

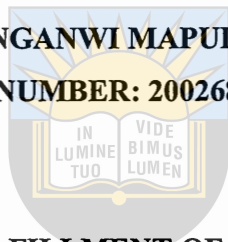


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**THE FUTURE OF NEWS IN THE NEW WORLD ORDER: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS
OF THE ROLE OF CITIZEN JOURNALISM IN SELECTED SUB SAHARAN
AFRICAN COUNTRIES**

BY

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**A THESIS SUBMITTED IN FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE
DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

Together in Excellence

**DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION
FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES
UNIVERSITY OF FORT HARE
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NOVEMBER 2015

DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, certify that this thesis is solely my own and unaided work, except where references are indicated. I also confirm that this thesis has not been submitted in any university for the award of any degree, and I hereby present it for examination, for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, University of Fort Hare.

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ABSTRACT

On the 14th of October 2015, a temporary pedestrian bridge collapsed near Sandton in Johannesburg. Two people were killed while the twenty one injured people were trapped in the crashed cars. The professional journalists were nowhere close to the scene when it happened, but eye witnesses took photos and videos of the unfolding event, thanks to the mobile technologies. Back in April 2015, a series of xenophobic attacks left many foreign migrants leaving in fear in South Africa. Disturbing images of foreigners suffering at the hands of South Africans were all over the media. As usual, journalists from around the world reported on the above mentioned incidences and many more of that nature. At the same time, citizen journalists also uploaded images and footages of the same events as they were happening in their respective locations. That practice of citizen journalism has been the focus of this study. This study examined the growth of this phenomenon, looking at how it has impacted on the journalistic discourse. Essentially, the study investigated how citizen journalism has acted as a corrective to Africa's stalling media liberalisation process. This has been achieved by interrogating the space that this kind of journalism is negotiating within Africa's media landscape, with particular references of course, as well as the new practices that the phenomenon is developing as a critical tool capable of engaging with and facilitating the continent's democratisation process. In particular, this study revealed that the digitisation process has changed the media environment and most importantly, the question that the study endeavoured to answer is, how? To answer this question, the study employed qualitative content analysis, inductive reasoning, qualitative surveys, focus group as well as in-depth interviews with citizen journalists and experts in the field of journalism. Among other things, it has been revealed that mainstream journalism acknowledges the importance of the phenomenon, but it still stands firm that objectivity is a prerequisite in journalism. Most of the respondents interviewed showed appreciation of the citizen journalism phenomenon as an alternative information provider. However, others also remained doubtful of the news value aspect of the practice, indirectly preserving their news gatekeeping function. It is essential to note that this study cultivates an appreciation of the relationship between traditional and citizen journalism as the field of journalism endures major transformations.

Key Words: *Journalism Citizen Journalism Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) Digital Media*

DEDICATION

- To my late brother, Proud. I miss your phone calls. Even when you didn't have airtime, you would just dial my number to say 'hie'. That meant a lot to me. RIP.
- To my tiny treasures, Beauty and Jaclyn, you taught me that life is certainly precious and worth fighting for.
- To my mother, you brought me up to realise that in the toughest of times, it is the strength of character that shines through. Thank you for being the person that you are.



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My childhood academic mentor, Tatenda Chinoda, you taught me to appreciate the virtues of hard work. The sky is indeed the limit!

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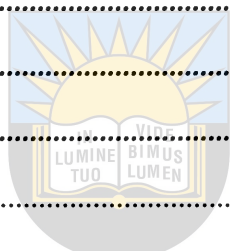
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CHAPTER 1

GENERAL OVERVIEW

1.1. Introduction

The citizen journalism phenomenon has sparked a lot of controversy in the media and academic discourses. The main argument has been how news production and consumption has changed, in particular, the role of the journalist as well as the audiences, as a result of technological innovation. Although the concept was a little bit hazy for me in the beginning, it made more sense by the day when I began to notice how mainstream media like *Al Jazeera* and *CNN* used amateur videos in their reporting. As the ideas about citizen journalism resonated more clearly as I progressed with my studies, I thought of pursuing the subject for my Master's thesis. Instead, I ended up researching on the popularity of tabloids, another 'new kid on the block' at the time. I shelved the idea of citizen journalism, but at the same time I was exploring the possibility of doing further research on it at some point. Already, I got interested in the ways the Grahamstown's *Grocott's Mail* newsroom was applying the aspects of citizen journalism in an atmosphere where citizen involvement had been known to be a more and more imperative principle in many segments of society.

As an important aspect in the journalism circles, citizen journalism basically advocates for a change in the way in which traditional journalism practices are perceived, with its main strength being how it could positively add to the democratic space. In that way, citizen journalism also draws from the public sphere theory as envisioned by Habermas. Another line of enquiry looks at citizen contribution to news production from the perception of the so called new technologies as well as the evolution of the Internet, with the main focus being the potential of technologically-aided engagement of the citizens and the different ways in which the practice might democratise information dissemination and existing communication frameworks. The aspects highlighted above, make this study more relevant now and in the years to come. The more research I did on the concept, the more I got convinced that the notions of journalism as a social practice are gradually changing and that alliance between professionals and ordinary citizens engaged in news production is getting better as we progress. Thus, this study offers insights into the process of making news with citizens, as it is referred to as by some scholars. The study aims at investigating the role of citizen

journalism in a few selected Sub Saharan countries. From the outlook, the process is becoming more and more achievable, provided research can present notionally solid ideas of what is really happening and why. In that regard, this study aims to present diagnostic aspects for investigating different notions of citizen journalism practices.

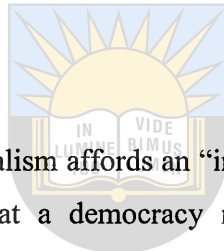
1.2. Background and Context of the Study

Africa has always been lagging behind in news gathering and dissemination to its own people. Often, the continent is read about from foreign news media which are collected by foreign news correspondents with little and sometimes no local involvement. New developments in technology and news revolution seem to have forced this practice to change. Many new media scholars have hyped citizen journalism, one of the latest news innovations in the 21st century journalism (Howe, 2007). The history of the citizen journalism phenomenon is linked to the upsurge of the Internet as a medium for public information and news, as well as the easy accessibility of portable media technologies like the iPods and camera phones. These modern communication technologies have helped us as citizens, to produce, consume, amass and dispense information. As a result, the experience has capacitated the democratisation of content production, and with it, the surfacing of a new resonance of communications and media more accustomed to the desires of all citizens. The concept citizen journalism has been defined in various terms, but has been used in describing incidences of newsworthy experiences produced by ordinary citizens who are not journalists by profession. Rosen defines citizen journalists as

the people formerly known as the audience... those who were on the receiving end of a media system that ran one way... and who today are not in a situation like that at all...the writing readers...the formerly atomised listeners who, with modest effort, can connect with each other and gain the means to speak— to the world, as it were. (2001: 46)

From the above definition, the concept implies how the public has assumed an active role in collecting, distributing and analysing news and information (Bowman & Willis, 2003: 10). To elaborate on this definition, citizen journalism has attempted to re-empower media audiences by turning them into news producers while the professional journalist is turned into a “shepherd” in the practice (Glaser, 2004: 89). Besides being reader-produced, citizen journalism does highlight the objectives of mainstream media but it does however transform

them into some formats which are not just simply reader-driven, one that allows for interactivity. The implication is that previously, citizens' voices were sidelined from the public domain by the gate keeping character assumed by mainstream journalism (Deuze, 2003: 68), but that citizen-driven journalism discourages the gate keeping and rather emphasises the citizen's participation in public conversations. Critical to the concept of citizen journalism are the weblogs, affectionately known as blogs. Dwelling on a variety of issues, blogs basically relay daily events and the more ordinary issues of everyday life (Rodzvilla, 2002). The nature of blogs is that they can be published by private individuals or by a group of people. In this sense, they can happen to "be personal or expressive, and it can be written in any manner from everyday prose to formal essay style" (see Bar-Ilan, 2004; Littau, 2007).



For Bowman and Willis, citizen journalism affords an "independent, reliable, accurate, wide-ranging and relevant information that a democracy requires" (2003: 10). Cable News Network's (CNN) IReport.com, for instance, highlights its approach and agenda this way:

Lots of people argue about what constitutes news. But, really, it's just something that happens someplace to someone. Whether that something is newsworthy mostly depends on who it affects—and who's making the decision. On iReport.com, that is you! So we've built this site and equipped it with some nifty tools for posting, discovering and talking about what you think makes the cut...Use the tools you find here to share and talk about the news of your world, whether that's video and photos of the events of your life, or your own take on what's making international headlines. Or, even better, a little bit of both (iReport.com).

"Unedited, Unfiltered News", goes the tagline of the website. The tagline alone highlights the fact that the citizen submitted material is not checked or verified prior to being posted on the website, thus, affirming that there are no guarantees about the content which is found there. Moreover, the quality of the news reported is not the responsibility of *CNN* but the responsibility rests with "you, the iReport.com community."(iReport.com). In this way, it is evident that notions of citizen journalism have emerged to represent a new kind of journalism which is "of the people, by the people, as well as for the people" (Gillmor, 2004:14).

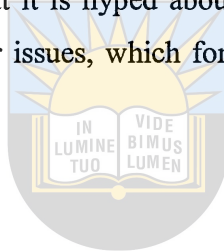
Despite creeping into some aspects of mainstream media, it is imperative to realise that aspects of citizen journalism are not essentially taking over the traditional news media. In fact, scholars alike argue that the phenomenon is rather complementing as well as supplementing mainstream media (Primack, 2007: 219), which makes it impossible for the two forms of journalism to exist autonomously. This argument has been detailed in the following chapters of this thesis. Despite the two being able to coexist, many scholars have however despised citizen journalism, arguing that it is somewhat of a misnomer. Giving reference to the traditional roles of journalism, Primack defines the profession of journalism as a process “that centers on fact-based, balanced, edited and verified information, presented in a coherent and understandable way, to as broad an audience as possible” (2007: 218). In addition, Primack further argues that journalism is a “science that requires some training and qualifications, certain ethical standards, and credibility” (ibid). The above description thus portrays how impossible it is for a random ordinary person to assume the position of a journalist, while it is of course feasible for any person to be involved in the practices of journalism, with the Internet and specifically, the mobile technologies leading the way with regards to the changing relationship between citizens and the news. Given the multi-platform media environment of the 21st century, news has become portable, personalised, and participatory. It has been claimed that:

...37% of Internet users have contributed to the creation of news, commented about it, or disseminated it via postings on social media sites like *Facebook* or *Twitter*. In addition, people use their social networks and social networking technology to filter, assess, and react to news. And they use traditional email and other tools to swap stories and comment on them. Among those who get news online, 75% get news forwarded through email or posts on social networking sites and 52% share links to news with others via those means (The Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, 2010).

This shows how, in this day and age, citizens are consuming the content that they are creating, making them both producers and consumers of media messages. According to technorati.com, a measurement tool, about 15,000 new weblogs are initiated every day, while at the same time new conversations are initiated every 3 seconds. But the question remains whether citizen journalism is impacting on the news processes in the way it is being hyped about. This question is worrying, more especially for journalists and the media fraternity per se. To sum up, it can be argued that it is the expansion of the media audiences and the mixed patterns of news consumption which all make citizen journalism a prime area of

investigation. Habermas' concept of the public sphere is relevant to the aspects of democracy, citizenship and the media. The public sphere concept highlights the rational-critical debates amongst individuals on issues of public concern.

The development of citizen journalism is also a matter of concern for the ordinary citizens themselves. Much has to do about the exact meaning of "citizenship" and "journalism", together with the multiple connotations and activities now practiced in respect of both. Using the word "citizen" in illustrating this kind of journalism is a connotation of some kind of contribution in an autonomous society. Again, the question here is whether citizen journalism really has the democratic capacity that it is hyped about, and what does that mean for the society? One may ask these and other issues, which form part of the research questions as highlighted below.



1.3. Research Questions

The questions to be addressed include:

- What are the factors influencing journalism in the contemporary African society?
- How has the citizen journalism practice transformed the news processes in Sub Saharan Africa?
- How do conventional media perceive the citizen journalism practice?
- How has the society been democratised by the citizen journalism practice?

1.4. Aims and Objectives of the Study

This study endeavours to make sense of the citizen journalism phenomenon. In that view, this study aims to appreciate people's experiences of citizen journalism practices. For that reason, the study has the following specific objectives. To:

- Analyse the context in which citizen journalism is being practiced in Sub Saharan Africa

- Assess how ICTs have shaped, and are being shaped by people in their citizen journalism activities
- Establish the extent to which mainstream journalism is embracing citizen journalism
- Realise the democratic essence of the citizen journalism practice, as well as to recognise the potential transformative influence of the phenomenon.

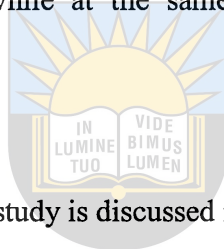
1.5. Significance of the study

This study has quite a social and academic significance. This is so because the study seems to highlight a contemporary trend that is relevant to our capacities of being well-informed citizens of a democratic society. Scholars have studied citizen journalism from numerous perspectives and have revealed its potential to outmaneuver the conventional media's character of gate-keeping, that citizen journalists have adopted some of the norms and practices of professional news organisations. To some extent, other scholars have also analysed the motivations behind the production of citizen journalism (Li, 2007; Cohen, 2006; Wall, 2005). These analyses though, have mostly been quantitative in nature.

Specifically, this study is to add qualitative data to the quantitative that has already been generated by scholars regarding citizen journalism. It could be a fact that little is still known concerning the value of citizen journalists' online content in the media marketplace. Carpenter's (2008) study revealed that online citizen journalists do not often rely on media customs and they mostly generate stories from unofficial sources. It has further been noted that they assume the watchdog role for their community (Kurtz, 2002; Rosenberg, 2002).

However, events such as the 2013 Egyptian uprisings, the 2013 Zimbabwean election, as well as the 2015 xenophobic attacks in South Africa have shown beyond reasonable doubt that citizen journalism can actively influence media coverage. Some of the smoky images of the Egyptian uprising were taken by camera phones. Within a few hours, news organisations such as the *BBC*, *CNN* and *SkyNews* jumped on these pictures and made them part of their breaking news reports. The camera phone pictures from ordinary citizens who happened to be present at a time when the mainstream media journalists were nowhere to be found, defined the event, and demonstrated how the connection between the traditional media and society is transforming.

On that note, I believe that the respective chapters of this study would go a long way in presenting the foundation for fresh dialogues to surface with regards to citizen journalism today, as well as its future. Looking at how crisis events particularly throw into sharp relief the imperatives underlining this transformation, the importance of this study becomes clear. Of major concern is the future of the journalism profession itself. Mainstream journalism is formerly referred to as the ‘first draft of history.’ Gillmor (2004) argues, “Now, I’d argue, much of that first draft is being written by citizen journalists. And what they’re telling us is powerful indeed.” This perspective signals a serious challenge whereby we ought to unleash new means of recasting “the rigid, zero-sum dichotomies of the professional versus amateur” debate. This therefore calls for fresh minds to deliberate on the social roles of the ordinary citizen as a mainstream journalist while at the same time reviewing the roles of the professional journalist as a citizen.



1.6. Methodology

Even though the methodology for this study is discussed in detail in Chapter 6, it is important to provide an overview of the methodology at this juncture. This study is grounded mainly in the qualitative approach to research, as “the most significant work on news is qualitative” (see Tuchman, 1978). The option to employ qualitative research methods narrates to broader theoretical notions of methodology. Qualitative research assumes the actor’s point of view as the beginning, and therefore highlights that in investigating media audiences, we are probing an imaginative procedure whereby audiences generate and preserve their kind of life and society, together with aspects of meaning and value. This study therefore aims to explore a relatively emerging and much debated research area of citizen journalism and the consequential social transformation it has caused through the methods of inductive reasoning, personal interviews, content analysis, case studies and comparative studies (document review), and personal observations, with interpretation facilitated by pre-determined and emerging themes.

1.7. Ethical Considerations

This research was conducted in an academic and or professional setting, therefore I was aware of the ethics behind the research activity. Prior to conducting the research, I applied for Ethical Clearance from the University’s Research and Ethics Committee (see Appendix 1). Also, before conducting the individual interviews, I ensured that I had the permission of the

people involved. Issues of objectivity versus subjectivity are other important considerations. In that regard, I made sure my own personal biases and opinions did not interfere with my research and that I gave both sides fair consideration. Importantly, most types of research, such as surveys or observations are typically conducted under the supposition that the findings of the research would be kept anonymous. Likewise, I let the subjects know whether the research results would be anonymous or not.

1.8. Thesis outline

Chapter 1 is the introductory chapter, which basically has highlighted the background information to the study. It also highlights the research questions and the significance of the study. **Chapter 2** conceptualises citizen journalism as well as how it works. Importantly, the chapter tackles the historical development of the practice, as well as the concepts of citizen, citizenship and democracy. A discussion of where citizens and journalists intersect is imperative in this chapter. The democratic potential of citizen journalism is also discussed. The second part of the chapter discusses the concept of citizen journalism alongside the normative roles of journalism. The purpose of doing that was to determine whether or not citizen journalism is being practiced within the confines of the journalism profession. The concept of citizen journalism is also discussed in relation to, among other things, Habermas' concept of public sphere and most importantly, the rise of the Internet. **Chapter 3** looks at how citizen journalism has been perpetuated by the information and network society of the twenty first century. It provides background information on the concept of the information society, as well as the definition of the concept and how journalism is being practiced in the network society. **Chapter 4** discusses Harold Innis and Marshall McLuhan, bringing them in the discourses of citizen journalism in order to interrogate the concept together with media technology. The importance of this chapter is to appreciate how Innis and McLuhan deeply influenced media theory and communications by highlighting the role of communication technologies as principal drivers of social change. **Chapter 5** delineates how citizen journalism is practiced in the Sub Saharan part of Africa. The chapter highlights the fact that despite challenges like scarce Internet access as well as the slow Internet penetration rate, citizen journalism has played a significant role in the region. **Chapter 6** is the methodology chapter, in which the rationale for using the chosen methods is given. The methods used are discussed in depth. **Chapter 7** presents the findings of the study, highlighting the various

themes emanating from the analysis of the data. **Chapter 8** is the conclusion, which summarises the study and presents suggestions for further research.



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CHAPTER 2

THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF CITIZEN JOURNALISM

“Citizen Journalism, only two years ago still in the experimental stages... had gone from an interesting journalism trend to a full-blown phenomenon”-Braiker, 2005.

2.1. Introduction

The previous chapter provided an overview of the research. This chapter reviews important aspects of the concept of citizen journalism. The chapter will begin with the historical development of the concept of citizen journalism. Following that will be a conceptualisation of the related aspects of citizen and citizenship, as well as how these concepts link with notions of democracy. Essentially, the normative roles of journalism will be discussed alongside the public sphere concept. Prior to that, below is an overview of the development of the internet.

The world's first website <http://info.cern.ch/> was initiated by physicist Tim Berners-Lee in 1991(see Berners-Lee, 2000). However, the website did not offer any audience interactivity. It was not long before the number of websites increased. The development of the Internet increased audience interactivity. Around 2004, the then newly established Web 2.0 introduced many features which permitted audiences to publish their own websites as well as to feed content into the mainstream media. Some notable features of Web 2.0 include blogging, *Facebook*, *Twitter*, *YouTube* and other concerted applications. The incorporation of such features, together with digital technologies, capacitated online audience participation. Audiences began generating, publishing and contributing content to online media. The 21st century audiences are now able to discuss, scrutinise and initiate “post mortems” of media content. The most remarkable thing about the cybersphere is how it affords almost unrestrained and non-geographic access to citizens. In that way, the media are no longer functioning according to the old logic of professional exclusivity (Deuze, 2005).

2.2. The Historical Frame of Citizen Journalism

The phenomenon of citizen journalism is described in various ways: ‘amateur journalism’, ‘accidental journalists’, ‘user generated content’ and many more (Banda, 2010). The many terms associated with the phenomenon indicate the controversy surrounding it and thus, it is not easy to give a precise definition of the concept. The practice is believed to have emerged through a string of developments and shapes generated both internally and externally. Internal critiques considered the issue with the abolition of social responsibility intrinsic in the disentanglement of shielded professionals from the communities they were to serve (Hamilton, 2008). Much of the condemnation of the professional convention of journalistic objectivity occurred as the so-called ‘New Journalism’ (Weingarten, 2006). This kind of news reporting repositioned the reporter, but unfortunately did not consider the audiences’ position (ibid). Also known as ‘literary journalism’, the reporting considered the reporter as the main player in the process (Weingarten, 2006). The new literary journalism rapidly turned out into a global phenomenon (see Bak & Reynolds, 2011). More criticism on the professionalised journalism surfaced from within the news organisations.

In an effort to make the news of the day more convincing and maybe to improve its function of empowering citizens in order that they could make more-informed decisions, the news creation process was made more translucent and was made available to public analysis mainly by incorporating audiences (ibid). Citizens seemed not very interested in the news reported by the mainstream media but they also initially did not believe that they could also be able to influence change (Weingarten, 2006). Accordingly, they insisted that mainstream journalism, especially the print media, should reconsider the “news coverage on policy issues” and desist from reporting scandalous material, whilst building new open and unrestricted places for citizens to convene and talk about matters of interest (Bak & Reynolds, 2011). So public meetings would be organised, then the community’s issues of public interest would be on top of the agenda. Citizens would partake in the news production process as focus group interview partners or by making their voices heard at public gatherings. It was envisaged doing so would afford audiences the potential to make their own evaluations on the reliability and authenticity of issues discussed (Bak & Reynolds, 2011).

At the same time, other corporations perceived citizen journalism as a feasible business strategy which could be a corrective measure for the dwindling readerships hence, the

common inclination towards citizen journalism (Romano, 2005). By the year 2000, the escalating accessibility and circulation of the portable digital communication technologies highly influenced the attraction of citizen journalism for media organisations which then frequently integrated amateur footage in their news reporting (Bak & Reynolds, 2011). Not only that. Some of the news organisations further devised for amateurs' online basic training in visual journalism (Romano, 2005).

As citizen journalism gained popularity, new capacities were created for social movements which realised the possibility of addressing global audiences completely outside the traditional news media spheres. In that regard, diverse forms of community and citizen media were installed to grant grassroots viewpoints and information (Hamilton, 2008: 121). The idea was to construct a method of open publishing, with anyone capable of uploading information of any format to do so without any restriction (ibid). This saw the multiplication of the digital platforms, with the amalgamation of traditional and non-professional media organisations also coming into picture. The popular South Korea's *OhMyNews* emerged in 2000 as an alternative to the conventional media system of that country by producing a sustainable crossbreed of nonprofessional and professional business news organisation (Hamilton, 2008).

Despite the term being relatively new, the concept of citizen journalism has long been in existence. Bentley (2008), points to the greatest known American citizen journalists Alexander Hamilton, James Madison as well as John Jay. Between 1787 and 1788, the trio published 85 essays in newspapers. Named *The Federalist Papers*, the essays fell under the strange by-line "Publius", and were trickled out to readers in small portions (Bentley, 2008). It is in the late 1990s when the public began to vilify the press as elitist and catering for the needs of the bourgeois while being insensitive to the public (Quinn & Lamble, 2008). Fortunately or unfortunately, it is around the same time that the Internet came into being. Launched in 1991, the World Wide Web (www) and the Internet fast became a popular thing, which in the process afforded the public the capacity to dispense "news" in their own unique ways. This slowly opened the doors for the weblogs, popularly known as blogs. Like most Internet developments, the blog, which has been defined as "a type of web site where entries are written, or posted, the same way you would update a journal or diary", soon became a

recreational web fixture despite not getting much recognition until they became a news source (Quinn & Lamble, 2008). A few years later, blogs began producing powerful journalism, leading to a more profuse same kind of news reporting that reached out to many audiences.

The blogging practice was not without criticism, as many contemplated the huge effect that it was imposing on the journalism profession. In 2001, Lasica summarised it all this way:

While no one is really sure where this is all heading, my hunch is that blogging represents Ground Zero of the personal Webcasting revolution. Weblogging will drive a powerful new form of amateur journalism as millions of Net users – young people especially – take on the role of columnist, reporter, analyst and publisher while fashioning their own personal broadcasting networks (Blogging as a Form of Journalism).

This clearly shows how Lasica and many other scholars predicted the capacity of blogs as a channel for citizen journalists. In the same manner, technology continued to progress with the Internet and the blogs. Conveniently, many citizens can now access the news from anywhere and at any time. This accessibility has made the news becoming “democratised”. In this day and age, it is now the news that finds the people instead of the other way round- an obvious deviation from the role the media have traditionally assumed (Banda, 2010).

Martin Luther King popularised the phrase ‘every man is a priest’, and if we are to have a new Martin Luther, it would be Oh Yeon-ho, the founder of the politically motivated online daily newspaper, *OhMyNews*, who declared that “every citizen is a reporter.” Together with other South Korean liberals, Oh claims that the reason they started *OhMyNews* was mainly due to dissatisfaction with the country’s mainstream press. In lieu of starting a mainstream newspaper, Oh and his friends turned to the “guerrilla methods” of using volunteers to post journalistic material on the Internet instead of doing it the traditional way of printing (Rannikko, 2010). In his own words, Oh argued:

I wanted to open a place of fair competition where people who wanted to share news with one another could do so through the Internet. I wanted to establish a culture

where the quality of news determined whether it won or lost. I wanted to start a tradition free of newspaper company elitism where news was evaluated based on quality, regardless of whether it came from a major newspaper, a local reporter, an educated journalist or a neighbourhood housewife. I wanted to realise through the Internet the motto “Every citizen is a reporter,” something that couldn’t be done through printed newspapers. So I decided to make the plunge into the sea of the Internet, even though I feared that which was different from what I was accustomed.

To date, the success of Oh’s remarkable publication strategy is popular worldwide. *OhMyNews* is also now profitable and it also has an English-language version.

The phenomenon of citizen journalism has been referred to as a collection of largely journalistic activities, for which Lasica (2003) referred to as “random acts of journalism” embodied by definite “practical and technological affordances: they draw on the voluntary contributions of a wide-ranging and distributed network of self-selected participants rather than on the paid work of a core team of professional staff, and they utilise Internet technologies to coordinate the process and share its results” (Bentley, 2008). In Tremayne, citizen journalism is defined as a label “used to describe a form of media that involves moderated reader participation” (2007: 240). The phenomenon is viewed as a practice that overturns the sender-receiver procedure of traditional journalism, a practice in which the audiences assume the gatekeeper role in producing news while the journalist takes the role of a “shepherd, looking out for society voices and submissions” (2007: 240-241).

The above definition seems problematic though. Assuming that citizen journalism is “moderated” reader participation ignores a host of bloggers who produce a great deal of their own material. Even if sometimes what they do is just commenting on the day’s news, most bloggers create and moderate that material hence, they befit the phrase citizen journalists exclusive of the moderating function (Tremayne, 2007). Furthermore, if that “audience” that is seen to be providing much of the content comprises “citizen journalists” as described by Tremayne (2007), one would then question about the “journalism” aspect of citizen journalist. Actually, that is not the journalism that we know, the one that underlines verification. In the 21st century, citizen journalism is perceived as nothing but an insurgency in newsgathering, whose processes are seen by some critics as aimed at stripping away the

potential of professional journalism in totality. This notion is highlighted by Bowman and Willis who summarise that the “profession of journalism finds itself at a rare moment in history when, for the first time, its hegemony as a gatekeeper of news is threatened by not just new technologies and competitors but, potentially, the audience it serves” (2003: 7).

The manifestation of citizen journalism has been a product of the failure of the mainstream media which, more often than not, are argued to systematically and deliberately shun away from controversial themes for either political or economic reasons (Bowman & Willis, 2003: 9). The argument is that as the mainstream media-space increasingly gets centralised as well as profit-driven, their aptitude to present a diversity of perspectives on globally essential affairs is reduced (Rushkoff, 2003: 17). In that view, citizen journalism tends to be filling in the gaps abandoned by the mainstream media. It is therefore obvious that the practice of citizen journalism was an attempt at increasing the sensitivity of the mainstream journalism to the wishes or desires as well as the struggles of ordinary citizens. The idea of citizen journalism seemed to advocate for a society free of warped public discourses. Since gaining a grip, it has transformed and wielded positive results on the improvement of the political arena and the mainstream media (Rannikko, 2010).

In other words, the distorted deceptive news as well as the capitalism expansion, together with the need to democratise communication and information, made social movements and working class organisations initiate local and community media as alternatives of mainstream media (Rodriguez, 2001; Atton, 2004). The phenomenon was known as “alternative journalism” emanating from ordinary citizens and non-professionals. One salient feature of this alternative media was radicalism, which conflicts the hierarchical establishment that professional journalism adopts. In that view, Atton says:

Alternative journalism suggests that authority does not need to be located institutionally or professionally; that credibility and trustworthiness can be derived from accounts of lived experience, not only from objectively detached reporting; and that there need be no imperative to separate facts from values (see Atton, 2004).

Along with citizen journalism and the swift ICT expansion is the increased social media platforms which have been defined as “a group of Internet based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations on the web 2.0, and allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content” (Kaplan & Heanlein, 2010: 61). *YouTube*, *Facebook*, and *Twitter* are popular social media platforms whose main objectives include sharing information of any kind, the journalism aspect included.

Social media sites have turned into an important tool for journalists for affording them the ability to publish headlines to wide audiences. At the same time, audiences can also afford to follow their favourite journalists or news organisations and are able to get latest content as it is uploaded. I personally followed one *e-News* Channel journalist on *Twitter* during the Oscar Pistorius trial which ran for months in the year 2014. As an asset for the citizen journalists, social media sites allow ordinary citizens to post news online. This is also quite evident in South Africa, with citizens going on *Twitter* to discuss the issues making headlines in the country. The most debated issues of 2014 included the story of the South African victims of the collapsed Nigerian church building owned by renowned Prophet T.B Joshua, President Jacob Zuma’s Nkandla homestead controversy, the chaos in the Parliament where politicians point fingers at each other in the house and the Oscar Pistorius trial, to mention but a few. Such topics which form the agenda on social media sites are probably good examples of the influence of social media in setting the agenda.

The above discussion clearly highlights the beneficial aspect of the partnership between traditional and citizen journalism, the relationship of which had initially been viewed with scepticism. Nowadays, media giants are incorporating citizen journalists in their news reporting. For instance, CNN’s *iReport* promotes the contributions of videos and pictures to the network by ordinary citizens, and these contributions might then be used in CNN broadcasts. Since its launch in 2006, *iReport* has presented itself as a valuable source of news, with its first major report being a video captured by a student on his camera phone in 2007. The recording was nothing but the gunshots sounds of a campus shooting that had taken place (CNN, 2007). Despite CNN’s professional journalists out of the scene of the

incident, the broadcaster covered the event using that video. Browsing through the website, I found this interesting:

“Everything you see on *iReport* starts with someone in the CNN audience. The stories here are not edited, fact-checked or screened before they post. CNN’s producers will check out some of the most compelling, important and urgent *iReports* and, once they're cleared for CNN, make them a part of CNN's news coverage” (“About CNN *iReport*”).

Such an initiative like *iReport* shows how news organisations have recognised and appreciated the merits of working in partnership with citizen journalists in producing well-timed and urgent news to the general public. Now in 2015, it is indeed remarkable to see how traditional media organisations have become more attuned with citizen journalists, evidenced mostly when they integrate social media feeds into their programming, and especially the use of amateur videos in their news coverage. With social media on board, the partnership between news organisations and citizen journalists has never been so rewarding.

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Having traced the historical development of citizen journalism, it is essential to further discuss some basic issues around this tangential journalism, particularly the blogs. The subject of blogs and other related issues have perfectly been addressed by Tremayne (2007), who flawlessly demonstrates the dichotomy of the mediascape today by examining blogging, a transient medium which is also the most direct and special characteristic of the new media. Largely through content analysis of some blogs, the empirical studies in Tremayne (2007) illustrate the practice in a kind of snap-shot approach that describes the twofold elements of this seemingly most democratic of media formulations. It further queries the supposed credibility of the new media, besides incorporating their journalistic implications with their obvious function as what is called “narrative therapy” (ibid). Main insights are highlighted in the findings that blogs also execute the traditional journalistic functions. Scott’s (2007: 142) remark that blogs are a surveillance on the media, and seem to have taken “the tools of the fourth estate and used them on the fourth estate” is especially intriguing. Another perceptive observation is how technology has reduced the cost of publishing to an affordable level, a development which can allow every citizen to be a publisher. Thus, the inexpensive nature of blogging signifies the practice’s capacity to significantly revolutionise journalism (Scott, 2007: 142). Apparently, the blogosphere continuously calls all citizens to post anything they

wish to a potentially large audience, something that many respected print and broadcast media organisations cannot do.

Whilst assuming the watchdog role over mainstream media, blogs also afford otherwise isolated and anomic citizens a possibility to 'vent' without ever turning political analysis into actionable politics. Kaid and Postelniku's (2007) investigation on the issue of perceived credibility found out that the audiences of bloggers are usually not particularly concerned as regards whether their preferred blogs are reliable sources of information. Not that they acknowledge the reliability of the bloggers, but they tend to consider all opinions as equal in their eyes, implying that they possess a typically postmodern attitude towards the truth: *vis a vis*, either that it is non-existent or that it does not matter. So, if this is the case, one would be left with no choice but to contemplate the future of this blogging game.

The truth of the matter though is that an absolutely transformative communications revolution is definitely taking place. Perhaps what we are seeing today is just the beginning of more things to come, and authors like Tremayne (2007) have demystified some of the more peculiar predications that have already been made in the recent past. In *Harnessing the Active Audience: Synthesising Blog Research and Lessons for the Future of Media*, Tremayne summarises how blogging is taking place, and has also prefigured on blogging and the new media. Interestingly, it has been noted that blogging will not substitute the role of traditional journalism (Scott, 2007; Kaid & Postelniku, 2007). It can therefore be argued that except if bloggers embark on reporting serious news more frequently, they are still far from replacing conventional journalism. With social media becoming more 'hyperlocal', most of the content is certainly becoming audience produced hence, the response to journalism's future would probably be 'the citizen journalist' (ibid). So, it is not startling that Tremayne considers 'hyperlocal' electronic journalism as an arena where much of the reporting will come from the audience, with blogs allowing ordinary citizens real voices and therefore ushering the field for citizen journalists in their own polities. In this regard, citizen journalism could be regarded as a huge technological "turning point" in the history of communication, with blogging being an essential adjustment of communication, even though it does not grow to the height of civilisation-modifying innovation. A quick perusal of Tremayne's (2007) book

would show that there is a great potential to determine and measure the real meaning of information technology without the hype hence, the collection is such an amazing contribution to the information technology discourse as it presents convincing interpretation on technology and society as it is lived in the 21st century.

So far, this part of the thesis has traced the historical emergence of citizen journalism, and the main argument has been how changing technology is creeping into the aspects of traditional journalism. One can safely argue that the uprising of citizen journalism has been a result of ordinary citizens sharing the same notion that the escalating amalgamation of ownership in mainstream media and the mounting pressures from 'popular journalism' are a severe threat to democracy (Deuze, 2005). In that regard, they granted that the answer to this crisis is principally based on participation by ordinary citizens in news production hence, the insurgence of citizen journalism. As an alternative, the phenomenon defies the control of conventional mainstream media. Nonetheless, there is no universal understanding of the notion, apart from the fact that ordinary citizens keenly partaking in the news production and consumption, and the series of practices varies depending on a number of issues. For instance, it might depend on whether professional journalists are involved, whether the general public is being mobilised for social engagement.

Among other things, despite contemporary citizen journalists having more tools at their disposal than their historical counterparts, the notion of citizen journalism remains the same. The technologies related with the current form merely afford the contemporary citizen journalists better chances of reaching greater audiences than previously. Nevertheless, the larger the audience the greater the concerns, and modern-day citizen journalism is challenged by loads of issues and looming struggles surrounding it. Some of the issues will be dealt with as the thesis progresses.

Now, with all that has been said about the phenomenon and its impact on the mainstream media, the next move would be to come up with some important ideas about the next steps in developing the newsroom of the future. It would also be proactive to establish if there are any

opportunities that the media or tech-savvy entrepreneurs could take advantage of. Importantly, what would be the other technological developments that are liable to affect journalism so that the newsrooms can prepare, if not pre-empt these changes? These and other issues sound provocative enough for the media fraternity. The following sections deliberate on other important aspects with regards to the subject matter, citizen journalism.

2.3. Citizen Journalism: Empowerment, Citizen and Citizenship

It is a fact that research about the rise of citizen journalism from an African perspective has been limited (Paterson, 2013; Atton & Mabweazara, 2011). Emerging studies about the practice have focused on a few African countries which include Zimbabwe, Nigeria, South Africa, Kenya and the Arab spring, to mention a few. Atton and Mabweazara (2011: 668) further argue that such “research has largely lacked theoretical and empirical grounding in terms of examining how African mainstream journalists are forging “new” ways to practise their profession in the light of technological changes in their newsrooms”. This study thus aims to fill in the gaps by highlighting how citizen journalism is thriving in the Sub Saharan African context. Also indicated in the study are the new forms of citizenship resulting from the proliferation of information and communication technologies, “especially in a continent where democracy is perennially under threat” (Atton & Mabweazara, 2011, 667). An interesting feature of the study is how these online practices, which Moyo (2009) calls the “parallel market of information” identify with specific politically aligned publics which are autonomous from the mainstream media. What is evident in the practice is how the phenomenon shows an exceptional ability for the politically active to surpass and affect the conventional ways of information flow (Paterson, 2013).

The citizen journalism practice grew at the same time with the proliferation of the interactive nature of the Internet as well as the information communication technologies like the mobile phones. Masquerading in different forms as explained from the beginning of this thesis, the fundamental basis of citizen journalism is contributing journalistic pieces to the news process (Lieb, 2009: 216). This depiction is echoed in the words which describe citizen journalism as being “individuals playing an active role in the process of collecting, reporting, analysing and disseminating news and information... It is news of the people, by the people, and for the people” (Gillmor, 2004; 2006). Citizen journalists are self-governing and freelancing

ordinary citizens who are not restricted by mainstream journalistic procedures. Without adhering to any editorial oversight, citizen journalism is “an online people-centred movement of the so-called ‘We the media’” (Gillmor, 2006:12). A strong advocate of the phenomenon, Jay Rosen, defines it and explains the rationale behind:

Citizen journalists are ‘the people formerly known as the audience’, are those who *were* on the receiving end of a media system that ran one way...and who *today* are not in a situation like that *at all*...The writing readers...The viewers who picked up a camera... The formerly atomised listeners who with modest effort can connect with each other and gain the means to speak— to the world, as it were (1994:16).

However, there are claims that refute Rosen’s definition of citizen journalism. For instance, the National Association of Citizen Journalists (NACJ), a US based organisation, makes a distinction between the different types of journalists namely: accidental, advocacy, as well as citizen journalists. NACJ suggests that if an individual takes a video or picture of an incident with a camera phone and then uploads it onto the Internet, that does not make him or her citizen journalist. People now have blogs where they write about their favourite subject, but that does not qualify them as citizen journalists (cited in Ross & Cormier, 2010: 57). Individuals who happen to be on the scene of an incident are accidental journalists: they take photos or videos and upload them onto the Internet. That should not qualify them as citizen journalists (Ross & Cormier, 2010: 58). Advocacy journalism, on the other hand, is another genre of journalism that assumes a viewpoint on behalf of others. It is journalism with a deliberate and translucent bias (Ross & Cormier, 2010: 60). To this end, it may be necessary to discuss the two broad types of citizen journalism.

Banda (2010) distinguishes between non-institutional as well as institutional citizen journalism. The former refers to the extra-institutional in which the individual citizen is at the centre stage of the practice. In this way, citizen journalism willingly gets itself into diverse kinds of social networking. In other words, in this instance, private citizens engage different platforms to produce content and transmit in a variety of ways (Banda, 2010: 28). Since the individual is at the centre of the practice, this non institutional citizen journalism does not adhere to any organisational constraints hence, the practice in this sense is highly personal and self-regulated (Banda, 2010: 28).

At the other end of the spectrum is institutional citizen journalism which adheres to an organisational structure (Banda, 2010: 29). In this instance, media organisations are encroaching into the spaces created by, and are partnering with non-institutional citizen journalists. For instance, the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) allowed its own reporters to assume citizen journalism in order for them to engage the general public in news processes, however, in a less professional environment. Other examples include the South Korean *OhmyNews.com*, which goes by the motto “every citizen is a reporter” (Gillmor, 2006). Locally, there is the South African *Mail & Guardian* with its ‘Thought Leader’ forum which stirs tough debates from well-known, interesting, prominent voices in different aspects of development, politics, technology, the arts, to mention a few. The guidelines of the forum read as follows:

We welcome as much interaction and vibrant discussion between our contributors and their readers as possible – but we do want the website to be a mature and thought-provoking environment, so some guidelines apply for posting comments (M &G, 2007).

The forum specialises on blogs, opinion and analyses thus, evidently pointing to its credibility and seriousness. Commenting on institutional journalism, Banda notes that they always moderate the citizen journalists’ contributions. He further argues that the flexibility in terms of rules and procedures followed in order to accommodate citizen journalists do not necessarily indicate their formal editorial policy guidelines (2010: 30). However, by allowing that room for flexibility, it shows that the institutional citizen journalism is influenced from outside, because it is them (the formal organisations) that have found themselves tapping into citizen journalism. To this effect, it has been observed that:

Not everyone in the organisation recognises that this shift is happening or accepts it. Several of the kinds of initiatives... have existed at the margins of our services and are only just beginning to move toward centre stage. Such changes raise policy issues that disturb some colleagues (Sambrook, 2005:14).

At this point, one could query the institutions’ journalistic reputation since they seem not to be in full control of their content. It is true that the staff should not step down from their accountability for objectivity and editorial judgement should always take precedence, a rule which is a critical aspect of news organisations (Ross & Cormier, 2010). In as much as they accept the public’s contribution in terms of news, that should not compromise the editorial value. However, issues of impartiality and diversity are strengthened when news

organisations open up to a variety of perspectives, aspects of which are gained through understanding the audience. This discussion invokes another important matter in citizen journalism, that of citizen participation and empowerment. These concepts are normally regarded as part and parcel of the concept of citizen journalism together with the unshakeable power of ICTs which bring citizen journalism into reality.

The notion of empowerment sounds very useful and therefore needs to be expatiated so as to appreciate its meaning in the context of citizen journalism. I will discuss the concept as defined by Banda (2010). For Banda, the term assumes that people lack power. He defines empowerment as the aptitude to determine or manipulate one's own life. People that do not have power cannot manage their own lives. That implies their incapability to make informed decisions regarding their livelihoods. In this way, the less powerful would have already positioned themselves under the economically and informationally powerful people. Drawing from such assumptions, Banda assumes a tripartite critical approach which helps to understand the concept of empowerment. The concept has been analysed in relation to three aspects which include absence, transformation and presence. And the logic goes like: empowerment implies "transforming a state of *absence* (of power) into a state of *presence* (of power)" (Banda, 2010: 31).

In the information fraternity, an absence of information means the lack of important information that is needed by citizens for them to be able to make informed decision regarding their lives. Such relevant information can be communicated through the media. Banda argues that people must be empowered by ensuring the infrastructural accessibility of the relevant communication channels by the mainstream citizenry. In that case, citizen journalism, with the related technologies, is amongst the practices that can make the channels more accessible to citizens (Banda, 2010: 31). Citizen journalism has to do with the public's potential to actively integrate the technological aspects to enhance their contributions in the political world. The concept of citizen empowerment therefore, goes further than its literal meaning. The concept seem to speak to the principal reasons for the dearth of "capacity and opportunity", which is the absence thereof, in as much as it alters the status quo into a condition that assures the existence of opportunity and capacity (Banda, 2010: 32). That is when citizen journalism assumes a more political stance. That means in this regard, citizen journalism becomes a social practice that is acquired by citizens in order to deal with their

needs and therefore change their lives. Talking of citizens, a discussion about the concepts of citizen and citizenship in the Internet age, of course in relation to citizen journalism, becomes imperative.

The ways in which the ICTs have transformed aspects of media production and reception, as well as how these adjustments have impacted on 'being a citizen' and on practices of citizenship are essential matters in this study. The concept of citizenship is often associated with public opinion formation. Journalism takes the role of the watchdog in a democracy and at the same time mediates for citizenship, since many discussions about citizens often take place in the news media (Deuze, 2005). Since technologies have transformed the media landscape, aspects of what is expected from the news as a medium for citizenship, as well as how citizenship is endorsed, are very critical in this regard.

It is important at this juncture to reiterate that public opinion formation is in fact the key component of the type of bonding called citizenship. Turner (1994) defines citizenship as being knowledgeable and competent members of a community. Scholars from the political science discipline defined citizenship along the lines of voting, while at the same time, cultural studies scholars considered citizenship from the perspective of community building and bonding. What is important at this point, especially within cultural studies, is how citizenship is understood in daily manifestations of subjectivity (see Miller, 1993). Citizenship has been defined as "a set of practices that make people competent members of a community" (Turner, 1994: 159). It can also be defined in terms of the status of individuals within a polity, with citizens having rights and responsibilities. A more compelling definition of citizenship integrates civic action, citizens' attitudes, as well as their obligations to their communities (Turner, 1994: 159; Dahlgren, 2000: 317). Marshall (1964) perceives citizenship from the perspective of being a member of a polity. In that view, he suggests some dimensions which represent citizenship: civil, social, political and cultural (Dahlgren, 2000: 317). This view of citizenship emphasises equality in a democratic state. However, the contemporary society has moved away from this state oriented view of citizenship to a people-centred view (Hartley, 2010: 234). The people-centred perspective highlights that citizenship is not just about 'being', but also about 'becoming', meaning that in this context, one can learn how to become a citizen (Delanty, 2007). Delanty argues that this perspective does not recognise citizenship from a 'membership' point of view, but it focuses on

“common experiences, cognitive processes, forms of cultural translation and discourses of empowerment” (Delanty, 2007). This kind of citizenship occurs in the context of our daily lives and is determined by the everyday activities in our lives. In this context, Steenveld (2013) argues that “citizenship is thus not just about rights and responsibilities, but about capacity for action, the learning about the self and the relationship of the self to the other”.

Golding and Murdock (1989) define citizenship from a perspective that highlights the extent of access that citizens should have to information regarding their rights. The definition entails access to a broad range of information and views regarding various issues affecting them. The definition also presents a scope for citizens from all corners of society to see themselves in a broad range of representations presented in the media, as well as to contribute in influencing those representations. This is the “cultural” dimension of belonging, which Anderson (1991) refers to as an “imagined community”.

The concept of citizenship remains a bone of contention in most developing democracies of the African continent (Mamdani, 1996). Most developing countries are characterised by high levels of inequality and limited access to human rights. This on its own is enough to question the notion of citizenship as it makes the practice difficult (Mamdani, 1996; Mahajan, 1999). In South Africa and many other African countries, the stumbling blocks to accelerating citizenship are attributed to the legacies of colonialism (ibid). In that view, it is essential to determine if the phenomenon of citizen journalism is playing any role in ushering a public sphere for citizen deliberation.

Miller views citizenship (cultural) as “the disciplining of subjects in the cultural realm of capitalist social formations”, adding that:

...culture is a significant area in the daily organisation of fealty to the cultural-capitalist state... the civic cultural subject – the citizen – is produced as a polite and obedient servant of etiquette, within limited definitions of acceptable behaviour (1993: 218, 223).

For Miller, citizenship is about being subjects and not about liberty, while disciplining together with seduction hold control. Cultural citizenship presents the way of life, how the general public should understand its world. It determines the state of mind as well as the feelings in relation to how we bring popular media into play (Miller, 1998). Therefore,

citizenship is not just about being the informed citizen (Hermes, 2006: 303). It revolves around issues of community building and bonding, as well as reflections on that bonding.

Political citizenship, on the other hand, is about the political and social constitution of the public (van Zoonen, 2005). Some cultural studies have highlighted many instances whereby popular culture constitutes 'publics'. It is argued that we appreciate "popular drama stories as a mark of quality" (Mephram, 1990: 57). Ian Ang coined the phrase 'emotional realism' to highlight the significance of soap operas. Ang talks about how the viewers of *Dallas* reflect on issues of gender relations (see Ang, 1985). On the same note, Hall talks about 'fictional rehearsal' when watching soap operas (Miller, 1993: 79). In my previous research, I noted parallel mechanisms when I interviewed readers of the South African *Daily Sun* tabloid newspaper, who expressed the gratification of short-term imaginary ultimate identities while reading. Calling this 'cultural citizenship' brings to the fore not only the assumption of identity and variation, but also, how the constructions of the eagerness to participate in the political world. One can then say that 'being informed' has lost its ground, evidenced by, for instance, how newspaper readership is declining on a frequent basis. And now being informed is kind of being replaced by the demand for as well as the supply of more practical experiences, implying the need for a wider perspective of citizenship. Although we cannot totally applaud technology as having given birth to the 'experience economy', it is no doubt that technological change has driven us to rethink as regards politics and democracy (Pine & Gilmore, 1999: 18).

Marshall (1964) highlights the role of the media in enhancing citizenship, arguing that the media ought to raise awareness on citizens' rights for them to make informed decisions. The role of the media is to ensure that citizens have access to the information they need in order for them to make informed decisions, as well as to present a way through which citizens "recognise themselves and their aspirations in the range of representations" (Murdock & Golding, 1989: 183). This will in a way validate their identity as citizens (Ronning, 1994: 15). In addition to that, the media should increase citizens' understanding of ways of civic participation (Marshall, 1964). In the contemporary society, the internet and the new communication and information technologies are increasing citizens' media practices, thereby broadening citizens' activities in the public sphere. One thing that needs to be ascertained with regards to citizen journalism is the extent to which the practice is enhancing

the aspect of citizenship. One of the case studies of this study, the *Iindaba Ziyafika* project, is supposedly aimed at encouraging the practice of engaged citizenship and therefore deepening the democratisation process (Nyathi, 2011).

An essential aspect underlining citizen journalism is citizen participation. Referring to alternative media, Atton (2002: 25) argued that alternative media are designed principally “to enable wider social participation in the creation, production and dissemination of content”. From this perspective, participation entails direct and independent engagement in media production processes as well as controlling their social experiences through the media. In that view, Bailey et al. noted that “participation *in* the media and *through* the media sees the communicative process not as a series of practices that are often restrictively controlled by media professionals, but as a human right that cuts across societies” (2008: 11). It is therefore clear that participation is directly linked with citizens’ right to communicate, the process which should take place not only within the limits of the constitution, but also with some kind of public responsibility to hold the state accountable to the public (Hamelink & Hoffmann, 2008). Thus, alternative media and citizen participation are so closely linked that it is difficult to talk about each of them in isolation hence, the reference to alternative media as “participatory media” or “grassroots media” so as to stress the significance of aspects of inclusion and participation that are entrenched in alternative media like citizen journalism. In this regard, citizen journalism thus entails a notion of communicative practices that are entrenched in our daily lives of communities, together with content created by those communities. In this case, Nyathi (2011) refers to citizen journalism as a “community of practice”.

2.4. Internet citizenship practices

The discussion about public opinion poses the need to examine some forms of communication that are associated with the Internet. The role of the Internet in entertainment, consultation, information, as well as in communication cannot be emphasised. In as much as it facilitates and connects large numbers of groups and individuals, the Internet has been remarkable in facilitating small group communities hence, the varying citizenship goals (political, national or cultural) (Hermes, 2006: 304). In the process of bringing together these communities, publics and public opinion are formed. What is being realised in the process is

the convergence of strangers who accidentally connect to each on the basis of sharing a common goal or otherwise having disputed agendas. Such cultural bonds created seem to be more important as they reignite political issues and answers to the outside world that politics assumes (Hermes, 2006: 304).

To attempt to provide some answers concerning the discussion about citizenship and the Internet so far, it can be argued that ICTs may not be necessarily generating 'new' citizens. In fact, what they are doing is that they are affording for new citizen practices (Atton, 2004). The media fraternity is experiencing some serious transformations in news content, of course with remarkable consequences. Internet based communities evidently suggest that these ever emerging communication forms afford new types of citizenships, as well as new individuals to assume citizen identities: at the end of the day it is upon us to become conscious of our environment. It can therefore be argued that the 21st century people have been embroiled in a somewhat uncomfortable generational shift where there is need to adapt so as to be able to deal with the digital world in which news is being accessed from more advanced platforms and devices (Hermes, 2006). In that regard, the real challenge becomes the need to recognise the burgeoning of these platforms and to develop alternative means of promoting informed political participation (Banda, 2010). At this juncture, the discussion about the democratic potential of citizen journalism becomes apparent.

2.5. Social News, Citizen Journalism and Democracy

This part of the chapter is a deliberation of social news as 'metajournalism' in conjunction with the related phenomenon of citizen journalism. It is essential at this point to note that it is difficult to distinguish between the two, since there are similarities and differences. Examining the relationship between the two can help in bringing to the fore the possible advantages of social news for democracy as well as the public sphere. But, before looking at that, there is need to elaborate more with regards to the 'boundaries' of citizen journalism. First of all, citizen journalism is initially associated with the Internet, but the truth is that it does not end with digital-interactive media (Goode, 2009: 88). It is common these days to see broadcasting news integrating aspects of citizen journalism. This is taking place in forms of, for instance, amateur footages from eyewitnesses' cell phones, journalists reporting stories that were initially brought to the limelight by citizen journalists. Print media too are also tapping from citizen journalism (ibid). Given these scenarios, one can therefore object to

citizen journalism as being purely a digital interactive affair. However, the boundaries start to blur when such practices begin to affect the objectives and editorial policies of the news media (Goode, 2009: 89).

Secondly, having been argued that citizen journalism seems to be threatening the mainstream media, it can thus be taken as a 'movement' with inherently oppositional features. For instance, Gillmor regards the phenomenon as a grassroots movement (2006:12). Nevertheless, without discounting the drastic implications of this 'movement', it might be useful to perceive it from another angle. Goode argues that the multiple perspectives attached to the concept are possibly attractive but we need to take care.

He points to the political economy of the practice and how it is engaging with large-scale commercial advertising industry. Salient examples include Yahoo's purchase of *Flickr* in 2005. Google also acquired *Blogger.com* in 2003 followed by *YouTube* in 2006. In the following year, MSNBC acquired *Newsvine* (Goode, 2009: 103). Even in the presence of organisational autonomy from 'traditional' media, citizen journalism sites might tap, intentionally or unconsciously, into mainstream media. But still, research in this area needs to recognise and query the integration of citizen journalism practices by mainstream news organisations. The point here is to emphasise that it is possible to let go of such developments as in some way ingenuine or 'recuperative' acts of 'digital capitalism' that involuntarily reduce or prohibit the essential and democratic potentials presented by the citizen journalism movement (see Schiller, 1999). At least it is logical to disregard establishing those sorts of binaries before embarking on a critical cross-examination of the still developing field of citizen journalism research.

It is at this point important to reiterate on the profession of journalism itself. The philosophical arguments around objectivity can be overlooked and one can just observe the journalistic routines in order to realise that journalism is just an art of story re-telling, since news reporting is about re-telling and 'translating' what has been said or what is written (Cohen, 2002: 533). The point here is not to look down upon the importance of divulging issues that might be hidden from the public domain. This includes the important democratic role of mainstream journalism and to some extent, some notions of the citizen journalism phenomenon. But, by highlighting how this 'revelatory' characteristic of journalism cannot

be detached from the “meaning making, interpretation and re-articulation” processes that naturally affect the public sphere (Goode, 2009), we therefore cannot dismiss the latest approaches of citizen participation made possible by the Internet at this point. In other words, we cannot regard the ‘metajournalism’ of social media sites as in some way independent from the actual business of journalism (Goode, 2009: 103). News production usually involves a multifaceted string of communication and sense making whereby ideas and issues are influenced by diverse ‘filters’ or ‘gatekeepers’, which, among others, include sources, journalists as well as sub-editors before they are given out for public consumption. Apparently, there has been a multitude of new potentials for citizen engagement at varying stages along those strings of sense-making that influence news. Goode proposed that an evaluation of the potential effect and importance of citizen journalism should at this point not be guarded by regarding ‘metajournalism’ as separated from the actual journalism (Goode, 2009: 104).

