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Exploring factors leading to journalists leaving the profession in South Africa

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Title: Exploring factors leading to journalists leaving the profession in South Africa.

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A research project submitted to the Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in fulfilment of the requirements for a master's degree in journalism and media studies.

Declaration

I declare that this research report is my unaided work. It is being submitted as part of the requirements to complete a Master of Journalism and Media Studies degree at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at any other University.



Mampholodi Glorious Musi

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Abstract

This research looks into factors that lead journalists in South Africa to leave the profession to pursue other careers. Some journalists who have been bringing news to South Africans have been seen taking on jobs such as spokespersons and other roles in government and the private sector. This adds to the loss of skills newsrooms suffer due to the widespread retrenchments in the sector. A qualitative research method was used to gather data from 20 former print and broadcast journalists across South Africa, who shared their experiences in in-depth semi-structured interviews. The interviews were conducted over Zoom video link with journalists who left the profession between 2018 and 2023. This period covers the period before the Covid-19 pandemic, which has been a catalyst for some of the changes in the media landscape and the period post-pandemic. Using Herzberg's two-factor theory of motivation, this study reveals that the lack of financial resources in many media houses has created a toxic mix that is pushing journalists out of the jobs they love, mainly because of poor salaries, added work responsibilities that are not matched with compensation, job insecurity, a toxic work environment, poor work-life balance, and unethical management. In general, the former journalists still love journalism but are moving away from the working conditions they were subjected to. Most journalists who have left the profession have more than 10 years of experience in the field. They take with them the skills and institutional memory built over the years – much to the detriment of the society they serve. Many say they are using the skills they have gathered in journalism to build new careers in the private sector corporate communications field and government, while others are running their businesses.

Keywords: Journalism, Journalism profession, Journalists, South Africa, South African media, News

1. Section 1: Introduction

This study aimed to determine the reasons why South African journalists switch careers. There has been a trend where journalists have left the profession to join other sectors. Some of these are experienced journalists and their departure from the profession has created several problems. Experienced journalists leaving the profession weaken the media's role in a democracy. The media plays the role of holding those in power accountable. The loss of skills in newsrooms deprives them of valuable knowledge and expertise that have been honed over the years. Several experienced journalists have left the profession to pursue careers as spokespeople in the private and public sectors, as public relations officers, or pursue other careers outside journalism.

A sample of 20 former journalists who have worked in print and broadcast newsrooms was interviewed to find out why they decided to leave journalism. The former journalists are of different ages, races, and genders and are located in different South African provinces. They have varying years of experience in journalism; before leaving the profession, they occupied various positions and had varied levels of seniority in several newsrooms.

The study found that the main reasons for leaving journalism have to do with poor remuneration, lack of career growth prospects, lack of work-life balance, a toxic work environment, poor management, and job insecurity.

Some 95% of the former journalists who participated in the study were unhappy with their levels of remuneration. Some stated that, over the years, they did not receive inflation-related adjustments in their pay. The Covid-19 pandemic made matters worse with many in the print sector saying they had to take pay cuts of as much as 40% as newspaper circulations declined due to lockdowns that were imposed to curb the spread of the virus. Some said their salaries were never returned to pre-pandemic levels after the pandemic had ended, while others stated that they never received salary increases for years following the pandemic. The poor pay progression led to many deciding to leave the profession to find opportunities that would make them financially stable.

The lack of career growth prospects was stated by 85% of the participants as another reason that led them to leave journalism. Many stated that there were no clear career development paths in their newsrooms. Some decried unfair promotion policies, while others, especially those at the head offices of companies seemingly get more opportunities. Some said people stayed in positions for too long, which limited promotion opportunities for others.

The journalism profession has become precarious with 65% of participants saying they felt insecure in their jobs. The widespread retrenchments in the industry have left many, especially from the print sector, saying there was no job security. Many said they had been through several rounds of retrenchments. Sixty per cent of the participants felt unhappy with management in their newsrooms. Some said they had a management that had no clue about what they were doing, either because management did not have a journalism background or they got promoted to management but lacked management experience.

Poor work-life balance is also a major factor for many. The job cuts in many newsrooms and posts not being filled, means the remaining staff have to take on more responsibilities. The added responsibilities are not matched with compensation. The changes in news consumption patterns also mean journalists now have the responsibility to adjust news content to various online mediums, including social media.

This study concludes that the main reason South African journalists leave the profession is because of poor remuneration and poor working conditions. The financial challenges that newsrooms face are the root cause of the crises journalism is experiencing. The inability of newsrooms to find suitable business models that will generate revenue to sustain operations presents a threat to the existence of many newsrooms.

This study therefore makes the following recommendations:

- Newsrooms need to prioritize finding business models that will enable them to generate enough revenue to fund their operations.
- Employees should be a part of decision-making when finding solutions to the challenges that organizations face, so that solutions are well understood, and accepted and are not seen as being imposed by management.
- Management positions in newsrooms should be filled with people who are familiar with the field of journalism and management training should be provided to journalists who are promoted to management.
- Investment must be made in the training of journalists who are not familiar with the use of new media and technology as well as different social media platforms to ensure they do not get left behind as consumer preferences change.
- Instead of journalists having to chase stories with the added pressure of adopting them to fit different platform styles, there could be personnel that is hired specifically to adopt news copy to different platforms
- There should be clear career development plans in newsrooms.
- Attention should be given to supporting the mental health of journalists.

1.1 Research report structure

Section 1 is the introduction to the study. It provides an executive summary of the study. It provides a summary of the overall paper, looking at the purpose of the study, the methodology employed, and the findings and gives a summary of the conclusion and recommendations of the study. Section 2 looks at developments in the journalism sector and the general media landscape for the period under review. It looks at economic conditions, the effects of changing consumption preferences, the move to digital platforms, the effects of the old business models no longer working, the impact of Covid-19 on news organizations, the deteriorating working conditions of journalists as well as the increasing precariousness of journalism jobs in South Africa and other countries. The period under review was characterized by widespread retrenchments, especially of senior journalists, and the juniorisation of newsrooms. A subsection looks at the South African economy between the years 2018 and 2023. The weak local economy went into a recession before Covid-19 arrived on South African shores and went deeper into a recession because of the lockdown implemented to curb the spread of the coronavirus. The section explores also the impact that Covid-19 had on news media operations and the aftermath of the pandemic. The period was marred with newspaper closures worldwide as they buckled under economic pressure. Job cuts were the order of the day as companies restructured their operations to try and stay afloat. Many media houses have transitioned to online platforms to keep up with the changing preferences of consumers.

Section 3 is the literature review which looks at empirical studies locally and internationally on the conditions in journalism, job losses, uncertainty that came with that, the effects of the economic shocks on the sector, and studies that looked at why journalists in other countries left the profession. Themes that emerge are that there is widespread job insecurity in journalism because of the business models that are failing, leading to massive job losses. While there are different conditions in different countries, the impact of the failing business models is similar across the globe. There is a view that there is a growing need for credible information, but across the board, advertising revenue does not follow. This leads to media houses trying out various other business models to try and sustain their businesses, but revenue streams are not as robust as in the olden days with advertising revenue. Some have put up paywalls while others have gone the subscription route. Overall, more media houses have moved online, and they are also on social media. Globally, media workers are complaining of long work hours, additional uncompensated work, and the precariousness of

journalism work. The effects of the disruption in journalism have largely impacted print media, more than electronic media. The literature review also delves into the new business models of media houses. It looks at the effects of the adoption of paywalls and subscription models. It touches on the pros and cons of such subscription models. It also looks at the impact of the commercialization of news on credibility. The lack of resources and news organisations striving to survive raises flags in terms of risks of vulnerability to commercial and political influences. There is also a look at the challenge of the juniorisation of newsrooms on the back of financial difficulties. It looks at the impact juniorisation has on product quality and the lack of skills transfers in newsrooms. This subsection also explores the impact of the loss of skills in the form of experienced journalists on the role of journalism in society.

South Africa is a maturing democracy, with challenges of corruption, and an independent and capable media is a necessity. The loss of skilled journalists weakens the ability of the media to play its role in a democracy to hold those in power accountable.

Section 4 looks at the theoretical framework looks at Herzberg's two-factor theory. Herzberg believed that other than money, more factors motivate employees to perform, coming up with two sets of factors, motivation factors and hygiene factors. Section 5, explains that the research method employed for this study is qualitative. In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with 20 South African former journalists from both print and broadcast media over the video link Zoom. This study sheds light on the experiences of former journalists working in different newsrooms between 2018 and 2023, which includes the period when the world suffered the shock of a pandemic. These former journalists left their employment in the newsrooms and are now pursuing different careers. The interviews were transcribed and analysed according to Herzberg (1968)'s two-factor theory. The sampling method used is snowball which involves referrals of possible candidates.

Section 6 tables the findings which in short show that South African journalists leave the profession because of various factors, with poor remuneration being amongst the top factors. Other factors listed as drivers of journalists leaving the profession include the lack of career growth prospects, job insecurity, bad management, and poor work-life balance. Section 7 discusses the findings and implications of the unfavourable working conditions leading to experienced journalists leaving the profession. Section 8 concludes that the factors leading to South African journalists leaving the profession to pursue other careers are poor remuneration, the lack of career growth prospects, job insecurity, bad management, and poor work-life balance. Section 9 states the recommendations of the study.

1.3 Aims and Objectives

This study aims to understand the factors that drive journalists to leave the profession and follow different career paths. It is hoped the findings of this study will be helpful to news organisations wanting to maintain the quality of their product to come up with staff retention policies to curb the loss of skills from the sector. By knowing the main factors leading to job turnover amongst senior journalists, media houses can implement better policies to keep skilled staff satisfied in their roles.

The objective of the research is to contribute to the knowledge base of journalists exiting the profession in favour of other careers. The information uncovered will be helpful to media organisations in their quest to hold on to experienced staff so they can continue to reap the benefits of the investments they make in training them. It will help build functional newsrooms and endeavour towards a happy workplace that would encourage creativity and productivity. It could be helpful to journalists, as well, as they build their careers and in their negotiations for better working conditions. It could also provide a light to young people hoping to pursue careers in journalism to know what to expect.

1.4 Research Question

A research question refers to the question around which the study is centred, and it guides the researcher by "providing a path through the research and writing process" (George Mason University Writing Center 2018, p. 1).

The main research question of this study is:
RQ: What are the main factors that lead South African journalists to leave the profession?

Flowing from the main research question, all participants in the study, all of whom are former journalists, from both print and broadcasting from across South Africa were asked the following questions in their interviews to arrive at the answer to the main research question:

- Tell me a little about yourself – How old are you and what qualifications do you have?

- Why did you choose journalism as a career?
- What kind of journalism did you do?
- How long were you in journalism before you decided to leave?
- How would you describe the years you spent in journalism?
- What are the main factors that led you to decide to leave journalism?
- What would have changed to make you stay in journalism?
- How would you describe your working conditions in your newsroom in terms of your relationship with your colleagues including management?
- Did you think the level of rewards was fair, in terms of salary and other benefits?
- Did you feel you were given enough space/autonomy to do your work as a journalist?
- How did you feel about the prospects of career growth?
- Would you say there was recognition or acknowledgement of the work you put in?
- Would you say you were more positive or pessimistic about your work by the time you decided to leave?
- How did you feel about job security at your place of work?
- What do you do for a living now?
- How do you find your new career choice?

Section 2: Background

The journalism sector has been shedding jobs (Daniels, 2020), amidst the crisis created by failing business models. Many journalists are leaving the profession for good to pursue careers elsewhere. Many of those leaving, spent numerous years in the field perfecting their craft, but the sector is changing on various fronts and seemingly pushing out many senior journalists to the detriment of society. As McChesney (2016, p.128) puts it “journalism is a requirement for a democratic society or a free society; any sort of quality society requires credible, independent, powerful journalism. It is hard to conceive of a society you would want to live in that is journalism-free”. In a young democracy like South Africa, which has already faced huge challenges such as state capture (Ramaphosa, 2022), skilled journalists are

essential to hold those in power accountable. Experienced journalists leaving the profession leave a gap in the effort of thoroughly holding those in power to account. The journalism profession has over the years experienced changes that are driven by digitization, leading to changes in audiences' media consumption patterns, affecting revenue generation and triggering a domino effect kind of disruption, affecting every fabric of the sector. Journalists, as professionals, are caught in the middle. Many are pushed out by struggling media houses, while others are unable to bear the working conditions brought about by the changes and the lack of resources that newsrooms must operate under. Job uncertainty (Rumney, 2022), pay cuts, added responsibilities without compensation, changes in the nature of the job and longer working hours are just some of the challenges journalists are battling (African Media Barometer, 2018). These challenges could not have come at a worse time, in the era of fake news, and internet information overload, making access to credible news more important. Many factors are at play, leading to deteriorating working conditions in newsrooms. Scholars have pointed out that "thousands of journalists have left the news industry over the past decade as shifts in digital platforms, audience attention, and news economics have upended institutional patterns" (Mathews et al., 2023, p. 73).

This study explores the factors that lead journalists in South Africa to leave the profession. The issue is also of concern in other countries. A study conducted in the United States amongst broadcast journalists who left the journalism profession, (Woodruff, 2020) found that the main reasons given by the 12 former journalists he interviewed on what led to them leaving the profession are more work demands and longer hours at work, the inability to attain work-life balance, and the lack of resources as well as poor compensation. Journalists play an important role in society (Woodruff, 2020). "They ensure that citizens make responsible, informed choices rather than acting out of ignorance or misinformation. Second, information serves a checking function by ensuring that elected representatives uphold their oaths of office and carry out the wishes of those who elected them" (Center for Democracy and Governance 1999, p. 3). News organisations need to understand the stroke that breaks the camel's back, leading to experienced, senior journalists leaving the profession. The study will contribute to the policy direction of news organisations, looking at holding on to their experienced staff to continue contributing to quality news production and for media houses to continue to reap the benefits of the years of training invested in senior journalists.

