

South African media: local contests and global shifts

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SA another BRIC in the wall?

- SA joining BRICS heralds new global partnership
- Optimistic view: process of emergence from isolated pariah to regional powerhouse
- But not as simple narrative as that.
- SA's status as a BRICS country contested – much smaller economy than other partners
- Internal inequalities militate against uncritical celebration of economic growth and prosperity



South African media

- As far as media is concerned, South Africa can be seen as a regional power:
 - Vibrant media industry
 - Free press
 - Leaders in education and training, professionalisation
 - Expansion into continent
- But not a simple, linear process:
 - Multiple flows of content, interpenetration of capital
 - Internal tensions, inequalities
 - Outward relations controversial – hegemon on continent, China-Africa relationship critiqued
- Local contests, global shifts make up a complex dynamic



Outline

- SA media landscape after apartheid – local contests
- SA media within new outward relations – global shifts



SA media in brief

- **Under apartheid:**
 - Political parallelism (Afrikaans/English/alternative)
 - Repressive legal environment
 - Dominated by white ownership and editorial staff
 - Technologically sophisticated industry

SA media in brief



- **After apartheid:**
- Constitutionally guaranteed freedoms
- Self-regulated
- Less polarised, 'watchdog' orientation
- Normative frameworks contested
- Political economy:
 - Commercial concentration (demise of alternative media; attempts to transform via ownership and staff but elite continuity/renewal; state intervention via MDDA, but public and community media face challenges)
 - Unequal access, concentration in a few big conglomerates, content still largely racially segmented



New pressures ...

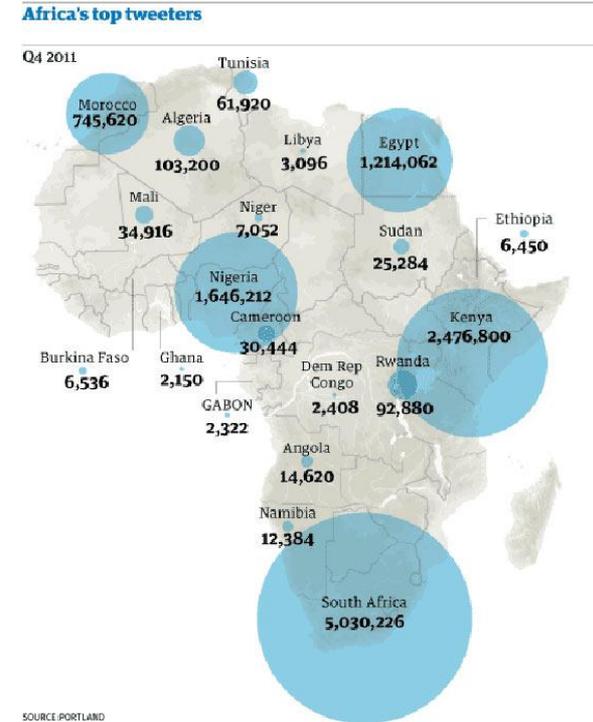
- **Pressures**
- Media Appeals Tribunal
- Protection of State Information Bill (securitization of state – Marikana?)
- Transformation Commission
- State interference in SABC (viz Jimi Matthews on Nkandla)
- Satire not appreciated (Zapiro sued, 'The Spear' outcry, ZA News not on SABC)



....and opportunities

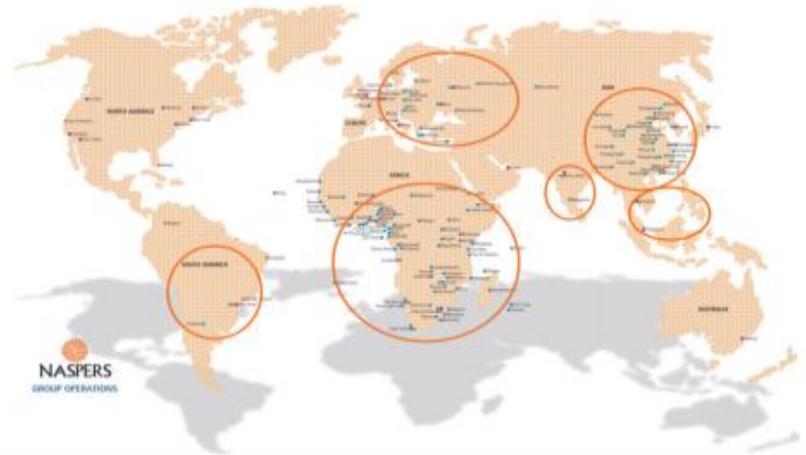
- **Opportunities**

- Technology: huge take-up of mobile phones, more internet access than fixed-line
- Social networks : Mxit huge among teenagers, Twitter biggest on continent (twice as many as Kenya in 2nd place)
- Strong civil society using social media: Right 2 Know campaign, Equal Education

