

# 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 ...

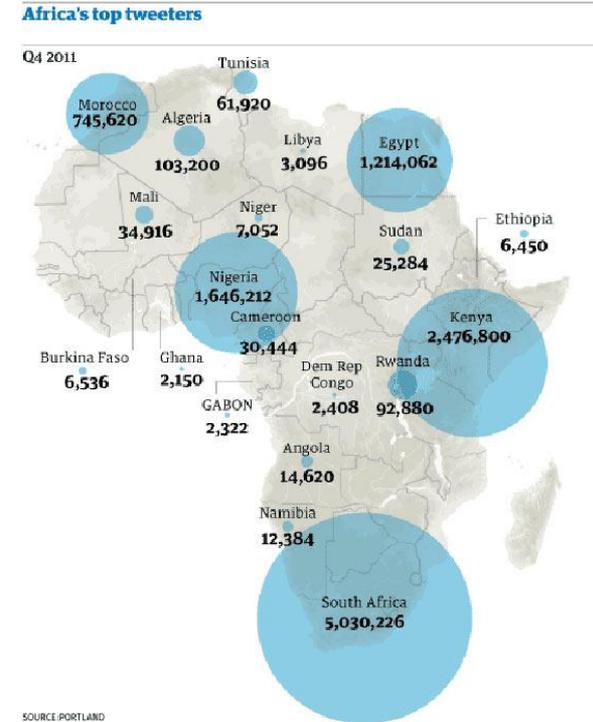
- **Pressures**
- Media Appeals Tribunal
- Protection of State Information Bill (securitization of state – Marikana?)
- Transformation Commission
- State interference in SABC (viz Jimi Matthews on Nkandla)
- Satire not appreciated (Zapiro sued, 'The Spear' outcry, ZA News not on SABC)



# ....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 2<sup>nd</sup> place)
- Strong civil society using social media: Right 2 Know campaign, Equal Education