While the troubles in the journalism sector are not a new phenomenon, the advent of the

Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated these challenges (Rumney, 2020). With the urgent need for credible information amidst a crisis, people flocked to online news services as well as broadcast media. The Covid-19 pandemic, in a way, pushed many media houses, especially newspapers, over the edge, worsening the challenges the sector has been facing. "The crisis – complete with lockdowns and other restrictions – has hastened the demise of printed newspapers, further impacting the bottom line for many once proud and independent media companies" (Newman et al., 2021). Daniels (2020) wrote that the journalism sector lost almost half of its workforce between 2010 and 2020. Her report added that many of the journalists who lost their jobs were senior and experienced journalists. "One of the results of the media landscape changing so rapidly and the loss of experienced journalists is that beat journalism is dying" (Daniels 2020, p. 5). The South African National Editors' Forum report on the state of the news media details the difficult times that the industry has endured, especially since the outbreak of Covid-19 (Rumney, 2022). This period saw some newspapers shut down under the pressure of too few resources caused by declining revenue streams and changes in news consumption patterns. Newspapers could not sell hard copies leading to circulation sinking (Rumney, 2022). The report states that during the Covid-19 period, there was growth in the consumption of news from credible news organizations, as there was a need for credible news amidst the uncertainty of the pandemic. Advertising revenue, however, took a knock as the circulation of newspapers dropped and the economy was in a depressed state (Rumney, 2022). With a dip in revenue and changes in news consumption patterns, many news outlets had to move to invest in online presence. Many news organisations had to retrench staff or staff had to take pay cuts (Rumney, 2022). The uncertainty and job insecurity caused by these challenges may have led to journalism jobs being less attractive. In the United States, Ekdale et al. (2015, p. 2) found that the "rapid change in the news industry and the prevalence of layoffs, buyouts, and closings have led many news workers to experience job insecurity and worry about their long-term futures in journalism". This research explores the reasons why journalists have been leaving the profession in South Africa and whether the above challenges could be among the reasons. Woodruff (2020, p. 3) quotes the *Radio Television Digital News Association* as saying the news environment is a "high-stress, fast-paced environment with heavy workloads, limited control and the need to always be on, and these conditions are exacerbated today by an environment that has been generally unfriendly toward journalists". Journalists are usually on duty every day of the week, including some nights and weekends as they must respond to breaking news, and with the limited resources that newsrooms must contend with, the

overtime work that journalists do may not be compensated. The extended hours of work may come at the expense of family time. With the expansion of platforms, especially online, and following recent retrenchments at many news organisations, journalists may be expected to do more with less, providing content to various platforms without adequate compensation. The changes in news consumption patterns have seen newsrooms having to adapt to the changing needs of consumers, creating an online presence. While some journalists may easily adapt to the changing workplace needs, some may struggle, as technology use, for instance, requires new skill sets.

It is therefore important to understand what drives experienced journalists out of the profession, for them to pursue other careers, taking with them years of experience in the field, to the detriment of society at large. While there have been studies locally, such as Daniels (2020) and Rumney (2020) who have looked at the changes in the media and the difficulties that newsrooms are going through, there has been a gap in knowledge of how journalists that are working under these conditions have been impacted by these challenges. The exodus of journalists, particularly senior ones, from the newsroom robs the public of quality news, something that is detrimental to democracy. Institutional knowledge and skills lost to the industry as a result of the said resignations could negatively impact the news organisations themselves in terms of the quality of their content, as well as the public at large. Woodruff (2020, p.5) argues that "the loss of a journalist from a newsroom can have a significant impact, particularly when that journalist takes with them institutional knowledge and a history of the market". As Westlund (2015, p.1) explains, "Hardware and software facilitate not only communication but also the production and consumption of media". The convenience of smartphones that are always within arm's reach has changed how people read their news and shaken newsrooms business models in a way that people no longer wait until the top of the hour to listen to news bulletins to get an update on what is happening, but they find their news on websites, cell-phone applications, and social media. This has meant that news organisations have to move on with the time and cater to their audience. Westlund (2015) argued that the increase in the use of cell phones has affected the business models of news organisations, as well as how they gather and publish news. The changes in consumption have seen newspaper circulations decline over the years, and with that, the levels of advertising, and as a result a drop in revenue. Simon and Graves (2019) found that the year 2018 was tough especially for the print sector, with also the move to digital unable to change its fortunes. These conditions were worsened by Covid-19 that stopped the circulation of newspapers because of the lockdown that restricted movement in the fear of spreading the

virus, leaving many newspapers with no option but to shut their doors for good. Others had to restructure and cut jobs or journalists had to take pay cuts to stay in their jobs (Rumney, 2020). The problems have continued well into 2023 with some newspapers still cutting jobs as they struggle to find sustainable business models. Some have introduced paywalls and other subscription models, but these are said to not be as lucrative as advertising as it's not everyone who can pay for news or is willing to pay for news as there are many other free news services on the internet (Pattabhiramaiah et al., 2019). News organisations are under pressure, and in the process of cutting costs, they are losing some of their senior journalists, impacting the quality of news. This process has also intensified what is termed juniorisation of newsrooms – leaving junior journalists in newsrooms and inexperienced journalists being promoted to higher positions early on in their careers (Steyn & De Beer, 2004). The loss of skills can be read as not only affecting media houses but also society at large, as poor-quality information means society does not get served well-researched, well-contextualized stories. "Journalism can serve democracy by providing political information to help inform voters before they head to the polls, but journalism's role in serving democracy extends beyond this" (Schudson 2013, p. 172).

Given the lack of resources in newsrooms, and journalism being a powerful tool to reach millions of people, Schauseil (2019) believes media could be at risk of being captured by those with resources. "Fertile grounds for corruption may be created through a lack of journalistic training and technical skills, low professional and ethical standards, financial pressures on media outlets and individual journalists, which makes them susceptible to bribes, as well as ownership structures aligned with business interest" (Schauseil 2019, p. 13).

2.1 The economic background for the period under review (2018 – 2023)

The local economy was already struggling with weak growth by 2018. According to Statistics South Africa, the economy grew by 0.8% in 2018 when compared with 2017 (Statistics South Africa, 2019). The National Treasury had expected "GDP growth in 2019 to reach 1.5 %, improving moderately to 2.1 % in 2021" (National Treasury, 2019), but this was not to be, as the economic growth slowed to 0.2%. By the time Covid-19 reached South African shores in 2020, the economy was already weak. The pandemic brought destruction of massive proportions to the local economy due to the measure's government put in place to curb infections. It saw the economy contract by 6.3%. National Treasury noted in the Budget Review of 2021 that "The negative risks to the outlook continue to outweigh the positive,

with new waves of COVID-19 infections and associated disruptions to economic activity posing the most serious risk to growth" (National Treasury, 2021). Four years after the pandemic, economic growth continues to be weak. National Treasury (2023) expected the local economy to grow at 0.8% in 2023 and to grow slightly higher at a meagre 1.4% between 2024 and 2026. Economic recovery has also been stifled by global factors. The Russian war in Ukraine has seen inflation spike globally and South Africa was not spared. This has seen the South African Reserve Bank (2024) raise interest rates in a bid to curb the rising inflation, seeing South Africans suffer high debt repayment levels amidst the high unemployment levels and the weak economy, causing a high cost of living crisis for many (Parsons, 2023). With the high cost of living, it's hard to imagine consumers will be rushing to buy newspapers or subscribe to online news or other media as disposable income is reduced by high inflation and interest rates.

SANEF commissioned a research report on the impact of the pandemic on the sector. Rumney (2020) found that the pandemic devastated the sector leading to closures and massive job losses. "The effect of the lockdown announced on 23 March 2020, and attendant regulations, has had a devastating effect on the established media as this SANEF commissioned research shows with job losses, the closure of print publications and the looming threat of widespread retrenchments" (Rumney 2020, p. 3). He said that despite the growing need for trustworthy news sources during the pandemic, which saw increases in viewership of TV channels and increased traffic to online news services, advertising dried up, adding to the sustainability crisis in newsrooms. "We find that people consumed more news during the early months of the pandemic than normal because (1) they had more time on their hands due to things like shelter-in-place orders, layoffs, and shifts to working from home and (2) they were more interested in understanding the coronavirus' spread and risks as well as the preventative measures being pursued" (Nelson & Lewis 2022, p. 2495) noted that "within two weeks of the World Health Organization declaring COVID-19 a pandemic on 11 March 2020, news media companies around the globe lost at least half of their advertising revenue and saw print circulation numbers significantly reduced". The pandemic and the lockdown restrictions implemented around the world to control the spread of the virus meant no newspaper distribution or sales. With many companies that were not regarded as essential service providers not being able to work and bring in an income, advertising which brought in income to newspapers, became the last thing for such companies to worry about. Rumney (2020, p.9) says "Wide-scale salary cuts to workers in three of the big four print-and-online

media groups were disclosed, and thanks to a dramatic decline in advertising revenue, even the broadcast industry had its forecasts overturned. Retrenchments loomed". The impact on journalists was the cut in salaries, with newspapers being the hardest hit. "Cutting costs inevitably means cutting staff because it is the biggest cost item" (Rumney 2020, p. 29) Rumney (2022, p.6) found that "retrenchments and newspaper closures or rationalisation of titles and circulation cutbacks continued through 2021". Retrenchments and newspaper closures or rationalisation of titles and circulation cutbacks continued through 2021". Kilman (2022, p.9) noted that "independent media was already facing an existential threat when Covid hit". He explains that the business models of news media organisation were hit hard by the move to online news consumption leading to a serious loss of revenue. "Without this traditional source of funding in many places, news outlets are closing, and journalists are losing their jobs, communities are being left without reliable sources of news" (Kilman 2022, p. 9). Kilman (2022) explains that the lack of resources leads to news organisations being too weak to fund operations, making them vulnerable to those with resources like businesspeople or politicians, which has the potential to compromise the independence of news media. Dugmore (2018) says the changes in the news media industry have brought insecurity and it's unclear what the future holds. "Digital migration and a lethargic local economy mean that print circulation is dropping rapidly for most dailies and weeklies, while the move to online is proving difficult to monetize" (Dugmore 2018, p. 100). As economic growth remains weak, impacting the media sector directly and indirectly, the challenges at media houses remain. With the local economy expected to grow at about 1% in 2024 (Parsons, 2023), news media has no choice but to find new business models and adapt to remain sustainable so that they can retain and be attractive to journalists.

Media has an important role to play in society, and the conditions must be right to enable the institutions to play a meaningful role, free from external influences. The media need to always be accurate and fair in their reporting to maintain credibility and trust from the public. Understanding why journalists leave the industry could assist media organisations in introducing measures that would be conducive to the retention of journalists in the newsrooms. This study sought firsthand experiences from former journalists on the reasons they turned their backs on the careers they spent years building and decided to move on to other careers. The literature review delves into the media landscape and empirical studies globally as well as the economic conditions under which the media has been operating in the period under review as well as the effects on newsrooms and society, at large, regarding, the

loss of journalism skills from newsrooms.

Section 3: Literature Review

Literature review studies and reviews research, books, and other material that was done earlier about the subject being researched as well as looking at debates and theories on the topic being researched (Fink, 2014). A literature review "provides a description, summary, and critical evaluation of these works in relation to the research problem being investigated" (Fink, 2014, p. Online). This chapter looks at prior research and scholarly work done on the conditions in the journalism industry in South Africa and internationally and assesses what other scholars have found in researching why journalists leave the profession in those countries.

"Journalism used to be good, but now it is bad" (Örnebring 2009, p. 1). This view seems to encapsulate the description of the changes in the news media landscape. The working conditions in many newsrooms worldwide have deteriorated over the years, as a symptom of downturns in economic cycles or disruption brought about by technology and business models that are no longer fit for purpose. Deuze and Witschge (2017) noted that the profession was once practiced in structured organisations with journalists doing their work in a formal setting, but things have changed and the experience of those in the profession is ruled by uncertainty, and it's fragmented. A lot of companies are no longer employing workers permanently and there is a rise in the casualization of journalism jobs especially amongst younger, less experienced reporters, but also amongst senior journalists that have been victims of retrenchments (Deuze & Witschge, 2016). The challenges are brought about by commercial models that have been shaken by digitization which was speeded up by the Covid-19 pandemic. Journalism has in many ways become a precarious profession as studies in many countries have shown. Fisher and Park (2023, p.280) say the challenges facing many newsrooms are the "loss of advertising and a fragmenting audience in an era of information abundance".

3.1 A South African perspective of conditions in the sector

The last six years have been tough on many fronts for the local news media sector, extending more than a decade of decline (Daniels, 2021). The sector has faced many challenges such as the low economic growth environment, and changing media consumption patterns due to technological advancement forcing many institutions in the sector to adapt or die. Cracks were evident in the structures holding together many newsrooms as Finlay (2017, p.1) noted "downscaling in newsrooms persists as a troubling feature of the local media landscape". The challenges are forcing news organizations to reinvent and come up with new business models that would ensure sustainability in the long run. Kruger (2017, p.ii) stated that "there is no question that journalism across the world continues to be under enormous pressure. Under the impact of new technologies which are changing audiences in profound ways, traditional media business models are in decline and may not survive". The newspaper sector was already on a decline in terms of circulation and the loss of revenue that goes with newspaper sales (Finlay, 2017). The closure of newspapers had already started, with *The Times* shutting down its print edition, forcing many out of jobs (Finlay, 2017).

The deterioration of conditions in the news media sector continued in 2018, with job losses and closures of news agencies as business models failed. "Newspaper circulation is still on its downward spiral, with a few titles looking as if they might not make it. "Retrenchments in both broadcast and print remained a feature in 2018, most dramatically in the announcement by the SABC that it intended to shed over 980 jobs, about a third of these from its news division" (Finlay 2018, p. 3). Newspaper circulation dropped further, and more journalism jobs were lost as news agencies struggled with revenue generation and the restructuring and closures continued (Finlay, 2018). The Covid-19 pandemic broke towards the end of 2019, and reached South African shores in early 2020, exacerbating the challenges of the already bruised media sector. Job losses intensified, newspaper closures continued, and retrenchments were the order of the day as agencies were drowning fast, and advertising and circulation revenue dried up (Finlay, 2019).

3.2 The impact of covid-19 on news media

The South African National Editors Forum (SANEF) commissioned a study to look into the impact of the pandemic on the media. Rumney (2020) painted a grim picture of an industry that was already struggling and the pandemic breaking down the little that the sector was holding on. “The Covid-19 pandemic has effectively taken that pie away and what is left is a news industry desperately looking for new ways of sustaining itself while audience demands for timely, credible but free news surges” (Rumney 2020, p. 3). No subsector was spared. As much as the need for reliable news sources was evident, on the back of the new unknown virus, advertising revenue dried up, on top of the sales revenue that could not be realised as the lockdown meant people were locked up in their houses, unable to buy newspapers. Broadcasters and online news services were the go-to places for information on what was happening around the world and locally. Rumney (2020) wrote that on the upside of the Covid-19 period was the growth of consumption of online news, with traffic to such sites increasing by about 72% just after Covid-19 was declared a pandemic. However, salary cuts as well as job cuts became the order of the day as media houses crumbled under pressure. As Rumney (2020, p. 9) stated: “As this study was being prepared, shock closures of magazines, leading to the loss of scores of media jobs were announced, and the loss of hundreds more at hyperlocal publishers were revealed, along with a study showing that many of the hundreds of freelance journalists and photographers have been deprived of much or all of their income”.

