

Gordon Institute of Business Science (GIBS) launches Media Leadership Think Tank

The University of Pretoria's Gordon Institute of Business Science (GIBS) is proud to announce the launch of its Media Leadership Think Tank. This think tank aims to deal with pressing issues facing the media and audiovisual industries and how they impact democracy.

Issued by [Gordon Institute of Business Science](#) 9 Sep 2021



The think tank will be launched on 14 September 2021 with a high-powered global panel tackling 'Social media, internet shutdowns, incitement and democracy'. The panel will discuss issues ranging from former US President Trump's de-platforming, incitement on social media networks, and widespread internet shutdowns across Africa and other parts of the world, among other issues.

GIBS has appointed Michael Markovitz to head and build up the initiative. Markovitz is currently a non-executive director on the board of the SABC and has more than two decades of experience as an activist, consultant, and business executive in the media and entertainment industries. He has played senior advisory roles over the years and was the head of the Expert Reference Panel advising the government on the audit and audiovisual services policy review. He has also worked as a senior adviser at ICASA and played a part in drafting South Africa's new broadcasting legislation in 1993.

Commenting on the initiative, GIBS Interim Dean, Dr Morris Mthombeni said, "At GIBS we are a proud UN PRME Champion School, and actively use our considerable convening capital to advance the fourth estate by enabling a world with responsible information – both online and offline. The Media Leadership Think Tank is an important initiative in the fulfilment of our commitments to sustainable development goal (SDG) 16 (specifically target 10) – ensuring public access to information and protection of fundamental freedom."

Markovitz said, "We are pleased that GIBS has given its strong support to this initiative. This comes at a time when the media is confronted by a perfect storm of mis- and disinformation, challenges to its sustainability and the extra-territorial power of social media platforms."

The main purpose of the think tank is to support democracy by generating research, debate and solutions for business, civil society, and government policy in the broad media space. "We will draw on experts from across Africa and other parts of the world and will reach out to key organisations, leaders, and educational institutions," added Markovitz.

Confirmed speakers for the launch include Fatou Jagne Senghore, Gambian-Senegalese human rights activist, women's rights activist and lawyer; Professor Dario Milo, Webber Wentzel partner and globally recognised media lawyer; and Dr Anya Schiffrin, director of technology, media and communications at Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs and editor of recently published *'Media Capture: How Money, Digital Platforms, and Governments Control the News.'*

Markovitz explained that the think tank's focus would be broader than the news media and would include research on audiovisual content and 'the attention economy' informed by deeper insights into what audiences and the public need from the media in order to become active citizens.

"We will be looking for a more ethical understanding of audiences in our increasingly fragmented, multichannel and data-driven world. Re-imagining and creating a new media is inextricably linked to creating societies based on participatory democracy and inclusive economies," he added.

The launch event will be opened by Professor Tawana Kupe, vice-chancellor and principal of the University of Pretoria.

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