

THE PROTECTION OF INFORMATION BILL AND ACCESS TO INFORMATION IN SOUTH AFRICA: AN INFORMETRIC STUDY OF THE MEDIA COVERAGE*

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Abstract

Increased prominence and repetition of names of people, issues and organisations through media coverage have the potential to raise public recognition and attitudes towards the subject. The issues regarding access to, and protection of, information are no exception. Massive media coverage of these subjects can increase the public knowledge and raise awareness on the subject of access to, and protection of, information. The purpose of this study is to analyse in a qualitative and quantitative manner, the national print media coverage of legislative issues relating to the access to, and protection of, information in South Africa between 1981 and 2011. The study extracted data from the South African Media database, which is one of the databases hosted by SABINET (South African Bibliographic and Information Network). Adopting an advanced search strategy of combining various search terms resulted in a total of 392 articles which were analyzed using different analytical tools and computer software to obtain frequencies of occurrences of the most common title words, subject terms, and subject categories. Other variables that were analyzed included the most productive newspaper (media). The trend of media coverage of information protection and access (including the media bill) were also investigated in the study. Preliminary findings suggest that the media coverage of the protection of, and access to, information during the period under

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study was very high. The study concludes by arguing that the 2010 Information Protection Bill has received massive coverage due to the fact that it has a negative impact on the work of the journalists and the information society, in general. Conclusions and recommendations for further research are offered.

Keywords: Protection of Information, Access to Information, Freedom of Information, Media Bill, Privacy, South Africa, Print Media, Informetrics

Introduction

Park (2003:145) asserts that “the media is considered a window through which people observe the world, and the picture the people see depends on the position of the window, vis à vis what is being seen”. Indeed, the media plays a critical role in defining the parameters of public knowledge. The media has the power, although indirectly, to influence the public about a particular subject. For example, the media has shaped and sharpened the view of society and the process by which we elect our leaders, formulate our statutes, and construct our values, among others. This is due to the fact that, in the course of discharging their functions of informing and educating the people on matters of importance to the society, the media plays a pivotal role in raising the understanding and appreciation of the people for those issues and events in which they have interest and which contribute to shape their destiny.

Increased prominence and repetition of people, issues and organisations through media coverage therefore have the potential to raise public recognition and attitudes towards any given subject. The issues regarding access to, and protection of, information are no exception. Massive media coverage of these subjects can increase the public knowledge and raise awareness of the protection of, and access to, information. This in turn will help to promote accountability, transparency and good governance as citizens would be aware of their rights of access to information. People need to know their rights, as well as the best way to address problems when they occur. Through the awareness created by the media, people can keep democracy strong and ensure a better future for themselves and their children. If the citizens find out more about government services and

get to know their rights, then they will begin to see positive changes around them. The media can be found in various forms such as electronic (television, radio, etc.), print (magazines, newspapers, journals, etc.) and, lately, the Internet or information superhighway (Banjaw 2007:8).

Despite the crucial role played by media coverage in subjects as indicated above, there is consensus amongst researchers such as Craig (1991), Ngoepe and Ngulube (2009), Pugh (1992) and Russell and Huang (2009) that information professionals around the globe do not capitalise on the media to cover activities of their profession. Jimerson (2003), Riehle (2008) and Russell and Huang (2009) suggest that archivists and librarians should communicate the importance of their activities to the public at large through the media. Craig (1991) is saddened that the information professionals have a tendency to leave it up to the journalists to cover activities of library, archives and information profession in the media. We (authors) believe that by communicating their activities through the media, information professionals are likely to be more visible in society. As a result, information professionals would be less vulnerable when demonstrating the value added by their contribution to society, reviewing their own programme and budgets, or exploring ideas to improve programmes and services (Grimard 1999; Ngoepe and Ngulube 2009; Russell and Huang 2009).

Given the widespread news coverage that the Protection of Information Bill has received in South Africa, it is imperative that an empirical study is undertaken to investigate the salience and framing of the protection of, and access to, information in the print media in the country. For the purpose of this article, emphasis was placed on the newspaper coverage of legislative issues relating to access to information and protection of information. Through a literature review, the article also focused on the information access and protection of privacy (IAPP) legislation as stipulated in the Promotion of Access to Information Act (Act No. 2 of 2000) (PAIA), the Protection of Information Bill and the Protection of Personal Information Bill (POPI).

An overview of IAPP legislation in South Africa

Mutula (2006:440) and Screene (2005:35) argue that the concept of IAPP is not new, although it is increasingly gaining currency all over the world. For example, countries such as Canada, New Zealand, Australia, Sweden and the United States of America (US) have enacted the IAPP legislation. According to Mutula (2006:440) the protection of information is often abused by governments who out rightly deny or restrict public access to information. In eastern and southern Africa, it is only in South Africa, Uganda and Zimbabwe where the IAPP legislation has been enacted where it comprised the Promotion of Access to Information Act (PAIA), the Protection of Information Bill (POIA) and the Protection of Personal Information Bill (POPI). The other African country which enacted the freedom of information legislation in 2011 is Nigeria. The IAPP legislation in South Africa is fragmented and overseen by different oversight mechanisms such as, for example, PAIA which is overseen by the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC) and POIA by the Ministry of Intelligence.