These were just the early days of the pandemic that would last for years, with serious devastation of the sector that saw media companies continue to cut jobs as the economy also struggled to recover from the pandemic devastation, as geopolitical tension delayed the economic recovery. Rumney (2020, p. 3) said the “first and most visible casualty was the magazine industry with the closure of two magazine publishers with the loss of 97 jobs at the one publisher and up to 250 at the other. Away from the limelight, small, independent, hyperlocal print publications were also ravaged. This was in the first phase of the lockdown as small publishers were unable to access emergency funding, resulting in the loss of an estimated 300 to 400 journalistic jobs. Workers at three of the so-called Big 4 print media companies were forced to take salary cuts of up to 45% and temporary layoffs have been widely implemented”. Rumney (2020) found that the financial difficulties faced by media organisations present a deeper threat than just journalism jobs, it also threatens the ability of the media to provide credible news needed for a functioning democracy as well as possibly media independence. Finlay (2020, p. 9) wrote “The nationwide lockdown due to the Covid-19 pandemic that began at midnight on March 26 eviscerated an already fragile print media

industry, with the magazine trade and community newspapers suffering the most serious blows". Online and other electronic media recorded increased audiences as the need for reliable news grew, but this is said to not have gone hand in hand with advertising that would have generated needed revenue (Rumney, 2020). Matsilele et al (2022, p.282) quote an editor at Arena Holdings who took part in their study as saying, "The biggest effect on Arena Holdings as a publisher has been the sharp drop in advertising revenue that kicked in quickly at the start of the national lockdown at the end of March. Even a huge surge in digital subscriptions to our websites during this time was not enough to cancel out the effects of the revenue slump, which of course was an industry-wide trend". With the changes in news consumption that went online, so did the way journalists get their stories. Matsilele et al (2022) found that the pandemic fostered the speedy embrace of digital technologies, there were greater threats to media freedom and journalists found themselves dealing with the stress of dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic. Newsrooms adopted the use of video links such as Zoom and Microsoft Teams as well as the chat platform WhatsApp to conduct interviews (Matsilele et al., 2022). In other parts of the world, news media suffered the same fate. Casero-Ripollés (2021) explains that the situation in Spain was like occurrences in South Africa. News consumption increased but advertising dropped sharply. "The increase in news consumption recorded since the beginning of the pandemic in Spain was not accompanied by increased media advertising revenues. On the contrary, these were notably reduced. The falls were industry-wide" (Casero-Ripollés 2021, p. 56). The environment led to journalists' working conditions changing for the worse, retrenchments, and increasing the instability of journalism work, affecting the quality of the work produced by news media (Casero-Ripollés, 2021). German journalists experienced the same change in working conditions, and many noted that their working conditions and financial situation deteriorated (Rick & Hanitzsch, 2024). "Journalists regardless of income, gender, and age had a similar perception of worsened working conditions. It should be noted, however, that such perceptions were most pronounced among those with smaller earnings" (Rick & Hanitzsch 2024, p. 107). Freelancers were also among those worst impacted by the difficulties brought about by the pandemic, with many reporting that jobs dried out, and some were left with no income (Rick & Hanitzsch, 2024). In the United States, a survey of over 1400 journalists from around the world in a study conducted by Posetti et al. (2020) gave an early indication of the disruption that the Covid-19 pandemic would have on the news media sector. The indications were that "journalists are working in a severely pressured financial, physical and psychological environment during the pandemic" (Posetti et al., 2020, p. 27). As Perreault & Perreault

(2021, p. 4) put it, journalists' role in disaster and crisis communication is to serve as a channel of communication between "public officials and experts to the broader public which is known as the facilitative role of journalism". The report showed that 89% of the respondents said their newsroom implemented some sort of downscaling in terms of job cuts, salary cuts, or even complete shutdowns (Posetti et al., 2020). Sanal & Aram (2022) found that the outbreak of the Covid pandemic also led to an explosion of more cases of misinformation, mainly propagated through social media. "While social media may have originally helped in connecting people and sharing information, it may have also triggered a heightened accessibility in spreading misinformation and fake reports during the pandemic" (Sanal & Aram 2022, p. 2). Perreault et al. (2023) say while journalism contributed to providing credible information that helped keep societies safe, advertising revenue dried up, worsening the financial conditions of many news organisations. "When it comes to crisis and disaster communication, news reporting plays a vital role by connecting journalists and citizens through credible information" (Perreault et al., 2023).

Post the pandemic, many newsrooms are still in a state of disarray because of the impact that the pandemic had on operations. Kilman (2022, p. 9) says that post the pandemic, many independent media globally need "support to strengthen their viability if they are to continue to provide the news and information that are essential to democracy and sustainable development". Kilman (2022) says due to old business models failing to sustain them, because of the changes in consumption patterns, and the new business models not generating enough revenue to sustain them, news media becomes vulnerable to political and business forces. "The decline of independent news media, which some have referred to as an extinction event, has an impact on the very foundations of our societies. It is not just a question of failing businesses; without independent news media, corruption and incompetence thrive, and good governance is weakened" (Kilman 2022, p. 10).

The Covid pandemic was tough on news media on different fronts. From impacting the way news organisations operate, gather stories, and publish, to them having to adjust to preferred consumption trends. Covid-19 left many casualties in its trail, with many news organisations around the world closing, journalists losing their jobs, and if they get to keep their jobs, the nature of the job has changed, and possibly their income has been impacted. News organisations are left searching for new business models for them to remain sustainable into the future.

3.3 Deteriorating working conditions

A *Worlds of Journalism Study* South Africa chapter described the changing work conditions in journalism in South Africa deteriorating on various fronts, with journalists reporting the digital disruption and reporters expected to work longer hours (De Beer et al., 2016). The report showed that "a large majority of respondents reported an increase in their average working hours. Furthermore, most interviewed journalists felt that the credibility of journalism and the time available for researching stories had dropped" (De Beer et al., 2016, p. 5). The South African country chapter found that journalists reported that their work was increasingly being affected by social media as well as content that is user generated and that there were more profit-making pressures in newsrooms (De Beer et al., 2016)The journalists complained of the dropping ethical standards at their media organisation in the face of rising economic pressures. The report found "a majority of South African journalists reported an increase for market-related influences – such as profit-making pressures, advertising considerations, audience research, pressure toward sensational news, as well as for audience feedback" (De Beer et al., 2016, p. 5)

The difficult conditions in the media have led to job losses resulting from retrenchments and the closure of many publications. Daniels (2020, p. 1) asked whether "journalists are meant to serve the public by being reliable conduits of information. Yet if newsrooms are depleted of staff, especially of senior journalists, how can these functions be fulfilled?"

Daniels (2020) lists the retrenchment at *SABC*, *Independent Newspapers*, and the closures of *Afro Worldview* and *Afro Voice* as well as *The Times* and *Huff Post SA* that have gone down with many journalism jobs. Daniels (2020) indicated that journalism jobs had been halved in the 10 years to 2020. The job losses in journalism have led to many papers operating on skeleton staff with reporters taking on more work without any additional compensation. "Journalists who survived several job loss waves over the past decade are having to do much more (video-making and uploads, writing for online and traditional media, tweeting and making Facebook posts, and blogging) with much less—less time, fewer resources and less pay" (Daniels, 2020, p. 5).

The limited resources have led to the juniorisation of newsrooms, with criticism of poor outputs from news outlets. One of the participants in the study by Daniels (2020, p. 9) says "Too many juniors. Too much dependence on social media to get a story. Too keen to be first

with the goodies while making factual mistakes that are covered up by ‘this is a developing story’”.

In another study, Daniels (2021) studied journalists’ experiences in terms of retrenchments from their jobs and found that many found the process traumatic and that there was not enough support from their organisations. Many say they were given very short retrenchment notices, and they faced losses in terms of their incomes, and benefits. The retrenched journalists used words like “‘traumatic’, ‘shock’, ‘numbness’, ‘depression’, ‘panic’, ‘fear’, ‘post-traumatic stress disorder’, ‘heartbreak’, and ‘sadness and relief’ “when describing their experience of their jobs in journalism (Daniels 2021, p. 149). The retrenched journalists relayed the psychological effects that the job losses had on them with one respondent saying years after the event, the job loss, and the way their company handled the process left them scarred. The conditions that journalists face when companies are facing retrenchments seemingly did not get better seeing that SANEF released a media statement in November of 2023 when various media houses announced widespread retrenchments highlighting the precariousness of journalism jobs in South Africa. SANEF (2023) raised concerns with the new wave of retrenchments saying even fewer journalists would be left in the newsrooms negatively impacting the quality and levels of diversity at various media houses. SANEF (2023) also showed concern about the impact of job losses on the role that journalism plays in a democracy, informing and educating societies about developments. The organisation called for media houses to handle the retrenchment process with care and within the ambits of the law (SANEF, 2023).

Rumney (2022) warned that the impact of job losses in journalism goes beyond just the loss of experienced journalists to media houses. “The risks extended beyond job losses to throttling the flow of verifiable, credible information, necessary for the health of democracies and economies” (Rumney, 2022). Dugmore (2018) also believed the financial crisis in journalism is bad news for society at large, as resources are needed to be able to provide impactful news. “As news companies are starved of revenues, they will increasingly be unable to devote the kind of resources that bring about real, ground-breaking journalism that speaks truth to power – and provide the public with the information needed for them to fully exercise their rights in a healthy democracy” (Dugmore 2018, p. 100).

The sector’s recovery has been a difficult journey for many as more difficulties and economic shocks followed the period of the pandemic. In a follow-up study, Rumney (2022, p.6) said “Against the backdrop of an economy plunged into recession by Covid-19 and then roiled by

unrest as it recovered, the news media has had a turbulent time these past two years". Retrenchments continued unabated, more news agencies closed, others cut back circulation, and the move to online platforms gained momentum" (Rumney, 2022). This led to a change in the nature of the work of journalists, as they were to be expected to report for print publications, online platforms as well as social media. This was happening against the backdrop of budget cuts and in some cases, lower salaries as many in the print subsector had to take pay cuts. This study is set against the backdrop of the negative economic environment that has led to the pressure to do more with less for many organisations. The retrenchments also meant newsrooms were run with skeletal staff, with many journalists expected to do more than one person's job.

3.4 The impact of the troubles in journalism on the role of the media in a democracy

News media has an important role in society, especially in a young democracy such as South Africa. Wasserman (2020, p 464.) writes that "the South African media have contributed to a culture of democratic debate while playing a watchdog role to keep political power to account through investigative reporting into corruption and malfeasance". For the media to be able to play its role fully, skills and institutional memory are important traits for journalists to have so they can be able to analyse and put developments into perspective. Curran (2000) argued that the primary role of the media is to keep a check on those in power and hold them to account. If the media is losing skilled journalists, this can translate into the weakening of the role of the media in a democracy. In an earlier study conducted in 2010, Wasserman found that "commercialization and juniorisation were mentioned prominently as limiting the media's capacity to act as watchdogs of government or do the investigative work needed to provide information to the citizenry, at large" (Wasserman 2010, p. 585).

3.5 Juniorisation of newsrooms and the impact of the loss of journalism skills on society

Another symptom of the limited resources is newsrooms hiring young inexperienced journalists, a process being blamed by some for the decline in the quality of journalism (Daniels, 2018). "There's been a decline in in-depth news coverage of any field and a corresponding rise in a superficial array of news on a variety of topics. Infotainment gets passed off as 'news'" (Daniels 2018, p. Online). Da Silva (2010, online) wrote that "SA's

juniorisation of newsrooms has come as the result of overworked but underpaid senior news staff leaving the profession to seek greener pastures. This, coupled with lack of ongoing training, has led to the decline in the quality of journalism". Khumalo (2013) notes that to cut costs, newspapers have been seen to be hiring young and inexperienced journalists, as it is expensive to keep senior journalists. Khumalo (2013, p. 34) has determined that "there are reduced numbers of skilled people in newsrooms as several senior reporters leave the journalism profession to become a part of the other fields, most prominently public relations". This view was shared by (African Media Barometer 2018, p. 47) which says, "senior journalists often went into more lucrative positions in the corporate or private sector, while younger journalists were said to emerge with a degree, 'but no passion or real understanding of the media and they are not supported in the workplace'". As Tzoneva (2010, online) puts it "The skills required for professional and quality news pieces are slowly disintegrating, with the juniorisation of newsrooms leading to a 'double burden' on the fragile, fourth pillar of our democracy". As Jonas (2021) puts it "Without a vibrant and diverse media holding government and public figures accountable, our democracy cannot function, and without a free flow of information, our economy will not prosper" (Jonas 2021, p. Online). Khumalo (2013) found that the lack of training of junior journalists may negatively affect their contribution to producing quality news. "Juniorisation in newsroom may impact on the quality of news produced in the instances where juniors are not offered adequate training prior to being allowed to produce news for newspapers" (Khumalo 2013, p. 34). Tebele (2005) also states that juniorisation of newsrooms is a big challenge to news media, he says the lack of appropriate skills when reporting critical issues is not in the public interest. Tebele (2005, p.75) argues that these challenges are brought about by the lack of finances, forcing management to cut budgets, he says "many of these shifts have been caused by management seeking to flatten organisational hierarchies and reduce personnel budgets by cutting staff numbers and employing more junior people". The inadequate skills in journalism are also blamed for the decline in investigative reporting, adequately holding those in power to account. "There has been a decline in investigative journalism and an increase in juniorisation, attributed to cost cutting. This comes hand in hand with findings that journalists identify new-media training as a primary need, with, interestingly, younger journalists finding the increasing digitalisation of news more challenging to adjust to" (Banjac et al., 2016, p. 27).

The loss of experienced journalists will surely weaken the capacity of the newsroom to perform this role in society. The media should be fearless watchdogs, vigilantly examining

the exercise of power and protecting the public from wrongdoing" (Curran 2005, p. 120). Chuma et al (2017) also see the role of the media as central to a functioning democracy. "The media is seen as contributing to rational deliberation in the public sphere and increased transparency of democratic processes as well as ensuring greater accountability by officials towards citizens" (Chuma et al., 2017, p. 3). Daniels (2018) said with the retrenchments of newsrooms widespread in many countries, as news organizations under pressure to cut costs, they usually firstly let go of experienced senior journalists that are expensive to keep. "Beat journalism worldwide is disappearing. There are several reasons for this, among them the corporate and commercial pressures of going digital and competition from social media. Media companies retrench experienced reporters first to cut their salary bills – and beat reporters tend to be among the more senior staff" (Daniels 2018, p. Online). The loss of experienced journalists will therefore most likely impact on the quality of the news that media outlets produce as inexperienced journalists may not have the background to be able to contextualise the issues and give analysis that would make readers understand the importance of an issue. Daniels (2018) quoted some of the respondents to the South African leg of the News Beats study who are journalists in South Africa, and they expressed concern at the loss of experience from newsrooms and the impact that this was having on articles. One responded said "Journalism has become increasingly undervalued as a profession. Too many bad writers and too few beat specialists, which means that people in power are getting away with murder" (Daniels 2018, p. Online). Schauseil (2019) says media has a huge role to play in fighting corruption, given the right conditions of media freedom and plurality of media in a society. Media reporting on possible wrongdoing of business and government makes the public aware of what is happening, and authorities are also likely to act when a matter is being reported in the media (Schauseil, 2019). "The argument is that an independent and vigilant media constitutes an important channel of external control with a unique capacity to uncover transgressions by government and business officials" (Schauseil 2019, p. 3). In a country like South Africa where corruption is deep as the State Capture enquiry has revealed, a strong media with capability to uncover wrongdoing is a necessity for democracy to function and for citizens to be informed of any possible wrongdoing by those in power. This would discourage the looting of the limited resources that the country must deliver services to the millions of the poor. Schauseil (2019) argue that while the media has the power to hold those in power accountable, it is also at risk of being corrupted by those seeking to improperly influence public opinion. "Different media channels can be used to cover up instances of malfeasance, clientelism, and embezzlement, among others. Thus, attempts to

capture the media for personal benefits are risk in developing and developed countries alike. In extreme cases this might involve direct in-kind donations, extortion or cash for (non-)coverage to journalists and editors" (Schauseil 2019, p. 13). Carcasson (2022) calls it a dual crises, democracy and journalism crises interconnected. "Democracy is struggling as partisanship, polarization, and growing authoritarian tendencies and bad faith actors undermine our trust in institutions, expertise, and each other. Local journalism has been in crisis for a couple of decades as the financial model has collapsed with the growth of the internet" (Carcasson 2022, p. 16). Carcasson (2022) says vibrant media is essential in a democracy and journalism should be supported as a public good and he suggest that the public should be educated on the importance of dealing with the information overload on the internet and be taught about the importance of supporting local media. Chuma et al. (2017) found that the limited resources newsrooms are dealing with, are limiting the role that journalists should be playing to strengthen democracies. "The limited resources available to journalists to practice proper, in-depth journalism that would contribute to better understanding of democracy and provide context to democratic debates, is a recurring complaint. Journalists' attempts to contribute to democratic deepening are undermined by the institutional conditions under which they practice" (Chuma et al., 2017, p. 28). For the media to be able to play a meaningful role in contributing towards democracy, news organisations need to find business models that will enable them to afford experienced journalists who will be able to hold the powerful to account and be able to train younger inexperienced journalists to follow in their footsteps. The lack of resources has impacted many news media organizations negatively, taking away their capacity to serve their rightful role in a young but troubled democracy like South Africa.

