



Investigating the use and impact of social media in Zambian newsrooms between 2011-2013

Elastus Mambwe

Department of Media and Communication Studies, The University of Zambia, Lusaka, Zambia

Abstract

Journalism research from the last decade has shown that social media continue to take on an increasingly important role in the well-functioning of newsrooms. This ability is seen as an important development in the evolution of media in several countries. However, for countries such as Zambia, studies on the impact and usage of social media on journalism were until recently scant or merely unavailable. This paper provides the results of an early study conducted between 2011 and 2013 that investigated the use of social media among journalists in Zambian newsrooms. The study showed that that even though media houses were formally utilising social media at the time, the usage was mostly dependant on individual newsroom staff. It also showed that usage was still in its infancy at the time and was muddled by challenges such as low internet access, high cost of access and a sense of apathy towards their use.

Keywords: social media, new media, internet, Journalism, Zambia, newsrooms

1. Introduction

Social media have continued to take on a central role in news processes at different levels. For news organisations, social media have not only come as means to distribute content, but to also connect to consumers of their news products. Their use in newsrooms has challenged the long-standing definitions of mass communication as the lines between personal and mass have been significantly blurred. Social media present an unprecedented level of freedom for media houses that have traditionally seen heavy state control, regulation and involvement, particularly in countries in the South such as Zambia. Additionally, the ability for social media to facilitate faster, cheaper, wider-reaching and interactive communication comes as an added advantage to journalists and newsrooms in such countries. Social media have changed processes and methods of engaging with news content. Following global events such as the Arab Spring, the Occupy gatherings, as well as the UK riots, it became clear that more and more people were looking to social media as platforms for sourcing and sharing the news. W. Lance Bennett and Alexandra Segerberg in "*Digital Media and the Personalization of Collective Action*" as quoted by Diers argue that social media not only provide a platform for organizing people around issues of concern, but it also fosters the personalization of activism fostering sustained high levels of engagement, agenda focus, and network strength^[1]. Part of the reason for the success of social media is that they are interactive and participatory in their nature and are constantly looking for new and better ways to cater to the organic needs of their users^[2].

Despite growing acknowledgment of the role that social media was playing in news development and dissemination, it was doubtful that media houses in Zambia had fully embraced them as communicative tools. The degree and frequency to which social media were used by Zambian media in the said processes was not known. Furthermore, the impact these tools or platforms were having on general newsroom and journalistic practice in the country remained

unclear. This study addressed these questions and shows the finding of a study that sought to determine the level of utilisation of social media tools by media houses in news gathering and dissemination, and the perceived impact these tools have had on the media houses. The study not only investigated the use of social media in newsrooms but shed light on the factors influencing their use; the challenges media houses face in the interplay between social media and traditional media; and the perceived impact they had on news production.

The paper will show that even though media houses in Zambia formally utilised social media at the time of the study, its use was mostly employed by individual newsroom staff. Additionally, the study revealed existence apathy towards social media and the lack of training on the usage of the available tools inhibited its uptake. Zambian newsrooms also lacked formal social media policies, and where social media were being utilised, a largely positive impact was observable, but this impact was limited by factors such as poor internet access levels and the cost of connectivity.

2. Social media, the internet and mass communication

There exists no one single definition of social media as various scholars, writers and commentators have explained the concept differently. Furthermore, defining social media is compounded by the fact that the technology and tools which may constitute social media are constantly evolving and bringing new and often complex dimensions to the manner in which users are engaged or assimilated in the communicative processes. This, in part, is attributed to the fact that social media relates to the technology and platforms that enable the interactive web's content creation, collaboration and exchange by participants and the public. Mayfield posits that social media is best understood as a group of new kinds of online media, which share most or all five characteristics, which are: *participation* that blurs the line between media and audience; *openness* to access, use and comment; *conversation* oriented or two-way communication; *community* creation based on common

interests and effective communication; and *connectedness* by forging links to other people, resources and places online^[3]. Social media, a consequence and part of new media and the internet revolution. The internet itself changed and continues to alter media industries and the practices in mass communication. Scholarship has already observed that the journalism profession was at the crossroads because the internet defied long standing conventions and departed from the rules and practices established in the history of the field^[4]. For example, the internet can be mass and personal at the same time, it can be used for broadcasting and narrow casting at the same time, and messages can be for both homogeneous and heterogeneous groups.