Promotion of Access to Information Act

Access to information in South Africa is a fundamental human right enshrined in the country's constitution, under section 32 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa. Section 32 provides that everyone has the right of access to any information held by the state or information held by any other person that is to be used for the protection or exercise of any right. PAIA is the law that gives effect to section 32 of the Constitution. The Act is regulated by the SAHRC, and was approved by Parliament in February 2000 and came into effect in March 2001. The purpose of the Act is to promote transparency, accountability and good governance by empowering and educating the public:

- to understand and exercise their rights;
- to understand the functions and operations of public bodies; and
- to effectively scrutinise and participate in decision-making by public bodies that affects their rights.

Under the Act, any person can demand records from public and private bodies without giving any reason to do so. At present, public

and private bodies have up to 30 days (reduced from 60 days before March 2003 and 90 days before March 2002) to respond to the request. Organisations are required to compile a manual to serve both as an index of records held by public bodies and as a guide for requesters. The manual describes the procedure to be followed when requesting for records. Section 32 of PAIA requires every information officer to submit, annually, a report on statistics relating to PAIA to the SAHRC, outlining the number of requests made and how they were dealt with in the previous financial year.

Protection of Information Bill

The purpose of the bill is to regulate the manner in which information may be protected; and to repeal the Protection of Information Act, 1982. According to Dominy (2010) POIA is intended to guide governmental bodies on how to manage information that needs to be protected and sanction those who flout the protections. South African media fears that, if the bill is enacted, journalists will be forced to reveal their sources and there will be no media freedom, just as is the case in Zimbabwe. In Zimbabwe, cases of government interference with the freedom of press have been widely documented (Mutula 2006:442). Moreover, according to Kirby as quoted by Mutula (2006:442) the Zimbabwean government has adulterated the freedom of Information legislation through various amendments, for example, Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act has been used by government to often seize the printing machinery of certain newspapers and take journalists to court. Therefore, the South African media fears that if the Protection of Information Bill is enacted, they (media) will face similar problems as those experienced in Zimbabwe.

Furthermore, critics argue that the new law would allow the government to classify a broad range of material that is currently not secret. For example, it is argued that under the new law, it would be illegal to leak or to publish information deemed classified by the government, and the offence would be punishable by imprisonment (Dimba 2010). The Bill makes it a punishable offence (up to 25 years in prison) to possess, communicate or publish classified state information. Detractors contend that the bill will allow the government to invoke the “national interest” to cover up abuse of power. Documents that contain evidence of corruption, maladministration or

dodgy deals are likely to be classifiable – in the “national interest” according to the critics. The other argument raised by those opposed to the bill is that Parliament will lose its ability to effectively oversee the Presidency – one of the primary functions of a legislature in a democracy. Probing parliamentary questions are likely to be rebuffed on the grounds that divulging the requested information would pose a threat to the “national interest”. It is no wonder then that the government went back to Parliament on 22 October 2010, to state its new position that accommodates improvements in the bill (Dimba 2010). The government’s concessions were on a number of grounds including:

- a) the removal of the concept of protection of information in the national interest,
- b) the removal of the section related to the classification of commercial information, and
- c) the public interest override for review of classification decisions.

The debate associated with the enactment of the bill is not only in South Africa, but also in developed countries. As Dominy (2010) would attest, legislation associated with information access and protection has posed several challenges in other democratic countries such as Australia, Canada, Germany, the UK and the US. For example, in the UK, the Freedom of Information Act (FOI) provides for the Information Commissioner to oversee the FOI (and the Data Protection Act) and act as “referee if a request for information has been refused”. Balancing the need for individual privacy against the public right to information is a key part of the FOI and perhaps explains the dual role of the Information Commissioner. However, Shepherd and Ennion (2007:34) argue that the UK FOI was intended to make the machinery of government more transparent and to encourage openness and accountability, yet many of the exemptions put in place seem restrictive and fail to protect the privacy of individuals who were previously protected. In Canada, the protection of privacy and access to information is enacted under one Act of Parliament. In South Africa, it is clear that much of the furore around POIA relates to the alleged peril that lurks if information has to be declassified before it can be released.

Protection of Personal Information Bill

The Protection of Information Bill gives effect to the constitutional right to privacy, by safeguarding personal information when processed by a responsible party. The purpose of the bill is to:

- (i) regulate the manner in which personal information may be processed, by established principles, in harmony with international standards that prescribe the minimum threshold requirements for lawful processing of personal information;
- (ii) provide persons with rights and remedies to protect their personal information from processing that is not in accordance with the Act.

In terms of the Bill, personal information may only be processed if:

- (a) the data subject consents to the processing;
- (b) processing is necessary to carry out actions for the conclusion or performance of a contract to which the data subject is a party;
- (c) processing complies with an obligation imposed by law on the responsible party;
- (d) processing protects a legitimate interest of the data subject;
- (e) processing is necessary for the proper performance of a public law duty by a public body;
- (f) processing is necessary for pursuing the legitimate interests of the responsible party or of a third party to whom the information is supplied.

Although the right to privacy and the right of access to information seem to be contradictory or opposing each other in nature, PAIA, which promotes and protects the individual's right to access to information, does, however, make provision for refusal of information on the grounds of privacy. The South African government should have seized the opportunity of the existence of PAIA and included some of the provisions of POIA into PAIA rather than enacting a new legislation. Otherwise, there would be duplication of resources if POIA is separated from PAIA as it is the case currently. As a result, resources would not be used optimally.