It is of course possible to distinguish between journalism and metajournalism, despite the fact that separating the two might present the risk of doubting the possible implications for democracy as well as the public sphere, since citizens are gradually upholding aspects of journalism which were previously not visible to them and were beyond their reach (Deuze, 2005). Considering the two differently but not separately is an acknowledgement that despite them not being equivalent, the often disregarded ‘metajournalism’ is an essential aspect of the journalism practice: journalists are known to be filtering and mediating, they do not simply disclose (Goode, 2009:104).

Therefore, in lieu of regarding news as an eye-opener, we can thus locate citizen journalism within a broader structure of mediation which could present a wider range of news-making processes. So doing would make it practical to argue that citizen journalism comprises an intricate and multifaceted “mix of representation, interpretation (and re-interpretation), translation and indeed, remediation, whereby news and comment, discourse and information, are reshaped as they cross a range of sites and shifting media platforms” (see Bolter & Grusin, 1999). In that sense therefore, whether the ‘metajournalism’ of news can be regarded as part of citizen journalism is largely dependent on how citizen journalism is defined and of course, how journalism itself is perceived. A richer definition is therefore strengthened by integrating professional as well as meta- journalistic activities on particular sites (Deuze,

2005).

Some of the social media sites invite users to upload original content while at the same time giving them the liberty to comment on the existing content. Despite this duality though, in many instances the boundaries become blurred. For instance, users can comment on already existing stories while at the same time bringing in new ideas or knowledge about that particular story, in that case it is not obvious that the contribution will be taken just as 'metajournalism' (Goode, 2009). That means a reconceptualisation of citizen journalism seems acceptable, especially considering that the democratic role of creating new ideas and knowledge for the public is not relegated as the same with secondary commentary, the same that a journalistic piece in any news media would not be the same with letters to the editor in response to written articles (Hermes, 2006: 104).

Unquestionably, it might be useful to appreciate the impending rather than real democratic effect of citizen journalism by positioning this development in context. For instance, the percentage of the people who have engaged in some kind of 'Web 2.0' activity on the Internet, let alone those focusing on news processes, is ever increasing at around 21,3 percent (Internet World Stats, 2014). Monitoring such growth rates permit us to imagine the rate at which people are engaging with the Internet. All the same, numerous features of citizen journalism might possibly nourish the democratic imagination. With statistics of research into news media growing, the factors influencing news agendas are still foreign to audiences (Goode, 2009:107). In a mediascape characterised by inadequate media organisations which happen to have the same journalistic culture of publishing similar stories from the same old sources, the 'power' of the audience might be bargained to slightly more than direct prohibition (Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2006). The result is nothing but a disengagement from the mainstream media, as evidenced in especially the reaction of the younger audiences (Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2006). In Zimbabwe for instance, the general public tends to shun the conventional media because they do not trust some of the stories and the sources while they prefer getting news from the privately owned media which include online news (Moyo, 2011). The democratic appeal of digital online news therefore depends on the hope of recuperating that dearth as well as the further democratic petition of the citizen initiated activities more particularly, depends on the hope of the ordinary citizens themselves taking the lead in the agenda-setting processes.

This takes place of course by active engagement. Nevertheless, the phenomenon does not necessarily indicate the demise of the mainstream media in setting the agenda (Banda, 2010). These media organisations are still “breaking and framing” a magnitude of the news pieces flowing into the cyber sphere, and this is an ongoing thing for a long time. Moreover, the stories that they break and frame often take the form of raw material and not the final product – they often provide links in the news production chain which usually commence with the ‘wholesale’ news organisations instead of the ‘retail’ news organisations that engage with communications scholarship (Boyd-Barrett & Rantanen, 1998). This conception of a line of production which surpasses the news organisations has been previously debated within the media studies fraternity through the active audience theory. The theory simply highlights how audiences actively engage themselves in producing meaning from media texts as they read, process and reframe them (Moores, 1993; Hall, 1990; 1993; Ang, 1985). Citizen journalism could be an extension of this theory, thereby opposing the formerly settled producer–consumer dichotomy. This kind of citizen participation allows ordinary people to participate in setting the news agenda. The process takes place through creating original content and this makes the agenda setting mission of the traditional media temporary, flexible and open to critical interference (Hermes, 2006: 107).

This shows how citizen journalism can afford the democratic imagination as it can cultivate an extra ordinary possibility for the journalistic activities to become part of a dialogue. This directly echoes the notions of some scholars (Habermas, 1989; Carey, 1998). It also implies that news does not only become a product for consumption, but rather, citizens get engaged and sometimes critically discuss. However, caution has to be taken in considering the various and essential chains of communication that also occur in those circumstances: there happens to be very influential people, professionals and experts who also contribute and feed off the conversations. Mainstream media organisations normally report stories whose sources are those in power, a definitely important element for a functional democracy. At the same time, public figures cannot just close their eyes to the online communities in which their integrity is exposed to continuous analysis and re-evaluation. A case in point is the 2014 South African presidential candidates’ debates on the *e-News* channel in which candidates were questioned by those who contributed to the discussions. This was an especially high-profile manifestation of the amplified concern by the online electorate on the part of influential institutions. In any case, any form of democracy that does not consider the 21st century chains

of conversations, together with the power relations within them, is biased (Goode, 2009: 106-110).

Talking about the many facets of communication that run within the milieu of citizen journalism, one may ask if citizen journalism is really threatening mainstream journalism. This is an extremely contested issue. Predictions about the phenomenon range from those who confess the death of the traditional news media, to those who are uncertain of the capacity of citizen journalism to surpass the mainstream media. The debate is still a fresh one that needs to be digested. As Hermes observed:

The venerable profession of journalism finds itself at a rare moment in history where, for the first time, its hegemony as gatekeeper of the news is threatened by not just new technology and competitors but, potentially, by the audience it serves. Armed with easy-to-use web publishing tools, always-on connections and increasingly powerful mobile devices, the online audience has the means to become an active participant in the creation and dissemination of news and information. And it's doing just that on the Internet (2006: 38).

If that is the case, it can further be probed whether being able to do something automatically makes it feasible to do. Such visions which are filled with keenness and hype can be met with verdicts that are doubtful and restrict the triumph of citizen journalism. Harper argues that the prospects for user-generated content seem to be inadequate and not as valuable, adding that the much hyped about citizen blogs in the interim might have drawbacks (cited in the *Washington Times*, 2008). Deuze concurs with this view when he examined the surfacing of citizen journalism in Germany, the Netherlands, Australia, as well as the United States. He noted how traditional journalism is tapping into citizen produced content:

For all its success, citizen journalism remains dependent to a significant extent on mainstream news organisations, whose output it debates, critiques, recombines, and debunks by harnessing large and distributed communities of users. At the same time, increasingly mainstream news is taking note of what the citizen journalists are saying, and uses content generated by users as an alternative to vox-pops, opinion polls, or in some cases indeed as a partial replacement of editorial work (Deuze, 2007:15).

The worst denunciation is given by the Project for Excellence in Journalism (PEJ) which investigates the practice in the United States. In its annual report (2008), it was concluded that though many communication scholars are busy “scripting the demise of the profession at the hands of citizen journalists or the contributors”, some scholars still maintain that “citizen

journalism is an overrated phenomenon”:

The prospects for user-created content once thought possibly central to the next era of journalism, now appear more limited. News people report that the most promising parts of citizen input are new ideas, sources, comments, pictures, and video. But citizens posting news content has proved less valuable, with too little that is new or verifiable (PEJ, 2008).

Others have argued that except if the citizens are improving on what the journalists are offering, say for instance, by showing their amateur pictures from their mobile phones, most of those citizens who are publishing are simply scrambling for attention and therefore, shifting the control mutuality balance (PEJ, 2008). Other scholars argue that citizen journalism activities are being restricted by the fact that those involved are not rewarded or receiving any form of incentives. Dan Gillmor argues that giving the citizen journalists some incentives will definitely attract more of them. He notes that not giving incentives “seems to be kind of an unfair system”. For Gillmor, the media could attract more contributors if they “solicit video and information from people and pay for it instead of assuming that it’s free” (Gillmor, 2006: 16).

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Therefore, in lieu of seeing citizen journalism as a threat to professional journalism, the practice could rather be considered risky. The short history of the Internet has seen some of the few stories published by citizen journalists gaining so much popularity, despite being reminded of the risks of publishing stories from untrained, anonymous and unverified sources. Such incidents spark discussions about the accuracy of citizen journalism reports. There are many instances where unconfirmed reports or images are submitted to mainstream news media, but later on the reports turn out to be counterfeit. These possible false reports are some of the many potential effects of publishing from anonymous sources. Sometimes the news is factually true but some citizens tend to deliberately disregard the ethical standards of objectivity. Some sources deliberately have a hidden agenda to put the subjects in defamatory situations. Such biases are rarely found in traditional journalism because of the gatekeeping process (PEJ, 2008).

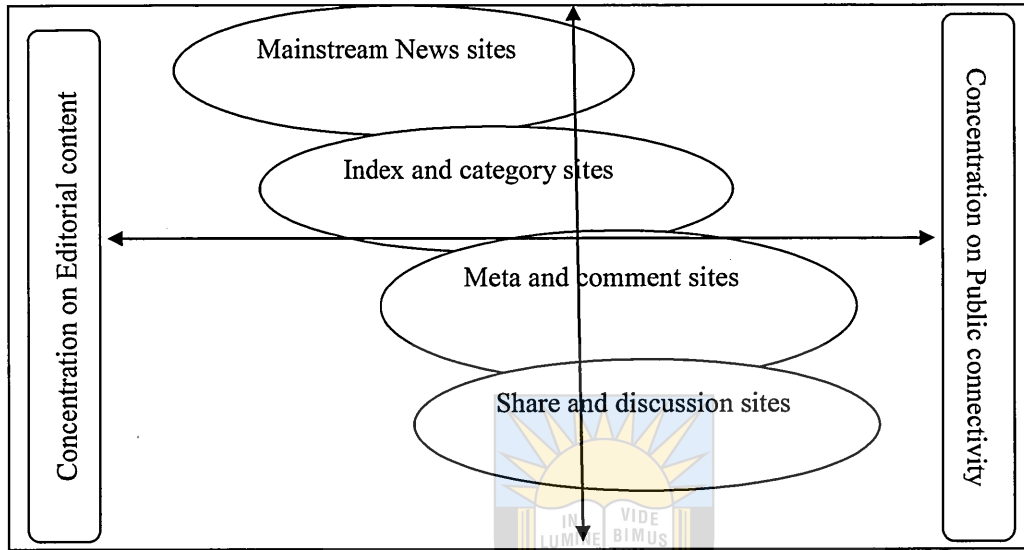
But where exactly is the distinction between the citizen and the journalist? This is another question. Citizen journalism seems to have turned the conventional news model on its head. While the journalist is employed by media outlets to source news, citizen journalists create news from their communities. They are not just sources, but they also gather and write the

news. The journalist on the other hand, is a “shepherd” who distributes the reported news in a legible way that does not defy journalistic standards (Glasser, 2004). The citizen journalist controls the format of the news, thanks to the affordable technologies that have exploded into the market place. Glaser argues that the philosophy behind citizen journalism efforts continuously points to the gatekeeping role philosophy behind mainstream journalism. While professional journalists deliberately select and determine what news is and what it is not, from their personal judgements, the citizen journalism philosophy is that any kind of piece of news is useful to someone out there, and it is upon the public to decide what to read and what not to read. The idea is that the ‘truth’ is somewhere in the multiplicity of voices. In fact, this resembles the “marketplace of ideas” popularised by Holmes who integrated Milton and Mill’s theories (see Milton, 1986; Mill 1985).

Deuze (2003) distinguishes between the four types of online journalism which sometimes overlap. The categories are as follows: mainstream news sites, index and category sites, meta and comment sites, as well as share and discussion sites. Most online newspaper sites can be categorised into the mainstream media sites which basically present originated or aggregated content with very little involvement from users (Deuze, 2003: 205). The next is the index and category sites which rather link to but do not produce original content. A good example would be the portal sites like *Yahoo*. Meta and comment sites concern the professional journalistic work which normally contains comments on how the news has been produced but not necessarily about the news per se. Lastly, group weblogs are typical of the share and discussion sites which are open forums that allow users to connect and exchange ideas with one another (Deuze, 2003: 205). The orientation of the sites mainly depends on how and where they fall on the axis as depicted by Deuze, as shown in this diagram.

Figure 1: Online Journalisms

Closed Participatory Communication



Open Participatory Communication

Source: Deuze (2003)

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The model above clearly shows how traditional journalism and online journalism are being done. Evident in the model is the gatekeeping journalism that concentrates on editorial content produced by trusted sources and are guided by their own personal judgements as to what news is. Some mainstream news sites have forums but that content does not make part of their front pages. This could trigger readers to dig up such stories which would have been gate kept by the editors. From the diagram, the citizen journalism format fits well into the share and discussion site which publishes the news that has not been published by the mainstream media and these are the stories that increase public participation (Deuze, 2003: 206). Despite not being totally unmoderated, the standards of the site are minimal and not so conspicuous.

Comparing the citizen and professional types of journalism, the latter's main goal has been known to be that of strengthening democracy, despite it preserving its gatekeeping nature. The gatekeeping model has also been frequently criticised essentially because the journalist cannot always know what is wanted and what is not wanted by the public (Bruns, 2008). On

the other hand, citizen journalists are not bonded to any of those concerns because to them everything is newsworthy. Citizen journalism aims to reinforce community ties through opening up the journalistic processes. The citizen journalism community emphasises participation and not passive consumption of news material (Bruns, 2006). Despite sharing some goals with traditional journalism, citizen journalism is not restricted to any model, be it the public sphere or the traditional gatekeeper model. Also, it is not restricted to report on political news only hence, it has a much broader concern as compared to those of the traditional journalist (Terdiman, 2004).

To summarise the differences between citizen and professional journalism, it could be argued that drawing news from the citizen produced content poses more risks to the mainstream media. The interconnectedness of the Internet makes it easier for unverified news reports to be fed into the mainstream media. However, the general benefit of citizen journalism is that it keeps the mainstream media and of course the general public updated by bringing in current news as they happen. Hopefully, it would be a matter of time before most citizen journalists equip themselves with the dos and don'ts of the journalistic practice, a move which could trim down the risks of the citizen journalism practice.

It is essential to note that those who seem to denounce citizen journalism are ignoring the fact that the practice is a developing one and is still to realise its potential. Mainstream journalism has existed for more than 500 years (see Gillmor, 2006). As such, any conclusions dismissing the active audience participation as manifested in citizen journalism proves premature. Therefore, at this point, we cannot glorify citizen journalism, nor denounce it as trumping on traditional journalism. We cannot as well say it is the future of the media. In that view, predicting where the media industry is heading is an impossible mission. However, one cannot disregard the fact that citizen journalism has got its own problems. The following section is an effort to contextualise the problems associated with the phenomenon of citizen journalism.

Considering that citizen journalism has to do with citizen empowerment, the whole issue becomes problematic to some extent. The implication is that governments have to invest in citizen participation enabling technologies. Nonetheless, the important thing is mainstream journalism has become to appreciate the capacity of the Internet as a marketplace of

“transactional democracy” (Goode, 2009). The main setback working against citizen journalism concerns its public legitimacy. One question to that effect has been who really approves and or legitimises the practice. Another one has to do with citizen journalists’ accountability to the public good. *Facebook* as an instance of citizen participation has largely been indicted of demonstrating how suicide is done, thereby encouraging suicidal activities amongst the youth (Banda, 2010). Obviously, this discourse does not go in tandem with issues of participation and empowerment.

One would ask what kind of democratic citizenship is citizen journalism dreaming of, and whether it is desirable. Certainly, such essential issues cannot be underestimated. This is one reason why some scholars have even highlighted some serious concerns regarding how best to approach new media technologies in the contemporary society. Notions of whether technology needs to be regarded as a determinant of political and social transformation, whether communities should embrace technology as a response to their specific socio-political agendas, prompt the need to institute the theoretical boundaries which determine the extent to which we can harness the practice of citizen journalism, both as a result and as a determinant of technological advancement (Williams & Edge, 1996). From the above discussion, it is feasible to situate citizen journalism as either technologically or socially determined, the subject which will form part of the discussion in Chapter 4.

This chapter has so far highlighted citizen journalism as a rising phenomenon that has seen ordinary citizens fast becoming initiators of communication in very substantial ways. In particular, it has shown how the presence of citizen journalism has to some extent affected, either positively or negatively, the existence of the one-way traditional media. The discussion has revealed that the phenomenon, once treated with scepticism, has taken on new and powerful meanings, with such synonyms as civic journalism, open-source journalism, people-initiated online journalism and participatory journalism becoming more widely accepted even among traditional mass communication scholars and practitioners. The success of this kind of journalism has literally been attributed to the ICTs which offer a vast amount of resources and tools for the journalist. From the discussion on the Internet and citizen journalism, one can appreciate that the implications of the Internet for journalism are not limited to the news reporting processes. Citizen journalism is distinguishable from other kinds of journalism due to its exceptional medium specific characteristics: hypertextuality, interactivity and

multimediality (Deuze, 2003). That is to say, the citizen journalist decides the media format that best conveys a particular story (multimediality), the citizen also considers the most possible option available for the public to respond to his or her story, to interact or even customise some stories (interactivity). At the same time, the citizen journalist has to think about the best ways to link his or her story to other stories, archives, resource, to mention a few, through hyperlinks (hypertextuality). Interactivity has not only to do with 'feedback' possibilities, it also refers to the extent to which users are empowered with additional control over how information is passed to them (Deuze, 2003). This has been discussed as the importance to democracy of citizen journalism, where citizens can engage in dialogue on issues of public concern.

Having discussed the concept of citizen journalism in relation to the related concepts thus far, it is important perhaps to do a recap on the basics of the profession of journalism itself. The previous part has basically dwelt on a whole lot of issues about citizen journalism, but what is lacking at the moment is to contextualise the concept in the broader sense of journalism. In other words, the question that needs to be addressed here is, what is journalism, and how is it done. This would perhaps help us to appreciate where citizen journalism is coming from. In that regard, it is essential to present background information in important areas which include the traditional roles of journalism as well as the concept of the public sphere. Thus, the following section explores citizen journalism in light of the normative theories of journalism. It also discusses Habermas' notion of the public sphere, in as much as it highlights some of the contrasts between the libertarian orientation as well as other theories of the press which argue for what should be the normative or ideal role of the media. These ideas are imperative as they enlighten and provide an abstract framework for much of the work carried out in relation to the role of news and citizenship in democratic societies. But before discussing the mentioned aspects, below is a presentation of the theoretical approaches to studying citizen journalism.

2.6. Theoretical approaches to studying Citizen Journalism

2.6.1. Post positivism

From this perspective, studies of citizen journalism seek for a way of codifying constant and predictable relationships. The research design in this case is comparative analysis, whereby traditional and citizen journalism are directly or indirectly compared in terms of to what extent does each live up to the normative roles of journalism as endorsed by liberal theories of the press (see Siebert, 1956). It is the quantitative content analysis method that determines whether and to what extent citizen journalism typifies the liberal-pluralist normative role of journalism, which entails presenting the multiplicity range of views. In a comparative study of coded news items, Carpenter (2010) noted that the series of diversity was better in citizen journalism as compared to its counterpart traditional journalism. Another study by Lacy et al. (2010) examined the extent to which citizen journalism was able to proxy traditional journalism in the fiscal marketplace. Their results revealed that citizen news and blog sites can actually complement daily newspapers, which implies that citizen journalism does not aim to threaten mainstream news organizations (2010: 44). Surveys have also been used to determine the degree to which citizen journalism fulfils the normative roles of journalism, and some have revealed that the online user generated news brings up to date news to the public in the same manner as traditional journalism. Other surveys have regarded, through interviewing newspaper editors, the significance of traditional journalism more highly than citizen journalism (Nah & Chung, 2009). In an effort to establish the motivations behind engaging in citizen journalism, it was found that citizens gain a multitude of affirmative emotional benefits through their participation. Above all, it has been established that the uptake of citizen generated material was negatively linked to political knowledge while at the same time positively linked to participation both online and offline. Conversely, the consumption of traditional journalism was positively related to political knowledge as well as to offline participation (see Carpenter, 2010; Lacy et al., 2010).

2.6.2. Convergence and Technological determinism

This perspective assumes a functionalist concern in systemic analysis, but Castells (1996) argues that it however broadens it geographically from separate localities to a globalised process. In discussing 'network journalism', Heinrich (2011) points to the fact that the

surfacing of citizen journalism is a good example of a revolution in media work determined by two processes of globalisation and technological developments in the form of digitisation (2011: 2). Research in the area of convergence has raised issues concerning 'systemic disruptions or equilibrium', the measuring tool being that of normative press theory. While convergence has been perceived as the sound democratisation of cultural production made (Jenkins, 2006), it has also been noted that user production, citizen journalism included, soothes the media consumers with a fake 'sense of agency' which associates involvement to use, that is, relating participation to consumption in lieu of linking it to critical reflection (Cammaerts, 2003).

Convergence as an organising conception deals with growing hybrids of professional-citizen organisations and practices. For instance, some scholars have claimed that citizen journalism has been completely engrossed by mainstream journalism (Carpenter, 2010). Likewise, it is also argued that mainstream journalism will preserve its integrity in the face of citizen journalism (Compton & Benedetti, 2010). Nonetheless, some scholars have also emphasised developing hybridities of creation and consumption. The appearance of 'collaborative networks' has been seen as the organisational demonstration of convergence motivated by technological change. Through the concept of 'produsage', Bruns (2008) demonstrated the hybridisation of roles, while a multinational comparative study by Deuze, Bruns & Neuberger (2007) revealed the emergence of novel professional-citizen hybrids.

2.6.3. Social constructivism

This perspective deviates from the preceding perspectives in many ways. Guided by the phrase 'constructivism', the viewpoint takes into account the roles, organisations, beliefs as well as the systems as progressing processes and not as established and stable attributes (Reich, 2008). For that reason, studies of citizen journalism from this perspective aim not to delineate or evaluate citizen journalism so as to account for the processes that maintain it. Instead, the purpose is to find out whether and to what extent organisational customs and self-perceptions of news not simply vary between citizen and mainstream journalism, but also how these perceptions or understandings either maintain or deter the incorporation of one into the other (ibid). Research depends on a combination of examination of news stories as well as

direct interviews, of course with the assumption that the ideas expressed are indicative of pertinent norms and practices at the workplace (Hermida & Thurman, 2008).

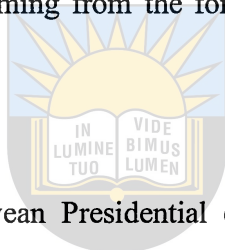
Some studies have revealed little in common between mainstream and citizen journalism. It has been found that citizen and professional journalists employ diverse routines when reporting and writing. Despite mainstream journalists depending more on official sources, their counterparts seemed to rely on opinions and unofficial sources, with the suggestion that the latter's reports stick less to professional norms (Carpenter, 2008). Interviewing both citizen and professional journalists on how they went about producing their stories, similar conclusions were found (Reich, 2008). The differences in their reporting were attributed to the different circumstances and resources accessible to each, hence, reflecting negatively on citizen journalists in relation to traditional norms (Carpenter, 2008).

On the other hand, some cohesion between the two types of journalism also exists, according to other studies. It has been noted that both groups subscribe to the liberal-pluralist professional ideology (Singer & Ashman, 2009). In another study, it has been shown that while some editors resist citizen journalism in any other form except reader feedback and opinion so as to preserve professionalism, other editors endorse it as it promotes closer participation of publics and the newspaper. Despite the limited impact on mainstream journalism though, one can argue that the impact is striking. Much of the discussions about citizen journalism are driven by mounting pressures of profitability and their forces on newsroom routines (Hermida & Thurman, 2008).

2.6.4. Critical discourse analysis

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) posits inequalities as intended and structurally relevant, insights that stay unclear to other perspectives (see Williams, 1975). The perspective perceives discourse as social activity thus, it also shares a constructivist preference with process in lieu of a positivist concern with aspects and features of wholly formed elements (ibid). CDA studies seem to identify or label citizen and mainstream journalism relationally instead of as opposites. So, its evaluation of citizen journalism is often regarded in terms of

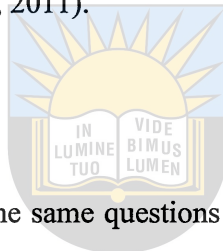
struggle and uneven amalgamation instead of the relative strength of contrasting positions or fully realised hybrids (Robinson, 2009). The levels to which these assumptions of other perceptions are left behind are evident in a range of work. The intricate relationships between citizen and professional journalism have been described in Robinson's (2009) study of news stories written and published after the 2005 Hurricane Katrina disaster in the US. Not opposing citizen journalism, the study recognises an assortment of diverse themes, characters, perspectives, and claims of authority by news pieces written to mark the anniversary of the Katrina disaster (ibid). Such conclusions imply the shortfall of claims about which side has the superior hand or claims of a fusion of the two types of journalism. Contrasting such claims, Robinson recommends the existence of a "patchwork" of mainstream media and citizen efforts that embody the performing from the forces of these changing roles (2009: 810).



During the 2008 and 2013 Zimbabwean Presidential election, non-professionals took to blogging, an act which Moyo (2011) described as gradually characterised by greater participation, multimodality and unidirectional flows (2011:756). From the above description, the emphasis on 'multi' and not binary in either citizen or professional journalism widens reflection of the complexity and interconnectedness of citizen journalism with other circles and practices. One can argue that citizen journalism is neither a direct opposite nor visibly different from mainstream journalism, it is rather an interim action manifested through complex relationships as well as the special circumstance in which it occurs. Despite Moyo suggesting the emergence of "a hermeneutic, constructivist and postmodern" view to journalism, which is different from the traditional professional mode, it cannot be denied that citizen journalism also shares with the professional mode "the idealism of the neoliberal discourse" which constitutes both as the watchdog of the state, but this concurrently would not allow them to conceptualise the alternative in really fundamental ways (Moyo, 2011: 758).

Kperogi's (2011) study of citizen journalism, with reference to CNN and its *iReport* element, digs the "enthusiastic valorisation of citizen media" to "the idea that they exist apart from and, in fact, in opposition to, the mainstream media" (2011: 315). The study proposes a

much more nuanced evaluation. On one side, citizen-generated items are integrated not through deliberate editorial assessment but indirectly, by building the ‘normality’ of current standards of news judgment, which the individuals who submit items acknowledge, if only in the interim (2011: 320). On the other side, and in spite of this mostly triumphant management, other *iReport* items plainly condemn CNN’s reporting of particular news events, signifying the porosity of ways of control (2011: 322). In that view, Kperogi (2011) highlights the omnipresent procession nature of this state of affairs by saying that there will always be conflict and the required approval of the majority has to be continuously “won and re-won” (ibid). What therefore becomes imperative is not to declare which side has won, but to realise the conditions of the struggle between the sides and, moreover, how this struggle represent the sides in conflict (Kperogi, 2011).



2.6.5. Historical studies

Historical studies seek to respond to the same questions concerning the ongoing, processual establishment of citizen journalism. Many historical studies of citizen journalism underline its historicity in place of universality by looking at its bottomless connection with the industrialised West (Hamilton, 2008). In doing so, the ascribed general effects of digital technologies are accepted as influenced more especially by social goals within unique social circumstances (see Williams, 1975). To highlight this point, some researchers have argued in favour of ‘conjunctural studies’ that track how social and political agents set up diverse media within different historical, cultural and political structures (Pidduck, 2010: 475). Pidduck’s study speaks to the restrictions of citizen journalism within the environment of the repressive regime of Burma, which he argues is infamous for widespread censorship and for the harassment and incarceration of journalists (2010: 475).

In comparison with the notion that the decentralised, participatory design of new media is inherently democratic, Pidduck argues that contextual awareness like the low Internet access in Burma moderates such claims when extended globally. The effectiveness of citizen journalism has been highlighted as functioning outside mainstream journalism in Egypt, preceding the changes created by the Arab Spring (Hamdy, 2009). The study emphasises prophetically the innumerable problems caused by Arab bloggers to the authority of the state,

the laws and regulations applicable at the time to try to lessen these challenges, and citizen journalists' strategies to circumvent such restrictions. In the same way, the South African experience has been discussed by Bosch (2010), who concluded that in relatively industrialised countries, that can be perceived as part of the 'online public sphere', which is an insinuation to Habermas' (1989) powerful formulation. Also, Hamilton (2008) provides an extensive historicisation of citizen journalism by situating its vibrancy and emergence within the years-long configuration of capitalist media organisation and its sound challenge brought on by increasing pressures of competition in the frameworks of the beginning of modernisation and technological change (Hamilton, 2008).

Notwithstanding the huge diversity of perspectives, many studies of citizen journalism are controlled by a framework of investigation defined by normative liberal-pluralist press theory and the theory of a definite distinction between professional and non-professionals. That constructivist, critical and historical perspectives for addressing citizen journalism turn such a framework itself into a problem deserving of theoretical attention continues to move studies of citizen journalism into new and exciting directions.

2.7. The traditional roles of Journalism

In order to position citizen journalism, it is essential to go back to the drawing board and review the traditional roles of journalism as a profession. Often regarded as the fourth estate, journalism is an indispensable aspect of the society that represents the watchdog for a strong democracy. Schudson defines journalism as:

...the business of a set of institutions that publicises periodically (usually daily) information and commentary on contemporary affairs, normally presented as true and sincere, to a dispersed and anonymous audience so as to publicly include the audience in a discourse taken to be publicly important (Schudson, 2003:11).

The above definition presents both the "business" side of journalism and the fact that journalism is a practice that is meant to serve the public. If so, before discussing the normative theories of journalism, it is essential to discuss the two models explaining the media business: the market as well as the public interest model. These present the parameters through which to evaluate and appreciate this concern about the commercial as well as the

public interest mandate inherent in the media.

The market model takes from an economic perspective of the perfect competition. It suggests that “society’s needs could best be fulfilled through a somewhat uncontrolled process of exchange based on the dynamics of supply and demand” (Croteau & Hoynes, 2006: 17). In other words, profit-seeking businesses constantly cater for the consumers’ demands in a competitive environment. In the context of the media, it implies that the government should not regulate the media. Instead, by being profit-seeking, the media would be competent enough to provide the needs of the public. Interestingly, popular citizen journalism sites such “*OhMyNews*” as well as the acknowledged *Guerrilla News Network* are also profit making business models. While this model suggests that a free market system encourages effectiveness, receptiveness, elasticity and improvements within journalism, the activities could also lead to monopolies or homogenised competitions, which could be harmful to the public (Croteau & Hoynes, 2006: 18). Looking at this framework in the context of journalism could present a rationale for the current trends in the media. For instance, news organisations reacted so fast and have become so flexible with regards to the audiences’ expectations. Audiences are now given a bigger portion of what they want and media organisations have become accustomed to their demands so swiftly. However, one can argue that these advantages of free markets have given rise to “infotainment” – a rather diluted account of what constitutes news, which prioritises entertainment at the expense of “serious” media content. In other words, this implies that news producers have been forced to transmit more infotainment and less of serious news in their efforts to stay competitive and develop their consumer base (Schudson, 2003).

One can therefore argue that such news programs will definitely fall short with regards to providing adequate “information and commentary on contemporary affairs” to keep the citizenry informed (Schudson, 2003: 11). Moreover, despite the fact that news producers have fulfilled the consumer expectations by presenting a continuous flow of news, journalists have now been put under so much pressure to be the first with breaking news, a move which has seen more of sub-standard media products and sometimes with unverified basis (Croteau & Hoynes, 2006: 87). More disconcerting is the realisation of mergers and acquisitions overshadowing the media industry, ensuing in a few major conglomerates dominating most information organisations (Dugger, 2000). The consequence of a few powerful voices being

heard cannot be ignored in as far as democracy is concerned. For Dugger:

... these few corporate monarchs set the pervading tones and agendas for us all. ...Freedom of the press has been upside-downed into corporate control of the press... Freedom of the press, far from guaranteeing democracy – its purpose when the country was founded – now protects the corporations that are methodically debasing democracy (Dugger, 2000:34).

On the other hand, the public sphere model highlights the view that the free market falls short in gratifying the entire needs of the society. Moreover, some of the societal needs “simply cannot be met via the market’s supply and demand dynamic” (Croteau & Hoynes, 2006: 21). These needs are of public concern and they include, among other things, variety and substance. However, since the needs have less economic value, they seem not to be recognised in a market system based on consumer purchasing capacity. In a nutshell, the public sphere model highlights the important fact that “because it is vital to a robust democracy, media content cannot be treated as merely another product... profitability cannot be the sole indicator of a healthy media industry” (Croteau & Hoynes, 2006: 21). As such, the model concedes the roles that governments can assume in the media fraternity so as to protect the interests of the public.

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Ananny et al (2002) examined citizen journalism through the public sphere model. They theorised that ideas must be crystal clear, unique, reachable and relational if they are to be recognised as the building blocks for public opinion. A further assertion they made was that as “multimodal” types of communication are surfacing now and again as the general public can now access them, the visibility for multiple expressions will also keep increasing (ibid). Their study is based on the perspective that public conversation is storytelling. They observed two important things from their study. Firstly, a growing public opinion has been realised through the evolving citizen journalism practice. Secondly, they noted some kind of self-censorship amongst the citizen journalism participants (Ananny et al., 2002). For instance, some participants employed what the authors regarded as “playful editing” to get away with distasteful messages.

The results of that particular study seem to confirm the many reasons put forward by the citizen journalists themselves. The fact that the format affords flexibility and complete control to the public, as well as the fact that the format allows the citizen journalists to

influence the public discourse is also highlighted. In another study, Kaye & Johnson (2002) found that reasons for drawing and distributing information online include, among others, information seeking/surveillance, entertainment and social utility. Besides the day's news, it seems those browsing information on the Internet have other reasons than when they peruse a newspaper. On that note, Ananny et al indicated the main challenges associated with the open source kind of citizen journalism: the need to cultivate essential communication skills in the citizen journalists themselves, the necessity of editors to completely understand the emerging voices surfacing on the sites, as well as the need to represent the various perceptions in all types and circumstances of the publication (Ananny et al., 2002).

Using the public sphere framework to analyse the media as exemplified above reveals the shortcomings inherent in the free market system. Initially, the free market does not uphold the principle of democracy – the business making the highest profits automatically becomes more powerful and influential in the marketplace, resulting in inequality. The voices and judgments of the affluent and influential media conglomerates are the visible ones, while independent sources struggle for visibility (Croteau and Hoynes, 2006). Moreover, the free market system is incapable of affording social or democratic needs. For instance, public media are meant to be accessible to every citizen in spite of their affordability to pay, due to the fact that they are such an invaluable public resource. However, supply and demand forces do not allow the provision of such public goods (ibid). Also, news which shocks or panders to the attention of consumers does not either inform the general public or present the citizens with the opportunity to democratically participate in issues that affect them in their everyday lives (Croteau & Hoynes, 2006: 23-25).

Evidently, the two models discussed herein tend to contrast each other in how they relate with the public: the market model perceives the public as mere consumers while the public sphere model perceives them as citizens. Importantly, while the former represents the typical nature of the media in the contemporary society, the public sphere model highlights what journalism should be and how it should function: an accessible system which allows information to circulate freely, and a system which allows for multiplicity regarding the ownership and control of the media (Croteau & Hoynes, 2006: 26). Thus, one can argue that the growth of the Internet has brought the media nearer to this principle. To amplify the two models described above, the discussion below further describes what have been termed the normative

theories or normative roles of journalism.

2.8. Normative Theories of Journalism

These are the theories that highlight the ideal functions of the press. Normative theorists have identified democratic theories like the libertarian, social responsibility, democratic participatory, as well as non-democratic theories like the authoritarian and the totalitarian (Siebert, Peterson, & Schramm, 1956; McQuail, 1987). It is essential to consider only a few of these theories which are relevant to the study.

As highlighted above, normative theories outline the desired criteria or values from which media practices may be assessed (McQuail, 1987). The theoretical foundations described herein are reflected within this framework, despite the fact that they hardly ever compare with the real circumstances on the ground. Undeniably, that explains why normative theory is normative. On the flipside, since such assumptions are ideal types, they should not be assessed based on to what extent they match the real socio-political environment, but instead, on an elementary ideological foundation, to a great extent in the same manner in which one would go for a democratic and perfect system which does not exist at all. Nonetheless, this study endeavours to scrutinise the theories from the normative (ideal) as well as the empirical point of view. Ideally, the literature provided here envisages filling in the gaps between the theories of the functions of journalism and how, in real life, the journalists perform those roles. The point here is that the 'ideal' does not automatically transfer to the 'real'.

2.8.1. The Libertarian Theory

Libertarianism has its roots in the Enlightenment influenced free market ideas of Adam Smith and John Stuart Mill, John Milton's free discussion views, as well as John Locke's notions on popular autonomy. These scholars are known for suggesting some firm individual rights which encompass press freedom (see Siebert et al., 1956:43- 50). At the core of the libertarian movement are the objectives of Enlightenment, which emphasises the notions of individual autonomy from state interference, freedom as well as truth seeking by the means of science and reason (Grossberg et al., 1998). Such concerns illustrate the idea of an unconstrained media that is anticipated to help the public in realising the 'truth', while at the same time as also assuming the 'fourth estate' role: public protection. All this has become

extensively acknowledged as the main ideology of the practice of journalism (Altschull, 1994). Siebert et al highlight libertarianism as advocating for assuming the watchdog role in order to serve the interests of the public, as well as assuming the “instrument of public education” role because democracy is founded on an informed public (Siebert et al., 1956: 51-74). An essential aspect in this regard is journalism’s liberty from state influence (Curran, 2000). In the midst of the introduction of a theoretical foundation for the freedom of expression idea, McQuail argues that the idea of reporting objectively was developed so as to execute its role of truth finding and non-aligned medium of information (McQuail, 1994). In this way, objectivity gained recognition as an indispensable attribute of good professional journalism (McQuail, 1987; 1994).

Thus, from the ‘objectivity’ viewpoint, the journalist is an impartial, isolated and unprejudiced manifestation of reality. In other words, being objective entails providing a just and impartial assessment of a story while at the same time using the correct facts to contextualise issues (Tuchman, 1972: 1978). The libertarian perspective in this case therefore focuses on ‘hard’ news: a fundamental feature of the news media. Hard news in this sense refers to the serious stories about important themes (Tuchman, 1972). Hard news concentrates on factual events and not trivial matters (Kanyegirire, 2007: 45). Since news is associated with facts, it implies that hard news relies on statistics gathered by reliable and official sources whose perceptions are trusted, legitimate and essential for the audience (Oosthuizen, 2001).

A personal reflection on the post-colonial press would make one conclude that the press has traditionally struggled in instilling the libertarian values of sovereignty and the associated objectivist stance in journalism. In particular, private media organisations have had to continuously survive government efforts which are meant to control how they function. In fact, Kasoma argues that the post-colonial media are historically embodied by political membership, whether linked to the state or not (Kasoma, 2000). One can therefore argue that this is what drove the commencement of the objectivity concept. Theoretically and practically though, the significance of the libertarian theory in the lives of the ordinary citizens has been under scrutiny, considering that the media turned out to be a profit seeking business. This in fact has actually “altered the nature of the marketplace of ideas by making the press’s major role that of a marketplace of goods and services” (Picard, 1985:14). Having discussed the

libertarian theory of the press, it is also imperative at this point to deliberate on other journalistic role emphases which also derive from libertarianism. These include the neutral as well as the watchdog or adversarial roles of journalism.

2.8.1.1. The Neutral role of Journalism

This role of journalism places emphasis on objectivity. Also known as the information disseminator role of journalism, its other point of emphasis has been the public servant whose mission is truth finding as well as reporting the progressive social issues in an approach that is neutral (see Berger, 2000). Other theorists like Janowitz (1975:618), noted that the neutral role of journalism is grounded on the perception that objectivity and facts are the most important basis for the wellbeing of the media and should therefore be separated from opinion. From another perspective, this disseminator role is regarded as “a meshing of two key roles: getting information to the public quickly and avoiding stories with unverifiable ‘facts’” (Weaver & Wilhoit, 1996:137). This kind of journalism is also evident in the neo-liberal function of the media. Simply put, the neo-liberal role contributes to the functioning of democracy as it is devoted to the reflection of pluralism and diversity. Based on Mill’s (1985) marketplace of ideas, the neo-liberal role puts emphasis on creating a stage for open deliberations amongst different voices (Berger, 2000:85). In that regard, it becomes possible to argue that this cultured neutral standpoint is furthermore influenced by the social responsibility theory as well as the public sphere concept, considering that the media are expected to endorse a discursive sphere in which news personnel put forward matters of public concern in a free manner (Berger, 2000; Hyden & Leslie, 2002).

So to speak, Siebert et al. indicate that the neutral as well as the neo-liberal approaches are in numerous ways reactions to the authoritarianism of preceding eras which are deep-founded in libertarian philosophy (Siebert et al., 1956:33). Under these roles, journalists are ideally expected to be emancipated in their respective organisations (Siebert et al., 1956:43). From these perspectives, journalists are perceived as “neutral referees in the contest of political forces” (Berger, 2000:85). In other words, these roles of journalism draw from the professional notions of editorial independence, balance, freedom of expression, objectivity, fairness, as well as having access to information protected by the government. These are the indispensable prerequisites, considering the fact that journalists are for the most part

anticipated to establish a 'laissez-faire' communicative round-table for a marketplace of ideas (Berger, 2000).

On the flipside though, the neutral and the neo-liberal roles of journalism have not been without criticism. Those who critique them have in most cases accepted their normative objectives and focused largely on how these are diluted by realism. In a way, this is different from a normative critique as such, for instance, as is embodied in other theories like the social responsibility and development-oriented approach (Shoemaker & Mayfield, 1987). As such, the neutral role's emphasis on objectivism is time and again criticised with regards to practice. Moreover, many media studies consider the agenda of a libertarian 'functionalist' viewpoint since news is merely taken as impartially updating citizens on the events of the day so that they become an informed electorate (Tuchman, 1972). Nonetheless, research on the media has also profited from numerous humanistic based schools that have engendered intuitive interpretations and analyses the intricate journalism and media production practices. For example, cultural studies as well as the sociology of news production mainly dwelt on the "routines of newsgathering" together with the "ideological influences" in journalism activities to highlight that media personnel create the news (Schudson, 2000; Tuchman, 1978; Shoemaker & Mayfield, 1987).

Studies on the sociology of news production have reiterated and identified "news as a social construction of reality", while media organisations have been recognised as its symbolic manufacturer (Tuchman, 1978). However, different media theorists have given emphasis to diverse aspects of such construction. For instance, Gans (1979) put forward the fact that in news construction, journalists uphold the political, social, economic and cultural hierarchy in society. On the other hand, the political economy perspective regards news as being characterised by a "by-product of the liberal nature of individual journalists at elite news media" (Lichter et al., 1986; Herman & Chomsky, 1988). This perspective suggests the media as commercial and political agents that wittingly preserve or uphold the capitalistic ideology of the ruling class (Herman & Chomsky, 1988).

Scholars like Schudson (2000) have highlighted how the news gathering procedures are taken by reporters to socially construct the end product of news. For Schudson, news comprises newsworthy events as seen from the eyes of the journalists, rooted from socially constructed

perceptions of news, and is determined by the socio-cultural context to some extent (Schudson, 2000). In that way, news is not just constructed in an empty space, since journalists are also confined within the customs of a particular society (Oosthuizen, 2001:463). In other words, the point being put forward here is that news, in Branston and Stafford's words, is not a translucent "window on the world". Instead, Branston and Stafford argue that news is rather a manipulated or constructed reality, while journalists replicate the news with the interests of the ruling minority at heart (Branston & Stafford, 1996:161). It is in this view that news is theoretically evaluated as a solely "constructed 'discursive' reality developing exclusively from regular journalistic practices that are objectifications or externalisations of journalists' self-driving meanings" (Tuchman, 1978).

This perception about news content insinuates that journalists do not necessarily consider the varied interests of society members. Paying special attention to roles and news content, De Beer suggests that the deliberate editing of "facts" is indicative of the journalists or the editor's intention, as well as the perspectives of the media organisations and the society in which the media professionals operate. In this way therefore, objectivity is an impossible mission (De Beer, 2004:195). The reality is that journalists do not objectively disseminate the truth as suggested in the neutral and neo-liberal roles of journalism. In fact, Tuchman put forward the fact that journalists are not as neutral as they profess to be when it comes to news production (Tuchman, 1972). So, the issue of objectivity is often a difficult one to deal with as it obstructs the standards that guide the journalist, thereby supposing that they do not affect the journalism practice.

Normatively speaking, believing in objectivity presupposes a "real world" somewhere out there, but only a few journalists who seem to be unconscious of the subjective influences around them can account for this (De Beer, 2004). In the real sense, objectivity is not an unattainable mission for journalists, considering that when choosing a particular piece of news item, the journalist is possibly getting rid of other items that cannot make it for that particular day's news. In that process, the journalist is in fact prioritising some news items over others (ibid). Thus, concluding the possibility of objectivity is "to imply that an unarguable interpretation of an event exists prior to the report" (Branston & Stafford, 1996:167). As such, it becomes possible to rule out objectivity. For Hazel, the concept of objectivity is fundamentally and theoretically complex. In Hazel's words, the notion of

objectivity is “not a single unitary ethic” which can be used by the journalists (Hazel, 2001: 94). The conception of objectivity from this perspective has been disregarded in different scholarly circles. This is so because scholars became skeptical about their own levels of objectivity whereas also challenging that searching for “objective reality” and the “truth” implies departing from personal and political accountability (Tuchman, 1972: 676). Practically, the objectivity philosophy is blamed for discouraging as much probing into opposing points of view as is evident in advocacy journalism. For this reason, Glasser argues:

Objective reporting has stripped reporters of their creativity and their imagination; it has robbed journalists of their passion and their perspective... has transformed journalism into something more technical than intellectual... has turned the art of story-telling into the technique of report writing. In addition, most unfortunate of all, objective reporting has denied journalists their citizenship; as disinterested observers, as impartial reporters, journalists are expected to be morally disengaged and politically inactive (1992:181).

It therefore can be argued that even though a few journalists still shield objectivity, the notion is still a major impediment to their playing an accountable and productive role in public life. Some critics have suggested that objectivity in reporting is not ideal but rather impractical and or unachievable (Janowitz, 1975: 619). Furthermore, Janowitz proposes that the journalist is supposed to represent the concerns of opposite groups, particularly the marginalised and disadvantaged (Janowitz, 1975: 619). Journalists can also stress objectivity “as a strategic ritual” so that they desist from being persecuted for being biased and to demonstrate their interest in the public (see Janowitz, 1975). In another instance, Glasser views the notion of objectivity as prioritising news from reliable, official sources and ‘facts’ while ignoring the basics: context, structures and processes (Glasser, 1992).

Important to mention at this point is the fact that objectivity has kind of become a flexible and sensible institutional aspect which guides how journalists are supposed to perform their roles (Ward, 2004). Practically, the neutral journalists view objectivity as involving a chain of programmed values and customs by means of which the journalists endeavour to arrive at the diverse groups in society at the same time as also mitigating their professional behaviour and actions (De Beer, 2004; Tuchman, 1972). This could explain why the neutral-role perspective on journalism has preserved so much reputation, considering its “flexible, not too complex, non-confrontational and adaptable to change across contexts” agenda on reporting (Siebert et al 1956:71). Having discussed the neutral role in depth, it is also imperative to explore other

roles of journalism as influenced by libertarianism. The following section discusses the watchdog or adversarial roles of journalism.

2.8.1.2. Watchdog / adversarial role of journalism

The main tenet of the watchdog role is that in democratic societies, journalism is a watchdog that monitors state activities and also exposes those who abuse their official authority (Berger, 2000:84). This kind of journalism highlights the 'fourth estate' function of the media (Curran, 2000:121; Berger, 2000). From this perspective, the central function of journalism includes state surveillance (Siebert et al., 1956). Other scholars have considered this role as a "melding of two items: being constantly sceptical of public officials as well as business interests" - shortened as "scepticism of those in power" (Weaver & Wilhoit, 1996:139). This kind of journalism exposes wrongdoing, while at the same time exposing those who abuse the law. It also regulates the codes of standards while at the same time emphasising common sense decency (Ullman, 1995: 3). It is a fact that contemporary journalism is mainly characterised by investigative reporting, which certainly calls to mind the model of an independent watchdog press. In this regard, the press should particularly take on the watchdog role in order to put to an end state complacency, unresponsiveness as well as irresponsibility (Hyden & Leslie, 2002). Furthermore, Hyden and Leslie (2002:12) put forward the fact that the private media that surfaced in the post-colony have assumed an important role in the democratisation process by questioning state policies and actions. Nevertheless, it is very important to note that even if there is value in the watchdog role of journalism, it is not always easily translated into practice. Taking the South African *Mail and Guardian* as an instance, even though the newspaper is investigative in nature, the conventional 5W's and 1H reporting which is typical of the neutral role, is dominant. In another example, newspapers in Zimbabwe, both state and privately owned, struggle to perform the watchdog role. This is because since the beginning of violent politics in Zimbabwe, the journalism practice has generally been divided between 'public' versus 'private' media journalism. These two main camps are commonly influenced by conflicting perceptions of the social function of journalism thus, the polarisation.

On one hand, the private press in the country is principally influenced by the traditional liberal pluralist conceptions of journalism, mainly encouraging issues of objectivity, watchdogism, as well as the fourth estate role of the media discussed above. This is

evidenced in certain editorial charters of the independent newspapers in the country. For instance, in the Zimbabwe Independent's charter, the paper is highlighted to be "determined to hold Zimbabwean leadership to account.... for too much has been lost, stolen, squandered in recent years and we are, as a society, immeasurably poor as a result" (Mukasa, 2003: 7). On the same note, The Financial Gazette similarly conceits itself as a newspaper "that jealously guards its editorial independence and supports pluralistic politics and free market policies". Evidently, these editorial guidelines reveal that the nature of journalism practiced and endorsed by these institutions is mainly informed by the adversarial style of journalism entrenched in the presumed tension between the state and the press. On the other hand, the 'public' press is submissive to the state (Mukasa, 2003). This status quo is based on the argument that the media must support the government's developmental initiatives. Issues of objectivity and press freedom are not on the top of list of the public media. This is highlighted in the views of the former Minister of Information and Publicity, Witness Mangwende who on one occasion reiterated that:

There is no such thing as freedom of the press. The press is a structural component of the society whose interest it must reflect, promote and defend. Therefore freedom of the press is only relative to a given social, economic and political circumstances you are in relation to the existence of other... (Mukasa, 2003:5).

In the view of the above, the public media perceive their function as being that of upholding national unity, restoration, development and cultural sovereignty. Given this background, it can thus be argued that the divergent conceptions of the function of journalism between journalists from the two camps are at the core of the active polarisation in the Zimbabwean media, especially the press. Thus, the inconsistencies between the role notions endorsed by journalists, together with their actual practices, are a product of the socio-economic, political and legal regimes in which they function (Moyo, 2011).

Because of the above-mentioned factors, journalists are in most instances forced to "toe the line" of the neutral approach. Referring to the Ugandan newspapers, Mwesige (2004: 87) reiterates that it is much safer to report government officials' speeches in the conventional format (who? what? when? where? why?) and not assuming the interpretive role which interprets the speech for the audience. In most cases again, journalists end up endorsing the developmental role in part for the reason that it is much safer and these roles are considered less controversial than the doubtful adversarial position (Shafer, 1996). In short therefore, it is

no doubt that the contextual factors mentioned are playing a critical role in determining the journalists' functions.

Given the above description, it becomes visible that despite being essential, the watchdog role is not as clear-cut as it appears. In that view, Curran asserts that the watchdog role is not the ideal one for the journalist to assume in the contemporary society (see Curran, 2000). Moreover, the watchdog role seems to focus on government as the exclusive entity of press vigilance. This has been attributed to the previous analysis of the state as the embodiment of authority and hub of repression. Again, the customary perception does not take into account the use of economic influence and authority by shareholders in private businesses. Curran points that the media are huge businesses themselves, and therefore argues for a reconceptualisation which views the media as watching over both the public and private power (Curran, 2000: 122). In other words, Curran is highlighting the fact that many media organisations have become profit-oriented and seem to be enjoying the business-friendly governments (Curran, 2000: 123). This therefore implies that the media also have commercial interests and for that reason, may not all the time be able to watch over the very systems that they are part of (Nerone et al., 1995: 26). To this end, it becomes impossible for media practitioners and their respective institutions to assume the independent watchdog that they are supposed to. In this manner, Donohue et al. (1995:115) warns journalists that they might sometimes involuntarily serve as 'guard dogs', suggesting that they execute their duties as a 'sentry' or patrol, not necessarily for the society per se, but for the influential groups and interests. Donohue et al reiterate that in this case, journalists are not conceived as "guardians" of the general public, instead they are rather seen as "defenders" of the ruling minority (Donohue et al., 1995).

To summarise the above criticism, it is clear that as 'watchdogs', journalists are not self-governing individuals who are independent from socio-structural influences. This could be traced back to the libertarian notion which supposes that it is simply through the open contestation of ideas that the truth can be realised (Siebert et al., 1956). As argued earlier in this chapter, journalists also have to encounter a variety of pressures, from bottom-up to top-down. Thus practically, they are not essentially sovereign from different interest groups: owners, advertisers and other political forces (Berger, 2000: 84). In spite of this though, the watchdog normative notion is to a greater extent still an influential model. It however does

not work in isolation. In that view, another important libertarian-influenced journalism approach is expanded in terms of theory and practice. This is the social responsibility theory, discussed below.

2.8.2. Social responsibility theory

This theory originated from the United States' (US) 1947 Hutchins Commission of Inquiry¹ into how the media should function in a democracy (Siebert et al., 1956). Just to recap on the Commission's enquiry, the rationale for the enquiry was to question the freedom of the press in the United States (US). The results of the inquest indicated the scarcity of variety in the media which are meant to cater for the different publics, the incapacity of the media to be autonomous, as well as the crumbling of responsible journalism mainly because of the escalating monopolisation of media ownership (Siebert et al., 1956; McQuail, 1987). Despite preserving the normative values of libertarian theory, another approach was advanced in order to afford some functional principles for professional media practice.

In its proposal, the Hutchins report highlighted five values or principles of media performance necessary for an independent and accountable press. The first one indicated that the media should present a "full, truthful, comprehensive and intelligent account of the day's events in a context which gives them meaning". The second one highlighted that the media should afford a "forum for the exchange of comment and criticism". Moreover, the media are supposed to provide a "representative picture of constituent groups of society". In addition, the media ought to provide and illuminate the "goals and values of society". Ultimately, the press is obliged to give "full access to the day's intelligence" (Siebert et al., 1956:87). Coined the "social responsibility theory" by Siebert et al. (1956), the report became an essential philosophical mainstay for journalism and the media studies scholars, to appreciate the roles of journalists (see Siebert et al., 1956). Thus, the importance of the report lies in its acknowledgment or appreciation of the role of the media as a social concept. This is so

¹ The Hutchins Commission, whose official name was the Commission on Freedom of the Press, was formed during World War II, when a Commission was recruited to question the functioning of the media in a modern democracy. After deliberating for four years, the Commission came to this conclusion in 1947: the media have an essential role to ensure the development and stability of modern society and, as such, it is compulsory that the media commit to the social responsibility role.

because prior to the Hutchins Commission, the media were understood to be kind of automatically inherent into the libertarian press (see Merrill, 1989: 68). Thus, the Hutchins report highlights that a socially responsible press carries the positive obligation of employing the concept of freedom of expression.