This study pays attention to the journalists at the centre of these challenges, where many were pushed out of jobs by the conditions, while others voluntarily left journalism to pursue other careers for many reasons. While many local studies, as stated above, focused on the tough conditions in the media sector, there is a gap in understanding how the journalists responded to such pressures. This study will add to this knowledge gap by presenting the views of these journalists who left the profession in the past six years on what led them to decide to leave the profession to follow other careers. There are many studies conducted in other countries looking at reasons journalists leave the profession. This is discussed in detail in the following section.

3.6 International studies looking at reasons journalists leave the profession

Mathews et al (2023), in the United States, analyzed texts published on digital platforms by former journalists after they left the profession. The former journalists "expressed feelings of powerlessness, a form of disappointment for one's dream job provoked by the omnivorous demands of the industry's digital transformation" (Mathews et al., 2023, p. 63) found that many journalists left the profession as the landscape shifted towards digital platforms and there were changes in news consumption and business models. They argue that journalists were driven out of the industry by the challenges of working long hours, limiting work-life balance, and poor compensation. These challenges were made worse by the difficult economic environment that has seen many media houses with reduced revenues and had to face changing consumption patterns. They also point out that the growth of digital technology has seen advertising revenue at traditional media organisations fall, as people prefer accessing news via social media. Mathews et al (2023, p.68) say "The former journalists first expressed (1) feeling stuck, mourning a "dream job," (2) feeling always-on, in a prison- or factory-like environment, (3) feeling strained mentally and isolated from social circles, friends, and family, and (4) feeling unsupported by the industry and colleagues". Woodruff (2020), also in the United States, concluded that the reasons broadcast journalists left the field were the high job demands expected to be done with limited resources, and long working hours leading to the difficulty in attaining a work-life balance. The former journalists also complained of difficulties with management in the face of increased commercialization of news that was leading to unethical demands (Woodruff, 2020). The former broadcast journalists were generally unhappy with the work-life balance (Woodruff, 2020). Woodruff (2020) also found that broadcast journalists sought employment elsewhere because of the struggle with increased demands of the job, issues with management, and low salaries. Woodruff's study also highlighted that when broadcast journalists leave the field, they take with them institutional memory that has been built over the years. The author stated that "…they take with them valuable knowledge and a history in the market where they are working" (Woodruff 2020, p. 40).

Perez and Cremedas (2014), also in the United States, found that broadcast journalists have also shown that changes in working conditions have led to frustration leading to some deciding to quit the profession. Perez and Cremedas's (2014, p.159) study looking at the changes in working conditions where the multimedia journalist news gathering method was implemented, found that "most of the respondents say they are less satisfied with their jobs,

and some have considered quitting the business". Another motivating factor for journalists to leave the profession may be that their education levels give them options to explore other professions as Gever et al. (2023) found in their study. They also found that the level of education of journalists has a role to play in whether they stay in journalism. A study amongst television camera operators found that the more educated, the more the propensity to quit journalism and vice-versa (Gever et al., 2023).

Tinca and Zajc (2022, p. 412) found that "in journalism, work–home conflict affects not only employees and organisations but also the public sphere and citizens". They point out that the work of journalists is of vital importance to a democracy as "it keeps the public informed, shapes public debate, and reveals issues in the public interest" (Tinca & Zajc 2022, p. 412).

Miller (2021) found that in the United States, another contributing factor to journalists considering leaving journalism is harassment mainly from audiences or politicians that can happen online or in person. Miller (2021) states that, in the United States, about 25% of women journalists and 24% of men consider leaving the profession because of harassment.

In a study looking into the crisis in newspaper journalism also in the United States, Reinardy (2011) found that the percentage of journalists who expressed the intention to leave the newspaper industry was 25.7%, while those who said they did not know if they would leave was at 36%. The study noted that those who intended to leave felt high levels of being tired and negative as well as not giving the best to their work (Reinardy, 2011). He says, "Further examination reveals that 31% of young journalists (34 and younger) expressed intentions to leave the profession, and 43.5% answered 'don't know'" (Reinardy, 2011).

Ekdale et al (2014, p. 383) say "Rapid change in the news industry and the prevalence of layoffs, buyouts, and closings have led many news workers to experience job insecurity and worry about their long-term futures in journalism". Ekdale (2014) found that journalists' attitudes toward their work, following retrenchments, differed. Some still believed their jobs were secure, and they worked according to new changes to add value to the company. He found that those who were cynical about the changes, blamed management for what they believe are the wrong decisions. Those who were pessimistic were "planning their exit strategy, one that included blaming the leadership, or lack thereof, for the company's misfortunes" (Ekdale et al 2014, page 395).

Huda & Azad (2015) interviewed 55 journalists at different private television stations, in Bangladesh, looking at the main sources of professional stress amongst electronic media journalists. The study found that the main sources of stress were "inadequate support from

management is the most heated cause of professional stress. However, the result also concludes that ‘harassment’ at the workplace is an insignificant determinant. Other major determinants of stress are ‘unclear objective’, ‘insecure job climate’, ‘excessive time pressure’, ‘friction’, “long working hours” and ‘life threat’” (Huda & Azad 2015, p. 79). Huda and Azad’s (2015) study determined that the main sources of professional stress amongst electronic media journalists are inadequate support from management, peers, and subordinates when covering stories as well as support from government authorities, civil society, and other stakeholders when doing their work. They also see unclear work objectives as another source of stress. They also see the working conditions that bring job insecurity also causing them stress. The job itself sometimes exposes them to unpleasant things they witness. Long working hours, low pay, and family-related stress are other stressors (Huda & Azad, 2015).

Davidson & Meyers (2016) found that money played a big role in journalists in Israel leaving the profession. They are unhappy with the low pay and long work hours that they have to put in. Another reason the respondents said caused them to leave journalism is the dysfunctional news organisations as well the lack of proper management. The respondents painted a picture of newsrooms torn apart “riven by internal conflict and characterized by a management deficit” (Davidson & Meyers 2016, p. 597). The respondents blamed the dysfunction in newsrooms as being to blame for the lack of training of younger journalists. Job insecurity is also a major factor that leads to others deciding to leave the profession. Davidson & Meyers (2016) found that journalists find that the older they get, and the more responsibilities they get, the more they find the profession not conducive. “The study points at the perception of journalism as a stepping stone occupation and one that fits mostly the lifestyle and financial needs of young workers” (Davidson & Meyers 2016, p. 603).
Meanwhile, closer to home in Kenya, Ireri (2016) found that almost 62% of journalists there were unsatisfied with their incomes. “Poor pay is also responsible for the high turnover of journalists from one media house to another—standing at 57%. For the same reason, Kenyan journalists are joining the public relations industry in large numbers in search of higher income and better working conditions” (Ireri 2016, p. 181). Ireri (2016) says poor pay in journalism harms the profession as it has led to unethical practices such as taking bribes and extortion as well as journalists not being committed to the profession, weak productivity levels, and low morale.

Reyna's (2021) study into why journalists leave the profession in Mexico, found that they feel they have lost control of influencing their work environment when it came to "methods, tasks, quality, quantity, pace, schedules, supervision and salaries" (Reyna 2021, p. 1129). He found that journalists felt that their work involved increased workloads which led to them being stressed and ultimately journalists deciding to quit the profession. Reyna (2021) makes the point that amidst the widespread job losses in newsrooms, there is also a wave of journalists choosing to leave the profession, rendering newspapers unable to hold on to skilled professionals. He concluded that the study shows that "turnover intentions and turnover are triggered by this population's perceived reduced capacity to influence the organizational decision-making process. As job demands are high, role strain breaks through and news workers are responding to it by quitting their jobs and, in some cases, journalism altogether" (Reyna 2021, p. 1141). The deteriorating work conditions that journalists find themselves having to work under contribute a lot to their decision to quit the profession. These include the demands brought about by changes in media consumption patterns and their inability to influence decision-making in their organisations. Reyna (2021, p.1141) found that intentions to leave the job and actual leaving are triggered by the participants' "perceived reduced capacity to influence the organizational decision-making process".

3.7 News media and economics

Some of the difficulties that media organisations go through appear to be linked to economic downturns. As Koksal and Grégoire (2017, p.10) put it "The 2008 crisis triggered a collapse in advertising revenues, which newspaper owners and managing editors – more and more of them business school graduates – used as a pretense to "streamline" their operations. The consequence: newsrooms are empty, the "survivors" are on the brink of exhaustion, and much of a newspaper's content is supplied by an army of invisible freelancers". (Koksal & Grégoire 2017, p. 10). The same effect was visible with the economic shock brought by the Covid-19 pandemic where newspapers could not sell papers, and as news consumption moved online as people were locked indoors, advertising revenue also dried up, forcing many to shut down or restructure organisations with horrendous consequences for journalists (Rumney, 2020). McChesney (2016) likened the crisis the media is facing to a death spiral. He said the crisis in journalism is structural, as news organisations cannot make money from traditional sources due to technological advancement and changes in media consumption. "We are witnessing the collapse of journalism before our eyes at breath-taking speed. The

problem is very simple to explain: It is a structural crisis, the commercial system is collapsing, it is failing, and it is not coming back" (McChesney 2016, p. 129).

These challenges were made worse by the Covid-19 pandemic, as (Rumney 2022, p. 6) states that in the case of South Africa "against the backdrop of an economy plunged into recession by Covid-19 and then roiled by unrest as it recovered, the news media has had a turbulent time these past two years". Newman et al (2021) say all print media houses in South Africa saw a contraction in their circulation and revenue. "Circulations for daily newspapers are down by 40%, on average, for Q2 2020/2021. Digital News Report survey shows that print as a source of news has dropped to 32%, 5pp down from last year. It can only be a matter of time before we see more print titles closing" (Newman et al., 2021, p. 157). The evolving nature of news consumption and the associated demands on journalists as well as the decreasing revenue of many news outlets may lead to job insecurity, which could lead to the journalism profession being unattractive.

Media Sustainability Index (2012) after interviewing a panel of media professionals on various issues in South Africa said newsrooms cutting costs could be to blame for experienced journalists leaving the profession. It says journalists tend to leave their jobs after five years in the newsroom, leaving for better-paying jobs. "Journalists migrate out to other jobs, particularly to state media liaison. People do not stay in journalism unless they manage to secure a spectacular promotion" (Media Sustainability Index 2012, p. 380). Finlay (2018, p.5) wrote in The *State of the Newsroom* about the challenges the media industry faced marked by "the spectra of job losses tightened its grip on the sector in 2018, as low advertising revenue took its toll on print and online titles and restructuring in the industry continued". The 2021 *State of the Newsroom* report states that "in March the SABC announced it had finalized its restructuring and 621 staffers would lose their jobs. In 2020 the jobs of at least 2 600 employees working at the country's biggest media houses – including the public broadcaster – were on the line" (Finlay 2021, p. 9). Job insecurity in the news media field could have spooked many journalists in a country with high unemployment levels where one salary may be responsible for looking after many people. The uncertainty could lead to many jumping at job opportunities in areas that seem more stable and can provide some job security and possibly better pay. Mathews and Onyemaobi (2020, p. 1836) called journalism a "precarious profession". They found the lack of job security and poor pay are sources of discontent in Nigeria. They found that "the salaries of journalists in most media

houses are very poor and often these are paid in arrears and that some of the newspaper houses owe journalists arrears of salaries of eight months, 15 months and even up to two years" (Matthews & Onyemaobi 2020, p. 10).

The negative work conditions in many newsrooms have led to some journalists experiencing burnout, and makes them inefficient in their work, or it drives them to leave the profession. MacDonald et al. (2016) found that work-related factors leading to burnout in journalists include the difficulty to balance work and life priorities, high workload, low organizational support, and low salaries, amongst others. Their research found that "journalists most at risk of burnout are young females with fewer years of journalism experience, working in small circulation size newspapers" (MacDonald et al., 2016, p. 21). The always-on mentality required for journalists to meet deadlines and already be looking for stories for the following day leaves little room to take a proper break and switch off. Mac Donald et al (2016) also found that it is editors and reporters that experience higher levels of burnout.

3.8 Women leaving journalism

A study by Reinardy (2009) has shown that journalists who are not satisfied with their work conditions tend to want to leave their jobs. He found that women were more prone to dissatisfaction as they also experienced added pressure as they may also be expected to take care of their families. His study also found that more women than men intended to leave the profession with the main reasons stated for wanting to leave being poor remuneration, job insecurity, stress, and non-conducive working conditions. "A survey of 715 U.S. newspaper journalists reveals women report higher levels of exhaustion and lower levels of professional efficacy than do men. Among women 27 and younger, 30% said they intended to leave the field" (Reinardy 2009, p. 42). In another study Reinardy (2011, p. 33) asserted that the "plummeting circulation, declining revenues, new technology, convergence, conglomerate ownership, and layoffs paint a bleak picture for anyone pursuing a career in newspapers".

The studies that Reyna (2021) analysed looking into why journalists left the profession like Elmore (2019), Everbach and Flournoy (2007), and Lucht (2015), found that women left the profession because of sexism in newsrooms, and lack of work-life balance. They quit because they want to focus attention on family. Low salaries and lack of growth opportunities are among the causes. Everbach and Flournoy (2007) found that women journalists left the profession because they found the sector to not be women-friendly. "The reasons were many

— lack of opportunity, low salary, lack of mentors, unwillingness by management to offer flexible work schedules" (Everbach & Flournoy 2007, p. 59). The women interviewed in the study said attaining work-life balance was difficult and that newsrooms favoured their male counterparts. One of the respondents is quoted as saying "It is very difficult to lead a balanced life in the newspaper business, especially in a competitive market, you were supposed to give your blood to the news, and after 10 years of that, it took its toll" (Everbach & Flournoy 2007, p. 54). The women felt that while they loved journalism, the profession did not afford them enough time with family and, therefore, they preferred more predictable working hours. Male domination in power structures is also a factor leading to some women leaving the profession as they felt their male counterparts were offered better positions and opportunities compared to them. Some said they experienced discrimination based on their gender in their newsrooms. "The women in this study perceived that they were part of a subordinate class at the male-dominated news organizations where they worked," said Everbach & Flournoy (2007, p. 57). The study has determined that journalists usually find new jobs through the connections they make in their journalism jobs. They also use the skills they gained in journalism in their new jobs.