Theoretical framework

Reese, Gandy and Grant (2003) argue that a principal approach for examining news reporting is through framing analysis. Framing analysis examines how the media packages information for their audiences and how that information is presented (Reese, Gandy and Grant 2003). In the print news media, the headline is usually pivotal because it provides an instant summary of the story and at the same time locates it within certain reference points for the reader, for example the use of the heading 'Soweto giants' in the coverage of South African soccer matters with reference to Orlando Pirates Football Club and Kaizer Chiefs Football Club. The media frame can be viewed in a number of ways such as: they can reflect broader social processes (see Mickler 1992); they can reflect media views about audiences and what will sell newspapers (see Banjaw 2007); and they can reflect power relations in terms of the sources that were used and those that are marginalised (Reese, Gandy and Grant 2003).

Media frames have received detailed examination across a wide variety of subjects around the globe. For example, Kondowe (2008) used framing analysis to examine international newspaper coverage of Malawi; Kambitsis et al (2002) examined sports advertisements in print media during the 2000 Olympic games; Menashe and Sigal (1998) analysed newspaper coverage of tobacco issues. While framing choices do not fully determine audience interpretations, they can have a potentially powerful impact on them. The use of the media and, more particularly, newspapers to study the patterns and trends of coverage of topical issues has also been extensively practiced in different subject fields/areas such as health (e.g. Kowalchuk 2010; Smith 2005; Collins, Abelson, Pyman, et al. 2002; Lewison 2001); religion (e.g. Moore 2008); epidemics (e.g. Chan, Jin, Rousseau, et al. 2002); and politics and international relations (e.g. Kim, Su and Hong 2007). In framing, the researcher may also involve critical examination of media text so as to identify certain patterns of media coverage (Banjaw 2007:54). In tandem with the previous studies, this paper used framing to do an informetric analysis of media coverage of access to, and protection of, information in South Africa.

Research objectives

The general purpose of this study was to investigate the patterns of coverage of legislative issues pertaining to access to, and protection of, information in the South African print media and the nature of the coverage thereof. The specific objectives were to:

- identify the number of news items concerning the protection of, and access to, information published in the newspapers between 1981 and 2011;
- identify the subject category of news items concerning the protection of, and access to, information;
- find out the newspapers that cover issues on the protection of, and access to, information;
- examine the core terms used to discuss legislation issues pertaining to the protection of, and access to, information in South Africa; and
- measure the strength of association of the most common title words that are used to describe the literature on the protection of, and access to, information.

Research methodology

Kondowe (2008:15) argues that studies about the news coverage are divided into two groups. One group of studies merely describes the quantity of news, what type it is and from what source it comes. These descriptive studies, according to Kambitsis, Harahousou and Theodorakis (2002:155), are important because people depend on the news to be aware of certain developments, a situation that, in turn, leads to certain actions. The other group of studies focuses on understanding the factors governing the content of news (Cho and Lacy 1999). The current study falls into both groups. Firstly, the findings have been used to describe the content, as well as the volume of news items concerning protection of, and access to, information in the South African newspapers, and more particularly the debate surrounding the Protection of Information Bill.

In order to undertake an informetric analysis of the print media coverage of protection of, and access to, information in national daily and weekly newspapers in South Africa, this study extracted data

from the SA Media database, which is one of the databases hosted by SABINET. The database covers more than 120 South African newspapers and periodicals. The SA Media database, produced by the University of the Free State, is updated daily and covers newspaper clippings since 1978. It is a web-based search application database which allows users to retrieve full text as well as bibliographic data on news items, including articles, editorials and letters to the editors. Adopting an advanced search strategy of combining various search terms, namely 'information', 'legislation', 'protection' and 'access' resulted in a total of 392 articles which were analyzed using different analytical tools and computer software such as UCINET for Windows, Pajek, TI and Textstat. Each record that was downloaded from the database contained the following information:

- Subject category
- Date of publication
- Source (i.e. the media name/title)
- Subject terms
- Title of article

All this data was used in the final analysis to obtain frequencies of word occurrences of the most common title words, subject terms, and subject categories. Data was also analysed to find out the most productive newspaper (media). The trend of media coverage of information protection and access (including the media bill) was also investigated in the study.

A core/periphery model analysis was conducted using UCINET analytical technologies to identify the core terms which were used to describe the legislation of information protection and access. Simply put, a core/periphery model analysis categorises units of analysis (which, in this study, were title words) into those that belong in the core, on the one hand and those that belong in the periphery, on the other hand (Borgatti and Everett 1999; Borgatti, Everett and Freeman 2002). The core terms are considered to be the main descriptors of a concept (see Ocholla, Onyancha and Britz 2010; Onyancha and Ocholla 2009). In order to conduct a core/periphery model analysis, a list of the words that appeared in two or more titles (numbering 81) was obtained by analysing the article titles using the TextSTAT

software which generates frequencies of occurrence of terms/words in a text, where a text can be the full-text document, titles, subject headings, or abstracts. Besides the list of the most common words, another list containing the titles was also prepared and saved as Text (i.e. text.txt). Both files (i.e. word.txt and text.txt), saved in text (.txt) format, were then subjected to analysis using the TI software in order to create two co-occurrence matrixes named COOCC.DBF and COSINE.DBF). Whereas the COOCC.DBF matrix provided the frequencies of co-occurrence of a pair of words, the COSINE.DBF matrix contained the normalized frequencies of co-occurrence which depicted the strengths of association. The COSINE matrix was then subjected to further analysis by UCINET's analytical tools to generate the core/periphery clusters or class memberships illustrated in Fig 3. The Pajek software was used to generate the social network of the most common title terms/words reflected in Fig 4 in order to demonstrate the relationships between the words.

