ANALYSIS OF THE ARTICLES

RAPPORT / NETWERK24
"BRIT ARRESTED AGAIN AFTER RENTAL SCAM"
17 DECEMBER 2022
MAYGENE DE WEE.

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In the following articles, we have significantly reduced the length of our responses and comments. This is because much of what is covered in these articles has already been addressed in our previous analyses, with many of the same violations and misleading conduct repeating themselves. We are mindful of the limits on the amount of content, though it remains a challenge to adequately address the violations when there are 119 offending statements. While more comprehensive responses are available, we have limited the length of each answer here, ensuring that no essential details are omitted.

"A British citizen who was arrested for fraud on 4 August this year and released shortly after on bail of R30 000 was arrested again on Wednesday on similar charges."

This statement is incorrect. (1) I was not arrested for fraud on August 4. (2) This extremely significant false statement is repeated across all articles. (3) It is concerning how four different journalists across three publications over six months could all make the same grave error. (4) By the time this article was published, four months had passed since the arrest—more than enough time for the journalist to familiarize themselves with the case, rather than relying on information packaged by those with vested interests. (5) As with all the articles, glaring omissions are evident, including the failure to mention that the August charge had been thrown out two months earlier. (6) Why did none of the four professional journalists or the most significant news provider in South Africa notice the clear discrepancies between the narrative they were fed and the available evidence? (7) As time progressed, the gap between the narrative and reality only widened. (8) There was no similarity between the charges of December and August; Media24 effectively invented a narrative, repeating what WDS and his clients fabricated. **PRESS CODE: [1.0]** (reporting truthfully), **[1.1]** (verifying facts). **REF:** [A], [B].

"Detectives attached to the police's provincial commercial crime investigation unit arrested Darren Russell (52) this time at one of the luxury houses in Llandudno that he rents and then apparently sublet."

The use of "apparently" is misleading. (1) The subletting was fully legal and consented to buy the property owners; this was the fundamental basis of the agreement. (2) The article presents unwarranted suspicion without any factual evidence to back it up. (3) This issue did not form part of the arrest, charges, docket, objection to bail, or the state's case, yet the article misleadingly presents it as central. **PRESS CODE: [1.0]** (reporting truthfully), **[1.1]** (verifying facts). **REF:** [E], [F].

"Darren Russell (52) was arrested by the police at a house in Llandudno on Wednesday after he apparently continued his ploy to rent houses and then sublet them."

The statement "continued his ploy" is false. (1) The first arrest was not for fraud, nor related to the second, so there cannot be any "continuation" of a ploy. (2) The renting and subletting were integral to the agreement, making the claim of wrongdoing baseless. (3) Inexplicably, the journalist, like the others, made no attempt to contact me. (4) Instead, they published a narrative with no more evidence than the versions provided by WDS and prior articles. (5) This issue did not form any part of the arrest, charges, docket, objection to bail, or the state's case, yet the article falsely presents it as relevant. **PRESS CODE: [1.0]** (reporting truthfully), **[1.1]** (verifying facts), and **[1.8]** (dignity and reputation). **REF:** [E], [F], [H].

"After he was released on bail in Wynberg magistrates' court on August 23, Russell is said to have continued to rent luxury homes in Cape Town's posh neighbourhoods such as Camps Bay, Llandudno, and Hout Bay from their rightful owners and then sublet them to other people, without the rightful owners' knowledge or consent."

This statement is false. (1) The rental and letting arrangements were known to and consented to by the owners from the outset. (2) As stated before, this did not form part of the arrest, charges, docket, objection to bail, or the state's case, yet the article presents it as if it were central to the story. (3) It seems implausible that any publication could publish an article where 95% of the content is false or fabricated, yet this is what occurred. **PRESS CODE: [1.0]** (reporting truthfully), **[1.1]** (verifying facts), and **[1.8]** (dignity and reputation). **REF:** [A], [B], [C].

"Col. André Traut, police spokesman, confirmed on Friday that a 52-year-old British man had been arrested for fraud." "According to Traut, the police seized documents and computer equipment." "According to him, the man's arrest is related to the fraudulent letting of property in the Cape Town area." "'He will appear in the magistrate's court in Wynberg on Monday,' says Traut." "One of the rich man's houses on Darren Russell's website lacollectionsprestige.com."

