

# Youth is wasted on the young, but let's see how we can work with them

## anyway

It's hardly an ideal time to be a journalist, never mind a whole journalism start-up. Our colleagues at some of the most established media houses in the country are battling job cuts and print circulations are dwindling too quickly for executives to throw more money at it.

By Khadija Patel

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Innovation is sparking great excitement but there is still little clarity on how to make online economically viable. And even as media transforms, we are still battling draconian surveillance, hostile governments and attention spans that demand to understand the world, all its problems and lolcats in pockets of 140 characters.

Journalism is not in such a grave crisis that may warrant us to think about the end of journalism, and the world as we know it. Journalism is however in a fix. And much of the interrogation around journalism today persists in managing the crisis of journalism itself.

But it's not all bleak.

The uncertainty in which journalism exists has ushered in excitement for new platforms. We are certainly surrounded by some of the best, and most important journalism the world has ever seen.

It is within this cauldron of conundrum and opportunity that we founded The Daily Vox; at once acutely conscious of the precarious place young journalists find themselves and yet fully aware of the opportunity ahead.

The institutional challenges of journalism continue to be widely discussed, interrogated and debated. But what is often less discussed, and even less understood, is how young journalists experience these challenges.

Too often in South Africa, young journalists are thwarted by the traditions of newsrooms, the dogma of editors and the agenda of owners. Journalists must carve a space for themselves, their ideas and their capacity to force change in newsrooms that prescribe conformity to a prescribed ideal of what journalism is – an ideal that is often not as noble as it is made out to be.

### *Not-so-black journalists*

Our not-so-unique history as a colony, and our situation as slaves to international, corporate media still extracts a toll from us today. There is a kind of repression enforced on young media professionals in too many newsrooms. Most often it is young, black journalists who are expected to decry their blackness. They must prove every day that they are capable and honest story tellers, but also that they are not so black that they would question the common sense assumptions that drive the news agenda.

The quintessential journalist then is still white, and male, with the worldview of another era, but with some coding knowledge thrown in. To be a successful young journalist in the traditional media, is to give up your own ideas, to give up little parts of yourself until your writing, or speaking, conform to a dominant

discourse. So media might be changing, and the voices are far more diverse than ever before, but mainstream media still owns the narrative, driving diversity to the crowded, but murky periphery.

And it is exactly this experience that hinders many aspiring journalists from finding space for their voices in South African media. They may work hard but hard work alone is not enough when past and present continue to impinge on the future their legacies of injustice, inequality, and imperialism.

Azad Essa and I have ourselves experienced the difficulties of finding spaces for untrained voices in South African media. Neither of us were trained as journalists, but both of us gravitated towards journalism as a receptacle of our curiosities. We've both been fortunate enough to receive vigorous training at the Daily Maverick and Al Jazeera respectively that has allowed us to see the gaps between the ivory towers and the certificates they confer and the actual skills needed to be a journalist.

One of our core principles of The Daily Vox is to offer young journalists the training and experience that will help them raise their voice in any newsroom in the country.

It is however not enough to simply give young journalists a space to do what we think they should be doing. Young people bring with them a new vigour and a new experience of the world, that must be allowed to impinge on the norms and processes of our institutions. In the year in which The Daily Vox has been live, we continue to learn the value of listening to the young journalists who work with us, and allowing them the spaces and time to tell the stories that matter to them, in ways that may be considered unorthodox to traditional journalism. It doesn't always work out, and we sometimes get it wrong, but when it does work, the results are spectacular: we tell the stories of South Africans in their own words.

### ***But it hasn't all been easy***

Finding the right combination of people to grow The Daily Vox has proved to be one of our greatest challenges. There is no shortage of young people looking for work – and certainly within 24 hours of us putting out a vacancy notice on social media we typically receive more than 50 applications. But the next step from there, getting these people to deliver test assignments has been more difficult. Whether it is a lack of confidence, or a very real lack of access to transport and the internet, many young journalists stumble at this first obstacle – The Daily Vox then is the unvarnished story of the new South Africa.

We are confident that we are building a news platform that speaks to young people, by giving young journalists the space, time and gentle guidance to drive what we do. But most importantly, we seek to reposition the person on the street, the ordinary South African, to the forefront of our news agenda. Journalism is supposed to be vital to democracy, it is supposed to be the harbinger of the public experience.

Indeed if the world remains as it is, though we may cling to technology for solace, we face a very troubled future. The need for good journalism that underpins the principles of democracy is needed now as ever. The Daily Vox is our hope for a journalism that is meaningful to the people who grow with it.



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