews. The challenges include the financial constraints and lack of resources of newsrooms, a lack of specialist reporters with the necessary skills for constructive journalism, entrenched mindsets and binary reporting habits among journalists, and misperceptions about the meaning and aims of constructive journalism.

In Theme 11 of the findings (Chapter 4, Theme 11: Suggestions for building constructive journalism praxis), participants’ suggestions for building constructive journalism praxis paint a picture of the overall potential of the form in online news. It is a picture that addresses/partially addresses some of these challenges and continues to support the vital role of watchdog journalism in the country’s fragile democracy. It shows some participants’ proposals of how a shift in the country’s journalism culture towards including solution coverage can be started collectively. These suggestions point to practical ways in which business models can be adapted and journalists can play a bigger role in taking society forward. Some of these suggestions are already in progress, and others reveal innovative thinking on how newsrooms could collaborate on specific projects.

An important finding is that the appending position of constructive journalism in the overall news cycle, as explained by the Constructive Institute (‘What is constructive journalism?’, 2022), is a key factor in participants’ views of how the form could be implemented. For most journalists it was significant to realise that constructive journalism is not meant to be practised on all stories all the time, and not meant to be added to the practices of time-pressured breaking-news journalists, but rather to follow in the period afterwards. The conclusion that can be drawn from this is that definitions of constructive journalism should give a clear indication of constructive journalism’s appending position in the overall news cycle.

An equally important aspect of constructive journalism that seemed to facilitate creative thinking among journalists was the understanding that the form should be seen as a mindset and a specific set of tools that can be developed in innovative, context-specific ways, as stated by Haagerup (2021).

In findings from both datasets of this study a theme arose of an ingrained binary mindset in journalism and society at large that poses a challenge to the introduction of constructive journalism. Participants aligned in their suggestions that an important part of the addressing this challenge is that journalists should trade less in ‘villains and heroes’. As Pauli van Wyk argued, life is not binary and cannot be described as if it is:

Good people do bad things. Bad people do good things. You have to as a journalist then go and look at what was wrong and what was right in the bigger context of things and describe it in that way.

(Pauli van Wyk, Daily Maverick)

Interviewees highlighted that journalists should do more reading to be able to understand and consider layers of context when practising constructive journalism – context that revolves around a person, a community, a country and a globe.

Journalists’ interest in learning how to incorporate expanded interview techniques proposed in constructive journalism (drawing on the disciplines of conflict resolution and mediation) is summarised earlier in this chapter (‘Polarising binary conflict reporting model can be improved’). The potential changes in praxis that the acquisition of these new skills may foreshadow is another way in which the challenge of ingrained and limiting reporting habits can be addressed. As seen in the literature, these techniques are aimed at giving journalists, interviewees and audiences more options of thinking patterns around problems that seem insurmountable (‘What is constructive journalism?’, 2022). The underlying question is: If audiences can’t look ahead, how can they develop ways of thinking to address problems? News24 editor Adriaan Basson cited crime as a problem that seems insurmountable in South Africa and added that people’s worldviews are influenced by how crime is reported on. He suggests that the interviewing techniques proposed in constructive journalism could improve crime reporting in a way that can also give some hope to communities.

A strong theme that emerged is that constructive journalism should be established collectively in the South African media industry. Different elements of this theme, independently proposed by participants, show ways in which some of the prominent challenges to constructive journalism’s implementation can be addressed or partially addressed.

First, the strengthening of an existing blended model, in which corporate mainstream titles like News24 combine forces with donor-funded organisations such as Bhekisisa, AmaBhungane and others, was suggested. Basson (News24) said this model gives the public access to more in-depth, well-researched pieces and it would be an effective way to grow constructive journalism.

The suggestion of a collective approach to implementing constructive journalism shows a way in which the challenge of a lack of funds, as well as the lack of specialist reporters, could begin to be addressed. As reported in the literature review (Chapter 2, ‘Developing contexts’ in Section 2.4.5), journalists at Bhekisisa are given a high degree of training in the skills necessary for constructive journalism. The strengthening of the blended model would create more opportunities for these skills to be applied to grow constructive journalism.

Second, the proactive approach of a summit was suggested to trigger a collective mind-shift and implementation of constructive journalism. Jason Felix (News24) proposed that the industry come

together to be encouraged to change their approach to include constructive approaches around big topics that have a severe impact on people's day-to-day lives. Topics like the failing economy, state-owned enterprises and load shedding were mentioned.

Third, adding to the theme, Ferial Haffajee proposed that newsrooms combine forces to tackle a few chosen projects on big issues through an interwoven investigative/constructive approach:

I think there has to be a consciousness and then choice about what you're going to focus on. We're going to have to learn from how the media did the Gupta Leaks, where three really big newsrooms got together and put their people together to do it. We have to use that model to choose a couple of big choice things of social impact. And I think that's how you can hopefully shift a journalism culture.

(Ferial Haffajee, Daily Maverick)

The theme of newsrooms combining forces on a few chosen big issues to implement constructive journalism in a way that expands investigative journalism shows how the challenge of ingrained mindsets in journalism can potentially be addressed. Moreover, as seen in the findings (Chapter 4, Theme 8C: Broad definition of constructive journalism a challenge and opportunity), interviewees recognised that the challenge of ingrained mindsets and fixed ideas about what constituted news also had a bearing on audiences. The proposition that journalists would have to learn to tell constructive stories in compelling ways so that it feels investigative (as also argued in the literature review [Malan 2022]) could be activated through appending constructive aspects of issues to investigative aspects in collaborative work on big-issue projects. This process would generate a body of specialist skills in the industry, addressing another of the stated challenges to the implementation of constructive journalism.

As seen throughout this study's findings, the lack of financial resources is at the root of many of the issues perceived as challenges to the implementation of constructive journalism. Haffajee's next statement could therefore be seen as a potential game-changer for the prospects of constructive journalism in South Africa:

There's lots of funding available for 'great projects'. And if we frame them as a mix of investigation and solutions, so that you can almost create teams for a short while, but with dedicated focus to do this, it would change the landscape. Then should you have impact, you can do it again and again. So that you keep building up this body of specialisation. But you need to give it time.

(Ferial Haffajee, Daily Maverick)

Journalists and editors highlighted that the implementation of constructive journalism is going to require a top-down approach and that editors must be included in building praxis, for instance through webinars following investigations, asking how issues can be taken forward.

The Daily Maverick's Home Affairs project was cited as an example of successful, innovative praxis that could be taken out wider, with more partners across platforms to build momentum and a can-do-spirit around big issues. The collapse of municipalities was another noted example of a serious problem where a combined team of newsrooms could connect more closely with citizens to address challenges as they develop, rather than writing about it only when the auditor general's report comes out.

In terms of the overall potential of constructive journalism for South African online media, the form's possibilities to engage constructively with new leaders after the country's 2024 election were emphasized:

I think it could be absolutely invaluable, because we are about to enter a terrain of completely new governance. For me 2024 is going to be as big as 1994 [...] As coalitions become the key form of governance the media is going to have to make sure that the country is running well and that political parties don't become so absorbed in coalition management that they forget that they serve us.

5.3 CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY

5.3.1 Industry contribution

This is the first empirical study in South African media discourse of the manifestation of constructive journalism in online news and the perceptions and attitudes of journalists and editors towards the form in online news. Many of the findings and interpretations are original insights adding to industry knowledge.

The finding that journalists and editors recognise a role for constructive journalism to be introduced alongside watchdog journalism in the overall news cycle in digital news shows a shift in attitudes towards the form in the larger context of South African media debates. In previous years constructive journalism has mostly been seen as 'sunshine journalism' lacking the rigour required to play a useful role in the country's media context. The study offers more granular insights into when a shift in attitudes began and the reasons for it.

The research indicates that there has been a change in how some journalists think about the information needs of audiences and journalistic obligations to address those needs since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic. As seen in the findings, there is a discrepancy between the absence of constructive journalism principles in reporting during the first five months of South Africa's Covid-19 lockdown in 2020, and the recognition of a role for constructive journalism by some of the journalists who authored articles and some of the editors involved in the editorial approach of the three news outlets in the sample two years later. These interview participants motivated their support of constructive journalism to be established in the overall news cycle by speaking about their increasing concern about the effects of relentless negative news on audiences and about the value of watchdog journalism (in its current form in mainstream news) in an environment where audiences have no trust that those in power will act upon the problems exposed. The change in some journalists' perception of audiences' information needs in the current era since the start of the pandemic, and their perception of constructive journalism's potential to fulfil those needs alongside watchdog journalism, adds new information to media debates about ways to respond to the challenges of the era. It points to a willingness to chart a new path for journalism in a context where government is failing.

Industry knowledge is further enriched by the practical suggestions that emerged from interviews regarding how to offset some of the significant challenges to the implementation of constructive journalism. Challenges include the financial constraints and lack of resources of newsrooms, a lack of specialist reporters with the skills required for constructive journalism, entrenched mindsets and binary reporting habits among journalists, and misperceptions about the meaning and aims of constructive journalism. The most notable suggestion, emerging from editors and journalists of two of the outlets, shows how a shift in the country's journalism culture towards including solution coverage can be started collectively. It is proposed that a few newsrooms join forces (as done before in the successful "Gupta Leaks" model), create and train combined specialist teams for months at a

time, and tackle some of the country's critical problems by employing both investigative and constructive journalism. It was shown that examples of such investigative/constructive projects have already been started and could be expanded by collaborative partnerships across newsrooms. This suggestion is seen as an actionable proposition to expand journalism praxis and strengthen the vital role of watchdog journalism in online news. The collective approach addresses the obstacle of financial constraints through the potential unlocking of funds for "great projects" to take the country forward, and it addresses the challenge of a lack of specialised skills by strengthening investigative journalism skills and building a body of constructive journalism skills in the industry. These big new ideas go further than constructive journalism. It speaks to potentially actionable journalism design in an environment of failing government/governance.

The study revealed that conflict stories tend to be told in lean, binary narratives, pointing to underlying binary thinking habits among journalists. Editors and journalists recognised that binary reporting contributed to polarisation in the country and they largely saw a need to move away from the 'template' of conflict reporting predominantly used in the industry. They were interested to learn more about expanded interviewing techniques from the disciplines of mediation and conflict resolution, as proposed in constructive journalism. The interviewees' call to fellow journalists to trade less in 'villains and heroes', and to refrain from describing life as if it is binary when the situation is complex, is a significant criticism of the way watchdog journalism is practised in South Africa's conflicted and polarised society. The proposition that the reporting of conflict and contentious societal problems can benefit from the expanded interview techniques proposed in constructive journalism could foreshadow changes in praxis that will begin to address the challenge of ingrained mindsets and limiting binary conflict-reporting habits.

Insights about the harmful effects of journalists' unthinking use of militaristic language and a metaphor of war are important. It highlights the question of how journalists can move away from activating such metaphorical uses (for instance by using the most inflammatory verbatim quotes to catch readers' attention). It also begs the larger question of how reflective journalists are about their habitual uses of metaphors and whether they connect actual language used to "compassion fatigue" in audiences.

