Postgraduate Diploma in Media Management (PDMM)

COURSE OUTLINE

Sol Plaatje Institute for Media Leadership
RHODES UNIVERSITY

1. Introduction

Course content

The curriculum of the Rhodes University Sol Plaatje Institute Postgraduate Diploma in Media Management (PDMM) was re-designed in 2024 to reflect the changing digital media environment in South Africa. The PDMM is now a new course that is up to date with similar courses offered in the rest of the world. It aims to offer media practitioners currently working in digital media across the African continent the opportunity to enter the kind of course that will not only offer them the knowledge to become more marketable and to step into middle management positions, but to contemplate starting their own media enterprises.

The PDMM is intended for people with undergraduate degrees who are currently working within the media industry, and who wish to succeed in middle management positions within the public, commercial or community media sectors, and in digital media entrepreneurship. Graduates who have not yet started work in the media industry could also enter this course.

On completion of the course, students should be able to:

• Demonstrate a broad knowledge of relevant theories and principles with a specialised understanding of how these can be applied in the holistic and strategic management of a media enterprise.

• Apply the skills and knowledge they need to perform effectively and ethically in the management of a media enterprise.

• Generate academic research work about the positions of media managers in South Africa vis a vis the changing nature of digital media.

• Articulate an understanding of contemporary issues in digital media management from a Pan-African perspective and with the knowledge of some developments in the digital media across the continent.

 • Understand and analyse the role of Artificial Intelligence, big technology, decoloniality and African language digital media in the new digital media era on the continent.

• Navigate the media space as media managers with a full understanding of how to use their role to maintain the editorial integrity of the press in situations of downsizing, convergence, increased concentration of the media and media capture.

There are seven Modules in the PDMM. Four are taken in the first year and three in the second year.

First Year:

- Research Methods
- Media governance, law, ethics, leadership and advocacy
- People management and the new world of work
- Media ownership, economics and concentration

Second Year:

- Media Marketing and Advertising
- Media Management and Artificial Intelligence
- Digital Media Entrepreneurship and Innovatio

Module ONE:
Research Methods

This Module teaches all the tools needed and steps towards writing a thesis research proposal, including:

- Research design

- How to conduct unstructured, semi-structured and structured interviews

- Quantitative research

- Qualitative research

- How to write an academic research proposal

Module TWO:
Media Ownership, Economics and Concentration

Media Economics born in the industrial age, has undergone significant shifts. Media companies based on the industrial printing press model, that is capital intensive as well as labour intensive, have had to downscale operations, retrench workers, or liquidate. The old economic model faces extinction. Yet, new models struggle to be born. An understanding of the basic principles of economics and the core concepts that drive and define the discipline is essential for media managers.

Media managers today have to contend with workplaces that are publishing 24 hours a day, seven days a week, all year round on multiple platforms, with fewer journalists and other editorial staff than before. Media managers are under enormous pressure from media owners to get more work done using less resources. They are also often at the coalface of implementing owner-dictated cost-cutting measures, which include the convergence of media outlets within a company, reducing or eliminating print titles, and downsizing measures.

There are new and competing political and economic interests in media companies, meaning that media managers need to be on guard against any potential erosion of editorial integrity of their media platforms.

Media ownership has become highly concentrated with the demise of advertising and print, with many smaller news outlets either closing down for lack of funds, or being bought out by bigger media corporations. The entrance of 'Big Tech' into the digital media ownership space poses an additional challenge to media managers who must maintain editorial integrity while working for owners who have invested in the media for purposes other than funding the publication of public interest news.

This module unpacks the latest trends in new digital media ownership on the continent, the increasing footprint of 'Big Tech' in the media space in Africa and how media ownership in Africa impacts media management. It also offers an understanding of the link between media ownership, media capture and the role of media managers in situations of media capture, and how media managers of different media outlets in Africa are managing to work under less than optimal conditions.

The aim of the course is to ensure that candidates for the Post Graduate Diploma in Media Management have a deep appreciation of the major economic and financial shifts in the media economic landscape that have disrupted traditional medium business models.