Terry Flew states that due to the implementation of digital media by various media organizations^[5], three benefits resulted, these are

- a. A reduction of costs of storing and distributing information
- b. The development of an online presence enabling cross promotion between the organizations various outlets such as print and television and lastly,
- c. The shift from mass distribution models to systems that are tailored to meet desires and needs of individual customers.

In view of this transformation, journalists needed to change adapt. In his analysis of the new era for journalists, Briggs contended that there had never been a time that offered so many powerful ways to tell stories and serve readers with information^[6]. This is because of the many tools available for journalists, the increased interaction with audiences and the near disappearance of traditional constraints of time and space. Further, Fulton described the online environment as a challenge to the practices of journalism, in which: the answers would create a new generation of journalism conventions that could well affect old media as well^[7].

The Internet is a multifaceted mass medium that contains many different configurations of communication that are constantly evolving. Its features are so dynamic that Morris and Ogan call it a continuum^[8]. The internet and new media presented a challenge to media and communication theories largely due to the fact that they were increasingly being used for tasks of public communication as well as for communication in the sphere of personal life and in many professional and business contexts^[9]. What interested many media scholars about the internet was how it manoeuvred the source-message-receiver features of the traditional mass communication model, sometimes putting them into traditional patterns, sometimes putting them into entirely new configurations.

3. Media and internet in Zambia

The media in Zambia has evolved from being predominantly state-run. In both electronic and print, the media in Zambia is widely seen as the fourth estate and is considered to be a vital element of Zambian society. Historically, the media have been seen viewed as partners in development and a unifying factor. This view has been expressed in all three republics and by all types of media. Broadcasting and Newspapers in Zambia dates back to the colonial era From Independence, the role of the media was to abide and foster what was the norm for the government. Following the change of government in 1991 from the United National Independence Party which ruled from

independence, to the new Movement for Multiparty Democracy (MMD) after the reintroduction of multiparty democracy, it was widely expected that there would be many improvements in the media. The liberal policies of the government also led to the liberalisation of media with legislation that resulted into increased private media penetration. With the coming of the internet, a number of online newspapers or new blogs emerged.

Access to Internet in Zambia began in November 1994, when the country became the fifth African country, second from South Africa in sub-Sahara Africa, to gain full access to Internet^[11]. The first operator of internet service was ZAMNET Communications Systems Ltd (ZAMNET). ZAMNET was a result of research from the University of Zambia (UNZA), at its Computer Centre. By the end of the first decade into the 21st century, Zambia had low access to the internet despite growing from 11, 647 total subscribers, to 49,867 at the end of 2011 (ZICTA, 2012). This is attributed to the implementation of technologies such as GPRS, EDGE, 3G and the roll out of optic-fibre networks. The high cost of bandwidth was seen as a major factor affecting the growth of the internet in Zambia. Despite the increased demand for broadband internet, the majority of Zambians were still unable to make individual subscriptions but due to the high cost^[12].

Mobile phone use was significant to the study because the number of peoples accessing social media using their mobile devices was on the rise. At the time, the mobile sector was dominated by Airtel Zambia with slightly over 52% of the market share at the end of 2011, followed by MTN with 33% and lastly, Zamtel with 15 %^[13]. Internet-enabled mobile phones became more widespread after mobile phone providers introduced BlackBerry and smartphone packages in 2008. These devices often included free internet access to certain websites (including Facebook, Twitter and MySpace) and/or monthly data bundles^[14].

