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South Africa Indie Info Providers: Responding to Resource Constraints with Creativity and Collaboration

South African newsrooms are shrinking. CNTI's new report finds the indie info providers responding to that collapse with creativity, collaboration and a pointed push to decolonize local media.

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Read the full report online:
https://cnti.org/reports/south-africa-indie-info-providers/

Overview

As of September 2024, about one in four people in South Africa get news from individuals rather than organizations.

In a mobile-first country where more than four in five residents say digital technology is *"very important"* for staying informed, social media platforms have become vital news sources for South Africans. Though some evidence suggests news creators (i.e., indie info providers) are less popular in South Africa than in many other countries, the data points to a clear trajectory that aligns with the global trend of personality-led journalism and the rapid rise of new entrants.

Why & How We Did This

Note on terminology

There is no consensus on terminology, even among our interviewees. We primarily use the term "indie info provider" and sometimes "creator-journalist," which was the term used in our survey and interviews. Both terms appear throughout the report to refer to the same group: *"people who are working to provide verified factual information with a personality- or voice-driven brand that leverages the creator economy."* That definition encompasses a tremendous amount of variation.

Why we did this

This is the second report in a two-country series about indie info providers.

According to our research, about one in four people in South Africa get news from individuals rather than organizations.

Moreover, the South African media environment is undergoing a profound transformation. Media crises in recent decades have led to *"an increasingly constrained business environment,"* forcing outlets to rely on freelance journalists and short-term contracts to stay afloat and leaving many journalists without stable employment. This shift has coincided with a massive migration in audience habits: recent surveys find that about 7 in 10 surveyed (online, English-speaking) South Africans get their news from social media, especially on their smartphones.

To date, research on this trend has largely focused on the broader landscape of content creators, including entertainers, politicians and other creators who do not necessarily focus on informing their audiences. And most research to date has focused on content

sourcing and linking strategies. To enable a future for a plurality of fact-based sources that readers and viewers find relevant, our project sheds light on who indie info providers are and how they approach their role in the broader news landscape.

How we did this

In partnership with Code for Africa, CNTI recruited 43 content producers in South Africa to take a screening survey, 42 of whom met the eligibility criteria, and chose 18 of them for a 60- to 90-minute virtual interview. (The one who did not meet the criteria was neither South African-based nor working for a primarily South African audience.) CNTI selected interviewees to represent a range of professional backgrounds, such as project management and the military, beyond legacy journalism. This report is based primarily on insights from the interviews, with data from the survey as a secondary source.

In interviews, we asked participants about their backgrounds and motivations, audience engagement, their relationships with other indie info providers and legacy news outlets, platforms, and algorithms, revenue and business strategies, and their view of success and satisfaction with their own work.

We developed codes using a bottom-up iterative approach as themes emerged from the analysis. Code categories largely reflected the range of interview topics, as well as the addition of the broader theme "apartheid and historical context."

These methods provide richness and depth; however, it's not possible to generalize about the frequency of behaviors from these interactions, so we limit our use of quantitative terms to our interviewees throughout this report.

CNTI research and professional staff prepared this report. This project was made possible by the financial support of the Lenfest Institute and a second anonymous donor.

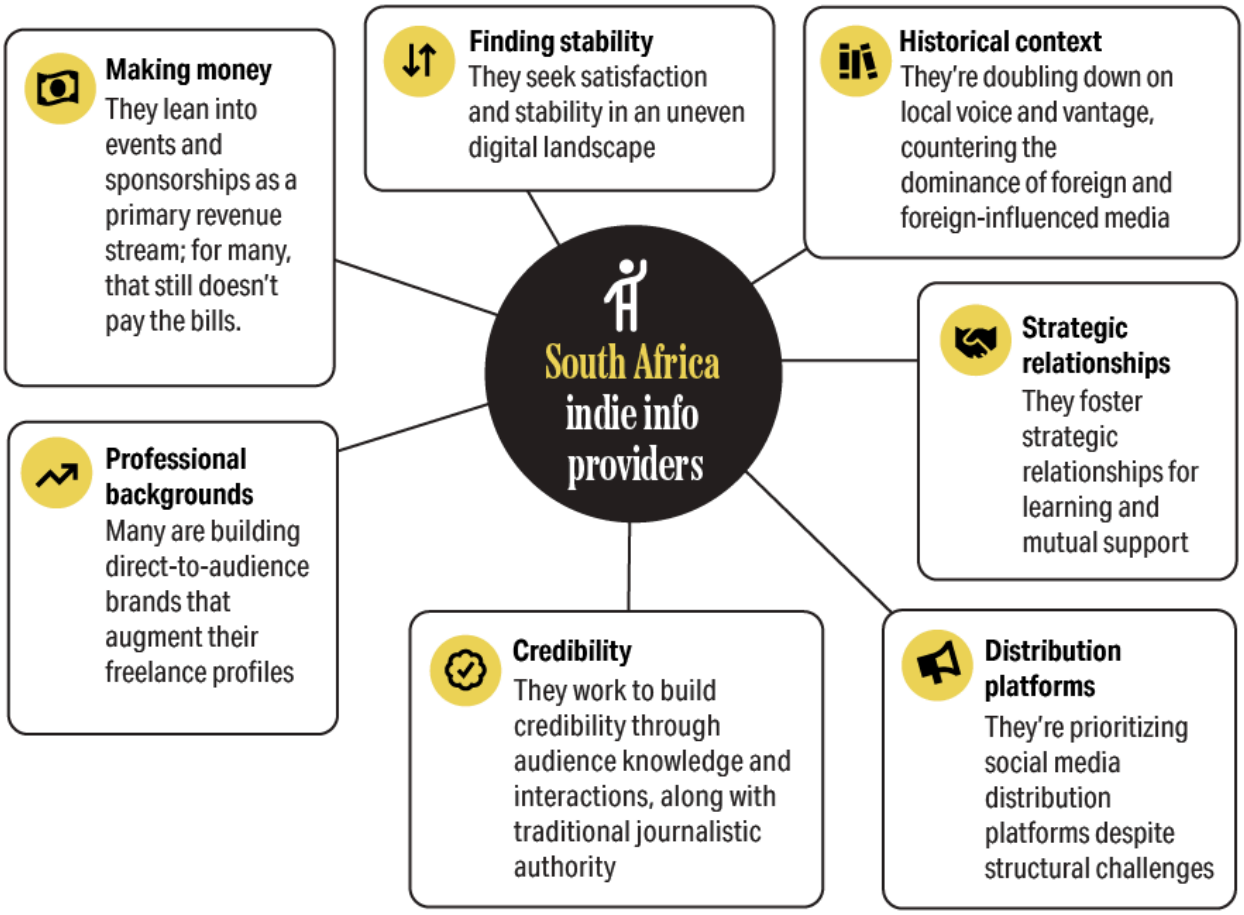
See "About this study" for more details.

CNTI sought to better understand this active arena of South African indie info providers playing increasingly important roles in people's daily lives. What are their backgrounds, motivations, relationships with their audiences, revenue streams and strategies and their sense of their role in the broader news information landscape?

To offer a starting point, CNTI conducted a series of in-depth 60- to 90-minute interviews with a mix of South African indie info providers, defined as "people who are working to provide verified factual information with a personality- or voice-driven brand that leverages the creator economy." The group was primarily drawn from Code for Africa's

broad network, which was built through targeted mapping, continent-wide surveys and the MediaData database. In addition, snowball sampling was employed during the survey, which means that interviewees played an active role in defining who to include, and some participants may come from outside Code for Africa's network.

Among this set of South African indie info providers interviewed, we learned that:



→ Many are building direct-to-audience brands that augment their freelance profiles.

Most interviewees (11 of 18) had journalism backgrounds, and most of those (seven of 11) had been freelancers at some point during their careers. In the face of decreasing journalism opportunities, they launched indie brands to attract more freelance work. That means they don't necessarily draw a clear line between work for others and for their own brand. While the term "journalist" resonated with many interviewees, some found it too limiting and they drew a distinction between "creators" and "journalists." Like their U.S. counterparts, they're driven by a desire to inform people — and many define success as fulfilling that mission while building financial sustainability. The interviewees who felt

prepared to manage the business side of their ventures attributed their skills to prior experience outside of journalism, not journalism school or formal training.

→ They're doubling down on local voice and vantage, countering the dominance of foreign and foreign-influenced media.

For interviewees, questions of social privilege and power shape how stories are told and who is seen as entitled to tell them. In fact, many see their identity as a key part of their branding. This cohort of interviewees raised concerns about ongoing dependence on foreign coverage, which is short on local stories for local people and tends to be overwhelmingly negative. In response, they see themselves as *"decolonizing"* local media and offering a *"solutions mindset,"* which are intertwined. (In contrast, their U.S. counterparts did not situate their work in a larger global context at all.)

→ They foster strategic relationships for learning and mutual support.

South African interviewees have expansive networks, encompassing not only professionals but also family and personal connections that play a meaningful role in supporting their work. They rely on *"relationships where you can either learn or grow together."* Driven by resource scarcity and the need for growth, most leverage a mix of formal and informal partnerships to sustain operations, expand audiences and combat professional isolation. This extends to ongoing relationships with newsrooms: many indie info providers maintain collaborative ties as freelancers, allowing them to contribute to legacy outlets while sustaining independent projects. (Their U.S. counterparts, on the other hand, were less successful in developing relationships with newsrooms.)

→ They work to build credibility through audience knowledge and interactions, along with traditional journalistic authority.

South African interviewees draw on direct audience feedback, overall metrics from social media platforms and story-specific engagement data to maintain a relatively clear sense of who they reach. (As a group, they had more sophisticated audience knowledge than their U.S. counterparts.) Audience feedback is generally seen as generative and valuable, if sometimes overwhelming. Still, *"showing up"* for the audience online and in-person is a key component of building and sustaining credibility: *"It's not a situation where I can establish credibility from on high ... so it was always going to be about getting on the ground with people and getting into the nuance and the details."* At the same time, South African interviewees also aim to build trust via traditional markers of journalistic authority, particularly through rigorous sourcing, verification and fact-checking practices.

→ They're prioritizing social media distribution platforms despite structural challenges.

Reflecting the country's high mobile phone adoption rate and widespread social media use, most South African interviewees rely heavily on social media over newsletters and websites. Even within the social media space, interviewees diversify their presence to

hedge against changes in visibility and reach, shadowbanning and overmoderation — a strategy shared with their U.S. counterparts. These challenges are further compounded by misogyny and racism online, where indie info providers, especially Black women, face coordinated mass reporting campaigns when addressing sensitive social issues.

→ They lean into events and sponsorships as a primary revenue stream; for many, that still doesn't pay the bills.