The study contributes to the South African media debates about the ways in which journalism praxis needs to adapt to the changing political landscape in the country. A valid argument put forward during the interviews is that journalists are going to have to explain, report and engage with leaders in new ways to make sure political parties don't become so absorbed in coalition management that they forget that they serve the people. The idea that journalists will learn to engage in new and meaningful ways with leaders in an era of increasing coalition government through the introduction of constructive journalism alongside watchdog journalism adds a fresh perspective to how journalistic skills can be expanded to strengthen the developing democracy.

5.3.2 Academic contribution

The study's finding that South African journalists recognise a role for constructive journalism to be introduced alongside watchdog journalism in the overall news cycle in digital news enriches understanding of the applicability of constructive journalism in developing contexts outside mature Western democracies, as called for in constructive journalism discourse (Mast et al., 2018). The study contributes to South African media discourse by suggesting that constructive journalism could be a suitable framework to begin to address scholarly appeals for approaches beyond the currently dominant form of watchdog journalism practised in mainstream news (De Beer et al., 2016; Wasserman et al., 2018). Watchdog journalism has led to many successes, but also stands accused of

emphasising conflict and negativity, reflecting the perspectives of the political and economic elite, lacking nuance and complexity, and disregarding the voices of disenfranchised groups (Friedman, 2011; Garman & Malila, 2017; Wasserman & Garman, 2014; Rao & Wasserman, 2015). Journalists interviewed in the study largely recognised that constructive journalism approaches offered ways to bring more nuance and complexity into conflict reporting, to include diverse voices and perspectives, and to go beyond the mere reproduction of problems that leave audiences feeling hopeless and disempowered.

The study confirms the view in the literature (Bro & Gyldensted, 2021) that the lack of agreement on a single definition with clear delineating parameters for the umbrella concept of constructive journalism can lead to misunderstandings of the form as journalism lacking independence. In countries like South Africa, where watchdog journalism plays an essential role in safeguarding a fragile democracy, the risk of misinterpretation of constructive and watchdog journalism as mutually exclusive is especially pronounced. For most journalists in this study, it was significant to realise that constructive journalism was an additional step to breaking news and investigative journalism ('What is constructive journalism?', 2022) and was not meant to replace their monitorial role in society. The appending position of constructive journalism in the overall news cycle was also a key factor in suggestions of how the form could be implemented alongside investigative (watchdog) journalism in big-issue projects. Hence, it is proposed that the phrase "in the overall news cycle" (or similar) is included in the definition of constructive journalism, particularly in developing contexts where the practice of watchdog journalism is as vital as it is in South Africa.

A further consequence of the broad definition of constructive journalism to be addressed is that in media contexts where press freedom remains threatened, like South Africa, extra care should be taken to ensure a firm understanding of the constructive journalism requirement that journalists stay critical, investigative and factual when covering possible solutions to significant societal problems ('What is constructive journalism?', 2022). Journalists in this study cautioned that threats to media freedom have escalated since the capture of a major media group, Independent Media, by a faction of the ruling party. They highlighted the risk of manipulation of constructive journalism for political gain by partisan media like the Independent Group and likened this risk to the controversial use of (what is called) constructive journalism by Chinese state media to increase China's 'soft power' in Africa.

In an additional contribution to the discourse about the risks posed by the broad definition of constructive journalism, the study confirms that the lack of an exact prescription of how the form should be operationalised is also an opportunity to innovate practices in context-specific ways, as argued by Van Antwerpen et al. (2022). Journalists cited current and suggested examples of such innovation in South African online media. Again, the important caveat for fragile democracies like South Africa is to ensure that rigorous journalistic norms (as proposed in constructive journalism) are upheld when new practices are developed, to guard against misinterpretations or manipulation of the form.

This study contributes original insights to the knowledge of constructive journalism vis-à-vis a journalism based on the ethics of listening and care by showing a strong alignment between the two approaches. South African scholars propose that in polarised, unequal and contested democratising contexts, a journalism proceeding from the ethics of listening and care could make a substantive contribution to the human dignity, agency and well-being of citizens (Wasserman, 2021). In an interesting alignment with arguments put forward at the "Listen Louder" 4th Global Constructive Journalism Conference ('How to cover war and conflict constructively', 2022), Wasserman (2021) contends that instead of presupposing a passive role for the media as simply a "mirror" or observer of

events, a journalism based on the ethics of listening includes an element of intervention, imposing an ethical obligation on the media to contribute to de-escalating violence or finding solutions. Furthermore, it is argued that as a normative concept, listening can guide journalists toward changing their relationship with audiences-as-receivers to audiences-as-partners, -interlocutors and -co-creators of news (Wasserman, 2021). This view supports the call in constructive journalism to strengthen connection and co-creation with the audience (Bro & Gyldensted, 2021; McIntyre & Gyldensted, 2018). Wasserman (2021) positions a journalism based on the ethics of listening and care as a framework that is distinct from the normal conventions of watchdog journalism and cautions that listening in this way does not imply an uncritical acceptance of people's claims or stories on face value. He continues by stating that critical media should hold their monitorial role in balance with their orientation as caring listeners (Wasserman, 2021). Again, these arguments about the application of active listening (proceeding from the ethics of listening and care) support constructive journalism theory regarding how constructive journalism is to be practised alongside investigative (watchdog) journalism ('What is constructive journalism?', 2022).

This study on constructive journalism strengthens the appeals in South African media discourse for more contextualised, thematic reporting to provide citizens with in-depth information to hold officials to account in local contexts (Chapter 2, 'Proposals for empowering of citizens through the ethics of listening and care' in Section 2.3.3). Malila (2019) makes the case for journalists to expand their understanding of watchdog journalism to enable them to go further than exposing corruption and the mishandling of public funds, by supplying citizens with the public administration information they need to exercise their right to social accountability. The constructive journalism principle of "placing issues in a broader and relevant content" was found to be largely present in eviction-related articles in as far as the representation of the interests of poor and disenfranchised communities was concerned, but the articles lacked in-depth information about resources to help citizens in local contexts solve their problems (Chapter 4, Theme 2A: South African contextualisation mostly present). In the study's second dataset, it emerged from interview responses that journalists attributed the lack of such information to the lack of resources and specialised skills in the industry. Thus, we see that the calls for the bolstering of journalist knowledge and skills in existing research are supported by journalists' appeals in this study for the strengthening of data research skills in South African media (Chapter 4, Theme 8B: Juniorisation and lack of skills in newsrooms).

The theoretical underpinning of constructive journalism from the field of cognitive linguistics, tracing the significance of words and linguistic processes in the impact of news, is given more granularity in this study's literature review (Chapter 2, 'Interdisciplinary and cognitive linguistic research' in Section 2.4.3). The insights about the activation and functioning of metaphors add to the current limited investigation of this field's relevance for constructive journalism (Atanasova, 2022). This addition to theoretical knowledge could increase an understanding of the harmful effects of the habitual activation of a metaphor of war in conflict reporting habits and highlight the importance of a move away from such language in practice.

Although the study's scope did not allow a specific focus on the role of emotion in news, insights about the links between emotions and linguistic processes could nevertheless extend the understanding of theoretical assumptions about the impact of a negativity bias in news on audiences. It is argued that Pinker's (1994; 2021) view about the potential of the language and images in more positive newsfeeds to mitigate the effects of overexposure to negative news can be seen as theoretically supported by Feldman Barrett's (2017) research on the linguistic origin and building of emotions in the brain's hierarchical system. Feldman Barrett (2017, p. 112) contends that the brain meshes new concepts with existing concepts to create a person's first instance of a new concept of emotion. She

demonstrates that the more verbal options (words) one's brain has to predict and categorise shades of emotions, the better it can be incorporated into behaviour (Feldman Barrett, 2017, pp. 180–181). In this way, the linguistic building of emotional granularity can help a person to cultivate emotional well-being (Feldman Barrett, 2017, p. 181). Translated to the field of constructive journalism, the argument is then taken further through reliance on Fredrickson's (1998; 2001) broaden-and-build theory, which asserts that negative emotions tend to narrow one's thinking, while positive emotions allow individuals to think more inclusively and creatively and to consider more options when deciding how to act. The insights from Feldman Barrett (2017) highlight on a granular and neuroscientific level how the words used in news reports – and the frequency of their use – can become part of the internal vocabulary of audiences' thought patterns and affect their emotional state.

Final contributions to constructive journalism and South African media discourse concern the constructive journalism principle that journalists should strengthen connection and co-creation of news with audiences. Important arguments in the literature about the growing influence of audience contributions (often sourced from social media) in online news, and the ways in which these contributions can strengthen connection to the public are highlighted in the content analysis of the study's content analysis (see Chapter 2, 'Calls for citizens to be seen as active participants to meaning making' in Section 2.3.3). The findings showed that audience connection was bolstered through discussions in articles arising from citizen videos that first went viral on social media. The discussions were seen to determine the news agenda for long periods after the original videoed event, strengthening Bosch's (2017) argument that social media discussions should not be seen as detached from traditional news platforms, as they often set the mainstream news agenda.

Debates about emotion as a news value are of growing importance within journalism's grappling with shifts in news values. As seen in the study's findings, societal emotions triggered by the reporting of a critical event on social media remained a central factor in the shaping of the news agenda. These findings are not unproblematic, as became apparent in journalists' largely negative attitudes in interview responses to connecting with audiences through social media and their visceral critique of Twitter as a "scourge" in the journalism industry (Chapter 4, Theme 10: Closer connection with audiences necessary, but social media's role controversial). There seems to be a disconnect between the evidence of the importance of audience contributions sourced from social media in shaping the news agenda and strengthening connection with audiences on the one hand and, on the other, respondents' largely negative attitudes to connecting with audiences through social media. This disconnect points to intense debates in the literature and in the industry about the increasingly porous boundaries defining what counts as legitimate journalism and what not, and about the role of emotion in news. The debate is far from over, with some scholars warning that the uncensored prominence of audience contributions from social media in news, and the societal emotions it evokes, leads to the erosion of journalistic norms and the spread of sensational and often false news (Harber, 2021; Tolsi, 2020). Others call for the recognition of emotion as a news value (Barnes, 2016) and a central factor shaping the news agenda (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2016). This study aligns with Wahl-Jorgensen's argument that while the heated debates around these shifts show that the "emotional turn" in digital journalism is not complete, scholars have the urgent task of understanding how the changes shape people's views of the world.

5.4 LIMITATIONS AND CONSIDERATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

While the transferability of this study is enhanced by the richness of descriptions of findings, practical considerations placed limits on the scope of the study's sample size of journalists and editors for qualitative interviews. It is therefore recommended that the generalisability of findings will be

enhanced by a similar, larger study with a more extensive sample of journalists. Furthermore, the South African media industry will benefit from research about the potential of constructive journalism across platforms, including television, radio and print.

The study's findings are limited by the exclusion of visual elements like videos and photographs in the article sample selected for content analysis. Videos and photographs are a vital part of digital storytelling and the user experience of online news (as was evident in the findings about audience reactions to videos, emerging from textual analysis of the main body of articles). Research that includes specific analysis of the presence/absence of constructive approaches in visual elements will be valuable.