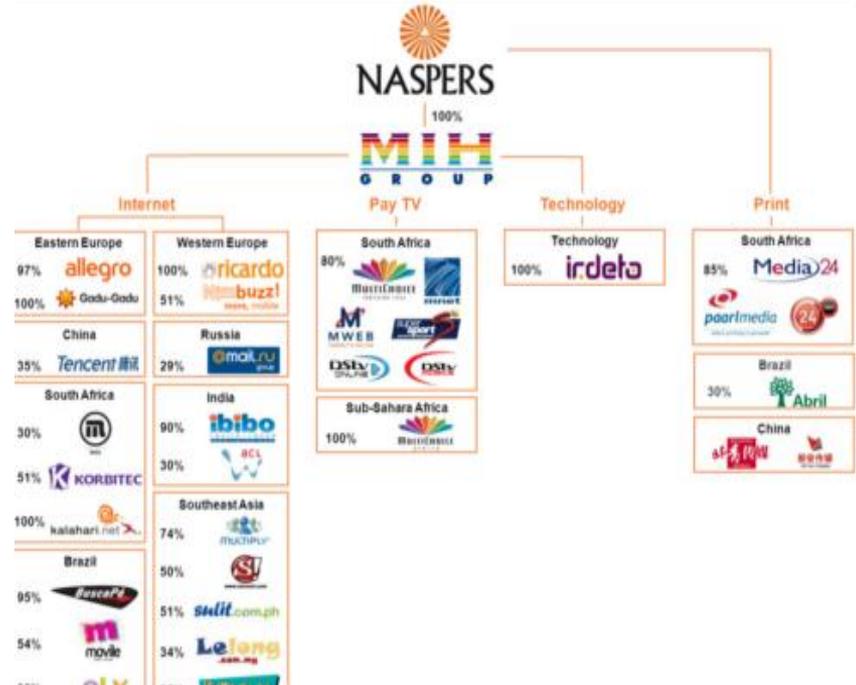


# Global shifts

- ‘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\*



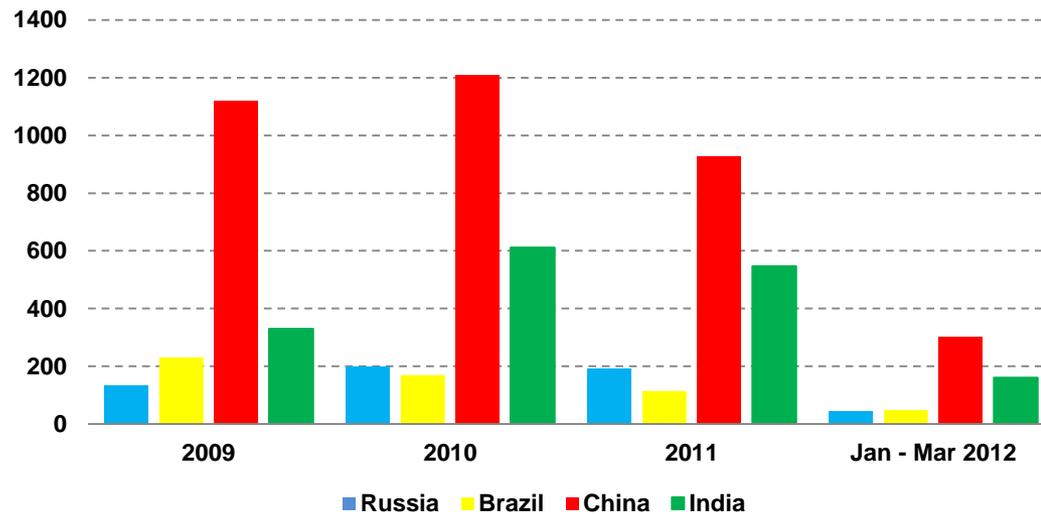
# SA within BRICS

- 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

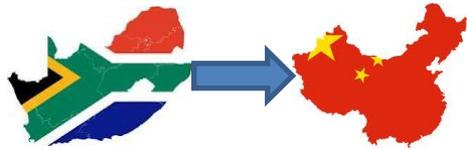


# Image of China in SA media

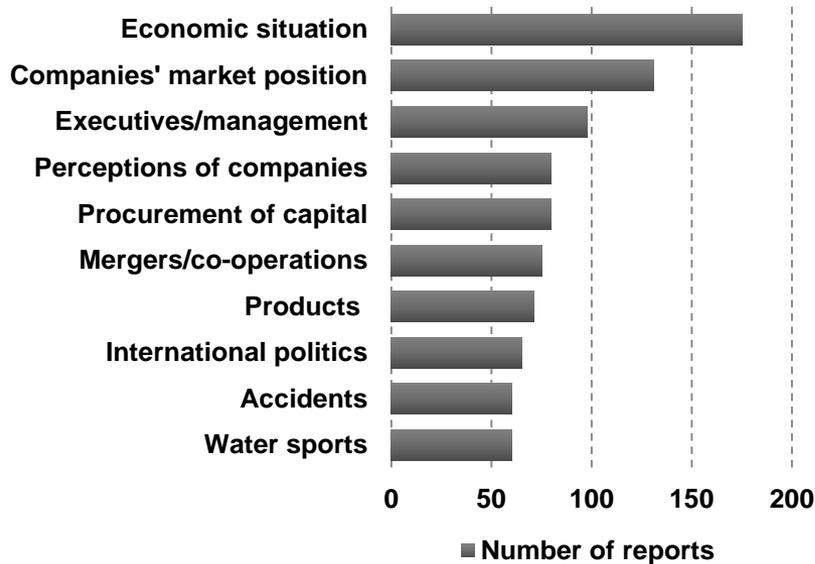
- Started with cautious attitude
- Analysis of coverage over last 3 years shows balanced view of China emerging, becoming more positive
- Cautiously optimistic attitude in media – not pigeonholed as ‘good’ or ‘bad’ story
- China firm place on news agenda
- Strong economic focus, little social coverage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



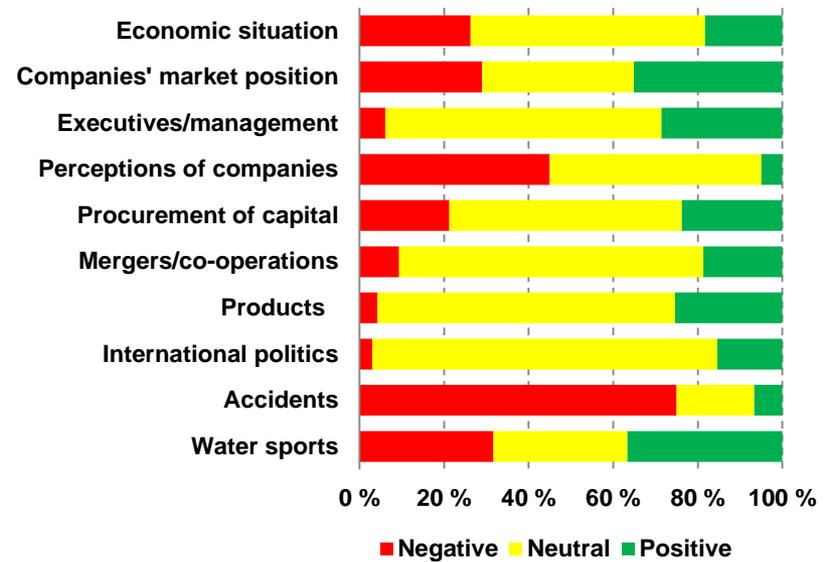
# Image of China in SA media



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