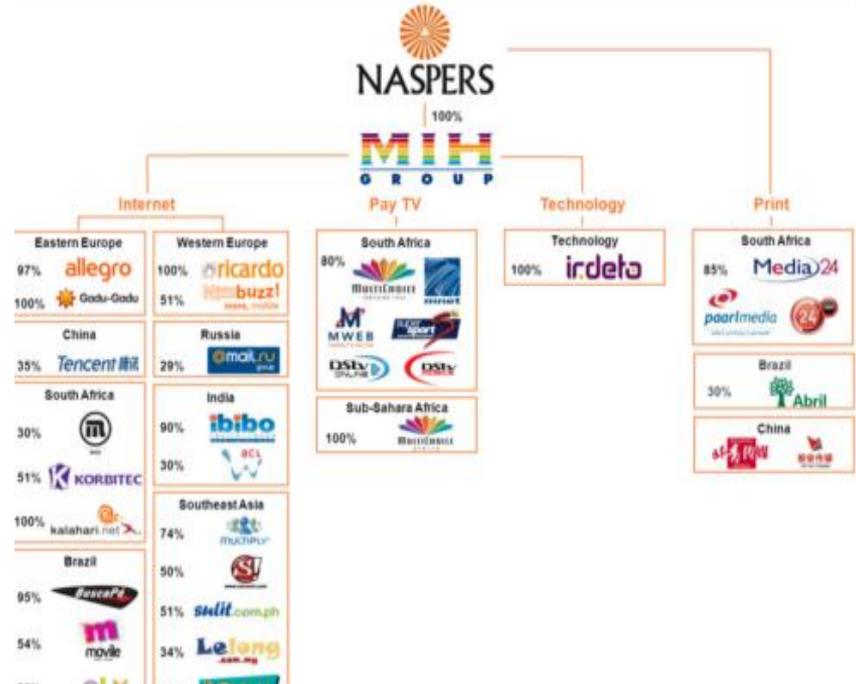


Global shifts

- ‘Interpenetration’ of capital
- Inward flows:
 - Capital: Independent Media
 - Content: global formats
- Outward flows:
 - Hegemonic position on continent
 - Global interests via pay TV, internet



Group Structure*



SA within BRICS

- Entry into BRICS alignment brought renewed media focus on international relations
- Among these – China most important (continent's biggest trade partner) and receives most coverage of BRICS group
- Most contentious partnership – fears of interference in local politics, loss of jobs etc.
- But also fewer strings attached to aid – non-interference in domestic policies
- Africa historically 'a horse – Western brutal rider, beating the horse, Chinese rider gives carrots'
- Questions asked in media : new type of imperialism? 'Scramble for Africa'? 'Partner or predator'?



Representation of BRICS in SA media

Volume of SA media coverage on BRIC countries over time

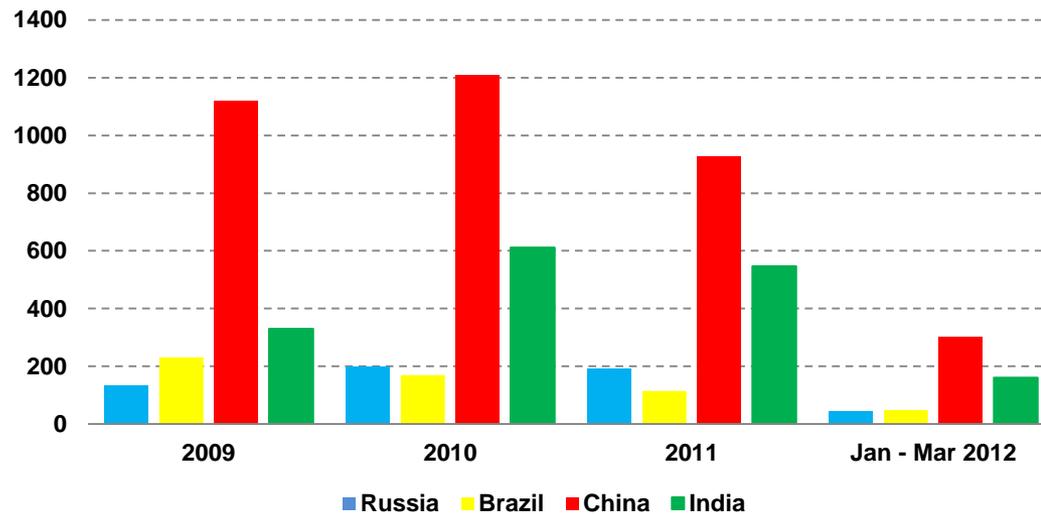
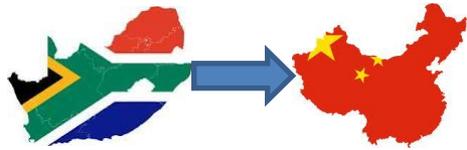