An added limitation is that analysis of social media posts appended to articles was excluded from the content analysis sample due to the restrictions in scope of the study. The importance of news on social media cannot be underestimated – research has shown that social media is becoming the technology of choice to engage with news for an increasing number of South Africans (Newman et al., 2020). Ideally, a large-scale mixed-methods study on different aspects of news on social media and its impact in other news platforms should be considered. The emotional valence of news and news discussions on social media in South Africa, the effect thereof on audiences and the potential of constructive journalism in news on social media are aspects that could be considered for such a study.

The review of literature in this study made a start on expanding the existing arguments of constructive journalism's theoretical underpinning from research in cognitive linguistics. Additionally, the review refers to the growing prominence of research into the significance of metaphors in news reporting. Yet, the argument can safely be made that most journalists have little awareness of the cognitive linguistic processes determining their choice of words and phrases when they report stories, and the effects of these choices on audiences. Future research is therefore suggested to explore journalists' linguistic choices in stories, the effects on audiences, journalists' awareness of their own linguistic choices, and their willingness to increase their knowledge of the impact of linguistic choices on audiences. The enquiry could be extended to exploring the attitudes of journalism schools and newsrooms to raise knowledge about how this aspect of journalism can enhance training in the industry.

5.5 CONCLUSION

The purposes of this study were to explore the manifestation of constructive journalism in South African online news reporting and to establish the perceptions and attitudes of journalists and editors towards the form in South African digital news.

The most distinctive principles of constructive journalism were largely absent in a sample of articles on evictions written in the first five months of South Africa's Covid-19 lockdown in 2020. The conclusion drawn from this finding is that journalists and editors were uninterested in, opposed to or unaware of constructive journalism at the time. Yet, in interviews conducted in 2022, it emerged that journalists who wrote some of the articles and editors who are involved in the editorial approach of the news organisations in the study sample recognise a role for constructive journalism to be introduced alongside watchdog journalism in the overall news cycle in online news. Journalists' views ranged from supporting constructive journalism as a necessary and valuable approach that would strengthen watchdog journalism, to seeing the form as a "nice to have" in the overall news cycle. Moreover, interview responses showed that there has already been a recent swing towards the inclusion of constructive approaches in the output of some of the outlets in the sample – even if it has not been recognised or labelled as such. The conclusion drawn from the contrast between the findings

of the two datasets is that it indicates a change in how some journalists have started to think about the information needs of audiences since the start of the Covid-19 epidemic and how they view journalistic obligations to address those needs. Journalists' interview responses highlighted their awareness of the effects of critical, intensifying societal problems and relentless negative news on audiences. Participants' recognition of a role for constructive journalism to be introduced alongside watchdog journalism in the overall news cycle indicates a realisation that audiences in the current era may require more from journalism than the exposure of problems.

The study showed that industry pressures and participants' difficulties with conceptual clarity regarding constructive journalism pose significant challenges to the implementation of the form, but that some of those challenges are also opportunities. Taking challenges like the lack of funds and specialist skills in newsrooms into account, some journalists and editors gave practical suggestions of how constructive journalism could potentially be implemented collectively. They proposed that a few newsrooms join forces to tackle chosen big-issue projects through creating joint investigative/constructive teams for periods of time. This suggestion strengthens the vital role of watchdog journalism in online news and is seen as an actionable proposition to expand journalism praxis in the country. The collective approach offers ways to offset the challenge of financial constraints through the potential unlocking of funds for "great projects", and it promises to address the challenge of a lack of specialised skills in the industry by strengthening investigative journalism skills and building of a body of constructive journalism skills.

Challenges associated with the lack of a single definition for the umbrella concept of constructive journalism were confirmed in this study. For most journalists it was significant to realise that constructive journalism was an additional step in the overall news cycle and was not meant to replace their monitorial role in society. Therefore, it is recommended that the appending position of constructive journalism in the overall news cycle should clearly be indicated in definitions of the form.

The study addresses overlapping research gaps in both the global and the South African literature by enriching the understanding of the applicability of constructive journalism in developing democracies, and by showing that the form can add nuance and complexity to current practices of watchdog journalism, which dominates mainstream news in South Africa. However, a conclusion drawn from the findings is that in developing contexts like South Africa, where watchdog journalism plays an essential role to safeguard a fragile democracy, there can be pronounced risks of constructive journalism being misinterpreted, or manipulated by partisan media for political gain. Thus, extra care needs to be taken to adhere to the rigour of journalistic norms proposed in constructive journalism when the form is implemented in tenuous developing contexts.

References

- 'About GroundUp' (2022) GroundUp. Available at: <https://www.groundup.org.za/about/> (Accessed: 1 September 2022).
- Adebayo, J.O. (2017) 'The role of peace journalism in the deconstruction of elections and the "national question" in Nigeria', *International Journal of African Renaissance Studies – Multi-, Inter- and Transdisciplinarity*, 12(1), pp. 140–156. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/18186874.2017.1333298>.
- Aitamurto, T. and Varma, A. (2018) 'The constructive role of journalism', *Journalism Practice*, 12(6), pp. 695–713. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2018.1473041>.
- Allam, R. (2019) 'Constructive journalism in Arab transitional democracies: Perceptions, attitudes and performance', *Journalism Practice*, 13(10), pp. 1273–1293. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2019.1588145>.
- Atanasova, D. (2022) 'How constructive news outlets reported the synergistic effects of climate change and Covid-19 through metaphors', *Journalism Practice*, 16(2–3), pp. 384–403. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2021.1968311>.
- Babbie, E. and Mouton, J. (2015) *The Practice of Social Research*. Cape Town: Oxford University Press Southern Africa.
- Baden, D. (2015) 'Ethical issues in the news sector: Hidden from view', paper presented at the European Business Ethics Network (EBEN) annual conference, Istanbul, Turkey, 26–28 June 2015. Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/299450199_Ethical_issues_in_the_news_sector_Hidden_from_view (Accessed: 16 January 2023).
- Baden, D., McIntyre, K. and Homberg, F. (2019) 'the impact of constructive news on affective and behavioural responses', *Journalism Studies*, 20(13), pp. 1940–1959. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2018.1545599>.
- Barnes, R. (2016) 'The ecology of participation', in T. Witschge, C.W. Anderson, D. Domingo and A. Hermida (eds) *The Sage Handbook of Digital Journalism*. London: SAGE Publications, pp. 179–189.
- Basson, A. (2020) 'A new era for news as News24 prepares to launch digital subscriptions', News24, 14 July 2020. Available at: <https://www.news24.com/news24/opinions/columnists/adriaanbasson/adriaan-basson-a-new-era-for-news-as-news24-prepares-to-launch-digital-subscriptions-20200712> (Accessed 29 January 2023).
- Bennett, W.L. (2016) *News: The Politics of Illusion*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Bickford, S. (1996) *The Dissonance of Democracy: Listening, Conflict and Citizenship*. Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press.
- Blankenberg, N. (1999) 'In search of a real freedom: Ubuntu and the media', *Critical Arts: South–North Cultural and Media Studies*, 13(2), pp. 42–65. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02560049985310121>.

Blankson, I.A. (2007) 'Media independence and pluralism in Africa: Opportunities and challenges of democratization and liberalization', in I.A. Blankson and P.D. Murphy (eds) *Negotiating Democracy: Media Transformation in Emerging Democracies*, 15–34. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Blau, W. (2022) 'Beyond climate fatigue', Constructive Institute. Available at: getvisual.net/stream/?constructive-institute-listen-louder-conference (Accessed: 22 August 2022).

Bodas, M., Siman-Tov, M., Peleg, K. and Solomon, Z. (2015) 'Anxiety-inducing media: The effect of constant news broadcasting on the well-being of Israeli television viewers', *Psychiatry*, 78(3), pp. 265–276. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00332747.2015.1069658>.

Bornstein, D. (2022) 'How "solutions journalism" can transform the media', Reliable Sources, CNN Business. Available at: <https://edition.cnn.com/videos/business/2022/08/07/how-solutions-journalism-can-transform-the-media.cnn> (Accessed: 22 August 2022).

Boroditsky, L. (2011) 'How language shapes thought', *The Scientific American*, (February), pp. 63–65.

Bosch, T. (2017) 'Twitter activism and youth in South Africa: The case of #RhodesMustFall', *Information, Communication & Society*, 20(2), pp. 221–232. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2016.1162829>.

Brannock Cox, J. and Poepsel, M.A. (2020) 'Deep participation in underserved communities: A quantitative analysis of Hearken's model for engagement journalism', *Journalism Practice*, 14(5), pp. 537–555. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2020.1731321>.

Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2013) *Successful Qualitative Research*. London: Sage Publications.

Bro, P. (2018) 'Constructive journalism: Proponents, precedents, and principles', *Journalism*, 20(4), pp. 504–519. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884918770523>.

Bro, P. and Gyldensted, C. (2021) 'Constructive journalism: Portraying the world accurately through positive psychology reporting', in K. McIntyre Hopkinson and N. Smith Dahmen (eds) *Reporting Beyond the Problem: From Civic Journalism to Solutions Journalism*. New York: Peter Lang, pp. 31–48.

Cappella, J. and Jamieson, K. (1996) 'News frames, political cynicism, and media cynicism', *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 546(1), pp. 71–84. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716296546001007>.

Carpentier, N. (2003) 'The BBC's *Video Nation* as a participatory media practice: Signifying everyday life, cultural diversity and participation in an online community', *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 6(4), pp. 425–447. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/136787790364003>.

Chasi, C. and Rodny-Gumede, Y. (2016) 'Ubuntu journalism and nation-building magic', *Critical Arts: South–North Cultural and Media Studies*, 30(5), pp. 728–744. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02560046.2016.1262441>.

Choi, J., Lee, S.Y. and Ji, S.W. (2020) 'Engagement in emotional news on social media: Intensity and type of emotions', *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 98(4), 1017–1040. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077699020959718>.

Chomsky, N. (2017) 'Language architecture and its import for evolution', *Neuroscience and Biobehavioral Reviews*, 81, pp. 295–300. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.neubiorev.2017.01.053>.