Module THREE:
Media governance, law, ethics leadership and advocacy

South Africa is a constitutional democracy and this supremacy of the Jurisprudence of the Constitution, 1996, is the hallmark characteristic of the democratic era of the country. This also means that all laws, policies, mores and values-including how the media is conceived of, given powers and rights, flow from the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, adopted in 1996. Given this, the governance framework for media law, as well as for business law, and advocacy of rights, is drawn from the Constitution. In the Bill of Rights, and the preamble to the South African Constitution, the need to right the wrongs of the past, is written into the laws of the country and codified. If a law or practice in the Media is at odds with the letter and spirit of the Constitution; it stands to be struck down and deemed unconstitutional.

Thus, advocacy for media rights, and freedoms has been at the heart of most media activism and leadership since the dawn of democracy in 1994. The Constitution in section 16 (1) Everyone has the right to freedom of expression, which includes— (a) freedom of the press and other media; (b) freedom to receive or impart information or ideas; (c) freedom of artistic creativity; and (d) academic freedom and freedom of scientific research. (2) The right in subsection (1) does not extend to— (a) propaganda for war; (b) incitement of imminent violence; or (c) advocacy of hatred that is based on race, ethnicity, gender or religion, and that constitutes incitement to cause harm.

However, waves of media concentration, and anti-competitive conduct, have tested the law. So too have convergence, commercialization, and liberalization and privatization meant the exclusion of large swathes of the population, from their 16(a) Constitutional rights, such as the right to be informed.

Concentration happens when the means of production in market sectors are owned by increasingly fewer and fewer large corporations. Small players are urged out of the market and freedom of expression rights are monopolized by those who have the financial means and the institutional power to dominate the market and ideas. Further, commercialization, has meant that access to news is determined by the purchasing power and the financial means of individual citizens.

Thus, eroding the power of the media to educate all equally and universally. Universal access to the means of communication in our democracy is also constrained by rural and urban biases, as well as financial and economic means. All these factors serve to constrain the

extension and realization of guaranteed constitutional rights. Thus, media governance has been dominated by the issues of universal access, equity, between races, closing the digital divide and the class divisions that have continued to widen during the democratic era. Advocacy has involved the fight against those economic, political and social factors that inhibit South African citizens from realizing the promise of the Constitution.

The aim of this course is to ensure that candidates are empowered with insights into the governance challenges, rights and obligations, trends in the political economy of the media, as well as the constitutional framework governing media in South Africa.

Candidates for the PDMM course upon successful completion of the module, will be equipped with skills, insights and capabilities to manage powerful media institutions and enterprises within the appropriate legal frameworks, and governance, ethics and press scripts.

Module FOUR:
People Management and the New World of Work

The aim of the course is to ensure that candidates for the Post Graduate Diploma in Media Management are proficient in the middle to upper management skills levels, for managing people, resources and tasks; In line with compliance requirements, legislative imperatives and best practice.

Candidates will be proficient in the competencies to understand the complex emerging world of work, in a fast evolving and digitizing labour market. Digitization has disrupted the labour practices of the analogue and industrial age. News Rooms of the future source skills and talents globally, resources are procured through global supply chains. Likewise, distribution channels are international, and production cycles span many time zones.

According to the Reuters Institute in collaboration with Oxford University, : "The report documents how video-based content, distributed via networks such as TikTok, Instagram and YouTube are becoming more important for news, especially in parts of the Global South, while legacy platforms such as Facebook are losing influence" (2023:1).

Candidates for the PDMM course upon successful completion of the module, will be equipped with skills, insights and capabilities to manage a global workforce in a digitized newsroom.

The State of the Newsroom Report of SANEF and other key pieces of research examine the concept and reality of a global converged newsroom and how it ought to be managed. The concept of an online newsroom is nothing new to communicators. While content may differ from one organization to another, the premise is the same: a communications hub that connects the organization with its audiences across the world. This raises a myriad of questions regarding how newsrooms are best managed and therefore, what skills and competences media managers ought to possess to enable them to excel in their tasks and lead media entities and institutions.

However, in today's world, the newsroom has expanded into a global hub of information and through channels such as social media, sharing news and stories is faster and reaches more people than ever before. Correspondents are deployed across the world in multiple cultures and in very different legal jurisdictions. How does a Media Manager ensure that the brand of the entity coheres, and that correspondents, employees and contractors are treated fairly and justly and remunerated accordingly across the various regions and countries of the world in which they operate.