Unlike the libertarian theory which emphasises unconstructive freedom that despises any kind of government restriction or intrusion, the social responsibility theory focuses on the positive freedom that stresses the critical objective of the press as upholding public participation by paying attention to a diversity of voices (Siebert et al., 1956: 93; McQuail, 1987). It is from this perspective that Thurston (1979) says is what gives the social responsibility its “active connotation that changes the right of free expression from a natural right as in libertarian theory to a moral right, with the attendant quality of duty or obligation”. On the same note, other media theorists also note the social responsibility theory as being at “a ...higher level, theoretically, than libertarianism – a kind of moral and intellectual evolutionary trip from discredited old libertarianism to a new or perfected libertarianism where things are forced to work as they really should work under libertarian theory” (Merrill and Odell, 1983:160).

In his analysis, Altschull (1994) postulates that the social responsibility theory is strongly rooted in utilitarianism, in which ethical responsibility takes its supremacy. To explain it further, utilitarianism seeks the execution of moral justice in reality, which protects the maximum contentment for the majority. The utilitarian view supposes that the press is meant to implement more dynamic, developmental and participant performance on the part of the social and political integrity (see Altschull, 1994). Obviously, journalists are the participants in the process and as custodians of the public interest, they are anticipated to stimulate political action when needed (Merrill & Odell, 1983). In that manner, journalists are not inhibited from partaking or superseding in social and political activities to achieve socially significant results for the betterment of the public. That is why social responsibility-oriented journalistic functions are sometimes taken as ‘interventionist’ (Ward, 2004). Ward further purports that interventionist journalism can also be viewed as being ‘attached’. The reason behind this proposition is because interventionist journalism is closely linked to a social and or political cause, and it sometimes disregards aspects of objectivity and neutrality in journalism (2004: 90). From this perspective rather, attention is given to issues which prolong

for longer periods, processes like for instance, national reconciliation and nation building, as well as identity construction (Ward, 2004: 90).

Shim (2002) suggests that social responsibility oriented journalism is thematic-oriented rather than event-oriented. Moreover, its reportage is interpretive, rather than descriptive (Shim, 2002:53). Some argue that this is where the social responsibility theory suggests a normative substitute that goes further than the libertarian highlighting on news that can be conveyed faster, by persisting rather on human-interest features that look into public problems (Shim, 2002; Fedler, 1997). In short, the social responsibility theory presents the theoretical view by highlighting the essence of broadening the journalist's purpose for both social and political transformation. The theory derives from the idea that the media have a moral duty of providing sufficient information to citizens who will then be able to make informed decisions. Therefore, the social responsibility and the libertarian theory differ in the sense that the former depends on someone (e.g. the government, the public) to ensure that the media execute their roles responsibly if they fail to do it voluntarily (see Shim, 2002).

Prior to exploring the social responsibility-oriented journalistic roles described below, it is at this juncture important to pinpoint some of the critiques against the social responsibility theory, taking into consideration the fact that they relate of course to some extent, to the roles highlighted in the section below. As argued previously in this chapter, normative theories like the social responsibility present some problems in the ways they endeavour to force ultimate remedies which may not be at par with the real social experience (Kasoma, 2000). In the same way, the social responsibility theory has been disregarded for not being practical, applicable and possible amongst journalism scholars (Picard, 1985).

The whole concept has been constantly criticised for lacking realistic guidelines (Altschull, 1994). For Altschull, the phrase social responsibility is “devoid of meaning” and its “content is so vague that almost any meaning can be placed on it” (1994: 446). Similarly, it has been pointed that the theory does not provide an adequate account of how the media and the journalists are supposed to represent their social duty (Lambeth, 1986). According to Lambeth, the theory does not have much to help journalists in their daily activities. Moreover, he further argues for the absence of a universal framework that is applicable to specific decisions (Lambeth, 1986: 7). Importantly, with the purpose of this study in mind,

one can argue that despite the need for a solid and unfailing media, serious reporting and journalists whose focus is to serve the public, not enough has been done to illustrate the impact of the social responsibility theories on the professionals' work as well as the news content that they produce. In a way, this signals the need to reflect on that, as well as on their (journalists') role perceptions.

On that note, the following section discusses other journalistic role perceptions which also benefit from the social responsibility theory (Janowitz, 1975). These include the participant-interpretive, the advocacy as well as the public-citizen roles of journalism. As indicated above in this chapter, these roles highlight the roles of the journalist in society. "Reform rather than reflection... change rather than the status quo", are the priorities of the journalists assuming these responsibilities (Altschull, 1994).

2.8.2.1. Participant-interpretive role

This type of journalism involves journalists actively and imaginatively creating newsworthy material (Johnstone et al., 1976). Other scholars suggest three crucial roles depicted by this kind of journalism: probing government allegations, examining and scrutinising difficult issues, as well as engaging in public policy matters in a fruitful way (see Weaver & Wilhoit, 1996:137). This conception implies that important information is often withdrawn in the neutral kind of journalism discussed earlier. For this reason, the journalist assumes a socially focused intervening and proactive approach. To achieve that, the journalist filters the important information from the real story and then eagerly engages in the production process of the news item (Altschull, 1994). In other words, the journalist needs to know the background information and to give enough interpretation for the reporting to make sense. When reporting on issues of social conflict, journalists are mandated to report from a multi-perspective viewpoint because it generates and carries their own personal view of the meaning of reality (see Janowitz, 1975: 619). In addition, it also allows for an extensive and wider pool of sources. Doing this is of paramount importance as it has been observed that the profession of journalism has deteriorated in its capacity as the information provider to the total bracket of citizenry, particularly the underprivileged and those in the working class owing to lack of diversity in its sources (Herman & Chomsky, 1988).

2.8.2.2. *Advocacy*

Another kind of journalism role situated within the social responsibility theory is the advocacy role. In this role, journalists engage in some kind of the “advocacy process”, and seek to get to the bottom of community struggles by efficient illustration of different meanings of reality (Janowitz, 1975: 619). For Janowitz, the advocate journalist participates in social and political practices and he or she becomes an activist for those who are deprived of influential spokespersons. From the above description, it is evident that the advocacy model of journalism unmistakably defies the libertarian standpoint by highlighting broader pro-activity than the other kinds of roles described above. However, it also approves dimensions of the watchdog role, for example, probing of societal struggles and exposing the exploitation of the powerless by those in power (Janowitz, 1975).

In the South African framework, advocacy journalism manifested through the alternative media during the Apartheid² era. For Jackson (1993), the alternative media contrasted the mainstream journalism which masqueraded as taking an “objective” approach to news dissemination. The journalist, from the advocacy perspective, conveyed silent and unspoken voices to the centrality of public representation while at the same time also revealing the consequences of the existing power inequities (Janowitz, 1975).

As in the participant-interpretive role, investigative reporting is obligatory in the advocacy journalism, taken as a tool for overwhelming the weaknesses of objective reporting. By investigating, the advocates go deeper to report the often ‘hidden’ aspects of political processes (Donsbach & Klett, 1993: 56). By so doing, the journalist goes beyond both sides of the story and assume a crucial and political position. This assumption is rooted from the notion that there exist obstacles to socio-political transformation or revolution in the world. In that case, the advocate together with other bodies such as the judiciary, arbitrate and represent the voiceless so as to assure them of their legitimate citizenry (Janowitz, 1975: 621). Talking about citizens, the following section discusses another kind of journalism role subscribed to the social responsibility theory.

² Apartheid was “a system of legal racial segregation enforced by the National Party government of South Africa between 1948 and 1994, under which the rights of the majority ‘non-white’ inhabitants of South Africa were curtailed and minority rule by white people was maintained”.

2.8.2.3. Citizen Journalism

The rise of citizen journalism is linked to, and has been prompted by the fading confidence in the deteriorating press readership. Together with this, have been the persistent critiques on the libertarian stand in journalism practice. Also referred to as “civic journalism, community journalism or conversational journalism”, depending on the circumstance, public journalism has not been spared in the communication and media debates. For the purpose of this study, I will refer to it as citizen journalism. The proponents of citizen journalism argue that the popularity of this phenomenon has been triggered by the journalism profession itself, which they argue, has failed in its capacity to serve the public interest (Rosen, 1999; Berger, 2000). Instead, they propose citizen journalism, advocating for a massive and active participation of ordinary citizens in the society, with the intention of encouraging “dialogue and civic consciousness” (Rosen, 1999). It is only in this way that perhaps journalism can take a step further to mirror and convey aspects of cultural diversity and substantive dimensions of societies (Rosen, 1999). It is essential at this point to emphasise that citizen journalism has taken a big turn away from the way traditional journalism is practised. It is in this regard that some scholars have linked citizen journalism to the social responsibility theory, considering the Hutchins Commission proposal which advocated for journalism as all-encompassing and representing the broader collective purposes and principles or ideals (Siebert et al., 1956). This perception of what constitutes journalism or news sort of became an important feature of interest inherent in citizen journalism.

Moreover, the ancestry of citizen journalism can be connected to the topical concerns which include the works of Habermas (1989) on the failure of the ‘public sphere’ (which will be detailed in the following sections). For Habermas, the media should be rated in accordance with the extent to which they contribute to the democratic participation through the public sphere. Essentially, the general public can participate more freely and on an equal level in conversations necessary for the “public good” only through the media (see Curran, 2000: 135; McQuail, 2000: 158). According to Habermas’ conceptualisation of the public sphere, a knowledgeable and actively participating citizenry relies mostly on the media whose main responsibility is public service (McChesney, 1999). Drawing from these insights therefore, citizen journalism thus intends to contribute to the democratic aspect of the news reporting industry.

The key philosophy behind citizen journalism is to “pull” the public to contribute in conversations regarding the day’s news (Charity, 1995). In other words, this phenomenon encourages ‘citizens’ who do not often participate in the democratic political activities to engage in news production processes in order to seek answers to societal problems, of course with the support of professional journalists (McQuail, 2000: 159). To achieve this, the professional journalist has to be emotionally involved and as an affiliate of the broader commune, should go further than merely neutrally reporting or assuming the watchdog role over the government by allowing citizens to engage and deliberate with themselves over diverse issues (Rosen, 1994a:11). Rosen reiterates that this initiative does not simply help to unravel mutual social predicaments through the media, but it also stimulates that sense of being a community (Rosen, 1994a). This perception of the public as not just being at the receiving end of media messages but as participants as well, has led to the conclusions that the critical objective of citizen journalism is the welfare of the general public (Ward, 2004:74).

Though, in order for citizen journalism to thrive, it has been advised that journalism practice has to revisit the historical libertarian customs and news values like impartiality, fairness and the sense of balance. This is in view of the fact that these actually promote an independent journalistic standpoint, all of which control the journalists in their efforts to actually bring back the public (Rosen, 1994b: 376). This implies that news values and the news writing styles like the 5W’s and 1H need to be amended in order to encourage the professional journalistic affection and real issues-driven reports about collective dilemmas and achievements (Merritt, 1995:127).

Despite the concept being normative, in the sense that it highlights a perfect kind of journalism which is not practically clear, in reality, journalists need to preserve the notions of ‘truth’ and ‘objectivity’ so as to afford the implementation of the ideals of citizen journalism (Ward, 2004:73). Put in other words, the point is that even though journalists are sometimes subjective, they still have to respect their moral obligations of preserving some of the principles of independence, balance and truthfulness in order for them to appreciate the reality on the ground (Ward, 2004). It is in this view that citizen journalists are not regarded as “radicals departing from the canons of their profession, but traditionalists attempting return to first principles” (Charity, 1995:12). Obviously then, the initiative is not to discard the

aspects of objectivity, but instead, to reconsider its normative principles and standards as a foundation for serving the citizenry.

Having discussed the tenets of both the libertarian and the social responsibility theories, there are obviously some key distinctions that emerged. For instance, the two schools of thought tend to vary in their views of the roles of the media and those of the state (see Nerone et al., 1995). To point it out, libertarianism distinguishes the roles of the two institutions, highlighting the media as performing largely through its watchdog role towards the government. On the other hand, the social responsibility theory is not against the notion that both institutions have a nation-building purpose, and accordingly, collaboration between them is perceived as attractive and befitting (see McQuail, 1994; Berger, 2000).

Nevertheless, with the national development rhetoric and the media masquerading as controlling journalism politically, many journalists in the African contexts have become sceptical of assuming the social responsibility function. Supposedly from what they have experienced, this has been perceived as a controlling and political propaganda tool (Berger, 2000: 94). In their study, Weaver and Wilhoit (1996) revealed indications of citizen journalism taking place as a 'populist mobiliser'. For them, it implies progress with regards to the logical and cultural thinking of the general public defining the political agenda while at the same time affording the public the platform to air their views regarding the public affairs (1996:140). Even though this role is taken by a few of the journalists, Weaver and Wilhoit (1996) found out that some of the journalists have embraced the citizen journalism culture amongst their core values.

Kanyegirire (2007) argues that for Tanzanian journalists, the aspects of citizen journalism are noticeable in the significance they attribute to the educational function as well as their continual loyalty to the "*ujamaa*"³ perception of journalism which regards news as a social commodity (Kanyegirire, 2007). News which demonstrates a public journalism function includes perceptions of the majority of people in the sense that it also encompasses perspectives from different layers of public life as well as from a variety of communities thus,

³ *Ujamaa* is the "Swahili word for extended family or familyhood and is distinguished by several key characteristics, including that a person becomes a person *through the people* or community. Up to now, Ujamaa villages are socialist organisations created by the people, and governed by those who live and work in them".

the views would not only be set in their boundaries, but would also mirror the diversity of the larger communities (Weaver & Wilhoit, 1996). This would in turn lead to stories on problems as well as those with useful ideas and solutions (Pew Research Centre of Civic Journalism, 2000:33).

To this far, it is thus reasonable to highlight that citizen journalism has also been criticised by scholars from the libertarian wing. Nerone et al point out that citizen journalism is similar to what has been taking place previously but has not been given a new name (see Nerone et al., 1995). Others assert that citizen journalism is breaking the rules of objectivity and independence and for that reason, should be shunned or re-articulated (McDevitt, 2003). The same with the Hutchins Commission, citizen journalism emanates from the works of researchers and their views of influential consequence that challenges high culture with immaterial entertainment forms (Blevins, 1997: 9). Others have reiterated that citizen journalism also assumes an active and culturally conscious public that can respond to its own information needs (Hardt, 2000). Again, citizens may not necessarily enjoy being guarded by mainstream media into solving problems hence in this regard, citizen journalism has been taken as a form of 'paternalism' towards the reading audience. This in a way is a condemnation that is frequently uttered with regard to public service broadcasting (Kanyegirire, 2007).

Just to wrap up the discussion on the traditional roles of journalism, it can thus be summarised that these roles are similar in one way or the other, for example, with regards to supporting or encouraging a more flexible and active role for journalists, as well as their approaches to news as a socially significant aspect through which citizens can realise their capacity. Moreover, to some extent, the roles can be criticised for highlighting principles which in most instances, are not appropriate in political and economic environments embodied by bottom up and top down pressures like the African societies (Nerone et al., 1995). Nonetheless, the abovementioned roles also differ in many ways. For instance, despite the participant and advocacy roles emphasising investigative aspects, the participant role does not essentially mean that the journalist has to assume the role of an activist to advocate for particular groups.

On another note, citizen journalism principally regards journalists “as citizens and not as activists per se”, to contribute to the public’s stories and at the same time promoting societies’ capability in problem solving. It is from this perspective that citizen journalism is associated with democratisation processes in society (Charity, 1995). Perhaps for the purpose of this study, it is possible to rely on the broader meaning or characterisation of ‘social agenda’ motivated journalism to categorise the different types of journalism discussed above. This is made possible since they are all normatively dedicated to be involved in the production of news, with the aim of encouraging socio-political agenda for the benefit of societies and groups. In this case, the interventionist strategy implies detailed news which embodies the multiple perspectives of the citizenry, news that represent the broader society in terms of their concerns, news that scrutinises societal predicaments, that enhances the intellectual and cultural aspects of the masses, as well as news that suggest resolutions and victories (see Charity, 1995). In classifying the abovementioned roles as ‘social agenda’, one can realise the focus in the modern African framework on the interventionist – “educator, activist and development” – functions of journalists in citizen journalism as well (Charity, 1995).



The normative theories highlighted above cannot be discussed in isolation, that is, without mentioning the public sphere concept. In fact, it is not feasible to detach the theories from the concept. In that view, a detailed discussion of the public sphere concept becomes relevant at this juncture.

2.9. The Public Sphere concept

At the centre of studies in democracy, citizenship and the media has been Habermas’ idea of the public sphere. The concept remains pertinent to the discourse of citizen journalism. Habermas highlights the notion of a public as private individuals coming together to discuss issues of common concern (1989: 49). Not controlled by private interests, the public sphere depends on logical and crucial debates between diverse groups of people on issues of public concern, to which access is given to every citizen. Habermas concedes that in the modern society, the role of the media is to disseminate information in order to make communication achievable. According to Habermas, the public sphere entails the participation of citizens by actively probing influential powers and the extremes of business interests (Habermas, 1989: 50). Specifically, Habermas noted that for the bourgeois, the public sphere meant:

...the authority of the better argument could assert itself against that of social

hierarchy... discussion within such a public presupposed the problematisation of areas that until then had not been questioned (that is, moving beyond the confines of the traditional authorities such as the Church)...everyone [bourgeois] had to be able to participate (Habermas, 1989:35-6).

Nonetheless, it is essential to note that we have surpassed the forms of organisation where one-on-one communication is still a feasible instrument for daily democracy (Thompson, 1995: 247). Resultantly, the bourgeois type of the public sphere is not applicable anymore in the modern day circumstances. For that reason, partaking in the political environment as envisioned by Habermas is not possible. Rather, public life is characterised by “mediated publicness” (Ornebring & Jonsson, 2004: 285). In the bourgeois public sphere, the main challenge was the struggle by one class to get a new place in society.

In the mediated public sphere, people struggle for visibility, that is, the struggle to be noticed in the first instance (Thompson, 1995: 247). Struggling for visibility indicates that there is no single mediated public sphere. Instead, the mediascape involves a hegemonic and other alternative spheres, whereby citizens debate various issues in different ways (Thompson, 1995: 247; Ornebring & Jonsson, 2004: 285). Fraser (1992), who put forward this view, argues that Habermas “...stresses the singularity of the bourgeois conception of the public sphere, its claims to be the public arena, in the singular” (Fraser, 1992: 122). The essential unity and all-round aspect of the bourgeois public sphere is a vital element of its appearance as a principle: all individuals participating in public life, going according to the imperatives of logical discussion and fairness. Instead, one can argue that making available the potential for alternative public spheres is healthy for democratic processes and public debate:

I contend that in stratified societies, arrangements that accommodate contestation among a plurality of competing publics better promote the ideal of participatory parity than does a single, comprehensive, overarching public. (Fraser, 1992: 122) ...This historiography records that members of subordinated social groups—women, workers, peoples of colour, and gays and lesbians—have repeatedly found it advantageous to constitute alternative publics. I propose to call these subaltern counter publics in order to signal that they are parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counter discourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities interests and needs. (Fraser, 1992: 123)

However, it has to be appreciated that Habermas and Fraser had opposing theoretical and pragmatic missions. Habermas saw the public sphere as a platform for political power, while

on the other hand, Fraser viewed the public sphere as an intermediary of cultural identification (Ornebring & Jonsson, 2004: 285). Despite the link, the emancipating aspect of the public sphere would be evaluated based on the notion of whether the mainstay standard is “equality of power or equality of recognition” (Ornebring & Jonsson, 2004: 285). As highlighted above, Habermas’ vision privileges the views of the dominant groups in society. Specifically, his assertion that only issues in the ‘public interest’ are viable topics for discussion in the public sphere, paying no attention to matters of ‘private need’ (see Benhabib, 1992), seems tricky, since what constitutes ‘public interest’ is typically defined by the most powerful, ‘in such a way as to sustain their privilege’ (Wahl- Jorgensen, 2007:13). Moreover, the ‘everyone’ referred to in Habermas’ account was essentially limited to those who counted as ‘citizens’, which in the historic period excluded the majority of the population, encompassing as it were primarily educated, property-owning men (Fraser, 1992).

Habermas’ apparently uncritical embrace of ‘rational debate’ has also been a cause of criticism. Politics is basically passionate and partial, in which people seldom get involved because of some abstract notion of ‘common good’ (Goodwin et al., 2001). In the same way, real-life discussions are not grounded on rationality or consensus, but are instead chaotic and conflicted (De Luca & Peeples, 2002). Furthermore, the focus on ‘rationality’, ‘consensus’ and ‘civility’ does not adequately incorporate the forms of participation enabled by modern mass communications, particularly the Internet. This has “fundamentally transformed the media matrix that constitutes our social milieu, producing new forms of social organisation and new modes of perception” (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2007:14). Likewise, Habermas’ idea of a ‘golden age’ of media production has been blamed for ‘cultural snobbery and elitism’ (Dahlgren, 2005). For instance, it has been argued that people never inactively consume media, but actively influence it for personal interests and discuss everyday predicaments in their day-to-day lives (see Billig, 1991). However, despite such criticisms, few scholars challenge the importance of the public sphere as a concept and ‘powerful tool for analysing a fundamental problem of limited participation in mass democracies’ (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2007:15).

While Habermas’ study as described above was an examination of a set of historical conditions and processes, he also envisaged establishing a set of normative ideals for how

modern democratic societies should function and how citizens ought to participate in this. Ideally, citizens in a democratic society should actively engage in public discussion, with the sole purpose of holding government to account. Such discussions should echo the features of the bourgeois public sphere as described above – particularly, a rational, reasoned and open minded debate, where people review arguments on their merit and not on the position of the speakers. In his other works, Habermas also made a distinction between two types of communication pragmatics: ‘strategic action’ and ‘communicative action’, where the former ‘is goal-oriented and manipulative’, whilst the latter ‘aims for mutual understanding, trust and shared knowledge’ (Habermas, 1991, 1996; Dahlgren, 2001:40).

Unsurprisingly, communicative action is directly linked to deliberative democracy, in as far as it emphasises communication among people as a way of instilling democratic actions (Benhabib, 1992). Democracy in this sense is perceived more as a permanent process than turn-based representative terms. In addition, democracy not only involves free speech, but a form of democratic speech, as Noveck puts it:

It is a half-truth to say that democracy depends upon free speech. Rather, the participative practices of democratic life require open, equal, reasoned deliberation. Deliberation is more than just talk; it involves weighing approaches to problem solving in such a way that the viewpoints of all members of the community can be heard. Deliberation is a special form of speech structured according to democratic principles and designed to transform private prejudice into considered public opinion and to produce more legitimate solutions. (2004: 21)

Evidently, one objective of deliberative democracy therefore is the construction of consensus or common opinion, which can underscore decision-making. This does not however suggest that differences, or ‘private prejudice’, cannot exist. It is rather that people are open and eager to compromise their situations in the presence of a more compelling argument. Habermas also diverted from the strict normative component of the public sphere, which he replaces with a more unpredictable conception of discussion and debate (Roberts & Crossley, 2004).

On a different but related notion, the public sphere concept has been used by most media scholars to illustrate and assess the function of the media in public life. The same theory can also be applied to assess what citizen journalism is doing in society. It has been highlighted in this chapter that the major role of the media is to inform the public regarding current issues so that they make informed decisions (Ornebring & Jonsson, 2004: 283). That means the

hegemonic conception of the media entails allowing the Habermasian kind of logical public discourse. Now, citizen journalism is blamed for failing this model (see Goode, 2009). The kind of journalistic representation by citizen journalism does not uphold the normative notions of journalism with regards to the representation of political and social issues (Goode, 2009). Particularly, the “citizens” seem to concentrate on trivial daily life and disaster issues instead of reporting on “politics” hence, the shortfall in failing to give the society the kind of news that is important in determining the people’s decision making regarding their governance (Goode, 2009).

On the other hand, despite the above raised point of view, citizen journalism has also proven to be an alternative public sphere (see Gillmor, 2006). This analysis goes along with a “more cultural understanding” of the notion of the public sphere and not the principal evaluation of the media as “democracy’s watchdog” (Hermes, 2006: 29). While discussions surrounding citizen journalism and the society are important to theories about the function of the media in democracies, the informational contribution of the citizen journalism practice has not provided an absolute appreciation of how it appeals (see Gillmor, 2006). It therefore makes sense to argue that journalism’s purpose is more than just giving information on public matters. This makes more sense than just thinking that journalism is “primarily about the transmission of information which can be used by the citizenry to accrue knowledge and engage in responsible judgements” (Langer, 1998: 5). To mitigate this lack, which Langer refers to as ‘the lament’, some theorists have analysed that which citizen journalism critics have regarded as the irrelevant side of news (see Langer, 1998). In lieu of seeing news as just a channel through which to convey information, another approach could regard citizen journalism as a “cultural discourse”. This perception regards people’s association with news as being “more ritualistic, symbolic, and possibly mythic, rather than informational”, the argument being that news can rather be conceived as a kind of cultural discourse which determines and is determined by society (Langer, 1998: 5).

This therefore implies that citizen journalism can be interpreted as part of our culture instead of looking at it as a remote journalistic or social phenomenon. In lieu of regarding the content as unprofessional or unimportant in comparison with the more ‘weighty’ news items, the content could be taken as facilitating debates about privilege, where it is seen as debatable, and the privileged evaluated based on compulsory principles (see Connell, 1992). Taking

from Fiske's (1992) views on another controversial [tabloid] kind of journalism, one can say that criticism that assumes this [citizen] type of journalism does not only shun from political participation, but also results in some passive audiences, does not consider the genre-specific nature of [citizen] journalism which expresses political issues differently from the usual discourses (Fiske, 1992).

From the discussion so far, it is therefore clear that the role of the media is not simply about informing or educating the public. It also serves as a platform for some of the dialogic exchanges of a public sphere to take place – that is, a communicative public sphere in its own right. In the context of deliberative democracy mentioned earlier, it can be argued that the role of journalism extends far beyond that of simply informing citizens. It has also been argued that 'since it is through media and journalism that citizens mainly access political discussions, the deliberative model of democracy places challenging demands on media and journalism' (Strömbäck, 2005:340). Particularly, Strömbäck indicates that the core normative demands pressured upon journalism are that it should act for all-encompassing discussions: mobilise citizens' interest, engagement and participation in public discussions, connect discussants to each other as well as fostering public discussions characterised by rationality, intellectual honesty and equality (2005: 341). Undoubtedly, these demands are not merely about building a communicative space within the mass media where the public can engage in political debate, nor is it simply about the qualitative features of the dialogue taking place (Strömbäck, 2005:341). Certainly, it is implied that media organisations should actively pursue such a function by mobilising and connecting citizens.

However, informing and providing a communicative space for the public in a rational and universal way might not be simple with the increasingly fragmented publics of the contemporary society (see Swanson & Mancini, 1996; Dahlgren, 2001; McQuail, 2008). With the diversification and specialisation of media, audiences are concentrating on a selected set of media while they abandon others, thereby leaving little or no overlap in the audience. Consequently, different parts of the society get accustomed to various forms of information, value systems and world views. The common sense of experience for all groups of society breaks up and the public sphere splits into disjointed publics (Schulz, 1997: 62). The ideal method to deal with this fragmentation could be one ruled by public service principles. That is, a media system that is not driven by the commercial interests of private

enterprises, but rather media as a universal service for the public good. Serving the public implies a connection with the same democratic ideals described above in relation to the function of media, vis-à-vis the public sphere. That is, there exists a strong link between the perceived purpose of journalism in the public sphere, and the public service ideals (Moe, 2008).

Importantly at this point, one significantly vital aspect of power relations at risk in the public sphere is the 'gatekeepers' role (opinion leaders, media personnel and censors) and how they contribute in influencing the boundaries of public discourse (McQuail, 1994: 213–14). The phrase 'gatekeeper' is a very important but inadequate metaphor as it indicates "intention" and "conscious" human action yet in most cases the gate-keeping processes occurs unconsciously (McQuail, 1994: 214). This is mostly evident in the online news sphere than in conventional journalism. Some scholars have used the term 'gate watcher' instead of 'gatekeeper' with reference to online news, indicating the consumer practice of publicising and not controlling information when there is too much information, in comparison to the shortage of the pre-digital age (Bruns, 2005). The continued presence of traditional gatekeepers is clearly shown in the citizen journalism sphere. The relevant factors affecting this altered environment of citizen journalism include advertising revenue, venture capital, large scale corporations and commercialism as a whole. As noted earlier in this chapter, some citizen journalism sites have taken the profit making business model. Moreover, traditional media organisations, as well as other public and private organisations, do to some extent apply gatekeeping influence, though they do it under difficult and demanding conditions for reasons highlighted above. In that regard, we cannot discharge the notion of gatekeeping out of hand as a thing of the past made outdated apparently by the unrestricted marketplace where anyone can produce and get news that they want (Gates, 1996).

Still within citizen journalism communities, there are other modes of gatekeeping powers emerging. These include the moderators, who guard the boundaries and make sure that some margins are not contravened (a post-publication process). The professional editors also fall in this bracket when they selectively filter and edit citizen generated content prior to it being published online. A good example is *Yahoo's* user created news. It also employs editorial staff from the traditional media organisations that integrate aspects of citizen journalism in their news programmes, as exemplified by the South African *Mail and Guardian*. It cannot be

taken for granted that they are just but simply traditional gatekeepers drawn into the cyberspace, since the values and standards through which they (the professional journalists) identify and filter citizen journalism material are not at par with those that guide their ethical practices in relation to material created by mainstream journalists (Manovich, 2001). It is therefore important to evaluate the difference. Perhaps what needs to be done is to further analyse how those who are traditionally trusted with the gatekeeping function in citizen journalism context exercise that influence, and the values, routines and codes that determine their practices. The phrase ‘code’ in this respect definitely needs to be unpacked in further research. It seems there is need for integration of news and media studies *and* the “new media” studies so as to better appreciate the various forms of new media in which journalism and the news gradually mingle. The phrase ‘code’ again seemingly points to the digital element supporting such improvements mainly for the reason that the term has a shallow and ambiguous nuance of impartiality that need to be challenged (see Manovich, 2001).

Thus, research is needed in both the features that characterise the web as a medium as well as in the particular sites that embrace citizen journalism activities. That is, for instance, the need to engage with the sites’ “aesthetics, information architecture, interface and algorithms” (Johnson, 1982). Collectively, these premises indicate a possible area of further research which could present a better appreciation of the fundamental dynamics regarding latest journalistic activities now that the news media are experiencing serious transformation as a cultural element in the digital era. The ever increasing intricate interactions between news processes, between the citizen and the mainstream journalist, *and* between ‘news’ and ‘comment’, are all a cause of concern with regards to the framework of the new media structures which surround these transformations (Johnson, 1982).

2.10. Summary

This chapter introduced and examined the theoretical influences to the functions of journalism. As such, it is evident that many researchers regard the ‘watchdog’ and ‘neutral referee’ roles of journalism as rooted from the libertarian theory, while the ‘participant’, ‘public’ and ‘advocacy’ roles are attached to the social responsibility theory. Importantly, the chapter highlighted that the role divisions espoused in the journalism philosophy, that is, the libertarian dimension endorsing “objectivity” while the social responsibility theory allowing for “intervention” and “subjectivity”, contrast one another, predominantly in terms of theory

and practice. Nonetheless, the role distinctions are in real sense not as clear as is expected. This is because of a variety of social, structural and contextual influences as exemplified in the Zimbabwean and Ugandan cases discussed in this chapter. In view of that, it makes sense to conclude that when talking about journalistic identity in its entirety, there is need to consider and include both the objective and subjective strings (Berger, 2000). The point is that journalists seem to assume multiple roles than is often expected. In theory again, the theoretical influences seem to overlook the degree to which journalism is prejudiced by structural and socio-cultural limitations which often restrict them following the principles of their functions (Mukasa, 2003). As a consequence, journalists' reports are context based, carefully chosen constructions in relation to the real stories that they represent.



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CHAPTER 3

CITIZEN JOURNALISM IN THE INFORMATION AND NETWORK SOCIETY

“The understanding of our world requires the simultaneous analysis of the network society, and of its conflictive challenges. The historical law that where there is domination there is resistance continues to apply. But it requires an analytical effort to identify who the challengers are of the processes of domination enacted by the immaterial, yet powerful, flows of the network society”-Castells.

3.1. A brief History of the Information Society

The information society thesis is rooted in the US's post-World War II programme of research, engineering and mathematics (Mansell, 2009: 4). The research saw the publication of a book in which Wiener (1956) was concerned with neurological, information processing, as well as feedback systems. In *Cybernetics: or Control and Communication in the Animal and Machine*, Wiener's main argument is that “to live effectively is to live with adequate information” (1956: 17-18). The argument simply highlights the relevance of information systems within society. Complementing Wiener's publication is Shannon and Weaver's (1949) *Mathematical Theory of Communication*. Together, these works sign-posted new perspectives to mechanisation as a way of guaranteeing management mechanisms for military and non-military applications (Mansell, 2009: 4). At the time, Mansell argues, there was very little interdisciplinary collaboration with social scientists that might have pointed to the suggestions of information and control mechanisms being hypothesised and eventually adopted by the engineers and scientists (2009: 4). Resultantly, the conventional or principal vision of the Information Society that came out at the beginning was not a product of theoretical ideas rooted in the social sciences concerning changing the information processing methods and how these changes could be incorporated within the broader societies or with the implication of such incorporation (ibid).

It is against this background that, from a social sciences perspective, economists embarked on a fact-finding mission of assessing the concentration of information activities as well as the increase in the professions along the information field in the economy of the US (Machlup, 1962; Porat & Rubin, 1977). Around the same period, Masuda carried out a research in

Japan, in which he described the society as a “computopia”, a society which could “function around the axis of information values rather than material values” as well as one which could be “chosen, not given” (Masuda, 1980: 147). Masuda’s work emphasised the aspect of the increasing reliance on information in Japan, as ICTs, more especially the computers, became a common thing by the day (ibid). Despite Masuda maintaining that the possible growth of societies ought to be “chosen, not given”, there were those with questions about whom the “choosers” would be and if they were to make choices, the choices would be in whose interest. What is evident here is the element of technological determinism linked to the anticipation of choosing the greatest or most favourable technological configurations (Masuda, 1980: 147).

In the US and Europe, many social scientists became aware of ICTs and the ‘information age’ through Bell’s (1973) *The Coming of the Post-Industrial Society*. Basically, Bell’s argument was that the variables ‘information’ and ‘knowledge’ were supposed to be the main focus of study. He also pointed at the essence of focusing research on business, management and societal issues. Despite the fact that the technologies could enhance efficiency in the processing of information, the challenge had to do with being loyal to the ICTs innovation as a potential mobiliser of social and economic development (see Bell, 1973). During this time, there was also a strong realisation or appreciation of the potentially transformative character of ICTs in some parts of the social sciences research community hence, the popularisation of the term ‘global village’ which broadened the works of Innis (1950-1951), and at the same time highlighting the characteristic elements of communication in the oral and written traditions (see Chapter 4 for a discussion on Innis and McLuhan).

Those who criticised the then up-and-coming dream of the Information Society could not imagine socio-economic development as transforming into the Information Society. For example, there were those who argued that the precedence should rather be the development of a theory of society concentrating on the effects of ICTs, thereby not disregarding “sources of social dissent and political struggle” (Golding & Murdock, 1978: 347). Miles and Gershuny (1986: 35) also advocated that the interface of socio-economic and technological transformation was connected to different tertiary (services) divisions of the economy in various nations. Therefore, a natural move towards the Information Society was not automatic and was not to be taken for granted. In this regard, debates about the implications

of information resource distribution surfaced, with some scholars maintaining that some questions needed to be answered prior to developing and installing the systems (Miles & Gershuny, 1986: 35). Freeman and Soete (1990) echoed the same sentiments when they advocated for a ruling on several incompatible interests surrounding the development of ICTs.

Even though in some studies attention was drawn to the problems of universalising ICT solutions initiated mostly in the developed industrial economies, it was also evident that the relationships between the growth of ICTs as the root of socio-political resistance were subjects of discussions in policy making platforms (see Mansell & Wehn, 1998). At the time, it had been realised that the emphasis on ICTs and the Information Society as drivers of emancipation had failed in accomplishing purchase since it resulted into an internally illogical research motive: it was merely pressing forward certain priorities in the information commercialisation within the capitalist structure (see Garnham, 2000). The organisational and cultural manifestation of up-and-coming network societies and the significance of their social configurations had been highlighted by Castells (1996; 1997; 1998).

Some scholars criticised Castells' work for its "modern version" of "technological determinism" (see van Dijk, 1999: 129). Despite the criticism though, Castells' works also focused on the advantages and disadvantages of ICTs when they are deployed in diverse social environments. Notwithstanding the vital interpretations of some researchers, the economic relevance of ICTs and information took centre stage in the research-based perspectives for policy projects regarding ICTs (van Dijk, 1999: 129). Around the 1990s, economists argued that the production of knowledge is a potential move towards the Information Society dream. In reiteration, knowledge-based economies heavily depend on the creation, circulation and utilisation of knowledge as embodied in humans as well as in technology. David and Foray augment:

The crux of the issue lies in the accelerating (and unprecedented) speed, at which knowledge is created, accumulated and most probably, depreciates in terms of economic relevance and value. This trend has reflected, *inter alia*, an intensified pace of scientific and technological progress. ... Knowledge-based activities emerge when people, supported by information and communication technologies, interact in concerted efforts to co-produce (i.e. create and exchange) new knowledge (2003: 20, 27).

To summarise this discussion at this point, it is possible to argue that ICTs are not likely to be emancipating if commercial interests are not minimised. In order to deal with some of the problems associated with inequalities due to the development of ICTs, Garnham (1997) examines economists' work on the potential and the rights that people can implement in order to make a foundation for policy and research, regarding decisions pertaining to whether to mediate or intervene into the marketplace so as to deal with these disparities. For Garnham, since connectivity and unbiased access to networks are prioritised in people's lives, it calls for the need for some policy interventions to protect equity and fairness (see Garnham, 1997; Mansell, 2002). In that view, the media, communications and cultural studies are aimed at recognising the conditions in which the employment of ICTs may stimulate emerging structures of participatory democracy, together with the enhancement of abilities and skills. Much of this literature is rooted within the camp of those criticising the traditional dream of the Information Society, for instance, Dahlgren (2001).

Based on the discussion so far, it can therefore be argued that the Information Society vision will never benefit every individual, and this is evident in some of the social science literature. These debates, to some extent, influenced the publication of *Towards Knowledge Societies* (UNESCO, 2005), which was an endeavor to shift away from the leading debates about the Information Society. The report traces the plurality of information or knowledge societies both in the historical as well as in the current context. The main tenet of the report is the question: "Does the aim of building knowledge societies make any sense when history and anthropology teach us that since ancient times, all societies have probably been each in its own way, knowledge societies?" (UNESCO, 2005: 17). The main argument of the report is that there are no readily available "models of the Information Society" which could be embraced in order to be certain that ICTs are devised and utilised in acceptable manners. With this in mind, efforts were made to integrate the knowledge societies notions to the sustainable development ideas.

Following that was the big question of whether we are well equipped to achieve knowledge in an equal and universal manner, as this is perceived to be the basis of real knowledge societies, underpinning the sustainable and human development. It can also be argued that the Information Society is inspired by technological advancement. Notions of knowledge

societies take into recognition the wider political, social and ethical aspects. It is envisaged that there is a lot of such aspects which dispute the thoughts of a readily made model of the Information Society, because the model would not effectively consider the linguistic and cultural diversity, critical if people are to be comfortable in a transforming world (UNESCO, 2005: 17).

This idea of moving the point of concern about ICTs into the political, social and ethical aspects appears very crucial. This is because in some way, it challenges the academics to channel their commitment to a research agenda which can allow the traditional methods which focus on a common passage towards the Information Society. For instance, as argued by Mansell (2009), scholars could focus on research which defies the principal vision as well as its theories regarding the homogeneity of knowledge societies because in the 21st century, knowledge societies are constantly evolving. Mansell calls for the need to evaluate the principles entrenched in ICT-related practices and policies. The reason for doing this is to aim to contradict those that prioritise technology and applaud a number of market-led ideals. In fact, the agenda of the research should revisit the sustainable development goals in the broader framework of knowledge or information societies as well as the role of ICTs within that framework (Mansell, 2009). Having provided a historical background to the Information Society, it is imperative at this point to further discuss the phenomenon within the contemporary society.

3.2. Defining Information Society

The accessibility of immeasurable quantity of information regarding diverse issues around the world today has led to the realisation that the world is now an 'Information Society'. The concept is an evolving one, and has for that reason been conceptualised in different ways, depending of course on the level of infrastructure development of those using it. Based on the literature, there is controversy over what constitutes the Information Society (Webster, 2002; 2005; Berger, 2004; Biebl, 2004; Castells, 2000). While it has been argued that the Information Society has arrived, and the developing countries need to catch up with the developed ones so as to be part of the Information Society, it is still not yet clear as to what a true Information Society is. These conflicting views possibly highlight the contention over what constitutes an Information Society.

The Information Society concept began in Japan and was used to refer to the post-industrial society (McQuail, 1994; Lyon, 1988). Cited in McQuail (1994), Melody reiterates that Information societies were defined as “those which have become dependent upon complex electronic information and communication networks and which allocate a major portion of their resources to information and communication activities” (1990:26). What is interesting in the above assertion is the fact that information is perceived to be predominant in an extraordinary manner. As will be revealed in this chapter, it is no doubt that information has permeated through the cultural, the occupational, the technological as well as the economic spheres of our daily lives. Namusoga (2006) notes that in Uganda, the Information Society is perceived by the National Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Policy as “a prerequisite for a knowledge society where individuals as well as institutions are valued (and judged) according to what they know and how much they know” (Namusoga, 2006: 1).

Given the effect of information on these different spheres, it becomes sensible to point to the diverse theories that are functional in appreciating or comprehending the Information Society. Thus, drawing on these spheres, Webster presents or recommends a practical way of understanding the Information Society by looking at the five definitions of the Information Society (2000; 1995). The definitions offered by Webster not only appraise the usually taken-for-granted features of the Information Society. In fact, they also direct to some of the essential characteristic features of an Information Society by highlighting diverse aspects of the Information Society. For the purpose of this discussion, the Information Society concept will be discussed based on these five definitions as proposed by Webster. These are: the technological, cultural, economic, spatial and occupational. It is essential to highlight that the Information Society concept will also be discussed based on the ideas given at the 2003 (in Geneva) as well as in 2005 (in Tunis) World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS). Despite the controversy surrounding the Information Society concept, the WSIS managed to accommodate and merge different perceptions and therefore, drew up a holistic definition (Berger, 2004). For that reason, a discussion of the WSIS is imperative, as it lays the history and background of the WSIS, as well as the WSIS’s main principles which in a way happen to be relevant for this study.

3.2.1. The Technological definition

The most common view of the Information Society is the technological view, which basically suggests the Information Society as being characterised by the centrality of technology, particularly computers and computer networks, ensuing from the convergence between telecommunications and computers (Webster, 2000). This convergence has resulted into enormous links connecting terminals, within and between banks, offices, shops, factories, homes and schools (Webster, 2000). Naturally, it is this network of computers in conjunction with the spread of broadband, which supplies instant information anywhere and whenever needed. It is again this immeasurable connection that makes it appear as if we are surrounded by information wherever we are, hence the term, the Information Society. Proponents of the technological view put forward the argument that the world is undergoing a 'technology revolution', whereby technologies are viewed as the key drivers of the new order (Webster, 2000). It is in fact argued that new possibilities in information processing, storage and distribution result in the spread of ICTs in almost all aspects of our lives (Webster, 2002; Van Audenhove, 2003b).



In view of this definition, the WSIS proposed the spread of ICTs in social life as a way to achieve the Information Society goal. Nevertheless, the WSIS Declaration of Principles also states that "we are aware that ICTs should be regarded as tools and not just as an end in themselves... they can also promote dialogue among people, nations and civilisations" (WSIS, 2004a). Therefore, the WSIS did not fall into the technological definition trap. Nonetheless, the technological view of the Information Society has not been without criticism. Among others, it has been criticised for not setting standards for measuring what kind of technology qualifies a society to be an Information Society (Webster, 2000). It has also been criticised for focusing a great deal on new ICTs, more than ever the Internet, and therefore taking these as the key distinctive features of information in the Information Society. Based on these two main arguments, the technological definition thus encounters two main objections: the first has to do with the problem of measurement, both in terms of quantity and quality of the technology (Webster, 2000). Concerning quantity, it is not obvious how much Information Technology (IT) it takes for a society to qualify for Information Society status and no standards have been set for measuring this quantity (Webster, 2000). In terms of the quality of technology, there are no strategies or guidelines in place for what

technology to regard as relevant technology, even if one were to just consider the quantity of technology (Webster, 2000). For instance, it is not apparent whether video equipment is more important than a personal computer.

The second objection points to the definition's assumption that at a particular time, technologies are initially invented and consequently affect the society. If this is the case, people are bound to modify their lives in order to keep pace with the new technology (Webster, 2000). This assumption has been heavily condemned as it places technology above humankind when technology is seen to influence society, yet in actual fact it is the society that determines the type of technology that should be innovated and not vice versa (Webster, 2000). Drawing from the assumption, Berger argues that this definition characterises a whole society on the basis of technology, thus reducing human existence to technology (see Berger, 2003b). Berger goes further in indicating that the assumption also assumes that ICTs are neutral and that anyone can use them for any purpose (2003b). For this reason, it has been argued that ICTs invent mostly from the developed countries and are tailored to the needs and purchasing power of the citizens of those countries hence, may therefore not automatically satisfy the needs of the people in developing countries.

It is a fact that ICT usage in some of the developing countries is still very low. For instance, Zimbabwe remains in the bottom ten of ICT Network Readiness Index, according to the 2010-2011 Global Information Technology Report (World Economic Forum, 2011). It is also a fact that most people in the developing countries still rely on 'older ICTs' such as radio and television for information required for their daily lives (see Deane et al, 2003; Nyamnjoh, 2005a). In Uganda, more than 90% of the population listens to the radio while only 23% has access to the internet (Odyek, 2015). Given such statistics, it should therefore be realised that the older ICTs and the role they play in information delivery in developing countries should be given a central place in the Information Society (Deane et al, 2003).

3.2.2. The Economic definition

The thrust of the economic definition goes further than technology. The perspective views information as a tradable commodity with financial value (Berger, 2003b; Webster, 2000). When a financial value is attached to the information, this means that such a scenario would

exclude those who cannot afford the information, yet they include the majority in most developing countries. Jonscher once proposed that “once the greater part of economic activity is taken up by information activity rather than, say subsistence agriculture... it follows that we may speak of an Information Society” (Jonscher,1999; cited in Webster, 2002:25). Such a society implies that information becomes both the critical raw material and the essential product (Berger, 2003b).

Though, the economic definition does not provide standard measurements for the quantity and quality of information, just like the technological view. The issue of the qualitative worth of information, especially the social value of information, has been underestimated (Webster, 2000). In that regard, “pornography may be a big money-spinner, but its social value is different from that of investigative journalism” (Berger, 2003b: 2). Another condemnation stems from the quantitative measurement of the information sector. Webster mentions that it is not clear at which spot (on the economic graph) one enters the Information Society (Webster, 2000). Maybe, it happens when 50 percent of the Gross National Product (GNP) is contributed to by the information sector, it is not clear. Thus, the economic perspective does not present a good definition of the Information Society.

3.2.3. The Occupational definition

In this view, the Information Society is perceived as one in which the prevalence of occupations is found in information work. Proponents of this definition argue that the Information Society should constitute a majority of people whose occupations are all information-related. That is to say, the economy is led by people who are mostly occupied with the manipulation of information (Berger 2003b; Van Audenhove, 2003b; Webster, 2002). In simple terms, the Information Society has been reached if the number of those delivering information such as clerks, teachers, journalists and entertainers, outnumber production-based labour (Webster, 2000). Such an understanding of the Information Society makes light of the gender aspects of employment and international disparities (Berger, 2003b). The WSIS Declaration of Principles and the Plan of Action, however, salvaged the WSIS when they call for the inclusion of women and children in every aspect of the Information Society.

Nonetheless, the occupational definition is criticised from the perspective that the methodology for allocating workers to particular categories of information work is flawed (Webster, 2000). This is because it is literally easier said than done to differentiate between informational and non-informational workers since most occupations involve a degree of information processing and cognition (Webster, 2000). Thus, the occupational definition makes it more difficult to define or understand what constitutes the information society.

3.2.4. The Spatial definition

The key point of this view rests on information networks which have led to the shrinking of time and space, making communication instantaneous. What determines the Information Society in this regard is the transnational interconnectivity and interdependence caused by the amplified speed and spread of information flows (Berger, 2003b). The spatial definition basically appreciates the electronic highways which have caused a new prominence on the flow of information. The intense effects that this has on aspects of time and space have been exceptional (Castells, 1996; 1998; Webster, 2002; Berger, 2003b). For instance, due to the Wide Area Networks⁴ (WAN), it has become much easier for companies to manage their affairs efficiently and effectively on a global scale (Webster, 2002). According to Berger (2003b), this approach significantly favours multinational business interests and underestimates national policy and international governance issues.

However, even if it is true that new technologies help to shrink time when they make communication instantaneous, it is not clear what comprises a network and how much information should flow on the networks to make up an Information Society (Webster, 2000). Webster reiterates that no one has presented reliable figures which are convincingly enough to give a clear picture of information traffic. In addition, the spatial definition runs the risk of resembling the technological approach to the Information Society by defining networks as technological systems (Webster, 2000).

⁴ "A wide area network (WAN) is a computer network covering a wide geographical area, involving a vast array of computers. WANs are used to connect local area networks (LANs) together, so that users and computers in one location can communicate with users and computers in other locations" (Wikipedia, 2006).

3.2.5. The Cultural definition

The emphasis of this view is the fact that “there has been an extraordinary increase in the information in social circulation” (Webster, 2000:21). As a result, the enormous volumes of information today define and shape our own identities as modern day culture is unmistakably more profoundly information laden than ever before (Berger, 2003b; Webster, 2002). It is a fact that the ubiquity of the media has had a noticeable effect on the way we dress, the way we talk, the way we walk, as well as the way we model our lives (Van Audenhove, 2003b: 91). This concurs with Berger who notes that today’s generation is much more exposed to brands than anything else. It is in this view that Berger further contemplates whether this information flood should qualify a society as an Information Society when in actual fact the information is leading to cultural imperialism⁵ (Berger, 2003b). On this regard, Webster also observes that there seems to be a paradox of more information but less meaning, which can also highlight the need to address the issue of the quality of the information that is in circulation (see Webster, 2000). For instance, Berger reminds us that people have become so used to television images of violence that in the end, the concept ‘Information Society’ becomes inappropriate in view of the fact that it is not easy to distinguish between kinds of information (2003b). It has been noted that this definition pays no attention to the large numbers of the people in the world who only receive cultural products but do not produce any themselves thus, the WSIS was prone to taking this definition given the few voices from “the margins” at WSIS (Berger, 2003b:13).

To conclude this part, the divergent views presented in the five different perspectives of the Information Society above clearly show that there seems to be no conformity on what constitutes an Information Society. A key assessment of the concept ‘Information Society’ has been expressed by neo-Marxist scholars (Webster, 2002). For them, the concept implies that we have come into an absolutely new type of society. It is in this regard that Webster observes that if more information is still to come, then we cannot understand why someone implies that we have something totally new (2002: 259). Webster further indicates that the approaches to the Information Society stress discontinuity, as if modern society is radically different from the society of 100 years ago. Such suppositions would be ideological for the

⁵ The cultural imperialism thesis holds that the North dominates cultural trends and tastes in the South via the media. Indeed, what we call “African culture” today is a mixture of European, American and local ways of life, a process commonly referred to as “cultural imperialism” (Berger, 2003b:3).

reason that they confirm the analysis that there is nothing we can do about change but we can only become accustomed to the reigning political ideas (Webster, 2002: 267).

Other neo-Marxist critics put forward the argument that today's society is a capitalist one acquainted with amassing political, economic and cultural capital (Castells, 2000a; Garnham, 2004; Webster, 2002). It is also conceded that the Information Society theories put forward significant novel characteristics of society: for instance, globalisation and informatisation. However, the theories fall short in indicating that these are characteristics of largely capitalist configurations (Garnham, 2004). Given these debates, it is clear that there is a need for a holistic approach to the definition of the Information Society; one that includes the old and the new media, as Castells argues about the "dialectic of continuity and discontinuity; capitalist development would have entered a new phase of development" (Castells, 2000a). As such, the following section endeavours to establish an in-depth analysis of the Information Society, as discussed at the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS).

3.3. The WSIS: Towards a working definition of the Information Society

The WSIS was envisaged in 1998 by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU). Later in 2001, the United Nations (UN) general assembly formally authorised the summit to be held in two phases (Klein, 2003). Basically, the WSIS was an endeavour by the UN system to deal with information and communication matters on a global scale (Raboy, 2004a). The idea of the summit was born out of the need to make a link between the UN's Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) for the alleviation of poverty, as well as ICTs which could be beneficial to all people (Armstrong, 2004). ICTs in this context meant all the different means through which information flows, is collected and or stored these days. These, among others, include television, telephone lines, radio, computers, cell phones, fax, Internet and satellite systems (Armstrong, 2004).

The first phase of the summit occurred from the 10th to the 12th of December 2003 in Geneva, while the second one took place from the 16th to the 18th of November 2005 in Tunis (WSIS, 2003c). The former phase was designed with the intention of developing and fostering a comprehensible statement of political will, together with taking concrete steps to institute the foundations for an Information Society for all. The latter was intended to follow

up and being an assessment of the first phase (WSIS, 2003c). Two major goals were the focus of the summit. The first and most important aspect was to create a common acceptance of the concept of the Information Society, while the second one was the need to ensure the urgent access to ICTs by the world's population for their own development (WSIS, 2003b). The Declaration of Principles, as well as the Plan of Action were meant to call to different nation states to invest in ICTs, in order to accomplish the goals of the MDGs, for capacity building and essentially, for the assurance of autonomy and plurality of the media (ibid).

The central criticism of the Information Society definitions discussed earlier on is that we cannot rely on statistics concerning the availability of information as well as the development of information as evidence of real social transformation (Webster, 2002). Information Society definitions offer a quantitative measure, for example, the number of workers, and assume that the Information Society is achieved at the point where number of occupations is evident in the information field. As such, there is need to query the kind of technology and the quality of the information that this technology delivers when referring to the Information Society (Webster, 2002). Doing so would leave room for the inclusion of other ICTs, such as radio, which are the dominant information and communication technologies in developing countries like Zimbabwe, Zambia, Malawi and Uganda, to mention a few. It would also point to the questions of who creates the information in circulation, and who is able to access this information?