Elmore (2009) found that women journalists had turning points in their careers that led to them leaving the profession. Her study determined that the decision to quit the profession followed a period of job dissatisfaction, and when the turning point event happened, the women followed through with the decision to leave. Elmore (2009, p. 238) found that "having children, getting an unsolicited job offer, and having an attainable new full-time goal come to fruition" were the main factors that led to women leaving the newspaper business. Some of the respondents felt the need to spend more time with their kids at home, while other factors such as the cost of day-care, and the inflexibility of working from home contributed to their decisions to leave the profession. The long unpredictable hours linked to journalism work proved unattractive to journalist moms. Others received unsolicited job offers that were paying more than their journalism jobs, leading them to decide to leave their journalism jobs.

In South Korea, a study focusing on why women journalists leave the newsroom found that their decisions are motivated by various factors. Lee and Kim (2022) found that gender stereotypes, discrimination, and the difficulty in balancing work-family life are some of the factors that have led to women journalists' plans to leave the profession. In addition, "emerging factors based on the advent of the new media environment, such as cyberbullying,

additional online workloads, and the weakening of social status, were found as positively associated with women journalists' intention to leave" (Lee & Kim 2022, p. 12).

A *Reuters Institute* study of 240 news organizations in 12 markets across five continents found news organizations lacking in terms of diversity at top management (Eddy et al., 2023). "The clear majority of top editors across the sample are men. All the markets covered have a majority, often a large majority, of men in top editorial positions" (Eddy et al., 2023, p. 6). It was found that despite continued scrutiny on media organizations lagging in terms of gender equity, there seem to be no efforts in organisations to improve. Top positions in most news organisations are occupied by men (Eddy et al., 2023). The report notes that in South Africa, the situation has been deteriorating between 2020 and 2023 where the number of women in top editorial positions has declined (Eddy et al., 2023).

3.9 News Business Models

MacNamara (2010) says finding suitable business models is the most pressing the media is facing as media organizations around the world continue to deal with the effects of technological advancement changing news consumption preferences. "Identification of sustainable media business models is an urgent priority, as the continuing decline in audiences and collapse of media organisations pose a major threat to journalism and society, with scholars agreeing that further erosion of quality journalism threatens democracy" (MacNamara, 2010, p. 20). The changes to digital media have brought a change in the profession, also leading to financial challenges for many media organisations as well as a search for ways of doing business and generating revenue that can sustain newsrooms amidst the changes. He noted that newsrooms continue to shrink in terms of staff employed to produce news, along with the contraction in available resources caused mainly by declines in advertising revenue Franklin (2014) and Myllylahti and Meese (2024) found that in Australia, news agencies have been building new business models, but they have not been able to impressively take them a step higher to effectively solve their financial shortfalls. Myllylahti and Meese (2024, p. 1) noted that "Digital reader revenue has become a prominent source of income for many publishers, but the bulk of them continue to rely on advertising and print subscriptions for money". Meese (2024) said newspaper circulations around the world continue to decline, and television viewership is also down, as audiences are attracted by other sources of information such as social media and other online sources.

According to Fisher and Park (2023), while technological advancement introduced new ways of publishing and consuming news, it also served as a root cause of many of the economic challenges media organizations face. They note that media organisations, especially newspapers that were highly dependent on selling advertisement spaces to businesses for the eyes of their readers, found themselves competing with online platforms for the small piece of the advertising revenue cake. “Most of the advertising revenue was diverted away from traditional news outlets to two major platforms, Google and Facebook, which means a shift away from news content” (Fisher & Park 2023, p. 282).

Da Silva and Sanseverino (2020) noted that the availability of free information to internet users led to internet users' unwillingness to pay for news. Da Silva and Sanseverino (2020, p.28) say “Simply erecting paywalls around content may work for some well-established brands, but probably not for online-born news media”. Doyle (2014, p. 16) found that “newspapers should recognize that in the digital era news publishing involves a low cost, low revenue model and not a high cost, high revenue model”.
Some of the new business models adopted by news agencies include paid subscriptions and paywalls. Franklin (2014, p. 483) however says “paywalls are being erected at break-neck speed, seemingly reversing the earlier industry mood that ‘news must remain free’. But they are also being demolished—and promptly”. The *10th edition of the Tomson Reuters Digital News Report* says “It is also clear that paid content is not a silver bullet for all publishers, nor will it work for all consumers. The vast majority are still not prepared to pay for online news and with more high-quality content disappearing behind paywalls there are pressing concerns about what happens to those who have limited interest or who can’t afford it” (Newman et al., 2021, p. 29). Chiou and Tucker (2013) in the United States, found that erecting paywalls at times put off other readers. “We find a 51 percent drop in visits after the introduction of a paywall and a far larger drop for younger readers” (Chiou & Tucker 2013, p. 1). The study shows that young people aged 18 to 24, as well as low-income earners get excluded from news sites by paywalls. “Paywall newspapers experience a decline in visits after the introduction of paywalls while other sites appear to experience relatively little change” (Chiou & Tucker 2013, p. 9). In an unequal society such as South Africa, with high poverty levels and high unemployment rates, there is no doubt that paywalls will serve to further increase inequality in terms of access to news. Paywalls may therefore not be at all ideal for every society, but with the financial challenges that news media is facing, more solutions that would help generate the much-needed revenue to be explored. “Paywall sites experienced a

large decline in visits after the introduction of paywalls. Since newspapers form a multi-sided network between advertisers and users, how the decline will affect the other sides of the network will depend largely upon which users continue to use the network" (Chiou & Tucker 2013, p. 13). Chiou and Tucker (2013) also found that following the implementation of paywalls, the visits by males went down by 58% with those of females down by 42%. The exclusion of younger readers by paywalls may affect advertising revenue for papers as some advertisers may want to expose products to younger audiences, and this may also affect news agencies' ability to attract this age group at a later stage (Chiou & Tucker, 2013). Pattabhiramaiah et al. (2019) in the United States using the New York Times as a case study came to a similar conclusion as Chiou and Tucker (2013). Pattabhiramaiah et al. (2019, p.21) determined that the downside of paywalls is that "the number of unique visitors decreased by 16.8% because of the paywall. This drop was also accompanied by a significant reduction in engagement metrics such as visits, pages consumed, and duration per visitor". Simon & Graves (2019) however came up with different findings looking at the effects of paywalls in the United States and Europe. They found that people from different age groups were willing to pay for content they regarded as valuable. They argued that media houses should produce such content to attract subscribers willing to pay for their content (Simon & Graves, 2019).

The topic of the dwindling finances of media organisations brings to the fore the issue of the commercializing of news, its impact on the ethics of journalism and independence of newsrooms as well as the impact on the media's ability to play its rightful role in a democracy. Tomaz et al (2022) have found that the economic pressures that many media houses face have made the separation of the newsroom and corporate, profit-seeking units more porous, meaning the economic hardships make newsrooms susceptible to external influence. "According to critical normative theories, this brings the risk of owners and advertisers influencing coverage and undermining the independence of the editorial staff, and thus the contribution of news media to democracy" (Tomaz et al. 2022, p. 165). If newsrooms can be able to operate without the outside influence of owners of advertisers, then journalism will have space to play its rightful role in a democracy, holding those in power to account and reporting without fear or favour (Tomaz et al., 2022). Topaz et al (2022) argue that the decline in advertising revenue has seen an increase in sponsored content leading to the struggle for survival and putting media houses at risk of external influence. They found that in most countries that were surveyed, the main reason for owners, management, or advertiser influence on the news is the economic pressure. Odunlami and Adaja (2015) found the

situation is similar in Nigeria. They state that the "unfolding realities reveal that commercial considerations have vitiated the statutory mandate of the media as the fourth estate of the realm" (Odunlami & Adaja 2015, p. 69). They say in Nigeria, it is a real challenge for news organisations to remain steadfast in their journalistic ideals amidst the economic challenges they face. Odunlami & Adaja (2015) say the poor state of finances of media houses has led to them bowing to the pressures of those with deep pockets and in the process damaging their credibility. Oberiri (2016) also found that the commercialisation of news negatively impacts the independence of journalists when reporting on stories. Oberiri (2016, p. 63) also found that "poor remuneration, personal greed, and corruption are some of the reasons why news commercialization strives". Oberiri (2016) says the practice of brown envelope journalism where journalists demand some form of gratification to cover stories is rife in Nigeria, contributing to the erosion of public confidence in news organisations. Mwangi (2007, p. 5) in South Africa found that the growing commercialization of news views news as a commodity that is being packaged and marketed and that "market-driven journalism diverts public's attention, energy and resources away from society's fundamental needs like public education, health care, economic justice and gender equality that are essential to the health and well-being of any community". However, Ismail et al (2021) found that despite the challenges posed by commercialization on news media, it is possible to avoid the negative impact that it could have on news media's independence. They concluded that "the issue of news commercialization can be effectively surmounted when both practicing journalists, media proprietors, the government and the audience put all hands on desk by playing their responsibilities as expected" (Ismail et al., 2021, p. 40).

News organization needs to stay steadfast to their ideals of being impartial in their reporting despite the economic pressures if they are to continue being taken seriously by their audiences. When a news organization losses credibility due to it being viewed as biased, it loses public confidence and it also loses sales or viewership and therefore more revenue, even from advertisers as the loss of numbers of audiences will also cost the news organisation. The many problems faced by media organisations mainly stem from the changing consumption preferences of audiences, which is what the next section explores.

Section 4: Theoretical Framework

This study will look at the problem of journalists leaving the profession by using Herzberg's two-factor theory. "The main concept of this theory is the difference between motivation factors and hygiene factors" (Alshmemri et al., 2017, p. 12). Hertzberg (1968) came up with

the two-factor theory, premised on two pillars affecting employees' attitudes towards their work. Herzberg (1968) identified these factors as motivators – which are directly linked to the job itself, and hygiene factors which must do more with the conditions under which the work is being done. "He concluded that such factors as company policy, supervision, interpersonal relations, working conditions, and salary are hygiene factors rather than motivators" (Gawel 2019, p. 1). Hygiene factors can demotivate employees if they are not catered for, but their presence does not motivate workers to work harder (Gawel, 2019). Riley (2005, p. 6) defines the two factors of the theory as "intrinsic motivators and extrinsic motivators". Motivators are more non-financial factors that are directly related to the job itself such as "achievement, recognition, work itself, responsibility, advancement, and the possibility of growth" (Riley 2005, p. 5). When hygiene factors are not up to the standard that the employee expects them to be, then they become demotivated about their work, as Alshmemri et al. (2017, p.13) put it "among the factors of hygiene when the factors deteriorate to a level below that which the employee considers acceptable, then job dissatisfaction ensues". If the motivational factors are met according to the employee's job expectations, this will make them more satisfied with their job. These include "the growth or motivator factors that are inherent to the job are achievement, recognition for achievement, the work itself, responsibility and growth or advancement" (Herzberg 1968, p. 9).

Table 1: Herzberg's two-factor theory

Motivation factors	**Hygiene factor**
Advancement	Interpersonal relationship
Work itself	Salary
Possibility of growth	Policies and administration
Responsibility	Supervision
Recognition	Working conditions
Achievement	

Source: (Alshmemri et al., 2017, p. 13)

Herzberg's two-factor theory is relevant to examine which of the conditions that the former journalists worked under drove them to decide to leave the profession. Earlier studies and scholars such as Daniels (2020), Finlay (2021), and Rumney (2022) have looked at the deterioration of conditions in many newsrooms, due to the financial pressures many news

organizations are battling. The lack of resources and the expectations from journalists to do more work with fewer resources have created difficult working conditions for journalists. This study will reveal which of these challenges is driving journalists out of the profession to find greener pastures elsewhere.

Section 5: Methodology

The study conducted qualitative semi-structured in-depth interviews with 20 former journalists in South Africa who left the profession between 2018 and 2023. Qualitative research refers to a study design that "emphasizes words rather than quantification in the collection and analysis of data" (Hammersley 2013, p. 1). Scanlan (2020) explains semi-structured in-depth interviews as a research tool that encourages the interviewee to share their views on a specific topic without restrictions, and that the interviewer can ask follow-up questions to get more information or clarity on the topic being discussed. The main characteristic of participants is that they have worked in newsrooms, and then left to pursue other careers. The interviews were conducted via the video link Zoom between 12 December 2023 and 10 January 2024. The qualitative interview method was decided on as it would allow participants to fully share their individual experiences on the reasons why they left the journalism profession. The interviewing method is appropriate for this study since according to Rabionet (2011, p. 563), "there is no doubt that qualitative interviewing is a flexible and powerful tool to capture the voices and the ways people make meaning of their experiences". Ten of the participants were from various broadcasting media platforms, while 10 worked in newspapers. The participants are of different demographics with ages varying between 30 and 58 and are of different racial groups. They hold various tertiary qualifications ranging from diplomas to master's degrees. Participants held various positions differing in seniority levels in the newsrooms they worked in across South Africa. The years of experience in journalism vary between six and 27. Twelve of the participants are female and eight are male. The former journalists left their newsrooms by either resigning or taking voluntary severance packages, while others were retrenched from their jobs. Participants were promised anonymity under the approval of the ethics committee of the University of the Witwatersrand. The main research question that the study sought to find answers to is:
RQ: What are the factors that South African journalists say led to them leaving the profession?

A question sheet was prepared for the interviews and participants were asked the same questions with follow-up questions asked where detail was lacking.

Table 2: Profiles of participants

Participant	Age	Sex	Years of experience	Media type	Position held	Resigned or retrenched	Current job	Province
Participant 1	40	F	19	Broadcasting	Bulletin Editor	Resigned	Business	Gauteng
Participant 2	35	F	11	Print	Regional Editor	Resigned	Government communications	Eastern Cape
Participant 3	41	M	7	Print	Reporter	Resigned	Corporate Communications	Kwa Zulu Natal
Participant 4	48	F	20	Print	National Editor	Resigned	Corporate communications	Gauteng
Participant 5	40	M	15	Broadcasting	Reporter	Resigned	Government Communications	Limpopo
Participant 6	30	F	6	Broadcasting	Reporter	Resigned	Corporate Communications	Gauteng
Participant 7	42	F	16	Print	Content Editor	Resigned	Business	Kwa Zulu Natal
Participant 8	30	M	10	Broadcasting	Reporter	Resigned	Government Communications	Gauteng
Participant 9	43	F	22	Pint	News Editor	Voluntary Severance	Business	Kwa Zulu Natal
Participant 10	43	F	15	Print	News Editor	Resigned	Corporate Communications	Gauteng

Participant 11	45	F	21	Print	News Editor	Resigned	Corporate Communications	Kwa Zulu Natal
Participant 12	40	M	11	Broadcasting	Reporter	Resigned	Government Communications	Limpopo
Participant 13	40	F	14	Broadcasting	Producer/ Presenter	Resigned	Government Communications	Limpopo
Participant 14	35	F	14	Print	Reporter	Resigned	Business	Kwa Zulu Natal
Participant 15	52	M	20	Broadcasting	Producer/ Presenter	Resigned	Government Communications	Limpopo
Participant 16	36	F	12	Broadcasting	Reporter	Resigned	Government Communications	Gauteng
Participant 17	58	M	27	Print	Editor	Retrenched	Business	Gauteng
Participant 18	55	M	26	Print	News Editor	Resigned	Corporate Communications	Gauteng
Participant 19	46	F	20	Broadcasting	Senior Reporter	Retrenched	Government Communications	Gauteng
Participant 20	35	M	12	Broadcasting	Reporter	Resigned	Corporate Communications	Northern Cape

Table 2 enlists participants in the study, their age, gender, years of experience in journalism, section of the industry where they worked, positions they held, how they left the industry as well as the provinces where they are based.