Limitations of the study

The study was limited to the coverage of legislation issues pertaining to protection of, and access to, information in the South African print media. Foreign and broadcast media were excluded from the study. We have also noted that the SA Media database is limited in that, in some instances, it misses out some articles appearing in newspapers mainly because it does not include wire services. Nevertheless, the searches resulted in a fairly representative number of news items on the subject being studied, which the researchers were able to classify into different categories as explained in the results section.

Results and discussion

This section presents and discusses the results of the study under the following headings:

- Distribution of records according to newspaper/media
- Distribution of records according to topics
- Distribution of records according to broad subject categories
- Trend of coverage
- Core/periphery model of title words
- Social network of the title words

Distribution of records according to newspaper/media

A total of 41 newspapers published at least one article each discussing legislation issues pertaining to information protection and access. Out of the total 392 records obtained from the SA Media database and analysed, 70 (17.9%) were published in *Business Day* which was the leading newspaper, followed by the *Star* (49, 12.5%), *Die Burger* (31, 7.9%), *Beeld* (29, 7.4%), and *Citizen* (18, 4.6%), just to name the top five.

Table 1: Distribution of records according to newspaper (N=392)

No.	Rank	Source	Records	%
1	1	Business Day	70	17.9
2	2	Star	49	12.5
3	3	Burger	31	7.9
4	4	Beeld	29	7.4
5	5	Citizen	18	4.6
6	6	Rapport	15	3.8
7	7	Finweek (Fin and Tegniek)	14	3.6
8	7	CAPE ARGUS (Also Argus)	14	3.6
9	9	Saturday Star	12	3.1
10	9	Mail and Guardian (Weekly Mail and Guardian)	12	3.1
11	11	Sowetan	11	2.8
12	11	Cape Times	11	2.8
13	13	Volksblad	9	2.3
14	14	The Times	8	2.0
15	14	Sunday Times	8	2.0
16	14	Pretoria News	8	2.0
17	14	Daily News	8	2.0
18	18	Financial Mail	7	1.8
19	18	Sunday Independent	7	1.8
20	20	Herald (Eastern Province Herald)	6	1.5
21	20	Natal Witness	6	1.5
22	22	Sunday Tribune	4	1.0
23	23	Daily Dispatch	3	0.8
24	23	Afrikaner	3	0.8
25	23	City Press	3	0.8
26	23	Transvaler#	3	0.8
27	23	Saturday Weekend Argus	3	0.8
28	28	Bloemnuus	2	0.5

No.	Rank	Source	Records	%
29	28	Landbouweekblad	2	0.5
30	28	Sowetan Sunday World#	2	0.5
31	28	Weekly Mail#	2	0.5
32	32	This Day#2004	1	0.3
33	32	Weekend Post	1	0.3
34	32	Leader#	1	0.3
35	32	Tempo#	1	0.3
36	32	Diamond Fields Advertiser	1	0.3
37	32	Sunday Argus	1	0.3
38	32	Servamus	1	0.3
39	32	Enterprise	1	0.3
40	32	SA Journal On Human#	1	0.3
41	32	Sunday Star#	1	0.3

It was observed that the top five newspapers contributed over one half (50.3%) of the total number of records, thereby constituting what Bradford calls the core or nuclei (Onyancha 2008). Bradford's law of scattering simply states that "if scientific journals are arranged in order of decreasing productivity of articles on a given subject, they may be divided into a nucleus of periodicals more particularly devoted to the subject, and several groups or zones containing the same number of articles as the nucleus, when the number of periodicals in the nucleus and succeeding zones will be as $1:k:k^2$, where the constant k is known as Bradford's constant or multiplier" (Ungern-Sternberg in Onyancha 2008). It was observed, too, that the most productive newspapers are the most frequently published. In other words, it was observed that periodicals that are published daily performed better than the weekly or monthly periodicals. The majority of the top-ranked newspapers in Table 1 are daily newspapers.

Table 2: Top 30 most common topics of discussion (N=392)

Number	Rank	Subject heading	Records	Percentage
1	1	Legislation	392	100.0
2	1	Information	392	100.0
3	3	Protection	356	90.8
4	4	Commentary	92	23.5
5	5	Consumers	79	20.2
6	6	ANC	49	12.5
7	7	Corruption	42	10.7
8	8	Change	41	10.5
9	8	Government	41	10.5
10	8	Privacy	41	10.5
11	11	Secrecy	40	10.2
12	12	Parliament	38	9.7
13	13	Media	37	9.4
14	13	Classification	37	9.4
15	13	Columns	37	9.4
16	16	Requirements	34	8.7
17	17	Accessibility	32	8.2
18	18	Proposals	31	7.9
19	19	Freedom of the Press	30	7.7
20	19	Heckling Questions	30	7.7
21	19	Reviews	30	7.7
22	22	Influences	29	7.4
23	23	Journalists	27	6.9
24	23	Tribunals	27	6.9
25	23	Credit	27	6.9
26	26	Editorial	24	6.1
27	27	Experts	23	5.9
28	27	Implementation	23	5.9
29	29	Transparency	21	5.4
30	30	Comparisons	20	5.1