Having discussed the information society theory from the above perspective, it becomes clear that research into the phenomenon has largely focused on the fact that most effective impact on society had been the production and distribution of information. This is the reason why some scholars have chosen to adopt the phrase “the network society” because it gives a better description which reflects that the main difference is in the ways people associate with one another. The differences are described in this way:

The point is that quantitative measures – simply more information – cannot of themselves identify a break with previous systems, while it is at least theoretically possible to regard small but decisive qualitative changes as marking a systemic break. After all, just because there are many more automobiles today that in 1970 does not qualify us to speak of a ‘car society’. But it is systemic change, which those who write

about an information society wish to spotlight, whether it be in the form of Daniel Bell's 'post-industrialism' or in Manuel Castells' 'information model of development' or in Mark Posters' 'mode of information (Webster, 2006:22).

Simply put, the argument here is the fact that calling it an information society does not go beyond the nature of this systemic transformation to the effect – which refers to that of largely expanded as well as different networks in society. Thus, Giddens (1990) discusses the network society from that perspective, as his concern is the shifting roles between public and private, and how they are affecting governance and democracy. This makes his works especially more appealing to debates about the network society as it is closest to conventional sociological thinking. The “network society” sounds far much more than the alleged information society. Castells (1996) notes that technology alone cannot define contemporary societies, but it also comprises the political, economic and cultural factors that constitute the network society. Aspects like cultural socialisation, religion, social status and political organisations all determine the network society, as they can either promote or discourage these societies (Castells, 1996).

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By 'network society', Castells highlights a fundamental reason that directs social action and organisations through a co-dependent world. The network society points to a collective organisation of the Information Age and it constitutes networks of experience, power and production (Castells, 1996). Despite being continuously opposed by social variances, its existing logic however gives character to a unique system of values, beliefs and norms (ibid). Particularly, Castells upholds that at the centre of the network society is a twin-process kind of relationship between the modes of production and technological advancement. This interface is not linear or automatic in any way and neither is the interaction influenced by governments (see Castells, 1996). Somewhat, the network society seems to be shrouded by a whole new power structure whereby the previously autonomous government is pressed under certain powers and counter powers beyond its influence. Castells further notes that these opposing forms of power are founded in “networks of capital, production, communication, crime, international institutions, supranational military apparatuses, non-governmental organisations, transnational religions, and public opinion movements” (1996: 304). In addition, under the government there exist tribes, cults, localities, communities and “gangs”,

which are all stumbling blocks restricting the government's ability to act. This therefore clearly indicates how governments are progressively being successfully de-centred. Given this background, the following is a discussion of the important aspect of journalism in the so called network society.

3.4. Journalism in the Network Society

As indicated above, the term network society has been used to describe phenomena associated with the socio-economic, cultural and political transformations resulting from the proliferation of the networked digital ICTs. Coined by Jan van Dijk (1991) and popularised by Manuel Castells in *The Rise of the Network Society* (1996), the network society has been conceived as a kind of society which is fast becoming connected in media networks, slowly complementing and displacing face-to-face communication. This shows how the media and social networks are impacting on the principal mode of organisation and vital frameworks of contemporary society. Thus, it is no doubt that the network society thesis has been an essential part of the information society theory:

One of the key features of informational society is the networking logic of its basic structure, which explains the use of the concept of 'network society'... As an historical trend, dominant functions and processes in the Information Age are increasingly organised around networks. Networks constitute the new social morphology of our societies, and the diffusion of networking logic substantially modifies the operation and outcomes in processes of production, experience, power, and culture (Castells, 2000a: 21).

Castells views the network society as logic, and a product of a new technological paradigm known as informationalism. Van Dijk concurs with Castells when he defines the network society in the following manner:

...a social formation with an infrastructure of social and media networks enabling its prime mode of organisation at all levels (individual, group/organisational and societal). Increasingly, these networks link all units or parts of this formation (individuals, groups and organizations) (2006: 20).

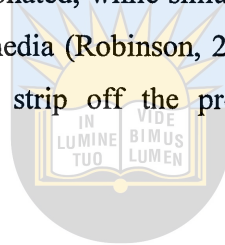
The above description clearly indicates that networks have become our central nervous system. However, while Castells attaches the notions of the network society to the capitalist

framework, Van Dijk (1991) perceives the ideal as the consequence of the escalating broadening and submerging of networks in the broader society. Other scholars have interpreted the term as societies that demonstrate two essential characteristics. The first one is the availability of complicated digital technologies and the distribution of information technologies that make up the main structure mediating a number of socio-political and economic activities. The second one entails the recreation and institutionalisation of networks throughout societies, as the critical aspect of human association and organisation over a broad spectrum of social, economic and political organisations (see Barney, 2004: 25).

Citizen journalism can be described as one characteristic of a broader “networked journalism.” The concept embraces a diversity of the cyberspace where the traditional media organisations have espoused various websites of different purpose and influence. The integration coexists in an intricate network of congested hubs and several unrelated nodes joined by links. It is no doubt that citizen journalists are a crucial part of this process. It should however be noted that looking at citizen journalism as part of the network society presents its own advantages and drawbacks. Prior to discussing the role of the citizen journalist in the networks, it is imperative to contextualise journalism per se, in the network society. This is because journalism paves the way into the overall flow of information in the network society. Castells (1997) points out the fact that while these flows influence the locations in which the journalists are found, they also experience the “place-less” locations, which are the online networks of information. In that way, they also influence and are also influenced by those networks. There are many factors that continue to affect the traditional journalism fraternity, resulting in an eroding audience. These include the possibility of citizens producing their own media and thus competing with mainstream media, the fragmenting audience and the use of community-led networks to fill in the gap neglected by the mass media, to mention a few (see Castells, 1997; Meyer, 2004; Campbell, 2004). In order to deal with some of these challenges, media organisations have gone online and are making efforts to integrate and interact with their audiences through as many platforms as possible. For instance, some organisations have made available platforms for citizens to post their stories, their photos and videos to journalists and editors’ blogs (Deuze, 2005; Singer, 2006). Through this kind of networked journalism, the effects that citizen journalism puts upon the activities of those organisations are visible. It has also been noted that some

bloggers are “certifying” the blog medium, following the mainstream journalistic principles and assuming the gatekeeping role of the traditional news organisations (Singer, 2005). The practice seems vibrant though, since the norms of blogging are often negotiated, even by professionals ‘blogging’ on conventional media websites (Singer, 2005).

Even though the association between citizen journalists and the professional journalists might be forcing the citizens to embrace the professional journalistic principles, it is also true that the professional journalists themselves are also being forced to assume new professional identities. The identities are difficult, because the professionals adopt the citizen journalists’ style: subjective, interactive and opinionated, while simultaneously progressing to affirm the influential power of the mainstream media (Robinson, 2006). The above assertion indicates how blogs and related technologies strip off the professional journalist’s gatekeeping influence (PEJ, 2008).



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Nonetheless, the effect that technology has on society is a product of many factors, among them: the journalistic standards, the organisational culture, the identity in question, to name a few (Deuze, 2007). In analysing how news organisations are coping with the challenges presented by the online activities of content production and audience disintegration, Deuze acknowledges the reigning clash between journalists’ identities and the business interests incited by the greater trend towards individualisation and partnership (Deuze, 2005; 2007). Cultural and commercial influences deter the capacity of professional journalists to embrace and integrate the marginalised voices in their online activities, in as much as they also create similar obstacles for citizen journalists (Deuze, 2007). It is thus important at this point to revisit Habermas’ framework which presents a guideline which can be used to evaluate how well professional and citizen journalists are functioning because it shows to what extent professional guidelines can affect citizens who are supposedly not enchained by these norms.

3.5. Revisiting Habermas’ Public Sphere

First of all, the public sphere is argued to be all-encompassing and strong in the citizen journalism activities. For Habermas, the mass media should assume this public sphere,

mediating between citizens and organisations. He however points that the media have failed this ideal (Habermas, 1962; 1996). Though, Habermas further argues that the media are not directly responsible for failing the normative standards. Initially, the printing press has been the one that permitted the proliferation of ideas and the mobilisation of the public so as to manipulate those in the decision making processes. This saw the powerful and the private interests dominating the media, shifting the media's role in order that they meet their needs in a "refeudalisation" of the public sphere (Habermas, 1996: 236). With the mainstream media providing the platform for the public sphere, and being threatened by the influential powers, Habermas bemoans the public debate which he argues has become comparatively desolate.

Those who criticised Habermas' original model pointed to him not acknowledging the marginalised groups and not including them in the "ideal" in the 18th century public sphere. This critical analysis of the public sphere as being insensitive to other groups like women, the majority of the working class, as well as other cultures resulted in the perceptions of the dominant public sphere competing with counter spheres (Negt & Kluge, 1972; Fraser, 1992; Downing, 2001). These counter spheres were forums for less powerful societies who rallied and debated prior to threatening the dominant sphere. Other evaluations of the public sphere model queried its emphasis on "rational debate", highlighting the influential power dynamics which are formed during such developments, as well as the importance of unofficial dialogues against powerful influential discourses (Downing, 2001; Lyotard, 1984). For Fraser, the public sphere was not just exclusive, but it was also a crucial medium for the control of societies by the influential, since it mobilised societies to transform the law founded on power and oppression to one that is centred on consent amongst the public, of course "through hegemony and ideology" (1992).

This modified model of a sphere which interacts with other counter spheres clearly indicates the networked journalism ideal, and for that reason, it remains appropriate. The ways in which messages move through the blog network to the mainstream journalism is indicative of how messages can be passed from the counter spheres through to the dominant sphere. It also shows how focusing on rationality, the norms and standards that employ that rationality are possible ways through which the dominant sphere could override counter spheres by

determining the conditions through which participation can occur (Rutigliano, 2008). As highlighted previously on how ordinary citizen reporters can assume the identities of mainstream journalists, investigating the impact of traditional standards on the contemporary journalism networks seems very crucial to establishing if citizen journalists would defy the flaws of professional journalism or they will imitate them.

On another level, the interaction between citizen and traditional journalism can best be understood from the system/lifeworld perspective as conceptualised by Habermas. Just to recap, the system's organisation of society continuously tries to overpower the life world, which is embodied by communication, deliberation, and consent (Habermas, 1996; Adams, 2005). Again, rationality is an essential aspect of the lifeworld as it facilitates communication and encourages understanding which eventually leads to action. However, the logic of the system was more dependent on law and capital, the very same powers that influenced the public sphere, the same way in which business interests affected editorial powers (Jacobson, 2000).



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By engaging traditional journalists through networked journalism, citizen journalism happens to be overlapping the confines of both the system and lifeworld. Partnering with organisations which have been covered by traditional journalism could force citizen journalists to integrate aspects of the system into their procedures, for example, there are times when bloggers have to be issued with credentials to report on or cover certain events (Rutigliano, 2008).

In the same way, citizen journalists who want to report on sensitive issues find themselves subjected to regulations that govern freedom of expression. In this way, they are forced to forgo their freedom from being influenced because they would have chosen to gain access into the dominant webs of the networks they partake in (Rutigliano, 2008). However, as mentioned earlier, professional journalists fluctuate their standards and norms, in a way they are adjusting to the citizen journalism culture since they are competing for audiences. It can therefore be argued that in this case, there is a “cultural tension” between the system and the lifeworld. Since they are intertwined with the system, the traditions of professional

journalism influence citizen journalism by presenting it with a model to imitate. The fact that citizen journalism is detached from institutions makes it more of an epithet of the lifeworld, which also impacts on traditional journalism by forcing it to adjust or espouse its rivalry.

Bourdieu's (1993) theoretical framework perfectly highlights such relations between culture and power, as it analyses how professional and citizen journalism influence each other. Examining citizen journalism from the perspective of fields as suggested by Bourdieu can afford a comprehensible element regarding the ways in which the dominant media in the networked journalism preserve power, and how those who are newcomers to the field vie for audiences as well as assume a more profitable stance within the system. Bourdieu defines fields as the platforms where services, knowledge, as well as goods are manufactured while groups of people with different power influences race to access and control the different forms of capital within the fields. These include the economic, social and cultural capital (see Bourdieu, 1993). Bourdieu reiterates that these fields are arranged in accordance with the level of capital that each and every participant in the field possesses while at the same time the levels of capital depends on how the participants relate with one another. Thus, the important characteristics of the fields are struggle and dynamism, considering that the more powerful individuals compete with those who are trying to gain power, and the more influential one implement all different forms of tactics to gain the many forms of capital.

While Habermas' assessment of the public sphere dwells more on commercialisation, an examination of the journalistic field goes further than this to analyse aspects like procedures and routines, together with the broader structure or framework of the field (Benson & Neveu, 2005). From the field perspective, assessing the connection between citizen and mainstream journalism in the networked journalism field makes it feasible to calculate the diverse cultural framework, as well as the approaches of citizen journalism initiatives to their knowledge within the field (ibid).

Having discussed all of the above, this concluding paragraph highlights how the network society and journalism affect or influence each other. It is a fact that citizen journalism

resulted from the network society. The practice symbolises some aspects of the digital society that have manifested by way of digital technology. Interactivity and collaboration are some of the good examples. However, the phenomenon also seems to integrate a culture which emanates from an organisation-traditional media, which is apparently being threatened by the decentralising effect of the network society (Rutigliano, 2008). Maybe the relationship between journalism and the society at large is so profound that it can endure the dispersal of its establishments. Or maybe, the journalism phenomenon is an indication of the ways in which journalism should function in a network society, and maybe the way it is unfolding shows how mainstream journalism is being transformed for the better.

3.6. Summary

This chapter has discussed the Information Society as well as the Network Society paradigms within the context of an evolving networked journalism sphere. Basically, the discussion has highlighted that in the midst of a 'closed' structure of journalistic activities, together with the expanding networked journalism field, journalism does not work in isolation but is rather influenced by several factors discussed in the chapter. Given this background, professional journalism outlets constitute just one node within this network thus, it is their ability to interrelate, assimilate and collaborate with other aspects which will definitely influence their destiny within the growing global media fraternity. With the rate at which citizen journalism is becoming popular, the situation undoubtedly calls for the need for the mainstream journalism to strategically reposition itself within this vibrant and multifaceted field comprising many information nodes and broaden its approaches to execute networking practices so as to improve their association with other information nodes. This involves giving room to different contribution canals, in as much as the mainstream media ought to situate themselves as pivotal information "nodes" collecting and sifting information while at the same time moderating discussions for their audiences. In the process, they could be re-established as "supernodes" working on different platforms.

Paying no attention to the revolution in the journalistic environment is detrimental and could ultimately result in seclusion in a network society where participants are continuously merging information sources and hunting for the 'breaking news'. For the mainstream media,

it would be pertinent to appreciate the revolution of the boundaries of 'public service' in the context of a network society. To survive in this fast emerging network society, professional journalists ought to offer a diversity of perceptions of news and distribute them via as many platforms as they can afford. In this way, they could moderate conversations and the strategy could become an 'added value' offered by the mainstream media within the networked journalism field. The main role of providing reliable and trustworthy information remains unscathed, but it is the way in which journalism is being practiced that is changing. Simply put, appreciating the dynamics of a developing networked journalism traditions and streamlining newsrooms in accordance to that remains essential for the survival of media institutions.



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CHAPTER 4

THE CONTEXT OF INNIS AND MCLUHAN'S THEORIES

“Societies have always been shaped more by the nature of the media by which men communicate than by the content of the communication”-Marshall McLuhan.

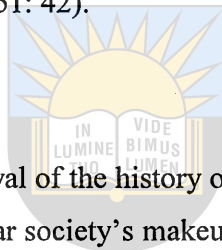
4.1. Introduction

This chapter adopts a perspective inspired by Harold Innis and Marshall McLuhan to examine the discourse of citizen journalism. These two figures are worth mentioning because of their influence in media theory and communications, in which they highlight the role of communications technologies as principal agents in social change. Innis, a political economist, is commonly accredited for instigating some deep rooted discourses on media from a Canadian perspective. On the other spectrum is Marshall McLuhan, who was directly influenced by Innis. McLuhan is perceived by many as the father and chief prophet of the electronic age. During his time, McLuhan actively engaged in appreciating the effects of technology in relation to popular culture, as well as how this eventually influenced human beings and how they relate to each other in society. His keenness in studying how the media and technology affected humankind saw him developing the iconoclastic theory that the media are the extensions of human senses (Heyer, 2003).

4.2. Harold Adam Innis (1894-1952)

Harold Innis' work on communication explored how the media shape the culture and development of civilisations. His main focus was on the social history of communication media. His works are indicative of the strength of cultures being dependent on the equilibrium as well as the availability of their media. In his investigations in this subject, Innis suggested we ask three basic questions: the first one has to do with how specific communication technologies operate. The next one looks at the assumptions that these communication technologies derive from and contribute to society. The last question is, what forms of power do the technologies encourage? It should be noted that for Innis, the answer to societal transformation is derived from the growth of communication media. He maintains that every medium represents a bias with regards to the organisation and management of information (1951: 38).

As a historian, Innis was particularly concerned about time thus, the notion that time was a linear path towards growth and progress. That is the similar approach which he applied to his study of human communication. From Innis' point of view, the entire forms of communication were believed to be dominant in a particular time and place: from paper to oral culture, print culture as well as electronic culture (Innis, 1951). His appraisal of communication technologies envisaged to comprehend the circumstances that sustained stability and caused change in society. Innis' characterisation of stability refers to the capacity of a society to adjust to changes and to safeguard cultural life (1951: 42). Looking at technologies from the time they were conceived to the time when they became the essential form of communication, Innis discovered that fundamental technological invention ushered in new forms of social organisation (1951: 42).



The Bias of Communication is a portrayal of the history of communications media. His thesis endeavours to connect it to the particular society's makeup which includes its culture, values, strengths, as well as its ultimate downfall, as media generally heavily impact on the "distribution of knowledge over space and over time". Innis' basic tenet is that each society has a bias which could either be towards time or towards space, which can be realised by recognising that society's dominant media as well as its organisational power structures. An analysis of the bias of a particular empire serves to help appreciate how power structures were sustained and reproduced through technology and administrative institutions like religion, laws, education, to mention but a few. Important to highlight is the fact that what Innis considers critical is an empire's adaptability, for instance, the acknowledgment that new media call for different handling than the usually dominant ones. Any physical and or technological changes have to be responded to, because if ignored, a bias or monopoly might lead to destructive consequences, despite the fact that it might have served that same empire well before (Innis, 1951). Here, what he implies is that new technology is not merely 'invented' and thus calls for adaptation by society, as McLuhan would theorise. What Innis means is that a society's wish to deal with prevailing disparities one way or the other needs some kind of innovation. Also, essential to note is the fact that Innis underlines that media developments exist within a wider framework of technology, innovation, as well as history. In that view therefore, some technological innovations could be regarded as assuming a crucial part in instituting the empire's hegemony. Generally, Innis' theory is founded on a

broad, rational understanding of the concept “medium.” His theoretical ancestry is strongly grounded in his earlier studies of Canadian economic history in which he discusses the significance of particular staple goods and means of transportation for the development of a nation. Migrating his attention to media, Innis preserves his passion in contextualised “transmission,” simply trading “goods” for “information” (Heyer, 2003).

Innis’ assumption in the ‘monopoly of knowledge’ is that those who are in control of knowledge through the dominant media of a particular society are also in control of the dominant discourses. This is true and obvious, because those who control and promote the centralisation of power have the audacity to characterise what knowledge is legitimate. These people include religious leaders, the ruling elite and professionals. In this way, monopolies of knowledge tend to widen the gap between the mass of the ignorant and the knowledge elite. Innis was a bit skeptical of the moral consequences of this condition in which there is political and cultural centralisation of power (Innis, 1951: 179). He attributed the situation to the technological change, together with the sophisticated weapons and space-conquering communication technologies. For Innis, communication flows should be one-way, that is, moving from the centre to the margins. This form of centralisation and the unidirectional flow of communication constructed and upheld the Roman and British empires. Due to their strong central powers, these empires extended their monopolies to marginalised communities and other colonies (Heyer, 2003: 76).

It can therefore be argued that the monopolisation of communication is thus strongly associated with concentrations of political control and economic power. After observing how monopolies of power are produced and conserved through the transmission or control of knowledge, one can thus conclude that the consequence of monopolies of knowledge is inequality in society. In this regard, Innis noted that the discrepancy or disproportion of power hinders the flourishing of a balanced and healthy society, mostly by dampening the competition of ideas, traditions and institutions (Innis, 1951: 180). It is certainly the “monopolies of knowledge” which determine the long life of empires. In the 21st century though, new media seem to be threatening the previously existing monopolies of knowledge. We are currently witnessing changing monopolies in the ways the news is being delivered: from newspapers, radio, television and ultimately to the Internet. Each of these media was

characterised by its own bias which changed in accordance with the importance of the others in the realisation of cultures. In the process, the previously powerful cultures are at risk of attacks by cultures which employ the new communications technologies (Heyer, 2003).

Innis noted that in order to appreciate any medium, there is definitely a need to focus not only on its physical attributes, but also on the ways in which it is employed and institutionalised (1950: 170). He observed a dialectical association between technology and society, arguing that they affect each other in the same way. From this perspective, particular social structures and circumstances influence the advancement of new media. Functioning within certain circumstances, these media bounce back into the society and bring along a series of transformations (Innis, 1950: 170). It is important at this juncture to stress that this view does not qualify Innis to be a technological determinist, as he has never maintained that technology is a driver of social change. He does however acknowledge the substantial influence endowed in communication technologies and monopolies of knowledge to affect culture.



The above discussion has clearly indicated that the instability which comes from the imbalance between time and space biased media, together with dispute from the marginalised, is a possible driver of social evolution. For example, the espousal of music and other data-sharing software prompted immediate reactions from various stakeholders. In any case, the result of such strategies would be the introduction of new laws that support the development of new technologies. Given such a scenario, Innis would call for action to render the cultural possibilities of different media of communication. (1950: 172). The above analysis would make it possible to consider Innis as a technological *pragmatist*, adjudicating the “technological humanism” rooted in McLuhan who noted the ingenious potential of every new medium. It also brings into picture the idea of “technological dependency” popularised by George Grant, who viewed technology as the platform for human supremacy. For Grant, technology is a ‘prison house’ which enchains people’s bodies and minds, making them being ‘half flesh, half metal’. Grant (1969) assumes technology as causing degeneration of both technological society and its members.

The influence of Innis' theories is still evident in the contemporary media. New media scholars still endeavour to make sense of our own current media age. Marshall Poe (2011) suggests a theory of media rooted from Innis' theories. Poe's is an appraisal of the history of communications media: from the origin of speech through to the Internet culture. His work is very important as it presents a carefully expressed theoretical framework which highlights why successive media emerged, when and where they did. Essentially, the framework also shows how the respective media have shaped the way people appreciate and organise themselves (Poe, 2011).

Poe's media theory points to two sub-theories inspired by Innis: the first one is the 'pull theory' of media origins, which highlights how technologies overtake after interested parties organise around pulling the medium into existence. In other words, the theory discusses the emergence of a new medium when it gets "pulled" into being by organised groups after they have already produced the technology or parts of it, good enough to sustain the media (Poe, 2011). The second one is the 'push theory' of media effects. The main thrust of the push theory is how the media impact on society. The theory practically correlates eight media attributes, "accessibility, privacy, fidelity, volume, velocity, range, persistence, and searchability" (see Poe, 2011). In appreciating how the "push" theory of communication development can be applied across the centuries, Poe notes that social demands create media change, not the other way around. The consequential effects are the media shaking social institutions in often unsurprising directions.

4.3. Marshall McLuhan (1911-1980)

McLuhan's concept of a society defined by its technology, of interactive media, and of a globally connected village has proven amazingly prophetic. His work was ignored for a long time. It only became impractical to overlook the man who envisaged a "global village" and put more substance on the method than the message as the Internet age developed and communication passed through a new evolutionary stage. Since the advent of the Internet age, related revelations have taken more tangible shape: these include glowing prophecies of an obvious convergence between online services and traditional broadcast media as well as predictions of a universally wireless future. Besides predicting the existence of a global

village⁶, McLuhan foresaw the escalation of the world community to its present condition (1994: 61). With regards to this, Lapham perceives it as “a world of people who worship the objects of their own invention in the form of fax machines and high speed computers” (1994: xi).

4.4. The ‘Global Village’ that McLuhan predicted

In order to discuss the global village aspect in relation to media production and consumption in the contemporary world, it is perhaps necessary to mention the concept of globalisation, because the concept, together with the communication technologies, offer exciting dynamics in trying to appreciate the turbulent mediascape. In this discussion, I will delineate the concept of globalisation from the standpoint of its impact on the media, since the concept can be viewed from different angles. The Levin Institute (2010) sums up globalisation as “a process of interaction and integration among the people, companies and governments of different nations, a process driven by international trade and investment and aided by information technology”. The above definition emphasises the point that globalisation cultivates contact and communications amongst citizens of diverse cultures and backgrounds. The definition also highlights the emergence of the ‘global village’ predicted by the famous McLuhan, bringing into light the fact that citizens of the global village are sharing their experiences through the media. In that regard, McLeod (1996) suggests that the function of the media in building relationships in the global community cannot be underestimated.

Thus, the creation and distribution of media content across nationalised boundaries affords a global community without margins and in so doing refuting conventional ideas about nation states as well as citizenship. It is in this global community where people are making use of different mass media platforms to advocate for social processes across the world regardless of nationality. It is the process of globalisation together with the communication technologies that are shaping the way the mass media are relating and connecting with media consumers. Due to media convergence, the improved access to media content creation and dissemination offers the potential for intercultural discourses amongst different constituencies of the world.

⁶ Marshall McLuhan popularised the phrase “global village” to show his observation that an electronic nervous system (the media) was quickly converging the planet: events happening in one part of the world could be experienced from other parts at the same time.

The digital landscape has presented a platform for media consumers to become critical participants in content formation and distribution, a movement that has propagated the plurality of voices amongst audiences from different backgrounds including the previously marginalised members of society, thus, the presence of a variety of information is a positive ideal in democratic societies. Thus, instead of the 'brain drain' effect that traditionally resulted from migration, the process of globalisation could have cultivated a sense of "brain networking" resulting from the collaboration among different professionals particularly through the Internet as citizens could still use digital media to share information (The Levin Institute, 2010).

From a personal point of view, it is clear that the concept of globalisation discussed above shows how today's communication technology revolution has changed the many aspects of human life, let alone the journalistic field. Communication technologies are redesigning the essential facets of our communications system, and this has made us review our assumptions about how that system could be used to collect and to dispense the news. With the immense transformations in the mediascape and the related technologies, questioning the nature of news journalism is a critical task we encounter in defining the public interest nowadays. The repercussions for the future of the news as well as for the practice of democracy are detrimental. Apart from the benefits derived from the phenomenon, the media world is also now overwhelmed by an unmatched range of professional challenges, of course not just due to the diverse media arising, but the new aspects of work as well. The new equipment and devices that are introduced on a daily basis at times emerge in excesses of options and opportunities that are not yet known by journalists and the audience.

Digital technologies have pervaded society with new formats and possibilities of communication, influencing the journalism practice not only in the ways journalists gather information and disseminate news stories, but also how news organisations configure themselves and do business. Looking into the future, it is feasible to predict a media world characterised by an extremely strong competition. McLuhan's (1994) works highlight that each medium offers a transformed sensory understanding to expand the being into the world,

a scenario that the journalistic fraternity experienced with the birth of the Internet. The interactive nature of the Internet has altered the journalistic culture, hence, “networked journalism”, which simply suggests how the process can be viewed as a positive move for the journalistic revolution which has seen ordinary citizens creating journalistic content and disseminating it regardless of geographical boundaries while at the same time having the privilege to counteract conventional media in virtual spaces (Kline & Burnstein, 2005).

In other words, the digital world has done nothing but the provision of a platform for the free flowing of information and ideas across the world and numerous ways in which changes and challenges are presented to the sources and the consumers of the news. In the process, journalists’ responsibilities, their eventual control of news, as well as their practices are not spared as audience members have assumed an active role in journalism (Bowman & Willis, 2003). The journalism process has become more ‘dialogic’. In Deuze’s words, “The content of a new medium is fully maintained by journalists interacting with citizens” (2003: 219). The above notions call for the need to ascertain the theoretical boundaries through which citizen journalism can be appreciated, both as a product and a determinant of technological innovation. Below is a discussion of citizen journalism as either technologically or socially determined.

4.5. Technological determinism

The technological determinism approach is grounded in the works of McLuhan, who asserted that the ‘medium is the message’ (McLuhan, 1964: 6). The approach postulates that nothing else but technology determines the social configuration. Even though McLuhan’s assertion tends to imply that social organisation is determined by the medium of the particular time, it could be argued that the concern is rather with more critical issues than are ascribed on him. In other words, what matters is not the ‘message’ that travels through the particular medium in question. Instead, what matters is rather the effect of the medium on the society (McLuhan, 1964: 6). For instance, no one can deny the fact that the kind of communication at a particular time generates certain forms of social and political organisation. Undoubtedly, we can even go beyond and analyse how the 2013 South African presidential candidates’ television discussions were structured because of the medium of television. The presentational approach

was determined and made possible by the audiovisual nature of television, together with the practices and expert routines that developed around it. In that way, we can say that McLuhan is a media effects theorist (Banda, 2010: 35). So, McLuhan was concerned about the 'effects', what he referred to as the "unanticipated consequences" of any technological innovation on social organisation (Federman, 2004:65).

Possibly, citizen journalism is an "unanticipated consequence" of the new information and communication technologies. His description of the 'message' is "the change of scale or pace or pattern" that is introduced into human affairs by new innovation (McLuhan, 1964: 8). It is therefore imperative to acknowledge that neither the content nor the application of the technology, but rather the transformation in inter-personal aspects, that is brought by the technological innovation (Federman, 2004: 65). To cite an example, discussions around the effects of television on violence and cultural imperialism as indicated in the previous chapter hinges on the aspect of the unexpected consequences of the media. McLuhan's notion of the 'effects' of every technological improvement advocates his concern about how people could arbitrate to guarantee that any injurious unexpected consequences could be pre-empted. However, this interventionist perspective does not qualify him to be a technological determinist. Instead, it brings to the fore the policy options that humans can put into practice so as to prepare for some of the awkward unforeseen consequences apt to stem from the espousal of technology (Federman, 2004:66).

Obviously, certain kinds of technology have encouraged some initiatives of citizen journalism. Weblogging for instance, has afforded citizens to distribute and publish their personal works. It is the interactive nature of the facility that has legitimised the status of citizen journalists. Some bloggers are recognised with superior influence and believability, while others' works have been perceived as lacking in credibility and authority (Tremayne, 2007). Despite technology making it possible, in theory of course, for many to become journalists, it is just a few who successfully find their way through the web of unrestricted analysis and "legitimation". This concurs with Banda's (2010) notion that while the kind of the technological transformations influences the potential of open-ended communicative prospects, society still considers the circumstances in which those prospects become an important platform for communicative power (2010: 36). From that perspective, we can argue that technology is shaping, while at the same time it is being shaped by society. The social

shaping of technology theory is discussed below.

4.6. Social determinism

The social shaping of technology (SST) theory posits that different views and scholarly behaviours meet somewhere in the SST project (Williams & Edge, 1996: 25). The theory suggests the unlocking of the “black-box of technology” so as to permit the socio-economic processes entrenched in the substance of technologies as well as in the innovation processes that are still to be discovered and examined. It therefore disputes the notion that technological revolution cannot be queried: that it is an unalterable, linear series which alters all that comes its way (Williams & Edge, 1996: 25). SST disregards the notion that technology broadens in accordance with an inner technical sense. In fact, those who regard the theory recognise technology as a social creation, determined by the circumstances around its formation and utilisation (Banda, 2010). In that view, each and every phase in the creation and operation of new technologies involves a number of options amongst diverse procedural alternatives.

SST also paved the way for policy issues previously obscured by technological determinism. For a start, it condemned the highly regarded linear frameworks which regarded innovation as being based on a one-way kind of information flow, perspectives and resolutions from fundamental science by way of research and development, to creation and distribution of established artefact via the market through to the customers (Williams & Edge 1996: 26). Nevertheless, both the technological determinism and the SST approaches bear critical implications for citizen journalism, despite the fact that some scholars contend that there is no genuine disparity between technological determinism and SST (Banda, 2010: 37). In that view, caution must be taken in assuming a technicist perspective to ICTs. Rather, ICTs could be regarded as a “process” and not as a “tool” (ibid). This approach helps to shun the downside of technological determinism. However, there is also need to underline the fact that ICT is all about technology, equipment and appliances (ibid).

Subsequently, communities that promote citizen journalism to blossom could focus on such policy and institutional issues that prolong a sound infrastructural growth agenda. This would also include the technical abilities necessary for the manoeuvring of the devices that make citizen journalism feasible (ibid). Such a move could indisputably make us value or appreciate technological together with social determinism as characteristics of societal

revolution. Pulkkinen (2013) uses the phrase 'transformation' to demonstrate the transformative aspect of ICTs. That seems to be the main agenda of technology: to present citizens with a variety of social practices (citizen journalism included) in order for them to increase their developmental capacity (Banda, 2010: 38). In that view, Banda notes that an essential matter that follows could be how policy can be drafted to certify that ICTs accomplish these human-developmental goals (2010: 38). Having discussed these theoretical underpinnings, it is essential to go further in explaining the meaning behind "the medium is the message", as indicated in the following section.

4.7. The Medium and the Message

The media have been characterised by McLuhan as "any technology that ... creates extensions of the human body and senses" (McLuhan, 1995: 239). The end result of these technological extensions (which will be detailed in the following section) is the escalation of a specific sense of the human to the inconvenience of the others. For that reason, technology in effect interrupts the sensory equilibrium of persons, a situation which eventually affects the receptiveness of the communities in which the affected individuals live (ibid). Based on McLuhan, this process is the unconscious origin of every main cultural modifications that symbolise diverse eras in the history of the humans. These include "the renaissance" and "the industrial age" (1995: 239). McLuhan was more influenced by the electronic age, which saw the evolution of the telegraph, the radio, the film, the telephone, the computer and the television, among other things. This electronic age saw the restoration of the previously lost sensorial balance of humankind (Carr, 2008). This was achievable because the nature of electronic communication was instant as compared to the mechanical technologies which presented the constraints of time and space. For McLuhan, electronic media extended the whole human nervous system, as compared to the print media which only extended the individual senses. Moreover, not only did electronic media bring back the "pre-literate 'tribal' stability of the human senses, it also released the human nervous system into the world, generating a universal neural consciousness", as McLuhan noted:

The electronically induced technological extensions of our central nervous systems... are immersing us in a whirlpool of information... the aloof and dislocated role of the literate man of the Western world is succumbing to the new intense depth participation... decentralising - rather than enlarging - the family of man into a new state of multitudinous tribal existences (1995: 249).

Essential to this discussion at this point is the second aspect of McLuhan's "medium is the message" cliché. Traditionally, when people communicate, they typically focus absolutely on what they are saying (the content), but not focussing on the media. That is the reason why McLuhan's perspective overturns the usual traditional supremacy of content over medium. In his version, content is less significant as "it has about as much importance as the stencilling on the casing of an atomic bomb" (McLuhan, 1995: 238). For him, the medium has been undermined and forgotten for a long time because it is invisible. He compares this to the electromagnetic waves which make up the noticeable spectrum. To the ordinary eye, light is invisible but ironically lights up the whole world. In this view, McLuhan argues that the electric light "is pure information... it is a medium without a message, as it were" (1964: 23). The "content" of the electric light is everything that it shines on "...whether the light is being used for brain surgery or night baseball is a matter of indifference" (McLuhan, 1964: 24). On the same note, the medium is the message, as the media produce their own conditions which seem to be favourable to some messages while at the same time being hostile to others. To illustrate how different media amplify and repress their content, McLuhan puts it this way: "In as much as sodium-vapour light mutes all colours to an orangey-grey and ultra-violet light makes white and some colours glow eerily". In the same way, if some people lived in a community always lighted up by sodium vapour light, their perception of reality would be different from those who are used to be lighted by ultra-violet light (McLuhan, 1964). This is of course in spite of the fact that these people from these two different worlds would be unconscious of the misrepresentation in their vision.

Nonetheless, McLuhan's notion of the medium as the message has not been without criticism. For instance, some scholars believed that McLuhan was a "hard technological determinist", As Williams put it:

The work of McLuhan was a particular culmination of an aesthetic theory which became, negatively, a social theory... It is an apparently sophisticated technological determinism which has the significant effect of indicating a social and cultural determinism... If the medium - whether print or television - is the cause, of all other causes, all that men ordinarily see as history is at once reduced to effects. (1990, 126-7)

Williams (1990) seems to go too far in his criticism as McLuhan never attributed any independence to communication technologies. To McLuhan, technologies were *always* the *extensions* of human beings, and therefore always determined and operated by human beings.

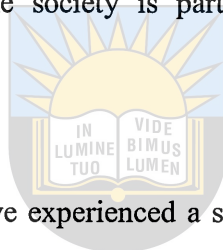
Perhaps McLuhan's determinism concerned the costs and limitations caused by the technology which in a way could limit how man could operate. Other critics like Eco (1987) argue that McLuhan's notions regarding the type of media are generated from the idea that he applies the term so "broadly, for phenomena that can be at times reduced to the channel and at other times to the code, or to the form of the message" (1987: 138). Embedded in the above argument is McLuhan's incapacity to differentiate between "content form" and "media form". In that view, McLuhan's perception of the significance of the media form is missed (Eco, 1987: 138). It is undeniable to say that McLuhan's approach does not essentially permit for a detailed examination of the intricate social phenomena. Eco concludes that McLuhan's limited judgment of the phenomena he has chosen to shrink to "media effects" is beyond belief (see Eco, 1987). Maybe, to fully appreciate the meaning of "the medium is the message", it could be essential to recapitulate on what McLuhan suggests concerning the various ways in which we as human beings "extend" ourselves, and probably in what ways such extensions influence how we interact with others. That is the subject of discussion in the next section.

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4.8. Technology: Extensions of the Human Body

In *Laws of the Media*, McLuhan (1988) constructed the Tetrad—a four-pronged, systematic method of stepping back to make sense of the impact of any man-made innovation. McLuhan believed these laws embodied the best method for revealing the effect of technologies on people. In simple words, the issues surrounding the Tetrad involve enhancement, obsolescence, retrieval and reversal. According to McLuhan (1988), every creation of the human mind certainly leads to these four different but binding processes. It is essential at this point to perhaps simplify the symmetry in McLuhan's formula. Simply said, any innovation or creation enhances or improves some aspect of its surroundings while at the same time obsolesces another. In the same manner, the innovation retrieves a formerly obsolesced phenomenon from the past and ultimately reverses its original purpose. The above explanation portrays the twofold nature of any technology: human inventions pose an incredible possibility for enhancement, yet the reversal might lead to something completely unforeseen (McLuhan, 1988). Taking citizen journalism as a technological innovation in journalism, it is feasible to look at the aspects of journalism that the phenomenon has 'enhanced' as well as those aspects that it has 'obsolesced'.

The extension referred to by McLuhan occurs when a person or a group of persons applies a new device in ways that broaden the capacity of the human mind in a spectacular way. For instance, in media extensions, the television becomes a technological extension of the eye, while the Internet has been seen as the extension of the human brain. McLuhan is still as applicable while his insights are still as essential and appropriate as ever, having envisaged the World Wide Web (with his concept of the global village) thirty years before its origin. In simple terms, McLuhan asserts that the society in which the medium plays a role is the one that gets affected, but not exactly by the content delivered, but by the features of the medium itself (ibid). This observation on the nature of communication versus the content and technological innovations has generated unmatched changes in all aspects of how the media report the news as well as how the society is participating in news production and consumption.



To say the least, traditional media have experienced a striking revolution as news websites have to vie with *Google News*, blogs, *Facebook*, *Twitter*, to mention a few. McLuhan could have been predicting *Twitter* when he said “It is the framework which changes with each new technology and not just the picture within the frame” because *Twitter* as a technology framework for communications has become an essential tool for journalists who use it to interact with readers and sources. I highlighted in Chapter 2, how audiences, including myself, follow their favourite journalists on *Twitter*. It is a fact that the onset of social media and in particular, citizen journalism, together with the communication technologies, is redefining how news and information are disseminated, with the consequent effects on journalism, the journalists themselves, as well as the state of the media fraternity. These technological developments and or extensions are a step in the evolutionary process of how we consume media which, as McLuhan would argue, have far more influence over how we define ourselves rather than the content we consume. Important points to highlight at this juncture are perhaps issues of what these changes mean, to the ordinary citizens, to the professional journalists, how are the changes impacting the newsroom and essentially, how are the changes helping in shaping the decisions that journalists might make about the future of news reporting. That is the purpose of this thesis, to answer the above questions.

Along with the media extensions mentioned above are the consequent ‘amputations’ that come with them hence, the downside of the innovation. The important aspect highlighted by McLuhan here is that we should look at the pros and cons accompanying the media inventions that have been made possible by the Internet, which has been likened to an extension of the brain. This is in tandem with McLuhan’s expectation of the advent of the Internet and its foreseeable relationship to our central nervous system. With reference to the subject matter of this thesis, which is citizen journalism, and many other social networks and or applications, we can look at the upside as well as the downside of those innovations.

Many social applications have been commended for being the new technological media of democracy which reach lots of people in the virtual world instantly (Castells, 2000), which is the upside of the innovation. The good side about media extensions and innovation is that with the technology savvy citizen journalists on board, citizens no longer have to be passive about the news. The phenomenon can be taken as a technological extension that has extended the act of journalism to ordinary citizens, without the traditional aspects that professional journalists assume with their qualifications, their professional affiliations as well as the constraints of working for a media institution. Content is apparently produced by “the people formerly known as the audience” (Bowman & Willis, 2003), and with accessibility to media tools, citizens are not anymore consuming everything filtered through the views of journalists and editors. In a way, the artificial boundaries of the past have been pulled down by the new media extensions while at the same time the innovation has empowered citizen journalists through public participation as well as engagement in a more democratic news gathering.

The downside though, which is the consequent amputation, citizen journalism has also contributed to reduced accuracy, quality of the stories as well as credibility while at the same time the phenomenon has made information dissemination look more like a hobby and not a profession. Through blogs, *Twitter* and *Facebook*, to mention a few, social media can be seen as anti-democratic. Referring to *Twitter*, Silverblatt (2009) notes that this social application does nothing other than helping producing a young generation that not only cannot spell but that is also unable to scrutinise the implications of ideas, challenging information, and thinking independently. This sounds like Carr (2008) who argues about the detrimental effect

of the Internet on our brains. Carr laments the Internet's demolition of our ability to contemplate and analyse when he observes: "What the Net seems to be doing is chipping away my capacity for concentration and contemplation. My mind now expects to take in information the way the Net distributes it: in a swiftly moving stream of particles". Looking at Carr's observation above, one can therefore argue that we are exposed to so much information and at the same time producing so much content such that we are losing the context, the standpoint, the quintessence of the story behind the reporting. Given that scenario, the challenge then becomes the need to manage the overflow of information, as new social media tools and technologies are popping up every day.

Looking at the discussion in this chapter so far, it can be safely said that the theories of Innis and McLuhan rest on notions of physiology and perception (Carr, 2008). McLuhan reiterates question of how communication technologies influence us, but placed more emphasis on the effects of electronic media on the individual. McLuhan and Innis' research on communication technologies contrasts with James Carey's (1989) delineation of specific communication "revolutions". Carey analyses the telegraph as a medium that changed the way we as humans interact by collapsing space. Till the onset of the telegraph, communication and transportation carried the same meaning. Carey however retrieves an important point from Innis: those communication technologies affect "time and space", burying the time and significantly standardising space (Carey, 1989: 227). The telegraph had three effects: the margins of how human beings interact, it changed how language and theoretical systems were used, as well as the new societal relations which saw the entrance of a business middle class (1989: 204).

Carey signposts a three step process of change that is equivalent to "Innis' tension and equilibrium between time and space". However, Carey puts the development and reception of communication technologies in a broader framework of "ideological and the religious sensibilities". He specifically points to the "rhetoric of the electrical sublime," the aspect of communication having the capacity to open the roads to a "Universal Brotherhood of Universal Man" (1989: 208). Building on Carey's ideas, Davis outlines a number of intriguing parallels between the Internet and the primitive perceptions of supernatural and divine communication (Davis, 1994: 30). In *Techgnosis, Magic, Memory, and the Angels of*

Information, Davis argues the discourse of new technologies not being new, but revisits quasi-religious perceptions of communications same as Carey's "Universal Brotherhood of Man," notions which have been in existence in the Western ideas for many years (1994: 30). Following Innis and McLuhan's theses on technology revolution, the following section deliberates on the concept of technology as it applies in the new world order.

4.9. Beyond Innis and McLuhan: Technology and the Internet in the 21st century society

The purpose of this discussion is to apply Innis' findings on the biases of time and space media theory to the latest paradigm shift in the media fraternity. The discussion endeavours to look at the Innisian theory's applicability to digital media in the wake of the increasing magnitude of the Internet and the implications of globalisation. This is essential as these factors deeply influence society. Since the theory has already been delineated earlier in this chapter, I hereby present an analysis of it in terms of its relevance in this Internet age since the instantaneous and omnipresent Internet shrinks the significance of both time and space for communication.

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In Innisian terminology, the Internet is a network that connects individuals and organisations from all over the world. The phenomenon has made it easier to communicate quicker and more effectively, thereby managing the distance issue and resulting in globalisation. This description undoubtedly qualifies for a bias towards space (Innis, 1951). Space and the costs brought about by the Internet in terms of transportation are not an issue anymore because with the Internet, communication occurs anywhere as long as one is in possession of a computer, the Internet connection, as well as the required software. This evidently is a democratisation of media production, circulation and consumption and it simply becomes achievable for the reason that the significance of space is reduced.

In the contemporary society, the pervasive Internet has become the main determinant of the human being, influencing how we interact on a daily basis, just the same way the dominant media in Innis and McLuhan's time determined how people constructed their identities. The new ways of communication have led the human mind to experience what has been referred to as "informed bewilderment." A new form of medium has gained superiority and has

irrevocably altered the media landscape since the death of Innis. The evolution from analogue to digital media has been referred to as a paradigm shift. If so, then perhaps an essential question to pose to ourselves is what sort of bias and monopoly we are faced with nowadays.

The interactive nature of the Internet qualifies one to argue that it has rejuvenated the sense of orality which has been seen as lacking in contemporary electronic mass media by theorists like Innis. To be specific, with the Internet, direct communication amongst individuals, even though not face-to-face, has become more popular. Innis' bias has been with the oral tradition. With the depreciation or suspension of space, citizens with a common goal are now able to create their own "living tradition" and can even go further than creating new relationships and networks that de-marginalise the electronic mass media and its one-directedness (McLuhan, 1989). In this way, human beings are defeating Innis' "mechanized tradition" through chat forums as well as using social networking sites, the environment of which has led to a re-injection of people's own experience and beliefs, together with their own personal opinions and imaginative thoughts into what was formerly 'mechanized.' Indeed, the Internet offers exchange of ideas, participation, dialogue, decentralisation together with the proliferation of individual opinion.

This analysis however poses one challenge that is difficult to overlook. For Innis, orality is a typical attribute of conservative cultures or communities that have a bias towards time and mainly slip back to durable, heavy media. Obviously, the Internet does not fit into this description in which the cultures heavily challenge the strong emphasis on individualism fostered by the Internet. The Internet is a highly fragmenting and individualising medium which heavily decentralises and affords a space for personal experience through the social networking sites (Neuberger, 2009). The main goal of the Internet is immediate communication, which has made globalisation feasible (McLuhan, 1989). It is a fact that the Internet has proved to be a centripetal force that allows vastly diverse crowds of people to form new communities by sharing certain ideals and values, sometimes without ever meeting since the significance of space has been drastically reduced insofar as communication is concerned. In that regard, one can reasonably argue that the Internet has subjugated the temporal restrictions of previous communications media.

However, the sheer numbers of Internet pages as well as the hyperlinks between them make old websites to disappear. This statement alone qualifies to say that the permanence of the Internet is accordingly not guaranteed and may therefore be considered a 'perishable' medium which might lead to problems in sustaining an empire's collective cultural memory in the long run, an issue that Innis raises in his "Plea for Time". Innis points to the fact that our modern society is a hyperbolised adaptation of his, adding that the contemporary society has an "undue obsession with the immediate" and that the sense of balance between time and space has been gravely disturbed with devastating consequences to Western civilization (Heyer, 2003).

The reflection on Innis and McLuhan's theories and their applicability to the Internet, indicate that the Internet is neither a just one more media tool to be used by the hegemonic and operating under what Gramsci (in Arnold, 1984) calls the subaltern's "mask of consent" nor is it a democratic tool with the power of changing all users into equals. This assertion concurs with Kahn and Kellner (2005) who argue that the Internet is neither a completely emancipatory nor oppressive technology. Instead, the Internet is an ongoing struggle that contains contradictory forces. To put it plainly, the Internet both centralises and decentralises: it obliterates old communities and forms new ones. Moreover, it is expressive of a monopoly of knowledge yet concurrently encloses seditious potential. Not only that, the Internet affords its users to outdo both space and time, which might lead to the loss of shared cultural knowledge in the long run. In Innis' words, the "mechanized tradition", which is the constant danger posed by the discontinuity and volatility of human communication through the mass media, can be reduced by the Internet, even though not completely eliminated (Innis, 1951). Given these characteristics of the Internet, perhaps the only way to survive is to stay flexible and compliant enough to respond to the fast-paced mediascape of the twenty-first century.

Defining "technology" is not an easy undertaking, looking at the difference between the use of the term back in the previous centuries and its use in the twenty-first century. In the former, the term directly referred to "tools, machines, factories and industry", and technology was not conceived as a societal phenomenon on itself (Winner, 1978: 8). That has since changed, as the term has apparently burst out into an astonishingly varied multiple meanings.

For the purpose of this study, I will follow Ellul's (who calls it *la technique*) definition of technology. Ellul defines technology as the *capacity* of people to manoeuvre the communication tools around them so that they improve the lives of those that they serve (Ellul, 1964: 5). In this case, technology is not a thing, but a facility. This is an important point as it shows that technology is not just a simple thing like communications network or a computing mechanism.

In popular culture, the notion of technology suggests that it should have a material existence. This contrasts with Winner and Ellul's ideas as they perceive technology as a tool of social change and not just a material object. As a tool of social change, technology can be viewed as a "philosophy of technology", which seem to have not been given serious concern. Winner calls this reluctance to explore the effect that technology has on society as *technological somnambulism* (see Winner, 1986: 5). This however, is not the subject of this discussion. The objective of this discussion is to help appreciate how technology has become a framework for human practice. The sense is that technology does not only assist human processes, it is also an influential tool that redefines that activity and its significance (Winner, 1986: 6). To illustrate what the above statement implies, a new medical technology alters not just what medical practitioners do, but it also changes the ways in which ordinary people perceive the medical fraternity. This explains technological determinism. To suggest the fact that with the development in new technologies, new human organisations and behaviours are constructed around them, Winner argues, "The construction of a technical system that involves human beings as operating parts brings a reconstruction of roles and relationships" (1986: 10).

The above discussion simply shows that the definition of technology must be broad and comprehensive to effectively speak to how technology and society affect each other. But one key attribute of technology is the fact that it has developed from the perspective of just being an instrument. As technologies are incorporated into lives, they have shaken off their instrument-like features to become aspects of our way of life. It is this incorporation that has made technology more of a cultural phenomenon like anything else, and has for that reason instilled the notions of technology as being eventually cultural. In defining technology as a "culture", Goyder notes that these technologies are somewhat used with conscious intent, that

means they are used purposely, the purposes of which are cultural as well as awareness based (Goyder, 1997: 8-10).

Although a very abstract definition, this sociological meaning of technology presents the capacity to view technology as some kind of phenomenon linked to the rest of the aspects of society. It is because of this that Winner differentiates the diverse groups of materials that are commonly characterised as being technological. Popular amongst these include the all-pervading items such as personal computers, cell phones and many other appliances that are used in various applications and illuminate the face of technology. The next group of objects in the technological realm include the body of technical practices: the expertise and processes that people incorporate so as to achieve their tasks and the ranges of societal organisation that embody this field of technical activities (Winner, 1986, cited in Goyder, 1997: 12). This parallels with Goyder's three dimensions of technology, namely materials, power and knowledge (ibid).



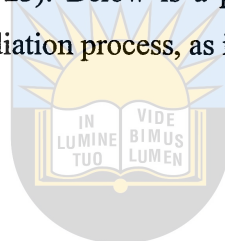
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Both Winner and Goyder draw attention to an incredible inconsistency: the perspective that technological change is unavoidable, and will move, is common in society. It is common knowledge however, that humanity presumes to consciously have preferences with regards to the advancement of technology. Also, it is general knowledge that every move in technological advancement is by choice. Earlier in this section, the same conception has been mentioned, that in response to technological developments, organisations of society and technology adjust themselves so as to integrate the new developments in technologies (Goyder, 1997: 47).

Thus, if technological developments influence how societal organisations move, the question that follows then is what authority does this present to the drivers of technological development? In other words, the simple question here is who controls post-industrial societies? If technological development compels societies to adjust to their existence, then technology would be directing the path of societies. From a different perspective, one can argue that technologies are instruments of societies that are used with total realisation of the

potential results and effects. This in actual fact implies that society can envisage what is oncoming, that is, the future, something that is very doubtful in reality.

Having discussed technology this far, it is imperative to discuss the role of technology and the effect it has on society as suggested by Innis and McLuhan, by looking at the Internet as a postmodern technology. With the objectives of this study in mind, it is imperative to look at the structural changes that have been caused by the Internet in the media system. Technically, media allow the generation, reproduction, storage, diffusion as well as the reception of messages. Unfortunately, the Internet has largely transformed the frameworks of this mediation practice (Neuberger, 2009: 23). Below is a presentation of three main ways in which the Internet has changed the mediation process, as illustrated by Fenton (2010).



4.9.1. The Social Dimension

The most important thing about the Internet has been its capacity to amalgamate different types of communicators. The communication process can be one-on-one, one-to-many, many-to-many. This flexible switching between different roles and the ability to enable interactivity are what makes it unique, after having surpassed the asymmetric and unknown nature of the traditional media (Neuberger, 2009: 23). The interactive attribute of the medium also blurs the producer-receiver roles, thereby reducing the space between the communicators. Commenting on the flexibility of changing roles Singer notes:

Message producers and message consumers are interchangeable and inextricably linked. You may be a producer one minute, a consumer the next – or if you're a good multi-tasker, both simultaneously. Moreover, you are always connected to others who also are occupying both roles (2009: 62).

In the “one-way information flow” traditional media, the professional journalists in the media reported news while the rest of the ordinary citizens passively received the news in the process. Conversely, in the twenty first century complex network of information, the new kind of public communication entails everyone participating and interacting. In this context, citizens have taken the role of the communicator and are all contributing to the network, “Because in a networked world, there no longer is the ‘journalist’, ‘audience’, and ‘source’.

There is only ‘us’” (Singer, 2009: 75). Bird maintains that the digital milieu has shaken the traditional kind of journalism out of its conventional “complacency”: media organisations have become vigilant and more receptive to the empowered and engaging media consumers (2009: 295). She further concurs with the reality that there is a new kind of journalism that is emerging, and the process is making traditional aspects of gate keeping and agenda setting less and less visible. Instead, citizens as news producers seem to be engaged in ‘gate opening’. This is made possible by practices that encourage user participation in lieu of the type of content selection linked with the previous gatekeeping processes (Mitchelstein & Boczkowski, 2009: 571).

Despite the changes in the media environment, Singer still believes that the primary ethical principles of journalists remain imperative, even though for different reasons than in the past (2009: 65). Singer argues that journalists’ key loyalty still lies with the general public and their goal still remains the provision of reliable information. Nonetheless, perhaps journalists need to make peace with the fact that they are no longer the only ones giving information to the citizens, in as much as they need to recognise that they are not mysterious experts anymore, but real people within the system. In this manner, Singer highlights that it is not the time anymore for journalists to detach themselves from the public in the name of wanting to maintain journalistic objectivity, as this signals the risk of being isolated and worthless (Singer, 2009: 72).

