



Social Media Driven Journalism in Africa: Some Theoretical Perspectives

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One of the critical issues one confronts when dealing with journalism in the current age is the definitional crises. Modern communications technologies have given rise to new forms of mass media that blur traditional boundaries with journalism (Flanagan, 2013, 2). The uptake of social media in news organizations is growing and today journalists are ‘romancing new communities by blogging and posting updates and stories on Twitter, YouTube and Facebook’ (Emmett, 2008). While journalism was easier to define prior to the advent of contemporary technologies and social media applications, over the recent years definitional aspects have become points of tensions coupled with the intensification of partisan divide. For countries emerging from colonial rule, especially in Africa, the new leaders expected a certain brand of journalism. This brand of

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journalism sought to decolonize, develop, and support the new dispensations. Thus an ‘Afro-centric’ brand of journalism which was devoid of any ‘westernized ... values ... unfit for local realities and norms’ was preferred (Rodny-Gumede, 2014, 55). However, these calls for ‘patriotic’ and ‘nation-building’ journalism were not without controversy, as this resulted in intolerance for critical and investigative journalism.

Closely related to ‘Afro-centric’ journalism was developmental journalism that African journalists were encouraged to employ immediately after the African states became independent. Developmental journalism originated in the Philippines and was developed into a coherent doctrine in the 1960s across Asia and the Middle East (Ogan, 1980, 8). As Tshabangu (2013, 313) observes, ‘In the subsequent years, development journalism gained universal currency with a strong following in the Second and Third World.’ In most of the liberated African countries, this form of journalism entailed journalists playing a public relations-like role where journalists only covered developmental issues, in what the famed Zimbabwean journalist, Willie Musarurwa, termed ‘Minister and sunshine journalism’ as it painted the newly enthroned ministers in glossy terms. As Musarurwa put it, this simply meant, ‘The sun is shining, and the minister spoke.’ This view is supported by Tshabangu (2013, 315) who argues, ‘In Africa ... development journalism should promote Pan-Africanism with such theorizing seeing the media as a revolutionary tool of African liberation from colonialism and imperialism.’ There is of course the conflation between being revolutionary and serving narrow and hegemonic liberational movements’ interests. This conflation is what made these new nations to see the media as extensions of government policies and infrastructure of social, economic, and cultural development and nation-building; creation of national consciousness; and unity.

Of course, ‘we cannot pretend that definitions and operations of journalism(s) in the global North are homogeneous with those in the global South’ (Mpfu, 2019, 59) making it needful ‘to develop better ways of understanding the generic characteristic of journalism over time and across geo-political space’ (Conboy, 2010, 441). As Singer argues,

[T]he current media environment—one in which anyone can publish anything, instantly and to a potentially global audience—demands a rethinking of who might be considered a journalist and what expectations of such a person might be reasonable. Journalists no longer have special access to the mechanisms of widespread production or distribution of information. Nor

do they have special access to information itself or to the sources of that information. These and other practical notions of what defined a journalist in the past no longer apply. Instead, the contemporary media environment demonstrates the need to emphasize normative constructs for journalists seeking to delineate themselves from other online information providers. (Singer, 2006, 8)

What we can agree on is that the definitions of journalism ‘are slippery and, at a basic level, border around training, ethics, collecting, writing, editing and broadcasting news to various news customers, newsroom cultures and rituals’ (Mpofu, 2019, 61) and also because “it is common for professionals to find it impossible to articulate explicitly what is implicit in their practice” (Burns, 2002, 34). Blood (2004) somewhat settles the definitional crisis thus: ‘Journalism, it seems, is like pornography. The specific definition varies from person to person, but in general, you know it when you see it.’ For Andrews (2003), journalism ‘implies that a disinterested party is reporting facts fairly’. To do that job well requires considerable training and the cooperative work of many minds. Of course, these assertions are challengeable and do not hold in the current world of techno-influenced journalism. Digital technologies have placed us in a context where discourses on asking if someone is a journalist or asking about their journalistic work are predominant. However, as Daly (2005) argues, ‘The issue is not the job title but the activity.’