F – Female M – Male

Participants were located by way of Snowball sampling. This method includes finding potential participants through referrals. Parker et al. (2019) describe snowball sampling method as “one of the most popular methods of sampling in qualitative research, central to which are the characteristics of networking and referral” (Parker, et al., 2019, p. 3). Some participants referred to others who fit the profile sought and were also recruited to take part in the study.

The data collected from the interviews was transcribed and studied. The responses were tabulated according to themes that emerged from the answers and analysed following Herzberg's (1968) theories of motivation and hygiene. According to Herzberg (1968), Hygiene factors include salary, policies, supervision, administration, working conditions, and status in the workplace, while motivators relate directly to the work that a journalist does daily as well as relationships with peers, personal life, and relationships with colleagues as well as job security.

Section 6: Findings

The main question of this research study is why South African journalists leave the profession. The main reasons stated by former journalists are poor remuneration, lack of work-life balance, lack of career growth prospects, a toxic work environment, poor management, and job insecurity. These factors appear to be emanating from the lack of resources that have led to many news organizations restructuring to keep their businesses afloat. The job cuts that have left newsrooms thin on staff, and the move to digital platforms have also added to the pressures that journalists must contend with.

Theme 1: Poor remuneration

Nineteen out of the twenty former journalists stated that their salaries have not grown to match the inflation rate in the past few years. Nine of the 10 former journalists from the print sector say they have not received bonuses, while seven of the 10 say have taken pay cuts – especially during the Covid-19 pandemic. Those who took pay cuts decry that salaries never returned to normal after the pandemic and they have not received a salary adjustment in several years. Nine of the 10 from the broadcast media also say they had not received salary increases in years. This, they said, was on top of journalists being generally underpaid. The pay cuts and lack of salary progression, as well as job insecurity amidst the widespread retrenchments in the industry, drove many out of the profession as their responsibilities grew as they grew older.

As Participant 18 put it “After sitting in a job for more than a decade and not once getting an inflation-related increase or no increase, at all, you go backward, so when you get a job that offers you where you should have been, there is no question. When you've got children and things, and you've got a house, you've got a car, and cost of living, money was a factor”.

Participant 8 said economic factors are primarily what drove him out of journalism. He argues that “journalists in this country are remunerated so little that it’s almost belittling if you want to be a journalist at heart and do the best you can, you must be content with staying in a one-bedroomed house with your family”.

Participant 3 said being a journalist is a sacrifice that comes at a big cost. He says in your quest to find the truth and expose the wrongs in society, one should not expect to be rich. He said “I think one of the things that they don't teach or emphasize is there is no money. Don't expect to be rich. They don't tell you that you get paid badly. You'll be talking to government spokespeople who earn two or three times your salary. To be a journalist is to be like a Jesuit. It's more sacrifice”.

Participant 6 said financial instability is what drove her to decide to leave journalism. She says “The financial stability, it wasn't really good, obviously when you start you are very young, you just need to pay your rent, and pay for your car, clothes and all of that, but the older you grow, the more responsibilities you assume, and I also have a little sister who is my responsibility, since my mom died, so financially, I wasn't in a good space, I was just getting by and because I loved it, I didn't see a problem until my responsibilities grew and I was looking to the future and saying No, it's very tight, I need to find something else that would make me financially stable, and it was that time when people were taking salary cuts, every year when there are increments, everything else went up, but the salary would go up by about an R1000, it didn’t make financial sense for me to stay"

Participant 9 stated “During Covid, our salaries were cut by 40% some of us by 25%, the response we got was that the company did not have money, we were in the middle of a pandemic, there was a time where people were not buying newspapers at all because the shops were closed, so we understood that to a certain extent, because when Covid ended, and we were asked to come to the office on certain days, still our salaries were not paid in full, how do you put petrol in your car, we were paid 40% less, and it continued, I remember other newspapers were retrenching as well, we were thankful that we still had jobs, our company did not cut any jobs, but all those things continued well into 2023 when Covid had long ended, and then the floods came last year, and they were gone and we still suffered, up until this day, the company was still cutting salaries”

Others say companies expect them to take on more responsibilities without financial compensation. When asked what the main factors that led to her deciding to leave journalism, Participant 1 responded “Money and growth. Money being the biggest drive”. She went on to explain that she had been acting in a senior position and when the position was eventually

advertised and she went for an interview, she was offered the position but was told she would not receive any salary adjustment as the company had reduced salary scales and she was already above current scales. “So, you would take up that role, with no change in the salary, meaning more responsibilities for you but the money stays the same, I mean stressful responsibilities because you are looking after a fast-paced show, a show that is number 1 on daytime TV with high audience ratings where one mistake, they will chop your head”.

She said this was the expectation despite her having not had a salary increase in about 4 years. “I'm very responsible with my money, and I live within my means, now 4 years down the line, there's no salary increase, but everything around me has gone up, as much as you can be responsible, but when your salary comes you can't even sustain the petrol that you need to drive to go to the office, you know your salary can't cover even the basic needs, and it kept on getting worse”.

Participant 10 said, “Journalists are shamefully underpaid, I don't know how people are surviving to be honest, the only way to get your salary hiked is not staying in one place, I changed jobs quite a bit, I got rehired by people I worked for before, I also did a lot of freelance work on the side, you also need to still do other things on the side to be able to get by".

Participant 11 chuckled when asked whether she thought her salary at the newspaper was fair. She said “Before I went into journalism, I knew that it wasn't going to be something that you're doing for the money. And as you got into it, I didn't think it was going to be as bad as it was compared to everybody else”. She added “In the beginning, as a single person, my salary was fine, but the minute that you have your responsibilities in terms of wanting to buy a house, wanting to buy a car, having a child in school and school fees and the cost of living, towards the end, we always had to fight to get some sort of an increase or an increase that was reasonable so that we could survive. Towards the end, it wasn't a standard increase that other people in corporate or other media houses would get, it would be a fraction of that, so it became very hard to survive”.

Participant 20 recalled that he used to have anxiety when his salary was due as he was always wondering how he would manage his responsibilities and still make it to the end of the next month. He says “I think for three years, they weren't any increments and unions constantly had to fight and you know, Inflation went up where food prices, fuel became expensive and you couldn't cope and I know people are still struggling out there, so at the time when I left my job as a journalist, I couldn't keep up anymore. It was like I get anxious when the salary draws to a close and then money comes in, and then the next day it's out and then you must

somehow look forward to the next salary payment where you think to yourself, well, it's a fruitless exercise".

Participant 12 said, "Just before I left, I had been elevated from earning R18 000 to earning R22 000, then when I moved into government where I started earning R42 000, and I moved to a higher position and started earning R54 000, when we grow older responsibilities pile up, I have kids, I had to find something to provide for my family".

"You give your service, the service must equal what you must get, we all look at everything economically, you can't give your service for free, remuneration must match your service," said Participant 15.

Participant 2 mentioned that one of the reasons she turned her back on journalism was because her pay was lagging when compared to her peers that followed other streams other than journalism. She said, "I felt like the industry wasn't paying fairly, I had been working for the past 10 years, but the salary that I'm earning is not reflective of that compared to people who I started working with, with similar qualifications, but maybe pursued careers in corporate communications or PR in terms of their salary is way ahead".

Participant 6 said remuneration policies at her newsrooms were unfair and perpetuated inequality leading to her deciding to leave journalism. He said "I once saw an invoice of another colleague, a freelancer anchor and it just didn't make sense to me, in fact on that day I had gotten back from a protest, I was so tired, I was burned by the sun, I even had a few rubber bullet scars, and I saw that invoice, and it was 5, 6, 7 times more than what I earned, and it just didn't make sense to me, and I just figured on that day that NO, I have reached the ceiling, there are no financial rewards. I became so depressed after that because you start now comparing the effort you put in because I started thinking I could be on screen and anchor for three hours, instead of being on the field for 12 hours doing the actual work, which was a turning point for me.

Others felt like working in their company's regional offices, instead of the head office, came at a disadvantage when it came to salary levels when compared to their colleagues at the head office. Participant 5 said "You see the problem was because I was working in the regional office, and I still feel today that the reporters in the region are not recognized. You'll have people in the head office who are on better scales, and they are only dealing with a specific beat, whereas as a regional reporter, you are an all-rounder, you must do sports or economy, all the news. Reporters in regional offices are neglected. They are not given enough attention. I'm not sure as to what the status is now, but I believe that I put in a lot of work, and it was never awarded in the 15 years that I was there".

Theme 2: Lack of career growth prospects

17 of the 20 participants mentioned the lack of career growth and have reached the proverbial glass ceiling in their career, while others felt promotion policies were unfair as reasons for having left the profession. Others said they felt they had stayed in the newsroom for too long, in positions that no longer served them and they were stagnant but held on merely because there were no other job opportunities available. Many in newspapers are calling the sector a dying industry, killed a slow death by the advancement of technology. Others are calling for solutions that would see news agencies able to generate revenue to sustain themselves.
Participant 19 said while she was retrenched from her job as a senior reporter, she was relieved that she could finally leave her job as she was never going to leave without another job. She said she had been applying for editor positions without much luck and she was holding on to her job as she could not quit without having secured another job. She said "By the time I was retrenched, I really was unhappy, something did have to give, so I wasn't really down about the retrenchment, because I was not going to leave without having another job, I was not getting another job, I was applying, so I would apply to all these newspapers, and I was a senior reporter, was not an editor but they could never even just meet my salary. "I was thoroughly, thoroughly miserable, I felt like I didn't want to be in the newsroom, I had given the newsroom everything I had to give it, I had nothing left to give, I felt that for a good while, but I was still working, because you can't just get a salary without working" She added. "I felt that I was much better placed to be a manager, I had the skills, I had the capability, I just didn't have the favour, and I was stagnant. It would have been much easier, much better if I had been able to get a management position" said Participant 19.
Participant 20 said he felt growth prospects at his media house unfairly favoured other people more than others that were more deserving. Participant 8 said the lack of a development plan in the newsroom where she worked was the main reason she became discouraged and decided to leave journalism. She said, "Reason number one, I left is I didn't see growth happening anytime soon". She said instead of her organization developing staff internally, they would hire someone from outside the organization when there were opportunities that could have meant a step up in her career. "We were never spoken to about the prospects of anchoring unless you ask and even then, our editors also don't know, you go to your line manager, they are also not sure of what is happening so no career growth prospects" she added.

Participant 5 said “The lack of career growth prospects was a bit frustrating, especially if you're in a regional office, you have reporters and editors, so the possibilities of growing are very slim. If you've got a manager who must still stay for 25 years, you must not have any expectations of moving up the ladder”. Participant 12 shares a similar view, he said “What I had in mind was to be elevated to a senior reporter, which never happened, growth there doesn't happen. It doesn't happen. There are some people I know, one right now is 61 and is still in the service, and this is the person who was supposed to leave so that we also become elevated to where they are, so yeah, there's not enough space for growth there”.

Participant 14 said “When I started, I thought that I would grow exponentially in the company and like, give it a few years and I'll go to senior partner to a chief reporter, to news editor to eventually editor and that wasn't happening and I've seen people who are there for 16 years, and they are still in the same position, not moving”. Participant 13 said, “Growth, where I worked, was very slow, that's what led me to seek career growth outside”.

Participant 10 said “What is interesting to me is that you get so many people in media management that have never actually worked in the industry. They don't really understand, and they think journalists understand nothing about business, I think there's a real gap that there's actually an opportunity I think there, there are great people who could have actually done great things if they were allowed to kind of make that crossover into the management side of things and I think there are some companies where this happens”.

Participant 4 feels being a woman can also be career-limiting in newsrooms. She added that “there was no room for growth, I mean, not everybody makes it to the position I was in, National news editor there. I looked at that building, I think there were only two females heading departments, and the rest were male. I wasn't going to grow”.

Participant 8 said growth was limited by what management purports to be in the interest of the company, and if management did not want a journalist to move from a position, then they would keep the reporter in the position where they want that reporter. He wanted to grow in the politics and governance reporting space, but due to a shortage of resources, he would often be taken off this beat to cover any other news of the day that editors deemed necessary. He said “Management would say we still need you on the ground because of the work that you do, how you tell your stories. When you say but I want to focus only on this, because they know you can still do AB and C, they won’t let you go. I think that's the kind of challenge I had because they limit your growth in a sense”.

Others said they felt they had stayed in their jobs for too long and fatigue set in, and they felt the need to get out and do something different. Participant 20 says after 10 years in the job he

felt he “needed to get experience in a different field, maybe one day tell myself well I have experience in the media, and I have experience in corporate communications, it wasn’t only about thinking about finances but also about getting experience in a different sector”. Participant 5 said, “I think after 15 years of service, I felt I have nothing left to offer, I had given journalism my all, having transverse the length and breadth of South Africa, interviewed all sorts of people, fatigue kicked in, at some point it became boring because I kept doing the same thing over and over again, and looking at how the world is evolving, the fourth industrial revolution, newsrooms becoming thinner, the workload became too much, the salary remained the same or even shrinking at times, one had to conclude that I have done enough and it’s was about time I moved to pursue other avenues”. Participant 4 said she registered and pursued studies in a different field while still working as a journalist, which was what she believed opened the door for her in the industry where she is now working.

Theme 3: Job Insecurity

13 of the 20 participants felt insecure in their jobs on the back of the retrenchments that took place across the South African media landscape. Nine of the 10 respondents from the print sector felt there was no job security in the sector. While there have been retrenchments in the broadcast sector, participants from the print sector mentioned they had been through rounds of retrenchments that left them feeling insecure and unsure that they would always have a job. They report that the job insecurity caused them emotional strain. Some lost trust in colleagues believing that they could be set up to make mistakes, so colleagues could take their jobs, while others became suspicious of new people joining the company, afraid they may be coming to take over their jobs.

Participant 3 said “There was no job security, they made you feel as if you're lucky to have a job. I went through a round of section 189 where people have had to reapply for their jobs and they cut down staff you know, so afterward, management was saying times are tough and that the media industry is cutting down, etcetera, and then COVID happened and then things got really bad”.