4. Methods

Apart from challenges relating to theorisation, researching new communications technologies posed staid methodological challenges for media and mass communication researchers. Social media, which fall within the rather broad category of new media are confounded in this quandary. For example, Hayes Mabweazara argued that there seems to be no unanimity among social scientists in terms of the appropriate methodological approaches to follow in different research contexts^[15]. Consequently, the researcher sought to find middle ground and utilise a variety of methods to help yield plausible, generalisable and verifiable results.

Mixed methods through triangulation was used in this study. Wimmer and Dominick define triangulation within the context of mass media research as “the use of both qualitative and quantitative methods to fully understand the nature of a research problem^[16]”.

Much of data collection took place between 2011 and 2012 but was complimented by a continuous document review. The field work was conducted largely in Lusaka, where nine out of the ten sampled media houses media houses investigated are based. The tenth media house is based in Livingstone in the southern Province of Zambia and was sampled to provide an alternative view from that of Lusaka. The key research questions relating to social media that the study sought to answer were:

1. Do journalists in the sample media houses know what social media are?
2. Do the journalists and media houses use social media in their work?
3. What forms of social media are mostly used by journalist in the news rooms?
4. What purposes do they use social media?
5. What has been the audiences' response towards the social media outlets?
6. What significant impact have these outlets had on the news gathering and dissemination objective of the media houses?

For the study, 10 News Managers or Editors, representing 10 media houses, and 50 journalists were sampled for the quantitative survey and additionally, six in-depth interviews were conducted. Observation was conducted at two of the media houses and all of their social media outlets were monitored. This sample was ideal given the period and the resources available for the researcher to conduct the research. More importantly, it was thought that the findings of the study from the sampled journalists can be generalised based on the fact the considerations for the selection were thought to be representative of the types of media houses

that exist in the country.

Purposive Sampling was used in view of the aim of the larger research in which this study on social media was conducted; it was thought that only media houses that were utilizing the technologies in discussion were to be sampled. In doing this however, caution was taken to ensure that there was representation at different levels. For example, the sample included three daily newspapers, two Television Stations, and 5 Radio Stations. Of the 10 media houses, three were state owned, one was a religious, and six were private. In addition, the following were considered in arriving at the list of media houses: (a) size of newsroom; (b) coverage, and (c) type of ownership.

Document review and analysis (policies) at media house level was also conducted. This included editorial policy for the media houses. This was done to assess the gaps that exist between policy and practice. The observation method was employed to learn how journalists use social media in relation to achieving their work objectives. The researcher spent time in news rooms with the permission of the news editors and the journalists as well. This was done to get a full insight of the way the social media is used and to also experience some of the stated annotations.

Table 1: Table of sampled media houses and journalists

Name of Media House	Number of Journalists	Type of Media	Type of Ownership
Zambia National Broadcasting Corporation (ZNBC TV and TV 2)	8	Television	State-owned
Muvi Television	6	Television	Private
The Times of Zambia	5	Newspaper	State-owned
The Zambia Daily Mail	5	Newspaper	State-owned
The Post	5	Newspaper	Private
Q FM Radio	4	Radio	Private
Radio Phoenix	4	Radio	Private
Radio Christian Voice	6	Radio	Private
Hot FM	4	Radio	Private
Zambezi Radio FM	3	Radio	Private
TOTAL Number of Journalists	50		

Quantitative data was entered in Microsoft Excel 2007 and later transferred to Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) for analysis. In-depth interviews were analysed in a thematic approach (theme by theme) going by the research questions and relevant relationships that were made in the light of the research topic. Conducting this study came with its challenges that stand as limitations to the study. Firstly, very little research on this subject has been done in Zambia making literature and comparison of findings very difficult, and secondly, the purposive nature of the study, though justifiable, can be a strong point of limitation. Ethical caution was taken knowing fully the significance and enormity of ethics, and through the entire process, confidentiality was upheld, and the respondents were assured of privacy.