More than half of South African interviewees described financial sustainability as one of their biggest obstacles, with six of 18 making no meaningful income and at least seven of 18 effectively sponsoring their own work in "*this loss-making entity called journalism*." Some adopt an ineffective "build it and they will come" approach, while other interviewees tend to rely on diversified revenue streams. Specific sources of revenue also differ from the U.S.: Events play a central role in many business models for South African indie info providers, building credibility and audience while also generating revenue. By contrast, subscriptions and memberships are widely seen as less viable, and traditional advertising is less common than sponsorships, advertorials and other forms of "spon-con." While grants are part of the ecosystem, they are not viewed as sustainable or predictable sources of support. Across approaches, there is a strong awareness of the ethical implications and trade-offs of outside financing.

→ They seek satisfaction and stability in an uneven digital landscape.

Most interviewees (12 of 18) started their businesses before 2020. While their U.S. counterparts are in the earliest stages of entrepreneurship, South African interviewees have the foundations largely figured out. They enjoy their work and take great pride in it, but financial uncertainty and stress are taking a toll on their happiness. While many established interviewees now maintain standard working hours, that does not necessarily translate to job satisfaction, as many continue to struggle to balance the pressures of growth and day-to-day operations. At the same time, interviewees and the South African public at large express cautious optimism about generative AI's potential to help manage resource-strained newsrooms. In practice, the effectiveness of this technology is frequently limited by cultural biases, linguistic gaps and unreliable internet infrastructure, particularly in rural areas. Reflecting South Africa's digital divide, indie info providers are often running sophisticated, cloud-based AI tools on fairly basic hardware. Read more.

Acknowledgments

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Professional Backgrounds

Many are building direct-to-audience brands that augment their freelance profiles.

In South Africa, indie info providers include not just former and freelance journalists but also political satirists, subject matter experts and civic-minded community members building grassroots platforms. To begin to understand this professionally diverse group, we collaborated closely with Code for Africa, which has been mapping the country's indie info provider landscape.

More than half of the interviewees have previous journalism experience; those who don't are building on previous careers and passions.

Most of the indie info providers in this study (11 of 18) have prior formal experience in journalism, whether as a freelancer or in a staff role. Of the other participants, four of them had worked in the arts and continue to do so and three had deep subject matter expertise that they parlayed into their work: for two, that expertise was professional, while the third writes about *"topics that fed my soul from very young."*

Most interviewees coming from journalism backgrounds launched indie brands to navigate a precarious industry.

Seven of the 11 interviewees who had journalism backgrounds began their indie brands as freelancers. They were largely seeking to build their profiles, motivated by the decline in journalism opportunities in South Africa.

Many don't necessarily distinguish between their freelance work and their indie brand; social media serves as a way to boost their freelance profile and continue getting contracts from legacy media. One interviewee said, *"As a freelancer... I've never really been able to rely on a publication to push my work ... social media for me, initially, was just on my personal Instagram where it was mostly people I knew."* Others described social media as only indirectly monetizable: having a growing public profile has led to offers of paid work.

When that hasn't been effective, indie info providers have started figuring out how to monetize social media directly. One interviewee began a self-funded project after their freelance work dried up and they felt that the journalism world was *"collapsing."* They continue to pitch their work to publications while also sharing it online, but they stated that they cannot depend on assignments from publications to cover their expenses.

This reliance on social media to maintain a flow of opportunities reflects the reality of the South African media environment for journalists, specifically the gig-ification of journalism work. While labor and economic precarity came up in most interviews, only a few

individuals mentioned the role of structural factors like race and location, and it wasn't a question we specifically asked.

While the term "journalist" resonates with many interviewees, some feel the term is too limited. They see "creators" as distinct from "journalists."

Interviewees lack a unified preference for professional titles, though many gravitate toward journalistic terminology, even if they don't have a background in the field. When asked what professional title they use on the pre-interview survey, most interviewees offered not just "journalist" but "producer," "editor," "publisher" and variations on those titles. On the same survey, 11 of the interviewees said they consider themselves journalists, while seven said, "It's complicated." A few feel the term "journalist" encompasses a small portion of everything they do. Not only do they produce journalistic content for their indie brands, they also serve as entrepreneurs, social media managers, salespeople, researchers, engagement teams and more. As one political satirist explained,

> *"I'm a new media creator who talks about the news and delivers news to people, so in a very simple way, I am a journalist. But I do it through wide-ranging media reading and consumption of information. I do lots of online data research. ... I'm definitely doing journalism but in South Africa with our investigative journalists and our frontline beat journalists it feels odd to put me in that category."*

Still, for some, "journalism" feels confining as a label. One interviewee likes the freedom to combine their personality with their work online, instead of feeling that they have to choose between their interests. Now, with their indie brand, they can address a broader range of topics: *"I love journalism, but I've never really identified as a journalist. I have so much more to talk about. Firstly, I'm not that into politics, honestly. And it feels like politics and journalism, at least in South Africa, are so intertwined as almost one thing. If you're a journalist, you're talking about politics."* This is consistent with previous research showing that the public largely defines the terms "news" and "journalism" somewhat narrowly around current events.

Some South African interviewees consider themselves *"creators,"* but they see this role as distinct from journalism. At least one person sees becoming a creator as largely positive, an opportunity to expand their professional toolkit. *"I felt like I'd be very limited if I only had journalism as a skill,"* they said. Others are much more negative about the term, like one interviewee who differentiated creators from *"serious people."*

The relative comfort with journalistic titles is consistent with public attitudes, since the South African public generally holds a positive perception of journalists. According to

CNTI's 2024 public survey, 76% of South Africans think that news organizations are a critical part of an informed society. Further, as of 2025, 55% of the South African public trusts news overall, the fifth-highest ranking in the 48-country study.

Deep dive: Some indie info providers distinguish themselves with expansive professional identities as artists, activists, academics and more.

Several interviewees define themselves as spanning multiple fields, with journalism and content creation as just one small aspect of their professional identity. For example, one person said in the screening survey that they use the title "journalist" yet responded "it's complicated" when asked if they consider themself a journalist. As they explained in the interview, the field of journalism is in constant change, and they are *"straddling academia and ... journalism."* Another interviewee rejected the journalist label and instead uses the title public relations officer: *"I'm not a journalist. I'm definitely a public figure. I'm definitely a leadership figure. I'm definitely an orator. I'm definitely a spokesperson."*

Some of these interviewees are members of the Rastafarian Movement, a decentralized faith and culture that gained momentum in Jamaica in the 1930s, spread informally in South Africa during apartheid and was introduced formally in South Africa in the 1990s. During the 1970s and 80s, South African Rastafarians were mostly unemployed black youth with an average age of 26 and low education rates. Since the end of apartheid, the movement has grown and includes school and university students, white South Africans and professionals. Its political philosophy largely reflects pan-African ideology, critiquing and analyzing Western society. A central tenet of the culture is the importance of community gathering and this philosophy is evident in the interviewees' approaches to their work. This orientation toward community may shape how these interviewees perceive their roles in the indie info provider space.

Across the South African interviewees, they see their personal and professional identities as connected (see "historical context").

Interviewees define success as fulfilling their mission to inform while building financial sustainability.

For many interviewees, success includes both mission- and business-related goals — not one or the other. As one interviewee put it, *"Success looks like making a thriving living, not a surviving living, off of actually solving the problems I want to solve."*

Mission-related goals often align with concerns about the state of journalism in the country. As one interviewee stated, they will feel successful when they can employ other journalists, help others do what they love and *"show that journalism isn't dead. There is*

still something behind it." Another interviewee's perspective on success underscores their worries about the exclusion of certain news stories and narratives. They want their work to be *"visible"* above all else because, "*These stories are important. These stories are about people who are invisible in the public discourse. They are people that are ignored, whose suffering is ignored by rich wealthy people whose comfort comes at the expense of those who are suffering the most.*" These responses echo larger trends. Specifically, the decreasing number of journalists and the decline in industry funding have led to fewer stories, particularly nuanced stories from local reporters.

Business-related goals include seeking financial stability, continuing to grow and becoming known as the best at what they do. As one interviewee said, *"I would like to have a sustainable business, a sustainable enterprise, you know where it's like a going concern. You know, it's not like, 'my god, are we going to make it?'"* These goals also reflect the reality of journalism in South Africa: Legacy media organizations are shutting down, leading to a general perception of decline in the South African news industry.

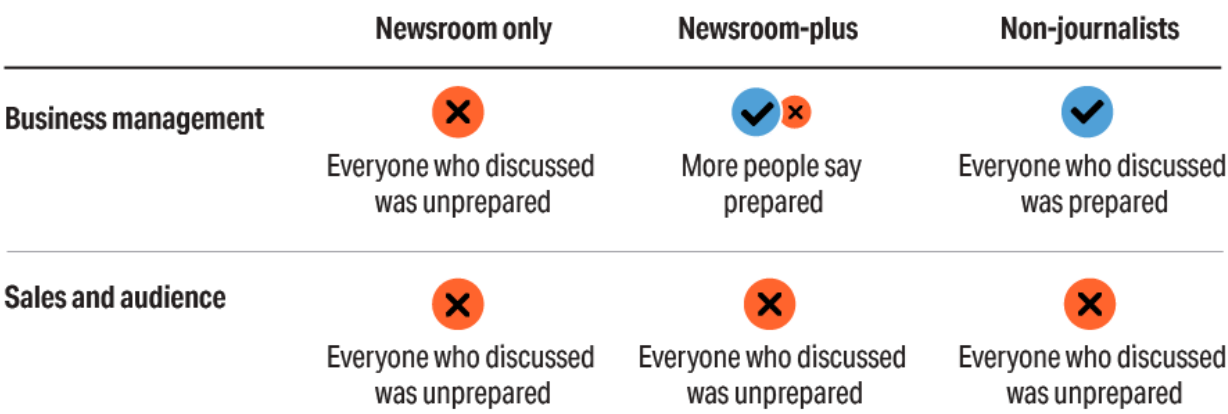
While both topics came up across every interview, some interviewees spoke primarily about measuring success by one metric or the other. In particular, those who highlighted only mission-related goals were largely subsidizing their own indie brands or making major financial sacrifices to continue doing this work.

Most interviewees who felt prepared to manage a business drew that confidence from prior experience outside of journalism.

Interviewees expressed a lack of preparation for sales and audience-building tasks, while they were more mixed about business management skills. Those who felt ready for the business side of their project had experience outside of journalism and said that previous jobs had equipped them with the business skills needed for their project. Of these interviewees, several had no journalism background. One had worked as a project manager, another as a CEO and a third in labor relations and strategy. A fourth interviewee explained that they used their time in the newsroom to learn the business side, but had also worked in other ventures.

Interviewees who mentioned their journalism school experience expressed that they were ready for the reporting side of journalism — but not for running a business. This finding is to be expected: South African journalism schools, like others around the world, do not prepare their student journalists to be freelancers or to run a business. Instead, these programs focus on preparing their students for a career in the newsroom, a future that might not be a reality for most graduates.

South African indie info providers across backgrounds feel unprepared for sales and audience work.



We interviewed 6 people with newsroom experience only, 7 non-journalists and 5 people with multiple types of experience. This chart reflects skills specifically mentioned in interviews. No single skill was mentioned by all 18 interviewees.

