

SABC presentation to MDPMI



Media and Digital Platforms
Market Inquiry Public Hearings

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SABC Delegation

Delegate	Designation
Lungile Binza	Acting Chief Operations Officer
Moshoeshoe Monare	Group Executive: News & Current Affairs
Philly Moilwa	Head of Policy and Regulatory Affairs
Angie Kapelianis	Digital Audiovisual News Head
Aasra Bramdeo	Digital News Editor
Annie Veeran	Project Sponsorship Executive

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1. The SABC's news mandate

- The SABC's mission is to provide “content that is accessible to all, anytime, anywhere”.
- As the public broadcaster, the SABC's news content must meet certain requirements:
 - Available in all official languages
 - Accessible
 - Low bandwidth formats
 - High quality and trustworthy content
 - Limitations on sponsorships and advertisements
- Private news organisations do not have the same responsibilities and limitations.
- The SABC still has to compete with private news players to earn advertising revenue.

2. SABC News in the digital era

- Shift in news consumption towards digital platforms creates major challenges for SABC.
- In keeping with its mandate, SABC Digital News is available on a wide range of digital channels.
- Operating its own OTT platform (SABC+), but predominantly depends on privately-owned platforms to reach South Africans in the digital sphere.
- Main focus for SABC Digital News is its YouTube channels, which had 13 times the number of views the SABC News website had in January 2024.
- Digital News utilises TV and radio news broadcasts to derive digital news content as well as create unique content.

3. SABC's finances in the digital era

- The SABC's revenue comes mainly from advertising.
- Shift by consumers towards digital media with resulting decline in TV and radio audiences.
 - Puts intense pressure on traditional media's advertising revenue, and therefore the SABC's overall income.
 - Contributes to lower levels of SABC licence fee payments.
- In addition to its allocated share of the SABC's overall income, SABC Digital News earns limited revenue from digital platforms.
 - SABC Digital News's only (very small) direct revenue is from YouTube advertisements.
 - The SABC is limited in its options to generate online revenue due to mandate.
 - For example, paywalls are not prohibited, but could be contrary to mandate of accessible news to all.
- Delivering digital news content in addition to traditional news increases resource requirements.
- SABC has to deliver digital news widely and in all official languages, while private news organisations can focus on more profitable target audiences or limit costs by focusing on a narrower selection of platforms.

4. Main concerns with digital platforms

- A lack of transparency about various visibility and operational issues is already limiting, and will increasingly limit, the SABC's ability to execute its public news mandate.
- The lack of transparency is limiting, and will increasingly limit, the SABC's ability to earn advertising revenue in the digital age.

4.1 Algorithms & ranking limits visibility of SABC's Digital News content

- Algorithms are complex, continuously evolving and many aspects thereof are confidential.
- Algorithms choose which content is shown to which users.
 - Limits users' freedom of choice.
 - Limits exposure to alternative views.
- Articles from SABC News website typically rank outside of top 10 search engine results. A low ranking of content results in:
 - Much less visibility – detrimental to accessibility as required by mandate.
 - Public perception of the SABC News articles having less relevance and credibility – contrary to SABC's mandate to provide content trusted by the public.
 - Lower click-through rates.
- Lack of transparency about how SABC Digital News can organically improve their rankings, i.e. apart from paying for boosting or search engine optimisation tools (SEOs).

4.2 Other factors limiting visibility of SABC's Digital News content

- **Boosting:**
 - Limited information available about platform's treatment of boosted vs non-boosted content and how the content competes against one another.
 - Other news services paying for boosting pushes down the SABC Digital News's search results ranking.
- **Paywalls and subscriptions:** if content behind paywalls/requiring subscriptions are favoured by platforms, SABC Digital News is deprived of potential consumers, and consumers potentially underserved.
- **“Shadow banning”:** the SABC believes some of its content were blocked, with no information provided about why or how to rectify it.
- **Inadequate technological support for African languages:** non-English content are less visible due to not being picked up by algorithms, etc.
 - Private news organisations without a language mandate can focus their resources on English content – increases visibility and advertising income.
- **Profit motive vs quality:**
 - High numbers of followers and views are key to generating advertising revenue – quality of news content may be sacrificed for virality or entertainment to attract followers and views.
 - SABC News focuses on the quality and journalistic integrity of their news content – this takes more time and resources.

4.3 Limited data transparency from platforms and associated ad tech stacks

- Limited data about the SABC News digital audience's preferences and behaviour made available by platforms.
 - Limits the SABC's ability to devise ways to reach a wider audience.
 - Limits the SABC's ability to compete effectively with other news organisations.
- Lack of transparency around how platforms determine the digital advertising revenue due to the SABC.
- Lack of support from platforms when seeking clarity about audience and advertisement data, and in general with queries and technical issues.

5. Lack of transparency and control over AI-generated content

- Lack of transparency about how AI content is generated.
- SABC has no control over how its digital content is used – or misused – by AI, with no protection from platforms that host this AI-derived content.
- SABC's branding and news anchors' likeness and voices are exploited in advertisements by using AI.
 - Not picked up by algorithms.
 - May include mis- and disinformation.
 - Can harm the credibility of SABC Digital News – contrary to mandate of providing news that is trusted by the public.
- None or very limited attempts by platforms to warn the public against mis- and disinformation.
- None or very limited attempts by platforms to check for and stop the spread of mis- and disinformation.
- If AI uses biased training data it could reflect in AI-generated news output, jeopardising impartiality.

6. Concluding remarks

- The SABC has a very specific mandate to fulfil, with certain limitations that other news organisations do not have to adhere to.
- The lack of transparency around certain issues related to digital platforms impedes the SABC from fulfilling that mandate.
- More transparency and greater support from platforms is needed for the SABC to continue to provide high quality, balanced and trusted news content that is easily accessible by all South Africans.



Thank you