It was also noted that some of the well-to-do newspapers own websites. According to the Ulrich's online periodical index, South Africa publishes a total of 114 newspapers. Of these, 47 own websites and have URLs (Uniform Resource Locator). Among them are *Beeld*, *Die Burger*, *Business Day*, *Business Youth Link*, *The Citizen*, *Communication News*, *Daily Dispatch*, *Daily Mail* and

Guardian, Daily News, The Star, Rapport, City Press, Sowetan, Sunday Times, and the Saturday Star. Although it is not conclusive, it can be said that online visibility may also enhance productivity of newspapers.

Distribution of records according to main topics

Table 2 provides the top 30 subject headings used to index articles on legislative issues pertaining to information protection and access in South African newspapers. A total of 863 subject headings were used to describe the subject of investigation in this paper. Among the most frequent subject headings are legislation (392, 100%), information (392, 100%), protection (356, 90.8%), commentary (92, 23.5%), consumers (79, 20.2%), ANC (49, 12.5%), corruption (42, 10.7%), change (41, 10.5%), government (41, 10.5%) and privacy (41, 10.5%). Some of the negative subject terms that appeared in the literature and may explain how the South African population feels about the information bill and the protection of, and access to, information include threats (15, 3.8%), violation (9, 2.3%), apartheid (7, 1.8%), unconstitutional (6, 1.5%), mock democracy (3, 0.8%), authoritarianism (2, 0.5%), power abusing (2, 0.5%), and autocracy (1, 0.3%).

Distribution of records according to broad subject categories

The broad subject category reflects the sectors, disciplines, or type of resources or, simply, the broad topic of discussion. The SA Media database indexes items covering 25 subject categories. This study's subject of investigation spanned a total of 17 subject categories. Fig 1 shows that most newspaper items covered issues related to media (127, 32.4%), economic affairs (107, 27.3%), constitutional affairs (69, 17.6%), and labour (24, 6.1%), just to name the subject categories that yielded 20 items and above. The subject category labelled media also covers issues on post and telecommunication. The subject coverage of the other dominating subject categories as outlined in the SA Media's list of categories is as follows: economic affairs (Economic Affairs, Trade, Industry and Mining); constitutional affairs (Constitutional Affairs and Elections); labour (Labour). Apparently, the media is the most (or most likely to be) affected by the proposed Information Protection Bill; hence, the highest number of postings. The question on how the bill will affect the economy (going by the prominent presence of economic affairs as a subject

category) cannot be satisfactorily answered, but given that the issue of economic affairs was covered extensively in the media, it can be said that the Bill has a bearing on how the economy will perform, especially with regard to trade.

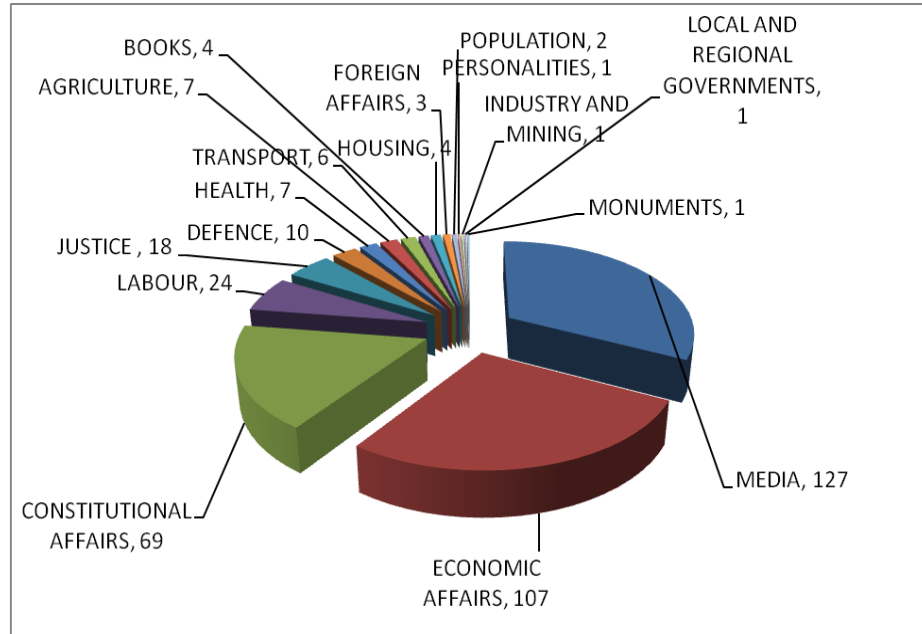


Fig 1: Subject categories

Trend in media coverage of legislation of information protection and access

A mixed pattern of coverage of legislation of information protection and access was noted as the number of items rose and fell throughout the study period. For instance, the number of items rose from 1 in 1992 to 15 in 1993, only for the records to fall to 3 where they remained for the three consecutive years before the number rose again to 4 in 1997, 10 in 1998 and peaked at 20 in 1999. The same pattern continued until 2004, after which the number of records steadily rose from 10 to 19 in 2005. The year 2006 witnessed a growth rate of 36.8% from the previous year's total number of 19 records. There was a further increase of 3 (11.5%) and 23 (79%) records in 2007 and 2008, respectively. However, the most phenomenal growth was witnessed in 2010 when the number of items rose from 13 in 2009 to 110 in 2010, a percentage growth of 746.2%. This may be due to the fact that the bill was introduced to Parliament in 2010. When the South African Government introduced