5 Results

5.1 Internet Utilisation

The study was conducted based on the stated research questions and other critical factors that are relevant to the study and of significant bearing to meeting the objectives. Factors such the attributes of journalists (gender, education, age), the usage of the internet were also considered. The survey conducted had 29 males and 21 females as respondents. This represents 58 percent and 43 percent of

the sample respectively. Even though it was desirous to have an equal representation in the genders, this was met with difficulty due to the actual imbalance in the actual number of male journalists compared to that of women in many media houses. This imbalance was also observed in a 2002 study of Gender and Media in Southern African radio stations conducted on 12 countries [17]. of the sampled journalists, 18 were between the age of 30 and 34, consisting the largest age group represented by those between 25 and 29 who were 16. The least age groups represented were 40 to 44 and 45 to 49, with one and two respondents respectively.

The researcher also looked at factors such as first exposure to the internet, types of access, where the internet is accessed from, and the actual uses of the internet. This information is relevant in shedding more light on the uses of social media by journalists. It was revealed that journalists have been exposed to the internet for a different number of years. For example, the findings show that about 56 percent of the respondents (28) had been exposed to the Internet for five to ten years up until the time of the study, and only 24 percent (12) have been exposed for over ten years. Ten of the journalists sampled, representing 20 percent had been exposed to the internet for two to five years. Of the sampled journalists, it was found that Broadband internet via Local

Area Network (LAN) connections was the most utilised internet connection with 48 percent or 24 users. This was followed by Mobile internet, which includes 3rd Generation (3G) Networks and GPRS devices such as USB Modems and Mobile Phones, as the second mostly used type of connection with 32 percent of the sample or 16 users.

On the part of the media houses, it was discovered that five of the media houses sampled used Broadband internet provided by way of LANs. ADSL and Mobile internet was used each by two media houses and only one media house used a dial-up connection. Forty-seven 48 (87 percent) of the journalists said they used the internet mostly at work. 17 of them also said they used the mobile phones as a point of access and three of them stated they accessed it mostly at home. Only one journalist exclusively stated that the mobile phone was used the most to access the internet. Even though 20 journalists (40 percent) indicated that they have access at home (and 30 indicting the opposite), only three indicated that they used the internet at home the most.

It was also relevant that the uses of the internet by journalist are also considered. In this regard, it was discovered that journalists used the internet for a number of tasks. All the journalists indicated that they used the internet for Emailing and searching for information, and 47 (94 percent) of them indicated that they used it for getting news updates and developing stories, and for Social Networking. Gathering

and filing news and uploading files and reports were also common tasks, with 44 (88 percent) and 41 (82 percent) journalists respectively indicating they used they used the internet for this purpose.

5.2 Knowledge of social media

All journalists in the sample said they knew what social media were. All definitions or examples that were given pointed to a level of understanding of social media. However, when asked what new media were, it was found that 34 of the 50 journalists knew what new media were, representing 68 percent. Seven journalists indicated that they did not know what new media were and nine of them were not sure if they knew what new media were, representing 14 and 18 percent of the sample, respectively. 49 of the journalists however indicated that they would like to know more about new media. As for the forms of new media commonly used the study unearthed various results. Websites were the majority with a 100 percent response from the journalists. Other forms that were identified are listed in Table 2 below with the corresponding count. Blogging had the distant second largest count with 13 journalist using blogs as a new form of media. This showed a clear understanding among journalist of the distinction between a website and a blog.

Table 2: New Media Uses

New Media Forms	Count
Websites: Inclusive of Social media sites	50
Podcasts	9
RSS Feeds	10
Interactive Multimedia devices such as Interactive CD/DVDs	10
Mobile Phone News alerts	12
Blogging	13

It was discovered that all the sampled media houses have websites, but differences exist in the use of the websites. In looking at the use of social media, the researcher took time to analyse websites of the sampled media houses because websites today have incorporated social media tools. Seven

out of the ten media houses had this integration and the remaining three from the sample did not have. Some the features that the websites had based on the analysis and interviews are given in Fig. 1.

