
THE INFLUENCE OF CITIZEN JOURNALISM IN THE PRACTICE AND PROFESSION OF JOURNALISM IN ZIMBABWE

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ABSTRACT: *Citizen journalism has been widely cited as revolving the field of journalism especially in Zimbabwe where traditional media is said to be exclusive due to the styles of newswriting such as the inverted pyramid style which is elitist. In citizen journalism anyone can be a journalist and this poses a threat to the practice and profession of journalism. In an effort to revolutionise mainstream media in Zimbabwe, digital survival strategies have been employed by newspapers where people can now read newspapers online. Traditional journalism has been heavily criticised by many scholars as failing to play its watchdog role by being elitist, focusing on political figures in a society at the expense of ordinary people. It is alleged that what makes news are the powerful people who misuse the media for their own self-centered advances at the expense of ordinary people in a society. The public media is used as a political party's sharpest weapon for propaganda purposes as suggested by Epp Lauk and Kreegipuu (2010). The contention by scholars that the practice and profession of many journalists and media are as dishonest as are different political parties with regard to how they frame, articulate and signify the political and economic crisis in Zimbabwe results in incompatible insights and worldviews by the general populace. This then brings the main thrust of the study to ascertain how citizen journalism purports to be practicing good journalism. A qualitative research methodology was used for this study which was informed by a constructivist philosophy. In constructivism reality is subjective as people are prone to have different interpretations regarding a particular phenomenon. The study was informed by the Public Sphere theory as well as the Democratic Participant Media theory. To ensure trustworthiness of data, triangulation of data sources and data generation techniques was done.*

KEYWORDS: Journalism, Citizen Journalism, Practice of Journalism, Profession of Journalism

Introduction and Background to the Study

The crisis in journalism is evident in the reliance of news sources from official sources who include prominent politicians, the elite as well as the opinion leaders who misuse the media for their own selfish gains perhaps for propaganda purposes McChesney (2012). McChesney (2003) notes that the news cover people in power. The sources of news are not expanded as the journalists rely on politicians instead of including people who are affected by issues. Most of the time journalists spend their time with politicians where for example journalists will say that the economy is rejuvenating when there are high levels of unemployment, no salaries, this is all because a particular journalist has met a politician who told him or her what to write in their publication.

The inverted pyramid style of newswriting which is a top down flow of information from the source usually politicians and influential people in a society is exclusive and for it to function properly it has to be replaced by a bottom up approach where the ordinary people are given an opportunity to have their voices heard by those in power. In Zimbabwe the inverted pyramid style of newswriting has led to a crisis in journalism due to its exclusive and elitist nature.

McChesney (2012) notes that political powers exerted control over the practice of journalism to such an extent that the voices of the working class and the so-called marginalized voices of women and children are hardly incorporated in the journalism industry. Politicians are perpetuating their ideologies to the rest of the people in journalism, sidelining ordinary people in society. In Zimbabwe the media is owned and controlled by the government who enact repressive legislation such as the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act, AIPPA, which stifles private media on its reporting. Traditional media, which include newspapers, radio and television has often been a trusted source of news. However, because of restrictive editorial policies, censorship and stringent laws such as AIPPA and POSA, the media have been subject to political pressures when dealing with issues affecting the interests of those in power (Kelley and Donway, 1990).

Most media houses are not owned and controlled by journalists, journalists are recruited to work in political and economic establishment. The fact that journalists are workers means a lot about the crisis of the profession. All governments want to control the flow of information even in most democratic countries such as United States of America, USA, particularly in war, people in Zimbabwe are unable to understand the dynamics of the economy of Zimbabwe because of the constrained flow of information. In the private media people are told about the futility of every effort in Zimbabwe while those who read the public media are very celebratory they have blind optimism which results from media deception, telling people that everything will be alright, while those who read private media have blind pessimism. People are exposed to lies.