The entry of technology in the communicative space has altered the way we have viewed communication and journalism. This conundrum imposed by technology is best illustrated by the Finnish court ruling when it concluded that:

medium ... used to transmit the processed data, whether ... classic in nature, such as paper or radio waves, or electronic, such as the internet, is not determinative as to whether an activity is undertaken ‘solely for journalistic purposes.’ Similarly, not preclusive is whether the publication is undertaken for profit-making reasons since commercial success may be essential to professional journalistic activity. Rather, the Court of Justice ruled that processing activities are to be considered as being ‘solely for journalistic purposes’ within Article 9, Directive 95/46/EC ‘if the sole object of those activities is the disclosure to the public of information, opinions or ideas.’ (Flanagan, 2013, 5)

Journalism as a practice has become vulnerable to various alterations as we see the people formally known as audiences transformed into ‘prosumers’—producers and consumers at the same time (Rosen, 2006; Mpofo & Matsilele, forthcoming). Mutsivairo aptly summarizes this when he observes that ‘it is impossible to ignore the dominance of an emerging new form of journalism characterized by rapid reporting, interminable interactivity and ubiquitous multimedia content sharing and customization’ (2016, 1). Consequently Moyo et al. (2019) point to a new form of journalism that is driven by use of metrics which they call analytics-driven journalism. Moyo, Mare and Matsilele (2019, 503) observe that ‘it is clear that there is a remarkable shift in news production processes and cultures, with increased reliance on analytics and social media for story ideas as well as multi-platform dissemination of news.’ Digital technologies have also introduced blogging cultures where people produce ‘easy to create Web pages with regularly updated information, commentary, and links of public interest, wide and narrow’ (Lowrey & Mackay, 2008, 64). The entry into the communicative or, to be more technical, journalistic space by the audiences has led to transformations in the understanding of the journalism profession and into the transformation of news gathering and distribution culture because of the instantaneity brought about by these technologies.

‘Citizen journalists’ have thus contributed to the transformation of journalism, and inadvertently to a new viral epidemic of ‘fake news.’ Fake news, defined by David O. Klein and Joshua R. Wueller, in the *Journal of Internet Law*, as the online publication of intentionally or knowingly false statements of fact (2017, p. 6), is a reality we must live with, and it has been critical that mainstream journalists and journalism in general tap into the digital world to fight competition and appeal to audiences who are migrating from traditional journalism platforms. If professional journalists ‘are expected to be news collectors and disseminators as well as watchdogs, monitoring excesses by those in power’ as suggested by Mpofo (2019, 62), then citizen journalists or accidental journalists (Allan, 2013) are capable of the same and more. Citizen journalism refers to ‘a range of web-based practices whereby “ordinary” users engage in journalistic practices ... such as current affairs-based blogging, photo and video sharing, and posting eyewitness commentary on current events’ (Goode, 2009, 1289). However, even citizen journalism has its own branches with one such branch being whistle blowing, what Mpofo and Matsilele (forthcoming) characterize as whistleblower citizen journalism. Whistle blower

citizen journalism entails the functioning of whistleblowers as investigative journalists mimicking the role played by investigative journalists for decades like ‘breaking news’ and exposing corruption among others.

Citizen journalists can record, broadcast, and debate issues, taking actions if they deem necessary (Mutsaers & Columbus, 2012). For instance, recent protests such as the #BlackLivesMatter, #ZimbabweanLivesMatter, #ThisFlag, #FeesMustFall, and many others draw from the wealth of citizen journalism’s capabilities of mobilization and agenda setting. Mainstream media analyzes and makes clear issues but has no organizational and ‘way forward’ approach to news and events in society. In a nutshell, a distinguishing feature between mainstream media journalism and citizen journalism is that the former is more circumscribed by traditions, rules and regulation, and norms of ‘professionalism,’ while the latter is largely unrestrained and often combines reporting and activism.

Citizen journalism has largely flourished on social media. The realization of the importance of the social media space by mainstream media has led to social media and activities that obtain therein impactful to the activities of the former. As Gordon (2009, 7) observes, ‘[A] recent trend in online news is not merely having a website on the Internet where users come to browse your content, but literally reaching out to your audience and delivering news updates through different channels on the Internet—known as social media.’ Social media activities have set the agenda in society. In most cases, we have seen mainstream media basing their stories on social media content (Lowrey & Mackay, 2008). Similarly, in other instances social media draws from mainstream media. This symbiotic relationship becomes critical to scholars of journalism and media as they lead us to rethinking and re-evaluating the possible new directions that news production, journalism, and ‘audience-ship’ are taking.