Sources: Center for News, Technology & Innovation, South African Indie Info Providers

The only interviewee who mentioned feeling unprepared for journalism-related tasks had recently transitioned from another career. They struggled with the realities of on-site reporting, saying, *"When you come from an office environment, you realize as much as it's the most exciting thing about journalism, going on site, wading through the Blyde River with crocodiles there, that's an experience that you can't prepare for."* This unpredictability was compounded by a lack of logistical support. As a newer indie info provider, they felt the lack of infrastructure for freelancers, identifying difficulty with *"the mobility, the logistics of it, figuring out how to do things. Unless you are well established [and] you have all of this at your fingertips. The guys that are just beginning or just starting off, there isn't much support on that side."* These issues are not unique to freelance journalism: Freelancers across industries are likely to face similar challenges, especially the feeling of being unsupported by institutional structures.

What the U.S. can learn from South Africa

South African interviewees move fluidly between freelance work and their indie brands, seeing each as creating opportunities for the other. On the other hand, many U.S. interviewees turned to both only after losing full-time jobs, and largely see the two in conflict with each other. South African interviewees weigh mission and financial sustainability somewhat more equally than those in the U.S., who prioritize mission. A broader understanding of the interconnectedness of all independent work may help alleviate some of the pressure U.S. indie info providers feel around making their work directly profitable.

Historical Context

They're doubling down on local voice and vantage, countering the dominance of foreign and foreign-influenced media.

The impact of historic and persistent forces of marginalization in the South African media environment came up repeatedly in interviews. South Africa's media industry remains deeply influenced by the legacies of colonization and apartheid. These historical injustices impact current coverage gaps, reinforce negative stereotypes and reflect imbalances in social power between segments of society. Further, some Africans have raised concerns that the reliance of African news outlets on Western news agencies and the influence of Chinese and Russian media outlets can overshadow local accounts. In response to these concerns, many of the South African indie info providers aim to provide nuanced and localized storytelling.

For South African indie info providers, social privilege and power shape how stories are told and who is seen as entitled to tell them.

For many interviewees, their social identities and the larger geopolitical context are inherently linked to their work. For example, one person was quick to situate themself as *"a white European male working in southern Africa, most of the time working with communities that historically are marginalized,"* where people are skeptical due to *"a several-hundred-year tradition of people like me coming in, taking what they want and leaving."* In this vein, several interviewees spoke openly about the history of apartheid and its legacy of racism and social segregation. In their view, these conditions continue to impact both individual careers and the larger information environment.

Many interviewees also reject the notion that "objectivity" is possible to attain, or even valuable to strive for. As one trained journalist reflected, *"No journalism is completely neutral or independent or objective. Everyone has a slant. It's about being honest about what your slant is."* For example, choosing whether to use the word "genocide" to describe conditions in Gaza or whether business journalism should be reflexively pro-capitalist reflects the journalists' stances and identity. Another interviewee with a journalism background linked their unease about this notion to South Africa's place in the world, saying, *"One of my issues with the way journalism is traditionally done is these established ethics that we work under. As an African woman, they've never felt instinctively correct — the ways that we appeal to authority, which is usually Western authority and things like that."* The interviewees' acknowledgment that objectivity is impossible is consistent with the framing of South Africa's Press Council.

South African indie info providers see themselves as decolonizing local media by promoting positive perspectives over negative Western narratives.

It was fairly common for interviewees to position themselves in contrast to mainstream media, which they described as *"negative"* and *"alarmist."* The larger media environment feels like *"the same people complaining about the same stuff"* who *"never talk about things that are motivating and encouraging civilians or citizens in a good way."* One interviewee even said that South African journalism *"often tarnishes the reputation of the country."* In response to this overall trend, these indie info providers see themselves as filling an important gap by providing "*a solutions mindset*" and the ability to report on positive developments that might give their audience hope.

Several interviewees discussed fighting these pervasive negative narratives in South African media with their content. One interviewee said their indie info projects *"[try] to present a kind of more positive story, but one that's not a feel-good story. It's one that's factually based."* Another interviewee, whose project focuses on the fashion industry, said, *"I think one of the big problems of African fashion, as an ecosystem, we tend to talk about ourselves like a charity, especially in South Africa, and not like a business."* They want the content in their newsletter to move beyond the creative — even negative — focus typically found in fashion coverage to be more actionable for their audience.

Many interviewees described their work as addressing gaps in a media landscape. One described working against entrenched media narratives shaped by colonization: *"The African continent, specifically South Africa, has been colonized for the longest time ... we also have a challenge when it comes to articulating our own culture, articulating our own language. So now I'm trying to decolonize all of this."*

In this way, interviewees' attempts to challenge limiting portrayals can be understood as part of a broader pushback against entrenched media narratives. Historically, Western-informed news has cast the Global Majority as an "entity of struggle," prioritizing the unusual, tragic, or bizarre, and creating narratives centered on famine, conflict and despair.

Interviewees fill a gap left by the influence of foreign media by providing nuanced, locally-driven storytelling.

One interviewee, who had previously worked with international outlets, started their indie brand to shift from writing about South Africa for international audiences to writing about South Africa for South Africans. As they explained it, *"there's a dominance of the international publications that could afford to pay correspondents and things ... and I know from working with international publications that that kind of coverage doesn't get into the nitty-gritty."* They added, *"I wanted to make that shift to just be part of the local news ecosystem so that I can write about things to more of a granular level."*

Another interviewee focuses their work on stories that mainstream media is not covering, and said, "*These stories are about people who are invisible in the public discourse. They are people that are ignored, whose suffering is ignored by rich, wealthy people whose comfort comes at the expense of those who are suffering the most.*" In the view of these interviewees, a reliance on foreign media narratives limits the number of nuanced African stories. Many interviewees see themselves as providing an important alternative.

What the U.S. can learn from South Africa

Both U.S. and South African interviewees are working to fill gaps left by legacy media, but only South Africans situate their work in a larger global context. This difference likely reflects the varied priorities of Global North and post-colonial audiences.

Strategic Relationships

They foster strategic relationships for learning and mutual support.

For South African indie info providers, strategic relationships serve as important sources of support. By leveraging professional networks — including partnerships with established media companies, mentorship programs and ties from previous career positions— these interviewees have overcome resource constraints and expanded their audience reach. Relying on relationships more than formal training reflects the broader national context where, according to the World Bank, 14.4% of South Africans over the age of 25 hold a bachelor's degree. Studies from Latin America and the rural United States also find that collaboration is vital for journalism's survival in under-resourced environments. Understanding how indie info providers collaborate can provide important insight into the future of journalism.

South African interviewees leverage broad personal and professional relationships to sustain their operations and combat professional isolation in the face of scarce resources.

For many indie info providers, collaboration is more than a professional choice; it is a cornerstone of success that bridges the gap between limited resources and high-impact output in South Africa. These partnerships range from formal groups to informal peer networks that sustain indie info providers both logistically and emotionally.

Multiple interviewees rely on informal support ecosystems to navigate the challenges of being indie info providers. These networks allow them to pool their resources. One group of female indie info providers meets regularly to share information about trusted photographers, videographers and graphic designers. Similar structures exist for those working in audio, where indie info providers offer everything from informal mentorship to branding assistance. For those in rural areas, these connections act as a vital lifeline: Where few others perform similar work, "talking shop" with a nearby fellow publisher provides the peer contact necessary to combat professional isolation. One interviewee noted how important their community was, *"especially as an independent and as a freelancer for many reasons, but not least for sanity checks and just advice and things on, how do you navigate this situation?"*

These informal networks include personal as well as professional relationships. Multiple interviewees rely on family members to provide key skills for their indie brand. One interviewee said their daughter helps them run their social media accounts. Another interviewee relies on a cousin to learn the technical side of producing documentaries because *"he has also put more experience in the technology, so I learned a lot from him."* For others, family members are not only knowledge resources but important collaborators. After one interviewee began gaining traction on TikTok, they hired a brother

and another friend. Their brother served as a sounding board for ideas, playing a key role in the collaborative creative process as they discussed current events and developed topics for their channel. These relationships show that interviewees go beyond peer and formal networks when looking for help, and find that family members might just have the skills they need to make their project work.

South African interviewees largely develop the skills they need through previous work experience and professional associations.

For those who had previously worked in media, many learned the necessary skills for their indie info brand through collaboration in their current or previous roles. One interviewee noted that working in mainstream media and television documentaries taught them the *"news nose,"* an instinctual understanding of journalism. Others found that while they started in legacy news media, their practical experience allowed them to pivot into digital formats. Even those who valued their university experience ultimately credited TV and film sets for giving them the technical foundation they needed to launch their own ventures.

Many interviewees supplement their skills through journalism-specific organizations and hands-on training. The South African Freelance Organization and the Writers Guild of South Africa were described as *"vital"* for beginners and the Association of Independent Publishers provides specialized knowledge on securing funding and navigating TikTok. These and other online platforms help interviewees access specialized information in areas such as digital marketing, disinformation and tips for covering elections.

Just three interviewees cited the relevance of their formal education specifically for business and administrative skills. One mentioned the importance of the skills they learned while attending business school in the U.S. through the Mandela Washington Foundation; another completed a university program at the intersection of business and social impact; a third referenced a certificate program in arts and business administration. Consequently, many interviewees broke into the media industry by developing their skills directly on the job rather than through school.

In addition to — or in place of — collaboration, a handful of interviewees find informal and self-directed methods to be essential tools for learning. These informal approaches include *"growing up watching Oprah,"* using ebooks and online guides to study industry best practices, personal initiative, and trial and error.

Collaboration helps indie info providers expand their audience and address news deserts — but not all interviewees see it as a positive.

Collaboration also serves as a powerful tool for audience building and content depth. Interviewees reported a diverse array of creative partnerships designed to expand their reach. Some have explored working with local comedians and younger content creators or cross-posted content to engage new demographics and amplify visibility. Along the

same lines, one indie info publication is launching a series with young South African creators to engage with role-playing video games for TikTok and YouTube Shorts. Two interviewees discussed partnering with think tanks and educational institutions to add a scholarly angle to their reporting. These partnerships with other creators and institutions can be mutually beneficial, as both parties are reaching audiences they might not otherwise.

Despite efforts to expand the audience, there are still extreme disparities in reach. The availability of news varies greatly across South Africa — between rural and urban, and affluent and impoverished areas. Subsequently, one interviewee is partnering with grassroots influencers to address news deserts in rural South Africa. This project provides younger creators with journalism training and addresses the lack of news coverage in certain areas, while granting the interviewee access to new audiences.

While networks and collaborative settings constitute a large part of the indie news ecosystem in South Africa, five participants indicated that they do not collaborate with others, or only have potential plans to do so. One had a strong stance against working with other creators based on negative experiences. Their primary concern was brand integrity, fearing that their core message might be misconstrued by collaborators who lack a deep understanding of the topic being covered. Another said that during the previous iteration of their project, they did not want to ask for help, but for a planned relaunch, they are looking forward to collaborating with others working in a similar space.