It has also been highlighted that the association between journalists and the public is no more just based on giving information to a mass of unknown public body. Rather, it is also based on associating with other persons on a more relaxed context. It is crystal clear that the situation has changed from the traditional media environment in which audiences were expected to trust the journalists more or less blindly. In the contemporary society, journalists need to be accountable and credible. Objective truth remains critical to any societal relationships and for the fact that the public is entitled to the truth. Singer concludes:

Thus we are moving toward a situation where authenticity or credibility becomes more a matter of the relationship that an individual establishes with his or her readers than with the institutional role of the media organisation (ibid: 67).

4.9.2. The dimension of signs and symbols

Also known as the channel dimension, the dimension of signs and symbols is influenced by the aptitude of the Internet's to bring together many media forms into one medium. The World Wide Web's platforms can combine audio-visual, text and animated material. Through convergence, the Internet can connect all these and hence overcome the boundaries (see Singer, 2009).

4.9.3. The time and space dimension

The Internet has considerably speeded up the fast and constant dissemination of information. Despite one's global location, information is accessible within seconds, particularly with the new technical all-rounders generation of mobile phones. This also entails the development of a 24-hour news series and regular updating in online journalism. The news consumption habit has not been spared by this revolution. Audiences now access news in a stable flow of information bites (see Bird, 2009). Commenting on the creation and consumption of news on the Internet, Fenton argues that "This new journalism is open to novices, lacks editorial control, can stem from anywhere (not just the newsroom), involves new writing techniques, functions in a network with fragmented audiences, is delivered at great speed, and is open and iterative"(Fenton, 2010: 6).

Highlighting the characteristics of the media in the Internet era as "speed and space, multiplicity and polycentrality, interactivity and participation", Fenton further warns that news organisations should revise and discharge online stories before they are scrutinised for journalistic integrity (Fenton, 2010: 6). It is essential to indicate that the theoretical prospect of getting more news because of participation, speed and multiple voices does not automatically transform into diversity. The more the participants in the news production process, the more channels of information dissemination, then the more of the same, which results in the sameness of the online news within and among traditional news sites. In that regard, Fenton notes that such activities do not exclusively crop up from the technological changes per se. She argues,

The nature of change is not to be attributed to technology alone but rather to the convergence of many forces...New media emerge by merging existing socio-material

infrastructures with novel technical capabilities ... this evolution is influenced by a combination of historical conditions, local contingencies and process dynamics (2010: 5).

The point here is that the philosophy or culture and art of journalism is positioned in association with democracy together with its principles. That means it is entrenched in a record of commerce, regulation and technological change. Journalism thus relies on an environment influenced by social, economic, technological and political factors (Fenton, 2010: 3). Given that scenario, it is feasible to talk of a technical novelty instead of technical determinism.

4.10. Discussion

This chapter has discussed Innis and McLuhan and gone beyond them. Now, going back to the concept of technology as extensions of the human body, the medium being the message aphorism, as well as the discussion about technology in the contemporary society as highlighted above, it is true that McLuhan's work shows the hidden consequences of technologies. Even though some of McLuhan's notions are still not yet accepted in some academic spheres, the fact remains that his works highlight the significance of media as the principal shaper or determinant of human fate.

As argued by McLuhan (1995), the way we interpret and consume information is transformed whenever we are introduced to a new communication medium. These new media, in Innis' words, are usually controlled by monopolies of knowledge, which are "those interests possessing extraordinary control over what information is available and/or those having a predominant influence over more complex patterns or habits of social thought" (Innis, cited in Comor, 2001: 280). In the digital milieu, the hold these monopolies have on knowledge has stiffened due to the speed at which messages can travel through the Internet. By analysing how information is controlled in both ancient and modern contexts, through the work of Innis and McLuhan, it can thus be concluded that every new innovation comes along with a new

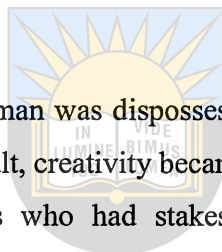
set of communicative opportunities and problems that transform the thought processes of people.

For instance, cell phones, with their multifunctional features, have presented opportunities to record and send their own news on the global platform. This has presented the previously marginalised groups with a chance to be heard. Previously, it was the professional journalist who decided what constitutes 'news' and in the process, most of what constituted news to the ordinary citizens was left unreported. Nonetheless, it is the same innovation that had been criticised by scholars who argue that these technologies have led to the journalism profession being undermined, because they have assumed that everyone can be a journalist, as long as they have the tools to write and record newsworthy information. To understand the existing communication media, there is need to first look back in the past, as it is only through examining the historical contexts in which media were developed that we could reveal the biases within them. Using Innis terminology, all media are biased either towards time or towards space. Innis argues that:

Dissemination of knowledge over time than over space, particularly if the medium is heavy and durable and not suited to transportation; or to the dissemination of knowledge over space than over time, particularly if the medium is light and easily transported (1949: 457).

The above statement gives the assumption that older communication media tended to have more of a time bias, whereas newer media have a space-based bias. McLuhan presents many instances of how communication media are dislodged by newer technologies and the monopolies of knowledge that go along with them. About the advent of the phonetic alphabet, McLuhan says "Literacy propelled man from the tribe, gave him an eye for an ear and replaced his integral in-depth communal interplay with visual linear values and fragmented consciousness" (McLuhan, 1969: 243). It is evident here that the onset of the phonetic alphabet resulted in the end of sensory-based tribal man and instead, a monopoly of knowledge based on literacy and education was instituted. In the process, the uninformed man was dislocated while supreme power was rendered to the literate man. The tribal man, as noted by Carey, was known for initiating debates, giving orders, sharing knowledge and important thoughts (2009: 14). Carey further notes that these kinds of creative expression became less dominant as man increasingly moved towards the phonetic alphabet.

With the extension of knowledge in alphabetic form, it got localised and split into specialties, thereby producing or forming divisions of roles, classes, nations and of knowledge itself (Carey, 1967: 6). This formation of a mixture of social classes and nations mainly served to divide man into smaller segments, with those able to utilise the phonetic alphabet divided between these groups. Drawing from Innis' ideas, it is this class that would become responsible for the production of new texts, leaving those unable to use the phonetic alphabet lagging behind. The introduction of the phonetic alphabet is believed to have caused a bottomless division in the way man interpreted the world. In the words of McLuhan, "This division of sight and sound and meaning causes deep psychological effects, and he suffers a corresponding separation and impoverishment of his imaginative, emotional and sensory life" (1969: 241).



This simply suggests that the average man was dispossessed of the sensory tools he used in the creation of artistic works. As a result, creativity became a tool that was primarily used by the knowledgeable class and citizens who had stakes in the monopoly of knowledge surrounding the phonetic alphabet. Innis called this way of controlling the existence of average citizens "the time/space dialectic" (McLuhan, 1969: 282). As can evidently be seen, the effects when applied to the phonetic alphabet, the same model can be used to other media in order to see how monopolies of knowledge endeavour to control people's lives.

The example of the phonetic alphabet above clearly shows how the advent of new technologies can leave those who are not savvy to its ways behind. The same concept applies to the Internet based technologies. In as much as it is widely available like the phonetic alphabet was in its infancy stages, the Internet is only used by particular sections of the population. That means those who have both the financial means as well as the technical knowhow can utilise it to its fullest potential. If the Internet were readily accessible for everyone on the planet, it would work essentially as a democratic tool where the objective would be to cultivate communication among all cultural and ethnic groups. Nevertheless, like any other communication media, the Internet has been monopolised by a few minority who have vested interests in controlling it for private and economic gains (Comor, 2001).

It is interesting to realise how Innis' and McLuhan's theories are still relevant in helping us understand how the Internet has affected modern day publishing. McLuhan noted that digital

technologies had the opportunity to democratise communication, while Innis believed that digital technology could become a tool to be used by monopolies of knowledge to control the lives of average citizens. He reiterated that digital media had the capacity to reduce time and space, meaning that information being broadcast to the public can be changed at a moment's notice to best suit those in control (Carey, 1967: 31). Applying Innis' theories to the digital media, Comor notes that while there are several non-corporate voices emerging in the digital sphere, the most popular sites often belong to traditional media companies which take advantage of the Internet to further their corporate goals (Comor, 2001: 284). The Pareto Principle⁷ can be used to appreciate the relationship between creators and participants in the digital sphere. Developed by Joseph Juran, the basis of the principle is that roughly 80% of the effect comes from 20% of the cause (Robert, 1992: 2). Applying this model to the state of digital ownership and publishing online as McLuhan and Innis would see, it is safe to presume that the majority of that 20 per cent comprises corporate companies, organisations that Innis would have referred to as monopolies of power.

We may not need to look any further than *Twitter* to recognise proof to support this claim. *CNN*'s breaking news feed which has millions of followers, is one of the most followed news account on the site, looking at the number of followers. Despite the fact that it is concerned with journalistic integrity, at the same time it also has a mandate to put out information that will result in clicks and ratings, guaranteeing its future success as a company. The same could be said for most mainstream outlets which rely on their audiences to keep them in business.

Even though the number is small, there are certainly some independent news producers out there whose models do not need as much financial support. For instance, *Global Voices* is a citizen run organisation which bases its coverage around what its readers want to see covered. It is easy to see McLuhan advocating this model, as it takes away authority from large corporate entities while at the same time allowing more creative and innovative journalism. Although this model is commendable, a lot of work needs to be done if it is to become the norm. Federman notes that certain groups, that is, monopolies of knowledge, become aware of the changes of a new medium before everyone does, thus, it renders them an opportunity to modify and influence to best suit their purpose (2004: 2). Perhaps, in an effort to bring more

⁷ The 80/20 Rule means that in anything a few (20 percent) are important and many (80 percent) are insignificant. In Pareto's case it meant 20 percent of the people owned 80 percent of the wealth.

independent creative thought into the Internet, those who are digital media knowledgeable need to educate others to become savvy media consumers as well as creators. Only then, would we be able to see the true power of the Internet in terms of its potential to connect us to each other (Federman, 2004).

The notion of the globalisation of electronic communication is still more relevant fifty years after it was conceptualised. McLuhan describes it as such: “These new media of ours have made our world into a single unit. Everybody gets the message all the time.” Even though they are the types of media that are changing and evolving, the current medium of the Internet and its social networking has provided information at an even faster rate. Not only that. The global connectedness together with the constant advancement in the technologies, have had an intense effect on the field of journalism. It is no secret that these have created a new capacity for the ordinary citizens to report their own stories. McLuhan could have probably described a person with an extended and projected nervous system, he calls this extension “outered by the profound organic character of new electronic technology” (McLuhan, 1962: 269). His conception of “outering” as it speaks to citizen journalism and blogging is well summarised by Federman, who notes that, blogging “outers”, or publicises the concealed psyche. A digital persona communicates with anyone in the world without the traditional restrictions of time or space:

Blogs are an instance of ‘publicity’--the McLuhan reversal of ‘privacy’--that occurs under the intense acceleration of instantaneous communications ... Blogging is an ‘outering’ of the private mind in a public way (that in turn leads to the multi-way participating that is again characteristic of multi-way instantaneous communications). Unlike normal conversation that is essentially private but interactive, and unlike broadcast that is inherently not interactive but public, blogging is interactive, public and, of course, networked--that is to say, interconnected (Federman, 2003).

Ironically, blogging complements McLuhan’s adage that, “One of the paradoxical features of substituting software information for hardware machinery is total decentralisation” (McLuhan & Powers, 1989: 184). Another unique aspect of this phenomenon is that it has created a:

... trend toward ‘everyone’s a journalist’--that is, the interactive nature of online/digital media moves citizens into the realm of journalism, participating and contributing to the world of ‘journalism’ alongside professional journalists... citizen and professional journalists as coexisting and complementing each other... an example [of a medium] where there's cross-over; either citizen or pro can publish... and either's work can be of value to the public (ibid).

Interestingly, Ogburn's conception of "citizen journalism" summarises McLuhan's assumptions that every new technology affects every aspect of the society in which the technology is embraced. This perspective is evident in the contemporary society, for instance, corporate giants like the *CNN* have installed their own blogs to race with citizen journalists.

4.11. Summary

The gist of this chapter, from both Innis and McLuhan's perspectives, is that whenever new technology is introduced in a society, it heavily influences that society's organisation, it changes how the people perceive the world around them and essentially, it affects how knowledge is stored and transferred. Despite both scholars agreeing that the media were biased towards time and space, McLuhan emphasises the "sensorium", that is, how the media affect our senses. He argues the media manipulate part of our senses and in the process, the effect changes how we view and understand our surroundings. Thus, for McLuhan, media studies enable us to see the invisible. He further argues that the meaning of technologies within a particular culture is contextual. Like Innis, McLuhan proposed ways through which to analyse the media, ways that consider the broader culture and society within which the media operate to recognise the strings of its effects. On the other side, Innis' works emphasise the fact that communications is the backbone of every society. Thus, Innis' acknowledgment of communication as a significant driving force for change is the ultimate legacy he has left.

CHAPTER 5

ICTS AND CITIZEN JOURNALISM IN SUB SAHARAN AFRICA

5.1. Introduction

It is a misconception that the phenomenon of citizen journalism is new and that it resulted from the technological innovations of the twenty-first century. Along with its novelty, the phenomenon comes with a profusion of definitions, such that it is hardly possible to draw its boundaries. In reality, citizen journalism has existed long before the journalism profession itself (see Chapter 2 on the history of the concept). Perusing through the American history could prove that the phenomenon has been in existence for centuries. The onset of journalism education saw the replacement of citizen reporting by professional journalists. It is thus in the recent years that citizen journalism has re-emerged, thanks to technological innovation and media consolidation. It is also because of this re-emergence that the number of voices in the media has grown so dramatically. In that regard, the purpose of this chapter is to expound on how citizen journalism is happening, with specific reference to some Sub Saharan African initiatives. The chapter highlights that despite challenges like the scarce Internet access as well as the slow Internet penetration rate, the significant role played by citizen journalism in the region cannot be ignored.

5.2. The Sub Saharan African context

The Sub Saharan Africa is one of the highest increasing mobile markets worldwide, with a remarkable annual growth rate averaging 44, 6% in 2014 (GSMA, 2015). More than 475 million mobile subscriptions have been recorded and this is a higher proportion when compared to the fixed line connections which is at around 12, 3 million in the whole world (GSMA, 2012)⁸. This increasing embracing of the mobile phones has seen an improvement in the access to ICTs for many African citizens. The Internet has become a normal feature of mobile communication, thanks to its affordability. Mobile and Internet connections have increased tremendously in many African countries, with South Africa, Nigeria, Ghana and Kenya being the largest markets in the continent. Over a 100 million mobile subscribers have

⁸ GSM (Global System for Mobile) Association is a trade group that represents network operators that use GSM technology for their networks.

been recorded in Nigeria, making the country the largest market in the continent (GSMA, 2012). Kenya has been experiencing an incredible boost in mobile phone subscriptions. Mobile phone subscriptions are at around 29 million, a sharp increase from the 127,404 mobile phone subscriptions recorded in 2000. Around 54% of the country's population can access the mobile phones (GSMA, 2012). These and other examples are clear indications that Africa is going mobile. The increase in subscriptions implies that many citizens are getting connected to the Internet. It is these and other developments that have been noted as key drivers for the mounting practice of citizen journalism in Africa (see Chapter 3 on the Information Society).

With over 600 million subscribers, a figure which beats Europe and America, it is estimated that by 2020, cell-phone penetration in Sub Saharan Africa is expected to go to 79% from 52% in 2012 (Frost & Sullivan, 2015). This sounds possible because of the fact that the costs associated with possessing and sustaining a phone have reduced significantly. With the cell phone becoming a true mass communication tool in Africa, the mobile technology has seemingly become the 'seventh' mass medium: the initial six being "the print, sound recording, cinema, radio, television and the Internet" (Dare, 2011). In 2010 alone, cell phone penetration rate stood at 45%, a marked increase from the 15% recorded in 2006 (GSMA, 2012) This is obviously a positive move at the level of the ordinary citizen, in the sense that the rise in ownership and use of the mobile phone gradually presents a 'ready-made' audience base for the journalistic outputs of citizen journalism. Thus far, it is evident that the Internet, its adaptation and subsequent increase in penetration into the media and larger African society, together with the emergence of mobile phone, have taken citizen journalism to the next level, as they are visible triggers for active citizen participation in the media (Frost & Sullivan, 2015).

What exactly has prompted citizen journalism is a question that has been asked and responded to in many ways. The cause has also been linked to different geo-political factors affecting the different African nations. For instance, in Zimbabwe and Nigeria, the cause for the upsurge of citizen journalism was highly political (Moyo, 2011; Dare, 2011). In Nigeria, it is believed that a void of progressive, investigative content and civic engagement was left

by the traditional media soon after the exodus of the military from power (Dare, 2011). It is also the lack of a democratised space for readership participation that remains one of the factors that keeps on driving Nigerian citizens towards citizen journalism (ibid). In Zimbabwe, it is asserted that the absence of bold investigative journalism by the mainstream media led ordinary citizens into querying the effectiveness of the media (see Moyo, 2011). That being said, impartiality and independence of the traditional media was being called into question by an audience increasingly isolated from them. Williams carefully summarises such situations this way:

Just as it is said that war is too serious a business to be left to soldiers and politics is too sacred a profession to be left to politicians, journalism is too serious a business to be left to professional journalists. Nature abhors a vacuum and as history has demonstrated, every profession, which devalues itself, which desecrates its sacred obligations, invites external interventions. The generalissimo defied and demystified the general; the political practitioner disrobed the politician; the “journalissimo” has demystified journalism turning citizens’ arrest into the preeminent form of order-enforcement (2006: 1).

It has also been argued that citizen journalism projects have been products of conflict, a case in point being the *ushahidi.com* which took off at the same time that Kenya experienced ethnic violence in 2008. The purpose of the platform was to have citizens giving their own personal testimonies and therefore discarding rumours. The messages would be posted via blogs, *Twitter* and *Facebook* (Banda, 2010: 43). After its success, *Ushahidi* (Kiswahili for *Testimony*) was used by citizens to update on information regarding shortages in the medical supplies in eastern Africa, updates on the xenophobic attacks in South Africa, as well as updates on the conflict that was rampant in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (www.ushahidi.com).

5.3. The challenges

Despite the promising future of journalism in Africa, there appears some stumbling blocks. Some citizens in some African countries still cannot contribute to news production due to some reasons which include lack of access to the enabling technologies. It is also common that the lack of access to communication technologies could be caused by resistance by some citizens who do not attach any significance on the communication technologies. The *Women*

of Uganda Network (WOUGNET) project, for instance, revealed that most of the women in the rural areas did not respond to the use of the technologies as they preferred spending their time on other things that they are used to doing (Dare, 2011). This was revealed when the project directors surveyed the rural women in their communities in an effort to establish how best to engage them in ICT initiatives. So, the lack of enthusiasm for technology shown by these women is a huge contribution to the demise of some democratisation projects such as the one mentioned above.

Besides the accessibility, infrastructure and training issues affecting the use of technologies in some parts of Africa, there is another issue of restrictive governments. Some governments are suspicious of how their citizens use these technologies so they deny them access to the tools. Despite some governments making efforts to increase the penetration and use of ICTs by their citizens, others purposely block and or monitor Internet usage by citizens (Dare, 2011). A good example is during the 2011 Egyptian uprising when the government shut down all Internet access so that the journalists and ordinary citizens would not access such media platforms (BGPMon, 2011). This took place following an eighteen day standoff of the Egyptians against their autocratic rulers, the event of which saw the then president of the country Hosni Mubarak resigning. In another example, in Tunisia, freedom of expression is restricted to such an extent that Internet service providers are mandated to release lists of names of users to the government every month (BGPMon, 2011). In Ghana, Nigeria, Zimbabwe and Ethiopia, to mention a few, Internet service providers, upon request, should be able to present the data on customers' online activities to their governments (ibid).

Truly, such legislations are a disservice to those citizens who might be meaningfully engaging in constructive online activities. In other countries, journalists are harassed or jailed for writing issues concerning the government of the day. In Chad, the journalism profession has cost the lives of many journalists, with some being gunned down by the police and others being poisoned to death or unfairly imprisoned. For example, Daniel Bekoutou who is a Chadian-born Senegalese journalist, found himself on the wrong side of the law after publishing his story titled '*Hunting the Dictator*' in which he implicated the former Chad President Hissene Habre in human rights abuses in 2000 (Media Rights Monitor, 2000). This

could be the reason why Internet usage in the country is close to nothing with only 2, 3% of the population accessing Internet in 2013 (World Bank, 2014).

An important point to highlight though is the fact that in the whole of Africa, citizen journalism is taking place not in isolation, but in parallel to, and is interlocked with mainstream journalism. This is evidenced by the growing convergence between conventional and citizen journalism (Mutsvairo & Columbus, 2012). At some point, ordinary citizens draw from and connect to stories available in the online versions of the print media while at the same time traditional media also take leads from these citizens and may even proceed to reprint articles retrieved from blogs without permission and without even verifying the contents of the blogs (Oteku et al., 2010; Goldstein & Rotich, 2008). It is in this regard that Moyo (2009) warns about how citizen journalism could at times spread untruthful stories which might sometimes cause “panic and disorder”, despite presenting important information.



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It is however worth mentioning at this point, the fact that initial reactions to the spread of the modern communication technologies, especially the mobile phone in Africa, were undoubtedly classified within the technological determinism paradigm. This was so simply because Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs), together with the Western governments, overemphasised the aptitude of the communication technologies to accelerate democracy in the African continent (see Moyo, 2009). In contrast, many media scholars associated it with the social constructivism paradigm, since locating people at the centrality of technological growth is reminiscent of agency and “subaltern transformative power” (ibid). Of course, “the more a technology is interactive, the more it is likely that the users become the producers of the technology in their social practice” (Castells et al., 2007: 2). However, where a mass-scale usage of communication technologies is concerned, it is usually the organisations and some public groups which influence ordinary citizens to espouse such technologies in ways that mostly benefit those influential people (Moyo, 2009).

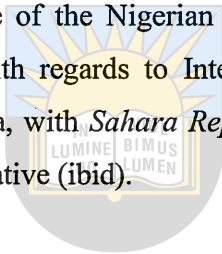
It is common to realise that many studies on technology and social change tend to empower ordinary people whom they perceive as redesigning the use of technologies to suit their own conditions. As Manji (2008) also notes, social change is not technologically driven, but is influenced by ordinary citizens who are capable of exerting authority or power on their own circumstances and therefore, they determine their own fate. This concurs with Moyo's (2009) study which examined how ordinary Zimbabweans influenced the mobile phones to become implements for election monitoring in 2008 (even in the 2013 Presidential election). In this regard, mobile phones have become an influential platform for political sovereignty based on free channels of independent interaction amongst people (Castells et al, 2007: 185). Castells et al further argue that the capacity of users to exchange messages with the people they know on the mobile phones is a clear contrast of the conventional mass media and therefore boosts their integrity, and at the same time, their ability for "flash mobilisation" shows how they significantly affect mainstream politics and government choices (Castells et al., 2007: 185). It is because of their multi-use nature that mobile phones have become the "living eyes and ears, together with minds, to observe events in real time and share them with the network" (Castells et al, 2007: 211). This is evidenced by the alleged influence that they inflict on the users who ultimately engage and network themselves and eventually generate amazing end result in a short space of time.

However, just possessing a mobile phone does not mechanically make one a citizen journalist. It takes more than that to generate that kind of mobile activism, *vis a vis*, among others, knowing the technology itself, a powerful organising force, some kind of funding in order to access the enabling materials to circulate the bulky messages (see Moyo, 2009). Having said this, the following section discusses selected case studies, which have not been grouped depending on the type of technologies they use. In fact, the cases comprise the Internet and mobile phone based platforms, as well as hybrid platforms (i.e., those that are based on both mobile phones and the Internet. Despite the focus being on Sub Saharan case studies on people's capacity as citizen journalists, reference is also being made to appropriate projects from other relevant and geographical contexts.

5.4. Case Studies

5.4.1. Sahara Reporters

Nigeria is one nation that has been caught in a wave of a democratised media, evidenced by the millions of Nigerians who have signed up for social networking sites, a number of audience-driven online citizen journalism sites, as well as discussion forums. Prior to this, Nigeria's more than hundred newspapers and magazines were the powerful link in news and information dissemination, though only about ten of the newspapers such as *Punch*, *This Day*, *Nigerian Tribune*, *New Nigeria*, *Champion*, *Vanguard* and *Guardian* dominated the media fraternity (Dare, 2011). It has been highlighted earlier in this chapter that the major causes of citizen journalism in Nigeria was the near nonexistence of audience partaking, interactivity and the allegedly undemocratic nature of the Nigerian traditional media (ibid). However, being amongst the leading nations with regards to Internet penetration in Africa, citizen journalism has been thriving in Nigeria, with *Sahara Reporters* being the most popular and most successful citizen journalism initiative (ibid).



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Established in 2006, *Sahara Reporters* (see appendices) was modelled completely as a citizen journalism website whose birth was triggered by a combination of factors from technology to the perceived failure of the traditional media and the cry from the ordinary citizens to be involved in news making (Dare, 2011: 31). From the outset, the founders of the website made clear the fact that they were not journalists or pretending to be, but they are citizen journalists committed to “advocacy journalism”. Omoyele Sowore, the founder of the website, indicated that *Sahara Reporters* is a cyber-based organisation sustained by a community of social activists and reporters who write news reports in all the formats from a “Nigerian-African perspective”. The journalists who contribute to the website comprise ordinary people whose objective is truth seeking and they publish it “without fear or favour”. Sowore sums up *Sahara Reporters*' founding philosophy in this way:

Sahara Reporters is not a journalistic endeavour. It is a reportorial platform for Nigerian citizens. It is a place where citizens report news – where they report themselves. We do not lay claim to the practice of journalism. We do not write or keep journals. We report events, news and write reports of real time issues. It is our response to the failure – the refusal or lack of will on the part of professional journalists – to report real news to the people. The goal of *Sahara Reporters* is like asking citizens to prepare their own food instead of eating junk food. *Sahara*

Reporters is doing well in that regard. We have broken the sound and speed barriers of reporting authentic, evidence-based news.

Alexa.com⁹ vividly captures the very essence of the work of *Sahara Reporters*:

... an outstanding, ground-breaking website that encourages citizen journalists to report ongoing corruption and government malfeasance in Africa. Using photos, text, and video dynamically, the site informs and prompts concerned African citizens and other human rights activists globally to act, denouncing officially-sanctioned corruption, the material impoverishment of its citizenry, defilement of the environment, and the callous disregard of the democratic principles enshrined in the constitution.

The basis of *Sahara Reporters* is the fact that everybody is entitled to freedom of expression. The right implies expressing opinions without being interrupted as well as conveying information in the media of choice despite efforts of gatekeeping by some people and organisations. It is in this view that the ordinary citizens take ownership of the site. Despite the criticisms about the quality and bent of some of the stories published on the website, *Sahara Reporters* remains the popular citizen journalism website. In response to some questions and allegations thrown at it, *Sahara Reporters* firmly locked in place the citizen orientation of its content and practice of journalism in this way:

We are Citizen Reporters, not Professional Journalists... We depend on the efforts of concerned citizens who act whistle-blowers as well as the main sources for our exposes. The information on this site, sometimes in the form of rare documents, photos, videos and audio records, comes from citizens anxious to see change. Our pages are free and open to everyone who wishes to contribute story tips, authentic information, or even rebuttals...*Sahara Reporters* maintains the faith that ordinary citizens, reporting a country about which they truly care, can build that country by opening up all the dark corners where both criminals and detractors try to hide (2010).

The above is a clear indication that *Sahara Reporters* makes its philosophy very clear: having ordinary citizens seriously sourcing information and exposing corruption from all corners. It is also clear that from the beginning, the website set for itself a directive to be a media platform for all citizens. The website does not have official reporters, but it depends on

⁹ Alexa.com is a web information company that provides free global web metrics on the top sites from across the web.

thousands of reports from citizens across Nigeria and abroad, who contribute content in all forms. Interestingly, it often engages people to follow up on important stories or help to investigate stories in which case they are paid. Currently, the website has over 500 citizen reporters who send stories and photos using blackberry messenger for free and a citizen volunteer corps of nearly 6000 drawn from the Nigerian community (Dare, 2011). To date, *Sahara Reporters* has published more than 4000 news reports with about 98 per cent accuracy as claimed by the founder of the site, Omoyele Sowore.

Even though *Sahara Reporters* is sustained mainly through donations from its readers, it also accepts adverts on its site from different sources like *Google Ads*, U.S. based online institutions like Capella and Phoenix Universities (Dare, 2011). The website also welcomes adverts from Nigerian businesses such as banks and oil companies and Nigerian's "corrupt politicians" (Kperogi, 2011). Nonetheless, the fact that the site accepts adverts from corrupt politicians has not stopped it from exposing their dirty actions of corrupt behaviour. This fact is a challenge to the common strand in alternative media scholarship which maintains that freedom from commercial pressure is the *sine qua non* of alternative journalism. Although advertising does certainly subtly control editorial content in media organisations, *Sahara Reporters* has proved that it is possible to resist this control, evidenced by its noteworthy editorial independence in spite of the fact that it accepts adverts even from the people it tortures through its adversarial journalism (Kperogi, 2011).

5.4.2. Iindaba Ziyafika (isiXhosa for *the news is coming*)

South African citizens have a particular relationship with alternative media. This is because in South Africa, alternative media have a unique and strong tradition founded in media established in opposition to the apartheid system (see Knight, 2010). The dominant media of the apartheid era excluded the majority when it came to information needs. With the alternative news media being built politically oriented and externally funded, many of them were forced to close down soon after the country's first democratic elections due to withdrawal of funding, thereby paving way for the resurgence of alternative media, primarily through community radios (ibid).

Under the Rhodes University banner, as well as South Africa's oldest independent newspaper, *Grocott's Mail*, the initiative is a citizen journalism project with a twofold approach (Lang, 2010: 19). On the one hand, the project is encouraging news production and networking through the mobile phone. This is undertaken by ordinary citizens within Grahamstown community. The objective of the project is to vocalise the voices of the marginalised citizens of the community and to enlarge their sources of information since there is limited access of the newspapers and the web in the community (Lang, 2010). Importantly, *Iindaba Ziyafika* is about empowering the citizens of Grahamstown and the vicinity by training them to use mobile media to enable them to contribute in local debates and effectively engage themselves in citizenship practices (Berger, 2007). For instance, the "journalists" in Grahamstown have managed, to some extent, to give first hand information on the things that affect them directly as a community and in the process, have compelled municipal authorities to act in response to the issues of concern being raised by the residents. On the other hand, *Iindaba Ziyafika* is an attempt at furnishing media organisations in order that they can fully utilise this medium (Lang, 2010: 19). A unique feature about *Iindaba Ziyafika* is how the project developed and integrated a content management system (CMS) which allows publications and their websites to engage more citizen generated content and to encourage audience-media dialogues through the mobile media (Iindaba Ziyafika, 2011a).

In addition to the development is the integration of a Microsoft Windows based application, NiKA, which makes it easy for editors to play around with news stories by importing from other applications, adding captions, pictures and headlines, to mention a few. An essential characteristic of this windows based application is its "ability to receive text messages sent from cell phones directly to NiKA, thereby making it possible to send SMS news alerts and headlines to subscribers" (Iindaba Ziyafika, 2011b). Importantly, in addition to allowing users to produce news, NiKA also enables users to trace the latest developments by distributing news headlines through text messaging. It is in this regard that the project has been applauded for contributing to the body of knowledge with regards to mobile phones as a form of media (Lang, 2010). These, among others, include knowledge on using the mobile phone for receiving the news through the SMS. The basic training provided to local citizens has enabled them to contribute news as text and pictures taken by the mobile phone cameras. The content produced by the citizens is published by *Grocott's Mail* in its newspaper as well

as online. It is of great value to highlight that the experience gained through the training that is provided at the publication's offices is packed into a training manual for future use in the small town and other interested communities (Lang, 2010: 20).

In support of the *Iindaba Ziyafika* Project, the local *Radio Grahamstown* launched *Izwi Labahlali* (The Voice of the Citizens), a radio show which presents content that is mostly produced and presented by citizen journalists and transmitted mainly in isiXhosa, the dominant local language. The show basically gives citizen journalists who have completed a six-week course in the Grocott's Mail Citizen Journalism Newsroom an additional platform to report what is going on in their communities.



5.4.3. Global Voices online

This popular project engages citizen journalists to contribute news from all walks of the African continent. The participating countries include Tanzania, Cameroon, Nigeria, Ghana, South Africa, Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Kenya. The objective of *Global Voices* is to promote citizens to produce news content that identifies with people of the same background (see Dockney et al., 2010). Technically, citizens in their different countries record news in form of stories and short video clips then post them on *Global Voices* for publication. It is through such works that the international community gets an insight into the lives of ordinary Africans, especially when they get to read news stories which perhaps went unnoticed by major news outlets.

The project has been exclusively collecting news reports from citizen media and blogs, particularly concentrating on developing countries and the previously marginalised voices therein. Founded in the Netherlands in 2005, the initiative boasts over 300 active bloggers together with translators who interpret selected stories from the *World Wide Web* into different languages to widen the audience base (Global Voices, 2010). In that view, *Global Voices* can be accessed in 18 diverse languages, despite having started off in English only. It is also commendable to note that all the translation from English to local languages is the responsibility of volunteers from the different language backgrounds (ibid). The reason for

translating from English, according to the *Global Voices* team, is the fact that “the international English-language media ignore many things that are important to large numbers of the world’s citizens ... [and] aims to redress some of the inequities in media attention by leveraging the power of citizens’ media” (ibid). In an endeavour to fulfil this goal, the team launched an Outreach program whose objective is to prioritise the disadvantaged people and bring their voices online, as well as to make their news content translated into their respective languages.

Some of the concerns of *Global Voices* include the stories that are contributed on the website, the credibility and the legitimacy of the contributing citizens (Global Voices, 2010). In this regard, the project has a very strong supporting structure in form of a team of volunteer authors, translators and regional blogger-editors who are either hired or have just been invited to contribute. These people are citizens of their respective countries hence, it is easier for them to relate to and appreciate the significance of the information supplied by their fellow country men and women on a daily basis, since some of their important roles include sifting through the information, making sense of it, as well as highlighting what the mainstream media are ignoring (Global Voices, 2010). News categories are classified according to country and topic, while topics range from politics, gender, the arts and culture, the media, as well as human rights issues, to mention but a few.

To support the individuals contributing to the website, *Global Voices* launched an advocacy drive whose purpose is to support the blogging fraternity in the engaging countries. In addition to advocate for the freedom of expression on the Internet, the campaign also supports the compilation of guide books and manuals on anonymous blogging (Global Voices Advocacy, 2009). Importantly, the campaign also engages another project, *Threatened Voices*, which is a combined mapping project whose aim is to protect the bloggers by tracking violence or threats incidents against them (Threatened Voices, 2011).

The case studies described above clearly indicate the various ways in which citizen journalism in the Sub Saharan Africa is being practised. Institutional citizen journalism is

also another way. For example, the Botswana newspaper, *Mmegi*, has a *Facebook* initiative which is particularly aimed for the young people. Another pertinent example is the Zimbabwean project *Kubatana.net*, which facilitated the “text’em” campaign aimed at enabling Zimbabwean women to make their voices heard in the constitution-making process.

A common contentious issue though is the fact that most of these citizen journalism sites lack solid quality control measures (Banda, 2010). However, some institutions are of the opinion that putting quality control measures would imply censorship hence, they reserve the right of publication and therefore do not publish whatever they think is not appropriate. The different models of practising citizen journalism as implicated in the above examples could be due to the fact that “a key feature of the contextual framework within which citizen journalism occurs relates to the sustainability or business model for the phenomenon of citizen journalism” (Banda, 2010: 54). For example, print media organisations seem to be too profit focused to execute citizen journalism initiatives. This could be so since they anticipate broadening their audience base by tapping into the youth segment, which perhaps is the most technologically savvy age group as they access the Internet much more than any other age group.

Commenting on how citizen journalism is taking place in the African continent, Moyo (2010) warns that there is a danger in the African context, whereby the platform meant for the practice might not realise its objective as a platform for serious citizen journalism. For Moyo, the practice assumes free agency where the citizens with their rights act impulsively to distribute information. Moyo also points out that the rising interference by NGOs to support and foster citizen journalism initiatives simply strips the citizens of their agency and autonomy, resulting in some kind of disempowered citizens who would be forced to meet some of the objectives of these supporting organisations (see Moyo, 2010).

Nonetheless, despite the successful examples of citizen journalism projects, there are those which failed to sustain themselves. For instance, the South African’s now defunct *Reporter.co.za*, got underway in 2006 but was not purely autonomous because it was funded

by its founder Johnnic/Avusa media (Knight, 2010). The contributions on the site were entirely from the ordinary members of the public, while it was the responsibility of a group of professionals to guide the citizen journalists as well as to edit the stories submitted. Contrary to the idea that the site was created “for the citizens”, Knight (2010) argues that the objective of the project was to increase the news base for the commercial bodies of Avusa. Banda (2010) notes that the reason why the site did not take off simply shows that “the African media space is not yet ready to engage in a dedicated citizen journalism project. There are still access issues that make it impossible for many people to contribute on [this] citizen journalism site,” (Banda 2010: 55). Or maybe, it could also imply that the society is not yet ready to embrace such changes and might need more time to adopt such concepts (ibid).

5.5. Summary

This chapter has illustrated how the modern ICTs have made incredible efforts towards empowering ordinary citizens in Sub Saharan Africa. It explored how the technologies have presented other accessible and convenient ways of reporting news. Importantly, it has been revealed that the capacity to create news is not the responsibility of professionalised entities like the famous politicians and the mainstream media, but rather, the power to distribute news has been dispersed and has therefore allowed ordinary citizens to safeguard their democratic rights. It has also been shown that the advent of the user friendly ICTs and the Internet, which provide “many-to-many and one-to-one horizontal communication channels that bypass political or business control of communication” actually presents the potential for citizens to generate more credible and legitimate information, as indicated by Castells et al (2007).

CHAPTER 6

METHODOLOGY

6.1. Introduction

The preceding chapters have highlighted the context within which citizen journalism takes place in society. Thus, this chapter is a discussion of the methodology employed to achieve the objectives of the study. It is imperative at this juncture to reiterate that the main purpose of this study is to assess the processes by which ICTs have influenced the onset of citizen journalism. The study also aims to establish to what extent the mainstream media have engaged citizen journalism in their professional practices. Essential to the study is the evaluation of the democratic value of citizen journalism, in order to appreciate the possible influential power of citizens in the production and consumption of news processes. In that view, the methodological approach for this particular study is largely qualitative, the subject of which will be discussed briefly in the following sections.

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It is however vital to note that data for this study was gathered using mixed methods, which are all qualitative: starting from qualitative content analysis, qualitative survey in form of a questionnaire, inductive reasoning, focus as well as individual in-depth interviews. The first phase involved qualitative content analysis of relevant literature on the subject citizen journalism, which paved the way for the inductive argument. At the same time, I also did qualitative content analysis of the citizen journalism websites discussed in Chapter 5. This was done in order to determine not just the potential interviewees, but also emerging themes which could be cross-examined during the interviews. Another reason for engaging in the qualitative content analysis was to get a close and systematic examination of what is involved in citizen journalism.

Thus, to achieve this, I embarked on an investigation of citizens' involvement in creating online news content in some cases of citizen journalism as provided by *Global Voices*, *Sahara Reporters*, as well as *Iindaba Ziyafika*, all of which were described in the previous chapter. These three seem to have the capacity to dispute the symbolic supremacy in media organisations by underlining the freedom of expression, as argued by Couldry with regards to alternative media (2002: 25). Media advocates emphasise that every individual, and not just

a few influential persons who can access the media, has the right to produce media content and transmit it in his or her medium of choice (see Hackett & Carroll, 2006). It is for this reason that I focused the investigation on the Internet and the mobile phone where most developments in citizen journalism are taking place through various platforms.

6.2. The Qualitative Approach

This investigation is positioned in the interpretive research practice, as the study aims to raise appreciation on the concept of citizen journalism from the encounters of those who are experiencing it in different ways. This means that the research participants are directly associated with the phenomenon, either as citizen journalists, as online media producers, or as experts in the field of communications, media and journalism. The study thus aims to evaluate the historical and social conditions within which citizen media are being produced and the perceptions of their producers. This viewpoint ultimately justifies the qualitative analysis employed. The holistic approach adopted also took into consideration the micro and meso standpoints, the former being reference to the citizen journalists while the latter being the organisations to which they are attached. For that reason, it was deemed necessary to perceive the concept not in isolation but within a broader organisational and socio-cultural framework. The following is a rationale for the multiple case study design in which citizen journalism initiatives operating in different geographical environments were chosen.

6.3. The Multiple Case study design

This study took a snapshot of a robust phenomenon that is changing and growing by the day. In order to achieve the objectives of the study, a case study approach was adopted. This simply refers to a pragmatic approach which espouses “multiple sources of evidence” to examine certain phenomena in their contextual setting (Yin, 1984:13). Case study research focuses on a specific situation, event, or organisation, with the central aim of providing holistic sociological descriptions of it (Yin, 1984:14). It is for this reason that the approach is most valuable when one wants to obtain a wealth of information on a relatively ‘new’ area of study such as citizen journalism (Wimmer & Dominick, 1991:150; Stake, 2000:24). Importantly, case study research allows for the triangulation of various research techniques, as “the more the data sources that can be brought to bear in a case, the more likely that the study is valid” (Wimmer & Dominick, 1991:150). Moreover, it is the openness of the case

study approach to a mixture of both qualitative and quantitative research methods that makes it one of its main advantages over other approaches to social inquiry. Qualitative methods like unstructured interviews can be used to complement findings from other methods like content analysis. By moving back and forth between various methods, it is in this way possible to gain further insights into issues that might have been missed if only one method has been used (Holsti, 1969:12). It is for this reason that a combination of qualitative content analysis, inductive argument, self-completion qualitative questionnaire and qualitative interviews were used in the study.

6.4. Sampling technique and sample characteristics

The sampling technique in this study rests on the idea of sampling which has been defined as a continuous process in which the results as well as the perceived theory continuously add to the process of improving the selected sample (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This approach is supported by Lindlof, who argues that many qualitative sampling techniques do not follow aspects of random sampling where every element in a population has equally the same opportunity of being chosen, but it rather depends on predetermined selection (Lindlof, 1995: 126). This theory is the most applicable to this particular study, as it applies maximum deviation sampling, which means that cases were chosen for a sample because of the probability that they might have added a new but usually complementary aspect to it (Lindlof, 1995: 126). Therefore, the objective was to select cases, both the institutions and their “personnel”, the action of which was expected to supply diverse insights into the phenomenon of citizen journalism in its institutional framework. Having discussed the selection of the cases, the focus now is on the sampling of participants.

6.4.1. Purposive Sampling

Since there is “no one method for selecting respondents” (Gaskell, 2000: 42), I prioritised diversity above everything else hence, the case studies from geographically different locations. Prior to embarking on the fieldwork, I envisaged including diverse groups of people as participants, as long as they are knowledgeable about the subject matter and they relate to it in one way or the other. In that regard, the participants included the citizen journalists who actively create content for online publication, members of staff like editors

and producers, facilitators of the citizen journalism initiatives in the organisations. Thus, purposeful-sampling techniques were employed. It has been observed that the sample of participants for every study should not just be knowledgeable about the subject matter, but should be able to engage in meaningful conversations regarding the subject under discussion (Morse, 1994; Seidman, 1991; Kvale, 1996). Accordingly, the participants for this study were carefully chosen. Focus was on people who create content, those who choose and filter what gets published, the columnists, the facilitators of citizen journalism projects like in the case of *Iindaba Ziyafika* where the citizen journalists are trained, agency writers like freelancers, were all considered. In addition to the above, I also considered those who were not in any of the groups mentioned above, but were deemed knowledgeable about the subject matter, for instance, media experts like analysts and academics in the journalism field. For that matter, participants included some of Rhodes University School of Journalism and Media studies staff members who participated in the *Iindaba Ziyafika* project. I found it necessary to include them since their informed responses could present a valuable barometer to gauge myself against making simple conclusions based on the perspectives of the citizen journalists only. Another reason for doing that was to realise a sample with a variation based not just on participants' relationship to an institution, but also on several other aspects of their association.

However, it has to be noted that the key players in this instance are the citizen journalists themselves. It is important at this point to reiterate that the objective was to engage people whose drive to publish online content on their respective websites would vary: people who post diverse content, in various formats and on varied subjects. The participants also differed in when they started to contribute to online news of their websites, their level of education and skills, their level of experience as citizen journalists and how often they contributed content online. I was also interested in knowing the different types of people involved based on their professions outside the citizen journalism world. An important group of interest included the facilitators or moderators, producers, editors and those who do the daily management of the respective websites. Knowledge of their routines was deemed necessary so as to get an appreciation of the “gatekeeping” editing process hence, interviews with them were essential. All these again strengthened my choice of purposive sampling.

6.4.2. Participant Characteristics

In terms of the gender characteristics of the participants, I envisaged to ensure equality, despite not establishing the proportions in the beginning. So, imbalances with regards to gender and age were to be reflected in the sample. Nevertheless, gathering such statistics was not achievable simply because in some instances, if contributors wish, they post content anonymously. Although some websites request personal information from participants upon registration, I did not think of having such statistics.

Prior to sending the qualitative questionnaire, I contacted the relevant people through e-mail and asked them to mobilise their contributors to participate in the study. They were very much willing, knowing that the results of the study would benefit them in appreciating the reasons behind the practice. Further contacts were established through snowball sampling, whereby a participant, at times encouraged by someone, also brought in other possible participants. This proved a very practical way of establishing who is contributing to online content hence, it assisted in having more participants prior to contacting one potential participant. The second stage involved emailing the questionnaire to the potential participants by creating a link to the questionnaire. This will be discussed in detail under the 'Qualitative questionnaire' section.

Unsurprisingly, the mainstream of the partakers were male. As noted earlier in this chapter, it was complicated to determine with assurance the gender distribution of the participants. From the observations during a scouting for potential participants when I went through the contributor base on the websites, I realised there were more men than women participating. In particular, on *Sahara Reporters*, I noted more male contributors than females, while on *Global Voices*, gender distribution looked less imbalanced.

Looking at other demographic factors, the age range of the participants was wide, ranging between eighteen and fifty something, but the majority were between their twenties and thirties. The reason for this could be the fact that it is this age group that is mostly technology savvy, as compared to those past this age group, as well as those who have not reached this stage. Based on the age structure of the participants, there is seemingly less evidence of older

people on the whole, probably due to their loyalty to mainstream journalism, or maybe due to the technicalities involved in the processes, which might not appeal or be user-friendly to someone in that bracket of age group. The participants' level of education in this study varied, but it would be fair to say it was relatively high, seeing that many either had at least a degree, or were still university students, even though there were cases of those who had just completed their matric, but were willing to learn or being trained as citizen journalists as in the case of *Iindaba Ziyafika*. Those who were not in the above mentioned bracket either had vocational qualifications or had completed other types of courses. Regarding employment, the majority of the participants were either employed, college or university students or self-employed like the freelancers. The fact that none of the participants mentioned that they had retired complement the point highlighted earlier in this chapter that the elderly are not really actively participating in some kind of citizen journalism. Having provided basic information on the study sample, the following section discusses the qualitative content analysis of the websites in question as well as other related material.



6.5. Research tools

6.5.1. Qualitative content analysis

Historically, content analysis is in two different forms: on one hand is the 'pure' quantitative content analysis while on the other is the 'qualitative content analysis' which analyses emerging themes and issues in media studies. This study uses the latter strand. The most common definition of content analysis is given by Berelson, who argues that it is a "research technique for the objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication" (1952:18). The essential part of this definition is that it is a pointer to some important aspects of the origins and concerns of the method, as revealed in the claim to "objectivity" as well as the emphasis on "manifest" (i.e. observable). Just like the quantitative methods, content analysis is expected to reproduce the rigidity of the natural sciences with regards to studying social experiences (Deacon, *et al.* 1999:115). Though, it is still a debatable issue that the technique affords "value-free insights" when studying content. Hansen, *et al.*, for instance, note that 'objectivity' in content analysis is not a feasible ideal helping to just confuse the interests, values and ways of understanding which underline such research:

Content analysis, of course, could never be objective in the value-free sense of the word: it does not analyse everything there is to analyse in text – instead, the content analyst starts by delineating certain dimensions or aspects of texts for analysis, and in so doing, he/she is of course making a choice – subjective, albeit generally informed by the theoretical framework and ideas which circumscribe the ideas which inform his/her research (Hansen, *et al.* 1998:95).

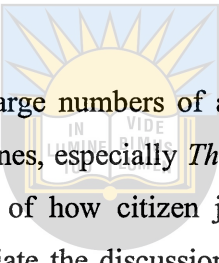
As a result, some definitions of the method omit the references to “objectivity” while emphasis is only put on the condition that it is “systematic” and “replicable”. For instance, Kaplan highlights that content analysis is very important in stating the rate of occurrence or perhaps non-occurrence of signs in a particular discourse in a logical and quantitative manner (1943:230). But Berelson’s original usage of the term, ‘objectivity’ in content analysis has to be taken as referring to the requirement that the categories and units of analysis used must be defined so accurately by the individual researcher that if applied to the same body of content by different analysts, they can produce the same results (1952:16). Thus, objectivity in this sense refers to the way in which the method is implemented on the foundation of clearly devised rules, in such a way that if personal decisions about data are made, it entails that these decisions are directed by a clear set of rules that minimise the likelihood that the findings reflect biases rather than the content of the data being studied (Berelson, 1952:17).

Conceivably, the utmost benefit of content analysis has to do with it being methodical, considering that all the sampled matter undergoes the same procedure. It is in this way that it provides the apparatus for the logical narrative of large quantities of media output, while at the same time allowing for certification of results (Holsti, 1969:127). It is also because of the fact that the method allows to produce the ‘bigger picture’ that it is well suited to dealing with the ‘mass-ness’ of the mass media. Possibly, it “remains the only available tool for establishing maps, however faulty, of [media] output” (Deacon, *et al.* 1999:115). It is for this and other reasons that qualitative content analysis formed part of this study.

In order to familiarise with the citizen journalism websites discussed earlier, I frequently browsed them during the period of this study. To reinforce the discussion on them, I did textual analysis of important documents like the editorial policies. The use of documents in qualitative research is important as they can fruitfully generate more data if the framework in which they were produced and used is seriously considered (Flick, 2006: 252). Content

analysis of the respective websites as well as the participants' contributions definitely added an essential aspect to the analysis.

Nonetheless, the focus of the study would have been too fragmented if I initiated the examination of the website content into the research design. Also, I rejected the idea after realising the impossibility of recognising every participant's input on the websites, given that most of them sometimes write anonymously. Although participants' contributions were not scientifically examined, I made efforts to carefully read and sometimes browse through a series of articles per participant.



In addition to the above, I reviewed large numbers of articles on citizen journalism from online sources, newspapers and magazines, especially *The Media* or its online version. I did this in order to get an understanding of how citizen journalism is being framed in the traditional media, as well as to appreciate the discussions surrounding the phenomenon. It was particularly interesting reading the articles and realising how the journalists and their respective institutions, together with expert analysts in the journalism field who often give remarks on the phenomenon in the public media, engage in debates on how the mediascape is shifting. In most of the articles that I browsed through, there was general consensus that the journalism profession is experiencing a revolution, and in many instances in the conventional media, citizen journalism has caused apprehension. Having gone through lots of data, I was tempted to consider the newspaper coverage analytically and then give the findings as secondary data in the study. Nevertheless, the amount of information that I got could form another research study in its own capacity. Moreover, I phased out the idea as it was not my purpose to investigate the representation of citizen journalism by the mainstream media. Instead, my intention was to give precedence to the perceptions of the citizen journalists.

Having done all of the above in the sequence that it is presented in this chapter, that is, identifying the websites as case studies, identifying the potential participants, as well as doing the content analysis, I felt fully equipped to embark on the next stage of the research, which involved qualitative interviewing through the distribution of the qualitative questionnaire to

the respondents, focus group and the semi-structured in-depth individual interviews. This is discussed in the following sections. Having exhausted quite a number of relevant documents and any other information relating to the subject matter, it is thus feasible to talk about inductive argument as a research methodology.

6.5.2. Inductive Reasoning as a qualitative element

Induction is an element of the qualitative techniques (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). The concept has been a fundamental subject for many philosophers in the previous centuries hence, the name ‘scandal of philosophy’ (Holland, 1986). Induction has been employed to differentiate the two broad research methods: the qualitative and quantitative. Contrasting the quantitative approach, “qualitative researchers use an inductive method: Data are collected relevant to some topic and are grouped into appropriate and meaningful categories; explanations emerge from the data themselves” (Wimmer & Dominick, 2006: 116). Induction is also believed to be the primary and main feature of qualitative methods (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984: 5). Despite the enormous significance of how the authors define qualitative methods, these extracts result in tautology: “it is qualitative because it is inductive, it is inductive because it is qualitative” (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984: 5).

To put it plainly, induction is a reasoning process in which a conclusion is drawn from particular cases. McCreath (1999: 23) defines induction as “any kind of inference in which we move from a finite set of observations about an ‘object’ or a ‘concept’ to a conclusion that is a general description of the object or the concept”. This is the exact opposite of deduction. Mill (1874: 208) defines induction as simply a generalisation of experiment. This shows that Mill perceives the concept as a way of generalising ‘cases’ from specific cases (ibid). Nonetheless, the many definitions of the concept have provided multiple meanings which in the end confuse its understanding. It is no doubt that this philosophy has undergone immense scrutiny in many instances, simply because of the fact that the philosophy is not concerned with application of any theory.

6.5.2.1. Justification for the Inductive Reasoning approach

The inductive perspective is necessary as it helps researchers to assume a reflexive position. As a qualitative approach, inductive reasoning puts the researcher in a constructivist practical

situation which highly considers the influential aspect of the researcher on the data (Zelizer, 2004). Importantly, the method gives the room for scholars to regulate their choice of methodology, the tools they need to use, in as much as it allows them to embrace other forms of research (McCreath, 1999). Inductive reasoning permits researchers to track the transformations in the media: to consider the possible transformation of the news media and latest innovations (Zelizer, 2004). By tracking the transformations, Zelizer means that the method encourages scholars in the journalism field to incorporate the philosophical, economical, sociological, historical and linguistic perceptions (ibid).

This is particularly proper since massive transformations have taken place and are still taking place in the media fraternity. It is a fact that the functions of the media as well as how those working in the media perceive the journalism practice have been changed since the evolution of the Internet, not to mention the integration of commercial goods and of the traditions of journalism in the media (see Zelizer, 2004). Journalism has become part of the daily life such that every individual has got something to say about the practice. It is therefore difficult for scholars in the field to drag them off the industry and more especially, to pull them out of the journalistic dialogues. It is therefore in this regard that Zelizer notes that following the inductive perception assists researchers to have a more appreciation of the lives of journalists and the media, as well as to desist from attaching common values and beliefs in their studies by putting aside predetermined notions and by allowing the meaning to come out of the data (ibid).