Participant 18 described job insecurity in the print sector as horrific. He said “It was terrible, there were retrenchments every single year, newsrooms were cut, they were merged, and people were not being replaced. In the 11 years at the newspaper, there was one year when I felt secure, the first year, and after that, it just dropped down the cliff. It was retrenchments,

and then more people cut and then more people, and then, papers going through a massive restructuring, so no job security, it was horrific".

Participant 14 went through two retrenchment processes at her newspaper. She said while she was at the newspaper, her company declared insolvency two times. "You read all of these things in the papers that the company owes all of this money and that the company is in hundreds of millions in debt, and then they keep on saying they can't afford to pay salaries, that their biggest expense is salaries and when you listen to all of these things, you're not going to think Oh my God, I'm safe in my job. You're going to say no, I need to get the hell out of here as fast as I can because I'm going to be left in the lurch" said Participant 14.

Participant 9 shared a similar experience. She said, "There was no job security at all because everyone was fighting for a slice of a very small cake, and we constantly had to watch over our shoulder because somebody would be ready to take your job or stab you in the back". She feared that any little mistake could cost her job.

Participant 10 recalled, "We were expecting the magazine to be closed down every week, job insecurity was a real thing".

Participant 20 said he had never felt job insecurity until the company he worked for went through financial difficulties and had to retrench workers. "They were financial concerns and I was scared whether I was going to get a salary the next month, I think that was also the scary part for me as a human being was if I was not going to get a salary at the end of the month, I was not going to be able to pay my bond, I would not be able to pay school fees for the child, I was physically drained and mentally, emotionally and also financially, I was a little stressed about job security," said Participant 20. Participant 19 also felt secure in her job throughout the time she had been there, until the company ran into trouble financially and workers were retrenched, including her. "I think largely throughout, I was so secure and then obviously that was shaken when the retrenchments came. But for the most part of it I felt secure because I didn't see any reason why my job would not be secure. It was a permanent position" said Participant 19.

Participant 15 felt secure in his job, despite having worked as a freelancer for years. He felt his ability to do his job guaranteed him his job at the radio station.

Theme 4: Bad Management

Twelve of the twenty participants reported being unhappy with management. Most felt management was not fit for purpose given the challenges the sector faced or did not

understand journalism, was uncaring, and at times unethical. They say this created an unhealthy work environment where journalism was no longer enjoyable. This exacerbated the already strained environment caused by the lack of resources, understaffed newsrooms, and increased demands on journalists.

Participant 3 said the main reason he resigned from his job was because of unethical editorial decisions by his supervisor that seemingly were not above board. He felt his editor was fighting personal battles by using journalists to write stories about people he wanted to shut up. “I was in a situation where we were given stories where you see that there's more going on here and we don't know what's happening, we were fighting somebody's fights. You know we must write a story in a particular way, even though the evidence is not saying that, but we must write the story in this angle, then you know there's more going on here” said Participant 3. He felt trapped with nowhere to go, as he was afraid it would be difficult to get another job if he quit. Participant 11 also felt most of their stories were about pushing agendas rather than news. She said “I found that the type of stories that we were doing was no longer independent, it was more pushing an agenda and I felt that it wasn't ethical. We weren't doing quality stories. We were just pushing an agenda and we weren't focusing on our target audience. We were losing a lot of readers because we were ignoring our target audience altogether”.

Participant 7 said the change in management with the changes in ownership of the paper she worked in brought into the newsroom leadership that was not familiar with journalism, sparking frustration in the newsroom. “My boss was an attorney, and she didn't understand newspapers in a very practical sense and often I would find myself explaining to her why we're doing this, why we shouldn’t do that, and she drove a very hard line. I remember the first time I met her, she said to me, if anybody doesn't want to go with what I'm saying, I've been told to just get rid of them” said Participant 7.

Participant 10 said unfit management drove several senior journalists out of her newsroom. She says “There was a real culture of bullying that came from the editor who was my boss when you speak up, you got to put in your place very quickly by the CEO and MD, so the culture was very difficult, it was like if you don't like what the editor is saying or doing then you shouldn't be here, and I think that's a very slippery slope for a newsroom to be in, because that's absolutely the place where power needs to be questioned, so the culture was very difficult, the newsroom was extremely understaffed, people were under a huge amount of pressure from their jobs and then you had this additional layer, culture element which was

unnecessary, that made it very hostile and we saw a mass exodus of people there, journalists quit in droves, about 22 people, there was a management failure" Participant 10.

Participant 18 said “I had no respect for the editor. None. Absolutely none. He and his deputy had no idea what they were doing” Participant 18 said. He said, “Because there was a high turnover in editors, people came into jobs they were perhaps not suited for and it showed quite quickly and it destroyed newsrooms, nothing destroys a newsroom faster than a bad editor”. Participant 16 felt management failed to provide leadership and she left because she did not have anyone to look up to and to learn from. She said “Managers in the newsroom, because you all started as journalists, many managers don't have management training, they don't know people management, they don’t know administration, so we were like floating there, it's like a circus. So, I need some level of structure, some kind of organized chaos, and once I recognize that you are failing as a manager, I, unfortunately, lose respect for you”. She said she had lost confidence in the management at her former newsroom. “Management was rubbish. Our management was pure rubbish, especially the ones that are still there, pure rubbish, the managers who understood the people in terms of making sure that journalists felt appreciated and making sure they felt like they were being supported, left, you have people who just don't know how to present ideas” said Participant 16.

Newsrooms being under pressure to generate revenue seem to be putting pressure on management who in turn put pressure on journalists creating an atmosphere of hostility. Participant 18 said the corporatization of newsrooms sows an atmosphere of fear in the newsroom where “if you dare question authority, you are punished”. He said the “newsroom became quiet, dull, and ghastly and the whole fun of being a journalist had gone. Because of the mismanagement of the newsroom, more and more people were leaving, especially the senior people, the highly qualified journalists”. He said this brought more junior journalists who lacked experience in the newsroom. “They were just churning out press releases and nonsense. There was no passion for the job anymore. You weren't coming because you cannot wait to do your job, you were going because there's a paycheque at the end of the month, and I think that was the key change for me, it stopped being fun, the job stopped being fun” Participant 18 recalled. Participant 10 said the industry changed drastically in a short period. “In the initial days it was great, well-staffed newsrooms, time to do stories. I had one beat. That was what I worried about. I got even international trips that the company paid for, I don't think those kinds of things still happen at all anymore” she said. Participant 10, with 22 years of experience in journalism said the first 15 years of her career were the best years of her life. She explains that this was because newsrooms were functional. She says the

last 5 years have been extremely difficult as it was hard to work with skeletal resources. She says, “Journalism ends up being compromised because of the lack of resources” Participant 9. She said the lack of resources has dimmed her love for journalism. In terms of interpersonal relationships, respondents say they have built lifelong friendships in the newsrooms they worked. They report that they loved working with their colleagues and that they were like a family away from family. Some believe that their work struggles helped build the bond they shared with their colleagues. Others highlight that the entrenched retrenchments, and journalists desperate to hold on to their jobs, have created a culture of mistrust and paranoia, with some in senior positions saying they felt they had to look over their shoulder because someone could be eying their position, and if they made a mistake, they could be removed from their position. Many however had difficulties with management. The fact that management is under pressure to turn around the fortunes of news media by doing more with less, in the process management puts pressure on journalists to also do more with less, this creates a recipe for disaster and leads to many reporting pessimism that leads to burnout and eventually leading journalists to escape the difficult working conditions to find new opportunities.

Theme 5: Poor Work-Life Balance

Limited resources in newsrooms have meant retrenchment for many, with posts not being filled and remaining reporters taking on more work. Some respondents have said the long working hours and sometimes awkward hours worked in broadcast have come in the way of time with family. Many mention that when they were younger, the hours were not a problem, but when they grow older, and have families and kids, the long hours become a burden. Some have complained of the long unpredictable work hours getting in the way of having healthy relationships. The long working hours, and always-on mentality, always searching for stories, and not being fully with family during family time have also caused strain for some leading to burnout, stress, or other health issues. One respondent mentions stress associated with her job leading to dependence on sleeping pills, while another says journalists in the newsroom, he worked with had various coping mechanisms including alcohol and smoking.

“I never had proper relationships because there was absolutely no time,” said Participant 3. He said this is another cost of the long hours in journalism. He said that mostly his day would start at about 6 AM when he is doing a morning shift, he would search for stories before

going into a diary meeting, and then once she gets the go-ahead would start working on the story. With unpredictable news makers' schedules, he reported that he would sometimes get comments for his story much later in the day and would probably knock off at about 8:30 PM, by which time he is exhausted and does not have time for anything else. He said "You can't have a relationship like that, you cannot date somebody, because imagine you are stressed the whole day from Sunday to Thursday. You don't have a social life. That's another cost. I had problems with relationships".

Participant 2 said one of the reasons she decided to leave journalism was because she was concerned about her work-life balance. She said she had become stressed because of the long hours she was putting in because of the staff shortages of the past 5 years where she had to work longer hours without compensation. She said "I felt like for someone who is barely 35, I was working very long hours. I felt like the system is not flexible enough to change, it's a case of things have been like that, so you sort of must accept it, so you must sacrifice. I think that's another big thing about journalism, there's a lot of sacrifice. That's why people who have babies had to set boundaries, so the lack of the work-life balance was also another big motivating factor". She said while working long hours is part of the "willing to work longer hours" spec of the job, "when you start working, you are not thinking that you're going to work long hours every day".

When asked why she decided to leave journalism, Participant 4 said she had several reasons why she left the profession, "number one was motherhood. I have got a son, so it was all good before, you know before you have a kid and all that, you could do the double shifts and work weekends and all of that. So, for me, one was motherhood". Participant 6 also felt journalism did not afford her the structure and stability to have time with family. She said "I think the biggest part of it was stability. I'm now at a phase where you know you've got a life partner; you are talking about marriage. There's a kid".

Participant 7 said journalism's long hours were not a problem when she was younger, but once she got married and had kids, the long hours became a problem. She said "I started as a single young woman and there were no boundaries at that stage. I worked 6:00 to 6:00 and then it got to a stage where I would start at 6:00, leave office at 6:00 PM, and go to a function. I would get home by 9:00 PM, maybe 10 sometimes, and then file. So, I was working ridiculous hours when I started, but I never felt it and I never thought of it that way, so it didn't bother me at all. So, then I got married, then I had children. Then going to the parties in the evening became more and more taxing". She said working way into the night

and still being able to wake up to attend to a baby at 3:00 AM and being able to ready for work in the mornings became hard.

Participant 11 had a similar challenge. She stated that with the demands of the job increasing, and her having to put in longer hours due to staff shortage, things were not easy on the home front. She said “With journalism, there's no 6:00 AM to 5:00 PM. You work erratic hours. It’s fine as a single person. You are used to that, once you get married, and especially if you're married to somebody outside of journalism who doesn't understand, the dynamics then, become very different”. She said the added job demands became untenable. She explained that “you know, like you’re working late hours, by the time that you get home, you're tired. You may not necessarily have the energy to have a conversation go out or do something that you normally would do when you're a younger person. So, it started becoming very tense because you had more responsibility and because of restructuring you had less people than what you used to have”. She said the staff shortages following the retrenchments meant additional responsibilities at work. “You are doing your work and you're doing somebody else’s because there's nobody else to do that. So, in essence, it felt like you were working at 24 hours and there was no downtime”, said Participant 11.

Participant 13 said not being able to be there for her children because of her working hours was motivation for her to look for a job that would allow her time with her family. “Working very early morning shifts was hectic, I couldn’t cope. Those awkward shifts, I had to be at work at 5 AM, and I couldn't help the kids going to school” she explained. Participant 14 also had difficulties with work-life balance after she had a baby. She said the pressures of the newsroom and the shortages of staff, the negativity of retrenchments, and balancing that with being a mom became difficult. “I'm in a different phase in my life now. I think when you're younger, you can. You have all the time in the world. You don't have any tie-downs; you have all the time you can in at midnight or early hours of the morning. Once I had my baby, my whole perspective on life changed. It was mainly to be present with my child and to not miss out on his early childhood, because a lot of the times you miss out on that when you're not there for like the first words, steps, and stuff like that because you're always working”.

Section 7: Discussion

This study sought to find out the factors that lead to journalists leaving the profession to pursue other careers. It has been found that there are several reasons. The main being that they seek better pay and career growth opportunities. They said poor management created a

toxic work environment and they were also getting away from untenable long working hours with high work demands which led them to battle to attain work-life balance. The financial challenges faced by many newsrooms across South Africa are at the root of the crisis in journalism. The inability of newsrooms to find business models that work following the changes brought about by technological advancement is threatening the very existence of newsrooms. Revenue generation challenges and struggles with fit-for-purpose business models that suit the changing media landscape have created a negative snowball effect, creating toxic work environments, and pushing experienced journalists out of the profession because they struggle to sustain their livelihoods. Budget cuts in media houses are making journalism unattractive, as journalists face heavier workloads without adequate compensation, leading many to seek jobs elsewhere. These themes identified in the interviews support Herzberg's two-factor theory. Herzberg's two-factor theory suggests that two sets of factors influence job satisfaction, they are hygiene factors and motivators. Herzberg (1968, p.8) wrote that "the growth or motivator factors that are intrinsic to the job are: achievement, recognition for achievement, the work itself, responsibility, and growth or advancement. The dissatisfaction-avoidance or hygiene factors that are extrinsic to the job include company policy and administration, supervision, interpersonal relationships, working conditions, salary, status, and security". When journalists feel they are perhaps not recognized for the work they do, and there is no room for growth in their career or they have reached the ceiling in terms of growth opportunities, they get motivated to look elsewhere for job satisfaction. Gawel (2019) writes that hygiene factors are factors such as company policy, supervision, interpersonal relations, and working conditions (Gawel, 2019). If the working conditions are not satisfactory, and the worker does not have good working relations with co-workers, the employee may be unhappy doing the work. He stated that "the absence of hygiene factors can create job dissatisfaction, but their presence does not motivate or create satisfaction. Rather, five factors in particular that were strong determiners of job satisfaction: achievement, recognition, the work itself, responsibility, and advancement" (Gawel, 2019, p. 1). The responses from the interviews with the former journalists indicate that, generally, newsrooms are unable to meet the hygiene factors leading to journalists leaving to find job satisfaction elsewhere. The working conditions in the newsrooms are characterized by high workloads and pressure to churn out stories for different platforms such as the traditional media platforms, such as newspapers, radio, and TV news bulletins, as well as providing news for online services such as websites, and social media. Participants expressed their love for journalism and said they went into the profession because of what it stood for – speaking

truth to power, and exposing what is wrong in society. The majority described the conditions in the early days of their careers as fun, and newsrooms as the best place to be, and they stayed for a long time in their jobs. With the changes in the media landscape over the years, revenue streams diluted by the advancement of technology which changed news consumption patterns, newsrooms have become desperately under-resourced, and journalists are feeling the impact of limited resources. The findings of this study confirm Herzberg's (1968) theory that the lack of hygiene factors such as salary, policies, supervision, working conditions, and interpersonal relations leaves employees demotivated. Respondents indicated that the main reason for them deciding to leave journalism was poor remuneration. They stated that their salary progression was below inflation levels leaving them poorer. Others stated that they had to take pay cuts as a result of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on newspapers. They say their salaries never returned to pre-pandemic levels. As working conditions deteriorated as a result of the limited budgets, many were left frustrated. Others were unhappy with management leading to them feeling demotivated and unhappy with their jobs. Hygiene factors were more important to the participants and when employers failed to provide them, the former journalists left their jobs to find satisfactory conditions elsewhere.

