

# What is the media's role in South Africa today?

 By [Marion Scher](#)

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Am I going to give you a quick answer? No. You see it depends on who you ask.

If you ask the ANC they would simply tell you the role of the media is not to question, but to help spread the word on all the wonderful things they're doing for the country. And talking of questions - don't even mention 'You know who - he, who is without fault'... They have their untouchables and untouchable questions, the most popular of which is "where did the money go for.....?" Fill in the blanks as you please.

The media's role here is to ask the hard questions, maybe not always to the role players concerned, but those whose lives will be affected by what they're doing. In fact when it comes to the ruling party the media's job is firmly to ask difficult questions, the ones that you have the right to have asked and answered.

Then we have the DA. When they say 'together for change' this naturally includes the media. They want their every query against the government's comings and goings to be front page news and it often is. Here the media don't have too difficult a job because the DA is one step ahead generally with giving press conferences and issuing statements. But don't question their leadership issues or mention any in-fighting within the organisation - that's definitely off limits.

Now the EFF see the media in a completely different light and the other way around. Let's face it Julius sells newspapers and wherever he goes a story and great photos usually follows. Want a good sound bite, Julius is your guy. So whether you think he's ridiculous or the saviour of the poor, he's not going away any time soon (unless the tax man finally nails him) and will continue to dominate news. The media's role here is to try and interpret it without causing a mass migration to faraway shores...

## Reading between the lines

One thing all three parties have in common is that they all expect the media to virtually cut and paste their press statements on a daily basis, which is where the media's role really comes in. The media - if they do their job properly - should be reading between the lines and asking the right people the right probing questions. The minute the media stops asking the hard questions is the minute the word 'democracy' goes out the window. This of course doesn't apply if you're a keen follower of SABC or ANN7, not to mention certain media houses with close links to the ruling party.

There are several problems today within media - not least of which is the shrinking ad spend, forcing media houses to cut down on staff and employ less experienced staff. What this means for the consumer is often cut and paste journalism or reworked agency copy. Sadly gone are the days, apart from the odd exception, when journalists actually got off their

backsides and out their offices really digging for the story.

Today journalists expect the story to come to them - and quickly. This is in large part due to the pressure of online journalism and the speed with which they're expected to turn over copy, which is no excuse for shoddy journalism.

So to answer my original question - what is the media's role in South Africa today?

The media's role should be to bring the public, the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. But as the saying goes, 'why let the facts get in the way of a good story'. And sadly sometimes this sees the end result being a story with truths, half-truths and not so truths...

Don't get me wrong we still have some amazing journalists in this country, particularly in independent radio and media, whose bosses are right behind them in working tirelessly to bring you the real story behind the story. But this type of media is in the minority.

## ABOUT MARION SCHER

Marion Scher ([www.mediamentors.co.za](http://www.mediamentors.co.za)) is an award-winning journalist, lecturer, media trainer and consultant with 25 years' experience in the industry. For more of her writing, go to her Bizcommunity profile or to Twitter @marionscher.

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