

# A challenge for the media: Proactive reporting

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Proactive reporting, which often means responsible and balanced news, is necessary to replenish South Africa's reputation after a series of looting that affected local and "foreign nationals" businesses. At this stage, the biggest challenge is the lack of comprehensive data around the number of looted businesses hence limited context or lack of a full picture to the situation is presented. Reactive reporting seems to be the primary way of delivering news around this critical issue, which needs considerable unpacking.



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The past weeks have been woefully frustrating, disappointing and counterproductive for the country's business fraternity. Government has also taken cognisance of this crisis, as it has been focusing on attracting investment into the country to reduce the unemployment rate of 29%, which has been pegged as one of the contributing factors to this outbreak.

Most significantly, these days have been the darkest for the South African families, friends, peers, customers and neighbours of "foreign nationals", some of whom have successfully integrated into local communities. These communities are protective of their own, including "foreign nationals" who are respected and referred to by their names. Right now, they are devastated, feeling guilty, ashamed, apologetic, saddened and sympathetic.

Noteworthy is that, although some local and "foreign nationals" in central business districts experienced looting, in rural areas and many townships, transactions have been taking place without any disruptions.

These angles deserve attention, especially for the international audience, and proactive reporting is the solution. However, media is under pressure to publish and air news quickly—to be the first to break the story! Whereas investigation to produce stories presenting all scenarios takes time. It is time that will be well-invested as it is necessary to unearth positive angles for the following reasons without comprising the ethics of journalism:

- Attraction of international investment into the country. The global audience relies on the news as an instrument to measure the temperature of a nation.
- News on digital platforms has a long lifespan; hence unbalanced stories are problematic.
- Limitation of fake news; the media industry's biggest threat.
- Prevention of umbrella headlines. In this context only associating looting of businesses with Xenophobia, with all interview questions leading to that outcome.
- Less responsive reporting often not providing depth and details.

The challenge for media houses is to find these untold stories and angles. It will be worth the effort as the media's primary purpose is to provide the full version to both local and international audiences, with a secondary objective of attracting investment into the country thereby increasing job opportunities.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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