The revenue shortfalls at media houses have seen many newsrooms struggle to come up with new business models to try and generate revenue, adding more workload to the limited staff members. Journalists, especially those in the print media, have had difficulties with continuous changes in management, as companies get sold to the next owners as they struggle to make ends meet. They said they strive to make profits leading to the corporatization of newsrooms, creating conditions that the former journalists find not conducive to producing quality work. The former journalists described the working conditions of the past five years as difficult, riddled with job cuts that led to job insecurity, low morale, and a generally toxic work environment.

Journalists who left the profession to pursue other careers because they felt they had stayed for too long in the profession and they just wanted a career change, to do something different from chasing stories, still feel interested in the profession and keep taps with developments in the news space. These are journalists who left the profession still feeling optimistic about journalism, but it was the conditions they worked under that forced them to look for jobs elsewhere outside the newsroom. These former reporters indicated that they loved journalism, many still do and wish conditions would have been different. Participant 20 said by the time he decided to leave journalism, he was “still passionate about the media industry and even up until today when I drive to work, I listen to the news and I'm thinking how I would have

approached a story". Participant 2 also still felt positive about the profession when she resigned. She said, "I still left it in a good place. I still respect the profession. I'm still invested". Participant 5 said, "when I left, I was just tired of doing one thing over and over, I was looking for a new challenge, I left without having any cloud hanging over me, I left without fighting with anyone, or with regrets, it was about time to move because it was almost 15 years and staying in one position for such a long time, usually is not good for one's career".

Many of the former journalists felt they did not get recognized for the efforts they put into their jobs, given that due to the nature of the job, they are expected to do more without compensation for the extra work. They found this frustrating as even if they put in the extra work, they would not get rewards for the work. Participant 18 said, "You could do 6 to 7 stories a day, and there was never a thank you, there was never an acknowledgment. All you would get was what are you giving us tomorrow? It was we want this, and we want more". He said even during performance appraisals, journalists would not be rated according to their true performance but would be rated lower according to the level of rewards management was willing to pay, which he found disheartening. Participant 7 said by the time she decided to leave, she was highly pessimistic because of the dysfunction of the newsroom. "We were going through the third cycle of retrenchments, it was like the wheels were falling off, I mean can you imagine having a car, and everything having its purpose and things are running in a particular way and you keep pulling out parts and you say okay, drive this car with one wheel instead of four, it just kept getting thinner and thinner, the structure around you, so if you wanted someone in adverting to go and do something for you, you'd find they were just not there anymore, it kept getting harder and harder to work without everybody" Participant 7.

The former journalists report that they found the budget cuts frustrating. Participant 18 said if he had competent management, better resources, and better pay, he would have probably stayed in journalism. "I was working on a computer that had Windows'95 and it was in the 2010s, the software was horrendously outdated, the only reason I kept up was because I bought my own laptop and worked on that, so resources in the newsrooms, the latitude to tell a story and have time to think about it, and not have to chase every nuance, social media has been terrible for journalism" said Participant. Similar difficulties are expressed by Participant 9, she says she found herself contributing her own resources so that the work of the company can continue. She said "unlike before when a company could afford to send you on a story for 3 days, with hotel accommodation and petrol in a company car, now the company could not afford to do all those things, sometimes I had to go to a story with my own car, because there

would be no cars at the office, or else you have to take an Uber, so I risked taking my own car to stories, using my own transport, my own petrol I was not even reimbursed for that" Participant 9. She said some big court cases like the murder trial of the slain Bafana Bafana captain, were covered on TV, where a reporter would sit in front of a television, watch proceedings, and write a story. She said this compromised the quality of stories as the reporter is not present at the courthouse, and should they have a power cut, then details are missed for hours. In terms of salaries, former journalists are generally of the view that one cannot become rich from being a journalist. They said journalists are paid poorly, and the financial difficulties faced by many media houses make this situation even worse. Participant 1's words of having to support extended family is a reality for many South Africans given the high unemployment levels. She said "Going for four years without any increase, I mean as much as you are responsible, we are not young anymore, we've got families and even relatives or extended families that you are expected to support. We know black tax is very common with us and you are not even able to sustain your immediate family and I've got a very small family, it's just to myself, my husband, my child".

With the constant retrenchments at various companies, job security, especially in newspapers is elusive. Covid-19 as well added to the precariousness of the journalism profession. As (Rumney, 2020, p. 28) stated "It must be stressed, though, that not only are jobs at risk. The flow of verifiable, credible information is as necessary for the health of democracies and economies as blood is for the existence of human bodies. And financial sustainability is an essential underpinning of credible news media". Participants have indicated that the lack of resources impacted news gathering and with the financial difficulties in many newsrooms, highly experienced and qualified journalists left the new business in search of greener pastures.

According to Herzberg (1968) motivating factors that inspire employees to achieve higher performance, such as personal growth, recognition, the work itself, and leadership style. Many participants have said that the lack of growth is one of the reasons they sought growth elsewhere. The changes in the work expected from journalists as they must also satisfy the requirements of online and social media have put pressure on many. Many have said they had difficulties with management that was not fit for purpose, leading to frustration in newsrooms. Participants have mentioned the low morale in newsrooms, with many wanting to leave their jobs, but sticking around as there are not many job openings. Participant 18 said, "There was no 'passion for the job anymore, people were not coming because they

could not wait to come to work, they were coming because there is a pay cheque at the end of it". Most of the participants stated that they were pessimistic by the time they decided to leave journalism. Participant 1 said by the time she decided to leave journalism, she had "no drive, no energy to wake up, you would drag yourself to get out of bed, because one, you were overthinking and stressing because the stress was the biggest factor". Participant 3 said, "I was negative, the whole newsroom was negative, people wanted out, it's just that some wanted out but it's one thing saying something and it's another thing doing it, taking that leap, I decided to take that leap".

The former journalists also raised concerns about the work itself, and the changing nature of the job. With the changing media consumption patterns, with society moving more towards consuming news online, journalists are expected to report for more than one medium. There is a concern that also with the understaffed newsrooms, they are expected to do more than one person's job. They have also raised that this meant even longer hours at work and the stress of making sure that the story is filed for the different mediums. Participant 2 said "Because of the staff shortages of the past 5 years, in a situation for example where I start at 8 or 9 AM and then I should finish at 4 PM, there should be a night editor, to take over from me, but there is no night editor, and when things go over time, you are still there, but you are not getting compensated for it, it's part of the willing to work longer hours spec of the job contract". Participant 18 said the workload became unbearable, as journalists were expected to "write for the online, you are expected to write for the newspaper, so take that story that has been sitting there for the entire day, change it up to something new and fresh that no one in the world has thought about for the newspaper, which will then go on to the newspaper again for a second day, and then you had the demand for the weekly publication to do something similar on the same story, it's like telling the same story three times, and you are expected to social media this thing".

The findings in this study concur with those by (Mathews et al., 2023) who found that journalists were driven out of the industry by the challenges of working long hours, limiting work-life balance, and poor compensation made worse by the difficult economic environment. Participants in the study mentioned that they were unhappy with their compensation and salaries stuck in one place for years, or increases that were below inflation levels. The thin staff in newsrooms resulting from retrenchments meant journalists had to take on more work leading to increased workloads without compensation and even longer work hours. As Mathew et al (2023) study found journalists who left the profession felt stuck in the jobs they loved, describing their work environment as a prison or factory like, some

respondents have likened their work environment to factories saying they were expected to churn out stories from press releases, without sufficient time to investigate and follow up on different angles. They felt this took out the fun of journalism and they went to work merely because there was a salary at the end of the month. Ekdale et al (2014) found that the widespread layoffs, buyouts, and closures in the news media industry led to job insecurity. The majority of the respondents who felt insecure about their jobs in this study said they witnessed various rounds of retrenchments at the news organisations they were a part of. They said there was no job security and they always wondered when their turn to lose their job would come. This created an environment of anxiety and lack of trust amongst colleagues, as they feared any mistake could cost them their jobs or their colleagues could be eyeing their jobs.

The challenges that the South African journalists state as factors that led to them deciding to leave journalism are like those found (Woodruff, 2020) in the United States, where he asked broadcast journalists who have left the profession what their reasons were. Respondents in the United States complained of the lack of work-life balance and poor rewards.

Many of the former journalists say the dysfunction in the newsrooms as a result of the thin staff, additional workloads, lack of resources to properly work, job insecurity, and low morale led to a toxic work environment where they did not look forward to going but had to go because there was a pay cheque at the end of the month. The difficulties obliterated the fun out of journalism, they said. Many report that the difficulties in their working conditions made them pessimistic and this pushed them to get out of journalism. Participant 19 says she was merely holding on to her job as a senior journalist because she could not find another job. She said, “On a personal level, I was done as a journalist, I thought I had given all that I could give for 14 years”. The levels of negativity in newsrooms are not conducive to productive work and positive contributions from experienced journalists. Newsrooms in their current state as expressed by the former journalists represent a weak fourth estate that is not capable of holding those in power accountable or to speak truth to power. Unless new business models are found that would ensure economic sustainability, it seems newsrooms are indeed a dying profession.

Section 8: Conclusion

The main aim of this study was to find out what factors lead to South African journalists leaving the profession. The findings show that South African journalists leave the profession to pursue other careers because of poor remuneration, the lack of career growth prospects, job insecurity, bad management, and poor work-life balance. The findings suggest that the lack of resources in newsrooms creates a toxic mix of intolerable working conditions that lead to journalists deciding to leave the profession for good. Journalists complain of poor salaries that the industry is known for, which were cut further during the Covid-19 pandemic as businesses could not work to generate revenue. Even after the pandemic, salaries were not restored to pre-pandemic levels. The majority say they never receive inflation-linked salary adjustments and therefore they regress in their level of earnings and because of the financial difficulties companies face, they never get bonuses. Because of the widespread retrenchments in the industry, newsrooms are running on skeletal staff that are expected to have more than one person's job. The additional work is without additional pay. Because of the thin staff, and the demands of online platforms as well as traditional media, the remaining journalists in newsrooms are expected to do even more work, leading to even longer working hours. The longer working hours make work-life balance almost impossible. Amid all that, they say management that is under pressure to generate revenue, is putting pressure on the already stretched journalists, and as a result, they feel unappreciated and made to feel like they are lucky to have their jobs. The budget cuts in newsrooms also affected the resources they had to do their work. Others mention having to use their cars and their fuel to get to stories and at times having to cover major court cases from a television screen. In an environment where electricity is not guaranteed, when there is load-shedding, then the quality of the story is compromised. Others mention not having appropriate vehicles to get to far-flung areas to cover stories or even use e-hailing services like Uber to get to stories as the company did not have resources to send journalists out to a story. The various rounds of retrenchments across the industry have made many feel like they are in a sinking ship, and they need to get out before they are pushed out through the waves of job cuts. Others felt like they had stayed in one position for too long and there were no visible prospects of career growth, so they decided to leave their journalism jobs to go find growth opportunities elsewhere.

The journalists who are leaving the newsrooms are mainly senior journalists with an average of over 15 years of experience. This is a big loss of skills from the profession.

The implications of such a loss of skills go deeper than just newsrooms losing experienced journalists. While this affects the quality of the work that newsrooms produce, society is robbed of quality news that would keep them informed to make decisions based on well-

researched, balanced, and thoroughly analysed and contextualized stories. This is bad for the functioning of a democracy like South Africa as newsrooms are robbed of the capability to hold the powerful to account.

While there have been studies looking at the tough conditions that many newsrooms find themselves under, one important contribution that this study makes to this field is understanding how journalists who are caught in the middle of these tough conditions are reacting to them. The factors that lead to them deciding despite their love and commitment to the profession for years, lead to journalists deciding that they have had enough, and they turn their backs on the profession.

This study will hopefully lead to news organisations building more conducive working environments that can motivate experienced journalists to stay in the jobs they have invested in for years. Journalism students looking at joining newsrooms will also have an idea of the working conditions and what to expect in the real world. Perhaps society in general as well can realise the importance of supporting local news media by subscribing to help them generate the funding needed to produce good journalism.

Policymakers in government saying they value independent, plural media for the role it plays in a democracy could perhaps find ways to support local media concerning a proper funding model in the case of the public broadcaster that has been battling to find a sustainable business model that will allow it to carry its public mandate for the benefit of all South Africans as SABC is still the main source of news for many in far-flung areas where only the public broadcaster able to reach. It is the responsibility of media organisations to find sustainable business models that will allow them to be profitable over the long term. In a country with high inequality, and high poverty levels, paywalls and subscription models may not be the ideal answer taking into account the inclusivity and affordability of many to pay for access to news.

8.1 Limitations

The limitation of this study is that it sampled only 20 participants. The study needed to be

concluded within set time limits. While the study will shed light on what journalists go through in newsrooms in the country, and explain the reasons why experienced journalists decide to leave the profession, perhaps a larger sample with representation of all the provinces in the country would give a fuller picture of the challenges that the newsrooms are facing.

8.2 Ideas for Future Studies

Future studies could look at larger samples of how journalists in newsrooms are coping with the changes in the nature of work and how companies are implementing strategies around helping journalists adjust to the new expectations of reporting for multiple platforms.

Section 9: Recommendations

News organisations should prioritize finding business models that will generate adequate sustainable revenue to fund their operations. Data has shown that at the root of the challenges that newsrooms face is the lack of financial resources. Employees need to be part of the solutions to the challenges that organisations face. News management needs to work together with staff in decision-making, so they understand the challenges that organizations are facing and come up with solutions to these challenges together, so they are not seen as being imposed on them.

With the changes in ownership of companies bringing in new management, these should be people who are familiar with journalism, so they understand the workings of a newsroom and why things should be done in particular ways. Journalists who are promoted to management should be equipped with management skills.

For journalists to focus on what they do best, being to chase newsmakers, make sense of developments and put issues into context, and write stories, to take away the pressure of having to write different stories to fit the different platforms, there should perhaps be technically trained people that are employed to take care of platforms such as social media and online services, that would adapt the already available stories to those platforms.

There needs to be career development policies to avoid fatigue and burnout with journalists doing one thing for years that may lead to them feeling stagnant. There should be clear skills retention policies as well as skills transfer to younger journalists.

Investment must be made in training older journalists on the use of new technology and the use of social media platforms.

Attention should be given to supporting the mental health aspects of journalists. Some participants in this study have complained of stress impacting their health negatively leading to them sometimes resorting to unhealthy coping mechanisms. They complain that the work itself is stressful and the conditions make this worse.

Many of the journalists interviewed mention that salaries in journalism are very low, and that is one of the factors that drive many out of journalism. Perhaps attention should be given to workers' salaries to avoid investing in skills that will leave the company due to low salaries.

Journalism schools could adjust curriculums to ensure learners are trained for the skills needs of the current newsroom environment, including modules on using technology to make new entrants ready to contribute meaningfully to newsrooms.

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