This implicates issues such as media law and media ethics as these are important in constraining communication in general to make sure it does not infringe of people’s rights and security. However, it must be noted that this is a difficult but important exercise to be carried out by authorities. Social media have made it possible for citizens to gather, edit, and disseminate news but most importantly for them to also make sense and commentary of the world as they see it being portrayed by mainstream news, corporates, and fellow citizens. Besides, social media magnifies identities and transcends boundaries making debates transnational and setting the agenda in diverse locales. The killing of George Floyd, a black American

man, by a white police officer set the world agenda on issues of the positionality of black lives in the global village and this magnified the similar experiences of people of color globally. The murder was filmed by an American citizen and later uploaded on Facebook. In the process the Black Lives Matter movement and theme occupied center stage globally as the campaign for racial justice intensified. For that month, the movement set the news agenda and mainstream media had no option but follow the news as largely frames by citizens on social media. At one level citizen journalists challenge the dominant discourses and society especially when citizens or some communities feel undermined.

This leads us to the important argument that journalism has, in the immediate past, been driven by social media. What does it mean then to have social media driven journalism? News gathering strategies by mainstream journalists have evolved as a result, while ordinary citizens have taken seriously their citizenship duties and married these to social media activism and reporting. Ordinary people increasingly understand their power to make events ‘trend’ and hence become the leading news of the moment and are willing and ready to pull out their cellphones and record whatever they deem as ‘news’ and share it. Social media ‘news’ ranges from the absurd, unacceptable, to the beautiful humane moments and events in society and the serious eye-witness reporting of important political, economic, or social events. It can be something that touches the core of humanity, such as the police killing of innocent citizens by firing a volley of live ammunition on a group of unarmed people protesting against poor service delivery, or a dog caring for a human new-born. Implied in this is the ability of society to communicate and share information using various platforms and the capability of judging whether something is news or not. However, there are instances where stories are deliberately embellished and fake news is spread, and this calls for different interventions by society and those in leadership position to preserve public peace, morality, and health. Social media driven journalism has altered the news cycle and concept of deadlines in traditional news settings and mainstream media find themselves having to be on their toes to break news first, before their competitors in the mainstream media and not before audiences. Recognizing the importance of co-creating news with citizens, some mainstream media have added columns/portals where citizen journalists can send their breaking news, thereby harnessing the labor of citizens into their news production processes.

Social media has seen a marked transformation of journalism and the birth of start-up news organizations that mix citizen journalism and professionalized journalistic styles where news is verified and professionally reported. Often, conflicting parties are treated fairly and objectively with a right of reply where applicable. Citizen journalism is rarely bounded by ethical codes, since most citizens do not have such training. There have been some attempts to remedy this through social media literacy training in some countries. However, many challenges persist, such as use of parodies, aliases, and the ability of citizens to switch on and off their social media presence when it suits them. Hence the dismissals of citizen journalism as ‘pseudo’ journalism ‘caught up in concerns around authenticity, credibility and controversy’ (Banda, 2010, 26), whereby strangers have encroached ‘into the space previously a preserve of trained journalists’ (Mpofu & Barnabas, 2016, 120). There is a growing tendency of calling out those who spread fake news, as ordinary people become more aware of strategies and sites where they can verify, and fact check news they receive from their networks on social media.

In some instances, especially in dictatorships, there is a tendency by political leaders to come up with social media laws that not only prevent the spread of fake news but are so overreaching that they impede and throttle freedoms of expression and association. While communication that exposes the public to danger and causes alarm and despondency should be curtailed, it remains critical that social media be given a certain leeway as it is central to various aspects citizen participation in social, political, and economic spheres. Most media laws used in some African countries seem to be premised on politicians’ fear of the power that these means of communication potentially confer on the citizenry, because an informed citizen is an empowered citizen who is not easily gullible. Investigative journalism and exposure of corruption in countries such as Zimbabwe has mainly been through social media in recent years. Legislating against these as journalistic spaces limits the power of investigative journalism and likely facilitates the spread of corruption undeterred and undetected.