The presentational public sphere is described by Rasmussen (2013) as characterised by the traditional news media we are used to such as the radio, television and newspapers where there are few voices. In presentational public sphere there is the use of traditional system of gatekeeping, voices of the elite and the intellectual are given enough coverage. Presentational public sphere is made up of attitudes by men and it is also exclusive, this is where people are regarded as consumers or spectators. In this sphere there is opposition of debates, isolation of people, unequal participation, lack of feedback, as well as hateful speech. The presentational public sphere can be called the traditional public sphere where the government has monopoly in the media as evidenced by minority speakers and majority listeners where the communication process is not interactive. Audiences are regarded as passive recipients of messages and as a gullible mass.

Markovits and Silverstein (1988) notes that the free press is necessary if the scandals of perhaps the elite are to be exposed to the public. It is on this background that the researcher wishes to find out the democratic potential of citizen journalism as it purports to be playing a democratic role, claim to be providing complete access to diverse information, independent from all invested interests and how the sacredness of life is respected in citizen journalism.

The purpose of this study is therefore to show how the prevalence of citizen journalism has changed the traditional way of journalism to an extent that most people in Zimbabwe rely on citizen journalism for the consumption and distribution of messages. Citizen journalists are able to change the status quo as they are actively involved in the communication process unlike in traditional media where the most influential people in a society misuse traditional media for their own self centred gains. However citizen journalism has its own shortcomings as will be revealed in this

paper hence the study also sought to explain how citizen journalism and traditional journalism complement each other. The rationale for conducting this study is to help equip traditional mainstream media to be alert and aware of how new media technologies are changing media ecologies in Zimbabwe so that they can stay prepared for any eventuality that may occur. The genesis of the internet has had a huge impact on the Zimbabwean journalistic practices, hence the need to have survival strategies.

According to The Daily (2016) online newspaper of South Africa, Pastor Evans has been described as 'The simple genius of Zimbabwe's #ThisFlag', as he managed to share his frustrations with the rest of Zimbabweans and the world at large on social media. Mawarire caused disturbance in Zimbabwe as he fueled harassments, intimidation, and public disorder especially when more people, that is citizen journalists joined him in the campaign demanding transparency and accountability in government as well as a call to end corruption in Zimbabwe.

Gaps exist between theoretical and practical aspects of the problem. The research will show how current knowledge needs to be validated clarified/improved.

Definition of Terms

Definition of terms come from the working title while others emerge. In this case the researcher needs to find out contextual meaning of the terms by looking at how scholars define the terms and what special meaning the terms have according to the researcher in her study.

- **Journalism** is the gathering, reporting and dissemination of news and information in the public interest (Masuku 2012).
- **Citizen Journalism** is defined by Rosen (2000) as public journalism aimed at seeing people as citizens rather than as spectators, readers or viewers, zombies, listeners, or homogenous audiences.
- **Practice of Journalism** for purposes of this research the practice of journalism will refer to the legal and ethical means that guide the operation of journalists and media houses.
- **Profession of Journalism** the researcher will look at the ideological and professional profiles of journalists in the media, professional orientation of traditional media practitioners.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

I used a qualitative case study research methodology informed by an interpretive or constructivist philosophy which according to Sibanda and Mafa (2015) argues that knowledge and meaning are generated from an interaction between researchers and participants. A qualitative research methodology was employed for the study as it is appropriate when one does not need to manipulate the behavior of those involved in the study. A case study research design was used as it enabled a detailed and contextual understanding of the phenomenon under investigation.

The population of the study was drawn from students from Zimbabwe Open University (ZOU). Participants were selected through purposive sampling because of the need to identify data rich sources (Creswell 2014) Media studies students from ZOU Bulawayo Regional Campus were purposively selected. Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and questionnaires were used for data generation. Two FGDs of 10 participants per group with Media Studies students from ZOU

Bulawayo Regional Campus were conducted. Open ended questionnaires were distributed to 20 students from ZOU. Interviews with 7 The Chronicle journalists were carried out.