"The complaint against Russell is new, and Traut asked that people who may have also been defrauded by Russell call Col. Kallie Lourens, the investigating officer, on 082 522 2786."

This is untrue. (1) The complaint was not new; it was over a year old. (2) The article actively called for supposed scammed guests or victims to come forward, even providing multiple contact details for people to report being defrauded. The publication, with its vast readership and significant reach, would have motivated readers to respond. (3) Despite this, not a single guest or victim came forward, none of the thousands of guests who supposedly contributed to the R34 million fraud. This glaring silence should have raised immediate concerns within the publication about the validity of the narrative they were pushing. (4) The disconnect between the article's claims and the absence of any response is immense. How can a publication that dedicates so much coverage to one man, providing contact information and urging people to come forward, not find it suspicious when the phone does not ring? (5) There is a vast difference between the narrative being fabricated and developed through these articles and the actual reality, which should have prompted serious reflection from Media24. **PRESS CODE: [1.0]** (reporting truthfully), **[1.1]** (verifying facts). **REF:** [H], [O].

"The private detective WdS from Fox Forensics said on Friday that there are now four or five new complaints against Russell."

This is untrue. (1) The arrest was not four "new" complaints. (2) the truth could not have been more different, the article was published three days after the arrest, and therefore must have been written between 14 and 16 December, but the charges were related to complaints from a full year earlier, all stemming from the events of Christmas Day 2021. These complaints had been investigated and dismissed for lacking any criminal element. Only to be revived by WDS, PD, and KB. (3) There can be no confusion—these charges were old and cannot be

misrepresented as new. (4) The fact that the article mirrors WDS's fabricated reality rather than the actual facts begs the question of how such inaccuracies continue to be published. (5) The article presents these complaints as credible without verifying their validity or the fact that they had been dismissed earlier. (6) Readers would understandably assume this is definitive proof of an ongoing scam, especially since the article refers to both arrests as being related to fraud. **PRESS CODE: [1.0]** (reporting truthfully), **[1.1]** (verifying facts), and **[1.8]** (dignity and reputation). **REF:** [E], [F].

"According to De Swardt, his modus operandi is the same as in the previous cases."

This statement is false, salacious, factually inaccurate, and yet another fabrication aimed at constructing the most damaging character of me possible. **(1)** There were no "previous cases" as implied by De Swardt, which falsely suggests a long-standing pattern of criminal behaviour. **(2)** The fact that the case for which I was arrested was over a year old, with nothing before or since, highlights the falsehood of this statement. The old complaints are presented as new, while simultaneously being referenced as "old" to suggest that the new ones are additional, thus fabricating a continuous pattern of criminal behaviour from the initial complaint to the "new" ones, when in reality, they are one and the same. **(3)** The few rental disputes that occurred were civil matters, not criminal cases, and they were confined to the same period during the COVID-19 Omicron wave, rather than spanning a long timeline. **(4)** This statement creates an illusion of continuity in wrongdoing that is entirely fabricated. **(5)** The phrase "modus operandi" is a loaded and highly emotive term, one that has nothing but the most negative and nefarious connotations. Media24 should have been extremely cautious in using it without a substantial basis, as it implies a long-standing pattern of premeditated criminal behaviour. **(6)** This attempt to imply a pattern of criminality when none exists reveals a clear bias and a failure in journalistic standards. **PRESS CODE: [1.0]** (reporting truthfully), **[1.1]** (verifying facts). **REF:** [A], [B]. **[F]**, **[L]**.

"He rents rich man's houses along Cape Town's Atlantic and False Bay coasts. He would live in the properties for a month or two and pay his rent and then stop paying. In the meantime, he then advertises the luxury homes on websites such as Airbnb and Booking.com."