This book looks at the appropriation of social media for journalistic purposes in Africa, what we regard as social media driven journalism. While several scholars have recently focused on this topic, these have been mostly in stand-alone journal articles and book chapters. This book attempts to make a sustained and wholistic focus on social media driven journalism by bringing together scholars from diverse backgrounds and looking at a wide range of case studies from across the continent. In this

volume we cover, among others, the political economy of social media journalism, theoretical perspectives, start-ups, and country case studies. The book provides insights into the complexity of the appropriation and incorporation of social media into the traditional news media mix in African journalism. The main aim is to examine what, how, and to what extent social media is reconfiguring and restructuring journalistic practice as we know it. The blurring of social media and news media content requires a closer investigation. If social media is reconfiguring journalism as a craft, to what extent is this aiding or undermining the profession. The studies in this book employ a wide range of methodological approaches, country case studies, and theoretical paradigms to assess trends and opportunities associated with the increasingly pervasive use of social media. The book opts to promote a new conceptualization of a certain type of journalism which is specifically born of and thrives through the social media applications in present-day sub-Saharan Africa.

SOCIAL MEDIA AND JOURNALISTIC RECONFIGURATION IN AFRICA

Few scholars have looked at the concept of social media journalism. Bor (2014), for example, has looked at how journalism educators are integrating social media into their curricula ensuring that those who leave training institutions are trained in what he regards as social media journalism. One of the conclusions from Bor's study is that institutions of higher learning should include emphasis on ethics, technical skills, and the potential for career development in their curriculum as a result of this brand on journalism. Adornato (2017), on the other hand, places much emphasis on the role technologies are playing in the journalistic sphere, arguing that the advent of social media has brought with it a more engaged audience who challenge news media to produce content that is more engaging, contrary to the days of passive audience. The engaged and active audience has also led to a rise in analytics-driven journalism, as news media are now tracking the impact of their content on an hourly basis, and in some instances being forced to tell stories audiences want to see or read.

As already alluded to earlier, several scholars (Carlson, 2018; Hirst & Treadwell, 2011; Newman, 2009; Alejandro, 2010) have looked at the intersection of social media and traditional journalism practice. Carlson looked at the public's responsibility in trending topics, while Hirst and

Treadwell have focused more on updating journalism curricula to ensure it speaks to the changing dynamics. Notable, these studies are entirely from the West—with a few having been done in Africa. In Africa, specifically, only a handful of studies (Bosch, 2010, 2014; Mabweazara, 2014; Paterson, 2013; Mare, 2013) conducted on social media journalism have looked at issues of ethics, appropriation, emerging cultures, and the role of social media in journalism. The major departure for this study is its interdisciplinary approach, geographical spread, country case studies, and multiple approach.

Social media has brought fundamental changes with far-reaching implications for the field of journalism and news making in ways that we cannot ignore (Harcup, 2011). The growing trend in people consuming news more on digital platforms than through the traditional ways has continued to manifest across the world, raising fears about the future of traditional media, which has been in decline in many places (Hedman & Djerf-Pierre, 2013). Beyond the debates as to whether citizens are journalists or not, one more critical issue has been that of regulation. How do we regulate citizen journalistic activities carried on social media without taking away the unmistakable contribution that comes with this, and what standards must mainstream news stick to when breaking news in this competitive news market environment? Again, what do we make of social media based journalistic start-ups? How are they redefining the field of journalism? Social media driven journalism invites us to rethink legal and ethical frameworks in the communicative field. Another important aspect that we need to consider given the circumstances is journalism training. Added to this, journalism is increasingly becoming data driven where human behaviors must be monitored for different ends (Mutsvairo et al., 2019; Joakim & Stavelin, 2014). Again, we need to continue questioning where social media will lead journalism and mainstream media (Alfred, 2013). In 2020, at the time of conceptualizing this research project, we saw how the coronavirus disrupted and even led to the closure of newspapers, as businesses across the board took a knock. But the digital media platforms remained relevant as a source of news. Mutsvairo warns us that we must think about the ‘reliability and expediency of news and content produced by non-professional actors in a technologically deterministic and fast transforming world of journalism’ (Mutsvairo, 2016, 1). Besides we also need to further question: are they going to help mainstream and traditional media survive? Are mainstream media going to stand the test of time (despite, as noted elsewhere, some mainstream media were affected by the global

COVID-19 pandemic and closed)? These are the questions which continue to be foremost in most researchers' minds and scientific research agendas (Ju et al., 2014).

CHAPTER SUMMARIES

This edited book focuses on the concept of social media journalism and new journalism ecologies in East and Southern Africa. The book addresses issues of use of social media for sourcing, ethics, participation, changing journalism landscape as a result of the advent and proliferation of social media use. The book demonstrates how new journalism ecologies have reconfigured journalistic practices in Africa. To ensure that the narratives follow a logical and coherent sequence, this volume has been arranged in a manner that ensures some coherence.