Dillon (2012) argues that in mass communication, inductive reasoning would take the form of using new media to share events through social media and e-mail, electronic descriptions of personal situations which may or may not be verifiable in any sense, and the transmission of perceptions to perhaps thousands of other persons (as through *Facebook*, *Twitter*) that the message is believably drawn from a particular case, a case which may be reliable to its base – or a case which is nonsense. It is further argued that rather than the receiver deducing from traditional media the meaning of events, new media provide opportunities to induce perceptions (ibid). It is in this regard that Dillon notes that new media, especially social media, therefore pave the way for more relativistic interpretations of the world. This study thus presents inductive reasoning from both the epistemological as well as the methodological perspectives. This simply means that I also had the task of engaging myself

in the field during the long period of my studies, even before embarking on this particular study: meeting journalists during conferences, observing them in their newsrooms where I could, making efforts to appreciate the journalistic practices.

Of course the induction perspective is regarded as the easiest way and hence, adopted by many researchers. Fortunately, the perspective is not just an approach but it is more than that, in as much as it is the original and accurate way to describe how science is produced (Zelizer, 2004). Hopefully, this study will clearly show that inductive reasoning is applicable to journalism studies as well, and could help moving away from the tendency to look at journalism and the media only but to also account for the new perspectives in media history, argumentative media evaluation, as well as professional sociology (see Dillon, 2012). It has also been further noted that while the journalistic practice seems to be threatened by aspects of citizen journalism, the inductive approach allows scholars not only to critically investigate and validate their personal thoughts (epistemology) or their options (methodology) but it also helps in describing the knowledge production processes which they share with their counterparts (Greenland, 1998). Nonetheless, the key controversial aspect about induction points to 'generalisation'. Some scholars have maintained that deduction for sound inference, while induction is impractical and is non-existent (see Greenland, 1998: 543).

6.5.2.2. Relevance for journalism studies

Researchers often lay their work between induction and deduction. The inductive perspective is adopted by many scholars to understand the empiricist route they would have assumed. Surprisingly, in this particular study, what I noted is much more complicated than these discursive rationalisations. I found myself doing a thorough analysis so as to not only justify my thoughts (epistemology) as a researcher, or alternatives (methodology), but also to describe the knowledge production process. The field of Internet is extremely unpredictable thus, I had to constantly fine-tune my methodological choices, as it is also the rule of induction to be as close as possible to the field so as to make necessary changes. Since blogs are part of the online information dissemination, I chose to examine them as a part of this study, despite knowing the fact that some of the bloggers were not part of the group of citizen journalists contributing news in the aforementioned websites. My assumption was that looking at this subject from a different perspective would definitely strengthen the inductive logic. Interestingly, analysing the discourses and the practices of some of the bloggers clearly

highlighted some discursive approaches and the ways in which some of the journalists assume their identities. My observation made it particularly significant the fact that what is taking place on the cyberspace as well as in the information industry poses a dilemma to the traditional journalists. By mentioning the phrases “journalist” and “journalism”, and by denigrating its representation, the cyberspace is actually abating the professional journalistic identity as well as its historical specificity.

From 2006 to 2009, I had the privilege as a senior student at Rhodes University, to attend the *Highway Africa Conference*, an annual ICT Conference hosted by Rhodes University in Grahamstown, South Africa. The 2012 theme, *Africa Rising*, also involved interrogating aspects of the role played by social media in the continent (Kabwato, 2012). The conference is a platform for critical discussions on journalism, technology and the media, bearing in mind that the challenges in the production of media and its distribution impinge on the journalistic practices. Topics previously discussed highlighted how the newspaper industry is being threatened by technology and convergence, the future of the news, the popularity of tabloid media, to mention but a few. In the year 2008, the thematic focus was on “Citizen Journalism, Journalism for Citizens”. The conference sought to address many issues regarding the objectives of journalism in society, and how ordinary citizens fit within those objectives with their double roles as both media content producers and consumers. The sessions on the onset of citizen media made me realise Dan Gillmor’s ideas on citizen journalism. His phenomenal book, *We the Media: Grassroots Journalism by the People, for the People* really embraces the citizen journalism practice. Through the conferences, I gained vast insights into the business side of journalism as I listened to debates about ICTs and how they have influenced the media terrain. All in all, the conferences, the interviews and the research afforded me a strong foundation on which to construct my arguments from an inductive perspective.

6.5.3. Qualitative Interviews and justification

Interviews are the most popular data collection tools in the qualitative research, as the method affords the necessary data from which to build an appreciation of the relationship between social players and their environments (Bryman, 2004). Gaskell concurs with the above assertion, noting that the aim is a well cemented comprehension of the beliefs, attitudes,

motivations and values, together with the actions of individuals in a specific social framework (2000: 39). Accordingly, since qualitative interviewing aims to get respondents' life-worlds from their personal perspectives, I considered the method more suitable for this study.

It is imperative at this point to indicate that the aim of this particular study was to access people involved in citizen journalism in one way or the other, and get detailed information on their activities. So, the principal data collection method chosen was the self completion qualitative questionnaire. To get as much data as possible, this was followed by a set of questions meant for focus group discussions. Importantly, I also conducted the semi structured in-depth interviews. The reason for doing this was to further clarify some concepts that surfaced from the findings gathered through the questionnaire as well as the focus group data. Known as triangulation, the most benefit linked to mixing the methods described above is noted by Orgad who argues:

Combining offline and online interactions with informants enhances the ways in which researchers are positioned in relation to their informants, and the ways they come to know them. As a consequence, arguably, the analysis that is being produced is enriched. (2005: 62)

An interview is a social contact aimed at generating knowledge because of its interactive nature (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995: 141). Furthermore, the result of an interview is influenced by the interview situation, how the participants perceive themselves against each other, as well as the power relations between them. It is in this regard that Kvale observes:

The conversation in a research interview is not the reciprocal interaction of two equal partners. There is a definite asymmetry of power: The interviewer defines the situation, introduces the topics of the conversation, and through further questions steers the course of the interview (1996: 126).

In addition, the approach applied when asking questions also influences the interview. I chose to do the qualitative questionnaire, face-to-face focus groups, as well as semi-structured in-depth interviews, mostly with open-ended questions since despite wanting some flexibility, I also had predestined themes and particular questions that I employed to steer the discussion. The number of interviews to conduct is usually dependent on the research problem as well as the extent to which additional interviews would generate new knowledge

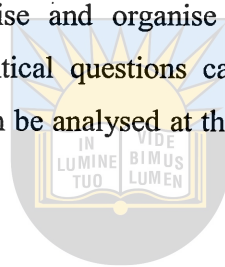
(Kvale, 1996). Thus, for this study, the number of interviewees is a function of the design of the study, the research interests, as well as the questions, with a focus on the subject matter. Considering the need to maintain focus and context of the interview scenario, I developed three different types of tailor-made interviews: one for the qualitative questionnaire, the other for the focus group interviews, then the last one for the in-depth interviews (see Appendices 2-4).

Despite this research being a sociological investigation aimed at shedding light on the social process of citizen journalism, one can argue that the social world has got its own problems, considering that it is made up of people in their everyday situations (Gaskell, 2000: 38). Thus, just like any other methods, qualitative interviews do have their own shortfalls. First of all, qualitative interviews heavily depend on the subjective perspectives of the respondents. That means they do not afford valid, objective and reliable data. It is further argued that qualitative interviews are rather unscientific and commonsensical hence, they are appropriate for exploration rather than for hypothesis testing (Kvale, 1996: 291). Kvale's criticisms are more nuanced and incorporate, for instance, how qualitative interviews emphasise respondents' verbal messages instead of their actual actions, and the risk of underestimating the social dynamics of the respondents and the broader context in which they are located (1996: 295). However, since qualitative interviews are used in many ways, these criticisms do not apply in every situation, but it depends on the purpose and how the interviews are addressed in the particular studies.

6.5.4. Qualitative questionnaire and its justification

Due to the different geographical locations of the study, the best method to gather data was through the electronic survey. The advantage of the electronic survey is that it affords users the ability to fill in the questionnaire at their own convenient time and space. The method was also the effective one considering that the respondents were all quite literate in terms of using the computing and being able to express their attitudes and feelings through virtual atmospheres. Therefore, the respondent base was drawn from the broader populace, to target those who produced citizen media, in opposition to being "self selected" (Corley, 2007: 3). Though, I presumed that the entire population of the potential respondents self identify themselves as "citizen journalists".

Historically, the qualitative questionnaire is known to be the most structured form of questioning (Deacon, *et al.* 1999: 64). However, this study employed an open-ended qualitative questionnaire technique which is almost like an in-depth interview in many ways. It is in this way that the questionnaire allowed me to collect data about the respondents' attitudes, behaviour and opinions on a wide range of topics or issues concerning citizen journalism (Hansen, *et al.* 1998:225). Qualitative questionnaires are of a standard format, and can differ noticeably depending on the different needs of each individual study. Hansen et al argue that qualitative questionnaires can be used in face-to-face situations (most common), or handed out, or posted to individuals for self completion, or completed by the interviewers telephonically (see Hansen et al., 1998). The main benefit of using the qualitative questionnaires is that they standardise and organise the collection and processing of information in such a way that identical questions can be asked to a large number of individuals while the data obtained can be analysed at the researcher's own time (Hansen, *et al.* 1998:225).



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But, it is however the needs of the research that influence the types of questions to be asked, because some qualitative questionnaires merely seek out factual information which require either 'yes' or 'no'. Others look for opinions or attitudes and therefore, open-ended questions are used. This study relied on the latter as the aim was to find out the respondents' attitudes, opinions and experiences of citizen journalism. Founded in the qualitative research tradition, qualitative questionnaires are an endeavour at "seeing the world through their [respondents'] eyes", that is, viewing perceptions from the point of views of the people under investigation rather than from the perspective of the detached, 'objective' laboratory scientist (Bryman, 1988: 61). For the researcher, every individual has a personal social history and perspective on the world hence, the best way to get a slice of that world is through open and often lengthy observation and/or dialogue (Fontana & Frey, 1994: 374; Lindlof, 1995:6). Fortunately though, personal and social skills of the researcher do not apply when administering self-completion qualitative questionnaire, as they do not rely on active social interaction (Deacon, *et al.* 1999:69).

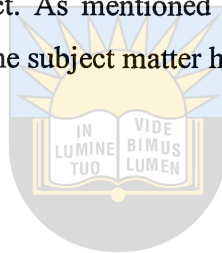
Essentially, some consideration must be paid to the question of sampling when using qualitative questionnaire. The question of just how many respondents to send the questionnaire to is very critical (Hansen, *et al.* 1998: 226). Hansen et al also note that it is clearly advisable to send them to as many people as possible so that one will be able to generalise the findings, even though this is not always possible. Other important issues concerning the questionnaire are the design as well the questioning style. Accordingly, I applied Lumsden's design process for electronic based surveys (2007: 46). The question style included multiple choices as well as the short answer. After designing the survey, I sent it to the administrators of the websites for them to advise accordingly in terms of format, language and content which would suit their users. The procedure also covered pilot process, as the respective administrators assessed the content while at the same time analysing the technical matters of the survey. After they and I were satisfied, they began the administration process.

The questionnaire was administered to a purposively selected group of citizen journalists. I envisaged emailing the questionnaire to some of the respondents. Unfortunately, I foresaw many challenges, principal among them was that I did not have all of the journalists' email or contact details, except for a few with whom I had established rapport. Trying to get the webmasters to send the questionnaire to the journalists on my behalf proved difficult mostly due to ethical reasons. As a result, it was the management of each of the websites that helped me in the distribution of the survey, through newsletters, posts in the user groups, as well as banner advertising. To increase the response rate, I did not set any closing date, but in a short space of time, my potential respondents had obliged, with 57 people having responded to most or all of the questions. I have to repeat the fact that this method was chosen for the simple reason that it is the most appropriate method that enabled me to get a significant amount of information from people from far-flung locations relatively faster and inexpensively (Hansen, *et al.* 1998: 225).

6.5.5. Focus Group discussion and its justification

Lunt and Livingstone acknowledge that focus groups are particularly functional in discerning meanings and perceptions from participants, in as much as they aim to present insights on specific aspects by examining small groups of participants' opinions, behaviours and attitudes

(1996:79). Traditionally, focus groups are done face-to-face, with the facilitator and the participants meeting in a predetermined setting in order to deliberate on the subject matter. Equally, this study sought the expertise of journalists, academics in the journalism field, journalism students, as well ordinary citizens who are actively engaged in citizen journalism. I need to reiterate that doing focus group discussions with citizen journalists from *Global Voices Online* and *Sahara Reporters* was logistically impossible since mobilising them to convene at particular place was prohibited by the geographical locations of the participants and myself as well thus, focus group interviews were only done with participants mostly associated with *Indaba Ziyafika*, due to the issue of proximity. It was easier for me to connect and come into contact with the participants, most of who were based in the Grahamstown, the home of the project. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, these target groups were all knowledgeable about the subject matter hence, they qualified to participate in the focus group interviews.



I carried out three separate focus group interviews, each with a different group of participants. The first group comprised experts in the field of journalism. Amongst the six participants was an editor of a community newspaper in the Eastern Cape Province, two academic lecturers from Rhodes' School of Journalism and Media studies, one of which specialises in New Media while the other one is a Professor who also doubles as a media analyst. The other three consisted of two professional journalists (one of them has his own blog) from the Grahamstown Community Radio, as well as a staff member of the *Indaba Ziyafika* project. Perhaps, before I describe the two remaining set of groups, it is imperative to highlight that I chose Grahamstown as the destination for the focus group discussions because the small town seems to be flourishing with citizen journalism projects, thanks to Rhodes University's school of Journalism and Media studies staff and students. It is for that reason that I identified potential participants who would enrich this study with their first-hand accounts of citizen journalism activities.

Given the rationale behind the *Indaba Ziyafika* project as illustrated in Chapter 5, I found it invaluable to do focus group discussions with the ordinary citizens of Grahamstown who are engaged with the *Indaba Ziyafika* project. Interestingly, the participants in this category have

other job titles like petrol attendant, till operator, restaurant servers, as well as shop assistants. It was really interesting to probe these participants into explaining why they are actively involved in citizen journalism. This group had five participants. The last group of participants comprised three undergraduate and three postgraduate students from the school of Journalism who are also part of the *Iindaba Ziyafika* project. Besides being part of this project, some contribute news to the *Grocott's Mail* newspaper, as well as the university newsletters. Amongst the six participants, three of them admitted to having their own blogs.

Broadly speaking, it was these and other factors that pushed me to complement data from the surveys with that from focus group discussions. It is also necessary to acknowledge that getting information from such diverse groups of people, from experts, to students, to ordinary citizens was both inspiring and interesting. During the sessions, the participants discussed general issues concerning the journalism practice, their perspectives of their roles in the practice and how they perceive the future of the journalistic terrain. As indicated above, the participants were selected based on their geographic location, as well as their ability to provide me with relevant information. I initially contacted the editor of the *Grocott's Mail*, the New Media lecturer from Rhodes' school of journalism, as well as one journalist from Radio Grahamstown, who helped in identifying potential participants for the discussions. Overall, 17 people participated in the focus groups. No financial incentives were given to the participants. As mentioned earlier, the three different sets of focus groups were done with a group size of five to six participants at a time. This was manageable in terms of quality as well as what came out of the conversations (Lunt & Livingstone, 1996). The conversations lasted an average of an hour. With the expert as well as the student groups, the location for the group discussions was one of the seminar rooms in the Africa Media Matrix building at the Rhodes University's School of Journalism and Media Studies centre. The other discussion was done in the *Grocott's Mail* building. I as the moderator followed the conventional role of monitoring the interactions, promoting participation and contribution from participants, as well as managing interruptions or distractions (Lunt & Livingstone, 1996).

The study analysis was rooted from the grounded theory approach which suggests that interview transcripts should be reviewed then the emerging themes must be developed on the

basis of the discussions by the participants. This approach is grounded in the association between data and the groupings in which they are coded, which are classified a posteriori (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). Information from the conversations is then examined, of course not forgetting the group dynamics of the focus groups, which is an essential component for the context of the research (Lunt & Livingstone, 1996).

6.5.6. Semi-structured In-depth Interviews and their justification

In-depth semi-structured interviews were done in order to probe how participants perceived their roles as citizen journalists, as well as how they respond to its interpellations. For the non citizen journalists that were interviewed, the aim was to get their sentiments on the practice. Arguably, interviews present a substantial room for those who are being interviewed to give in-depth information regarding their perceptions and encounter (Seidman, 1991). As highlighted earlier in this chapter, qualitative interviews present an opportunity for the researcher to learn some aspects which cannot be directly observed by way of validation, verification or remarks on the data acquired from previous sources (Lindlof, 1995; Connole, 1998). Grounded in qualitative research, the *sine qua non* of semi-structured in-depth interviews is seeing the social phenomenon being investigated from the perspective of the actor (Bryman, 1984:77-78). Furthermore, it allows one to appreciate and explain procedures and uncertainties, in as much as it allows for the establishment of new knowledge which cannot be easily explained by words, themes and other variables, thus allowing the participants to describe processes in their own words (Dhoest, 2004: 395). It has been remarked that, “the best way to find out what people think about something is to ask them” (Jensen, 1982: 240). That is the reason why I considered in depth interviews to complement the other research tools discussed earlier.

Prior to discussing the in-depth interviews in detail, there is need to reiterate that probing participants more than once often helps to surpass the “staged interview production”, and to give the interviewer some room to penetrate deeper into the territory of the interviewees (see Yanos & Hopper, 2008). It is also always important to continuously get information as it helps to appreciate participants and their situations, of course not by way of participant observation, but by means of online research (Yanos & Hopper, 2008).

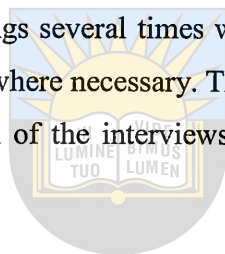
Having acquired much data from citizen journalists through the questionnaire, it was simply reasonable at this point to interview the industry experts in order to get their feelings, attitudes and opinions on the subject matter. Since these were follow up interviews, I randomly sampled from the people who had previously participated in either the survey or the focus group discussions. Amongst the interviewees were a Professor of media and journalism, an editor, a journalist and a media analyst who also blogs with one of the websites mentioned earlier on. Since most of these people are busy professionals who indicated they would not have time for face to face interviews, the interviews were done telephonically. The follow up interviews were meant to clarify certain issues that might not been thoroughly tackled during the focus group discussions. Central to the success of these in-depth interviews was the establishment of a rapport between me as the interviewer and the interviewees, since the goal of the technique is to understand rather than interrogating. I have to appreciate that I was able to rid myself of the 'researcher role' and thus tried to see the situation through the lenses of those being interviewed (Fontana & Frey, 1994: 367). This is in keeping with one of the epistemological underpinnings of qualitative research, that is, its commitment to viewing the social reality through the eyes of the actor (Lindlof, 1995: 21).

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6.6. Strategies of Data Analysis

It has been argued that there is neither a specific time to commence the process of data analysis, nor is there a clearly marked boundary indicating the beginning, the middle or the end of data analysis (Stake, 1995: 71). Again, data analysis "is a process of inductive reasoning, thinking and theorising" (Zelizer, 2004). Thus, data collection and analysis take place simultaneously in qualitative research (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998: 140). The first stage of data analysis entailed the collection of all the transcripts, documents, field notes, as well as other relevant materials from the literature (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). It is at this stage that a thorough scrutiny of the materials was done in order to ensure that I had the data on my fingertips. In the process, it was necessary to jot down important points that crossed my mind as I sifted through the data, while at the same time highlighting themes and patterns that emerged (ibid). I spent the next phase developing concepts, the process of which I have to admit was a discerning one. Doing so was essential since it is only through concepts that I could progress from just describing to interpreting and then theorising (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998: 140).

Following the development of concepts, I had to 'go back' and engage with theories and literature informing the study, as the process helps to connect with the data that direct the study. Taylor and Bogdan (1998) argue that the reason is not to match data and theory. Instead, theory serves as the foundation of the theoretical underpinnings in the study. Having done that, it became easier to get to the next step, which entails converging and analysing all the data, taking into consideration important ideas, concepts, themes and interpretations. This is called coding. With this background in mind, it was fairly possible to employ the data analysis techniques as suggested above. The most tedious task was transcribing the interviews. In order to familiarise with the transcribed interviews, and to ensure proper transcription, I listened to the recordings several times while at the same time checking the transcriptions and making corrections where necessary. This presented the benefit of getting a more comprehension and appreciation of the interviews by simply paying attention to the audio.



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Since the study focused on participants' personal viewpoints on citizen journalism by using the case study design, thematic coding was also deemed a suitable method of data analysis. I followed Flick (1998), who defines thematic coding from Strauss' perspective (1987). Related to this study, Flick scrutinised interview data from comparative studies by paying attention to the distribution of perceptions on an experience, assuming that in diverse social groups, diverse opinions can be recognised (1998: 187). On that note, Flick points that the procedure in thematic coding involves multiple stages which start from identifying each case, that is, data concerning the participants, a gist of main keywords highlighted by the participants, together with a brief description that brings in the essence of the interview content. For theoretical coding, I made use of NVivo. The software allows uploading interview transcripts and doing the thematic coding. It is at this point that I also made notes about exciting passages, key points, as well as potential quotes. Following Flick's (1998) procedure which emphasises open and selective coding, I also altered it by developing a coding structure from the beginning on the basis of the themes covered in the interviews, as well as inserting new sub categories during the course of action.

In addition to following the procedure outlined above, I also employed common diverse techniques to analysing interviews. For example, the most familiar approach to the analysis of interviews is to read through interviews and get an overall sense, revisiting the passages and quantifying statements which indicate diverse attitudes to the phenomenon, critically interpreting some statements, casting aspects of the interviews into narratives, to name but a few (Kvale, 1996: 203-204). For that reason, as described above, and as suggested by the process, the authenticity of the ways in which I interpreted the transcripts was not as comprehensible as the procedure suggested by Flick.

6.7. Ethical Considerations

Social science research also involves some kind of ethical issues. This is mostly important when investigations engage research participants. It is in this view that I also considered a number of aspects in relation to participants in this study. Following the University of Fort Hare's ethical policy on research and more especially the rules concerning informed consent, I explained to interviewees their rights as research participants. I also applied for ethical clearance from the University Research and Ethics Committee (see Appendix 1). In addition, before engaging the participants, it was necessary that they understand from the beginning, the aims and objectives of the study. I indicated to them how much of their time would be required to participate in the study. Essentially, I also had the role of explaining how the study would be of benefit to them as well as the organisations in which they contribute news. Among others, I made sure that participants were treated equally and with respect, putting into consideration their decisions and values, and most importantly, obtaining an informed consent as well ensuring no harm on the participants (Schroder et al., 2003: 99). Considering the diversity of the participants, I had to ensure sensitivity to the cultural differences that existed amongst them.

With regards to anonymity, some participants had no problems with their actual names being used, but others preferred the offered option of anonymity hence, some of the participants' names might be indicated while others are shown anonymously. It is a common tradition in qualitative research to make names of participants and or organisations anonymous, since it is

believed to protect participants. Nonetheless, evidence to maintain this notion that naming participants is unsafe to them is virtually non-existent.

6.8. Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to provide a detailed presentation of the research methods, procedures and techniques employed to achieve the objectives of the study. As indicated above, the discussion highlighted the appropriateness of the chosen qualitative methodology. Among other things, it has been revealed that triangulation in data collection is the best possible means of getting as much information as possible. However, the data collection stage was not without its challenges. First of all, I must admit that dealing with a multicultural three-case study research design posed its advantages as well as challenges. A major setback has been how the process was compromised in terms of how much time and resources were devoted to individual cases and accordingly, the difficulties encountered in analysing the cases. From data collection to the analysis, the general sophistication of the research certainly amplifies in a research design of this nature. However, the whole process was a learning curve, and, as a general reflection, the research techniques improved with each and every step, though along the way I felt that some issues of the study could have been better clarified from the beginning of the process of research. In other words, for instance, there evidently could have been numerous ways to research the phenomenon under discussion. However, given my endeavour to privilege the views of citizens involved in news making, it can thus be argued that employing the qualitative methods highlighted above was the most appropriate thing to do. From selecting case studies in their frameworks, to the analysis of the data, it is clear that the methods applied paved the way for the accumulation of truthful and remarkable findings, which are presented in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 7

ANALYSIS OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

“Citizen Journalism is capable of being professional and can add value to a mainstream media, but the world is just at a transitional point where it’s figuring out what its future holds”- Author unknown

7.1. Introduction

Prior to presenting the key findings of this study, there is need to reiterate that the purpose of this study was, among other things, to develop an insight into the practice of citizen journalism. Through the methodological approaches employed, I realised that citizen journalists are mostly inspired by the desire to participate in a creative process of content production and consumption, and to distribute it to the broader audience. Below is detailed description of the findings from the study. Upon analysing the data, I realised that most of the themes from the responses are overlapping and this is also evident in the discussion below, therefore, presenting the data from each and every research tool becomes repetitive. In that regard, I grouped the responses based on the major themes identified. So, in explaining the themes and where direct words are quoted from the participants, I will try as much as possible to indicate that this response is from a focus group discussion or any other research tool used for data collection.

7.2. Respondents’ Demographics

At the data analysis stage, I made pertinent observations about the respondents. The observations could be symptomatic of the broader citizen journalist terrain. An unexpected finding revealed that most of the participants were males. While I expected some kind of more homogenous results in terms of gender, the results echoed a typical traditional newsroom, where it is common to find more males and few female journalists, with even a very small portion in managerial roles. I envisaged the findings indicating greater numbers in terms of the female ratio, considering that the environment in which the journalists participate is not characteristic of the organised prejudice as traditional journalism. Drawing from the results of this study, further investigations would be relevant in order to ascertain if this is the

trend in the broader citizen journalism environment. It would be interesting to know the reasons for such discrepancies.

The results indicated most of the citizen journalists who responded to the questionnaire and participated in the focus group discussions falling in the twenty to fifty something age bracket. As argued in the methodology chapter, it can be assumed that these citizens are the ones who are mostly techno savvy, while most of those above this age group might not be digital natives¹⁰. It could also mean that the digital immigrants have largely been oriented by the traditions of the mainstream media. While it is popularly believed that it is the digital natives who are engaging in citizen journalism activities, this study has also revealed that some of them are in fact digital immigrants taking the helm of technologies and the media that are comparatively weird to them and they have not experienced the digital culture before.

As part of an effort to further appreciate citizen journalists and their work, I went further to probe them about their level of journalism training as well as their competencies in various journalistic skills. This information was deemed essential as it could help to suggest ways in which citizen journalism could be enhanced and what potential plans can be put in place to promote content of high quality. The findings also clearly indicated that a huge number of the participants have received no formal training in journalism skills. One participant admitted to having no kind of training in this regard but was “willing to learn”.

Given this unsurprising situation, it should however be noted that if citizen journalism is a potential major actor in the multiperspectival media sphere, then serious consideration should be given so as to ensure that citizen journalists receive some kind of training. The training could be in the form of professional-to-amateur support, peer-to-peer support or webinars. The *Iindaba Ziyafika* project stood out as an exception in which citizen journalists receive a six week training in order to be successful in their operations as citizen journalists. The journalists from this project admitted to have undergone training. However, despite that, they

¹⁰ The so called digital natives refers to the generation of people born during or after the rise of digital technologies while digital immigrants are those born before the introduction of digital technologies. The main argument thus is that the two worldviews that they represent are so different.

still do not regard themselves as professionals. Likewise, there are a number of practitioners who are professional journalists within the citizen journalism. Delegating them as mentors to citizen journalists has the capacity to boost the quality of their journalistic work, as well as how they relate with the traditional media. With the proliferation of the practice, perhaps attention needs to be focused on both open source and institutionalised ways in which citizen journalists could often be educated in journalism theory and practice which includes the production techniques.

7.3. Respondent perceptions of the citizen journalism practice

I will start this discussion with a response from one of the participants from the survey:

Citizen journalism is simply highlighting the changes currently taking place in the media fraternity. So, we are witnessing the decline of big media and the rise of citizen journalism. I strongly believe journalism is much too important to leave to large corporations, and I think this kind is a better system of news dissemination in the whole world.

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As would be expected, one of the leading questions to the participants was to get their understanding of the practice of citizen journalism. The responses gathered from the different research tools showed that the participants pointed to one thing: the act of non professionals engaging in journalistic activities. Although they responded in varying ways and degrees, the general consensus was that citizen journalism is about ordinary people who have become part of the news process. They also unanimously argued that the practice has afforded ordinary people the room to express their feelings, attitudes and beliefs through the news gathering process. Interesting responses emanated from the questionnaires, the focus group discussions to the in depth interviews. Asking them their definition of citizen journalism and what they think could have perpetuated the practice, below are some of the responses drawn from across the different research tools used:

Citizen journalism is an act that has given the media consumers the opportunity to practice the journalism profession so that people are not just audiences but they also contribute in the news making process. In other words, it is a mechanism that has empowered the general public by getting them directly involved in journalism practice. Now the role of the audience has changed from being just sources of news or just providing feedback (Respondent 1).

It is no doubt, the accessibility of these mobile technologies and the internet has brought about the activity and it has been great for the majority of the people. I mean, with them (the technologies), news has become so immediate and the correctness of it is something else. These days, you meet with something that you think could be 'cool' for your facebook page, you just tap it in for public consumption (Respondent 2).

I think it's the modern technologies that have made it easy for everyone to do journalism. So the general public has taken advantage of that to address some important political, social and economic issues affecting them. The phenomenon is in fact fastracking the democratic media revolution and promoting social change. People have been given the media tools to write and record news. What we have in the end is what is important, that is, a skilled citizenry and a society that is well-informed (Respondent 3).

These are people who have got stories to tell, and what seems to have triggered the practice is the feeling that the mainstream media are not doing enough to represent the ordinary citizens' voices hence, they came on board to represent themselves, of course a move which has not gone down well with the mainstream media organisations. The other thing is, the society feels like there are certain things that they should be hearing from the media, but then the media do not give coverage of these, for example, if you peruse through most of the stories that they write about, one wonders where they got them from, because you would not have heard a single thing about that story from the mainstream media. So, citizen journalists kind of 'whistle blow', bringing to the attention of the populace news that you have never heard of. However, these stories would have always come out as rumours and the mainstream media decide to sweep it under the carpet, then, that is the kind of information that you find posted online by citizen journalists (Respondent 4).

The above response was from a professional who does not actively contribute citizen material but is an expert in the field of journalism and the media. The sentiments from this respondent (Respondent 4) above reminded me of a blogger who goes by the pseudonym *Baba Jukwa* (Shona translation for Jukwa's father) on *Facebook*. The person is a Zimbabwean who is suspected of being a ZANU PF party insider who has become part of some rebels against the ruling ZANU PF government. On his *Facebook* page, Baba Jukwa describes himself as a "Concerned Father, fighting nepotism and directly linking community with their Leaders, Government, MPs and Ministers". He also refers to himself in the Shona language as "*mupupuri wezvokwadi*", literally meaning "the harbinger of truth". With more than four hundred thousand 'likes' on his *Facebook* page, Baba Jukwa became popular for criticising the regime by exposing some secretive operations within the ruling party (see Baba Jukwa *Facebook* page).

Since he gained popularity in the July 2013 election build up, some of the issues he has pre-empted include vote rigging by the ruling party, corruption plots, murders, assassinations and various crimes allegedly committed by officials. At some point, Baba Jukwa predicted the death of a former minister Edward Chindori-Chininga who died in a car accident nine days later (NewsDay, 2013). The faceless Baba Jukwa is believed to have shaken the political arena in the country so much that the president reportedly offered \$300,000 to anyone who could unmask this character called Baba Jukwa (BusinessDay, 2013). In the process, some people were arrested for allegedly being the faces behind the prominent Baba Jukwa.

Through this online platform, the July 2013 pre-election period saw the proliferation of a new breed of citizen journalists manifesting through Zimbabweans in all spheres of the world. What made the *Facebook* character Baba Jukwa prominent was the political issues that he tackled without fear or political bias. The online platform became an available source of news and a round-table for public engagement. Some of the issues discussed on the platform were never heard of before, and would never feature in any mainstream publication, but Baba Jukwa seemed to be well informed enough such that he would update Zimbabweans with every little bit of information that he thought was necessary. What is clear here is that the decentralised nature of the digital media has seen more information being disseminated to the citizens without gatekeeping. The popular Baba Jukwa platform has shown how citizens have become watchdogs constantly scrutinising and monitoring those in political power and putting them under surveillance and regular attack. This subject will be discussed in detail later in this chapter.

Besides the unanimous definitions on the concept, one respondent from a focus group discussion did acknowledge the practice, but preferred not to call them citizen journalists. The respondent is a former journalist and is now an academic in the field of journalism studies. His response was as follows:

Well, first of all I don't usually regard that term, but I do regard the practice. I don't know, but I just don't think it's appropriate to say citizen journalist. All journalists are citizens, including the traditional journalist. I prefer using other terms like, say, network journalism, because of the way it coordinates the whole process of

journalism. The process is simply spectacular journalism being done by non journalist people.

The above response sparked some bit of debate, with one of the participants in the group arguing that the reason for not referring to them as citizen journalists might be because “we know journalists as the people who are licensed to operate journalism... with citizen journalism, we are seeing people witnessing news and capturing it on their phones then eventually share that with the world over the Internet”. Having heard a different perception for the first time from the respondents, I probed further by asking what the respondent thought about the people involved in the practice and not the practice itself. Before he responded, an editor of a local publication who was amongst the participants responded as follows:

I personally think reporting is a highly socially valuable activity, and to be honest, citizen journalists that I have seen on the Internet don't do serious reporting. I don't remember any one citizen journalist going out to interview sources. They don't seek information. It's either he just sits in front of his computer and start posting things online and say hey you world, look, this is what is happening in Grahamstown or Port Elizabeth. But traditionally, we do interviews to support those claims, so without such proof, how do we know if the person is just 'daydreaming' whilst sitting in front of the computer?

The academic lecturer concurred:

Yes. It involves what we used to do as journalists, but it seems everything is changing now, maybe for the better or for worse. Traditionally, you go out and interview people all day, and you try to find out what's going on, then you present as accurate a report as you can to the general public on what's going on. In other words, you gather the news and bring it to the public. Not that I resent citizen journalism, but there are some things about it that I don't understand. Honestly, how can anyone just wake up from nowhere and start reporting news. All the professionals undergo some kind of training. Talk of the lawyers, the doctors, the mechanics. So, journalism is no different, people should get the necessary training.

These responses seem to have answered some of the questions that I was still going to ask them, of which I still did when the time was right. The responses tackled some of the heated arguments against the practice of citizen journalism: issues of credibility, accuracy and

objectivity. These will form the second part of the chapter and will be discussed in detail later.

7.4. The Rising Phenomenon: Former audiences as ‘Producers’

One of the attractions of the citizen journalism phenomenon is the liberty that individual partakers have “to play multiple roles simultaneously - publisher, commentator, moderator, writer, and documentarian”, of which the practice has helped people to correspond in simpler and easier ways (Bowman & Willis, 2003). This is evident of how the 21st century has been characterised by media audiences who are more authoritative and can take advantage of the benefits of the networked world, as noted by Gillmor:

Once mere consumers of news, the audience is learning how to get a better, timelier report. It’s also learning how to join the process of journalism, helping to create a massive conversation and, in some cases, doing a better job than the professionals...In the end, we’ll have more voices and more options (2004: xiv).

Bruns (2007) conceptualises the product of the combination of concerted production and usage as user-led content, which produces what he models as ‘produsage’, that is,

...the collaborative and continuous building and extending of existing content in pursuit of further improvement...in such models, the production of ideas takes place in a collaborative, participatory environment which breaks down the boundaries between producers and consumers, enabling all participants to be users as well as producers of information and knowledge.

The participants interviewed in this study did confirm the above assertion. From their responses, it has been noted that not only are more people getting their news from the Internet, but they are also doing it in new and various ways. By gathering, sharing and personalising the news they consume, audiences in a sense have become not only their own editors, but also decisive agents in pursuit of news stories. One participant from the survey argued that this process has not only liberalised the media fraternity, but also challenged those in the mainstream media to change the way they produce news:

We like what we are doing, as everybody can see. And this is not just about writing, it’s like the old system of news production and consumption has been reinvented,

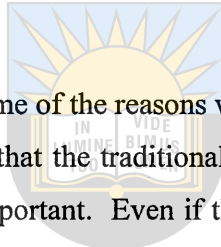
whereby anyone can write and report news. The point here is that we are telling news in our own words. What we do is just to link together information, opinion, and intimate details into ways which we think can complement the stories provided by news outlets. This poses a big challenge on those who call themselves professionals, because it means they have to increase their standards in order that they differentiate themselves from the rest...

In order to gain insights as to the reasons for producing citizen journalism content, respondents to the survey elaborated as to why they contribute in news production and consumption when they are not professionally mandated to do so, and why they think their content is unique from that offered by traditional journalism. Unexpectedly, most of them indicated the need to offer some kind of ‘truth telling’ as well as ‘community building’. This notion of wanting to tell the truth triggered me to find out more about it, having been given the perception that this ‘truth’ was not presented in the mainstream media. Prompting them further as to what they meant, a student respondent from a focus group discussion had this to say:

You know, the thing is we are very concerned about telling it as it is, and we want the whole community to know the truth. Our concern is especially those things that they consider unimportant, to us they are very important, and those are the issues that we want talked about even in the mainstream media. But what do they do, they sideline them saying they are not important. We as citizen journalists are picking up on those pieces and saying no, this is what we want to hear, because the truth of the matter is that these stories really matter in our day to day lives. So, you can say that we are also playing the watchdog role...

In her response, she further indicated that some of the stories they write about include human rights abuses at the hands of those in political power. To add to that, she gave reference to a video that was posted by a Zimbabwean citizen reporter. The video showed the police beating some members of the public who allegedly belonged to some opposition parties and were being tormented for campaigning against the President of the Republic of Zimbabwe. Interestingly, the idea of writing about that which the mainstream media are shunning directly resonates with the ‘agenda cutting’ approach which will be discussed later in this chapter. In an in-depth interview with a media analyst, he concurred with the above notion that the mainstream media do not represent the communities the way they are supposed to, hence, citizen journalists tackle their issues from varying perspectives:

The thing with citizen journalists is that they have the ability to present on a range of perspectives. They are doing journalism at the grassroots level, as some say. It is this unique 'first hand' account of events and incidents which has cultivated the potential to provide much deeper coverage of issues and moves away from event-based journalism, which is often historical and not contextualised. It is a fact that traditional media tend to use people in positions of authority and experts as their sources of information. For instance, when reporting about gender-based violence, their sources are the police or the lawyers. But where are the voices of the survivors of that kind of violence? In other words, traditional media is not deeply rooted in the community and have been failing to give a 'first hand' account of the reality on the ground. That's where the community members come in to tell their own stories which represent them in their own way. So you can see how citizen journalism is offering the alternative platforms for expression to citizens, particularly in situations where politics, culture and beliefs have the potential to limit citizen's ability to express themselves freely. That's the main secret ingredient of citizen journalism.



The above sentiments clearly reveal some of the reasons why citizens have become interested in producing their own news, the fact that the traditional media seem to ignore some of the stories that the community consider important. Even if the citizens take their 'valuable' and interesting news source and content to the newsrooms, to their surprise the 'something big' does not appear in the newspapers. This sidelining of their content by the mainstream media does not only frustrate the ordinary citizens, it also betrays them. Seeing themselves as journalists as well, the ordinary citizens were of the opinion that they also contribute meaningfully to the news production and consumption process, just the same way traditional journalists do. Another participant from a focus group discussion had this to say:

... it's not like there is much difference between the ways in which we report. I guess the only difference is that which we consider as news. Because, you go to them and tell them to come and see the pipes that are bursting in your community, they do not respond immediately. All they care about is rushing to an accident scene. So for them, an accident is more newsworthy than a bursting pipe in the location, you get what I am saying. So how is the municipality going to respond if such things are not reported in their newspapers? The only way to let them take action is to let people out there know what is happening, or else you can spend the whole week without water. So, if the journalist does not see that as important, we take it upon ourselves and let the world know that this is what is happening in Port Alfred.

The above assertion also clearly shows how citizen journalism acts as a political tool, the subject which will be discussed later in this chapter. Probing them on what actually caused the rise of citizen journalism, the unanimous agreement pointed to the availability of mobile

technologies which mainly grew so rapidly in the 21st century. This is indicated in the responses quoted earlier.

Responding to the boom in technologies, news outlets began to aggressively take advantage of this digital platform to deliver instantly updated text, audio and images. Mobile phones have had a long history of being used to improve the human need for interaction via SMS text messages. It has been noted that Finland, which was the home of Nokia (now closed down and bought out by Microsoft), is amongst the highest in terms of mobile phone usage in the world, with the young Finns using their SMS text system as their primary means of communication (Ward, 2003: 16). Accordingly, Alozie, Akpan-Obong and Foster (2010) note that:

The technology (mobile) has become the ICT of choice in the region (Sub-Saharan). This is so because of both the unassuming properties of the technology itself and other compelling derivatives of the African context. First, mobile telephone service is relatively cheap to acquire. Second, the technology is so user-friendly that one does not require any particular level of sophistication to utilise it, a feature important among Africa's largely illiterate populations. Third, the technology offers instant access even in transit. Fourth, the technology has bypassed the severe infrastructural constraints that hindered the old land-line technology.

No wonder then that before the end of the 21st century, the mobile phone has become a major platform for *Twitter*. Given the above description, one can argue that the pervasiveness of citizen journalism represents what has been described as the reconfiguration of power, as whatever happens in the public space becomes instantly available to the public. Back then, such information could be controlled and manipulated to present a certain perception, more often than not in the decision-making process of the mainstream media through the gatekeepers like producers and editors.

In the contemporary society, such information most probably gets straight into the cyberspace and once there, anyone who has access to read can question and judge or do whatever they deem necessary. In this day and age, information can go through different multimedia without gatekeepers' influence. So to speak, the reconfiguration of the power that

accompanies the control of information lies in the extension of “the press” to the people who have formerly been referred to as the public. The extension of the public service franchise¹¹ is facilitated to some degree by the supposed incompetence of the mainstream journalism to cover all kinds of voices. In news production and consumption, many sections of the population trust that they do not receive a fair hearing in the mainstream journalism. Unsurprisingly, such groups are more and more turning to the social media to get directly to their different communities. For that reason, those searching for alternative voices to events, those who feel “betrayed” by the news angles of the mainstream media, those who feel under-reported, as well as those people who are at the scenes of unfolding events can resort to citizen journalism which provides multi perspectives as discussed below.

7.5. Breaking News and Multiperspectival Journalism

Most of the respondents agreed that the first and most obvious time where the media benefit from citizen journalism is during breaking situations. I indicated earlier in the abstract, how ordinary citizens captured images of a collapsing pedestrian bridge in Johannesburg. The probability that there was no professional journalist when the collapse began is very high, but eye witnesses were present with their camera phones. This incident alone shows that the ability of the citizen journalism community to gather breaking news, interesting, new and diverse content is extraordinary. There is no uncertainty that citizen journalists also collect never-been-seen-before images of most of the breaking news events, especially considering that mainstream news outlets cannot have reporters everywhere all the time. One citizen journalist from a focus group discussion put it this way:

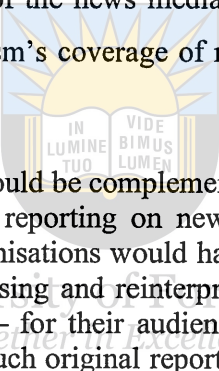
By the time the SABC people come from East London or Port Elizabeth, the events would already be history. So, we just catch it as it happens, then we show them (the journalists) photographs of what happened before they arrived on the scene. Even those photos of Gadhafi when he was being killed you remember, isn't it the citizens who captured those moments. So, we are just as good as them, only that we are not accredited... *(smiles)*.

The above statements clearly indicate how the citizens' contributions help the mainstream media share more complete and vivid stories, how the mainstream media get different

¹¹ The concept of public service franchise, though uniquely American because it is mandated by the Constitution, applies with greater demand to developing countries, manifesting in the concept of development communication.

versions as citizens present them with multiple submissions which allow for different perspectives of the same story, and recording stories which could have gone unreported altogether. The traditional media have the benefit of choosing the best content from citizen submissions, thereby making news coverage deeper and richer.

Gans (2003) defines multiperspectival journalism as news comprising fact and opinion while at the same time representing multiple perspectives. In practice, it means the news media give room for the unrepresented points of views, unreported versions or seldom reported aspects of the people. In short, Gans sums up multiperspectival news as “the bottoms-up corrective for the mostly top-down perspectives of the news media” (see Gans, 2003). Responding to the weaknesses in mainstream journalism’s coverage of news, Gans proposed a news media model in which the conventional



...central (or first-tier) media would be complemented by a second tier of pre-existing and new national media, each reporting on news to specific, fairly homogeneous audiences. . . . Their news organisations would have to be small. They would devote themselves primarily to reanalysing and reinterpreting news gathered by the central media—and the wire services—for their audiences, adding their own commentary and backing these up with as much original reporting, particularly to support bottom-up, representative, and service news, as would be financially feasible (1980, 318).

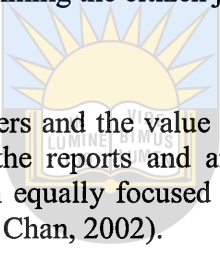
The “two-tiered media” system is aimed at representing a multiple perspective kind of reporting. Citizen journalism, as a kind of participatory online journalism, has become the second tier of news media whose main agenda is seemingly to comment on, critique and regularly correct the conventional media, as proposed by Gans (2003). Despite being in its infancy stage, citizen journalism has indicated the potential to refresh discussions as well as reflect on political matters, further than the polarised and polarising reporting of conventional media (Moyo, 2011). Rushkoff adds that the interactive technologies present a beam of optimism for a transformed kind of legitimate public involvement (Rushkoff, 2003: 16). However, due to the dearth of media platforms that could guarantee an extensive audience reach without a solid financial support, Gans seems not to find a way of achieving such a vision. In his analysis of the traditional media processes, Gans’ focus was on re-evaluation of the first tier, which resulted in the suggestion for the unconventional alternative media aimed at providing multiperspectival views (Gans, 1980).

There is surely a clear signal for content reappropriation in the second tier. For instance, in lieu of assuming the gatekeeping role in a traditional journalistic sense, most of the second-tier media forms, including citizen journalism, partake largely in what has been described as *gatewatching*. Invented by Bruns (2005), the concept of gatewatching entails surveilling the “output gates” of news sources and the objective for this is to select content (Bruns, 2005: 17). As an important aspect of citizen journalism, gatewatching has therefore become a remedy to the traditional gatekeeping practice commonly evident in the mainstream journalism. Gatekeeping is a system of controlling media content and deciding which content can be produced for public consumption while the ‘sieved’ content gets swept under the carpet in the newsroom. In other words, the process is a conventional standard of reporting which purports the traditional journalist as the principal provider of news analysis vital for the effective performance of the public (see Nel et al, 2007: 121). Contrary, citizen journalists are afforded the liberty to handle the news production processes and are able to create a more dialogic and interactive environment (see Arnison, 2001). As gatewatchers, citizen journalists might draw their content from that which would have been initially produced by the first tier hence, they sometimes ‘expose’ some of the details that would have been purposely missed by the conventional media. When being reproduced by the citizen journalists, the content could be in form of criticism of the original content by the mainstream media, or a practice referred to by Bruns as “news publicising” (2005: 19). This means publicising stories drawn from other sources, for example, the act of “retweeting” hyperlinks which lead to stories through platforms like *Twitter* (ibid).

So in gatewatching, the citizens would be looking for information that they think is of interest to their audiences but would have been deliberately left out by the mainstream media. They take such information passing through those gates and bring it into their own news coverage. One of the participants quoted earlier raised the same point that mainstream journalist ‘ignore’ their community issues and rather focus on political reporting hence, citizen journalists are reporting their own stories (the so called non mainstream themes and topics) which do not make it in the mainstream media. In most cases, they merge and compare the coverage of different mainstream news organisations in an effort to see the variation in analysis and prominence and therefore assume it is political prejudice or inadequate journalistic action (Bruns, 2005). During the checks and re-examination of such material, if

the reporting presents convincing fresh ideas which would have been underestimated by the first tier media, then the alternative perceptions would deserve to be pushed into the media discussions of the first tier (see Bruns, 2005). This echoes Gans' notion which portrays the two tiers as being responsive to and at the same time engaging with one another.

It is undeniable to say that citizen journalism focuses on the reporting of non mainstream themes and topics, as well as the open discussion of issues that benefit many participants. In other words, citizen journalism is not just providing 'facts' as implied by professional journalists, but it rather underscores the dialogic, discursive and deliberatory aspect of public involvement with the news media. Examining the citizen journalism news site *Slashdot*, Chan notes:



Highlighting the expertise of users and the value of their participation, news reading shifts from an act centred on the reports and analyses of news professionals and designated experts, to one often equally focused on the assessment and opinions of fellow users on the network (see Chan, 2002).

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Certainly, the method highlighted above is a concerted one, as has been noted that firstly, in the sense that large numbers of people work together in the writing and editing of the site. Then secondly, given the fact that the initial story is not the end product itself but rather the beginning which serves to ignite debates as people write what they think about it. This deliberative, collaborative and dialogic engagement amongst the site participants who become both producers and users (produser) involves not only production or consumption of media material but rather a process of produsage (Bruns, 2006). This clearly shows the realisation of Gans' notion of multiperspectival news reporting:

...ideally, the news should be omniperspectival; it should present and represent all perspectives... This idea, however, is unachievable. . . . It is possible to suggest, however, that the news, and the news media, be multiperspectival, presenting and representing as many perspectives as possible... and at the very least, more than today (1980: 312–313).

Conceptualised this way, citizen journalism becomes a substitute as well as a remedial to the first tier, but it however does not stand directly opposite to it, for the simple reason that the

perspectives discussed in that tier play an essential role in public debate as well. For Gans, the second tier of the news media, in this instance citizen journalism, mostly draws from the traditional media perspectives and sometimes questions the perspectives as politically affiliated, and in so doing, they do not regard them as representing the broader societal values and perspectives. Updating on his multiperspectival vision, Gans summarises it all:

... multiperspectival news encompasses fact and opinion reflecting all possible perspectives. In practice, it means making a place in the news for presently unrepresented viewpoints, unreported facts, and unrepresented, or rarely reported, parts of the population. To put it another way, multiperspectival news is the bottoms-up corrective for the mostly top-down perspectives of the news media (Gans, 2003: 103).

An important long term challenge for citizen journalists here, as highlighted in the above statement, is to warrant a place for multiperspectivity in the media sphere. This therefore implies the need to amplify or enhance citizen journalism initiatives so that they become more visible, while at the same time rectifying the equilibrium between the two tiers of the news media (Carey, 1997). Even though Carey's writings emerged before the proliferation of citizen journalism, Carey proposed that what is needed in such circumstances is to reinstate ideas of a republican society: a public place whereby liberal individuals gather for freedom of expression, speaking their minds, writing and or recording their discussions for public consumption (1997: 14). In that regard, citizen journalism seems to be doing what has been described by Carey as it is offering a passageway off the traditional news sites, avoiding the unsophisticated oppositional reporting of alternative media and becoming a full blown "second tier" of news media.

Moving towards a post Gansian media sphere, it is common knowledge that a variety of citizen journalism initiatives have taken off: from blogs to fully fledged websites like *Globalvoicesonline*, as well as pro-am (professional-amateur) editions like *Sahara Reporters*, which comprise professional editors and "amateur gatewatchers". It is however a fact that the Internet serves to draw attention from other media (Meikle, 2002: 61). Meikle further argues that citizen media remains in a bloodsucking kind of relationship with the traditional media. Simultaneously, the first-tier news media are also becoming more and more interested in what has seen citizen journalism thriving to the extent that some of the first tier media imitate

some citizen led systems in a corporate structure, of course with different levels of success. Now the big question that often pops up in relation to these two tiers is whether the two will complement each other, or collide head on, to which Lasica is quick to say it might include both (Lasica, 2003b).

Whether the two will complement or collide, an apparent fact is that the Gansian model is becoming more and more of an inadequate portrayal of the complex interaction between the two tiers of news media. Certainly, any account building on such binary dissection is not applicable anymore in the contemporary society. Some responses from the interviews highlighted that the mainstream media still treat the second tier media with skepticism as they still consider such alternatives:

not through a limited lens of a political-economic anti-globalisation channel, but through the professional lens of a 'competitor-colleague' journalism which may yet prove to be the crucible for new ways of reconnecting journalism, news and media professionals with ideals of sharing access and participatory storytelling in journalism (Platon & Deuze, 2003: 352).

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Besides offering news that appeals to different groups and classes, multiperspectival journalism also helps in reducing bias in the media (Gans, 2003: 102). The system has already been espoused by many news organisations and the citizen media sphere has also successfully executed the approach, more especially due to its iterative element (Bruns, 2006; Saunders, 2003). Being iterative imply that citizen media websites can present multiple perceptions of a story to be found on a website: one person posts a story, the next person comments on it while the next person might update the version of the story. This kind of audience participation enhances iterative media by making it multiperspectival. One interview respondent from the survey unknowingly highlighted this notion of multiperspectival journalism:

Yes, it's very interesting seeing how anyone with an Internet connection can contribute to a story that he is reading, I mean, the freedom to post a comment, or even to give your own interpretation of what is written by others. Or maybe, you know that the given information is not complete, you have the liberty to add more information, giving other audiences the details of the story, because the background information is very important. So, it's really amazing, it's something that we could not do in those days, we just had to read what has been printed on the newspaper, or

just listening to what is said on the television, without you having to give your own views about the issues.

However, it is important to highlight the fact this kind of citizen participation does not close the room or space for professional journalism, as certainly much of the citizen media material is drawn from the conventional media. The multiperspectival nature of citizen media indicates an aspect of a conversation and not necessarily a speech. It also shows that the media are never ultimate hence, recognising and appreciating this kind of news is an imperative step towards managing some of the challenges presented by mainstream journalism (Bruns, 2006).



7.6. Complementing Mainstream Journalism

In May 2006, BBC and Reuters sponsored a conference in London, whose main agenda was on how to “nail down the big issue” with regards to citizen journalism. The agenda of the conference simply suggests how mainstream journalism is wrestling with how to respond to the insurgence of citizen journalism. Therefore, the reason for the conference was to get media experts to dissect how best to create a better informed society by collaborating the old and the new media, having witnessed the potential of the two tiers in enhancing each other. Combining citizen reports with real journalism could produce something better, despite the two being totally different. Most of the expert analysts interviewed admitted that citizen media are complementary to that of traditional newspapers, even though they argued that some of their stories would not survive editorial scrutiny in the newsrooms of the traditional media. One respondent argued:

What we see from these bloggers is of course relevant stuff for the societies and it is sometimes true that mainstream media deliberately do not publish such material. So, if the citizen content were to go through the editors, it would definitely not be published for some reasons....

Literature on citizen journalism is rather inadequate, one of the reasons being that most scholars have mainly emphasised the outburst of the phenomenon as a replacement of the mainstream journalism instead of appreciating the complementary aspect of both. Of course, even though some citizen journalism websites have revealed how they have successfully

executed the ‘bottom-up’ alternative approach to the mainstream ‘top-down’ practice of news production, the impact of the former on the latter is relatively partial. Thus, arguing that the former is threatening the latter can be premature, considering how both forms can “complement each other, intersect with each other and play off one another” (Lasica, 2003: 73). This observation concurs with some of the respondents’ words from the surveys:

More people with Smart phones – more people will publish. Journalists need to work together with the crowd instead of ignoring them and telling them what the news is. Journalists can now make use of the crowd – participatory journalism is the way forward. Journalists can no longer by themselves decide what news is, the crowd decides and reports too (Respondent 1).