Newsrooms are another important source of collaboration; flexible niches help indie info providers maintain relationships with legacy outlets.

A majority of South African interviewees actively collaborate with larger news organizations by co-hosting events, publishing on their platforms and appearing on broadcasts. One interviewee described how their videos and articles were syndicated across multiple major newsroom websites and TV shows, and that they are actively pursuing relationships with two more outlets.

For indie info providers, seeing freelance work as continuations of their brands (see Professional Backgrounds) makes them amenable to a wide range of collaborations. And South African newsrooms may be more likely to see these indie info providers as collaborators rather than competitors, especially for those struggling to find funds for full-time staff.

Often, what differentiates indie info providers are tone and voice rather than topic area. Various interviewees described their own work as *"feminist," "human-centered," "creative storytelling, satire and comedy," "Afro-centric"* or *"factually based informed balanced and contextual narrative."* Three of those we spoke to are Rastafarian. All three described *"faith-based identity"* as a core lens that informs how they see — and report on — the world.

A key reason to maintain flexibility in their approaches is to stay adaptable and attractive to a broader range of freelance opportunities. For example, one South African interviewee focuses broadly on *"science"* because *“it's too risky to base your writing on one specific subject or journal.”* Given how many interviewees maintain close relationships with legacy outlets (see “Making Money”), adaptability is a necessity.

What the U.S. can learn from South Africa

U.S. interviewees, who are earlier in their entrepreneurship journey, are more focused on professional development, while South African interviewees are more focused on building and sustaining strategic relationships.

South African interviewees rely not just on professional networks but also personal networks to support their projects, while U.S. interviewees focus on networks of people with similar professional backgrounds. Professional diversity within networks may bring a broader array of complementary skills, which can be valuable for learning and growth.

Many South African interviewees have strong relationships with newsrooms. They appear on broadcasts, have their work republished and co-host events. U.S. interviewees want to strengthen these relationships, but run into financial and creative barriers. Positioning themselves as expert sources may be one way to collaborate on their own terms. Focusing on their tone or lens rather than their topic area may also create more opportunities if newsrooms see them as flexible.

Credibility

They work to build credibility through audience knowledge and interactions, along with traditional journalistic authority.

The public now accesses information from a vast media environment, drawing on established news organizations, independent voices like those we interviewed and a growing range of algorithmic platforms, including social media and AI chatbots. But people don't find all sources equally relevant, which has implications for commercial viability. With many major news outlets shutting down all or parts of their operations and growing news deserts throughout South Africa, deep audience understanding is essential for indie info providers. Producing credible information, building audience trust and engaging with audiences may become even more important in a country facing international disinformation campaigns. The indie info providers we interviewed have given a lot of thought to these topics.

Through multiple sources of information, including audience feedback and engagement data, interviewees have a clear sense of who they reach.

For the most part, South African interviewees obtain information about their audiences through a combination of analytics, content performance and feedback they receive. Based on analytics, most interviewees can speak confidently about audience location, age, gender and sometimes race. Many interviewees also articulated a clear sense of their audience's interests, such as politics or lifestyle, but distribution platforms don't typically provide this kind of data. Instead, consistent patterns in content performance can be illuminating. For example, several interviewees who create consumer-facing info said that reviews of budget products and *"anything that punches above its weight"* perform best, suggesting they can reach an *"aspirational"* audience on a fairly tight budget. If they work primarily in English, they are confident that their South African audience is middle-class or wealthier. Unsolicited audience feedback provides a third source of insight into their most dedicated audiences. For example, if most messages come from Black women, they assume most of the audience fits that profile. For one interviewee, brand outreach gives them insight into their audience.

Freelancing can also provide valuable secondhand knowledge about audiences. While not all interviewees can afford focus groups or other forms of audience research, some do have a clear sense of who they reach through larger publications. Those who regularly collaborate with or publish in other outlets answered questions about their audience with reference to these larger outlets. For example, one respondent described a regional outlet they partner with as reaching *"policy makers, they reach people in government, conservation, business. They really are a heavy-hitting title. They're read widely in South Africa and across the continent."*

South African indie info providers generally see audience feedback as generative.

Many interviewees described their audiences as a valuable source of ideas and inspiration. This may be in the form of direct requests for coverage or donations of multimedia content. For example, an interviewee with a satirical brand regularly incorporates audience-generated punchlines and memes into their show. However, it's more common for audiences to inspire news stories less directly, such as with audience questions. As a hyperlocal info provider explained:

> *"They expanded a new shop and we just did a video of it. There was no article even. The whole week I was fielding questions. They're like, 'Hey, so do you guys have a halal section?' I'm like, 'That's not my shop. Please go look.' But then we did discover people want to know which shops have halal sections. We should probably do that. So, that's kind of how we do it. 'Is it open after 9?' And I'm like, 'I don't know. I never asked them because I don't even live in that area.' But it did make me go, 'Okay, I've got to do a story on stores that are open late if you're working.'"*

Informal communication and in-person events are also opportunities to get a better sense of audience interests and questions that may eventually translate into content. A few interviewees actively seek out this kind of feedback through audience surveys with mixed success. Some receive almost no feedback this way, while others said surveys work best when they conduct them infrequently, albeit regularly.

Interviewees noted that the volume and tone of online communication with their audience can become overwhelming, but they view *"showing up"* as a core aspect of credibility.

Several interviewees had to develop strict boundaries to respond to *"toxic"* or *"rabid and horrible and abusive"* interactions online. One person had been the victim of a mass reporting campaign on social media, which left them cautious about sharing too much personal information. Two others set strict limits on what they answer and how much time they spend on it. This is necessary for their mental health and well-being:

> *"It's really important when you're working in algorithmically charged online environments to get outside and just remember that most people are still normal and don't behave like they're on TikTok all the time."*

Even when the interactions are positive, the volume can be overwhelming. As one interviewee noted, *"I'm trying to stay in touch with people across about 10 different platforms ... I simply cannot keep up with all of that and I am constantly apologizing and I realize that there is the risk of relationship breakdown."*

All the same, South African interviewees put a lot of emphasis on *"showing up."* For many, their work and credibility is fundamentally relationship-based, and it isn't possible to build

and maintain those relationships without being accessible. One interviewee described finding value in events where *"you get to speak to the people and you tell them, 'Look here, this work that we are doing is not funded by the government' ... [which] adds a bit more of a real authenticity to the work that we do."* Other forms of showing up include in-person conversation, especially around sensitive topics, or answering every email and DM they receive, often at length. As one interviewee said, *"It's not a situation where I can establish credibility from on high ... so it was always going to be about getting on the ground with people and getting into the nuance and the details."* Showing up may be particularly important in the context of unequal power relationships, like one interviewee who makes a standard practice of bringing reporting back to the affected communities. As they explained, *"you have to not just pay lip service to a more ethical way of being but actually also do it"* to maintain credibility in marginalized communities, especially as an outsider.

Interviewees also aim to build audience trust through traditional journalistic authority — especially through a rigorous process of sourcing, verification and fact-checking.

Interviewees frequently cited traditional journalistic practices and ethics as a way to build credibility. By far the most common practices cited were rigor in sourcing and verification, among both former journalists and those with no journalism experience. If they make mistakes, interviewees said, audiences will find someone else who does a better job. In many cases, that means not just fact-checking but sharing exactly which sources they use. As one interviewee explained it, the alternative is *"risking publishing something that may or may not be true. Do you want to risk your reputation on something like that?"* While the details of sourcing and verification practices were outside the scope of interviews, it is clear that interviewees prioritize rigor and fact-checking and view it as a way to build credibility with their audience, whether they are doing original reporting or curating content from other sources.

This type of rigor is clearly important in South Africa, where some interviewees see the country as *"uniquely vulnerable to fake news and bot-led disinformation networks."* Although South Africa has an established and functioning free press, the country, like others in the region and beyond, has been inundated with online disinformation campaigns from domestic and international actors, increasing concerns about information integrity.

Deep dive: With credibility comes a sense of responsibility.

Among the interviewees who emphasized rigor, several also described audience trust as akin to an obligation. They feel responsible for ensuring their audiences are not misinformed, and expressed concern about the ease with which false information can spread. As one of them put it, *"I do also worry that in a world of tech platforms and algorithms that if the content is just appearing out of context, people watch it and they*

don't think, 'where is this from and is this information reliable?' and then they share it and then it's like a falsehood that gets kind of propagated." This worry is not limited to the online space; another interviewee observed that some people take advantage of the secondhand credibility that comes with legacy media: "*If a media house gives us a platform to speak, they assume that we are an informed expert … they're endorsing us and they're trusting us.*" This person was frustrated with ill-informed pieces they had seen published.

In some cases, this profound sense of responsibility is a response to audience habits. One interviewee with a particularly loyal following said:

> *"I regret this, but I fully, fully understand that some people go to me for all their news … They give me 40 minutes a day and they basically read nothing else. And I understand the sense of responsibility and I often go on the show and once a week I'll say, 'Guys, Read these 10 channels, read these 10 newspapers. It can't just be me, please.' But I understand that many people largely experience the world through me."*

From the interviewees' point of view, financial and editorial independence, including transparency about funding, are another key facet of traditional journalistic ethics. These are particularly important to interviewees who cover commercial enterprises. As one of them said, "*[covered businesses] cannot own us and they cannot buy us.*" This person described a no-exceptions advertising and corrections policy, which they instituted to indicate a strong stance against financial or legal pressure. Another interviewee avoids collaboration because "*I was stung a few times by folks who had a real political agenda and would try and use me to reinforce their political agenda.*" Working alone makes it possible to maintain their independence.

Because ethics are so important, at least one interviewee voluntarily opened themself up to external scrutiny. This person chose to register with the South African Press Council so that they are held to the same standards as legacy outlets and can receive official complaints.

What the U.S. can learn from South Africa

South African interviewees have a clearer and more sophisticated sense of their audiences, while U.S. interviewees' knowledge is somewhat more vague. U.S. indie info providers may find it helpful to triangulate between a broader range of data sources, including overall audience metrics, article-by-article metrics and audience feedback. Synthesizing across these sources can help indie info providers to draw a picture that includes both demographics and specific interests and help them respond to both.