The book is going to ask three critical questions wherein lay the main contribution to the phenomenon of social media journalism and the new journalism ecologies: (1) how has social media and new journalism ecologies reconfigured traditional journalism practice?; (2) what are the new forms of journalisms or journalisms that are being spurred by social media platforms and new journalism ecologies?; and (3) with examples, what are the technical, mechanical, ethical, and viability challenges imposed by the advent and wide use of social media and new journalism ecologies in traditional media setting? These questions will assist this volume in making three critical knowledge contribution in the following areas: (1) re-looking and proposing new ways of looking at the question of ethics in light of social media driven journalism; (2) issues of viability of media operations especially political-economy questions with focus on sustainability; and, finally, (3) propose new conceptualization of social media driven journalism in the global south.

This chapter focuses on the conceptualization of a certain type of journalism which is specifically born and thrives through social media applications in present-day sub-Saharan Africa. This introductory chapter theorizes social media driven journalism and new journalism ecologies, maps the changing structure of journalism, and looks at new forms of journalisms enabled by advent and wide use of social media applications. Chapter 2 speaks to the effects of new media technology on news production practices in Uganda. The findings indicate customized mobile apps at NTV Uganda have enhanced the production and delivery of news, whereby it is easy to edit, produce, and share news content with the

producer. Chapter 3 deals with digital start-ups in Ethiopia carefully examining the structure of ownership, the nature of the staffing and the supply of content, and the business model these start-ups adopt, and how all these factors affect their proper functioning as professional journalistic organizations.

The next five chapters located under the theme of newsmaking cultures look at how social media has reconfigured new production practices in Lesotho (Chap. 4). The study concludes that there are a myriad of patterns that have emerged on the adoption and use of social media in Lesotho newsrooms which are shaped by and reflect the complexities and contradictions relating to the localized appropriation of digital technologies in African newsrooms. Chapter 5 looks at how social media, as a variant of citizen journalism, is becoming an alternative public sphere to articulate issues of gendered-based violence in South Africa. Chapter 6 looks at the issue of female journalists' harassment on the cybersphere with Zimbabwe being the case study. Chapter 7 investigates whether (and in what ways has) the decision by Malawi's leading print newspapers, *Times Group* (Times) and *Nation Publications Limited* (NPL), to adopt the digital first strategy of news reporting helped the news organizations to remain relevant and competitive in the fast-paced digital world. Chapter 8 looks at how social media and other digital affordances enhance accountability by elites through social media exposé with Zimbabwe being the case study. Chapter 9 investigates why Namibian online-only newspapers decided to abandon the traditional newspaper product for online-only delivery. The study found that this new model was intended to reach out to and engage audiences who are now online and much more because of financial reasons as publishing a traditional product was becoming an unsustainable burden. Chapter 10, under Part II 'Social Media, Funding Models and Participatory Cultures,' investigates Tanzanian journalists' attitude toward citizen journalism.

The next part deals with social media and participatory cultures. Chapter 11, with a sharp focus on South Africa, explores how ordinary citizens, using social media, are able to monitor and point out journalists and journalistic works that do not serve the interests of ordinary reading and viewing public but the interests of the 'factions' within the ruling African National Congress (ANC) and country book opens with the role of indigenous language media in South Africa. Chapter 12 focuses on the survival strategies used by social media driven online news outlets in Zambia. Chapter 13 explores the prospects and threats presented by the

digital age to the newspapers and radios that use African languages in South Africa.

The last part of the book deals with ethical considerations around social media appropriation in the news media space. Chapter 14 focuses how Zimbabwe's diasporic media has appropriated social media for its news production, dissemination, and sustainability purposes. Chapter 15 discusses the experience of a citizen journalism movement emerged in 2013 called Olho do Cidadão—'Citizen's Eye.' The main findings are that the Citizen's Eye represents an innovation in the way of informing and reporting about politics in Mozambique, although problems such as digital divide, ethics and professional deontology, and fact-checking persist. Chapter 16 analyzes visual news utilizing media and linguistics techniques to ascertain how visuals may help or hurt the aim of news transmission, especially in gory and emotionally charged circumstances as xenophobic news images on various news channels and social media.

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