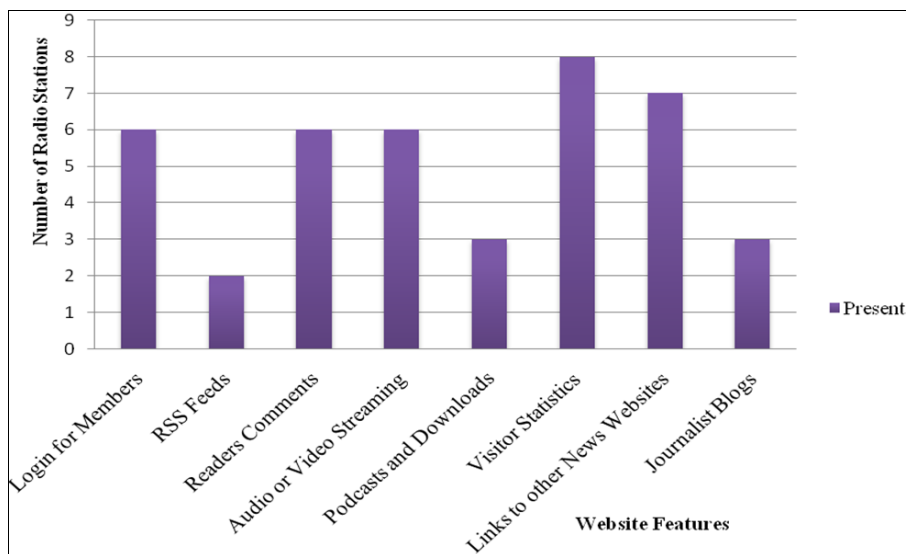


Fig. 1 Features of Media House Websites

5.3 Social media use

From the survey, it was revealed that the journalists do

indeed use social media in their work. For example, the findings show that about 94 percent of the respondents (47)

use social media tools in their work, compared to only six percent (three journalists) who do not (Fig. 7). All the 47 journalists used the computer mostly when accessing social media and 33 used both the computer and the mobile phone as the devices for accessing social media platforms. Only one journalist used the mobile phone exclusively and two used a tablet computer in addition to the computer and the mobile phone. It is interesting to note the growth of mobile internet use, which accounted for 32 percent usage for the journalist, greatly increased as a result of the introduction of mobile internet. Mobile internet was available in all the areas where mobile network reception is available. Journalists took advantage of this and acquired devices such as smartphones and USB 3G Modems, popularly called dongles. It is the ability to provide this service that has made mobile service companies, Airtel, MTN Zambia and Zamtel major players in internet service provision.

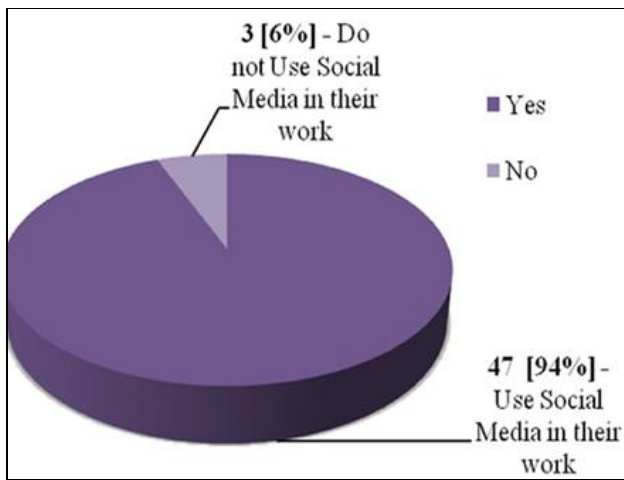


Fig 2: Use of Social Media in Journalist's Work

Most of the journalists used social media for work related activities as much as they did for more socially oriented activities. For instance, 23 journalist used social media tools very often for networking with fellow journalists and so did another 23 use it merely for making friends.