Distribution Platforms

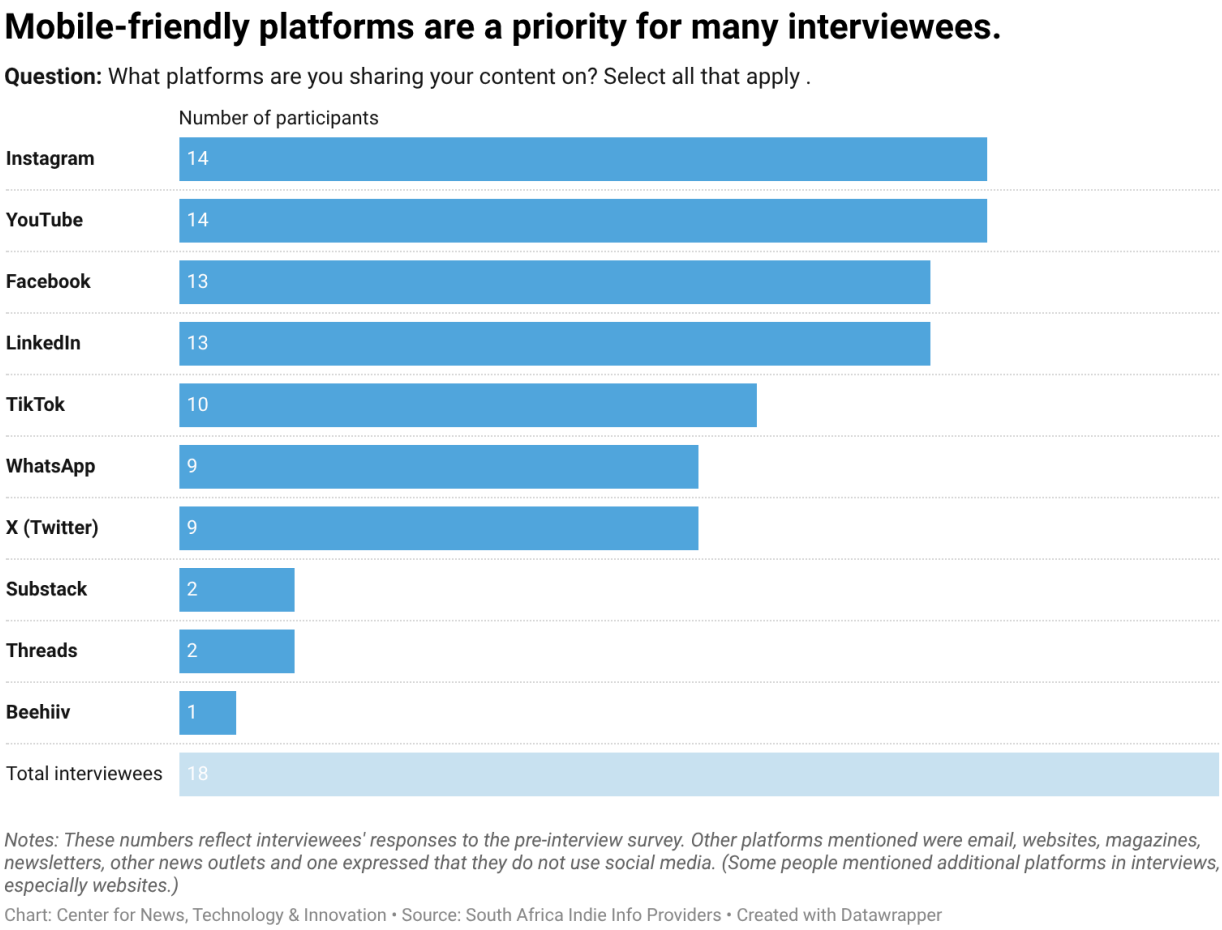
They are prioritizing social media distribution platforms despite structural challenges.

South Africa is a mobile-first market, with studies finding 67% of surveyed English-speaking news consumers accessing news via smartphones and 98.2% of surveyed internet users active on social media. The most-used platforms are TikTok and the Meta platforms (WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram and Messenger), with LinkedIn and X also reaching at least half of internet users.

These platforms all make it possible for indie info providers to reach large audiences even without institutional backing. At the same time, social media platforms act as gatekeepers, restricting access to audience data and controlling content visibility. Like legacy journalism outlets, indie info providers rely on global distribution platforms to share their content. Indie info providers are tied to, and often financially dependent on, platforms operating with opaque algorithms. The unpredictability of these systems makes it difficult for indie info providers to build a stable, reliable income. Moreover, studies show that content moderation frequently disproportionately impacts Global Majority countries, especially when content is not in English or addresses sensitive political topics. While these concerns are not unique to indie info providers or to South Africa, interviewees said that these dynamics impact their work directly.

South African indie info providers predominantly use mobile-friendly platforms, reflecting the country's high smartphone adoption and social media use.

Interviewees reported they use YouTube, Instagram, Facebook and LinkedIn the most. This distribution largely mirrors the most popular social media platforms in South Africa more broadly. Newsletter platforms such as Substack and Beehiiv, often designed with computer users in mind, were only mentioned by three interviewees. (In contrast, nearly all U.S. interviewees use at least one of these platforms.)



Nearly all interviewees do have websites, but they serve as a primary distribution platform for only a few. For most, websites function more like a portfolio, offering an archive, a source of credibility or a booking page. This is especially true for those who do a lot of freelance work for other outlets.

The higher mobile use and lower laptop and personal computer use impacts which platforms indie info providers prioritize. Not only do South Africans actively use video-first formats for entertainment, they also use them to follow news. A 2025 study found that 42% of the sampled South African population reported using YouTube for news — well above the global average of 21%. TikTok is also growing quickly as a news consumption platform: the same survey showed 33% of respondents in South Africa using TikTok for news consumption compared to the global average of 10%.

Deep dive: reflections on individual platforms

Instagram and Facebook are important platforms for participants; for many, it is almost a given that they are on them. Studies show high usage of these platforms, with 88.6% of South African internet users on Facebook and 71.4% on Instagram.

YouTube is an important platform for many interviewees, especially those with long-form video content. As one described it, *"Look, it's got its flaws, but [YouTube] is a system that was built with video in mind ... It's designed for longer viewing, which works well for our format."*

LinkedIn is an important platform for those with a specialized or professional audience.

TikTok is a relative bright spot as multiple interviewees reported their accounts were doing well on the platform. This reflects multiple studies that indicate that TikTok is seeing steady growth among South African users.

For many interviewees, WhatsApp is an essential app to connect with their audiences. One interviewee shares a digital newspaper via the app and uses a WhatsApp channel to stay connected with their audience. WhatsApp is indeed one of the primary communication apps used in South Africa, with 93.9% of internet users on it.

X (formerly Twitter) is an important platform for many interviewees, although several expressed discontent over changes in the platform. As one interviewee said, *"I personally built my brand on Twitter right before it became this complete swamp ... what is my luck that that is the one platform that has gotten so trashed?"*

For some, navigating social media algorithms and rapidly changing technology reinforces the overall uncertainty of their chosen career.

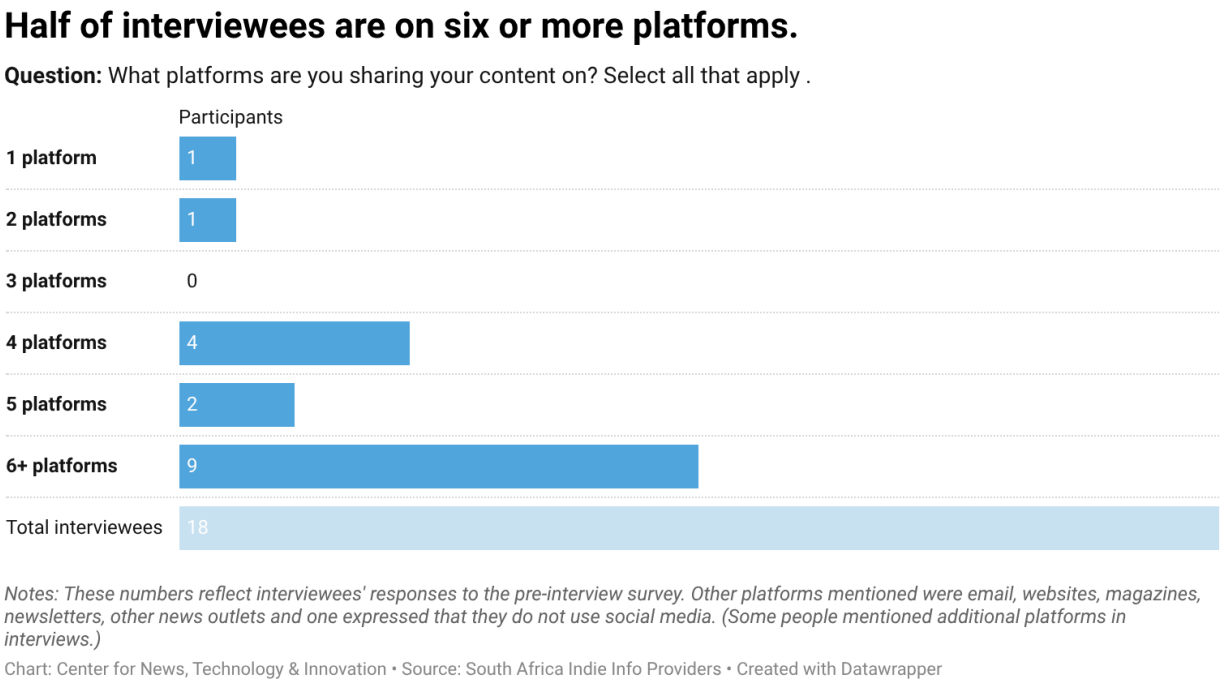
Many interviewees feel ill-equipped to handle social media. For some, relying on the platforms feels especially risky. They described algorithms as invisible gatekeepers, such that *"you think that you're having an influence over what you're saying and how you're reaching people, but algorithms are having a lot more influence than you are."* For some interviewees, the lack of transparency of the most popular platforms is a source of stress. They described the experience as putting faith in a technology that felt fundamentally unknowable. Memorably, one interviewee described it this way:

> *"Hopefully, the cold clinical eye of the algorithm sees you and then pushes you to the top of the list, but you just don't know."*

The rapid pace of technological change can be an additional source of uncertainty. *"At my age, I wouldn't describe myself as being well prepared for the social media array,"* one interviewee said. *"I mean, I think I'm reasonably competent now from a technological point of view ... I'm getting better at it, but I wasn't prepared for it."* On the other hand, at least one interviewee finds technical change a helpful way to improve their professional skills. Not only do they feel prepared, but they said learning how to hook people quickly has improved their journalism.

To offset risk from unpredictable algorithms, interviewees use multiple platforms.

Half of the South African interviewees manage a presence on six or more platforms. Doing so requires a significant time commitment, as they frequently tailor content to suit specific formats and audiences.



For example, one interviewee said they will adapt catchy soundbites from their podcast for different channels while maintaining a consistent brand identity. While interviewees noted that text content can remain largely similar across platforms, images and video require a more specialized approach because each platform prioritizes different types of content.

For a small number of interviewees, the ultimate goal across these platforms is to drive traffic back to their main website. Websites are not just a repository of credibility for these info providers; they are also a source of direct revenue through advertising and sponsorships. As one interviewee explained, the website *"gives us that validity to, 'Tada! Look what we did!'"* even though social media platforms are *"where the eyes are."*

For many interviewees, it is clear which platforms are performing best, but specific factors driving the differences remain unknown. For example, one interviewee noted they were pleased that Instagram had recently begun distributing their content more widely, but did not know why. Another interviewee saw their content performing consistently across most platforms, but described YouTube as an *"anomaly"* for audience engagement.

