

# ANC relishes wave of ‘positive media’ after birthday

**T**HE amount and value of brand exposure the African National Congress (ANC) gained during its centennial celebrations has provided a much-needed boost to the ruling party, particularly as it seeks to use the occasion to rejuvenate itself among voters and its own supporters.

The ANC recently undertook an analysis of the alleged biases of the news media — down to the “attitudes of individual journalists” — as it searches for answers on how to counter what it sees as unflattering publicity.

However, media research by Media Tenor SA and online reputation management agency BrandsEye indicates South Africans were more receptive to the ANC’s centennial message earlier this month, perhaps mainly due to the undeniable significance of the occasion.

The afterglow of the celebrations is setting the pace and focus for the rest of the year, which is due to end in the election of a new ANC leadership again in Mangaung, says Wadim Schreiner, MD of Media Tenor SA. The company tracked the media’s coverage of the ANC over four days during and immediately after President Jacob Zuma’s January 8 statement.

“Last year had been a difficult media year for the ANC,” says Mr Schreiner. The party began 2011 with considerable negative coverage (-11%), recovered slightly, prior to and during the local government elections (-6%), but opinion plummeted to -9% shortly thereafter, he says. This was linked to increased focus on the ANC Youth League and its leader, Julius Malema.

Mr Schreiner says the ANC’s celebrations received exceptionally high coverage in print media, estimated to be in excess of 200% more than the average coverage last year.

Online, the centenary enjoyed 9 839 online conversations measured over five days, reaching about 19-million people at a monetary value of just over R4m, says BrandsEye MD Tim Shier. The agency pulled together a range of statistics from social media activity around the event, including on Twitter.

Mr Shier says the online sentiment around the event was largely neutral, with the large number of “re-tweets” suggesting information was of interest and therefore shared. “Minor themes including the cost of the event; former president Thabo Mbeki’s presence, and the ritual sac-



**JOVIAL:** ANC president Jacob Zuma, right, shares a pew at the Waaihoek church in Bloemfontein where the party was formed in 1912. Picture: GCIS/SAPA

rifice were discussed,” he says.

Newly appointed Ogilvy SA CEO Abey Mokgwatsane says the amount of free and positive media exposure the ANC received locally and abroad was unprecedented. “It presented a political movement that all South Africans could be proud of, one that ended apartheid by unifying people across the colour, cultural, income and religious lines.”

Last week, ANC spokesman Jackson Mthembu said the coverage of the event was huge overseas. However, Mr Mthembu must be hoping Mr Zuma’s keynote address was not much of a big deal with the world media, after it was widely criticised by local critics, with one describing it as “bland, awful and dreary”.

“This was an opportunity for the brand to reinforce and celebrate its

proud history, acknowledge its present challenges and inspire the nation that its best years were still to come. The statement didn’t do that,” says Mr Mokgwatsane.

Mr Shier agrees, but says there was nothing that Mr Zuma said that could have set the debate alight.

“At the same time I don’t think anyone picked up on something massively negative.”

Mr Schreiner says the most negative observations were seen in the media the day after, on January 9.

“This sentiment is linked more with the reputation of President Zuma, and not automatically with that of the ANC,” he says.

Most notably, the centenary coverage allowed the ANC to also divert attention from Mr Malema and the youth league. “This provided for additional voices and comments and a move away from a two-person-focused political coverage.”

However, BrandsEye also reveals that the number of media hits around the centenary was relatively lower than those at the ANC Youth League hearing, which received 6 286 mentions in 24 hours.

Even then, Mr Schreiner says, early indications are that the coverage indicated a positive beginning for the ANC in an important year. stones@bdfm.co.za

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