5.4 Forms of Social Media Used

It was also of interest to the research to discover which social media tools were being used by the journalists. The most utilised form of Social media was social networking. It was for this reason that social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter had more responses. This high positive response rate for social networking sites seems to be high perhaps as a result of the fact that the journalists indicated that they use social networks as part of their work. The study found that journalist mostly used Facebook - 47, Twitter - 19, Google Plus - 16, YouTube -16, Blogging Sites (Blogger, WordPress) - 13, Hi 5 – 11, LinkedIn - 3, and E-buddy 1. At media house level, Facebook and Twitter were used by the all the media houses, except The Post which depended on its website for all online content. YouTube was used by three, and only two used Google Plus (see Table 3).

Table 3: Social Media Tools Used by Media Houses

Media House	Social Media Tools Being used		
	Facebook	Twitter	YouTube
1. The Times of Zambia	Facebook	Twitter	
Muvi TV	Facebook	Twitter	YouTube
2. Radio Christia Voice	Facebook	Twitter	
3. Zambezi FM	Facebook	Twitter	
4. ZNBC	Facebook	Twitter	
5. Zambia Daily Mail	Facebook	Twitter	
6. Hot FM	Facebook	Twitter	
7. Radio Phoenix	Facebook	Twitter	Google Plus
8. Q FM Radio	Facebook	Twitter	YouTube
9. The Post Newspaper			

Facebook usage in Zambia continues to increase, even though the number of users is still small. Social Bakers [1] estimates the number of subscribers to be 229, 200, which is about 1.90 percent of the population. Media houses have taken advantage of the Facebook phenomenon to reach out to their audiences and to provide a platform for news, information and interaction. Willems (2012) [16] concluded that websites are more and more being replaced with Facebook profiles or fan pages which are undoubtedly more manageable and cheaper alternatives to costly, high-maintenance websites. From the interviews, all the media house news managers responded positively to using Facebook, and all except for The Post Newspaper had active pages or profiles. Table 4 gives details on the Facebook pages at the time.

Table 4: Use of Facebook by Sampled Media House

Media House	Facebook Page/Profile	No. of 'Likes'
1. The Times of Zambia	Times of Zambia	451
2. Muvi TV	Ask Muvi	52, 582
3. Radio Christian Voice	Radio Christian Voice	6, 073
4. Zambezi FM	Zambezi FM 107.7	1,083
5. ZNBC	My ZNBC	1, 958
6. Zambia Daily Mail	Zambia Daily Mail	1, 555
7. Hot FM	Hot 877	14, 998
8. Radio Phoenix	Radio Phoenix	12, 716
9. Q FM Radio	Q-FM Zambia	58, 582
10. The Post Newspaper		

Source: Social Bakers

Q-FM had the largest following of the media houses sampled with 58, 582 likes. ZNBC had 1, 958 likes in a space of one month (May – June 2012). Despite the presence of these pages, it was observed that few of the media houses made posts relating to news. For example, ZNBC (My ZNBC) had programme schedules and reminder, and most of the radio stations had posts about topics being discussed on shows and programmes that were mostly about social issues, and not necessarily in the news. This is not to say that news items were not posted. Q-FM and Muvi TV, which also registered the largest followers on Twitter, were consistent in news posts on their pages.

5.5 Audience Response

In terms of audience response, the news mangers for the sampled media houses that utilised social media indicated

that they monitored audience response by looking at the numbers of listeners, readers or viewers who followed, subscribed or liked their platforms. This is true for ZNBC especially, which at the time was new to social media.