Interviewees also raised concerns about unpredictability within platforms, not just across them. For example, one interviewee described how videos might perform well on Facebook one day, but photos or text generated more engagement the next. These engagement changes seem to depend on the time of day or day of the week when content was posted, rather than on any changes to the content itself.

Several interviewees called out external private ownership of the platforms as a factor contributing to uncertainty about algorithms and monetization. They don't want to *"build on rented land"* or "*move from TikTok to another platform owned by someone.*" Moreover, they see their motivation — providing high-quality information — as inconsistent with the motivations driving major platform companies:

> "It's very challenging to work in an environment where the algorithms are so opaque, and we know big tech is not necessarily there about helping information integrity but more about engagement."

Instead, being on multiple platforms is a strategy to lower this risk. *"You've got to exist on every single platform equally if you can"* to weather the storms of unpredictability. Moreover, the unpredictability of platforms is not just an indie info provider problem. The impact of platforms in the information space is widespread, and legacy news outlets have also become reliant on traffic from social media platforms.

Interviewees report experiencing shadowbanning and overmoderation.

Interviewees described facing content deletion and shadowbanning, often triggered by specific topics. They have seen some platforms differentially delete viewpoints that are widely held in South Africa, which may be related to the fact that none of the major platforms are headquartered there. Among other topics, interviewees said that content about Gaza had been deleted on multiple platforms. While South Africa officially recognizes a genocide in Palestine, the issue is deeply polarizing in the U.S., where many of these platforms are based. Some reports suggest related content is being suppressed on multiple platforms, though whether this affects all viewpoints equally remains up for debate. Similarly, one interviewee noted that shadowbanning was common for users who post anything on X (Twitter) that is critical of owner Elon Musk or his conspiracy theories, a claim supported by multiple studies.

In addition, some interviewees reported experiencing over-moderation. For example, one interviewee received *"a very stern letter saying that I was engaging in fake news"* after posting a piece of fiction about mermaids.

These challenges are not unique to South Africa: content moderation norms are typically developed in a single country for a single language and particular cultural context, then applied universally — even though discourse norms are always culturally situated.

For indie info providers, this landscape creates a precarious situation. Visibility is essential for those who depend on income generated through ad revenue or event attendance, yet platforms rarely explain how their algorithms work, leaving creators to guess which words or topics might trigger a shadowban from one day to the next. To stay visible and financially afloat, they may feel pressured to avoid certain subjects or soften their coverage, undermining their independence.

Deep dive: Bad experiences online can be further compounded by misogyny and racism.

South African indie info providers reported facing significant hostility online, especially when addressing sensitive topics like racism, gender-based violence and politics. One interviewee reported being *"mass-reported"* across multiple accounts after sharing a story about racism in schools. Instead of receiving support from the platform, they were issued a content warning. This interviewee faced race- and gender-based abuse, leading them to adopt a strict blocking policy. They noted that, *"When you're a woman online saying what you think, men become rabid and horrible and abusive just in general."* They were not the only interviewee to experience under-moderation; someone else walked away from a relatively large following on X because *"I would repeatedly flag blatantly racist things, blatantly sexist and nothing would happen."*

Interactions with viewers often turn toxic, particularly in the political sphere. One participant said they handle this by only responding to questions they feel are valid, while another highlighted the *"vitriolic"* nature of political commentary. This interviewee observed that the intense passion and threats of violence found online rarely manifest in offline public spaces. This issue reflects the deep political divisions within South Africa, which are mirrored in the comment sections of the indie info providers' content.

What the U.S. can learn from South Africa

In both countries, interviewees manage risk and dependency by maintaining a presence on multiple platforms. South African interviewees rely primarily on mobile-first social platforms, while U.S. interviewees are more likely to prioritize newsletters and websites where they have more direct access to their audiences. These differences reflect the countries' respective infrastructure as well as distinct barriers to monetization. In both cases, interviewees are thinking strategically about who they want to reach and where to find them.

Making Money

They lean into events and sponsorships as a primary revenue stream; for many, that still doesn't pay the bills.

Like many countries, South Africa has faced multiple media crises in recent decades, resulting in "an increasingly constrained business environment." Larger media organizations had intermittently paused hiring journalists before COVID-19, and the pandemic exacerbated this trend. Major publishers began to cut staff in larger swaths, publications were closed, and of those who did not lose their jobs, many saw their salaries cut. As a result, many journalists have turned to freelance opportunities and short-term contracts to stay in the industry. In 2026, South Africa began taxing content creator income, which adds even more complexity to making a living as a journalist. Given this overall financial uncertainty, it is critical to understand whether, and how, indie info providers are making money.

Making a living is one of the biggest challenges for South African interviewees.

More than half of our interviewees highlighted monetization as one of their biggest challenges. *"How do we keep this afloat?"* one interviewee asked. Others described the *"uncertainty and financial insecurity of this kind of work"* as stressful even for those who are doing relatively well. Several interviewees said that it is harder to monetize in South Africa than elsewhere, while others see the problem as field-wide, rather than tied to any particular location.

In the pre-interview survey, just four of 18 participants said they were fully able to support their lifestyle, while six said they were not able to do that at all. The other eight fell in between.

South African interviewees were divided roughly equally between those who struggled to articulate goals, those who had goals but not yet clear plans, and those who had a fully articulated strategy for making a living.

> ### Some take a "build it and they will come" approach to business, driven by passion for their work, and view profit as a distraction, if not a necessary evil.

Many South African interviewees contrasted the aspects of the job they love — creating content or doing journalism — with aspects that interest them less, specifically strategy and business operations. *"I'm not there to build the brand, I'm not there to do a PR job for them. I'm there to do good journalism,"* one interviewee said of their relationship with sponsors. Some interviewees even described the two as mutually exclusive. As one put it, *"The problem with podcasters generally is they think it's a business model and it's not. It's an obsessive model. It's almost religious."* This person's business strategy and advice

amounted to "*build it and they will come,*" although industry publications have long been skeptical of this approach. Several interviewees were even more explicit in endorsing this logic, like one person who said that *"my strategy is around creating content that will be readable."*

Rejecting capitalism: mutual aid as a business model

One small group of interviewees — all of whom are Rastafarians providing content about Rastafarianism — expressed explicitly anticapitalist motivations and goals. When asked about business strategy, these three interviewees spoke about working within interpersonal networks in a model more akin to mutual aid than to a product. One of them maintains a mental list of prices for different services that *"is mapped out even though it's not documented or it's not put in a paper or a business card."* They know the value of their work but prefer to navigate pricing person-to-person. For donations, another person said, *"We can go to the aunties, people in your immediate family, your immediate friend group."* This person's sights are primarily on their immediate community as both an audience and a source of revenue. This vision was very different from those of other interviewees, who reach (or at least aspire to reach) an audience beyond their individual networks.

> **Those who use more strategic approaches rely on intentionally diversified forms of revenue to promote their independence — and they are largely more financially successful.**

The interviewees with the most strategic approaches have diversified their revenue streams, and do it thoughtfully. They have learned which forms of revenue work well for them and which aren't worth the time and effort. In some cases, they work backwards from their needs and rely on different sources of income to pay for different expenses. One person explained their logic in detail: "*We need to make this many shows a month at this level of views to get this amount of YouTube ad revenue to pay one sum. And then, if I'm going to pay another salary, we need to get a brand partnership deal...*" Some interviewees have diversified even within a single form of revenue: one balances three different forms of sponsorship (direct, a separate advertorial platform that subsidizes the editorial platform, and premium corporate subscriptions), and another is *"donor and philanthropy funded"* but makes a point of cultivating different types of funders for different types of work.

Many South African interviewees sponsor their own work through independent businesses or day jobs.

At least seven of the 18 interviewees described serving as their own sponsors, funding their indie brand directly. Three of them have a for-profit arm that creates content or runs events on a work-for-hire basis, while their journalism is produced under a non-profit entity. The others work in largely unrelated fields. In most cases, the subsidizing branch of the business is legally separated — like the person who said they *"had to start another business to fund"* their journalism or the person who runs *"just a boring old business that makes me money."*

Several interviewees had gone to extreme lengths to subsidize their indie brands, although they were still trying to make the work pay for itself. One of them had built a business in a different sector to underwrite this work. Instead of *"skiing holidays, I put all the profit into this loss-making entity called journalism that no one can seem to monetize unless you're, like, Financial Times or New York Times,"* they said. Another person had given up many middle-class creature comforts to keep doing this work, selling their house to escape debt. All the same, they said, "*I love what I do. I don't need to own a house or have a retirement plan.*" Journalism, in the view of these interviewees, is fundamentally not a profitable enterprise.

Still, almost all of these interviewees want to make their journalism directly profitable, or at least *"to break even without my [other] business involvement."* Just one interviewee said they appreciated the freedom that self-funding provides, noting that "*where you are professionally doesn't determine where you are socially, in real life.*"

Almost none of the interviewees is paid directly to write or produce video; instead, they subsidize their content through a range of ancillary activities.

As a central component of many interviewees' business models, events serve to build credibility, expand audiences and generate revenue.

About half of the interviewees see events, community connections or both as a key element of their business models. For some, events are another way to reach their audience, show up and build a grassroots sense of community (see "credibility"). For others, events feel like a side business rather than an integral component of the work. There is no single model for events: some indie info providers stage live versions of their online content in theaters, while others host exclusive industry awards or participatory online webinars. The three Rastafarian interviewees raise money through artistic performances and community festivals; all three described themselves expansively as artists and activists in addition to journalists or creators.

Two groups of interviewees are particularly financially successful with in-person events: B2B info providers and satirists. For the B2B providers, trade shows, lecture series and awards raise their profile in the field. At the same time, these events bring in sponsorships

and partnerships within their industry that could support the media production work. The satirists have large followings, which means they can rely on external speaking gigs as well as ticket sales from their own events.

In addition to in-person events, two interviewees are exploring ways to monetize online member communities. These two said their audiences have shared values, professional identities or both, so they want to offer paid access to other audience members for networking and joint problem solving.

For the most part, South African interviewees don't see subscriptions or memberships as viable.

Most South African interviewees agree that subscriptions and memberships are not an effective business model. Several of them tried to build a product based on user revenue and were unable to. A few think they may be able to succeed once they have a larger audience. *"But why would someone subscribe to me?"* one asked, adding, *"To get the why, I need to first build a credible reputation."* Many interviewees said that South Africans simply aren't willing to pay for news or content, which is consistent with a study of 48,000 South Africans that showed just 5% paid for news. The one interviewee who receives consistent donations has an audience that's mostly based in the U.S. For at least one interviewee, avoiding direct user revenue is a matter of mission: *"I feel strongly about keeping it free because ... the whole reason I started it was, people don't follow the news and are excluded from the news."* That is, South Africans may be unable to pay, not just unwilling to pay.

Even if direct user revenue were a viable business model, interviewees simply aren't comfortable asking for individual donations. They describe it as *"embarrassing"* and *"tasteless."*

Advertising is less common than sponsorship, advertorial and "spon-con."