- Christians, C.G. (2004) 'Ubuntu and communitarianism in media ethics', *Ecquid Novi: African Journalism Studies*, 25(2), pp. 235–256. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02560054.2004.9653296>.
- Christians, C.G. (2015) 'Introduction: Ubuntu for journalism theory and practice', *Journal of Media Ethics*, 30(2), pp. 61–73. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/23736992.2015.1020158>.
- Christians, C.G., Glasser, T., McQuail, D., Nordenstreng, K. and White, R.A. (2009) *Normative Theories of the Media: Journalism in Democratic Societies*. Baltimore: University of Illinois Press.
- Christians, C. and Nordenstreng, K. (2004) 'Social responsibility worldwide', *Journal of Mass Media Ethics*, 19(1), pp. 3–28. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327728jmme1901_2.
- 'Constructive journalism in summary' (2022) Constructive Institute. Available at: <https://constructiveinstitute.org/what/faq> (Accessed: 22 August 2022).
- Costera Meijer, I. (2016) 'Audience-centered journalism research', in T. Witschge, C.W. Anderson, D. Domingo and A. Hermida (eds) *The Sage Handbook of Digital Journalism*. London: SAGE Publications, pp. 546–561.
- Costera Meijer, I. and Bijleveld, H.P. (2016) 'Valuable journalism', *Journalism Studies*, 17(7), pp. 827–839. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2016.1175963>.
- Couldry, N. (2009) 'Rethinking the politics of voice', *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies*, 23(4), pp. 579–582. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10304310903026594>.
- Crawford, K. (2009) 'Following you: Disciplines of listening in social media', *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies*, 23(4), pp. 525–535. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10304310903003270>.
- Creswell, J.W. (2013) *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*. Los Angeles: SAGE Publications.
- Crittenden, L. and Haywood, A. (2020) 'Revising legacy media practices to serve hyperlocal information needs of marginalized populations', *Journalism Practice*, 14(5), pp. 608–625. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2020.1759124>.
- Curry, A.L. and Hammonds, K.H. (2014) 'The power of solutions journalism', Solutions Journalism Network, Engaging News Project. Available at: https://mediaengagement.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/ENP_SJN-report.pdf (Accessed: 25 January 2023).
- Curry, A., Stroud, N.J. and McGregor, S. (2016) 'Solutions journalism and news engagement', Engaging News Project/Annette Strauss Institute for Civic Life at the University of Texas at Austin [Preprint].
- Dame Adjin-Tettey, T. and Garman, A. (2021) 'Solutions journalism as a tool to erode polarisation in the media and society', *African Journalism Studies*, pp. 1–4. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/23743670.2021.1972530>.
- De Beer, A.S., Malila, V., Beckett, S. and Wasserman, H. (2016) 'Binary opposites – can South African journalists be both watchdogs and developmental journalists?', *Journal of African Media Studies*, 8(1), pp. 35–53. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1386/jams.8.1.35_1.
- Deuze, M. and Witschge, T. (2017) 'Beyond journalism: Theorizing the transformation of journalism', *Journalism*, 19(2), pp. 165–181. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884916688550>.

- DeVigal, A. and Louis, S. (2021) 'Engaged journalism: Shifting power dynamics to increase public participation', in K. McIntyre Hopkinson and N. Smith Dahmen (eds) *Reporting Beyond the Problem: From Civic Journalism to Solutions Journalism*. New York: Peter Lang, pp. 107–129.
- De Vos, A.S., Strydom, H., Fouché, C.B. and Delport, C.S.L. (2005) *Research at Grass Roots for the Social Sciences and Human Service Professions*. Third edition. Pretoria: Van Schaik.
- Dreher, T. (2009) 'Listening across difference: Media and multiculturalism beyond the politics of voice', *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies*, 23(4), pp. 445–458. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10304310903015712>.
- Duncan, J. (2003) 'Another journalism is possible: Critical challenges for the media in South Africa.' Centre for Civil Society research report no. 10. Durban: Centre for Civil Society, University of Natal.
- Du Plessis, J. (2005) 'The growing problem of forced evictions and the crucial importance of community-based, locally appropriate alternatives', *Environment and Urbanization*, 17(1), pp. 123–134. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/095624780501700108>.
- Edwards, C. (2022) 'The role and risks of solutions journalism for climate reporting', Journalism.co.uk. Available at: <https://www.journalism.co.uk/news/the-role-and-risks-of-solutions-journalism-for-climate-reporting/s2/a954292/> (Accessed: 22 August 2022).
- Ellsworth, P.C. and Scherer, K.R. (2003) 'Appraisal processes in emotion', in *Handbook of Affective Sciences*. (Series in affective science) New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 572–595.
- Entman, R.M. (1993) 'Framing: Toward clarification of a fractured paradigm', *Journal of Communication*, 43(4) pp. 51–58. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.1993.tb01304.x>.
- Feinstein, A., Audet, B. and Waknine, E. (2014) 'Witnessing images of extreme violence: A psychological study of journalists in the newsroom', *JRSM (Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine) Open*, 5(8). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/2054270414533323>.
- Feldman Barrett, L. (2017) *How Emotions Are Made: The Secret Life of the Brain*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.
- Fletcher, R. and Park, S. (2017) 'The impact of trust in the news media on online news consumption and participation', *Digital Journalism*, 5(10), pp. 1281–1299. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2017.1279979>.
- Flusberg, S.J., Matlock, T. and Thibodeau, P.H. (2018) 'War metaphors in public discourse', *Metaphor and Symbol*, 33(1), pp. 1–18. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10926488.2018.1407992>.
- Fourie, P.J. (2002) 'Rethinking the role of the media in South Africa : research article', *Communicare: Journal for Communication Sciences in Southern Africa*, 21(1), pp. 17–40. Available at: <https://journals.co.za/content/comcare/21/1/EJC27600>. (Accessed: 16 January 2023).
- Fourie, P.J. (2008) 'Ubuntuism as a framework for South African media practice and performance: Can it work?', *Communicatio*, 34(1), pp. 53–79. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02500160802144520>.
- Fredrickson, B.L. (1998) 'What good are positive emotions?', *Review of General Psychology*, 2(3), pp. 300–319. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1037/1089-2680.2.3.300>.

Fredrickson, B.L. (2001) 'The role of positive emotions in positive psychology: The broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions', *American Psychologist*, 56(3), pp. 218–226. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.56.3.218>.

Fredrickson, B.L., Mancuso, R.A., Branigan, C. and Tugade, M.M. (2000) 'The undoing effect of positive emotions', *Motivation & Emotion*, 24(4), pp. 237–258. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1023/a:1010796329158>.

Friedman, S. (2011) 'Whose freedom? South Africa's press, middle-class bias and the threat of control', *Ecquid Novi: African Journalism Studies*, 32(2), pp. 106–121. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02560054.2011.578887>.

Garman, A. (2005) 'Teaching journalism to produce 'Interpretive Communities' rather than just 'professionals'. *Ecquid Novi: African Journalism Studies* 26(2): 199-211. DOI: 10.1080/02560054.2005.9653330

Garman, A. and Malila, V. (2017) 'Listening and the ambiguities of voice in South African journalism', *Communicatio*, 43(1), pp. 1–16. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02500167.2016.1226914>.

Gilligan, C. (1993) *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development*. Second edition. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Given, L. (2008) *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications.

Goins, C. (2018) 'How a culture of listening strengthens reporting and relationships', American Press Institute report. Available at: <https://www.americanpressinstitute.org/publications/reports/white-papers/how-a-culture-of-listening-strengthens-reporting-and-relationships/>. (Accessed: 16 January 2023).

Griffin, J. (2022) 'How can you as a leader use constructive journalism in editorial rooms?' Listen Louder Takeaways, Constructive Institute. Available at: <https://constructiveinstitute.org/now-what/listen-louder-conference-site/> (Accessed: 22 August 2022).

Haagerup, U. (2014) *Constructive News: How to Save the Media and Democracy with Journalism of Tomorrow*. New York: InnoVatio Publishing.

Haagerup, U. (2021) 'Panel: Exploring constructive journalism', Deutsche Welle Global Media Forum 2021. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mp-IJvTp5jo> (Accessed: 29 January 2023).

Haagerup, U. (2022) 'Rethink journalism', Constructive Institute. Available at: <https://constructiveinstitute.org/why/support-democracy/> (Accessed: 22 August 2022).

Habermas, J. (1989) *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Hadland, A. (2015) *Media–State Relations in Emerging Democracies*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Hamelink, C. (2016) *Media and Conflict: Escalating Evil*. London: Routledge.

Hammonds, K.H. (2016) 'Lab test: Solutions journalism beats Brand X', The Whole Story, Solutions Journalism Network. Available at: <https://thewholestory.solutionsjournalism.org/lab-test-solutions-journalism-beats-brand-x-b9d730108155> (Accessed: 16 January 2023).

Hanitzsch, T., Hanusch, F., Mellado, C., Anikina, M., Berganza, R. *et al.* (2011) 'Mapping journalism cultures across nations: A comparative study of 18 countries', *Journalism Studies*, 12(3), pp. 273–293. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2010.512502>.

Hanusch, F. and Uppal, C. (2015) 'Combining detached watchdog journalism with development ideals: An exploration of Fijian journalism culture', *International Communication Gazette*, 77(6), pp. 557–576. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1748048515597873>.

Harber, A. (2004) 'Reflections on journalism in the transition to democracy', *Ethics & International Affairs*, 18(3). Available at: <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A127870109/AONE?u=unict&sid=AONE&xid=10488613>. (Accessed: 16 January 2023).

Harber, A. (2020) 'How investigative journalists helped turn the tide against corruption', News 24, 19 March 2018. Available at: <https://www.news24.com/news24/columnists/guestcolumn/how-investigative-journalists-helped-turn-the-tide-against-corruption-20180319>. (Accessed: 16 January 2023).

Harber, A. (2021) 'Satchwell Report paints a picture of the media in distress ... and then there's Iqbal Survé and the SSA', Daily Maverick, 27 January 2021. Available at: <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2021-01-27-satchwell-report-paints-a-picture-of-media-in-distress-and-then-theres-iqbal-surve-and-the-ssa/>. (Accessed: 16 January 2023).

Harcup, T. and O'Neill, D. (2017) 'What is news?', *Journalism Studies*, 18(12), pp. 1470–1488. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2016.1150193>.

Hayashi, K. (2017) 'A journalism of care', in C. Peters and M. Broersma (eds) *Rethinking Journalism Again: Societal Role and Public Relevance in a Digital Age*. London and New York: Routledge, pp. 146–160.

Heinrichs, E. (2022) 'Ellen Heinrichs on why we should Listen Louder', Listen Louder Takeaways, Constructive Institute. Available at: constructiveinstitute.org/now-what/listen-louder-conference-site/ (Accessed: 8 September 2022).

Hermans, L. and Drok, N. (2018) 'Placing constructive journalism in context', *Journalism Practice*, 12(6), pp. 679–694. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2018.1470900>.

Hermans, L. and Gyldensted, C. (2019) 'Elements of constructive journalism: Characteristics, practical application and audience valuation', *Journalism*, 20(4), pp. 535–552. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884918770537>.

Hermans, L. and Prins, T. (2020) 'Interest matters: The effects of constructive news reporting on Millennials' emotions and engagement', *Journalism*, 23(5), 1064–1081. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884920944741>.

Hermida, A. (2016) 'Social media and the news', in T. Witschge, C.W. Anderson, D. Domingo and A. Hermida (eds) *The Sage Handbook of Digital Journalism*. London: SAGE Publications, pp. 81–93.

'How to cover war and conflict constructively' (2022) Constructive Institute. Available at: <https://getvisualtv.net/stream/?constructive-institute-listen-louder-conference/> (Accessed: 12 November 2022).