From the time that we set up our Facebook and Twitter pages in May, we have had a very good response from our viewer and listeners. So many of them are commenting on matters and we are responding to those issues.

(Masuzyo Ndlovu, Public Relations Officer, ZNBC, 20th May)

The Editors or New Managers from the broadcast media indicated that the social media platforms had made it possible to reach more people than the conventional media would. The common response was “it is limitless” and it that “it is faster” to post a news item on social networks and this could be done at any time without waiting for the scheduled news bulletins. They further noted that the internet and social media have made it possible for audiences to participate by way of feedback, contributions and discussion, something that was previously uncommon. Additionally, it was noted by some news managers that the number of hits on their websites increased owing to the links that were posted on social networking sites to full details of the stories. This was true especially for the media house that used micro-blogging social network Twitter such as Q-FM. In this case, a tweet would include a headline and the link to the story. According to the new managers, there is a strong correlation between an increase in the number of hits on the website to the posting of a headline or summary on a social network as more readers would like to read more about the story.

5.6 Perceived Impact on News Gathering and Dissemination

From the study, social media emerged a tool that many journalists are using in their work. The various available tools created an environment of interaction and debate for the journalists and news consumers. Journalists were not only using social media for social related activities, rather they are also using social media to discuss items in the news, get story ideas, share news stories and network with fellow journalists. They are also using the social media to monitor public debate and contribute as citizens to these debates without the requirement of being objective as would be required in their media houses. Even though there were other uses identified, these news-related takes scored more affirmative responses. This shows an importance that journalists attached to social media in their work and the positive impact they said it had on their work

Table 5: Social Media Uses showing more Positive Responses

Task	Positive Response
Discussing items in the news	32
Getting story ideas	29
Sharing news stories	30
Monitoring public debate	32

Nine out of the ten media houses acknowledged the importance of social media and that their impact in meeting the news related objectives of their media houses were positive. However, even though nine out of the ten media

houses said they used social media in their work, it was perhaps only three made their social media platform a formal outlet and distribution outlet: Muvi TV, Q-FM Radio and Hot FM. Muvi TV, for example, in its programming includes its Facebook and Twitter pages (i.e. Ask Muvi TV and @AskMuvi TV) respectively, not only for feedback and discussion but as points of information access for its audiences. The TV station’s Facebook and Twitter pages were instrumental during the 2011 Presidential and Parliamentary Elections. These social media platforms were used to communicate various messages instantly as and when they happened or in real time, and on some occasions to publicise that which could not be said or shown on their traditional media outlets. In addition, citizen journalism came to life on these platforms on Election Day itself when members of the public posted details of what was happening in their communities and journalists would confirm those posts. Others who were privy to election results at polling centres went to the extent of posting them on the Muvi TV social media pages. However, from the interviews, the following challenges and issues were identified as factors affecting the use of social media in media houses.

- a. **Lack of Access:** Seven out of ten news managers or editors had the view that the lack of internet access by the vast population and even the poor access that most media houses had was a key factor if social media were to be fully employed in news processes. It was revealed that good internet facilities are located only along the line of rail and even along the line of rail, it better accessed on the more developed or urbanised centres. This lack of access is compounded by service delivery problems that make even the little access available seem as though there isn’t any at all.
- b. **Cost of Access to Internet Services:** The cost of internet access was overwhelmingly given as a major reason for the levels of social media use. All editors said this was as an important fact as they agreed (eight) or strongly agreed (two) with this point.
- c. **Lack of Social Media Policy:** None of the media houses not have a formalised Social Media Policy. Media Houses such as Q-FM, Muvi TV and ZNBC did have objectives for the platforms but these cannot be translated to be policy.
- d. **Inadequate Training:** Six of the editors noted that lack of adequate training in using the internet and social media were a factor in the levels of utilisation. For example, it was argued that none of the journalism schools in Zambia offered topics on social media until shortly before the time of the study.
- e. **Perceptions of the Importance of social media:** From the study, it was discovered that some perceptions that were held about social media contributed to its level of utilization and posed as a challenge to its continued use. For example, many people understood social media to be social networks only and were not capable of being used for work related purposes. This idea of perception included a level of apathy towards their use due to the lack of evidence that social media were helpful in the work of journalists. It for this reason that media houses such as The Post, Times of Zambia and ZNBC encouraged individual journalist accounts only, though for this latter, this position later changed.
- f. **Abuse of social media:** the news managers and editors expressed concern at the often-uncontrollable amount