True advertisements are less common than advertorials and sponsored content, though no consistent trend emerged regarding which indie info providers found this strategy effective. For example, a political comedian, a B2B publisher, a consumer product reporter and a hyperlocal brand all reported that advertorials and sponsored content are among their largest sources of revenue. One of them first realized their indie brand could be a full-time job *"when I got to a level on TikTok when very large brands were saying, 'Hey, can you make a video for us?'"*

This source of revenue may become tenuous due to increasing competition. Two of the interviewees who have been succeeding in generating revenue said they are moving into events because they noticed sponsorship starting to wane. Another noted that there are seasonal trends in advertising, making consistent revenue a challenge.

Even so, some indie info providers who have not yet been successful in making money in this area are exploring what it would mean for advertisements to become *"an actual meaningful income stream."* For now, advertisements and sponsorships are one-off deals when someone approaches them or responds to their outreach.

Grants are important sources of income for many of the indie info providers, but they are not seen as reliable.

For many, grants and donations are important sources of income. For some, the grants help with core funding and others have specific projects, maybe focused on a specific event or improving a specific capability. One interviewee had set up their indie info project as a nonprofit and is reliant almost exclusively on donations and philanthropy, but is actively working to expand commercial revenue and has hired a salesperson to help improve revenue from commercial sponsorships.

Another interviewee is reliant on a university fellowship and a foundation grant to continue their work. They explained that they tried to utilize social media and continue to pitch their work to outlets to gain an audience, but they said, *"I know that at least I've got funding until the end of 2027, and I'm really sure that the project will have gotten enough momentum that I might be able to get other funders on board so that I could keep going."*

For some, their grant applications result in funding every once in a while, but they are not a source they can rely on. As one explained it, *"Randomly over the years, [I] have applied for grants. Unsuccessfully, mostly. I've had a few successful grants, but I know my business model needs to be part marketing budgets, part grant funding."* For another, government grants are on the top of their mind, but remain elusive. They said, *"So if we are doing the government's work without the funding, we would like the government to give us our funds that we are doing because it's their work."* Grants are an important part of many interviewees' bottom lines, but how consistent they are as a funding source varies greatly from person to person.

South African interviewees are highly attuned to the ethical implications of their business models, especially if they rely on sponsors and advertisers.

Several interviewees highlighted the importance of finding *"morally acceptable"* sponsors and advertisers, raising concerns about conflicts of interest and editorial independence. They vary in the lines they draw, which depend on their audiences and the topics of coverage. Some organizations have *"hard limits,"* ruling out sports betting and online gambling in one case, or fossil fuels, alcohol, weapons and political parties in another. One interviewee rules out very large categories of potential sources of funding like *"large corporates"* because *"it would be a conflict of interest and ethically compromising."* The challenge is not new to the field. As one person pointed out, "*That's always been the awkward position of journalism. It's the only profession that I know of where you're not working for the people who pay your salary. You work for the audience, but it's the*

advertisers that pay your salary or the state or whatever it might be." However, the gap between the two may feel more acute for indie info providers, because the same individuals are involved in both coverage and sponsorship conversations.

Self-sponsoring interviewees are not exempt from these concerns. They are selective about partners and clients, even on the for-profit market and consulting side. In some cases, they choose not to cover particular industries because their for-profit *"sister company"* is too well-connected in those fields.

What the U.S. can learn from South Africa

While memberships and subscriptions are a key pillar for many indie info providers in the U.S., South African interviewees rarely get significant direct reader revenue. Instead, South Africans are much more likely to rely on events, which build community, credibility and audience all at the same time. As online advertising revenue continues to drop globally, U.S. indie info providers may also choose to build revenue via events and other community spaces. Offline experiences may also be less vulnerable to technology shocks and thus a more stable revenue pillar.

Finding Stability

They seek satisfaction and stability in an uneven digital landscape.

For South African indie info providers, entrepreneurship means constantly balancing the drive for growth with the need for personal sustainability. This pressure is so pronounced that in late 2025, organizations like the South African National Editors' Forum (SANEF) began actively urging journalists to prioritize their mental health. While some indie info providers have successfully stabilized their businesses to achieve a manageable work-life balance, many still grapple with the continuous demands of daily operations. Many turn to AI to manage operations, reflecting a broader national trend where AI usage far exceeds global averages — in one survey, 65% of South Africans used it to explore career changes and new ventures — even as creators navigate the cultural biases and connectivity issues inherent in AI applications.

Interviewees are mixed on whether they are professionally happy: They enjoy their work and take great pride in it, but financial uncertainty is taking a toll.

Of the 18 South African interviewees, 12 started their brands before 2020, with at least four of them running their businesses for 10 years or longer. This stage of entrepreneurship is not necessarily easier, but they are proud of what they have accomplished in this time.

For many, the primary source of pride comes from their impact on audiences and other stakeholders. They feel successful when they can *"get someone to change their minds about someone else"* or *"[change] the person who's reading it in some way for the better,"* and they revel in hearing that they have succeeded in doing so. This group includes several who take pride in telling important stories and telling them well, especially when other outlets are not reporting on these topics. Another source of pride is meeting goals they set for themselves, like publishing in a certain outlet or reporting on a certain topic. But this can be a double-edged sword: after meeting their goals, they may be more willing to leave the field. As one of them said, *"I've achieved a lot of the milestones I wanted to achieve and had the experiences and worked with the publications I've wanted to work with and now I'm a little bit, like, 'what now?'"*

When interviewees reflected on their happiness in their roles as indie info providers, they often felt very proud of their work. However, many noted that pride in their work does not make up for a high level of stress, and field-wide financial uncertainty is a major contributor. They feel like they have *"very little control"* over big questions about the future of the field, where *"the returns are diminishing."* In some cases, they're *"exhausted"* from working multiple jobs. Finding financial sustainability to help maintain a

work-life balance feels absolutely necessary, and yet, it remains an existential question. As one interviewee explained,

> *"To survive and to make a life are two different things. But now I feel like I'm still surviving. I'm not making a life. But I need to be in life mode, where I don't stress about money."*

While many interviewees have stabilized their businesses enough to maintain standard working hours, some still struggle with the demands of growth and operations.

Most of the South African interviewees do not work more than an average *"9-to-5"* day. Two of the 18 interviewees described their work as more than full-time, five worked about 30-45 hours a week, three reported working around 10 hours per week and the remainder gave vague answers or none at all.

Many of the interviewees have reached a stage where their work has become more predictable, mirroring studies that show entrepreneurs begin to work more regular hours after their businesses have stabilized. One interviewee told us proudly, *"Today we just agreed on set holidays for the year for the first time ... we now are in an era, we're all in our early 30s or late 20s, where we need to be sustainable and have lives."*

However, multiple interviewees said they felt limited by time to manage all aspects of their business. One said they need to spend more time writing grant applications and another needed to dedicate more time to the *"business"* part of their project, including growth and marketing. Another said it was difficult to spread themselves out across the needs of the newsletter, social media, marketing, operations, sales and everything else required.

Interviewees — and the South African public — are optimistic about using AI to manage newsrooms with limited resources.

For many of the South African interviewees, large language models (LLMs) seem to help them run their newsrooms with limited staff and funds. For example, one interviewee uses an LLM *"as a coworker when I'm doing strategies,"* but specifies *"no writing from AI."* Interviewees described using these tools for a wide range of strategic and editorial tasks, including optimizing headlines for SEO, developing story angles, drafting emails to potential clients, cleaning up scripts before recording their podcast and correcting their English grammar. As one South African interviewee said,

> *"Listen, I want to complain with everybody about AI and how awful it is, but I work alone. I am a one-man team, and it has been an invaluable resource for me."*

High levels of generative AI adoption in South African newsrooms are reflected in public optimism regarding the impact of technology on journalism. According to a 2024 CNTI

survey, at least 75% of South Africans approve of journalists using technology to improve writing, summarize documents, fact-check, translate content and edit images. This positive outlook sets South Africa apart globally. While 46% of South Africans said AI will have a mostly positive impact on reporting, sentiment is significantly lower in the United States (15%) and Australia (18%).

At the same time, new technology's effectiveness can be hindered by cultural biases, linguistic gaps and unreliable rural internet infrastructure.

Although a majority of interviewees are happy with the support they found in AI tools, including LLMs, several interviewees remain skeptical.

Some cite pragmatic and functional challenges, but may be open to using these tools if the quality improves. One of them noted that AI *"is not great at gleaning reputable South African sources for their content, and AI is not particularly good at translation across [12] official South African languages."* Indeed, multiple studies have shown that widely used LLMs have a cultural alignment more closely akin to English-speaking and Protestant European ideologies, and that quality varies widely across languages.

Others are opposed at a more fundamental level. One interviewee compared handing the writing process to AI to *"asking someone to eat my dinner for me."*

Physical infrastructure also presents a major hurdle, as the digital divide frequently dictates if and how technology can be used. As one interviewee explained it, *"One of the major problems is lack of internet access and lack of cell phone coverage. I mean it's incredible. It really shows the rural-urban divide in sub-Saharan Africa."* This interviewee reflected on the reality that 60% of rural South Africans lack a dependable internet connection. They continued, *"How do you keep your business going if you can't send text messages, phone people, or get onto the internet?"*

Interviewees' descriptions of the technology they use reflect a second digital divide: fairly basic hardware, but often quite sophisticated software.

The realities of life in South Africa often impact the technology interviewees use for their projects. Several of them primarily use a smartphone for their work rather than a laptop, and at least two specifically mentioned having better access to newer and higher quality phones than to computers. External peripherals like cameras or microphones are also relatively uncommon.

On the other hand, most use sophisticated software, which is increasingly available for all devices. These include dictation and transcription apps as well as project management tools, image generators like Kling AI and Midjourney, cloud-based servers and others.

Tools mentioned		
Area of work	**Specific task**	**Tools**
Managing workflow	Task & project management	ClickUp, Excel
	Strategy development	LLMs
Research	Managing sources & story fodder	ChatGPT
	Brainstorming story ideas	ChatGPT, Gemini
Production	Dictation or transcription	Fireflies, Heroscribe, LLMs, Otter.ai, Sonix.ai
	Translation	ChatGPT, Gemini
	Graphic design & image/audio/video editing	Ableton Suites, Adobe Audition, Adobe Premier, Audacity, Canva, CapCut, ElevenLabs, Garageband, Premier Pro, Reaper ProTools, Samson video
	Image creation and sourcing images	KlingAI, MidJourney, Nanobanana, Pixabay
	Text editing	ChatGPT, custom GPTs, LLMs, WhatsApp AI
	Cloud services	Apple Cloud, Google Drive, LucidLink
Distribution	Web hosting, newsletter service & CMS	Campaign Monitor, Personal CMS
	Social media syncing & management	Buffer
	Analytics	Google Analytics
Finances	Subscription management	Pipedrive

What the U.S. can learn from South Africa

Where U.S. interviewees are just starting to go solo, South African interviewees have been at it long enough to find some stability. More South African interviewees work a 40-hour week; U.S. interviewees, struggling with burnout and isolation, may find it more sustainable to work set hours.