This is entirely false. (1) The rental agreements were legitimate and honoured. (2) Payments were made according to agreed terms. (3) If I had only paid a month's rent, I would have paid around R340,000. If I had stopped after two months, the amount would have been R720,000. In reality, I paid nearly R5 million in rent alone, and over R6.5 million when factoring in rent, bills, and housekeeper wages. (4) The publication could have easily verified this by contacting me, but they never did. (5) The scam narrative collapses when you consider that a villa scam, by definition, would not require the actual acquisition, refurbishment, and management of properties. I invested heavily in these properties—why would I spend R6 million on rent, R2 million on managerial salaries, R8 million on refurbishments, and half a million on repairs and agency fees if my intention was to scam guests? (6) Why would I spend over R1.5 million on legal fees fighting the landlords if I didn't need real properties for real guests? (7) The platforms mentioned were never contacted by the journalist. (8) Media24 promotes itself as an investigative outlet, yet if WDS's allegations were true, how could I still have an operational, accredited Booking.com account at the time this article was published? (9) How does the journalist reconcile the facts available to them with the narrative they chose to publish? **PRESS CODE: [1.0]** (reporting truthfully), **[1.1]** (verifying facts). **REF:** [A], [B].

"Apparently, Russell also double-rented some of the properties he rented—or as de Swardt says—even triple-rented."

This is categorically false. (1) Despite WdS's claims, no evidence of double- or triple-renting has ever been produced. (2) Over the course of 2022 and 2023, WDS and his clients—particularly PD and KB—engaged in numerous investigations. They invested significant resources, using private investigators, SAPS officers, and others, including figures like Denis and Johan, who had unrestricted access to my home, laptops, and devices for an entire month. (3) Multiple law enforcement bodies, including Hout Bay SAPS, Camps Bay SAPS, Hawks, Bellville Commercial, the NPA, and Wynberg Magistrates' Court, spent thousands of hours searching for any wrongdoing, yet found nothing. (4) Had they discovered any fraud, they wouldn't have needed to resurrect the complaints from

December 2021. (5) Despite these facts, the articles published during this time parrot WDS's false allegations as if they were the product of serious investigation. **PRESS CODE: [1.0]** (reporting truthfully), **[1.1]** (verifying facts), and **[1.8]** (dignity and reputation). **REF:** [E], [F].

"Whoever gets there first gets the keys. The other tenants' money was put in his pocket, and it's thousands of rands."

This statement is completely fabricated and absurd. (1) The idea that keys were distributed in such a chaotic manner is implausible and unsupported by any evidence. (2) No such instances of misconduct occurred, and no tenants ever raised legitimate claims of being "cheated."

(3) If such a practice had existed even briefly, we would have lost all platform partnerships and online presence, and the internet would be flooded with negative reviews. (4) All of these fabrications, originating from WdS, found their way into the articles verbatim, with no effort to verify their accuracy. Worse, these falsehoods were presented as the result of journalistic investigation, when they were nothing more than pre-packaged defamatory statements. **PRESS CODE: [1.0]** (reporting truthfully), **[1.1]** (verifying facts), and **[1.8]** (dignity and reputation). **REF:** [E], [F].

"If the people demand their money back, he says they should take him to court."

This is false. (1) I never made such a statement. (2) The claim is presented without any verification, further perpetuating WDS's narrative. **PRESS CODE: [1.0]** (reporting truthfully), **[1.1]** (verifying facts), and **[1.8]** (dignity and reputation). **REF:** [E], [F].

"He knows it will cost the people thousands of rands and then they leave it instead."