- Hsieh, H.-F. and Shannon, S. (2018) 'Content analysis', in B.B. Frey (ed.) *The Sage Encyclopedia of Educational Research, Measurement, and Evaluation*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, pp. 393–394. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781506326139>.
- Ibarretxe-Antuñano, I. (2013) 'The relationship between conceptual metaphor and culture', *Intercultural Pragmatics*, 10(2), pp. 315–339. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1515/ip-2013-0014>.
- IPPA (International Positive Psychology Association). (2023) 'About IPPA'. Available at: <https://www.ippanetwork.org/about/> (Accessed 29 January 2023).
- Janowitz, M. (1975) 'Professional models in journalism: The gatekeeper and the advocate', *Journalism Quarterly*, 52(4), pp. 618–626. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/107769907505200402>.
- Jenkins, F. (2021) 'China's projection of soft power in terms of constructive journalism: A media content analysis of constructive news coverage of South Africa by *China Daily* and *South China Morning Post* in 2015 and 2018', *Transience*, 1(12), 24–43.
- Kahneman, D. (2011) *Thinking, Fast and Slow*. London: Penguin.
- Kallio, H., Pietilä, A.-M., Johnson, M. and Kangasniemi, M. (2016) Systematic methodological review: Developing a framework for a qualitative semi-structured interview guide. *Journal of Advanced Nursing* 72(12), 2954– 2965. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jan.13031>.
- Kalyango, Y., Hanusch, F., Ramaprasad, J., Skjerdal, T., Hasim, M.S. et al. (2017) 'Journalists' development journalism role perceptions', *Journalism Studies*, 18(5), pp. 576–594. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2016.1254060>.
- Kleemans, M., De Leeuw, R.N.H., Gerritsen, J. and Buijzen, M. (2017) 'Children's responses to negative news: The effects of constructive reporting in newspaper stories for children', *Journal of Communication*, 67(5), pp. 781–802. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcom.12324>.
- Kleinnijenhuis, J., Van Hoof, A.M.J. and Oegema, D. (2006) 'Negative news and the sleeper effect of distrust', *Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics*, 11(2), pp. 86–104. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1081180X06286417>.
- Kondracki, N.L., Wellman, N.S. and Amundson, D.R. (2002) 'Content analysis: Review of methods and their applications in nutrition education', *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior*, 34(4), pp. 224–230. Available at: [https://doi.org/10.1016/s1499-4046\(06\)60097-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/s1499-4046(06)60097-3).
- Kovacevic, P. and Perisin, T. (2018) 'The potential of constructive journalism ideas in a Croatian context', *Journalism Practice*, 12(6), pp. 747–763. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2018.1472528>.
- Kovach, B. and Rosenstiel, T. (2014) *The Elements of Journalism: What Newspeople Should Know and the Public Should Expect*. New York: Three Rivers Press.
- Lakoff, G. and Johnson, M. (2003) *Metaphors We Live By*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Lasswell, H.D. (1948) 'The structure and function of communication in society', *The Communication of Ideas*, 37(1), pp. 136–139.
- Lipari, L. (2010) 'Listening, thinking, being', *Communication Theory*, 20(3), pp. 348–362. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2885.2010.01366.x>.

- Lough, K. and McIntyre, K. (2021) 'Transitioning to solutions journalism: One newsroom's shift to solutions-focused reporting', *Journalism Studies*, 22(2), pp. 193–208. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2020.1843065>.
- Maier, S.F. and Seligman, M.E. (1976) 'Learned helplessness: Theory and evidence', *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General*, 105(1), pp. 3–46. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1037/0096-3445.105.1.3>.
- Malan, M. (2022) 'What is solutions journalism'. Talk delivered at a colloquium, 'Journalism under pressure', 10 June 2022. Rhodes University School of Journalism and Media Studies.
- Malila, V. (2019) 'Beyond watchdog journalism: Media and social accountability in South Africa', *African Journalism Studies*, 40(1), pp. 91–106. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/23743670.2019.1621918>.
- Malila, V., Oelofsen, M., Garman, A. and Wasserman, H. (2013) 'Making meaning of citizenship: How "born frees" use media in South Africa's democratic evolution', *Communicatio*, 39(4), pp. 415–431. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02500167.2013.852598>.
- Marsh, V. (2016) 'Africa through Chinese eyes: New frames or the same old lens? African news in English from China Central Television, compared with the BBC', in M. Bunce, S. Franks and C. Paterson (eds) *Africa's Media Image in the 21st Century: From the 'Heart of Darkness' to 'Africa Rising'*. London: Routledge, pp. 177–189.
- Mast, J., Coesemans, R. and Temmerman, M. (2018) 'Constructive journalism: Concepts, practices, and discourses', *Journalism*, 20(4), pp. 492–503. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884918770885>.
- 'Maverick Insider: FAQ' (2022) Daily Maverick. Available at: <https://dailymaverick.co.za/maverick-insider-FAQ/> (Accessed: 1 September 2022).
- McGoldrick, A. and Lynch, J. (2016) 'Audience responses to peace journalism: Merging results from a four-country research study', *Journalism Studies*, 17(5), pp. 628–646. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2014.992621>.
- McIntyre, K.E. (2015) 'Constructive journalism: The effects of positive emotions and solution information in news stories'. PhD dissertation, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.17615/g6sg-8p47>.
- McIntyre, K. (2019) 'Solutions journalism: The effects of including solution information in news stories about social problems', *Journalism Practice*, 13(1), pp. 16–34. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2017.1409647>.
- McIntyre, K. (2020) '"Tell me something good": Testing the longitudinal effects of constructive news using the Google Assistant', *Electronic News*, 14(1), pp. 37–54. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1931243120910446>.
- McIntyre, K.E. and Gibson, R. (2016) 'Positive news makes readers feel good: A "silver-lining" approach to negative news can attract audiences', *Southern Communication Journal*, 81(5), pp. 304–315. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/1041794X.2016.1171892>.
- McIntyre, K. and Gyldensted, C. (2017) 'Constructive journalism: An introduction and practical guide for applying positive psychology techniques to news production', *The Journal of Media Innovations*, 4(2), pp. 20–34. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.5617/jomi.v4i2.2403>.

- McIntyre, K. and Gyldensted, C. (2018) 'Positive psychology as a theoretical foundation for constructive journalism', *Journalism Practice*, 12(6), pp. 662–678. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2018.1472527>.
- McIntyre, K.E. and Lough, K. (2019) 'Toward a clearer conceptualization and operationalization of solutions journalism', *Journalism*, 22(6), 1558–1573. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884918820756>.
- McIntyre, K., Lough, K. and Manzanares, K. (2018) 'Solutions in the shadows: The effects of incongruent visual messaging in solutions journalism news stories', *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, 95(4). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/10776990187676>.
- McIntyre, K. and Sobel, M. (2017) 'Motivating news audiences: Shock them or provide them with solutions?', *Comunicación y Sociedad*, 30(1), pp. 39–56. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.15581/003.30.1.39-56>.
- McIntyre, K. and Sobel, M. (2018) 'Reconstructing Rwanda', *Journalism Studies*, 19(14), pp. 2126–2147. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2017.1326834>.
- McIntyre Hopkinson, K. and Dahmen, N. (2021) 'Introduction', in K. McIntyre Hopkinson and N. Smith Dahmen (eds) *Reporting Beyond the Problem: From Civic Journalism to Solutions Journalism*. New York: Peter Lang, pp. 1–8.
- Meier, K. (2018) 'How does the audience respond to constructive journalism? Two experiments with multifaceted results', *Journalism Practice*, 12(6), 764–780. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2018.1470472>.
- Meyer, R. (2021) 'Panel: Exploring constructive journalism', Deutsche Welle Global Media Forum 2021. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mp-IJvTp5jo> (Accessed: 29 January 2023).
- Miles, M.B., Huberman, A.M. and Saldaña, J. (2020) *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook*. Fourth ed. Los Angeles: SAGE Publications.
- Moors, A., Ellsworth, P.C., Scherer, K.R. and Frijda, N.H. (2013) 'Appraisal theories of emotion: State of the art and future development', *Emotion Review*, 5(2), pp. 119–124. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1754073912468165>.
- Muller, G. (2013) 'The legal-historical context of urban forced evictions in South Africa', *Fundamina: A Journal of Legal History*, 19(2), pp. 367–396. Available at: <https://hdl.handle.net/10520/EJC149298>. (Accessed: 16 January 2023).
- Newman, N. (2022) 'Insight Session: 2022 Reuters Digital News Report', 4th Global Constructive Institute Conference: Listen Louder. Constructive Institute.org. Available at: getvisualtv.net/stream/?constructive-institute-listen-louder-conference (Accessed: 3 September 2022).
- Newman, N., Fletcher, R., Robertson, C. T., Eddy, K. and Nielsen, R.K. (2022) 'Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2022', Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. Available at: <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/digital-news-report/2022> (Accessed: 22 August 2022).
- Newman, N., Fletcher, R., Schulz, A., Andi, S. and Nielsen, R.K. (2020) 'Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2020', Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. Available at: digitalnewsreport.org/2020/survey/ (Accessed: 23 August 2022).

- Newman, N., Fletcher, R., Schulz, A., Andi, S., Robertson, C.T. and Nielsen, R.K. (2021) 'Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2021: 10th edition', Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/digital-news-report/2021>. (Accessed: 16 January 2023).
- Nieman Foundation. (2010) *The Nieman Watchdog Journalism Project*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University.
- Noack, S., Orth, J., Owen, B. and Rennick, S. (2013) 'A transformational journey: adopting solutions journalism at Utah's Deseret News', Solutions Journalism Network. Available at: https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&ved=2ahUKEwiJYDoq8z8AhvVHUMAKHZjSATUQFnoECAsQAQ&url=https%3A%2F%2Fs3.amazonaws.com%2FDeseret-News-Case-Study.pdf&usg=AOvVaw2npiYGdtLI_7CTb79ZAnjt. (Accessed: 16 January 2023).
- Nölleke, D. (2019) 'Constructive journalism', in T.P. Vos, F. Hanusch, D. Dimitrakopoulou, M. Geertsema-Sligh and A. Sehl (eds) *The International Encyclopedia of Journalism Studies* (Major Reference Works), pp. 1–4. Available at: <https://doi.org/doi:10.1002/9781118841570.iejs0121>.
- Norris, P. (2014) 'Watchdog journalism', in M. Bovens, R.E. Goodin and T. Schillemans (eds) *The Oxford Handbook of Public Accountability*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 525–541.
- Nyamnjoh, F.B. (2005) *Africa's Media, Democracy and the Politics of Belonging*. London: Zed Books.
- Oelofsen, H.M. (2020) 'Listening for the quiet violence in the unspoken', in P. Gobodo-Madikizela and K.W. Jeff Prager (eds) *Post-Conflict Hauntings: Transforming Collective Memories*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 177–202.
- O'Mara-Shimek, M. (2016) 'When bears feast and bulls run free: Bridging the gap between metaphor theory and core ideals in journalism practice in financial news reporting', *Journal of Applied Journalism & Media Studies*, 5(2), pp. 245–275. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1386/ajms.5.2.245_1.
- Overgaard, C.S.B. (2022). 'Mitigating the consequences of negative news: How constructive journalism enhances self-efficacy and news credibility', *Journalism*, 0(0). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/14648849211062738>.
- Owen, T. (2016) 'Global media power', in T. Witschge, C.W. Anderson, D. Domingo and A. Hermida (eds) *The Sage Handbook of Digital Journalism*. London: SAGE Publications, pp. 25–34.
- Palmer, R., Toff, B. and Nielsen, R.K. (2020) "'The media covers up a lot of things": Watchdog ideals meet folk theories of journalism', *Journalism Studies*, 21(14), pp. 1973–1989. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2020.1808516>.
- Pals, J.L. (2006) 'Narrative identity processing of difficult life experiences: Pathways of personality development and positive self-transformation in adulthood', *Journal of Personality*, 74(4), pp. 1079–1110. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6494.2006.00403.x>.
- Papadatos Fragkos, K. (2022) 'Going beyond the attention economy. What are the incentive structures for quality news content?', Constructive Institute. Available at: getvisualtv.net/stream/?constructive-institute-listen-louder-conference (Accessed: 11 September 2022).
- Patterson, T. (2016) 'News coverage of the 2016 general election: How the press failed voters', Shorenstein Centre of Media, Politics and Public Policy, 7 December 2016. Available at: <https://shorensteincenter.org/news-coverage-2016-general-election/>. (Accessed 16 January 2023).