South African interviewees are also more comfortable making pragmatic choices about technology, such as running sophisticated software on bare-minimum hardware or relying on LLMs even as they raise concerns about the technology. More U.S. interviewees take a purist stance and avoid LLMs, but they might find the work more sustainable if they embrace similar forms of pragmatic compromise.

About This Study

Why we did this

The South African media environment is undergoing a profound transformation. Media crises in recent decades have led to "an increasingly constrained business environment," forcing outlets to rely on freelance journalists and short-term contracts to stay afloat, and leaving many journalists without stable employment. This shift has coincided with a massive migration in audience habits. As a mobile-first country, about seven in 10 (online, English-speaking) South Africans get their news from social media, especially on their smartphones.

Existing research on this trend, especially studies focused on Africa, is sparse. Our project addresses this gap by examining indie info providers in South Africa and exploring how they navigate the landscape, with the aim of supporting a future defined by a plurality of relevant and fact-based news sources.

How we collected our data

In partnership with Code for Africa, CNTI recruited 43 adults in South Africa, 42 of whom met the eligibility criteria to take a screening survey, and chose 18 for a 60- to 90-minute virtual interview. CNTI selected interviewees to represent a range of professional backgrounds. This report is based primarily on insights from the interviews, with data from the survey as a secondary source.

In interviews, we asked participants about their backgrounds and motivations, audience engagement, their relationships with other indie info providers and legacy news outlets, platforms and algorithms, revenue and business strategies, and their view of success and satisfaction with their own work.

We developed codes using a bottom-up and iterative approach. These methods provide richness and depth; however it's not possible to generalize about the frequency of behaviors from these interactions, so we have limited our use of quantitative terms to our interviewees throughout this report.

CNTI research and professional staff prepared this report. This project was made possible by the financial support of the Lenfest Institute and a second anonymous donor.

Recruitment

Using Code for Africa's network and additional snowball sampling, CNTI invited indie info providers to participate in a screening survey focusing on baseline information, such as background, audience size, revenue and platform choice. We used this information to determine eligibility for the interview.

Beyond ensuring that interviewees were focused on providing information (by reviewing their work), we took a maximum variation approach to several variables. We attempted to capture perspectives across a broad range of audience size and revenue amount.

A maximum variation sample is not intended to be representative and cannot speak to the frequency of behaviors or beliefs; instead, it speaks to breadth and variation. We are also aware of several additional limitations of our sample, likely due to the methods: while we offered interviewees their choice of South African languages, all interviewees were English-speaking and largely located in urban areas. Less visible or less prominent indie info providers may also have been unaware of the opportunity or less interested in participating.

The full recruitment questionnaire and topline demographics of our interviewees are available here.

Interview protocol

Our research protocol included six semi-structured modules:

- Background and motivations for their indie info provider project, including prior professional experience and time spent on content creation.
- Audience engagement, including relationships with the audience and audience characteristics.
- Relationships with journalism producers, including newsrooms and other indie info providers.
- Platforms and algorithms, such as which platforms they use and why, content tailoring and performance, and issues with deletion and shadowbanning.
- Revenue and business strategies, including business plans and revenue streams.
- Success and happiness, including overall satisfaction with their indie info provider journey and project.

Researcher positionality

The researchers who designed the protocols, collected the data and analyzed the data are based in the United States. In addition to a relatively high educational attainment, our team as a whole has a strong affinity for and knowledge of journalism. These attitudes may have colored our interactions with the interviewees. All questionnaires, protocols and findings were reviewed and adapted with the support of local partners.

Transcription process

Interviews were conducted with Google Meet, and Google Gemini produced a first transcript. Researchers reviewed each transcript for major errors before coding, and a researcher reviewed all quotations that appear in this report before publication. Each transcript was anonymized before it was imported into Dedoose qualitative analysis software.

Coding and follow-up analysis

The codes were developed with a bottom-up approach as themes emerged in the data. The CNTI team's coding schema focused on the following nine categories:

Background

In this category, codes cover how creator journalists prepared for and entered the work, including the skills they needed, their professional backgrounds and how they set themselves up to succeed. We coded for their reasons for starting, whether they identify as journalists, how prior jobs shaped their readiness and how they acquired the skills they lacked.

Audience

Codes in this section examine the indie info providers' relationships with their audience. We coded for how they think about trust and credibility, how well they can describe who their audience is, how they interact with them and how the broader information environment shapes their content and engagement choices.

Challenges

Codes in this category cover challenges the indie info providers face throughout their projects, including financial pressures, time constraints and mental health struggles.

Technology tools

The codes in this category cover what technology tools indie info providers use to make their work easier.

Professional relationships

Codes that fall under this category cover what relationships the indie info provider had with others in this space and with legacy media. This included employees or contributors they work with on their project.

Platforms

This category examines the relationship between indie info providers and the platforms they use. Codes covered audience data ownership, content tailoring across platforms, variations in content engagement and experiences with content deletion or shadowbanning.

Revenue and business strategies

In this category, codes cover the business elements of the indie info provider's project. This includes their business plans, their revenue streams and if they were funded through other means, such as an unrelated job, savings or spousal income.

Success and happiness

Codes in this category focus on the creator's reflections on the project, such as their level of happiness, how they define success, and changes or different strategies they would use if they were to start the project over again.

Bottom-up themes

After the initial analysis, we added one category. We were struck by how frequently participating indie info providers discussed the lasting impact of apartheid.

After all documents were coded, we reviewed all excerpts with the same code to inductively identify further themes and patterns within each larger category.

How we protected the research data

All identifying information (including consent forms and video recordings of interviews) were saved on a password-protected, encrypted cloud drive that is only authorized to the core research team at CNTI. All interviews were conducted using our team's video conferencing software. Google Gemini was used to create first-draft transcripts; our team uses a workspace account that does not share data or use it for training purposes. Interviewees could opt out of automated transcription, although none did.

Moreover, transcripts and screenshots were anonymized to the extent possible before export for analysis in Dedoose. Information like names and specific locations were redacted, as were photos of individual faces. We present demographic information only in the aggregate (see topline) to prevent anyone from identifying individuals who requested their participation in this project remain anonymous. All individuals acknowledged in this report gave express consent to be acknowledged.

Ethical review

Research plans were reviewed and approved by TERC Institutional Review Board.

Participating Creators

In total, 43 South African indie info providers took our survey, 42 of whom met the eligibility criteria and 18 of them participated in long-form interviews with CNTI. We offered the option of being named or remaining anonymous. Among the people who were interviewed, surveyed or both, 32 opted to be named and are listed below. We thank them and everyone we contacted for their involvement.

Name	Publication
Akashni Ashok Latchanna	Akashni Ashok Latchanna
Nick Dall	Nick Dall
Eleanor Douglas-Meyers	041online
Siphosethu Dyonasi	Siphosethu Dyonasi (@Umhambeliwendlela) • Facebook
Nicole Engelbrecht	True Crime South Africa
Stacey Fru	AfroStory President (@staceyfru) · Sandton
Nathan Geffen	GroundUp
Nobesuthu Hejana	eNCA
Stephen Horn	Politically Aweh
Thurston Jacobs	Thurston Jacobs
Leonie Joubert	Story Ark
Lawrence Jugmohan	Digital Street
Mark Keohane	KEO.co.za
Mlungisi Khumalo	Lifestyle & Tech
Tankiso Komane	NOWinSA
Desmond Latham	History of South Africa
Dylan Love	Dylan Love (@ph_journals)
Chante Matthews	Chante Matthews

Jacqueline May	Twyg
Bruce Middleton	Bruce Middleton
Zanele Mji	Zanele Mji
Michael Morris	South African Institute of Race Relations
Rasmus Nielsen Bitsch	Rasmus Nielsen Bitsch
Steuart Pennington	SA Good News
Verashni Pillay	Explain
Johann Pretorius	Farming Portal
Hein Scheepers	Ras Hein Scheepers
Steven Sidley	Steven Boykey Sidley
Enock Sithole	Climate Current
Giulietta Talevi	Currency News
Scott Timcke	The Social Question
Brett Venter	Stuff South Africa

Screening Survey & Topline Data

Using Code for Africa's network, CfA and CNTI invited indie info providers to participate in a screening survey covering basic background information, audience size, revenue and platform choice. This survey also helped determine eligibility for follow-up interviews. In total, 43 adults took the survey, 42 of whom met the eligibility criteria. (The one who did not meet the criteria was neither South African-based nor working for a primarily South African audience.) Although this report draws primarily on insights from the interviews, the topline survey data is included below as a secondary source.

1. **What title do you use when you talk about your work? [open ended]**

2. **Do you consider yourself a journalist? - Selected Choice**

	Interviewed	**Total surveyed**
Yes	11	27
No	0	4
It's complicated	7	11
Total	18	42

3. **What field or sector were you working in when you started creating content? [open ended]**

4. **What was your job title when you started creating content? [open ended]**

5. **When did you launch your content creation venture?**

	Interviewed	Total surveyed
Before 2020	12	29
2020	0	0
2021	0	1
2022	2	3
2023	3	4
2024	1	4
January to June 2025	0	0
Since July 2025	0	1
Total	18	42

6. **What topic(s) do you cover? [open-ended]**

7. **What platforms are you sharing your content on? Select all that apply**

	Interviewed	**Total surveyed**
Beehiiv	1	1
Facebook	13	31
Ghost		-
Instagram	14	29
LinkedIn	13	28
Substack	2	6
Telegram		2
Threads	2	6
TikTok	10	18
Twitch	-	-
WeChat	-	-
WhatsApp	9	20
X (Twitter)	9	21
YouTube	14	23
Other	8	16

8. **Who do you see as your primary audience(s)? [open-ended]**

9. **Approximately how many total followers do you have across platforms?**

	Interviewed	**Total surveyed**
No answer	1	3
Less than 25k	6	19
25k-100k	8	14
100k-500k	0	3
500k-1 million	1	1
Over 1 million	2	2
Total	18	42

10. **What other content creators do you work directly with, if any? [open-ended]**

11. **What journalism organisations do you work directly with, if any? [open-ended]**

12. **Are you able to support your lifestyle with your content creation work?**

	Interviewed	**Total**
I am not trying to monetize my work	1	4
Not at all	5	9
Yes, partially	8	14
Yes, fully	4	15
Total	18	42

13. What are your revenue streams for your content creation work? Please select all that apply.

	Interviewed	Total
Advertisements	8	19
Brand partnerships or sponsorships	11	20
Subscriptions	2	8
Memberships or donations	7	9
Freelance or contract production work (e.g. video, copywriting, PR)	10	18
Content-related service or consulting (e.g. financial advice, personal styling)	6	10
Other	4	9

14. Which revenue stream is currently most profitable? [open-ended]

15. What is your gender? - Selected Choice

	Interviewed	Total surveyed
Woman	6	14
Man	11	27
Choose not to respond	1	1
Total	18	42