of time that their journalists spent on social networks such as Facebook and Twitter that was often not related to news gathering or dissemination. This view was coupled with a comment by one editor who stated that Facebook was addictive and that some journalists were always on Facebook and not really working.

Despite acknowledging the value that social media play, the editors were sceptical on whether the impact that has been observed is significant enough to warrant shifts in policy. The feeling was that social media are important undoubtedly but there were still not in a position to go mainstream or to take on traditional media in the battle for audiences. The reason for this is also partly to the challenges given above. This feeling was expressed by six out of the ten editors. Nevertheless, the general feeling was that social media had a positive impact on the news gathering and dissemination objective of the media houses. Social media increased interaction with audiences on items in the news and that the increased interaction signalled a trust audience had for the media houses. Journalists also said they had obtained news ideas that had proved to be important to them, in addition to interacting with their audiences at a personal level, something they would not do with traditional media.

6. Discussion

From the findings of the research, it is clear that journalists in Zambia knew what social media were, and that they utilised them in their work even between 2011 and 2012. It was further determined that social networking and micro-blogging are the examples of social media used the most, in particular, Facebook and Twitter, respectively. Furthermore, the study revealed that the use of social media by journalists was not restricted to work related tasks, but this constituted a significant portion of their social media time. News related activities included: discussing items in the news; getting news story ideas; sharing news stories; and monitoring public debate on items in the news.

The study revealed that all the media houses in the sample are cognisant of the important role that social media play and nine out of ten media houses had a growing social media presence. It was learned that there was been positive response from the audience to these social media outlets going by the responses from media house posts on the social networks. This response was based on the aggressiveness of the media house to post news and information that is meaningful to people for them to respond. Evidence from some Facebook pages (Q FM, Radio Phoenix, and Ask Muvi TV) suggested that the most active pages were those that had consistent input from the media house. From the study, there was an understanding that social media had a positive impact on the news gathering and dissemination objective of the media houses seeing from the fact that journalists had indicated that they had value in their time on the social networks where they interacted and obtained story ideas. However, this impact was limited by the then low levels of utilisation of social media by audiences and the sense of apathy towards their deployment by media house officials.

From the results, it was clear that there was an urgent need for media houses to develop and implement social media policies that would guide how social media should be implemented. This would help allay fears about abuse of social media. The policy would also seek to address how the

media houses can involve citizen journalists. Additionally, it was observed that media houses needed to recognise the value that social media tools would bring to their organizations, including cost saving and having a wider reach. Further, there was need for journalists and news editors to be trained on how to effectively use social media in the news processes.

7. Conclusion

The study suggested the need for further research on the impact or value of user generated content and citizen journalism in order to get an even clearer picture of the social media/journalist interaction in media houses in Zambia. The study also concluded that the reality of social media was here to stay and must be thought to be indispensable and unavoidable. It called for Zambian media houses to react accordingly. As Lievrouw notes, the biggest challenge to new media studies is the need to shift away from thinking of ICTs as extraordinary, and to accept and study them as normal.¹⁸ the same can be said for social media. Several years down the line, the inevitability of social media to journalism practice has been cemented. It has become more of a norm than a special occurrence in journalism practice. The retrospective look presented in this paper also raises the need to discover what changes have been observed in period following this study. More importantly, it is important to take stock of what changes have occurred and how they have affected journalism practice.

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