Peruzzotti, E. and Smulovitz, C. (2006) *Enforcing the Rule of Law: Social Accountability in the New Latin American Democracies*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press.

Peters, C. and Witschge, T. (2015) 'From grand narratives of democracy to small expectations of participation', *Journalism Practice*, 9(1), pp. 19–34. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2014.928455>.

Pinker, S. (1994) *The Language Instinct*. New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics.

Pinker, S. (2018) *Enlightenment Now: The Case for Reason, Science, Humanism, and Progress*. London: Allen Lane.

Pinker, S. (2021) 'What we want in journalism is not optimism and not cynicism, but accuracy', Highlights of the Deutsche Welle Global Media Forum 2021. Available at: <https://corporate.dw.com/en/global-media-forum-2021/s-58092617> (Accessed 29 January 2023).

Pintak, L. and Nazir, S.J. (2013) 'Pakistani journalism: At the crossroads of Muslim identity, national priorities and journalistic culture', *Media, Culture & Society*, 35(5), pp. 640–665. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443713483654>.

Pintak, L. and Setiyono, B. (2010) 'The mission of Indonesian journalism: Balancing democracy, development, and Islamic values', *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 16(2), pp. 185–209. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1940161210391784>.

Ramaprasad, J. (2001) 'A profile of journalists in post-independence Tanzania', *International Communication Gazette*, 63(6), pp. 539–555. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0016549201063006005>.

Ramaprasad, J. and Hamdy, N.N. (2006) 'Functions of Egyptian journalists: Perceived importance and actual performance', *International Communication Gazette*, 68(2), pp. 167–185. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1748048506062233>.

Rao, S. and Wasserman, H. (2015) 'A media not for all: A comparative analysis of journalism, democracy and exclusion in Indian and South African media', *Journalism Studies*, 16(5), pp. 651–662. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2015.1054173>.

Reporters Without Borders. 2010. 'Worldwide Press Freedom Index 2010'. Available at: <https://rsf.org/en/node/79180> (Accessed 29 January 2023).

Rice-Oxley, M. (2022) 'How to edit "a stream" of constructive stories', Constructive Institute. Available at: <https://constructiveinstitute.org/how/contributions/how-to-edit-a-stream-of-constructive-stories/>. (Accessed 16 January 2023).

Ripley, A. (2018) 'Complicating the narrative', The Whole Story, Solutions Journalism, 27 June 2018. Available at: <https://thewholestory.solutionsjournalism.org/complicating-the-narratives-b91ea06ddf63> (Accessed: 22 August 2022).

Rodny-Gumede, Y. (2015a) 'An assessment of the public interest and ideas of the public in South Africa and the adoption of *ubuntu* journalism', *Journal of Media Ethics*, 30(2), pp. 109–124. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/23736992.2015.1020379>.

Rodny-Gumede, Y. (2015b) 'Re-conceptualizing the analysis of media development and trajectories hereof in post-colonial societies', *Global Media and Communication*, 11(2), pp. 131–146. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1742766515588416>.

- Rodny-Gumede, Y. (2017) 'Questioning the media and democracy relationship: The case of South Africa', *Communicatio*, 43(2), pp. 10–22. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02500167.2017.1318938>.
- Roper, C., Newman, N. and Schulz, A. (2019) 'Digital News Report 2019: South Africa Supplementary Report.' Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/our-research/digital-news-report-2019-south-africa-supplementary-report>. (Accessed: 16 January 2023).
- Rosen, J. (2006) 'The era of networked journalism begins', Press Think, 15 August 2006. Available at: http://archive.pressthink.org/2006/08/15/ear_ntw.html. (Accessed: 3 July 2021).
- Rosenberry, J. (2021) 'Civic journalism: Current journalism innovations can trace their ancestry to civic journalism', in K. McIntyre Hopkinson and N. Smith Dahmen (eds) *Reporting Beyond the Problem: From Civic Journalism to Solutions Journalism*. New York: Peter Lang, pp. 11–31.
- Rosling, H., Rosling, O. and Rönnlund, A.R. (2019) *Factfulness: Ten Reasons We're Wrong About the World – And Why Things Are Better Than You Think*. London: Sceptre.
- Rotmeijer, S. (2019) "'Words that work?" Practices of constructive journalism in a local Caribbean context', *Journalism*, 20(4), pp. 600–616. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884918770555>.
- Rusch, R., Simon, E., Otto, K. and Flintz, D. (2021) 'The impact of constructive television journalism on the audience: Results from an online study', *Journalism Practice*, 16(10), pp. 2221–2241. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2021.1901599>.
- Schmidt, T.R. and Lawrence, R.G. (2020) 'Engaged journalism and news work: A sociotechnical analysis of organizational dynamics and professional challenges', *Journalism Practice*, 14(5), pp. 518–536. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2020.1731319>.
- Schreier, M. (2014) 'Qualitative content analysis', in U. Flick (ed.) *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Data Analysis*. London: SAGE Publications, pp. 170–183. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446282243>.
- Seligman, M. (2019) 'Constructive journalism and Moyers' dictum', *Journalism*, 20(4), pp. 489–491. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884918770933>.
- Seligman, M.E.P. and Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2000) 'Positive psychology: An introduction', *American Psychologist*, 55(1), pp. 5–14. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.55.1.5>.
- Siebert, F.S., Peterson, T. and Schramm, W. (1956) *Four Theories of the Press: The Authoritarian, Libertarian, Social Responsibility, and Soviet Communist Concepts of What the Press Should Be and Do*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Sillesen, L.B. (2014) 'Good news is good business, but not a cure-all for journalism', *Columbia Journalism Review*, 29 September 2014. Available at: https://archives.cjr.org/behind_the_news/good_news_is_good_business_but.php. (Accessed: 16 January 2023).
- SJN (Solutions Journalism Network). (2023) 'Mission'. Available: <https://www.solutionsjournalism.org/about> (Accessed 31 January 2023).
- Steenveld, L. (2004) 'Transforming the media: A cultural approach', *Critical Arts: South–North Cultural and Media Studies*, 18(1), pp. 92–115. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02560240485310061>.

- Swart, J., Peters, C. and Broersma, M. (2017) 'Navigating cross-media news use: Media repertoires and the value of news in everyday life', *Journalism Studies* 18(11), pp. 1343–1362. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2015.1129285>.
- 'The burden of stress in America' (2014) National Public Radio/Robert Wood Johnson Foundation/Harvard School of Public Health. Available at: <https://www.rwjf.org/en/library/research/2014/07/the-burden-of-stress-in-america.html>. (Accessed: 16 January 2023).
- Thibodeau, P.H., Crow, L. and Flusberg, S.J. (2017) 'The metaphor police: A case study of the role of metaphor in explanation', *Psychonomic Bulletin & Review*, 24(5), pp. 1375–1386. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3758/s13423-016-1192-5>.
- Thibodeau, P.H., Hendricks, R.K. and Boroditsky, L. (2017) 'How linguistic metaphor scaffolds reasoning', *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, 21(11), pp. 852–863. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tics.2017.07.001>.
- Thibodeau, P.H., Matlock, T. and Flusberg, S.J. (2019) 'The role of metaphor in communication and thought', *Language & Linguistics Compass*, 13(5), e12327. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/lnc3.12327>.
- Thier, K. (2016) 'Opportunities and challenges for initial implementation of solutions journalism coursework', *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator*, 71(3), pp. 329–343. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077695816666078>.
- 'Three constructive approaches' (2022) Constructive Institute. Available at: <https://constructiveinstitute.org/what/the-three-pillars/> (Accessed: 22 August 2022).
- Thloloe, J., 1997. A new paradigm for journalism in South Africa. *Rhodes Journalism Review*, 15. Available at: https://rjr.ru.ac.za/rjrpdf/rjr_no15/new_paradigm.pdf (Accessed: 10 May 2023)
- Tolsi, N. (2020) 'Fire and media: Towards a new South African journalism', *African Studies*, 79(1), pp. 160–170. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00020184.2020.1747879>.
- Tshabangu, T. and Salawu, A. (2021). 'An evaluation of constructive journalism in Zimbabwe: A case study of *The Herald's* coverage of the coronavirus pandemic.' *Journal of African Media Studies* 13(3), 477–490. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1386/jams_00060_1.
- Tullis, A. (2014) 'Constructive journalism: Emerging mega-trend or recipe for complacency?', World Editors Forum, The Media Online, 24 November 2014. Available at: <https://themediainline.co.za/2014/11/constructive-journalism-emerging-mega-trend-or-a-recipe-for-complacency/> (Accessed: 19 December 2019).
- Turner, D.W. (2010). 'Qualitative interview design: A practical guide for novice investigators.' *The Qualitative Report*, 15(3), pp. 754–760.
- Van Antwerpen, N., Turnbull, D. and Searston, R.A. (2022) 'What's positive in a pandemic? Journalism professionals' perspectives on constructive approaches to COVID-19 news reporting', *Journalism Studies*, 23(4), pp. 506–524. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2022.2032804>.
- Van Dijck, J. (2009) 'Users like you? Theorizing agency in user-generated content', *Media, Culture & Society*, 31(1), pp. 41–58. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443708098245>.

Vollgraaff, R. (2020) 'Naspers's Media24 deals new blow to South African print media', Bloomberg, 7 July 2020. Available at: <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-07-07/naspers-s-media24-deals-new-blow-to-south-african-print-media>. (Accessed: 16 January 2023).

Voltmer, K. (2016) 'Media and conflict in transitional democracies: Polarization, power and the struggle for recognition', in Forum Medien und Entwicklung (FoME) Symposium, Berlin (Observer, Agitator, Target: Media and Media Assistance in Fragile Contexts, pp. 7–19.

Wagemans, A., Witschge, T. and Harbers, F. (2018) 'Impact as driving force of journalistic and social change', *Journalism*, 20(4), pp. 552–567. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884918770538>.

Wahl-Jorgensen, K. (2016) 'Emotion and journalism', in T. Witschge, C.W. Anderson, D. Domingo and A. Hermida (eds) *The Sage Handbook of Digital Journalism*. London: SAGE Publications, pp. 129–143.

Wahl-Jorgensen, K. (2017) 'Is there a "post-modern turn" in journalism?', in C. Peters and M. Broersma (eds) *Rethinking Journalism Again: Societal Role and Public Relevance in a Digital Age*. London and New York: Routledge, pp. 97–111.