the Bill to Parliament on 5 March 2010, no one could have predicted that such action would trigger mass-based civil society action that has not been seen since the dying days of Apartheid. The introduction sparked debates around the Bill. Since the Bill was introduced, it has been reported that the Avaaz advocacy group has collected over 40 000 signatures for a petition against the Bill, the “Right-To-Know” campaign group has support of over 9 000 individuals and 350 institutions and the opposition party, the Democratic Alliance, delivered a petition supported by close to 30 000 South Africans (Dimba 2010). As a result, this led to extensive media coverage of the bill during 2010, which is higher than any other year as depicted in Fig 2.

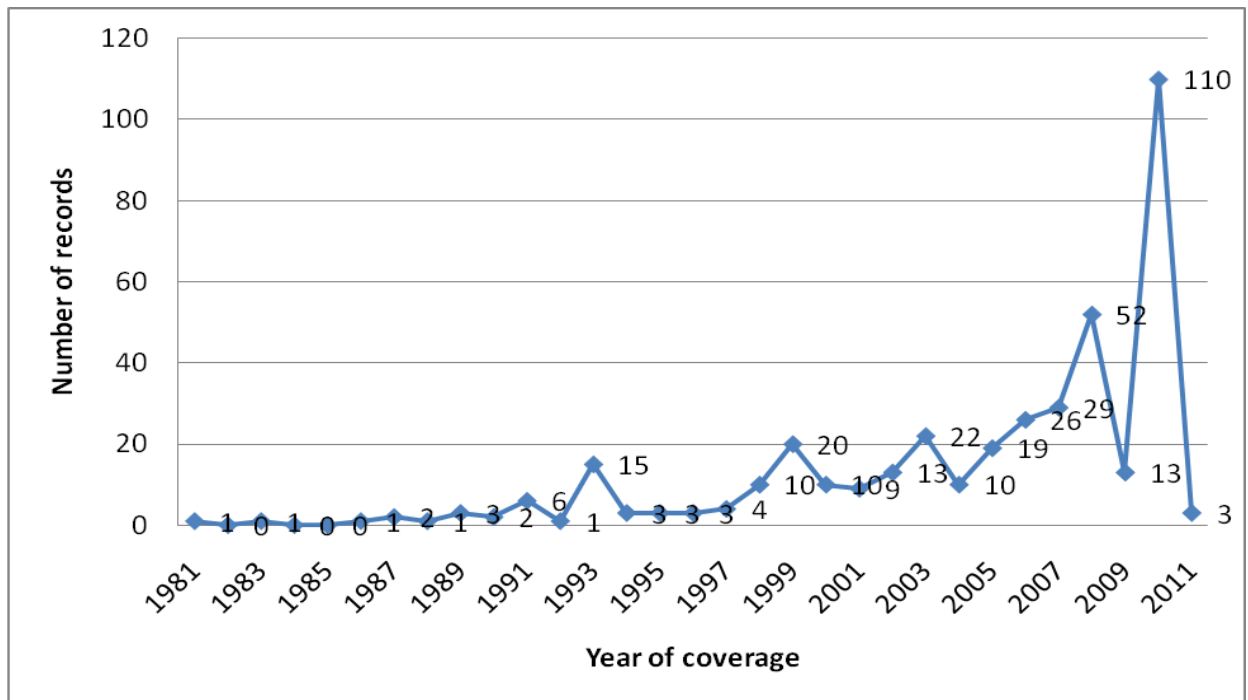


Figure 2: Trend of coverage, 1981-2011

Most common single title words

The analysis of the most common words within the titles was meant to provide another perspective of examining the specific content of discussion within the content of the newspaper items discussing information protection and access. It was noted that the word Bill was the most common, having appeared in a total number of 41 titles followed by *information* (37), *access* (31), *act* (25), *protection* (20), *protect* (16), *credit* (15), *law* (14), *privacy* (13), and *data* (11). It was

observed that among the issues listed in Table 3, which are likely to be negatively affected by the Bill, are *access to information*, as well as *privacy*, *democracy*, *secrecy*, *freedom*, the *media*, and *business*.