I think professional journalism is suffocating, especially at the newspapers. They have kind of locked themselves somewhere to escape the media house fire caused by citizen journalists on the web, while citizen journalists are evolving everyday by moving a little further away from wanting to be involved in mainstream media. To survive of course, more papers will likely have to restructure themselves (Respondent 2).

They just have to collaborate, in order to serve as good examples to other social media users. One thing they have in common is that they all publish media content in the public domain, which is important, so they are all responsible in the shaping of public opinion. Essentially, professional journalists should set the standards, by being careful with the information they provide. It is only through this way that other online users would be cautious in the opinions they share and the content they tweet or post online (Respondent 3).

In that regard, in lieu of perceiving the two as competing, it has been noted that the major impact of citizen journalism is that it is kind of controlling the traditional journalists’ professional practices, standards, ethics and values which are the centre stage of their professional identity and autonomous role (Lowrey, 2006; Singer, 2005). Probing another professional on how citizen journalism could gain trust from, and complement the mainstream journalists, the following was the response:

Conformity of presentation is important because it can give readers a recognisable framework to assess and understand what’s being written. Citizen journalists need to focus on doing more original reporting...One of the critical things many citizen journalists do not understand is the necessity of interviewing people and quoting them. The value of original quotes cannot be overstated...Otherwise, when done correctly, citizen media can be very powerful because of its speed and the ability of the fledgling industry to be anywhere at any time. Trustworthy citizen generated news has to be subject to the same quality-control mechanisms as mainstream journalism. It is scaring that many citizen journalists are basically amateurs who are simply

mimicking what they see on TV or in the press. The main problem with citizen journalists is how they freely mix opinion with factual reporting in obvious ignorance of how this is a conflict of ambition. When it comes to trust of the citizen generated media, I believe editing and supervision is necessary. Of course, many mainstream journalists may be skeptical of citizen journalism, but that's what they are taught to do. That said, I believe the world of citizen journalism needs to be encouraged to hold high standards of it and practice sound journalistic principles. At the same time, it is also upon the professional journalist to maintain the standards of reporting that they were taught, not reporting like they are also citizen journalists who do not follow any professional ethics.

In a follow up interview, another participant put it this way in response to the same question:

I am both a professional and citizen journalist, but I guess my fellow citizen journalists need to do a better job of practicing sound journalism. I know it is difficult to self-train. But I know it is hard for the average citizen journalist to know that there are ethics and a methodology. It is upon the citizen journalists to differentiate themselves from bloggers and that means learning some of the basics. At the end of the day, the objective for honest journalism is the same, which is presenting facts and information, but not entertainment. But, honestly speaking, citizen journalism is doing a disservice to the people doing the really hard work and following the example of the best of reporting. But above all, the acts of the citizen journalists are a good lesson to us the professionals to tighten our belts in reporting factual and accurate news.

Responding to the same question in a follow up interview, a media analyst put it this way:

...traditional media have this tendency of looking down on citizen journalists. Of course sometimes we see them collaborating, but I think it's mostly about getting free content and revenue from the citizens. But looking at where journalism is going, working together would be the best 'done deal', because not believing in citizen journalism could only result in the decline of the traditional media outlets in the years to come.

The idea about professional journalists considering working together with the citizens resonates with how traditional journalism is slowly tapping into citizen journalism content in the news production process, despite having regarded the new media environment with curiosity.

7.7. Agenda Cutting by Mainstream Journalism

The agenda cutting concept suggests the opposite of the agenda setting theory which highlights that individual personalities of those involved in reporting news set the agenda, or in other words, affect the decision to broadcast news stories (Dearing & Rogers, 1996: 17). By determining the news agenda, reporters or editors, for instance, keep certain issues off the national agenda by not taking notice of them or cutting them off the news. The process of “agenda-cutting” emerged as a consequence of the problems inherent in any study that endeavours to reveal news stories that went unreported, notwithstanding the fact that they had all the elements that make them newsworthy (Colistra, 2006). However, Colistra argues that there are challenges embedded in theorising the agenda cutting approach, as it is difficult to study and determine instances of agenda-cutting simply for the reason that this means calculating something not presented in the mainstream journalism (ibid).

Factors affecting agenda-setting and agenda-framing have been investigated. Unfortunately, a few studies have explored the reverse phenomenon whereby media pay no attention to some news stories because of external influences, the concept referred to as “agenda-cutting” (Colistra, 2006). In plain words, agenda-cutting simply refers to a situation whereby people within or outside news organisations do their best to bury or conceal stories. This happens in many ways. Firstly, it could occur when news producers position an item low on the news agenda. Secondly, the news item could also be removed from the agenda once it is there. Lastly, agenda cutting could take place by completely ignoring the news item so that it never makes it onto the news agenda in the first place (Colistra, 2006). Moving ignored and devalued information from margins to the mainstream news media became common in the networked information societies (Rutigliano, 2008). Rutigliano argues that bloggers with small audiences can create extensive attention for the disregarded information and help generating public sphere.

The torture and police abuse, as well as the bursting pipe cases mentioned earlier in this chapter are perfect examples of how citizen journalism is focusing on the issues that are “cut” from the agenda of the conventional media. The agenda cutting notion is more often than not prevalent in those countries where the democratic space is reduced and the professional

journalists in those countries are forced to ‘toe’ along the lines of their governments or ruling parties (African Media Barometer Zimbabwe, 2006). Commenting on the example of the footage which showed Zimbabwean police beating some citizens during the 2008 violent election campaigns, another citizen journalist who is a student and happens to be Zimbabwean argued that the professional journalists are ordered not to publish any details of such incidences so that they stay off the public domain, in case they prompt public discussion and awareness. On the same post, another citizen commented that probably the people deserved the beating because they are ‘anti-ruling party thugs’, further arguing that there was no proof as to the reason why they were being beaten. The ordinary citizen who commented suggested that the people could have been ‘thieves’ and no one knows the real truth by just looking at that video. Fortunately or unfortunately, such news stories are revealing how citizen journalism counteracts the “agenda-cutting” of mainstream media by dwelling on stories not reported elsewhere, thereby representing an alternative media that citizens rely on for information about real life in their communities. A professional journalist who is also a trainer of citizen journalists in the *Iindaba Ziyafika* project concurred with the above sentiments in her response about how citizen journalism is providing some sort of public space for people to discuss issues:

Citizen journalists deliver news just as journalists but they often manage to (because of their own background and context) have a different view on the matter, use different sources and get to news that escapes the attention of the regular journalist.

The comments highlighted above about the police video could be seen as a debate. The first commentator believes the video is true, accurate, reliable and trustworthy, while the second one considers it as inaccurate and probably ‘fabricated’. These two citizens represent two different parties insulting each other: from their comments it sounds like one is pro while the other is anti-government. This finding resonates with Etling (2008) who, commenting on blogs, notes that blogs engage the public sphere and give significance to debates between blog commentators. It also confirms the notion that the internet has afforded citizens with opposing worldviews to debate on issues that concern them. In October 2015, more than 14 South African Universities saw their students protesting over the fees increment for the year 2016 (eNCA, 2015). On that note, many citizens took to *Twitter*, and below is a news item that featured on *e-News Channel Africa*, about two people who debated the protests over fees hike on *Twitter*.

Anele, Roland Schoeman face off over #FeesMustFall

- Wednesday 21 October 2015 - 8:13am

A tense Twitter exchange took place between 94.7 presenter Anele Mdoda and Olympic medalist Roland Schoeman over the ongoing university fees protests. JOHANNESBURG - Radio personality Anele Mdoda and Olympic swimmer Roland Schoeman got into a heated Twitter exchange over #FeesMustFall.

The ongoing university fees protests have garnered support from a number of well-known South Africans, with AKA and singer Simphiwe Dana marching alongside Wits University students on Tuesday.

To think you call yourself a motivational speaker, when the only people you can motivate are those that came from privilege @Rolandschoeman

— Anele Mdoda (@Anele) October 20, 2015@Anelehave you ever heard me speak??

— Roland Schoeman (@Rolandschoeman) October 20, 2015@Anele and you display an incredible amount of circumlocution

— Roland Schoeman (@Rolandschoeman) October 20, 2015@Rolandschoeman Why did that guy drive over protestors with his car ??? Those kids were peaceful till then.

— Anele Mdoda (@Anele) October 20, 2015@Anele Twitter is a powerful voice. I'll happily sit in a room with you and discuss these topics.

— Roland Schoeman (@Rolandschoeman) October 20, 2015@Rolandschoeman Hey we should. I have so much to bring you up to speed on. It is not rosy at all, and all to blame.

— Anele Mdoda (@Anele) October 20, 2015@Anele I think you missed my statement where I said. If you choose to protest then fine, but allow those who choose to attend classes to go

— Roland Schoeman (@Rolandschoeman) October 20, 2015@Rolandschoeman I did not but this is you not understanding that is the nature of protests because you have never had to beg for anything.

— Anele Mdoda (@Anele) October 20, 2015@forvi45 @Lux_September @Anele many successful people in this world have come from absolutely nothing. pic.twitter.com/NZIDKQk4k1

— Roland Schoeman (@Rolandschoeman) October 20, 2015

That said, the following section discusses how the citizen journalism phenomenon has revolutionised the journalism profession, as evidenced by the responses from the participants themselves.

7.8. Journalism Revolution

The proportion of journalists who viewed the contribution by the public in the journalistic process to be an indispensable as well as an encouraging step in the development of journalism was shocking. Amongst the professional journalists as well as academics in the journalism field who responded to the interviews, the majority of them confessed to have embraced citizen journalism practices as part of their processes. One respondent from the survey said this, “The fact is that it’s no longer journalism in its traditional sense, but it has become something even bigger than that...something totally revolutionary”. Generally, most of the participants concurred that contemporary communication tools and technologies are increasingly improving the journalism profession, in as much as they understood the potential of the practice to be a largely collaborative, participative and active process. They admitted to increasingly using communication technologies to propagate news as well as to be updated on issues of interest and partake in conversations. Giving their views about how the phenomenon has changed the journalism fraternity, interesting and wide range of responses was noted. Probing them on what they think about the current state of the journalism profession, considering the proliferation of citizen journalism practice, interesting responses emerged, with one professional having this to say in an in-depth interview:

The point is, this kind of [citizen] journalism is not going anywhere, I mean, it’s here to stay and it’s actually progressing. It is all about connecting people with things they care about. The citizen journalists know their audiences, which is something that the traditional news media ignored. Now suddenly, those mainstream media organisations are now struggling to figure out how to engage with the ordinary people that they have ignored for more than a decade. That’s something they should have been doing all along, and something that they’re going to have to do much better if they want to survive in the contemporary media environment. Citizen journalists will always be at the right place at the right time with the right tools. News will be reported, no matter what, and the way it’s being reported is continuing to evolve. Traditional media is evolving. The tools that were used before are just not going to be used in the future. So, journalists just have to embrace social media, and have to figure out what’s going to stick in the next five years.

Another respondent from an in-depth interview clearly highlighted the differences between the professional and citizen journalism and how the latter is kind of changing the way journalism has been done, while at the same time warning the professional journalists on how to survive in the arena:

The fact is that journalism is in a process of adapting in the face of technological, social and economic changes. Now, what is important is that since citizen journalists see themselves as part of a community that shares values, rituals and language, professional journalists ought to negotiate this occupational culture alongside their own because these cultures differ in important ways. Citizen journalists are typically opinionated, whilst professional journalism at least aspires to objectivity, citizen journalists treat the audience as co-creators, while traditional journalism treats them as passive recipients, citizen journalism is incomplete and fragmented, but traditional journalism is structured and closed.

Despite such comments, there were some professionals who strongly felt that citizen journalism is a potential or has already threatened traditional journalism. This point will form part of the discussion detailed later in this chapter. An important point raised by the respondents was how the journalistic culture has been revolutionised. It was often pointed that the mainstream media have been stripped off the 'exclusive' powers to determine news production, as one respondent from the survey argued:

...back in the years, the broadcast model of having few producers and many consumers was the only way of receiving media. And now, with the decentralisation of the media, the ordinary people now have direct control of when, what, and with whom they exchange information... The media are no longer in control of what people read and how they read it. With citizen journalism on board, stories are now told to different audiences in diverse and fascinating ways and in terms of power dynamics, the traditional media have been stripped off its power.

In other words, in spite of the mainstream media's gatekeeping efforts, the contemporary society does not allow that anymore. Most of those in journalism itself have openly conceded that the outburst of the digital age has brought about shifts within the profession and are really concerned about where the new journalistic culture is heading (Sambrook, 2010). Albeit, one way to appreciating the new journalistic culture is to appreciate how the previous perceptions of "one-to-many mass media" communications have been replaced by the "many-to-many media" environment which has been precipitated by the decreasing costs of the technological gadgets, as well as the increasing global Internet access. Given such an enabling environment, one can conclude that media producers are no longer in control of the ways of sharing information with the broader audience. Commenting on how citizen journalism has affected the news gathering and dissemination process, some participants from different platforms put it this way:

I believe that citizen journalism is capable of being professional and can add value to a mainstream media, but the world is just at a transformational point where it's figuring out what its future holds. I think we are actually seeing much more cooperation and collaboration. I don't think newspapers and broadcasters would allow people to contribute if they didn't see the value in doing so. But well, I am not sure about how much grip citizen journalism can get in the industry because of funding. The notion that citizen journalism will replace the media is impossible because it can't afford to (Respondent 1).

...Media ownership is going to be broken, every individual will own the media, and that means more competition and more innovation. The people, the citizens, are the most important part of the media equation. However, more money is still needed to boost citizen journalism (Respondent 2).

The move to many-to-many communications which is already assumed to have shifted the power from the traditional journalists to citizen journalists has not been without implications for journalism as a whole. The objective kind of journalism of the 20th century has led to a 'chaos paradigm' (McNair, 2005). No wonder some scholars have called it a period of 'de-professionalisation' in journalism (Turner, 2010). Apparently, the journalistic profession framework is increasingly shifting, but no one is sure of what shape is going to be taken by the new professional culture, as indicated by these respondents from the survey:

...my wish is to see the tenets of journalism being maintained, even though the chances are very slim. However, I think there's definitely hope for journalism, the industry has much more to offer, just a matter of time. The future of the industry is unpredictable, especially with technology. You never know what the next 'Bill Gates' is thinking. The only known truth is that bigger things are happening as the conversation about media continues (Respondent 1).

The viewing experience is changing and the audience has more control than ever before. Technologies and the audiences they are serving are less predictable. Initially, the traditional media did not see the power of emerging new media and were slow to respond, and now, it is becoming more and more difficult to keep pace with these information and communication technologies (Respondent 2).

Again, it is no doubt that this kind of journalistic culture has been hailed as potentially breeding better journalism. Evidently, the reorganisation of the influence and actors within the field is intimidating the authority of the traditional reporters. However, it could be premature to celebrate that citizens have wrested power from professional journalists, as there is little evidence to advocate power to citizen journalists (Ornebring, 2010). It has thus been

warned that journalistic power will never really shift, because media organisations would always discover means to assimilate such participatory spaces (McChesney, 2000). Jenkins and Deuze (2008) describe the merging of the old and the new media and communication ways as 'convergence culture'. They further note that this all-encompassing media culture

...is both a top-down corporate-driven process and a bottom-up consumer-driven process...has had a decentring effect on journalism... has concentrated the power of traditional gatekeepers and agenda setters and in other ways... has disintegrated their tight control over our culture (2008: 6).

The above assertion clearly summarises the extent to which the convergence culture has overarching repercussions, influencing how media content is both produced and consumed (Deuze, 2009a). The assertion concedes that traditional journalists preserve their primary function in the production of news by deciding what gets to be reported, while at the same time highlighting the transformations in the daily aspects of journalism.

Probing the professional journalists on how far they use citizen generated content in their newsrooms, they basically argued that even though they have access to citizen journalists' content, and despite following it regularly, much of the interactions between them are vastly mediated. In fact, prior to taking citizen generated content in their news reports, the content has to be accepted and confirmed through various standard professional filters. What is presented here is equally an objective and logical distance between the two different journalists, the citizen and the professional, with the professional journalist maintaining the gatekeeping element of traditional journalism on integrity grounds. Citizen produced content enters the professional journalistic field only after it has been scrutinised: journalistic processes alone bring to the fore "information" in the form of "news", without changing the original content. Most of the professional participants who were interviewed gave the impression that producing news in a cultural way is the field of professional journalists, with the majority of them being skeptical of the news value of the citizen produced material. One participant argued:

No matter how much they try to be objective, you can tell that this piece has been written by a non professional. The language, first of all, in most cases it's a disgrace. Yes they can try to show the 4ws and H, but you can still see that something is

missing here. The order in which the events happened could be haphazard, making it difficult to follow the story. Storytelling should flow naturally, not presenting it in such a way like you are struggling to put your point across. That's when you start doubting if what is written has actually taken place, because narrating what happened is a simple thing to do. So obviously, it's always best to cross check the citizen generated content before incorporating it into the main media circles.

The discourse above clearly indicates that traditional journalists still emphasise on the values of truthfulness and ensuring that what is being reported has been thoroughly checked. Hence, the point is that citizen journalists have the responsibility to improve on their coverage of events with regards to the values highlighted above. This association is directly drawn from aspects of objectivity, a pre-requisite of news reporting. In Foucault's (1980) words, journalism is a 'regime of truth'.



Just to expand some points that have been highlighted above, it is clear that the move towards 'mass self-communication', in Castells (2009) words, is shifting the relationship between ordinary citizens and the organisations that were once in control of the communication structures and the means of production. Revisiting Castells' "network society", the hubs of influence "are in communication nodes: positions that are no longer exclusively the domain of institutional media". What is meant by Castells here is that power is not situated in a single institution, but it is rather distributed throughout the complete societal sphere (2009: 15). As mentioned earlier on, it is only the extent of this power dynamic which has been exaggerated by those who advocate for it (see Gillmor, 2004), but the ordinary citizens' access to the news creation processes has seen them being afforded more power than ever before. It is however essential at this point to indicate that an important difference here is that the objectives of many of these ordinary citizens reporting news are different from those of the mainstream journalism. In most cases, the function of the former is most evident in political mobilisations and as such, as audiences fragment into 'multiple public spheres' in online platforms, their influence becomes more powerful (Dahlgren, 2009). A case in point is how ordinary citizens in Zimbabwe used the online platforms to disseminate and share information about the elections of 2013, as exemplified by the Baba Jukwa case. This ability of the 21st century media technologies to bring together citizens from all social spheres of society in a short space of time and unformulated ways simply makes the individuals' actions seem to be more

activism than journalism. This is so for the simple reason that they have something in common to share: witnessing events and reporting them in the public interest (Chouliaraki, 2010).

Markham (2010) describes citizen journalism as a “mastery of perceived amateurism”. It is a fact that some of the citizen journalists have tended to establish themselves in contrasting positions with traditional journalists, thereby taking themselves as outcasts. One citizen clearly indicated how different they are from the professionals:

One thing for sure is we are not professionals, and we will never be. No wonder why some of those professionals are still skeptical to consider or believe what we write. The only similarity that we have is that we are doing the same job, updating people about what is happening in our different societies. By the time they come, the video footages would be all over the Internet. So I guess that is what is important. And sometimes we even do it far much better than them, because we have intimate knowledge of our communities, and that is what is informing this style of journalism.

Nevertheless, trying to distinguish between professional and amateur content presents the risk of disregarding the essential influence that they impose on each other. Of course, some scholars still regard the fact that citizen journalism is greatly different from professional journalism (Markham, 2010: 3). Evidence to support this notion is drawn from the idea that journalistic authority is no more a matter of the ‘official’ reporting of the story but is now based on the actual experiences. In the same way, the ability of citizen journalists to share their footages as well as the ways in which they distribute their experiences to others gives them some kind of the power formerly reserved for the professional journalists. Thus, it is this growing power of the ordinary citizens that is shifting the nature of journalistic witnessing (Chouliaraki, 2010). Equally, the journalistic profession is determined to show more real experiences. This authenticity concept is overshadowing the objectivity norm, in this manner transforming the journalistic model and therefore making journalists less powerful as regards content production and in influencing what constitutes news.

Despite the consensus agreement that the way journalism works has been changed, the responses pertaining to the extent of this transformation varied. Some respondents

acknowledged that journalism has always been about bringing the main points into a story, the act of which has been distorted by the information explosion of the twentieth century. In lieu of gathering and presenting the information as done previously, journalism now seems to be about navigating social networks and uploads, meaning that “gatekeeping is now about ‘debunking’ rumours, half-truths, and lies in this ocean of information and ‘distilling’ it down to something that presents reality more accurately” (Deuze, 2006). In that regard, journalists become facilitators and not gatekeepers (ibid). Some of the responses from the participants pointed to the contrasting roles of traditional and citizen journalists, with some professionals and experts reiterating that traditional journalism has always been more authoritative and positioned to report news beyond the obvious, as one respondent puts it this way, “I mean, citizens will always be citizens, they don’t have the skill to report it in detail. But for us, it is about giving more than the headline”.



7.9. Deliberative Journalism and Gatewatching: changing the news process

Deliberation is a process of weighing and examining the reasons in favour of, or against a choice to be made. It involves cautious consideration before making a final decision, for instance, the deliberation of a legislative council. In the same vein, deliberative democracy entails representatives closely deliberating on legislation, ensuring equal distribution of power. It also encompasses direct decision making by ordinary citizens, process known as direct democracy (Bruns, 2006). Deliberative democracy occurs in order to rationalise ordinary citizens or their representatives’ decisions. In deliberative democratic societies, citizens are regarded as independent individuals who participate in the governance of their communities, either directly or through their elected representatives (ibid). That implies citizens are not passive objects of legislation. Now, with citizen journalism at the centre stage, deliberative democracy has transformed the news processes for the journalism field. Bruns (2006) clearly puts it that it is now feasible to just present indicators to the main pointers of the news, in the bloggers or journalists verdict. The process has been termed gatewatching. Bruns argues:

This move to gatewatching over gatekeeping thus significantly reduces the power of the journalistic profession to affect public opinion. Gatekeeping is the mass media age exerted a measure of control over the public arena, but when gatekeepers lose their power to control the content of that symbolic arena, and when they are joined by an influx of alternative gatewatchers, “shared decision-making at the stage of gate-

keeping changes the journalistic power balance ... and demonstrates a reconfigured world order at the press/media power centres, leading to a blurring of lines between the centre and the periphery in a critical journalistic practice” (Bruns, 2006)

Bruns notes that gatewatching is iterative in the sense that the product of ‘gatewatchers’ is also observed by ‘other gatewatchers’, which feed into the practices of other sources of the media. This clearly explains the phenomenon of citizen journalism, whereby ordinary citizens are forming dispersed communities of commentators who are engaging with each other’s perspectives on the news, collectively with those articulated in other news. Although it is legitimate to solicit if the reposting of content from the mainstream journalism merely re-legitimises those sources genuine, Bruns argues that the framing of that content in the context of a blog gives a different impression of the news than is found in the mainstream journalism (Bruns, 2006). He further argues that the citizen media of interlinkage, commentary and engagement help locate the citizen generated content “into a more discursive” kind of journalism than the mainstream journalism. This is when the citizen produced media gets nearer to “dialogic” or “deliberative” news;

[Dialogic] journalism must openly encourage different reading (and search for news modes of stories that do so) and it must commit itself to the task of making these different readings and interpretations public. That challenge is to make the accents and articulations heard, to give them the power and position they need to argue on particular problems and to make them the objects and starting points for new emerging public situations and conversations (Heikkila & Kunelius, 2002).

So, according to Bruns, citizen journalism moves beyond dialogic journalism to deliberative journalism, the argument being that it just presents multiple readings but allows citizens to “engage with each other directly and contribute to public deliberation” (Bruns, 2006). Seeing how deliberative journalism highlights the different ways in which a single issue can be interpreted, Bruns says:

This removes distinctions of status and expertise from the participants in the deliberation, much as news blogging undermines the privileged position of professional journalists as commentators on the news: “in a deliberative situation expert knowledge has no privileged position. All the participants are experts in the ways in which the common problem touches their everyday lives. This, opinions and knowledge expressed in deliberation articulate the experiences of participants” (Bruns, 2006: 17).

In as much as the news process has been changed, it is also feasible to discuss the ways in which people's media consumption habits have also been changed, as one participant from the survey rightly put it:

In terms of options, people can now choose and even compare what they are reading on important issues over the internet, unlike in those days when they used to just wait for the day's broadcast or newspaper to be delivered to them. So now pressure is on those who publish news to package it in such a format that is accessible on different devices.

The concepts of deliberative journalism and gatewatching pose the need to discuss other concepts or themes that emerged. These include citizenship, community and mass self-communication. It is undeniable that the themes are also key aspects to notions of citizen journalism and they kept manifesting during the data collection and analysis phases, although indirectly. Rosen (1999) differentiates the terms citizen, consumer and client. Regarding individuals as citizens entail positioning them in such a way that they contribute to issues concerning them in the public life. That means they prospectively participate in public matters thus, they are a deliberative entity with common interests. Having a common interest implies that they can discuss public issues together and make decisions as a body, and the process of engaging with each other is more than just expressing personal opinions (Rosen, 1999). In fact, what they engage in is deliberation, a process that demands some sort of citizenship which involves shared values, civility, informed participation and the eagerness to listen to others (Rosen, 1999).

The concept of community entails the geographical space where news content is distributed, and is meant to be a public place. However, the emphasis on a shared locality dwindled many years ago as scholars, besides acknowledging rural areas, also recognised the existence of urban neighbourhoods as forms of communities (Janowitz, 1967). Moreover, the symbolic perspective which claims a community to be "imagined" as a psychological construct by having common forms actually dilutes the sense of a neighbourhood as an aspect of a community (see Anderson, 1983).

Analysing the focus on the “imagined” conception of communities, Castells (1997) stresses that common understanding is the foundation of a community. Nonetheless, marrying these notions together could undoubtedly signpost a community as comprising four major elements: collective forms, relations, social ties among members and eventually, a sense of belonging (Castells, 1997). It is also essential to note that the idea of a community without a collective neighbourhood has shaped the basis for research on Internet communities. It is therefore feasible to determine political communities by discussing public matters on the Internet using this idea of a community.

As highlighted earlier, deliberation is not just talking about problems, but it is a process of carefully considering the consequences of opting for certain actions as well as other people’s views (Rosen et al., 1997: 35). Despite the many definitions of the term deliberation, it can be defined as “debate and discussion aimed at producing reasonable, well-informed opinions in which participants are willing to revise preferences in light of discussion, new information, and claims made by fellow participants” (Chambers, 2003). Chamber further notes that a well- handled deliberation has its basis on being fully informed, including the fact that all viewpoints are demonstrated (see Chambers, 2003).

Before discussing in depth the concepts defined above, I have to admit that it was worth appreciating to realise that some of the mainstream journalists and media experts interviewed no longer perceive citizen journalism as a threat to the journalism profession. Traditionally, it is these same people who argued that citizen journalism amounts to the departure from issues of impartiality and objectivity hence, the description of citizen journalism as “dead” and “biased”. The thrust of the argument was that the purpose of a journalist is to report events from a detached observer’s perspective, and not to contribute in the “making” of the news. Thus, it is the basic tenet of citizen journalism that is thought to oppose the “traditional role of remaining objective and uninvolved in the news” (Rich, 2003: 23). In this regard, Brooks et al argue that there are some contradictions in the beliefs of traditional and citizen journalism. Among others, they posit that while citizen journalists believe that something basic has to change because journalism is not working, traditional journalists suppose that the traditions of journalism are fine: if anything needs to improve, it is the practice (Brooks, et

al., 2002: 11). Concurring with Brookes et al., one interview respondent quoted earlier on argued that journalism

...is in a process of adapting in the face of technological, social and economic changes. Now, what is important is that since citizen journalists see themselves as part of a community that shares values, rituals and language, professional journalists ought to negotiate this occupational culture alongside their own because these cultures differ in important ways.

The concepts explained earlier in this section clearly show that the significance of journalism for contemporary democracy needs not be underestimated. Furthermore, journalism's main function of reporting the events and issues of the day has been transformed by the ICTs revolution. Not only has this insurgency seen journalists themselves being bothered and mutely mourning the vanished principles of their respected profession, it has also raised an alarm regarding the quality of the content created by news organisations. Many have lamented that the media's obligation of serving the public interest has been overtaken by a despicable and flamboyant commemoration of what interests the public. Having said that, there seems to be an increasing accepting that what is regarded as journalism is being transformed across the developing communication area accelerated by digital platforms, which Castells (2007) describes as the rise of "mass self-communication": "The diffusion of Internet, mobile communication, digital media, and a variety of tools of social software...have prompted the development of horizontal networks of interactive communication that connect local and global in chosen time" (2007: 246).

The above assertion clearly indicates how citizens are taking advantage of the new technological innovations in order to construct their personal networked societies, and in that way, are increasingly challenging the organised power dynamics cutting across the parameters of the "network society" (see Castells, 2000). The notion of mass self-communication denotes how these parallel networks are fast coming together with the traditional media, as Castells rightly puts it:

It is mass communication because it reaches potentially a global audience through the p2p networks and Internet connection. It is multimodal, as the digitisation of content and advanced social software, often based on open source that can be downloaded free, allows the reformatting of almost any content in almost any form, increasingly

distributed via wireless networks. And it is self-generated in content, self-directed in emission, and self-selected in reception by many that communicate with many. We are indeed in a new communication realm, and ultimately in a new medium, whose backbone is made of computer networks, whose language is digital, and whose senders are globally distributed and globally interactive (Castells, 2007: 248).

Taking this as a point of departure, we could say that citizen journalism has since stirred a determining influence on journalism in the contemporary network society. By exploring the spur-of-the-moment activities of ordinary citizens forced to assume the journalist's role, one can recognise and evaluate how this vital dimension of 'mass self-communication' has registered its public worth in bringing about alternative perspectives and ideological analyses, especially in instances of national catastrophe. In such instances, most of the extraordinary and newsworthy experiences are not recorded by the traditional journalists. Instead, these instances are captured by ordinary citizens when they happen to be at the right place and at the right time. This incredible kind of reportage is a genuine illustration of how the news gathering process has been transformed by the technological innovation which now gives access to eyewitness archive of images by just clicking a button, thereby accelerating the response time to breaking stories, as citizens capture events that news organisations might have never seen unless by chance. This simply represents the democratisation of journalistic activities.

Having said so, it has to be mentioned that there are particular dangers in relying upon the so-called 'amateur' digital images. For instance, there is need to provide evidence about the accuracy of the images which citizens claim to have taken, given the possibility of hoaxes. In that view, caution should be observed to make certain that the images had not been manipulated to increase its news value. Also, the source of the image should be confirmed first, as there is the risk of being provided with images by someone who does not own the rights to them and it might create problems relating to the legality of authorisation to use them. In some cases, citizens provide news organisations with their images free of charge while at the same time they preserve the copyright which allows them to transfer the rights to other media institutions. However, very few of the citizen journalists consider themselves as journalists and thus, may not even think about the commercial potential of their images. Thus, the essence of exercising caution should be emphasised, as the rewards of citizen

journalism should not shadow the roles of the journalist and those of the citizens assuming journalist roles. This implies that professional journalism is still essential despite the fact the profession is being compromised. Professional journalists inevitably play a crucial role as editors thus, they remain as truly vital as ever.

The truth of the matter is that there seems to be little doubt that citizen journalism is overwhelmingly influencing the practices and epistemologies of mainstream journalism. In a world characterised by suicide bombings, tsunamis and civil wars, it is no doubt that the world has become reliant on the citizen journalists to get individual perspectives because they are the ones experiencing the news as it is unfolding. The interactive aspect of the online news offers “real-time dialogue” amongst citizens converging to determine and report the news (Deuze, 2006). Although citizen journalism manifests in various ways “through letters to the editor, man on the street interviews, as well as call-in radio or television shows”, the all-encompassing nature of the web has seen citizen journalists moving on to greater and new heights: individuals are giving their personal encounters of breaking news through blogging, videos, photos and podcasting (Bowman & Willis, 2003). In this regard, it is feasible to say that what is happening is “the future of news”, even though we are experiencing it now. As argued earlier on, while citizen journalism existed before, the impact on the society was not as intense as it is now, possibly maybe due to the scarcity of the enabling communication tools. So, perhaps back then, the act of citizen journalism was just an idea which has now become fully-blown and has transformed aspects of informational influence in the “network society”. But the big question is exactly how, and to what extent, has this happened? In the realm of mass self-communication, what is evident is the fusion of the communicative influence, which is apparently drifting from media institutions to the ordinary citizens. Online news has become a progressively more concerted venture, prompting an amplified sense of vicinity, but one that goes around in a close case. As such, the effects of this rising phenomenon on the journalistic field cannot be ignored especially with the blurring of the margins between ‘local’ and ‘virtual’.

7.10. A Political tool for Democratisation

Looking at the themes that emerged and have been explained so far, it is possible to conclude that most, if not all of the themes, point in one direction: the portrayal of citizen journalism as a political and democratic tool. Notably, citizen journalists also acknowledge themselves for what they distinguish or observe as their influential force on mainstream journalism. Amongst the highs of the phenomenon to democracy is that it has accessible means of telling stories that in most cases would not make it in the traditional media and for this reason, empowering the voiceless and making aspects of deliberation more representative. A student respondent from a focus group discussion confirmed this assertion in the following manner:

I can say it's a democratic media evolution, you know, having ordinary people reporting news from their own experiences and perspectives... and it's promoting social change, simply because we are telling important stories overlooked by conventional media. It's like media tools have been put into the hands of people who have been struggling to tell their stories. The idea is in fact promoting a vision of a world of well informed, skilled citizens...

It was really intriguing to realise how citizen journalism is understood to have surfaced as strong alternative media, with many citizens interviewed declaring that they do not share the same political agenda with the mainstream media:

You see where we differ with those so called mainstream media, they rush to report what was said in the Parliament, where the President has gone for some conferences or summit. But they do not look around us being exploited by those Parliamentarians. They don't report about us having no toilets and water in the shacks where we stay. So we bring such issues in the limelight, especially because we are simply crying for help. And it is our very own people who are affected by such issues who take action in order to be heard...

Downing (1984) brings in the aspect of “radical media” as that of social movements, one that is formed by political advocates for socio-political change. At the same time, these movements’ media are crucial not just for what they say, but their organisation as well (Downing et al., 2001). This “rebellious communication”, as Downing calls it, does not merely defy the current political situation in its reporting, it also disputes how the political status quo is produced. This assumption resonates with the assertion that in order to achieve effective political propaganda, there is need to desist from simply replicating the radical perspectives published in the news media (see Benjamin, 1982). Benjamin argues that the

medium itself calls for a change: the work and how it is produced need strategic realignment. This entails not just changing the means of production but also reconsidering the meaning of being a media producer (ibid). Thus, if radical media's intention is to change the socio-political status, then it is essential to do likewise. Downing et al refer to this as 'prefigurative politics' or the efforts to exercise socialist ideas presently and not preserving them for the future (Downing et al., 2001: 71). In that view, Downing points to "alternatives in principle" based on revolutionary beliefs. In the same way, he enforces the significance of promoting contributions from different interested parties so as to enhance the 'multiple realities' of society (1984: 17).

The above description presents an interest in considering alternative media and in particular, citizen journalism, as radical, to the extent that they [alternative media] candidly determine political consciousness through collective endeavour. Downing (1988) also notes that radical media represent a key characteristic of an alternative public sphere or, as suggested by many citizen journalism initiatives, several alternative public spheres (Fraser, 1992). On that note, the Internet-based news networks identified in this study may also be taken to mean a combination of localised alternative public spheres which converge to form a "macro" public sphere, meant to afford the geographically diffused citizens the privilege to deliberate and collaborate on advocate projects of a global reach. This in a way also affords the appreciation of the media that are produced by non-professionals, also referred to as the groups that are largely made up for progressive, social change. The discussion so far highlight the assumption that alternative media and in this instance, citizen journalism, is able to politically empower ordinary citizens. The assumption is that people can represent themselves as well as their communities in a better way if they are given the platform to produce their own media content. This gives the impression that citizen generated media are initiatives of self-education.

Drawing from "conscientisation" and "critical pedagogy" theories (Freire, 1970), as well as from perspectives of radical democracy (Mouffe, 1992), it can be concluded that alternative (citizen) media are not just presenting a "counter-information" function, considering the expression "citizens" as especially unique (Rodriguez, 2001) . For Rodriguez, 'citizens'

refers to individuals of the society who keenly contribute or partake in activities that seek to improve their own as well as the identities of their counterparts, activities that reshape their social environment, through which they become influential (2001: 19). In that context, these citizen media practices are meant to construct a kind of citizenship and political identity around everyday life traditions. In lieu of waiting for the mainstream media to determine the parameters for political participation, ordinary citizens are now able to employ their own personally controlled media to politically engage themselves in their own conditions (see Dahlgren, 2000; Norris, 1999). For Rodriguez as well as Downing, political or public self-transformation is seemingly the prime role of radical and citizen media.

Actively participating in media production processes entails political education in itself, and such activities have proved to produce localised empowering public spheres. In the same manner, Forde et al. (2003) suggest alternative journalism should be seen as cultural empowerment, where the main agenda is not just content production. What is notable to them is how community media enable community organisation (Forde et al., 2003:317). Such practices, according to Carroll and Hackett, represent “a reflexive form of activism that treats communication as simultaneously means and ends of struggle” (2006: 96). This accounts for the construction of identity and counter-publics, together with the addressing of broader audiences. The above discussion raises more questions than answers as regards journalism, and in particular, citizen journalism. With reference to alternative media, Atton (2002a) notes that there is little that is learnt about citizen journalism initiatives with regards to journalism practice. Atton highlights important aspects like what exactly do these people do, in what ways do they do it, how exactly they learn the practices and, if ever they call themselves journalists. Assuming that some of these questions have already been answered in some sections of this study when I pointed out that some citizen journalists position themselves in contrast to the traditional journalists, the point remains that citizen journalism activities are constantly entrenched in the everyday practices and therefore, are already situated in the greater socio-cultural, political and economic environments.

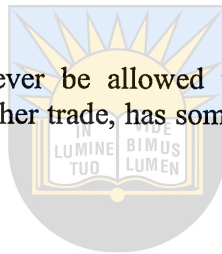
7.11. Rebalancing Media Power

This aspect of media power has been highlighted earlier when I quoted one respondent arguing that the professional journalists have been stripped off the power to determine what news is. Couldry (2000) points at how the alternative citizen media initiatives cause the ‘de-naturalisation’ of the media sphere, while at the same time promoting the rebalancing of the differential power of the media (2000: 25). By opposing and competing with the ideologies and representations of the traditional media, citizen journalism disregards the professional and organisational media power and at the same time defying the monopolies of production of symbolic forms by the mainstream media. Thus, speaking of alternative and citizen journalism implies the need to appreciate the relationship between the traditional, professionalised media practices and the trivial, ordinary citizen practices. Couldry further posits that the struggle between the two is the struggle for media power (see Couldry, 2000). Citizen journalism as an alternative journalistic practice thus affords ways of rethinking journalism and not just of advocating media practices for empowering the society and for self education. Another respondent quoted earlier indicated that ordinary citizens have been ignored for a long time by the mainstream media and it is only now that the mainstream media are in a dilemma to engage citizens in news processes.

Given the above description, Couldry argues that it is just to look at citizen journalism not only as political tools meant for radical institution of social movements and personal or societal consciousness raising. In that regard, Atton (2002a) explores the implications of what he describes as an expanded concept of amateur journalism in which he argues that all forms of alternative media ought to similarly regard practices and products: any media content has to be perceived as journalistic work, not just as expressions “of self-reflexivity” (Atton, 2002a; 2003a). Furthermore, he argues that amateur journalism does not only change social relations, it also changes the media forms. Other aspects that can be changed include competence, professionalism and expertise. According to Atton, alternative journalism might therefore include cultural journalism, like the one evident in fanzines and blogs (see Atton, 2001).

In a nutshell, this discussion has shown the nature of challenges presented to mainstream journalism by ordinary people producing media content. To the citizens themselves, the use of their reports, images and footages by professional journalists is confirmation that citizen journalism has actually moved a step further in enhancing freedom of expression and has impacted on traditional media. Some professional journalist participants have acknowledged their embracing of citizen generated content though to some extent. However, perusing through some interview scripts, it was noted that some participants, especially those who seemed skeptical about the citizen journalism phenomenon, do not concede this people power or this kind of influence by citizen journalism. In fact, most of their arguments pointed to the fact that because of scarce wherewithal which citizens have, they could not substitute traditional media:

... citizen journalism must never be allowed to replace professional journalism because, journalism, like any other trade, has some expertise and experience attached to it. That's why it has value.



One of the respondents who is a professional journalist, pointed out that perhaps the most vital role of citizen journalism has been that of “watchdog of the watchdog”, when he describes how citizen journalism often causes the media to be more accountable in their work. He further argued that in this regard then can citizen journalism be referred to as the fifth estate, as it has somehow proved successful in observing the sometimes stale and unethical fourth estate. Given this, citizen journalists can therefore be viewed as a throng of vigilant eyewitnesses posting their comments, feelings and analyses right away. Thus, notwithstanding the professional journalists’ unwillingness to admit the challenge, they have however recognised the power shift described earlier in this chapter.

Nonetheless, whether this impact is acknowledged or not, it is evident enough that citizen journalism has undoubtedly drawn the attention of the mainstream media. It is difficult to imagine a news organisation that has not engaged works of citizen journalists in their news coverage. From *BBC*, *CNN* to *Al Jazeera*, the emphasis has been about the democratising power of citizen journalism. Commemorated for their influence, citizen journalists have learnt to court the mainstream media and in the process, they have confronted authorities and challenged media laws. In most African countries in the Sub Saharan region, regimes have

endorsed the Internet and other digital technologies as representation of development instruments that need to be sustained (Banda, 2010). Other important reasons include the fact that these would catch the attention of foreign investment and could eventually leapfrog African countries into the information society, a concept described in the previous chapters.

The adoption of modern ICTs has been encouraged without hindrances. The result was the creation of democratic spaces which were initially not challenged, to an extent that citizens enjoyed unparalleled flows of information without being monitored by anyone until in the recent years when some governments realised that the liberty could result in unintentional consequences. Having been previously used to manage information flow through state owned media, as well as foreseeing the effects that could be caused by these technologies, most governments established regulations that control the technical elements of the digital epoch since the previous regulations that governed the old forms of media are no longer applicable in the contemporary society. Though, the above discussion just summarises how the world has become McLuhan's 'Global Village', with a global news culture, the subject of which follows.

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7.12. A Global News Culture

The digital technologies significantly impacted on journalistic work. Information travels so fast through the "digital space", propagating a kind of journalism [citizen] in the "information age". This transformation of news flow enables citizens to deliver first-hand information while 'on the spot' of whatever they are reporting on. A respondent from the survey said this regarding this issue:

It is because of the internet that people can now personalise the news they want and have it delivered to them. A breaking story in another country can be accessed as soon as it is published online.

In fact, a wide variety of "alternative" media disseminators has penetrated the media circles, thereby making an impact on the global media platform (Gillmor, 2006). The process has transformed many aspects of the journalistic field. Essentially, the gatekeeping and the agenda-setting models are not taking place the traditional way anymore (see Bennett, 2004).

Instead, it seems the techniques of a ‘closed’ functional journalism sphere have slowly been substituted by an extremely vibrant development of information exchange whereby the ‘alternative’ news disseminators are influencing how ‘traditional’ journalists report, a step ahead from the “industrial-style content” towards “the collaborative, iterative, and user-led production of content by participants in a hybrid user-producer, or *produser* role” (Bruns, 2006: 275).

Moreover, the way the news is accessed has totally changed, with the consumption of news now fast becoming “demand-led, rather than supply-led” and news consumers are no longer restricted by the media outlets timelines but they now access news anytime from anywhere when they want to (Bell, 2007: 78; *The State of the News Media*, 2008). These sentiments were also echoed by one respondent from a focus group discussion who said:

It’s now a matter of reading what you want to read at whatever time is convenient for you. Traditionally, people would get glued on the TV waiting for the main news bulletin, but now, people can surf news online while lying on their bed, in their offices or even while waiting for the bus at the rank. It’s so convenient...

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It is clear that news consumption has become more and more personalised, fulfilling Negroponte’s (1995) vision of the customised “Daily Me”. In his book *Being Digital* (1995), Negroponte foretold the prospect of personalised filters for every digital element to exactly tune media content to one’s individual choices. The famous passage summarises it all:

Imagine a future in which your interface agent can read every newswire and newspaper and catch every TV and radio broadcast on the planet, and then construct a personalised summary. This kind of newspaper is printed in an edition of one. [...] Imagine a computer of news stories with a knob that, like a volume control, allows you to crank personalisation up or down. [...] In the distant future, interface agents will read, listen to, and look at each story in its entirety... the filtering process will happen by using headers, those bits about bits.

Of course, that future arrived earlier than Negroponte’s anticipation. With our ‘daily me’ in form of the RSS feeds, the *iGoogle* and *Google Alerts*, we can even personalise our media experience. Bruns concurs with Negroponte’s vision, arguing that digitisation has transformed the media-audience relationship from mass reception and passive to a more

individualised and interactive kind of active engagement (Bruns, 2006: 282). Contrasting the traditional way whereby information used to be ‘pushed’ towards audiences, the Internet today has become a “push-pull medium” which allows not just journalists, but anyone to “push” into, as well as to discerningly “pull” information from the cyber world (Volkmer, 2003: 12; Poe, 2011).

Therefore, the growing numbers of ‘alternative’ news disseminators and the ever altering communication models with news being on the audiences’ side, among other things, have compelled media organisations to respond to the changing journalistic environment in which their functions as news reporters are being threatened. The traditional sender-receiver framework of journalistic work does not apply anymore in the contemporary society (Beckett & Mansell, 2008: 93). McNair actually warns that the quantity of information being circulated has somehow resulted into a “chaotic” media sphere at the dawn of the twenty-first century (see McNair, 2005; 2006). McNair describes it as a “cultural chaos”, whereby communication structures work “fundamentally non-linear, and thus, highly contingent. Like the strange attractors of chaos science, they exhibit structure, but of an irregular kind” (2006: xiv). Some have given this configuration the nomenclature ‘network journalism’.

To summarise the discussion in this chapter so far, it is clear that the findings of this study have highlighted the democratic potential of citizen journalism. It is clearly evident that journalism notions are changing, but the fact is that the revolution has not yet fully taken off. Undecidedly, professionals in the media fraternity have embraced the phenomenon with enthusiasm and apprehension. The basic argument highlighted so far is the fact that while citizen journalists perceive their role as non-threatening but just a way forward in advancing democracy, many professional journalists have not yet fully appreciated them due to the supposed lack of objectivity, a major element by which the field shields itself against that which threatens its culture. However, the journalistic field has also survived a long history of criticism. Fenton (2010) posits that the (supposed) demise of the professional standards and integrity of journalism have been linked to the personnel’s “egomania, their being parasitic, exploitative of human tragedy and generally squalid and untrustworthy”. Concurring with Fenton, Hargreaves (2003: 12) noted that journalism has been blamed for sacrificing

“accuracy for speed, purposeful investigation for cheap intrusion and reliability for entertainment”. As if that is not enough, ‘dumbed down’ media houses stand accused of sensationalism instead of reporting the significant, they are privileging celebrity news over achievement. Unsurprisingly, citizen journalism has ushered in a fresh way of anxiety as well as an extension of these fears. Despite mainstream journalists disregarding the emerging journalistic practices as journalism per se, the society has embraced the phenomenon and the essence of the Internet in this regard.

As implicated herein and in the preceding chapters, in spite of the above arguments ascribing the popularity of citizen journalism to ICTs, it can also be argued that the above concerns are not a result of technology per se or perhaps a result of the deteriorating professional standards of the journalists. In fact, they are part and parcel of a more multifaceted political, social, cultural and economic history. The findings from this study are indicative of how the Internet has brought about fresh means of news gathering in the newsroom. This new way of doing journalism is accessible to anyone from anywhere and not just the newsroom, it lacks editorial insight, it works in a system with dispersed audiences and it is delivered with greatest speed, among other things (Fenton, 2010). In this way of course, the Internet and the related technologies have strengthened democracy.

The first part of this chapter has mainly presented notions of how the practice of citizen journalism has been embraced with agility, especially by those who see the potential of it and beyond, including the citizens themselves. Notions of those who have lamented the existence of the phenomenon have also been noted in some of the responses quoted earlier. The section that follows highlights a few of the prominent issues which have been said to affect citizen journalists’ credibility in some way. These issues mainly emanated from participants who lamented that the phenomenon has impacted on the journalism profession in major ways. Many of the concerns surrounding citizen journalism revolve around issues of objectivity, accuracy, fairness, ethical practices and overall credibility of citizen journalism.

7.13. The Debates about Journalism as a Profession

It was interesting to realise that despite being involved in the practice of citizen journalism, some of the participants openly discussed some of the issues that have caused tension between the practice and the professional journalism. Some of them even admitted the shortfalls of the practice, but they are however willing to learn and improve themselves with regards to the news gathering process:

Well am not saying this is a profession as such, but what am saying is you can't just rely on Internet. Personally, I have also learnt to do interviews and being original, you know. It gives me that sense of, you know, loving what I am doing (Respondent 1).

Of course I am not trained but I think it is essential to receive some kind training or qualification in order to do better, and I think that is one reason why some people have not really appreciated what we do, because the basis of their argument is that we are not trained, we are just men from the streets.... (Respondent 2).

...recently when we went through some basic training but I wouldn't say it was enough to call myself a professional journalist. Because honestly, it was not my field of interest when I was growing up. I never imagined myself writing for the public (Respondent 3).

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The responses above present the need to take a step back and reflect on the phenomenon as well as the professional journalism. Many studies about citizen journalism have endeavoured to establish if the practice is journalism or not, with little success (Bruns, 2006). However, in lieu of using this frame, it is conceivable to refer to the phenomenon of citizen journalism as part of what has been called 'the grand project of journalism', whose main objectives include accelerating democracy, enlightenment, performing the Fourth Estate role, in Hartley's words, the "sense-making practice of modernity" (1996: 33). Rosen (2004a) argues that referring to journalism as *practice* instead of regarding it as a *profession* is more constructive when considering the contemporary media sphere, in as much as it also outlaws the general condemnation of citizen journalism by traditional journalists. Farmer (2006) puts it this way:

The very term (citizen journalism)... is a somewhat insulting assumption. Journalists suffer a similar fate to teachers in that everyone is or has been exposed to their work on a very regular basis – everyone's got an opinion and they are not afraid to share it. As a bit of a reality check, when was the last time you encountered a "citizen doctor", valued a report by a "citizen researcher", took off in a plane flown by a "citizen pilot" or saw justice meted out by "citizen policeman"?

Bruns further highlights that clearly journalism is not the same profession as medicine:

Ultimately, journalism is no more a profession than politics - an area of public life to which it is closely related, of course. Where, ideally, politics conducts dialogue, debate, and deliberation between differing opinions, journalism faithfully reports this process (ideally, again, by representing all relevant perspectives). And if it is so 'insulting' for journalists to be denied status as a profession, and to be reduced to the level of 'mere' citizens, then why does the same not apply to what is arguably the far more important field of politics? We may not have seen any citizen doctors or citizen pilots, but we entrust the fate of nations to what we may call 'citizen politicians' (and we indeed complain bitterly if they turn out to be 'professional politicians' ready to adjust their beliefs according to where the greatest majority can be found). Into what twisted reality have journalists retreated if 'citizen' has become a dirty word for them? (see Bruns, 2006)

Given the above, it can clearly be argued that the role of the media in mediating in the communication of issues of concern to the public is not obvious anymore. This then implies the public sphere is no longer exclusively being ruled by the media, a scenario which has led many to assumptions about the failure of journalism. This could however be an excessive technological determinism. Nguyen (2006), notes that if clearly assessed, participatory journalism can actually strengthen the critical function of journalism, a "more reactive and responsive" kind of journalism in the information era.

Hartley provides a critique of the journalism profession. Citing Ian Hargreaves, Hartley (2006) argues that journalism ought to be regarded as a human right. This perspective is founded in the participatory democracy model (Saunders, 2003). Those who claimed journalism to be a human right were men and women who engaged in the journalism projects (Hartley, 2006) Likewise, "being a journalist is about doing journalism" (Woo, 2005). That means everyone is a journalist in a democracy, considering that every individual ought to communicate his or her personal views regarding anything, no matter how small (Hargreaves, 1999).

The above assumption has not been without criticism. The first question that anyone could ask is that if everyone should be a journalist, why is the practice restricted and reserved for the trained journalists and the experts? That could explain why journalists separate

themselves from citizen journalists and regard them as outsiders (Hartley, 2006). Now, if it is a “restrictive practice”, it gives the impression that “outsiders” should be distanced from the practice (Bruns, 2006; Gans, 2003; Hartley, 2006). This principle does not conform to the tenets of a democratic society (Hartley, 2006). The social opposition to this highlights the aspect that confining journalism to a few “qualified” professionals is equivalent to certifying the “expression of ideas”, a move which is just anti-democratic (ibid). Furthermore, the call for skilled professionals and a clear understanding of the practice directly opposes democratic imperatives (Hartley, 2006).

Saltzman (2005) traces the history of journalism, arguing that when the idea was initiated back in the 1920s, it was envisaged that the journalists would be examined. The idea was however discarded since many of the journalists thought the process would become a kind of licensing which could threaten the freedom of the media (Saltzman, 2005). In this way, journalists themselves would threaten press freedom, thereby contributing to the “refeudalisation of the public sphere” (Habermas, 1996), in which institutions struggle to negotiate with governments and with one another and obviously, without including the general public. Nguyen (2006) thus says all this would be objecting the existence of the journalism practice: being the autonomous watchdog of public affair, turning it into a contemporary misleading notion.

One can thus argue that maybe journalism as it is known may actually be a “transitional” form, existing between the democratic possibility and the technological capacity to do so (Hartley, 2006). This assertion has been confirmed earlier when I quoted a respondent who argued that the world is at a “transitional” period, referring to how citizen journalism is transforming journalism. Perhaps the internet and the technological revolution have reduced the boundaries to publishing news and in the process, have given more people the room to practise journalism, a move which is in contrast to the norms of the professionals who wish to preserve the profession and the related insiders’ culture.

If Hartley's notion that journalism is truly a human right is anything to go by, we can therefore not just regard it as a technique that can be acquired by anyone, but perhaps we also need to expand on the meaning of journalism ahead of the democracy model to speak more with regards to what it really implies to be human, "more especially the world of private life and experience, and the humanity of those lying outside favoured gender, ethnic, national, age or economic profiles that are targeted by corporate news media" (Hartley, 2006). In that regard, considering traditional and citizen journalists as part of the wider media sphere using the journalism practice towards encouraging democracy allows the acknowledgement of these incompatible practices as part of the sum total. One would therefore argue that both citizen and traditional journalists equally play a role in making journalism a "sense-making practice of modernity" (Hartley, 2006). Even though professional journalists' power may be confronted by citizen journalists, that criticism is an essential part of modern journalism, as one could view it as a collaborative process in which both are implicated in producing the massive, iterative media sphere we are experiencing today. The realisation that these interactions are collaborative would perhaps show how these collaborations can benefit journalism. Some participants from various research tools also pointed the need for the two to collaborate as the most appropriate option:

As you can see, some of the big media organisations have realised the contribution of citizens and have integrated them in their news process, which is a good move towards amalgamation. I think that is the way to go (Respondent 1).

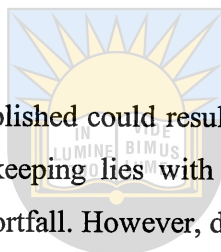
Now we see on national TV channels, footages from citizens who would have recorded important incidences in the absence of the professional journalists. That is the collaboration. Seeing citizen generated content being broadcast in the mainstream news is a step ahead, it shows the works of the citizens are being appreciated (Respondent 2).