Wahl-Jorgensen, K., Williams, A. and Wardle, C. (2010) 'Audience views on user-generated content: Exploring the value of news from the bottom up', *Northern Lights: Film and Media Studies Yearbook*, 8(1), pp. 177–194. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1386/nl.8.177_1.

Waisbord, S. (2013) *Reinventing Professionalism: Journalism and News in Global Perspective*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Walth, B., Dahmen, N.S. and Thier, K. (2019) 'A new reporting approach for journalistic impact: Bringing together investigative reporting and solutions journalism', *Newspaper Research Journal*, 40(2), pp. 177–189. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0739532919834989>.

Wasserman, H. (2006) 'Globalised values and post-colonial response', *The International Communication Gazette*, 68(1), pp. 71–91. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1748048506060116>.

Wasserman, H. (2010) 'Political journalism in South Africa as a developing democracy: Understanding media freedom and responsibility', *Communicatio*, 36(2), pp. 240–251. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02500167.2010.485369>.

Wasserman, H. (2013) 'Journalism in a new democracy: The ethics of listening', *Communicatio*, 39(1), pp. 67–84. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02500167.2013.772217>.

Wasserman, H. (2015) 'African journalism studies in a globalised world', *African Journalism Studies*, 36(1), pp. 1–10. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/23743670.2015.1007686>.

Wasserman, H. (2018) *Media, Geopolitics, and Power: A View from the Global South*. Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press.

Wasserman, H. (2020) 'The state of South African media: A space to contest democracy', *Publizistik*, 65(3), pp. 451–465. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11616-020-00594-4>.

Wasserman, H. (2021) *The Ethics of Engagement: Media, Conflict and Democracy in Africa*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Wasserman, H., Bosch, T. and Chuma, W. (2018) 'Communication from above and below: Media, protest and democracy', *Politikon*, 45(3), pp. 368–386. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02589346.2018.1446482>.

Wasserman, H. and De Beer, A. (2005) 'Which public? Whose interest? The South African media and its role during the first ten years of democracy', *Critical Arts: South–North Cultural and Media Studies*, 19(1–2), pp. 36–51. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02560040585310041>.

Wasserman, H. and De Beer, A.S. (2009) 'Afro-optimism/Afro-pessimism and the South African media', *Critical Arts: South–North Cultural and Media Studies*, 23(3), pp. 377–395. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02560040903251175>.

Wasserman, H. and Garman, A. (2014) 'The meanings of citizenship: Media use and democracy in South Africa', *Social Dynamics*, 40(2), pp. 392–407. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02533952.2014.929304>.

Weber, R.P. (1990) *Basic Content Analysis* (Vol. 49). Newbury Park: Sage.

Wekesa, B. (2017) 'New directions in the study of Africa–China media and communications engagements', *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 29(1), pp. 11–24. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13696815.2016.1270197>.

Wenzel, A., Gerson, D., Moreno, E., Son, M. and Morrison Hawkins, B. (2018) 'Engaging stigmatized communities through solutions journalism: Residents of South Los Angeles respond', *Journalism*, 19(5), pp. 649–667. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884917703125>.

Wenzel, A. and Nelson, J.L. (2020) 'Introduction "engaged" journalism: Studying the news industry's changing relationship with the public', *Journalism Practice*, 14(5), pp. 515–517. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2020.1759126>.

'What is constructive journalism?' (2022) Constructive Institute. Available at: <https://constructiveinstitute.org/what/faq>. (Accessed: 22 August 2022).

'What is solutions journalism?' (2022) Solutions Journalism. Available at: <https://www.solutionsjournalism.org/about/solutionsjournalism>. (Accessed: 20 July 2022).

'Why constructive journalism is being adopted by journalism leaders as an editorial strategy' (2022) Constructive Institute. Available at: getvisual.net/stream/?constructive-institute-listen-louder-conference/ (Accessed: 22 August 2022).

'Why we need to rethink journalism' (n.d.) Constructive Institute. Available at: <https://constructiveinstitute.org/why/support-democracy/> (Accessed 31 January 2023).

Willems, W. and Mano, W. (2017) *Everyday Media Culture in Africa: Audiences and Users*. (Routledge Advances in Internationalizing Media Studies). New York: Routledge.

Yanqiu, Z. and Matingwina, S. (2016) 'Constructive journalism: A new journalistic paradigm of Chinese media in Africa', in X. Zhang, H. Wasserman and W. Mano (eds) *China's Media and Soft Power in Africa: Promotion and Perceptions*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 93–105.

Zelizer, B. (2017) *What Journalism Could Be*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Zhang, Y. and Matingwina, S. (2016) 'A new representation of Africa? The use of constructive journalism in the narration of Ebola by *China Daily* and the BBC', *African Journalism Studies*, 37(3), pp. 19–40. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/23743670.2016.1209224>.

Zhao, X. and Xiang, Y. (2019) 'Does China's outward focused journalism engage a constructive approach? A qualitative content analysis of Xinhua News Agency's English news', *Asian Journal of Communication*, 29(4), pp. 346–362. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/01292986.2019.1606263>.

Appendix 1: DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION OF INTERVIEWEES

Name and Age	News Outlet	Title	Years in current position	Years in journalism	Education/ Training
Adriaan Basson (41)	News24	Editor	7	20	BA (Pol Sc), SU Hons (Afr Pol), Unisa
Jason Felix (29)	News24	Senior Parliamentary Journalist	2.2	11	Journ Dip, CPUT Various local and international journalism training courses/study exchanges
James de Villiers (27)	News24	Senior Journalist, In-depth News	2.3	5	BA Environ and Devp., SU MBA in process
Ferial Haffajee (55)	Daily Maverick	Associate Editor	5	34	BA, WITS Various local and international advanced journalism/editor training courses
Pauli van Wyk (36)	Daily Maverick	Senior Journalist, Scorpio Investigave Unit	12	5	B Journ, NWU M Journ, NWU MBA in progress
DM journalist (Anon) (28)	Daily Maverick	Journalist	2	3	BA Sociology and Gender Studies, UCT

Nathan Geffen (50)	GroundUp	Editor	10	10	Ph D Computer Science, UCT
James Stent (32)	GroundUp	Senior Journalist	1	2.5	PPE, UCT

Appendix 2: CONTENT ANALYSIS CODE BOOK

Main Category	Subcategory	Description	Example	Nr of Articles	References
SOLUTIONS		Reporting that covers possible solutions to eviction-related problems, elicited through statements or interviews, or expressed by journalists/non-journalists in opinion pieces.		139	275
	Containing Covid	Reporting that reflects solutions to containing Covid and improving living conditions within the context of communities experiencing eviction-related problems.	<i>“Community health workers should be sent to informal settlements. This intervention should include the use of informal health providers (such as sangomas in South Africa). These people are typically more trusted than government health officials, and should be trained to both protect themselves and others, detect symptoms and report possible cases to health authorities.”</i> GroundUp, 17/04/20 <i>“The delivery of basic services needs to be addressed. Every informal settlement and backyard dwelling needs electricity, water and sanitation.”</i> Daily Maverick, 27/07/20	24	46

	Land and housing long term	Reporting that covers possible broader, long-term solutions to the land- and housing-issues underlying eviction-related problems.	<i>“Second, the upgrading of informal settlements (introduced as a programme in 2004) needs to be expedited. This programme provides tenure security for citizens. It also is an ongoing city-wide response to informal settlements rather than the piecemeal housing projects every few years. “</i> Daily Maverick, 27/07/20	20	54
	Eviction	Reporting that reflects possible solutions to evictions and demolitions.	<i>“Western Cape High Court Judge Bryan Hack ruled that the City must allow 130 people to return to Empolweni and must give back the residents their building materials. Where material has been damaged, the City is to ensure that there is sufficient material for all 49 homes to be rebuilt.”</i> News24, 17/04/20	66	133
	Violence	Reporting that reflects possible solutions to violent or dehumanising behaviour against evictees or protesters.	<i>“Echoing Durojaye, De Vos said that the dignity of the poor should be paramount and that “elements of grace and compassion should infuse the formal structures of the law and therefore also the behaviour of those who enforce the law”.</i> Daily Maverick, 03/07/20	29	42
CONTEXT		Reporting that places the issue discussed in its relevant context. This can include broader historical/socio-cultural/political/economic/legal context of		133	708

		issues, or more immediate, factual context within which issues play out.			
	Events	Reporting on <i>what</i> happened, <i>when</i> it happened and <i>who's</i> involved: recounting of events and the immediate context within which it happened.	<i>“A large contingent of police officers broke down both entrances to the Central Methodist Church in Cape Town on Thursday 2 April, before entering the church as a group.”</i> Daily Maverick, 03/04/2020	90	286
	Recent	Reporting that gives recent and broader context to the events/issue described or discussed.	<i>“This particular area in Khayelitsha was illegally invaded during the first weeks of the national lockdown and the City responded to requests from the local community to remove the illegally erected structures. The City-owned land has been earmarked for the installation of services for the surrounding community.”</i> News24, 02/07/2020	77	182
	Court	Reporting describing matters to be brought to court, cases in progress, court judgements, and the context of these matters.	<i>“The case was brought by the SAHRC following a string of contentious demolitions and evictions by the City of Cape Town in recently-occupied informal settlements. The removal of Bulelani Qolani from his shack by City officers while naked was particularly widely covered in the media.”</i> GroundUp, 22/08/2020	32	85

	Legal	Reporting that gives legislative/regulatory context of an issue, or the opinion of legal experts.	<i>“He cited Section 26 of the pesky document: No one may be evicted from their home, or have their home demolished, without an order of court made after considering all the relevant circumstances.”</i> Daily Maverick, 22/04/2020	19	33
	Historical	Reporting that places an issue in its post-colonial/post-apartheid historical context.	<i>“During the colonial and apartheid eras, the state often violently uprooted whole neighbourhoods of black and coloured households on the basis that their very presence in well-located urban areas threatened the health of the public as a whole. Laws like the Health Act of 1817, the Slums Act of 1934 and the Health Act of 1977 gave the police far-reaching powers to forcibly relocate black and coloured people.”</i> Daily Maverick, 17/04/2020	6	16
	Housing broader	Reporting that places eviction related problems in the broader context of housing/land-reform challenges.	<i>“The City's Upgrading Informal Settlements (UIS) programme has been ongoing for many years. This has come as the City's response to the growing trend of informality brought on by urbanisation in Cape Town as well as in the rest of South Africa's cities.”</i> <i>This approach had been developed "as a way of catering to the large-scale accommodation needs for lower income groupings and with the realisation that formal housing alone will not address the housing need in South Africa"</i> News24, 29/07/2020	5	16