With this increased consumption rate and larger potential audience reach abounds new questions, challenges, and opportunities. This course enables emerging media managers to understand and apply key concepts in managing converged and global newsrooms and media entities. The course affords media managers key insights on how to develop and maintain the staffing of a global newsroom or communications hub in today's fast-paced digital world.

MODULE FIVE:
Media Marketing and Advertising

"As media options have proliferated and as nearly all media have become digital, our definitions and understanding of "media" and "audience" have radically changed. The lines have blurred between buyers and sellers, between publishers and audiences. Advertisers mostly used to buy media but now they often create it. Audiences used to consume media, but now they also amplify it through social media—sometimes with their own audiences of "followers". Advertisers who once relied on media to reach audiences (and on retail distributors to sell) now often try to build direct relationships with their customers—independent of both media and retail distributors. Advertising happens in the upper funnel, but also at multiple touchpoints, including the point of sale and beyond. Advertising has blurred with customer relationship management" (McDonald, 2020, p. xvi).

This course covers the importance of marketing in today's digital media environment, which is an environment characterised by declining advertising revenues in the print media and the advent of paywalls. It also provides insights for students into how media managers rely on search engine optimisation tools to generate traffic to news websites. Advertising pays according to the number of visitors to the news website. These news websites are in constant competition with each other, and search engine optimisation is an effective method for news websites to achieve high visitor numbers.

News websites have also become increasingly dependent on Facebook for audience traffic, a topic that was unpacked in detail by the Competition Commission's 2024 Media and Digital Platforms Market Inquiry. This module looks at marketing by digital news websites vis a vis "measurable journalism" (Carlson, 2020) where digital platforms provide news websites with more data about how audiences consume the media than ever before – in real time. This module delves into the processes whereby media outlets measure impact and use this to generate income, and how this affects media management through the rise of audience and metrics-oriented editing.

MODULE SIX:
Digital Media Entrepreneurship and Innovation

Journalists at major news houses can no longer rely on working hard, breaking important stories and then being promoted into editor or management positions after several years' working in a legacy newsroom. The print media's transition to digital has been characterised by major losses of advertising revenue, convergence, repeated rounds of retrenchments, budget cuts and downsizing of staff organograms. Many senior roles on newspapers, including the section editor positions, have been erased from newspaper staff organograms.

Globally, established newspaper titles have collapsed and job losses in journalism have mounted (MEAA, 2016). A recent example was the closure of the 125 year old Pretoria News and Pretoria News Weekend, which have been subsumed into The Star newspaper as a much smaller section.

According to Green (2020), "the evolution of the industry, as it is being disrupted by new media and new players, introduces uncertainty in the media market and changes the dynamic of the career trajectory for journalists entering the profession" (p.4). According to Jim (2021), wages in legacy journalism jobs are dropping and these jobs are becoming more insecure with a rise in short term contracts. Digital journalism is changing the craft of journalism rapidly.

Along with changes in audiences and advertising revenue, this obliges journalists, especially senior journalists, section editors and media managers, to develop a "boundaryless" praxis (Henry, 2012, p. 119), across the different fields of digital journalism.

This entails more than being multi-talented across what used to be different professions within journalism: writing, photography, sub-editing, design and multimedia. Today, senior journalists and middle managers must have the skills and knowledge to become media entrepreneurs, and devise and create new media concepts that are underpinned by feasible business models.

MODULE SEVEN:
Media Management and Artificial Intelligence

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has been introduced into many newsrooms over the past three years, changing the roles of journalists and media managers and altering the skill set needed to work in a newsroom. The introduction of Generative AI (genAI), defined as a subfield of AI that "involves the generation of new data, such as text, images or code" (Foy, 2022) has also sparked considerable ethical concern over how algorithms may introduce bias in news production.