Table 3: Most common title words (N=392)

No.	Title word	Items	Percentage
1	Bill	41	10.46
2	Information	37	9.44
3	Access	31	7.91
4	Act	25	6.38
5	Protection	20	5.10
6	Protect	16	4.08
7	Credit	15	3.83
8	Law	14	3.57
9	Privacy	13	3.32
10	Data	11	2.81
11	Media	10	2.55
12	Right	9	2.30
13	Laws	8	2.04
14	Secrecy	8	2.04
15	Democracy	7	1.79
16	Personal	7	1.79
17	Business	6	1.53
18	Freedom	6	1.53
19	ANC	5	1.28
20	SA	5	1.28

A closer examination of the context within which the word *right* was used revealed that the word was largely used in relation to *access* and one's *right* to *privacy*. Some of the titles in which the word appeared are:

- Access is not an absolute right
- Access to information is our right
- Everyone has a right of access
- Journalists' right to protect their sources must be covered by legislation
- Marketing and your right to privacy
- Personal information law extends right to privacy

The occurrence of the ANC, which is an acronym for the African National Congress, was illustrative of the ownership and sponsorship of the Information Protection Bill. This is due to the fact that many voices of opposition to the bill, specifically from the South African media, view the bill as giving the governing party (ANC) the power to deem anything they like "unfit" for public consumption. Critics are of the view that, instead of striving to extend freedoms and access to information to all South Africans, the ANC-led government is targeting a series of freedoms that will further curtail media freedom. Apart from promoting censorship, activists fear that the proposed bill could also be used to target citizens in the long run. Critics argue that the bill seeks to create a climate of secrecy by defining national interest and information security so widely that information could arbitrarily be classified (Dimba 2010).

From this study's findings it was noted that the content of the newspaper items does not mention contributions from other information professionals, such as librarians, archivists, records managers, etc. We have noted that this is also the case with other legislations ushered through Parliament in recent years, the general public often do nothing when they have a chance to oppose or comment on the said matters or legislations. However, once the bill is passed in Parliament and starts to 'bite', then the public would register their dissatisfaction through such means as public demonstrations. With regard to the Protection of Information Bill, only one article could be traced in this study. The article was authored by the national archivist in South Africa who argues that the bill generally articulates and cross-references fairly well with PAIA and the National Archives and Records Services of South Africa Act (Act No. 43 of 1996). The article was published on 26 August 2010 in the Cape Times. Other than that, the Nelson Mandela Foundation through its Centre of Memory and Dialogue and the South African History Archives, as well as Archival Platform made a submission with recommendations on the bill to the ad hoc committee. Other information professionals and associations such as the South African Society of Archivists, South African Records Management Forum and Library and Information Association of South Africa were conspicuously missing in action as far as the bill is concerned as their contributions could not be traced in this study. There was commendable visibility from journalists and advocacy groups such as

Right2Know Campaign, Open Democracy Advice Centre and South African History Archives and political parties such as the Democratic Alliance and United Democratic Movement.

Core/Periphery Class Memberships:

1: BILL INFORMATION ACCESS ACT PROTECTION PROTECT CREDIT LAW PRIVACY DATA RIGHT PERSONAL BUSINESS SA COMMISSION STANDARDS
 2: MEDIA SECRECY DEMOCRACY FREEDOM ANC CONSUMERS COURT DA FIGHT GOOD LEGISLATION STATE THREAT INVESTORS MARKETING PROTECTE

Blocked Adjacency Matrix

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	56	12	35	16	15	33	19	28
	BILL	INFOR	ACCES	ACT	PROTE	PROTE	CREDI	LAW	PRIVA	DATA	NEWS	RIGHT	CARDS	BUSIN	PERSO	STAND	SA	COMMI
1	BILL																	
2	INFORMATION	0.209																
3	ACCESS	0.027	0.528															
4	ACT		0.231	0.493														
5	PROTECTION	0.102	0.132	0.044														
6	PROTECT	0.136	0.088	0.175														
7	CREDIT	0.118		0.253														
8	LAW		0.084		0.238	0.286	0.165											
9	PRIVACY	0.042	0.054		0.124	0.186		0.355	0.193	0.084		0.067	0.302	0.174	0.081	0.123	0.174	0.246
10	DATA	0.046		0.108	0.059	0.472		0.193	0.084			0.175	0.392	0.105	0.160	0.113	0.320	
56	NEWS	0.218	0.120	0.073	0.240	0.091	0.228	0.264	0.174			0.065	0.065		0.077	0.118		
12	RIGHT	0.048	0.124	0.170		0.071		0.067	0.175	0.095	0.065				0.120		0.129	
35	CARDS				0.158	0.158		0.302	0.392	0.213								
16	BUSINESS	0.125	0.080	0.073	0.160	0.091	0.091	0.105	0.174									
15	PERSONAL	0.115	0.296		0.085	0.169		0.081	0.105	0.228	0.077	0.120						
33	STANDARDS	0.088			0.129			0.123	0.160	0.174	0.118							
19	SA			0.073	0.080	0.091		0.174	0.113	0.246		0.129						
28	COMMISSION					0.129		0.246	0.320								0.236	0.236
13	SECRECY	0.162									0.072			0.144				
14	DEMOCRACY		0.074	0.068														
21	COURT		0.098	0.359	0.098													
18	ANC	0.205																
23	FIGHT	0.076	0.098		0.112													
22	DA	0.136		0.161	0.175													
25	LEGISLATION	0.076				0.112						0.158						0.289
26	STATE	0.062	0.080	0.073	0.080	0.091								0.154				
27	THREAT	0.076																
11	MEDIA	0.193									0.102	0.100						
29	INVESTORS			0.226	0.129	0.258		0.123			0.118	0.183						
30	MARKETING	0.176						0.160		0.118	0.183					0.333		
31	PROTECTED			0.113														
32	SECRETS		0.090			0.112		0.107	0.139									0.289
24	GOOD			0.098			0.258				0.306							
34	BORROWERS				0.158		0.183											
17	FREEDOM	0.062				0.091												
36	CASE		0.139	0.127		0.158				0.213								
37	CENSORSHIP	0.108																
20	CONSUMERS	0.125			0.080	0.091	0.105				0.250	0.129						
39	COMPANY	0.108	0.139	0.127														
40	COMPLIANCE			0.127	0.139			0.151			0.144							
41	EVERYONE			0.127								0.224						
42	FORCE					0.158												
43	GAG	0.108							0.196									
44	GLOBAL				0.158			0.151	0.196	0.213						0.816		
45	GOVERNMENT																	