	Poverty	Reporting describing the living conditions of people living in informal settlements	<i>“Mdlalose said she spends most days wandering the streets, looking for materials to rebuild her shack. “It is not easy out there but I have to for my children’s sake,” Mdlalose added.”</i> GroundUp, 03/04/2020	5	10
	Inequality	Reporting that places eviction-related problems in the broader context of pervasive socio-economic and social justice inequality.	<i>“Respondents to the South African Reconciliation Barometer, a national public opinion survey conducted by the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation since 2003, have consistently identified the gap between the rich and the poor as the greatest source of division in society. Nowhere is inequality more visible than in unequal access to decent housing, particularly in Cape Town.”</i> News24, 02/07/2020	3	16
	Names	Reporting that describes the meaning of organisation/people names, and their purpose and background.	<i>“#NoEvictions is a campaign started by activist Nanandi-Simone Albers. It’s a response to the rent payment and eviction crisis sweeping through the country under the current lockdown restrictions.”</i> Daily Maverick, 31/05/2020	7	9
	Personal	Text that gives the personal context of the writer, relating it to the issue at stake in the article.	<i>“It’s not lost on me that I viewed these scenes from my phone while lying on my bed with a solid roof over my head. But I haven’t forgotten that I’m also black. That means that under different circumstances that shack could have been my dwelling, that man could’ve been my neighbour, could’ve been me.”</i> Daily Maverick, 02/07/2020	3	15

	International	Reporting that gives an international context to the issue discussed.	<i>“Countries like Spain and states in the USA like New York State, as well as numerous cities including San Francisco and Los Angeles, have banned evictions. In Los Angeles, 63% of the city’s four million residents are in rented accommodation and would be vulnerable to being evicted if unable to keep up payment of rentals.”</i> GroundUp, 30/03/2020	9	11
CRITICAL		Reporting that exhibits critical and fact-based investigation of the problem identified in the article and/or of possible solutions offered.		132	596
	Crit Problem	Reporting that exhibits critical investigation of the issue or problem identified in the article. This can include holding those in power accountable, reporting on critical points of view on the issue expressed by different sources, or the critical opinion expressed by the author of the article.	<i>“The real injustice of the eviction is not simply that force was used inappropriately. It is rather that the City decided to use public resources to embarrass and harass a resident, instead of providing improved access to decent housing.”</i> News24, 19/04/2020	120	577
	Crit Solution	Reporting that exhibits a critical approach to possible solutions offered to eviction-related	<i>“Perhaps most worrying is that these relocations will not be temporary. Many of the TRAs set up by the government have ended up becoming permanent as residents wait years or even decades to be moved to permanent housing.”</i>	12	19

		problems. This can include investigation of the limits, risks and obstacles to the solutions discussed.	<i>KwaZulu-Natal Human Settlements MEC Peggy Nkonyeni recently admitted that “many people have been staying [in transit camps] for more than 10 years and if you ask me how their living conditions are... they are very very bad.”</i> Daily Maverick, 14/04/2020		
SOURCES		Source of information identified.	<i>“Speaking before the release of the statement, Abahlali president S’bu Zikode expressed the distress that many around South Africa are currently experiencing.”</i> Daily Maverick, 27/03/20		
RESIDUAL		Parts of text that fall outside the coding categories established to address the research question. This can include references to hyperlinks to other articles, general summaries of article content, parts of opinion articles and information unrelated to evictions.	“Costs of the application will be shouldered by the City of Cape Town, except for the costs of the hearing of 25 July.” GroundUp, Article 31 25/08/2020		

Appendix 3: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS WITH EDITORS AND JOURNALISTS

Introduction:

Welcome, check that pre-interview information page read and UCT Ethics Consent Form completed.

Questions:

1) How do you see journalists' role in society; what is their main responsibility?

Prompts

- *To the state? To the public?*
- *How important is it to be seen as a watchdog journalist?*

2) Constructive journalism proposes that in addition to exposing and investigating society's problems, journalists should also – as part of the overall news cycle – intentionally have the mindset of asking where do we go to from here? That they should evaluate options for the future critically. What are your first thoughts about this as an overall concept?

Prompts

- *In principle?*
- *Tell me more?*

3) We know that in SA (and globally) journalists face considerable pressure – diminishing resources, shrinking newsrooms, an ever-faster news cycle, etc. In which ways could these challenges influence the potential of constructive journalism in online news, if at all?

Prompts

- *Other challenges?*
- *Tell me more about that challenge?*
- *How does this play out in your/ others' practice?*

4) In the analysis of articles on evictions, across all 3 news platforms, we found that journalists mostly did not investigate possible solutions to problems critically – also in the longer in-depth pieces. Any thoughts on what could have contributed to this finding?

Prompts

- *Journalists' workload and capacity?*
- *Availability of skills?*
- *Should/can this change, how? Training needed?*

5) You have seen that constructive journalism is concerned with a perceived flood of "negative news" in our always on digital society. What are your thoughts on the impact of news on South African society?

Prompts

- *How do you think audiences' reactions/behaviour could be affected by this?*
- *What is your sense of the effects on journalists – you and your colleagues?*
- *And just in everyday life, among the people you encounter?*

- 6) Do you think journalism in South Africa is helping society forward? And if so - in which ways? If not – in which ways does it not?

Prompts

- *What is the impact you see currently in actual practical terms?*

- 7) You may have seen The Reuters Institute's reports on a growing trend of *News avoidance* world-wide. In 2021 more than a third of respondents from over 30 countries said they actively avoided news. Nearly 60% of those said it had a negative effect on their mood and left them feeling powerless to change things. What are your impressions about people in SA, how do these trends relate to audiences here, if at all?

Prompts

- *Tell me more?*

- 8) Polarisation is an increasing and urgent problem world-wide, and the media often stands accused of contributing to polarisation through foregrounding violence and conflict – also in SA. Do you think journalists contribute to polarisation, and if so in which ways? If not – what comes to mind?

Prompts

- *Can you give examples?*

- 9) In the analysis of eviction-articles it became clear that journalists largely followed a recipe of splitting conflict into two simplistic sides, arranging sources into a predictable "he said/she said" pattern.

What do you think could contribute to this finding?

Prompts

- *What could be the effects on audiences?*

- 10) Constructive journalism encourages journalists to bring more complexity into conflict reporting, for instance through expanded interviewing, using knowledge and skills from mediation or conflict resolution. These techniques include deep listening and asking different questions to create better understanding of opposing viewpoints. How would you feel about [your journalists] acquiring such skills?

Prompts

- *What are obstacles/possibilities?*

- 11) In constructive journalism, journalists are encouraged to actively build a closer connection and co-create with the public. This can take the form of audience contribution like videos, tweets, comments at the end of articles, engaging on social media, facilitating democratic debate online, and so on.

What are your views on journalists engaging so actively with consumers?

Prompts

- *Do you use any of these tactics? Do they work?*
- *What are the challenges?*
- *Anything more, specifically on the role of social media in all of this? (We see people are increasingly accessing news primarily through social media)*

Appendix 4: PRE-INTERVIEW INFORMATION PAGE ON CONSTRUCTIVE JOURNALISM

Pre-interview info on Constructive Journalism

Constructive journalism is an umbrella term for journalistic approaches that go further than merely exposing and describing societal problems, by also investigating possible solutions critically and offering more perspectives that look ahead, asking “Where do we go to from here?”.

Constructive journalism is not good news or sunshine journalism. It critically evaluates options for the future, and other’s efforts to find solutions, as an added perspective/skill available to journalists when reporting on societal problems. It does not say all stories have to be constructive all the time, but argues for a shift in journalism culture and thinking to adapt to the challenges of our era. It recognises the vital role of breaking news and watchdog journalism but aims to expand the way problems are covered by also investigating how people can get beyond the problem.

Emerging from within the ranks of journalists themselves, the form has been growing for more than a decade in Northern Europe, the US and elsewhere in the world. The New York Times, Times of London, BBC, Danish Broadcasting Company, Deutsche Welle, the Guardian, Huffington Post, Seattle Times, NPR and many news outlets in Eastern Europe, the Middle East, Asia and Africa are now incorporating constructive journalism approaches in various parts of their output. Solutions journalism in the United States also falls under the constructive journalism umbrella. The “Solutions Journalism Network” has worked with more than 500 news organisations and 20,000 journalists worldwide on integrating solutions journalism into their reporting.

Constructive Journalism is concerned about the effects of a perceived flood of bad news on consumers in our “always-on” digital society. It points to journalists having to produce more news, sharper headlines, more conflict reporting, faster and faster in the battle for consumer attention. Constructive journalism aims to give consumers what it calls a more balanced sense of reality by providing more contextualized journalism based on rigorous research and data, and expanded interviewing skills. It aims to work with audiences to provide information that helps them make decisions that benefit their lives.

Some basic principles of constructive journalism, used in analysis by the researcher, are:

1. When investigating important societal problems, include coverage of possible solutions in the overall news cycle, staying critical, investigative and factual.
2. Place the issue in its relevant, broader context.
3. Expand journalistic interviewing to cover nuance and complexity.
4. Strengthen connection and co-creation with the audience.

Appendix 5: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN



Faculty of Humanities

Informed Consent Form

Title of research project: Constructive journalism in the South African online news context: an exploration of possibilities and challenges.

Name of principal researcher(s): Barbara Fölscher Kingwill

Name of Supervisor: Prof Herman Wasserman

Department/research group address: Centre for Film and Media Studies, University of Cape Town (UCT), Private Bag, Rondebosch, 7700.

Researcher telephone: 0794383620

Email: barbara.folscher@gmail.com

Name of Participant:

Nature of the Research: This qualitative research project has two parts. The researcher first analysed the presence/absence of constructive journalism principles in a sample of articles on GroundUp, News24 and Daily Maverick. The articles were on the theme of “Evictions” during the first 5 months of the Covid lockdown.

The interviewee participates in the second part of the research - qualitative interviews, with editors who are involved in the editorial decisions and approach of News24, Daily Maverick and GroundUp or journalists involved in the creation of the sample of articles.

Participant’s Involvement: The participant is asked to read through a short information page on the basic ideas of constructive journalism (attached) before the interview, and to do a 60 minute interview with the researcher on Zoom or in person – at a mutually agreed time. The

interview will explore the participant's views on the possibilities and challenges of constructive journalism in the South African online news context.

1. What's involved: The interview will be recorded and transcribed by the researcher. Recordings will be stored in password-controlled Dropbox files, and will be destroyed 3 months after the completion of the study. The participant is offered anonymity, but may waive the right to anonymity through the options given in the section below.
2. Risks: There are no risks involved.
3. Benefits: At a time when newsrooms are shrinking, resources are diminishing and journalistic practice has to keep adapting to the fast changing digital world, the industry itself is looking for new approaches to keep and grow audiences. The hope is that participants' deliberations on the ideas of one such an emerging approach – constructive journalism – will be enriching and thought-provoking.

- I agree to participate in this research project.
- I have read this consent form and the information it contains and had the opportunity to ask questions about it.
- In terms of anonymity, I have the opportunity here to choose a), b) **or** c):
 - a) I agree that my name may be used for the purposes of the assignment only and not for publication.
 - OR
 - b) I understand that the researcher may wish to pursue publication at a later date and my name may be used.
 - OR
 - c) I do not wish my name to be used or cited, or my identity otherwise disclosed, in the assignment.

PLEASE indicate option a, b, or c here:

- I understand that I am under no obligation to take part in this project.
- I understand that I have the right to withdraw from this project at any stage.

Signature of participant: _____

Date: _____

Signature of person who sought consent:

Name of person who sought consent: Barbara Fölscher Kingwill

Date: -----