The study was informed by the theory of the public sphere by Jurgen Habermas, a German sociologist and philosopher. Habermas believes that for democracy to prevail there is need of people to be informed, be aware, and to partake in debating issues of the day in society. Rasmussen (2007) came up with two dimensions of public sphere which are the presentational and the representational public sphere. There is a complementary relationship between representational and presentational public sphere in Zimbabwe. What is not reported on by the public media in Zimbabwe can be found in other forms of media in the representational public sphere in citizen journalism.

Gripsrud (2011) says the public sphere is now everywhere, a digital public sphere meaning that the communication platforms are now migrating to the internet and new technologies. Citizen journalism has become an important source of news for journalists especially in places where traditional media can hardly reach.

The study was also informed by a Democratic Participant Media Theory which allows for plurality and diversity in the media, multiplicity of ideas as well as a democratic participation by ordinary people in a society. For people often neglected by the media this theory affords them an opportunity to actively interact by engaging in political, economic, social and cultural debates for developmental purposes. Ideal journalism is the one where the media plays a democratic role, thus according to the Democratic Participant Media theory which is one of the normative theories of the media. It means that the media must provide adequate information which is objective, accurate, honest, diverse, truthful and ethical so as to enable citizens to make sound judgments. Rasmussen (2013) describes the representational public sphere as representing that which has never been presented in the traditional media. He further argues that the representational public sphere is inclusive as well as democratic and it is pioneered by the internet and other new information and communication technologies, (ICTs).

The trustworthiness of the data will be established through triangulation of data sources and data generation techniques, recording of interviews and Focus Group Discussions proceedings, transcribing and member checking. Prolonged engagement and extended fieldwork. Data triangulation through use of multiple sources. Iterative questioning (probing and prompting), frequent debriefing sessions. Peer review of research results. (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 1997). The following ethical considerations were employed in this study as explained by Best and Kahn (1993:45) where the following areas of concern are to be well-thought-out; informed consent explaining the purpose of the research, invasion of privacy; freedom and willingness to choose to participate, confidentiality, protection from stress, harm, or danger; knowledge of outcome.

Findings and Discussions

The two (2) Focus Group Discussions conducted with Media Studies Students from Zimbabwe Open University, ZOU, Bulawayo Regional Campus cited quite a number of issues regarding how citizen journalism is impacting on the practice and profession of traditional journalism in Zimbabwe. It is clear from the findings that citizen journalism allows for plurality and diversity,

democratization of the media landscape or the liberalization of communication as well as being the kind of journalism that is harmful to humanity through dissemination of falsehood, hate speech creating fear and despondency. Citizen journalism hence can be regarded as functioning like a double edged sword.

Nowadays society can influence public dialogue as well as media coverage as citizen journalists as indicated by the Media studies students where most of them were able to use the social networking sites.

Power is now at the disposal of everyone as a result of the popularity of new technological tools such as mobile phones and the internet that allow people to capture any footage that is of interest to them as they can share on social media with others.

In citizen journalism anyone can be a journalist, Adogla 2006 is also in agreement with this finding when he states that adoption of mobile phones transcends the class and economic strata granting access to even the poorest and marginalized to become a journalist.

Participants also noted that citizen journalism monitors the activities and behaviours of people, it has the ability to tell people what is wrong or right. With access to a camera and a smart phone one can be a citizen journalist.

Citizen journalism is done by people who are not professional journalists. People who are seeing events through their own eyes and experiences. Smart phones and social media are revolutionizing the understanding of journalism. The participants postulated that the fact that anyone can be a journalist through upholding the new forms of communication poses a threat to the practice and profession of journalism where ethics and legal issues are questionable, for example they cited a story of a child who was being eaten by a vulture, the photographer chose to take a photograph instead of helping the child hence there is compassion fatigue among citizen journalists, people tend to ignore the medium and only pay attention to the content.