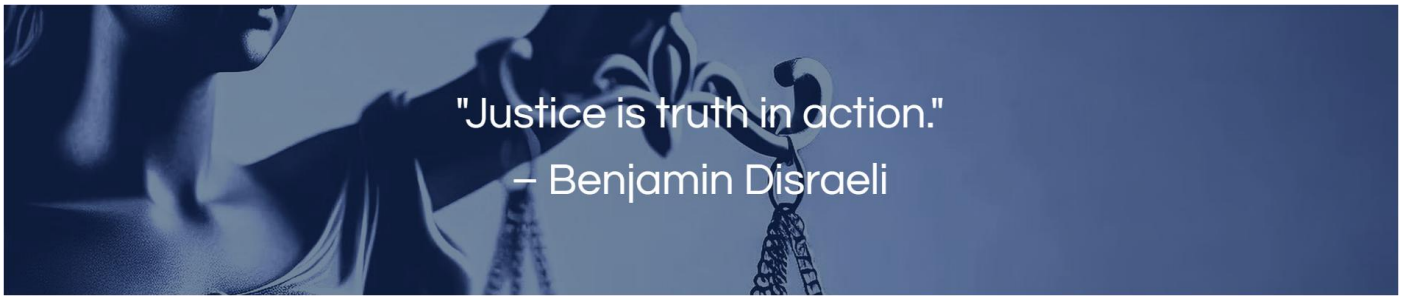
This is misleading and speculative. (1) Legal costs would be minimal compared to the alleged sums, and tenants would have pursued refunds if they had legitimate claims. (2) It is illogical to suggest that a guest would not spend a few thousand rand to recover a R200,000 vacation cost. (3) More importantly, why would they stay silent, not complain to their bank, the platform, or the press? The suggestion that tenants were dissuaded from seeking justice due to costs is a weak attempt to explain the absence of any legal claims. (4) The lack of legal action proves no fraud occurred. **PRESS CODE: [1.0]** (reporting truthfully), **[1.1]** (verifying facts). **REF:** [E], [F].

"Russell was first arrested on 4 August at a house in the Upper Cape. He then appeared in the Magistrate's Court in Wynberg on charges of fraud, burglary, theft, and malicious damage to property, as well as being in the country illegally because his visa had expired."

This is misleading. (1) The August arrest was not for fraud but for the alleged theft of three old televisions. (2) I was not charged with any immigration breaches in either August or December—this claim is wholly false. (3) The inclusion of unrelated immigration charges is part of WDS's deliberate attempt to mislead readers and exaggerate the allegations. Unfortunately, Media24 provided him the platform to do so. **PRESS CODE: [1.0]** (reporting truthfully), **[1.1]** (verifying facts), and **[1.8]** (dignity and reputation). **REF:** [A], [B], [C].

"It now appears that the property scam started as early as 2012. In a report on the website of The Evening Standard, a British publication, it was alleged in April 2012 that he had not paid deposits from tenants to the landlords, on whose behalf he acted. He is believed to have used the money to strengthen his own property portfolio and finance his luxurious life."

This is a misrepresentation. (1) The allegations from The Evening Standard were discredited and dealt with years ago. (1) a multiple titled media group, Media24 cannot have failed to appreciate the significance of the fact there was one article, published once, never repeated, not circulated or syndicated, no follow up or expansion of , and not

even published by the title's sister publications. (2) the approach of Media24 to this article is indicative of their whole approach, they cherry picked what to publish and what not to. They reference one article in 2012, a full decade before their articles, and yet the fact that there had been no articles in the previous ten years seems to have no relevance. The idea ii could have been operating scams in the previous decade and not hit the radar on multiple occasions again seems academic to their purpose. (3) or in fact that in the previous thirty four years covering the period that I ran my own businesses that was all they could find (or rather what WdS passed to them). (4) and my operation was not some small concern, I had estate agency covering Manchester & Northwest England as well as London and Greater London, a portfolio of properties valued in today's money at a billion Rand, the collection of businesses and brands included interior design, property investment, international inward investment, lettings, management and sales and much else.

We were one of the top 3 agents in Manchester and one f the busiest in London. But one of this gets the slightest mention or efference in the articles . The fact that this article was never followed up, republished, or built upon by its regional versions or sister publications demonstrates its speculative nature. (4) It is also factually incorrect: my property portfolio predated my estate agency business, and in fact the profits from the portfolio were what established and when need subsidised the estate agency business so the premise of the claim makes no sense. (5) The suggestion that I used tenants' money to finance a "luxurious life" is defamatory and unsupported by any actual evidence. (6) it also grabbing at straws considering the thousands of transaction done in the preceding decade that all they felt appropriate to reference from that period was the article. **PRESS CODE: [1.0]** (reporting truthfully), **[1.1]** (verifying facts), and **[1.8]** (dignity and reputation). **REF:** [A], [B], [C].