They just have to collaborate, in order to serve as good examples to other social media users. One thing they have in common is that they all publish media content in the public domain, which is important, so they are all responsible in the shaping of public opinion. Essentially, professional journalists should set the standards, by being careful with the information they provide. It is only through this way that other online users would be cautious in the opinions they share and the content they tweet or post online (Respondent 3).

The first chapter of this study quoted Bowman and Willis as saying that the objective of the citizen participation is to offer autonomous, trustworthy, truthful, wide-ranging and pertinent information required by a democracy (2003: 9). Nonetheless, the fact remains that most of

these citizen journalists are not professionally trained and some of them just do not have the above mentioned intentions. Going through the citizen generated content on the Internet, I realised that most of the citizen journalists typically give their personal and thus often biased views of events, while others clearly indicate their political intentions, thereby perceiving themselves rather as activists and not journalists, which then afford them the reason that they are not bound to hold on to media ethics. However, one respondent from the survey indicated that despite being a citizen journalist himself, issues of ethics should be adhered to:

I would like to emphasize that ethics and accuracy are more important than speed, but am sure this is not taken seriously in the citizen journalism world. Maybe it's high time governments start implementing strong measures for non-adherence to such important aspects of the journalism profession.



But the fact that their content gets published could result in detrimental effects, particularly on the sites where the editorial gatekeeping lies with the audience (Allan, 2009). Thus, anonymity in the practice is a major shortfall. However, despite the fact that imperfection and biased reporting are what makes citizen reporting credible, it is essential for audiences to actively utilise media content in order to profit from citizen journalism (Bowman & Willis, 2003). This includes verifying the facts presented and compare them with other sources, a process referred to as the creation of a “hierarchy of trust” (see Allan, 2009; Gillmor, 2006). One participant also noted the need for the professional journalists to assess the content submitted by citizens before publishing it:

Citizen journalists do not know about ethical issues. It is not for them to know as the people at the publication will fact check whatever he delivers. As a CJ you are not responsible, it is the publications' responsibility, e.g., the editor.

7.14. Citizen Journalists: delegitimising the journalistic profession

I will start this part by repeating this quote from one of the respondents from an in-depth interview:

I think professional journalism is suffocating, especially at the newspapers. They have kind of locked themselves somewhere to escape the media house fire caused by citizen journalists on the web, while citizen journalists are evolving everyday by moving a little further away from wanting to be involved in mainstream media. To survive of course, more papers will likely have to restructure themselves.

It is a fact that the power of citizen journalism has not gone unnoticed, especially in Sub Saharan Africa and abroad. This is despite arguments that the majority of the citizens practising it is not trained and does not pledge to the traditional journalistic norms of objectivity, fairness and accuracy found in media organisations (Friend & Singer, 2007). The assertion given by the respondent above seems to imply that traditional journalists are being intimidated by citizen journalists whom they claim to be threatening their privilege of determining what news is. Despite some scholars arguing that citizen journalism also connects with the audiences better than the mainstream news operations, professional journalists hold the view that citizen news is generally “poorly written, self-absorbed, hyper-opinionated, and done by amateurs” (Regan, 2003). This concurs with a respondent quoted earlier on who said that regular citizens do not produce the kind of work as produced by professionals. From the in- depth interviews, a journalist respondent stood firm in saying that:

Citizen journalists can write and people might get excited about them, but the fact is nothing they do will ever substitute the professional reporting of the mainstream media. We write professionally, we edit, we cross check the facts with the sources. With citizen journalism, they publish first and perhaps verify the facts later.

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Another respondent indicated that by looking at a journalistic piece, you can tell that it has been written by a non-professional because of its appearance. This is one aspect that limits the ability of the professionals to engage citizen journalism hence, it can never be compared to professional journalism as argued by one responded quoted earlier. However, recent developments have seen some citizen journalism organisations rising up to address some of their weaknesses especially with regards to quality control and gate keeping issues, as well as the general ethical conduct of their newsgathering operations. *Sahara Reporters* is a case in point. Dare (2011) noted that the site entreats citizens to ensure that they supply factual information, while at the same time the site ensures the gatekeeping role by verifying and editing every material sent to it, the task which is the responsibility of the experienced journalists hired by the organisation (ibid). What they do in this regard is that the publisher often delays publishing a news item until they confirm the details of the story. This is what has been suggested by one of the respondents quoted earlier, that it is the duty of the professionals to verify the material submitted by ordinary citizens, because they know nothing about issues of ethics and credibility.

Despite concerns on the lack of professionalism by citizen journalism, one can still argue that the absolute independence and its ability to give voice to the ordinary citizens are the characteristics that empower it and distinguish it from professional journalism. The phenomenon has been argued to lack editorial oversight and being too aggressive even though it has become the source of the most powerful news in the world, evidenced by how professional news organisations tap into the images produced by these amateurs. A respondent from the survey acknowledged the weaknesses of the practice but later remarked that the practice is changing for the better when she said “Of course, the virtues and faults of citizen journalism are crystal clear, but the practice has made commendable progress regarding its newsgathering process. It’s slowly getting there... I mean to perfection”.

Unlike the professional journalists who are obliged to identify themselves and not to report on issues talked about ‘off the record’, most of the citizens perceive themselves as autonomous and not bound by any professional codes. A student respondent from a focus group discussion confirmed the above assertion:

Well, as a journalism student, I know the rules of the profession of journalism, but now as a citizen journalist, it’s quite strange that there is no code of ethics written anywhere. That’s where the problem is. It becomes difficult to control the acts, because I mean, there are no written rules as to how citizen journalists should operate. And the fact that you are not bound by any standards means you have all the freedom to write whatever you want for public consumption. And worse still no editors to edit, the written stuff just goes straight online without being checked....

This is the reason why in some repressive countries citizen journalists are being imprisoned for not adhering to basic journalistic standards, as they are not immune from legal action (Friend & Singer, 2007). Citizen journalists are normally not qualified for such privileges like the protection against libel charges, which makes them different from the professional journalists who usually enjoy such privileges (ibid). Probing one interviewee about this issue, he had this to say,

... a professional institution affords reporters a level of protection that you may need when reporting on contentious issues. Reporters can get death threats from gangsters when reporting about local crime. Professional news organisations can protect their reporters from these influences in ways that can save the story...

Despite citizen journalism being popular amongst audiences, it has not been without criticism, especially from those in the professional journalism field who argue that the phenomenon is making professional journalists uneasy by putting them out of work. To explain the effect that citizen journalism is imposing on the traditional media, Gillmor notes that “the citizen media phenomenon is creating ‘near panic’ in the traditional media, with really troubling times, certainly for newspapers, but also television” (2006: 1). In order to reduce the effect, it is suggested that mainstream media should rather concentrate on linking with the escalating numbers of online and social network platforms as these seem to play a role in the mix (Ward, 2006: 2). In addition, rather than treating citizen journalists as delegitimising their profession, the key task for the professional journalists should be in fact to strike a balance on how best they can espouse citizen media. This also includes trusting the online sources as well as getting different news sources and perceptions. To acknowledge the works of citizen journalists, it has been noted that despite “mainstream” readers not reading content produced by amateurs, most of them often flip through reviews made by these ‘strangers’ before purchasing (Bowman & Willis, 2003). It is further highlighted that it is because of this that news organisations are putting more effort in positioning their professional journalists to become more than neutral reporters:

They have in many ways tried to represent them as experts in a field or interpreters of events. Although news organisations still have the resources to become known as the definitive authority on various subjects, they will have to make way for readers who want to pick up the tolls of journalism to contribute to a more informed citizenry and a more robust democracy. Journalists will have to change the way they have worked in the past and be prepared to collaborate with colleagues, strangers, sources and readers. After years of working their way up the professional ladder, some reporters will undoubtedly need to discover a newfound respect for their readers...Increasingly, audiences are becoming stakeholders in the news process. Rather than passively accepting news coverage decided upon by a handful of editors, they fire off emails, post criticism on weblogs and forums and support or fund an independent editorial enterprise (Bowman & Willis, 2003).

In contrast to the negative conceptions about citizen journalism, scholars like Hamilton (2000) argue for the need to assess the notion from a different perspective. Initially, it is essential to recognise the features of this amateur journalism and therefore identify what it is that sets it apart from the mainstream and professionalised practices (ibid). It is a fact that there have been numerous endeavours to define and conceptualise the notion of citizen journalism, clearly evidenced by the choice of words used to summarise its ideas and

traditions: citizen media, alternative journalism, democratic as well as radical media. It is thus important at this juncture to show how the notion summarises a framing philosophy that argues from a unique and ideological point of view. Important to mention is the fact that the different terms given to the phenomenon are all based on their amateurism. Williams points to the three features of communication that support this basis. For him, public communication can only be appreciated based on the process of “skills, capitalisation and controls” (1980: 54). Applying this presumption to citizen journalism, we could say that there is need to talk of “deprofessionalisation, decapitalisation and deinstitutionalisation”, as argued by Hamilton (2000) with reference to alternative media. This means that, as alternative media, citizen journalism should be accessible to ordinary citizens in spite of the prerequisite for professional training and unnecessary capital expense. Moreover, the process has to take place elsewhere and not in media organisations or similar structures. In that regard, Hamilton (2000) notes that such media would subsequently afford the capacity to intimately reflect the traditions of decentralised, democratic, autonomous and spontaneous networks of “everyday-life solidarity” that were realised at the hub of social groups practice by Melucci (1996).

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7.15. The Accuracy and Credibility debate

Credibility is one of the essential elements of the journalistic practice. Friend and Singer (2007) note that as the basis of any media organisation, credibility and accuracy involve reliable, factual information as well as convincing proof provided in an impartial manner. It is thus the role of the journalist to endeavour to seek the truth and provide a reasonable and complete narration of events for the mutual benefit of both the audiences and the journalists themselves. However, the broadcasting as well as the print media are challenged by the “gatekeepers” and political and ethical issues that regulate the information accessed by the audience. Some scholars would argue that these factors are not essentially a negative restraint as they help keep media outlets accountable. One of the questions I asked was on what the participants think about the issue of objectivity in citizen journalism. One journalist from a focus group discussion put it this way:

True objectivity does not exist but as a journalist you can try your best to get as close to ‘the truth’ as possible – you should adhere to the standards of practice so you always double-check and get quotes etc right. There are numerous ethics in place. I’m always evaluating objectivity in the back of my head while reading news, I mainly look at the sources used and the journalist who has written it.

Fortunately or unfortunately, the modern information and communication platforms of the twentieth century have the ability to challenge the gatekeeping aspect as well as the laws that restrict information flow. The process alone has eventually capacitated a growth in the numbers of citizen journalists reporting on issues and events that they feel have been sidelined by the traditional media platforms. In the process, those citizens who have been given the freedom to contribute to news have also become the watchdog for the media. Nevertheless, an important aspect still bothering those in the media fraternity is how credible is their information. To the professional media practitioner, these ordinary citizens are just but some people who manifest themselves as being knowledgeable and as being qualified enough to report on certain events. Traditionally, it would be an impossible mission to accomplish. One respondent from the survey shared the same sentiments in the following words:

The interesting debate that still lingers is that while studies of traditional media suggest that opinionated writing lowers credibility, those involved in the creation of online content vie that citizen generated media contain thoughtful analysis of the news events missing from mainstream media. There are however tangible reasons as to why citizen journalism content is less reliable than traditional forms of media.

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As highlighted earlier on, even though their perspectives sound reliable, citizen journalists lack the editorial oversight and in most cases, they are not under any professional or social obligation to present truthful and impartial information. Johnson and Kaye (2004) put across an important point which simply reiterates how the Internet has become so rampant with rumours and misinformation, the incident of which has eventually encouraged parody websites to sprout up on the Internet and disguising as official websites. The effect is that anyone can initiate a blog or a website and might not be bound by any ethics or regulations, despite them being applauded for bringing to the fore stories that would have been ignored by conventional media (Johnson & Kaye, 2004: 624). It is because of this that audiences might find citizen journalism content credible because the citizens are “independent” and do not have any kind of ties to corporate interests. This idea of not being tied to any corporate interests implies that citizen journalists can often shove the margins and publish sensitive issues that may be excluded, acts of which have ignited legal and political repercussions, and in some instances resulting in incarceration, as discussed earlier and as also noted by Etling (2008):

Reflecting the rising influence of online reporting and commentary, more Internet journalists are jailed worldwide today than journalists working in any other medium...45 percent of all media workers jailed worldwide are bloggers, web-based reporters, or online editors. Online journalists represent the largest professional category for the first time in CPJ's prison census.

It is therefore feasible to comment that citizen journalism content is becoming a more prominent and reliable basis of information. The aspects of accuracy and credibility are closely related to issues of objectivity as well, something for which the majority of journalists strive to achieve. It is however believed that most citizen journalists are not concerned about objectivity, as evidenced in how most of the citizens candidly confess to their prejudices. This acknowledgment to bias seems to threaten the credibility of citizen generated content, even though some would argue that their honesty in fact ascertains credibility instead of hurting it, as one of the citizen journalists argued in a focus group discussion:

No, the way we write or report the stories is what actually makes them credible. Because, what is important is that we know what the communities want to know, so we are kind of guided by them on what to write about and what not to. I think what is important here is transparency.

The aspect of transparency raised above is an important one. Friend and Singer (2007) argue that transparency has become a fresh ethic in journalism, as they note that it could be the single journalistic ethic borrowed from online to conventional newsrooms in lieu of the opposite. But they further acknowledge that transparency is quite applicable to citizens and not to professional journalists:

Trying to achieve transparency throughout a newsroom raises other issues, stemming in part from organisational differences between mainstream journalism and blogging. Most bloggers work alone. To the degree that a blog is transparent, it needs only reveal the blogger's biases, motives, methods, and sources. A daily news operation, even a small one, is exponentially more complex. A handful to dozens of people make decisions about what gets covered, how it gets covered, and how it gets played. (ibid)

The above simply indicates that while transparency is a good idea, it cannot be achieved by professional journalists because of the capacity of the newsroom thus, is easily achieved in smaller and less corporative citizen environment. It is therefore due to this that citizen

journalists can have the liberty to express their opinions in their reports given that they can pay off for prejudices in other ways (Friend & Singer, 2007). Friend and Singer further note that an essential way in which citizen journalists are being transparent in their practice is the way they present the news as a conversation:

One factor driving this new media phenomenon is dissatisfaction with the traditional model of journalists gathering and presenting an information 'product' to an audience – a one-way street...The web's interactive capability has been the most dominant feature of the new media landscape. It has spawned passionate, public conversations among a throng of diverse voices and perspectives and led to the return of a point-of-view style of news writing (ibid)

The main point highlighted above is the fact that because of the conversation kind of reporting, objectivity becomes insignificant in view of the fact that most sides of the subject under discussion are still covered, despite the different sources of information. However, it remains necessary that audiences verify the truthfulness of what is published online, no matter how credible it may seem. With appropriate analysis though, citizen journalism has proven to be an important source of news.

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7.16. Bootlegging

One of the major problems of today's online world is plagiarism, and the journalism field has not been spared. The practice is an essential ethical aspect regarding mostly citizen journalists, since professional journalists are aware of copyright laws (Etling, 2008). Most citizen journalists rely greatly on facts and figures they find online because the majority of them lack the extensive resources of professionals. Another journalist responded also pointed to the fact that citizen journalists, in most cases, do not write their own stories:

What they do is, they get a story from a media publication, they read, comment, reprocess it then repost. In many instances, that's what they do, but then they don't acknowledge their sources.

It is not surprising that in most cases they might not even be knowledgeable on how to measure the integrity of the information they get. Most traditional journalists as well as those in the journalism industry do concur that plagiarism is one practice that damages citizen

journalists' reputation and in the process ruins their credibility. In some countries, plagiarism could also land citizen journalists in jail or may sometimes incur a large fine (Etling, 2008). Since credibility is what makes citizen journalists successful, it is imperative that they observe this protocol and not become victims of immoral practices. In that regard, it is important for them to demonstrate the required ethical behaviour as mainstream journalists in their individual works. Doing this would definitely find them gaining credibility and earning the respect of their audience.

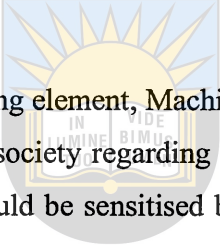
7.17. Quality Control and Ethics

A student respondent quoted earlier above indicated the dangers of not having a code of ethics for the citizen journalists. She indicated how citizens end up posting sometimes unacceptable content because there is no editor in the process to edit the material prepared by the citizens. This is an issue of quality control. An important assertion to make at this point is that the many publishing technologies at our disposition are not doing much to improve the quality of news. This assertion simply highlights the fact that an improved attention to the quality of news as well as the moral responsibility of journalists is long overdue. It is feasible to say that the professional journalists have been 'relaxing'. It is in the process that they tend to impede the industry from designing some plan of attack to address the existing quality and credibility issues in more reliable and consistent ways, which are probably appropriate to all media. This in a way has not been able to save the soul and purpose of news and journalism. One respondent from the in-depth interviews highlighted the importance of ethics in journalism:

...both professional and citizen journalists should adhere to the same set of ethical and professional codes. That is the journalism that we know. Just being a "mere" citizen journalist does not present the right to be irresponsible in reporting news. In order for them to be effective, non-journalists should know the basic skills and knowledge in the practice of the profession, and not just be relegated to being a source of news. Not adhering to the ethical concerns of journalism is just detrimental. In other words, it would be a disservice to the media audiences. It leads to ethical violations, like in such cases where one uses hidden cameras or other forms of deception to get the necessary information for a story.

Quality control and ethics as highlighted above are important issues regularly highlighted in the framework of citizen journalism. The 2013 anti Mohammed Morsi protests in Egypt

which left many people dead, more than ninety women protesters raped and sexually abused in just four days, and others injured, were also coordinated using social media as well as text messages (Booth, 2013). It is however not very clear if that resulted in the peaceful demonstrations or it actually encouraged citizens to be violent, but one thing for sure is that they succeeded in mobilising citizens to take up to the streets. Just like in the 2011 uprising against Hosni Mubarak, the Egyptian state authorities ordered the shutdown of all communication technologies and the internet to ensure journalists and the citizens did not access any media platform of that kind (ibid). I quoted a respondent above who argued that ethics and accuracy are essential but not taken seriously in citizen journalism. The respondent further suggested that governments take measures for not adhering to these aspects.



Investigating the alternative video-hosting element, Machill and Zenker (2007) suggest media policy organisations could engage the society regarding the use of improper content. Their argument is that the general public should be sensitised by encouraging the development of solutions to sift unsuitable content. Users can also be given the choice to flag the information, and work like a “Sword of Damocles” in cases when self-regulation is not being observed (2007: 23). However, some of these suggestions are only applicable if the platforms are managed by individuals. In that view, if the users comprise a community without any defined structure, then sensitising the society could be the most appropriate strategy. Media literacy could also be promoted through campaigns, it could also be integrated into curriculums. Awareness should be raised as to the effects of media messages. If adopted early, these measures could be more effective. Another way of doing this self-cleaning method of social media networks is to equip users with essential devices to report bad practices.

Having said that, it is appropriate to acknowledge that citizen journalism is literally difficult to manage due to the increasing numbers of the participants engaging in the practice (Maunganidze, 2011: 30). Instead, Maunganidze cautions that when reading media content submitted by these amateurs, it is recommended to evaluate if the content is reflecting all elements of the subject. In the same way, mainstream media cannot be relied upon for always disseminating the truth. Rather, double checking controversial issues from both camps could be the best way to figure out who is credible and who is not. Most citizen journalists have the

propensity to respond to what has been posted, and this already affects the credibility of their stories, as different parties participate and one cannot anticipate a lot of self-regulation in such scenarios. However, this does not mean that mainstream media organisations are protected against propaganda and hate speech. Some traditional media conglomerates have proved to be terrible tools for inciting violence. For instance, the Kenyan media were blamed for the 2008 post-election violence (BBC NEWS, 2008). Such cases are indicative of how some codes of ethics and professional standards could be violated.

What makes the case of citizen journalism even more complicated is the fact that most of the citizens do not even know about the profession's codes of conduct. Again, the society is protected by the freedom of expression as a human right, meaning that inhibiting the citizen journalists could be a violation of their right to expression. Given such a situation, it seems that awareness-raising as well as the promotion of media literacy on the society could help maintaining balance and fairness in the practice (Maunganidze, 2011). With the right tools, users can also flag immoral content or just ignore it (ibid). Doing this implies that the problems associated with the practice are being tackled from within, that means by the consumers themselves and not by a single individual hence, the approach could be more effective. The approach might also help solving problems posed by regulatory organisations which sometimes threaten freedom of expression (Maunganidze, 2011).

7.18. Summary

This study has indicated how ordinary citizens are contributing to the news-making processes in significant ways (Mabweazara 2011; Moyo, 2011). The results of the study clearly show the many ways in which the role of the traditional journalist has been transformed, as well as the ways in which ordinary citizens have been empowered to become “producers” and therefore their active participation in the production and consumption of media content. This indicates the *deprofessionalised*, *decapitalised*, and *deinstitutionalised* nature of alternative media (Hamilton, 2001; Atton, 2002). What this means is that media content has become “available to ordinary people without the necessity of professional training, without excessive capital outlay and they must take place in settings other than media institutions” (Atton, 2002: 25).

From this and the preceding chapters, it is evident that the practice of citizen journalism has stumbled upon essential aspects of credibility and the integrity of the journalism profession. However, it is noteworthy mentioning that the effect has not only been negative as was predicted. Despite the issues discussed above, it is noticeable that the citizenry is gradually considering the practice as a viable source of news. The fact has been embraced that we have moved towards an era in which not just the professionals still hold control of what we get as news and information. We have entered an era in which every individual can report and frame what they think is relevant for public consumption hence, acknowledging the fact that citizen journalism has become a vital aspect of the media sphere. To conclude this chapter, there are also other issues that seem to go unnoticed, for instance, the issue of how citizen journalism can be sustained. Many of the case studies mentioned in this study have yielded notable results, thanks to some development agencies for the financial backing. This is worth mentioning because there are those failed examples, South Africa's Reporter.co.za for instance. Launched in 2006, the project did not take off because soon after its establishment, the facilitators could not map a feasible business model (Banda, 2010).

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Lastly, a lot needs to be improved as regards the infrastructure, if the citizen journalism practice has to flourish as the democratic Messiah in Africa. Previous chapters highlighted the rate of acquisition of the technological tools in Africa, which is commendable. The citizens' level of literacy is also essential in the democratisation process thus, it has to be seriously considered. It is a fact that Africa is greatly lagging behind in this particular area, as reports have indicated that just four African countries are on the road to achieve the millennium development goals of universal basic education by the year 2015. In this regard, it is important that when considering the steps to educate the citizens so that they can effectively engage in citizen journalism acts, a lot is also reliant on the literate societies to make their voices heard.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1. Synopsis of the study

The previous chapters of this study have discussed the concept of citizen journalism from different perspectives, from the first chapter introducing the study, followed by a detailed discussion on the historical emergence of the phenomenon. Other chapters have highlighted how the phenomenon is being enhanced by the progressive technological environment, to how the phenomenon has impacted on the journalism fraternity. All in all, the intention was to build on the arguments surrounding the phenomenon. This chapter aims to conclude the study by highlighting the important areas of the study. It is important at this stage to reiterate the objectives of the study: to analyse the context in which citizen journalism is being practiced, to assess how ICTs have shaped, and are being shaped by people in their citizen journalism activities, to establish the extent to which mainstream journalism is embracing citizen journalism and finally, to realise the democratic essence of the citizen journalism practice, as well as to recognise the potential transformative influence of the phenomenon. Using the qualitative research methods, I believe that the study has gone a step further in contributing a unique and African perspective to the inclusive knowledge-base of scholarly work on the aspect of citizen journalism. This chapter thus presents the summary and conclusions of the study, highlighting the key aspects that have answered the research questions and fulfilled the objectives of the study. Based on the findings, the recommendations for further research, as well as the limitations of the study are outlined.

8.2. Summary of findings

Prior to summarising the findings of the study, it is important at this point to recapitulate on the research questions, which are as follows: What are the factors influencing journalism in the contemporary society? How has the citizen journalism practice transformed the news processes? How do conventional media perceive the citizen journalism practice? How has the society been democratised by the citizen journalism practice? This is essential as it reveals to what extent the objectives have been fulfilled by the study. The following section thus highlights the major findings of the study based on the objectives.

8.2.1. Citizen journalism: transforming the traditional newsroom

Based on the study, a major point noted is how the phenomenon of citizen journalism has influenced mainstream journalism. In as much as it is difficult to ignore the effects, the foremost challenge to the mainstream media is to change their processes and attitudes so as to increase audience participation in news making. In other words, the current participatory media climate requires journalists to challenge as well as reinvent the principles which have by now motivated their online efforts (Gans, 2008: 259). The point here is that while audiences have become accustomed to a media landscape that embraces them as content producers, journalists in the mainstream media ought to adapt their practices to consider audiences and at the same time create content that is compatible with the online medium and goes further than merely replicating media material, be it print or broadcast. This means that organisations are challenged not only to consider how they would journalistically as well as technically involve the audiences as dynamic producers, but they also have to change their perceptions of the “audience” (see Gans, 2008).

8.2.2. Citizen Journalism: a powerful alternative to the mainstream media

It has also emerged that what is pulling citizen journalism on top of the chart is its perception as a feasible alternative to the mainstream media. In that regard, the phenomenon has managed to attract consumers who were not satisfied by mainstream news, or were certainly not happy in the first instance, owing to the fact that traditional journalists do not include more of local affairs in their reporting. In that view, findings of the study indicated that the two camps could coexist if they embrace each other in order to deliver objective and quality news. This confirms Lacy et al (2010: 42) who noted that citizen journalism initiatives cannot be adequate substitutes for mainstream journalism due to the fact that they are not as timely as daily newspapers or their online versions, or relevant, not to mention the fact that most traditional media are better than their citizen journalism equivalent in terms of interactivity.

8.2.3. The timeliness of citizen journalism

The timeliness of citizen journalism has been hailed, and is not to be understated. The fact that citizen journalism sites seem to deliberate more on local issues than the mainstream newspapers simply signifies that the practice would still be on time with local news, a major attraction to audiences who prefer more of local news. In that regard, despite not being a wholesome alternative to the mainstream media, citizen journalism is surely serving its

purpose. It would be interesting to monitor how the relationship between the citizen and the professional journalism plays out, as it is possible to say that the association can absolutely work. It has been indicated by the respondents that partnership between the two seems practical, as evidenced by the many mainstream media tapping into the citizens' content for their main news bulletins or news headlines. Professional journalists could get story ideas from citizen journalists' content but the danger is they would be reproducing the disconnection crisis that traditional journalism is trying to solve.

However, an important finding was that despite citizen managed sites having daily contributions, the amount of content posted is limited as compared to that of daily newspapers. The reason could be that the citizen journalism sites rely on ordinary citizens whose principal job is not journalistic hence, they cannot always be on time or relevant. Importantly, the daily newspapers tend to be more resourceful than their citizen counterparts since the traditional dailies invest in their stories (Lacy et al., 2010: 44). This resource gap makes it impossible for citizen journalism to be an alternative for the mainstream media.

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8.2.4. Citizen Journalism, Professionalisation and Transparency

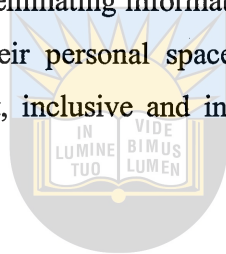
With social networking sites flourishing the space of instant, unrestricted remarks, the study has revealed that several citizen journalism projects are making efforts towards professionalisation and transparency, as evidenced by *Sahara Reporters*, *Iindaba Ziyafika* and *Global Voices Online*. For instance, the projects have engaged professional editors, in addition to putting down editorial guidelines so as to warrant better accuracy and credibility. In a way, this growing and improving citizen journalism practice, together with the effect of the economic catastrophe on the legacy media, have to a large extent, generated suspicions that the citizen generated content might as well substitute professional journalism, though this has been refuted for a number of reasons indicated in this chapter.

8.2.5. Citizen Journalism: a key diplomatic force

The unrestrained nature of citizen journalism has played an important role in the Sub Saharan region of Africa. It is thus not enough to ignore the unique opportunity that the phenomenon

has presented in playing an active role in diplomacy. The simple idea that the ordinary individual commenting on a story, creating pages or uploading videos at their own command is at least an amazingly influential player in the diplomatic sphere. It is this unrestrained nature of citizen journalism that has made it a vital building block, amplifying the perception of it as a key diplomatic force, despite concerns that the uncontrolled nature of it is imposing an unfavourable effect on diplomacy.

Citizen journalism provides an opportunity for active engagement, and the notion that it is often perceived as lacking the objective pillar of traditional journalism is in essence its best quality. Citizens are reporting and disseminating information and opinions that are of human interest to them and which affect their personal space. This mass participation and its uncontrolled nature create a dominant, inclusive and influential voice in the international democratic process.



8.2.6. Citizen journalism: reshaping the media and democracy

Having highlighted these important aspects about the practice, the debates still revolve on whether the technologies adopted by citizen journalists have impacted on the democratisation process. It is a fact that we have witnessed an unprecedented growth in amount and the flow of information in the recent decade, in as much as there has been a concentrated extension of the communicative platforms and ideological diversity. Resultantly, citizens are interacting more often, a key tenet to the premises of democracy, even though there is no guarantee that ICT accessibility automatically drives democracy. The basic tenet of democracy implies that individuals are capable of making rational decisions to rule themselves. Debates in the previous chapters have indicated that this is not the case with most African countries though, despite the increase in access to the modern communication technologies. The Internet might have expanded the platforms for dialogue and deliberation, but if ever this is democratising the African continent, then the pace is devastatingly slow. With a few exceptions of countries like South Africa, it is hard to pick a single government that has been democratically chosen. Of course, technologies could improve social action but that does not compel an active citizenry involvement. Perhaps the fact remains that the technologies are either promoting or weakening democracy.

8.3. Conclusions based on the findings study

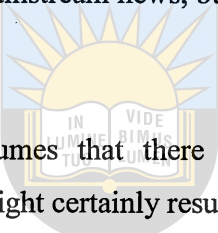
Overall, the results of this study revealed the power that citizens have in news production and consumption. It has clearly been indicated that journalism is changing, but that transformation is still to take shape. Traditional journalists, unsure though, have welcomed this revolution in the journalistic world with both anticipation and consternation. This study has also indicated that debates surrounding the practice of citizen journalism are far from over. The scores of terms used to illustrate the phenomenon in question show that the term “citizen journalism” needs to be comprehensively defined because apparently, the definition refers to anyone uploading user generated content which is considered ‘news’ by somebody in the world. Theoretically, the difference between *what* is journalism and *who* the journalist is, makes the subject more interesting, as it indicates the parameters of a career that is fundamental to the society. Therefore, a thorough description might begin from the axiom that whatever education or form of training they might obtain, the fact is that citizen journalists are ordinary citizens, not trained professionals, and this alone is enough to determine what we should expect from whatever they do, as well as its significance. Much of the controversy comes from the lack of a uniform definition of the phenomenon. Given the wide definitional scopes discussed in this study, it is perhaps logical for practitioners and policy makers in the field to be anxious about the impending effects of such activity. Below are some of the implications for these established actors.

8.4. Recommendations for practitioners and policy makers

It is commendable to appreciate the improved acceptance and appreciation of the citizen journalism practice by traditional news organisations and consumers alike, as evidenced by the results of the study. As exemplified by the *Grocott's Mail* which trains citizen journalists, some traditional news organisations have taken a major step of assisting citizen journalists with the devices, skills and knowledge of the professional operatives. To improve the quality of the citizens' content, some traditional news websites that concurrently integrate citizen journalists' content developed some regulations on what constitutes news and what is inappropriate for their sites. Apparently, *The Citizen Media Law Project*¹², recently transitioned to the *Digital Media Law Project*, is an American published guide that highlights

¹² The Citizen Media Law Project was formed in 2007 to encourage the vibrant online culture of citizen media and independent journalism by giving free legal advice and information on a variety of media law, intellectual property and business law issues.

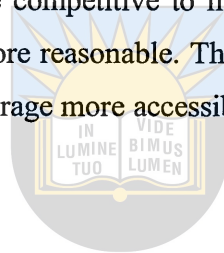
the importance of legal guidance for citizen journalists with or without formal training, and the guide is of help to anyone interested in citizen journalism, despite it being published in America. The change from 'Citizen' to 'Digital' shows the acknowledgment of the functions played by both citizen and professional journalists in online journalism. This is a project that might influence a number of citizen journalism initiatives to seriously consider aspects of professionalism and transparency by, for instance, setting up advisory boards, hiring professional editors as well as laying down editorial guidelines which could eventually ensure greater accuracy and credibility, as mentioned earlier in this chapter. These steps could induce fears that citizen journalism might eventually replace professional journalism, but the results of the study indicated that while amateur journalism is growing in niche markets, the practice is simply complimenting the mainstream news, but will never be a replacement.



In that view, Rusbridger (2010) assumes that there would be an increasingly closer collaboration between the two, which might certainly result in the so called "legacy media" to become "mutualised news organisations". It is a fact that citizen journalism mainly depends on the mainstream news for its topics, and many of their sites now include content-sharing contracts with traditional news organisations or their agencies, while others have been purchased by large media conglomerates. This collaboration is important in the sense that it could boost the credibility and trustworthiness of citizen journalism, as these are difficult to achieve as they need to be pursued with willpower. Thus, for citizen journalists to keep on giving appropriate information to the society, some respondents have noted that they need to be educated in ethical issues. For media practitioners, this can be achieved in partnership with organisations like the Knight Foundation and Open Society Foundations¹³ which advocate for the democratic capacity of citizen journalism. Meyer (2010: 27) advocates that those funding organisations should encourage literacy in digital media and give citizen journalists support in terms of education and training, especially in emerging democracies as well as those where authoritarian regimes rule.

¹³ The U.S. based Knight Foundation and Open Society Foundations (OSF) promote the democratic potential of citizen journalism by providing guidelines, discussion forums and citizen journalism training online, on the ground, and in cooperation with journalism schools.

Essentially, the critical objectives of any communication initiative and in the context of development include increasing the level of participation by citizens and ensuring that their voices are heard. Again, freedom of expression should be highly promoted to enable citizen journalists to express their opinions without fear. Institutions dealing with media development should keep on advocating for such a culture of free speech, not just by mobilising for the discharge of an appropriate lawful structure. This can also be achieved by encouraging campaigns that raise awareness and therefore send the message across to the ordinary people. It is also possible to develop a range of practical business models so as to allow citizen journalists to spend more time investigating their stories¹⁴. In any case, trustworthy and truthful content is imperative for a prosperous business model. Moreover, the telecommunications industry has to be competitive to make the prices of phone calls, text messaging and Internet connections more reasonable. Thus, mobilising for total competition and fresh business models which encourage more accessibility by ordinary citizens should be prioritised by organisations.



To maximise the potential of citizen journalists in the journalistic world, what is needed is a connection between existing concepts and technologies with new ideas. Pro-citizen journalism organisations could thus grab their potential as facilitators then increase the citizen journalism space by broadening up their networks to societal journalism projects. However, this does not imply reinventing the wheel by engineering completely new media platforms since compelling experiments are already underway. Perhaps a point of departure could be forming partnerships with already existing projects and establish the kind of support necessary to boost them. This approach presents a grassroots-driven development initiative which considers projects on the basis of their actual needs and not on the organisational precedence.

As a suggestion to enhance the possible collaboration discussed above, citizen journalists could be invited to partake in some mainstream media's online forums or live chats for discussions. Committed citizens could become full time contributors or commentators for

¹⁴ The Huffington Post raised US\$20 million since 2006 to promote the coverage of more local news and 'hire' more paid citizen journalists for investigative work.

specific media organisations and report news in areas which they have interest. It is thus clear that for the mainstream media, connecting with citizen journalists could be the starting point for a good working relationship. Connecting with such concerned citizens would be a major step towards connecting with the society. It therefore cannot be dismissed that the future of journalism entails an era in which the citizen and professional journalists collaborate to deliver the news of the day, with each performing their role in the process.

8.5. Limitations of the study

This study seems to have been overtaken by theories which mainly dwell on the political significance, and more especially, the ability of the citizen journalism practice in citizen empowerment. In a way, these theories tend to celebrate citizen journalism, yet little attention has been paid on how the citizen generated media are produced. Concentration has been paid on why citizen journalists do what they do, and yet less about what they do or why they do it in certain ways. This study, and the already existing studies, has not examined what Atton (2002a) describes as the “industrial practice”. The notion of industrial practice points to the need to appreciate alternative journalism traditions as “work”, an aspect which has been marginalised when analysing how alternative media are produced.

For Atton, studying the ‘work’ in alternative media would entail looking at the socio-political processes like decision making, the editorial conventions frameworks, as well as the ideological clashes. It might also involve scrutinising how people work, their acquisition of knowledge of becoming professionals, how they select which stories to report and how they choose their sources. It would also look at whether citizen journalists are actually autonomous, or whether or not their working methods are determined by the works of the traditional journalists.

Looking at all this, these are aspects that call for an appreciation of citizen journalists: their attitudes, motivations, ideologies, as well as how they relate with the broader society. Bourdieu describes this as an analysis of a practice that considers the association between “habitus and field” (see Bourdieu, 1991). Focusing on citizen participation only like that is

the only aspect of the practice could be dangerous when considering other aspects like how the practice gets its audiences and how the audiences relate to the practice (ibid). This may actually explain the continuing lack of audience studies in aspects of citizen journalism (Downing, 2003). Reception analysis in this area might therefore help, not only to facilitate the discovery of how citizen content is used (the extent and how the media are mobilising audiences), it might also help to elaborate the conception of audiences when they assume the producers, participants as well as ‘users’ role.

8.6. Recommendations for Further Research

It has been indicated in this study that professional journalists perceive themselves as strongly embedded within a specialised background of reporting objectively. Future studies could evaluate what professional journalists *say* as well as what they actually *do*. This is essential as it could show whether the assurance to objectivity is just an expression of their habit or if they do, and if they could produce evidence of fact-based reports that indicate impartial and objective analyses of the ‘truth.’

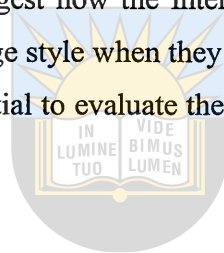
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Another study could also compare the motivation and gratification for producing media content by both citizen and professional journalists, to establish if there are any similarities or differences behind their motivations. As more news organisations are continuously tapping into citizen generated content, further studies could analyse how the content produced by both camps is complementing each other and being utilised jointly to create a complete mediascape. Also, the technological aspect, journalistic recruitment and the mentoring of citizen journalists could also be an important area of study which is necessary for a thriving future for the medium.

The results of this study indicated that professional journalists have not fully appreciated citizen-generated content as journalism. Evidence is abound in much of the literature which has indicated that despite understanding the significance of citizen media, professional journalists are not willing to acknowledge the practice as journalism (Chouliaraki, 2010). Despite the ‘progressive adoption’ of citizen media by their conventional counterparts,

traditional newsrooms are rather unwilling and careful not to release the whole of their production to the actively participating citizens (Domingo et al., 2007; Hermida and Thurman, 2007). Given this, more research could thus focus on investigating how citizen content is being adopted by the traditional newsrooms, and particularly, why the adoption appears to be happening at a snail pace. Some studies have mainly focused on the roles and attitudes of professional journalists towards citizen journalism content (e.g. Thurman, 2008), other studies could therefore examine or probe the organisational framework in which citizen journalism is believed to assume.

Findings of the study also clearly suggest how the Internet has become a battlefield where citizens tend to utilise a certain language style when they argue and defend their ideas online. Maybe, further studies would be essential to evaluate the language used in social discussions on the Internet.



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8.7. Summary

Going back to Gans' assertion that maybe "news may be too important to leave to the journalists alone," this study has indicated that the phenomenon under study generates journalistic material which is multiperspectival, and is to a larger extent positively impacting on the democratic society. It has been shown as well, that traditional media organisations can better appreciate and encourage consumers to become more active in news production if only they recognise the motivations behind the citizen journalism practice. Once media organisations accept the need to rekindle the relationship between them and their audiences, since the audiences have by now adjusted their position concerning the function as well as their connection with the media organisations, then only can they be better positioned to negotiate a mutually beneficial relationship in which the two tiers could collaborate to produce the finest journalistic material possible. Despite the availability of technologies for the "former audiences" to produce media content, the relationship between them and the traditional media organisations has to improve. This implies the need for the media organisations to view the audiences not in the traditional manner but rather as "participants and partners". For this process to take off, the initial stage entails understanding why citizen journalism is happening thus, they can be supported in any means to become a vital part of

the larger mediascape. Finally, this chapter has presented proposals for future research, especially for studies focusing on citizen journalism as a discipline as well as those that investigate ways in which citizen and traditional media might be taken in a complementary manner and not as opposing each other.



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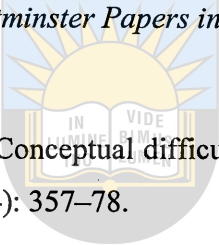
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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: ETHICAL CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE



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ETHICAL CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE REC-270710-028-RA Level 01

Certificate Reference Number: OSU191SMAP01
Project title: **The Future of News in the New World order: A critical analysis of the role of Citizen Journalism in Africa**
Nature of Project: PhD
Principal Researcher: Hatikanganwi Mapudzi
Sub-Investigator:
Supervisor: Dr O Osunkunle
Co-supervisor:

On behalf of the University of Fort Hare's Research Ethics Committee (UREC) I hereby give ethical approval in respect of the undertakings contained in the above-mentioned project and research instrument(s). Should any other instruments be used, these require separate authorization. The Researcher may therefore commence with the research as from the date of this certificate, using the reference number indicated above.

Please note that the UREC must be informed immediately of

- Any material change in the conditions or undertakings mentioned in the document
- Any material breaches of ethical undertakings or events that impact upon the ethical conduct of the research

The Principal Researcher must report to the UREC in the prescribed format, where applicable, annually, and at the end of the project, in respect of ethical compliance.

Special conditions: Research that includes children as per the official regulations of the act must take the following into account:

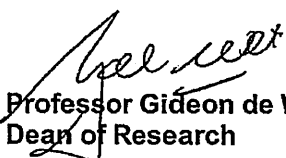
Note: The UREC is aware of the provisions of s71 of the National Health Act 61 of 2003 and that matters pertaining to obtaining the Minister's consent are under discussion and remain unresolved. Nonetheless, as was decided at a meeting between the National Health Research Ethics Committee and stakeholders on 6 June 2013, university ethics committees may continue to grant ethical clearance for research involving children without the Minister's consent, provided that the prescripts of the previous rules have been met. This certificate is granted in terms of this agreement.

The UREC retains the right to

- Withdraw or amend this Ethical Clearance Certificate if
 - Any unethical principal or practices are revealed or suspected
 - Relevant information has been withheld or misrepresented
 - Regulatory changes of whatsoever nature so require
 - The conditions contained in the Certificate have not been adhered to
- Request access to any information or data at any time during the course or after completion of the project.
- In addition to the need to comply with the highest level of ethical conduct principle investigators must report back annually as an evaluation and monitoring mechanism on the progress being made by the research. Such a report must be sent to the Dean of Research's office

The Ethics Committee wished you well in your research.

Yours sincerely


Professor Gideon de Wet
Dean of Research

01 October 2015

APPENDIX 2: QUESTIONNAIRE

Introduction

This request forms part of my doctoral study on citizen journalism. I am interested in teasing out people’s experiences of the practice of citizen journalism, that is, how and why people get involved in creating citizen journalism content, as well as evaluating the democratic value of citizen journalism, especially in Africa. As such, I have purposively selected you to help in the study by taking a few minutes to respond to the questions that follow. I do hereby assure you that confidentiality will be maintained.

A. DEMOGRAPHICS

1. What is your gender?

- Male
- female

2. In which age group do you fall?

- 15-24
- 25-34
- 35-44
- 45-54
- Above 55



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3. Your current position is.....

4. Which country do you live in?.....

B. General Questions about the role of media

1. What do you think is the role of media in society?

.....

.....

2. What do you understand by ‘alternative’ media?

.....

.....

3. What do you think is the role of alternative media in your specific country?

.....

.....

4. What do you understand by objectivity of the media?

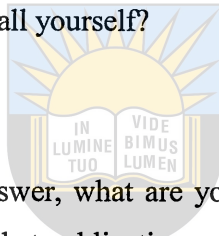
.....
.....
5. How do you evaluate objectivity of the media?
.....
.....

C. About Citizen Journalism

6. What do you understand by citizen journalism?
.....
.....

7. Which of the following do you call yourself?

- citizen
- professional journalist



8. Depending on your previous answer, what are your journalism activities in general, i.e., what do you contribute, to what publications and how often?
.....
.....

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9. What motivates you as a journalist?
.....
.....

10. What do you think is the role of citizen journalists in society?
.....
.....

11. Which particular website do you produce content for?
.....
.....

12. How interactive is the website that you create content for, in terms of users and people posting to it?
.....
.....

13. Are there any editorial policies that you adhere to when creating citizen journalism content?

.....
.....
14. If you said yes in the previous question, provide evidence.

.....
.....
15. Are there any principles or ethics that you follow as a citizen reporter?

.....
.....
16. If yes, how would you describe them?

.....
.....
17. How do those principles differ from those of professional journalists?

.....
.....
18. From my understanding, it appears one of the challenges of citizen journalism is quality and the other one are the reporting skills. As regards citizen journalism, what does quality mean to you?
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.....
.....
19. How do you compare citizen journalism to the 'traditional' professional journalism?

.....
.....
20. What do you think has perpetuated the increase in citizen journalism in recent years?

.....
.....
21. Do you think citizen journalism, like professional journalism, can influence, for example, political decision-making or policy-making?

.....
.....
22. If so, can you give examples?

23. Do you have any special kind of software or devices that you use to produce citizen journalism content?

.....
.....

24. Are there any particular skills that you need to be able to create the content?

.....
.....

25. If so, where have you learnt these skills?

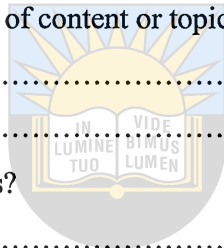
.....
.....

30 Do you have any particular kind of content or topics that you produce?

.....
.....

31 If so, why those particular topics?

.....
.....



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D. Target Audiences

32 When you produce your content, do you have a certain type of audience in mind or what?

.....
.....

33 Do you get feedback on what you produce?

.....
.....

34 If so, what kind of feedback?

.....

35 How often do you get it?

.....
.....

36 Again, if you do get feedback, do you respond to it?

.....
.....

37 Do you comment on other people's stories?

.....
.....

38. Finally, the future of citizen journalism, how do you see it?

.....
.....

39. Anything else you would like to share with me?

.....
.....

THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION!



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APPENDIX 3: FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. Tell me, how would you define “citizen journalism”?
2. Tell me more about your work as citizen journalists.
3. How does one become successful as a citizen journalist?
4. Do you have any kind of journalism training or what?
5. What would you say about the issue of credibility in citizen journalism?
6. How can citizen journalists gain the trust of the professional journalist and the audience? And how can it complement the mainstream media?
7. Do you agree with me when I say one of the critical things many citizen journalists do not understand is the necessity of interviewing people and quoting them?
8. And the issue of objectivity, what would you say about it?
9. Why are some of the mainstream journalists skeptical of citizen journalism?
10. Do you believe that citizen journalism is capable of being professional and can add value to the mainstream media?
11. Can ordinary people become ‘real journalists’ just by posting on a citizen journalism site? In other words, how does citizen journalism fit with the professionalism ideal?
12. The future of media, how do you see it?
13. Lastly, anything that you would like to share with me?

APPENDIX 4: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS

A. News and the Media

1. What is your definition of news?
2. What do you think is the role of media in society?
3. What do you understand by objectivity of the media and how do you evaluate it?

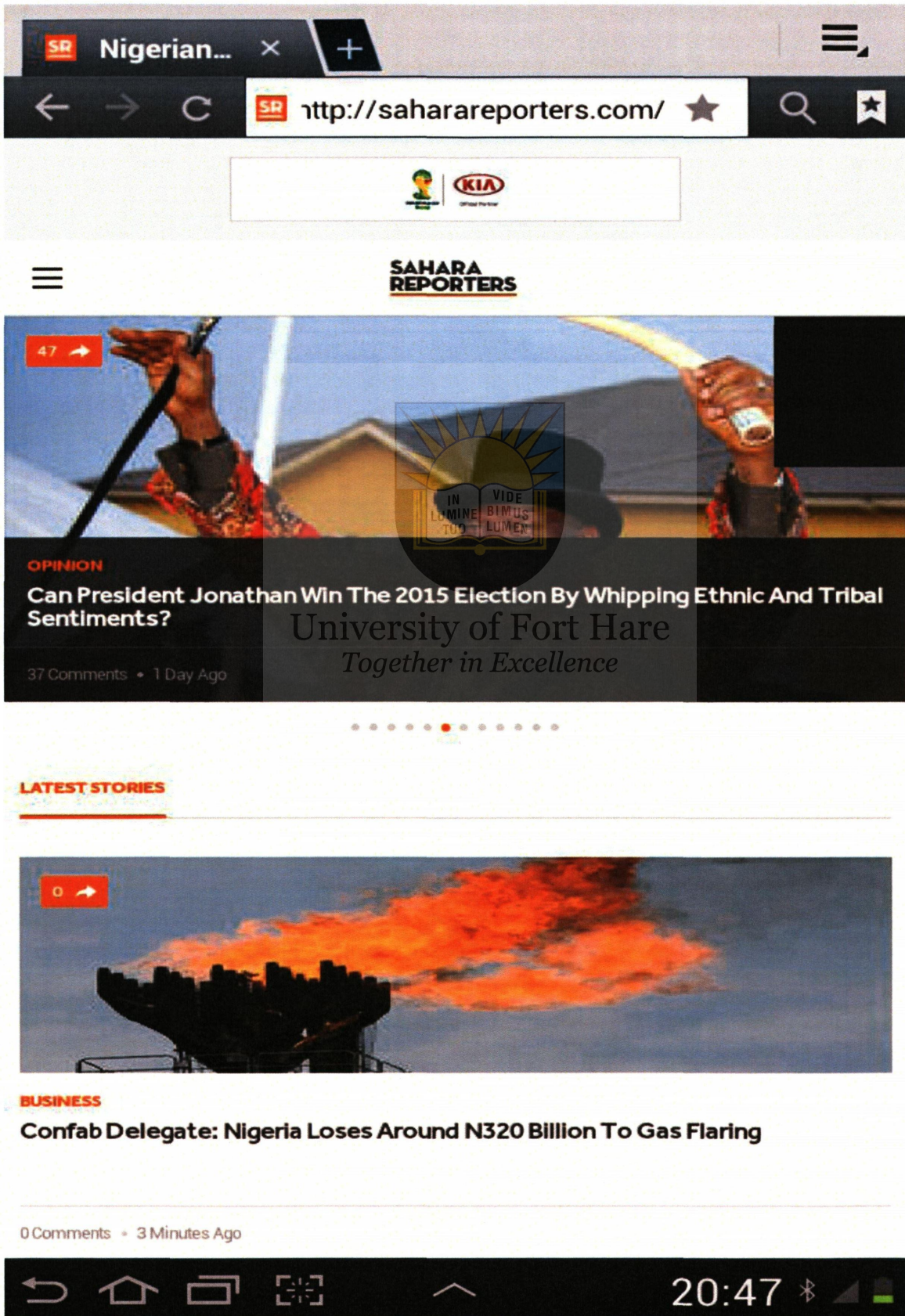
B. Citizen Journalism

4. How would you define citizen journalism?
5. What do you think has perpetuated the increase in citizen journalism in recent years?
6. What do you think is the role of citizen journalists in society?
7. Are there any editorial policies that are adhered to when creating citizen journalism content? Please provide evidence.
8. In your experience, how has citizen journalism transformed news gathering and dissemination?
9. How do you compare citizen journalism to the 'traditional' professional journalism?
10. Journalists as experienced and expert people concern ethical issues in reporting news. What about citizen journalists? Is it important or not?
11. In citizen journalism, the content is claimed to be the primary source of information. With your organisation, do you follow any ethical practice of journalism?
12. What is your take on the view that citizen journalism is providing some sort of public space for people to discuss issues? What is the general trend? Give examples where possible.

C. Effects of the Citizen Journalism Phenomenon

13. What trends do you see in citizen journalism that you expect to have a significant impact in the near future (5-10 years)?
14. Looking at the professional journalist, how do you think their work has been affected by technology, I mean, how the newsroom cultures have reacted to the citizen journalism phenomenon?
15. Lastly, the future of citizen journalism, how do you see it? Will the so-called 'citizen journalist' turn out to be a global phenomenon or will it only flourish in certain countries?
16. Anything else that you may want to share with me?

APPENDIX 5: SAHARA REPORTERS



APPENDIX 6: IINDABA ZIYAFIKA

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Y4Y Participants

Khaya Thonjeni, Y4Y show...
learners from St. Andrews' college.

Y4Y Participants

Y4Y

CJ Newsroom

Public Participation

Citizen Journalism Video

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Radio 6 - News On Your Doorstep

Radio Grahamstown has moved into the back of the Grocotts Mall building, where the press hopes to settle down permanently. Riding the airwaves through the frequency of 102.1 MHz FM stereo, local news and entertainment has been grazing the ears of both the youth and adults since late 1991, not without major difficulties, however.

Beginning with a group of individuals who had a vision of a community radio which would bring people together, breaching the imbalances of the past, Grahamstown Community Radio was born in 1991.

Even though the idea and commitment was in place by the people, there were no funds to start a studio. In 1993, Radio Grahamstown applied for a license with the Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA) but having no studio, they were only able to secure a slot on Rhodes Masic Radio (RMR) every Saturday between 7 and 10am.

Here, Radio Grahamstown was able to cover the main community issues as this was, and still is, the objective: to bring the community together.

Read more about the move here:

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Grocott's Mail Citizen Journalism Newsroom

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The Grocott's Mail Citizen Journalism Newsroom - opened on 8 September 2009 - is a walk-in community facility where citizens of Grahamstown can produce their own journalistic content (written stories accompanied with photographs, for example), for publication in Grocott's Mail, in the MyStory section on Grocott's Mail Online and elsewhere.

[View video of learners being trained in citizen journalism](#)

[View photo gallery of official launch of the newsroom](#)

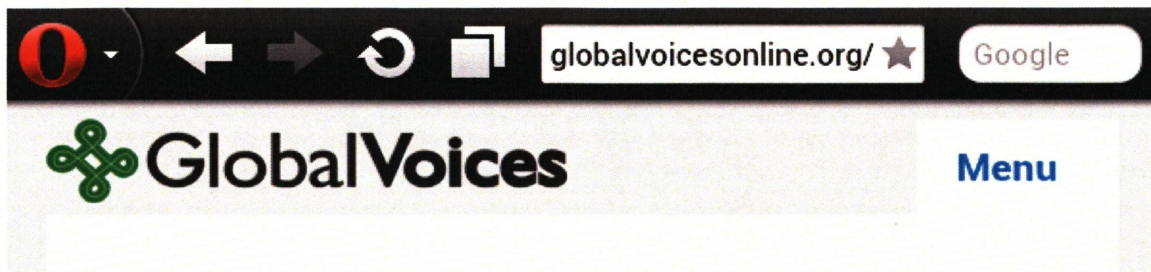
[View narrated slideshow of the official launch](#)



20:38



APPENDIX 7: GLOBAL VOICES ONLINE



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Our People

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