The findings also show that in Zimbabwe people do not have the liberty to exercise freedom of speech and expression, people tend to use pseudo names for security purposes, they fear for their lives therefore it becomes their right to remain anonymous. In citizen journalism there are no news values, ethics are not considered in the coverage of news. Citizen journalism raises freedom of expression which is not available in traditional media, however just like in any democratic country, the flow of information ought to be controlled to avoid any harm or damage for peace to prevail. Participants noted that Citizen journalism has changed the inverted pyramid style of news writing in Zimbabwe which starts with an introduction and ends with a conclusion and in between there is a series of arguments to a narrative structure that allows for user generated content through the multimedia content kind of communication.

Through the interviews held with seven (7) The Chronicle Newspaper journalists, journalists working in the public media fraternity viewed citizen journalism as a double edged sword as it can be said to be reviving the field of traditional journalism and at the same time acting as a threat to the practice and profession of mainstream media in Zimbabwe in several ways. People who have not been trained as journalists can use new technologies to cover news stories Strate (2008). Citizen journalism has been cited as a source of news for mainstream traditional media. Citizen journalism has been able to change the face of journalism in Zimbabwe where the journalists mentioned that

they use citizens to come up with stories to disseminate in their news coverage, they adopted citizen journalism's news.

Willson (2012) postulated that citizen journalism is a source of news that lacks credibility. Lara (2013) accused citizen journalists for disseminating obscene material and spreading violence through videos and pictorial presentations. Journalists cited that they are inhibited in terms of what to report and what not to report in their publication and this is through stringent laws enacted to guide the operation of media houses, laws such as AIPPA and POSA. The Gukurahundi images which were disseminated by citizen journalists through the use of cellphones and other technological devices were not going to be seen by citizens if there were no citizen journalists, as journalists they are not allowed to report on Gukurahundi using the newspaper platform.

The Baba Jukwa character on Facebook makes it known to the people the corrupt activities carried out by government officials though some people might not believe citizen journalism and social network sites as they heavily rely on mainstream media as credible sources of news. The public believe in content but do not trust the medium whose content can be easily manipulated McLuhan (1964). Public media journalists highlighted that they are bound by the Officials Secrets Act from exposing officials' secrets through their publications and in this case through The Chronicle Newspaper.

Traditional media journalists are in support of the use of citizen journalists' news content in their profession and in the practice of journalism in Zimbabwe. According to Lewis et al (2009) he says that if one can open a website and allow everyone to say whatever they think is newsworthy in that case there is more engagement and it is journalistically better. The participants noted that there is no more monopoly of news in traditional media as social media has enabled political parties and other groups to participate in public debates to enhance their communication skills and power.

The digitization of the print newspaper Boczkowski (2004) has also changed media ecologies in Zimbabwe hence the Chronicle Newspaper and its availability online allows for inclusivity of voices, participatory and open mindedness concerning particular issues making stories in the paper.

According to Mporfu (forthcoming) the use of Information and Communication Technologies, ICTs enables Zimbabweans to build horizontal many- to- many interactions. The newsletter and the website are the most fundamental ICT platforms for Kubatana.net which also uses other social networks such as Twitter to attract a large number of Zimbabweans to the site, the electronic newsletters are therefore seen as alternative media that can be fully used by traditional journalists in order to attract more readers to their publications.

Gaines (2010) said that the decision to go online meant that journalists have been familiarizing themselves with a new journalistic venue which is the online journalism. The internet has posed a threat to the profession, practice, strategies and economics of journalism, there is lack of professionalism as anyone can be a journalist. The participants noted that due to the emergence of the internet, traditional newspapers face less circulation figures, less newspaper readership which results in less advertisement and less revenue. The aforementioned threats and challenges emanating from the internet were cited as clearly indicating that journalism has been brought into

a crisis. The genesis of the internet has had a huge impact on the Zimbabwean journalistic practices.

According to Charles (2014), internet is a global network connecting millions of computers where data, news and opinions are exchanged amongst many countries. The participants mentioned that exiled Zimbabweans resorted to the web and published fearless political content that the government cannot stop through Zim.online.co.za, motto, to tell the real Zimbabwean story. Zimdaily.com provides the most uncensored news to the people however all these activities promote freedom of expression that needs to be controlled through the regulation of social media platforms.