Image of China in SA media

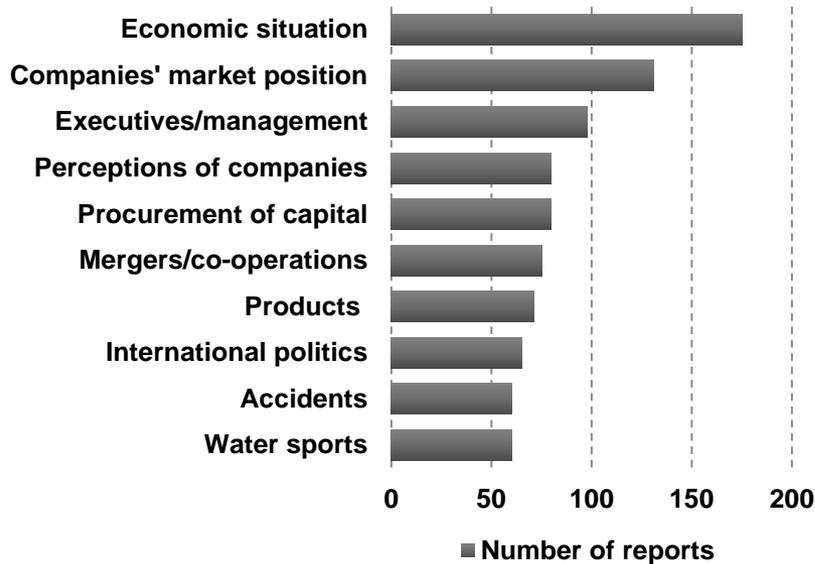
- Started with cautious attitude
- Analysis of coverage over last 3 years shows balanced view of China emerging, becoming more positive
- Cautiously optimistic attitude in media – not pigeonholed as ‘good’ or ‘bad’ story
- China firm place on news agenda
- Strong economic focus, little social coverage
- Economic interest supersedes political issues



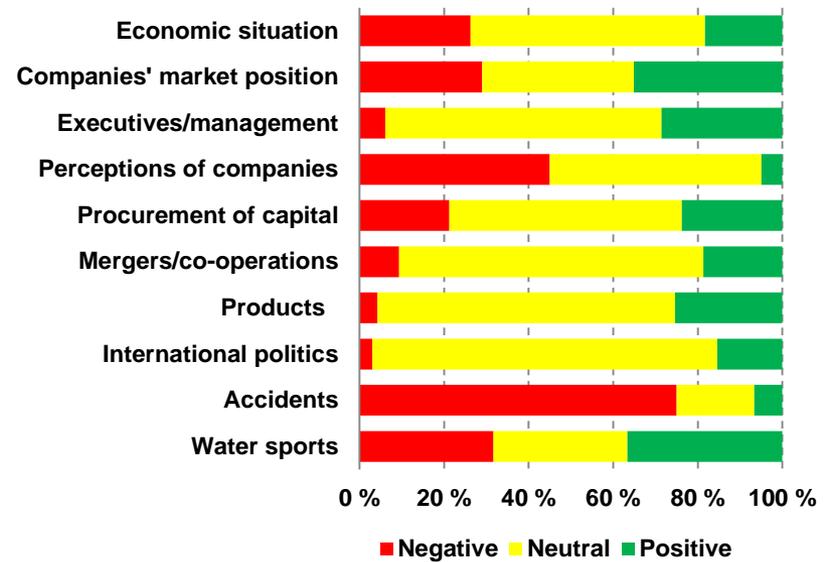
Image of China in SA media



Volume



Ratings



Jan 2011-March 2012

Conclusion

- South Africa emerging 'middle' power, part of global flows & contraflows of capital & content
- Multiple processes of negotiating internal and external relations
- As SA finds a place in new geopolitics, inequalities continue internally
- Translates into a media system that a) still negotiates its role in relation to state and public and b) views SA's membership of BRICS with cautious optimism