Media workers are often reluctant to embrace AI, given the fears that it is likely to lead to job losses, and that genAI digital writers will potentially 'dumb down' journalism, causing a "further decline in public trust in journalism" (Beckett & Yaseen, 2023, p.7). However, a recent global survey found that AI has already been widely introduced in newsrooms with only 40% of journalists saying that their newsroom was at the beginning of its AI journey. Reuters, for example, has used the Lynx Insight AI tool for the past five years to "analyse data, suggest story ideas and even write some sentences" (Kobie, 2018) and identify trends and key facts. 75% of journalists surveyed (Becket & Yaseen, 2023) said they already used AI and 80% predicted a much bigger role for AI in future (Beckett & Yaseen, 2023).

This role could extend beyond using genAI to generate headlines, to using AI to conduct interviews for articles that human content creators will refashion into articles. AI impacts heavily on media management. The new digital media manager will be required to be adept at interfacing this new tech with the tried and trusted principles of journalism, and steering journalists towards not using AI tools to support their work.

MODULE EIGHT:
Major Research Paper or Capstone Project

The final Module takes place in the last term of the second year of PDMM. Students are asked to write a major research paper, in the form of a mini-thesis, or decide on a Capstone project of their choice around innovative approaches to digital media. Students who wish to enter a Master's programme must opt for the Major Research Paper. Both groups of students will be provided with appropriate academic supervisors or mentors.

Assignment Assessment Criteria

Criteria	Highly competent 75% and above	Competent 60-74%	Meets minimum criteria 50-60%	Unacceptable Below 50%
Content	Relevant, sufficient, appropriate, accurate; knowledge of topic areas exceeds minimum requirements; examples chosen are highly appropriate or innovative, enabling novel application of theory	Reasonable knowledge of key topics and awareness of a variety of supporting topic areas; chosen examples are appropriate for the task	Evidence of limited knowledge of topic and some use of appropriate terminology; examples are appropriate for the task	Lacks evidence of knowledge relevant to the topic; writing is off topic; relevant examples insufficient, or lacking or do not meet the essay requirements
Concepts	Familiarity with and incisive understanding of relevant theoretical concepts; appropriate and accurate use of terminology ; innovation in selection and handling of theory; theory is convincingly integrated with analysis of examples.	Familiarity with concepts; clear use of terminology; some attempt to integrate relevant theoretical concepts with the analysis	Some key concepts outlined accurately, but discussion lacks insight, nuance and depth	Inaccurate or inappropriate use of concepts; consistent errors of use, or glib use, of theoretical concepts
Analysis and Insight	Sound reasoning; critical appraisal of theory and examples leading to novel and convincing interpretations; consistently able to apply	Clear application of theory demonstrating sound critical thought	Literature is presented uncritically, in a purely descriptive way; limited use of extended reading;	Understanding of the assignment not apparent; lacks coherent reference to literature; fails to assess literature;

	theoretical concepts to the analysis in critical and nuanced ways; develops and justifies own ideas based on a wider range of sources which have been thoroughly analysed, applied and discussed; insightful, original and compelling analysis of examples that leads to novel and convincing conclusion	around the topic area, able to appraise theory gained from a variety of resources developing own ideas in the process; can evaluate the relevance and significance of examples; uses the analysis to support the conclusion	limited and partially accurate analysis of examples; analysis is superficial; analysis does not support the essay's argument	scant/ unconvincing analysis and evaluation of examples; analysis omitted
References and sources	References are consistently accurate, comprehensive and appropriate; keen insight into how to integrate wider material; evidence of thorough grounding in given literature; ability to integrate appropriate internet material with given literature	Referencing is mainly accurate, use of a variety of sources; some reference to extended reading; appropriate use of internet sources	Some key literature referred to accurately and appropriately; superficial use of internet sources	Few references; frequent referencing errors; random/ inappropriate selection of sources used in the place of course literature
Structure/ technical aspects	Carefully structured to present a coherent argument throughout, clarity of thought and expression, close attention to detail, punctuation, grammar and spelling accurate	Task is mostly well-structured with good attention to detail, grammar, punctuation and spelling mostly accurate	Material is relevant but lacks clear structure; some grammar, spelling punctuation and spelling errors; inconsistent proofreading	Task is disorganised; poor paragraph and/or sentence structure leading to illogical or incoherent argument; frequent spelling, punctuation and grammatical errors