Chari (2009) says online papers have a latent opposing slant. Online media played an important role in keeping checks and balances on government public affairs, for example, exposure of corruption in the government, abuse of rights, for example the case of Dzamara, national debates and the right choices of referendum, space given to dissenting voices and subjects government policy to heavy scrutiny and criticism, for example, the land reform programme, election coverage, results and rigging, sanctions among other examples as cited by the participants.

Internet has also been named as a means to spread government policies and squash dissenting views and voices where participants referred to the fast track land reform programme and the bond coin issue introduced by the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe, RBZ. Berger (1997) says new information technologies are gold mines presenting journalists with opportunities to improve their practices.

The impact of the internet on the practice of journalism in Zimbabwe can be viewed as open to interpretive flexibility as the internet acts like a double edged sword. Internet promotes lazy journalism as journalists rely on the internet as their news sources. Lethogile (2005) says some journalists resorted in unethical practices such as lifting material from the internet without attribution. Internet has given room to malicious stories, for example, one person started a story that the then Reserve Bank governor Gideon Gono had died, and news travelled like veld fire on the internet, Wikipedia was even briefly altered to show the day of birth and death of Gono.

In Zimbabwe the use of mobile phones by journalists makes them publish stories without giving parties the right to reply on the false pretext that their cellphone was on voicemail.

Herald was at one time hacked, with the hackers replacing every word on the site with the word Gukurahundi, this was possibly from people or a society not happy with the editorial policy of the Herald (Hacked on May 10 2008- hackers targeted herald website)As noted by scholars like Roda and Rinke (2011), who researched on media ecologies during the Facebook revolution in Egypt, alternative media ecologies are oppositional and also have the potential to increase participation. Citizen journalism challenges traditional media forcing them to open up to people to user generated content, (UGC).

New media enhances citizen access to protest media ecologies in Africa .Citizen journalism and new media in Zimbabwe give rise to participatory journalism in Zimbabwe. ICTs are widely considered as crucial in bringing about social change in Africa Ndlela (2009) through empowering

citizens, open up new opportunities for journalistic practice, and create new platforms for free expression and activism. Okello (2010) says 'We media' is said to be more democratic, interactive, inclusive and multimedia.

Laws such as the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act, AIPPA, have now become redundant due to the proliferation of citizen journalism and other forms of communication facilitated by new media technologies which are changing media ecologies in Zimbabwe. There is no accreditation of journalists and they can gather online and partake in public interest debates. The new media are able to reach a heterogeneous public of consumers where there is decentralized production and reception. People have adopted new media on a massive scale. The participation enhanced on the internet makes it possible to indicate that the internet is a tool for democracy which is not found in traditional media. The normative theories of the media such as the Authoritarian media theory are no longer applicable in this era of new technological tools as people can practice self-censorship and social responsibility they envisage to be necessary in the production and reception of messages online.

Citizen journalism is not one sided like the traditional media in Zimbabwe, it is an interactive medium which allows for plurality and diversity in the media. The one sided communication exhibited by the mainstream media in Zimbabwe has been greatly changed by the internet and citizen journalists. People are now able to select the content of news which is not edited by the professional journalists Newman et al (2012).

CONCLUSION

Citizen journalism and other forms of communication facilitated by new media technologies such as the internet and the social networks are changing media ecologies in Zimbabwe. The traditional or mainstream media has been affected in terms of ownership, control, and laws that regulate the operation of media houses in Zimbabwe in such a way that media ecologies in Zimbabwe are changing. The internet has had many implications in the production and the reception of news. The internet seems to have substituted and displaced media ecologies in Zimbabwe. Nowadays the media in Zimbabwe is not controlled by the state due to the availability of online journalism and other new information and communication technologies. Mainstream media in Zimbabwe no longer have monopoly in the production and distribution of news due to citizen journalism and other forms of new media technologies.

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