Fig 3: Core/periphery model of the most common title words

commission and *SA* (0.236); *act* and *information* (0.231); *protect* and *news* (0.228); *data* and *personal* (0.228); *news* and *bill* (0.218); *data* and *cards* (0.213); and *information* and *bill* (0.209). A combination of any of the two words, as presented in Fig 4, would generally indicate the topic of discussion in a given title. Seemingly, the most discussed issues pertained to the law (or Act) on the protection of information, which coincidentally was the subject of investigation. This pattern may imply that indexers often use title words to index news items.

The social network reinforces the core/periphery model in Fig 3. At the periphery in Fig 4 are words that did not have as many links to any other title. For instance, the words that had one link each included *hot*, *legal*, *press*, *protecting*, *transparency* and *tribunal*. These terms and many others formed what can be termed as the peripheral class of terms in the core/periphery model in Fig 3.

Conclusions and recommendations

This study draws the following conclusions based on the set out objectives as well as its findings:

- The number of news items on the protection of, and access to, information published in the South African media between 1981 and 2011 has continued to increase, but only peaked in 2010 when the Information Protection Bill was introduced in Parliament. However, the volume of coverage of the subject of investigation of this study is still low, most probably because information protection and access are not life-threatening issues when compared to such topics as HIV/AIDS and other diseases. Other issues that are frequently covered in the South African media, according to our knowledge, include racism, politics, corruption and crime. It will be interesting, though, to conduct an empirical study of the main topics covered in the South African media to ascertain whether or not our personal observation is valid.
- With regard to specific subjects or topics of discussion in the items published on information protection and access, it was revealed that legislation, information, protection, commentary, consumers, ANC, corruption, change, government, privacy and secrecy featured prominently. This pattern was replicated in the analysis of the most common title words wherein the words *bill*,

- information, access, act, protection, protect, credit, law, privacy* and *data* recorded high frequencies of occurrence. *Media* was the dominant broad subject category. This was not surprising because we noted that the majority of the contributions originated from journalists, either as articles, features, news items, commentaries or editorials. Other subject categories that recorded high frequencies included economic affairs, constitutional affairs and labour.
- The most productive newspapers that publish news and other items on information protection and access in South Africa are: *Business Day, Star, Burger, Beeld* and *Citizen* which published slightly over one half ($\frac{1}{2}$ or 50%) of the total number of items on information access and protection.
 - The core terms that are used to discuss legislation issues pertaining to the protection of, and access to, information in the South African media are *bill, information, access, act, protection, protect, credit, law, privacy, data, news, right, cards, business, personal, standards, SA* and *commission*.
 - The strengths of association between a pair of title words (as measured by normalised counts of co-occurrence) were relatively low and therefore implying weak relationships among the words. The highest strengths of association occurred between the following words *information* and *access*; *act* and *access*; *data* and *protection*; *cards* and *privacy*; *privacy* and *law*; *privacy* and *commission*; and *cards* and *law*.

Generally, it was noted that the Information Protection Bill has received massive media coverage, and more particularly in 2010, most probably due to the fact that it has a negative impact on the work of the journalists and the information society, in general. Enactment of the bill is highly likely to result in secrecy and concealment of scandals such as the Travelgate, Oilgate, the Arms Deal which are therefore not likely to be known by the public and, hence, the government would not be held accountable as critics of the bill argue. We argue that access to information by the South African population can help them to become well informed and to contribute positively to governance through democratic participation. Similarly, access to information can enable people to make realistic demands on government and assist in service delivery. Therefore,

access to information should be safeguarded as it supports accountability, transparency and good governance.

As indicated in the findings, there was minimal contribution from information professionals towards the publication of items on the information access and protection, including the Information Protection Bill. Information professionals are therefore urged to contribute articles to the newspapers regarding their activities and should refrain from relying on journalists to argue their cases. As Harris (2007:5) would attest, whether working in archives, museums or libraries, information professionals are in trouble because they have forgotten how to be activists. According to Harris (2007:5-6) information professionals are very good at being functionaries and bureaucrats, and they are teaching the next generation of memory workers to be functionaries and bureaucrats. It would seem information professionals are intimidated by both the system and the rhetoric of those in opposition and they tend to keep their heads down and focus on being “good professionals”. Hence, they do not contribute to the debate on the issues of information protection and access. As we argued in the introduction, that by communicating through the media, information professionals’ activities, as well as the profession’s visibility will be enhanced. As a result, information professionals would be less vulnerable when they have to justify their existence to society or review their budgets.

Finally, it is hoped that the study will be of interest to information professionals and scholars who may want to conduct further research into the area of media coverage of their activities and how best they can promote the profession through media. In that regard, we recommend further research on media coverage in such LIS topics archives, knowledge management, libraries and librarianship, information literacy, and information and communication technologies.

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