

WhatsApp and the Changing Face of the Zimbabwean Newsrooms: A Case of the *Chronicle* and *NewsDay*

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Abstract: The structure of modern journalism, is closely intertwined with technological transformations, unfolding in the communication space. The advent of WhatsApp, has triggered a drastic reconfiguration of newsrooms and radically transformed journalistic practices. Drawing on the Network theory, this study explores the impact of WhatsApp on Zimbabwean journalistic practices, using the *Chronicle* and *NewsDay* newspapers, as a case study. The study gathered data, using a total of 75 questionnaires and 3 in-depth interviews. The study established that, WhatsApp apart from having a profound impact on news-making processes at the *Chronicle* and *NewsDay*, has also massively changed the consumption practices of media consumers. The emergence of WhatsApp as the primary news-making and consumption tool, has been triggered by its numerous advantages. However, the study also ascertained that, the social media platform, has ushered a number of challenges, which threaten traditional journalism. There are concerns that, WhatsApp is promoting fake news, eroding essential journalistic skills and triggering a decline in newspaper hard copy sales. It is therefore, imperative for newsrooms to embrace WhatsApp with caution. Its adoption must be accompanied by investment in ethical training and the preservation of essential old age journalistic values and professional practices.

Keywords: WhatsApp, social media, newsrooms, journalism .

INTRODUCTION

Since the 1990s the media witnessed rapid transformation, which was ushered by new media technologies. There was radical shift from old media practices, where reporters would produce hand written stories and present them to the newsroom typists for typing, using typewriters. The emergence of social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and WhatsApp has enabled easier interactions for journalists. According to Ganiyu and Akinreti (2011) Social media has increased interactivity among people, making them to be producers and consumers of information in a simultaneous manner. Cheney (2013) advances that social media is not only used as a way to communicate and keep connects but well developed system of sharing and building communities by disseminating information.

WhatsApp has become the most used social media platform for news transmission (Newman *et al*, 2020). WhatsApp usage has increased among journalists as well as high authorities around the world (Bahri, 2019). The social media platform has a number of advantages, which have promoted its usage in newsrooms. According to Bahri (2019) WhatsApp is the fastest and reliable platform for news sharing and reporting, which also provides a safe environment to practice journalism.

The foregoing analysis depicts that, there is potent existing literature on the use of social media in general and WhatsApp in particular by journalists. An analysis of existing literature

however, reveals that there is still a lot to examine about the use of WhatsApp in newsrooms, particularly from an African viewpoint. This paper therefore, interrogates the impact of WhatsApp on news gathering, dissemination and consumption practices in Zimbabwean newsrooms, using the *Chronicle* and *NewsDay* newspapers, as a case study. The primary questions being investigated in this paper are: 1. How is WhatsApp being used for journalism in Zimbabwean newsrooms? 2. What factors have promoted the use of WhatsApp as a journalistic tool in Zimbabwean newsrooms? 3. To what extent has WhatsApp transformed Zimbabwean journalistic practices?. The paper will commence by presenting contextual literature, followed by the theoretical perspective. It will then proceed to outline the methodological approach, followed by a presentation of findings and finally the conclusion.

CONTEXTUAL LITERATURE

The Appropriation of Social media in Journalism

The term social media refers to the wide range of internet based and mobile services that allow users to participate in online exchanges, contribute user created content, or join online communities (Dewing, 2012). Social media has also been described as a group of new kinds of online media that allow participation by audiences, openness to feedback, allowing for the creation of conversations, keeping people connected and allowing communities to form quickly (Mayfield,

2008,p.5). Kaplan & Haenlen (2010,p. 16) posit that social media applications are powerful technological tools for communication used for interacting, creating and sharing information built on the foundations of Web 2.0, which facilitates a two-way communication process. This is as opposed to the one-way communication of analogue media. Social media platforms, include the following:

WhatsApp, Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, Linked-In, among other platforms. These social media platforms enhance the socialization aspects of journalism (Nyamai, 2021). Mare (2015, p. 20) advances that this use of social media can be described as the “creative appropriation of new media technologies in everyday news-making routines”. Kumari and Pradhan (2018) argue that social media is an “add on” to the conventional journalism and has converted media users from being mere consumers of content to becoming creators and publishers of it. The platforms enable people to create global online communities to share information, facilitate relationship building and democratise news content (Nyamai, 2021).

The foregoing paragraph reveals that social media is changing technologies inside newsrooms and journalism is changing with them. The way modern journalism occurs is closely intertwined with the technological transformations and the economic, social as well political conditions in which the communication system operates. As Wasserman (2015) advances, in understanding journalism, it is vital to take it as a set of values and practices that cannot be divorced from the sets of power relations, steeped in history and intertwined with very specific economic and political struggles. This paper therefore, examines the extent to which social media has transformed Zimbabwean journalism practices, taking into consideration the socio-economic and political conditions, in which the media operate.

The transformations ushered by the social media to journalism are largely positive but the challenges that journalism is facing with advent of social media, should not be overlooked. The challenges that journalism is facing upon the introduction of new technologies has been described as sharply binary (Butler Breese, 2016). On one hand, it has been argued that some journalists have “put up a furious resistance, adamantly refusing to subordinate their sacred professional ethics and idealistic civic morals to what they see as the profane, polluting logic of market and technology” (Alexander, Breese, & Luengo 2016, p. 13). It also

has been argued that the inclusion of new technologies in the newsrooms is causing high levels of distress because they are constantly changing professional practices and blurring the lines between different journalistic genres (Erdal, 2007). Mabwezara (2013, p. 135) advances that, while new digital technologies offer mainstream journalism in Africa, and the rest of the world, alternative opportunities to engage and deliver content to their audiences, few studies have explored their disruptive implications to the practice of the profession. He further posits that social media raises normative dilemmas and challenges for journalists as seen in a study of the appropriation of the internet and the mobile phone by Zimbabwean print journalists, which showed the implications of social media, at many levels that include news sourcing routines, and the structuring of the working day. Holton, Coddington, and Gil de Zuniga (2013, p. 720) posit that, as much as social media and citizen-driven forms of journalism have risen to prominence alongside professional media production, they (social media) have presented a challenge to traditional journalistic values and processes. They note that “citizen journalism consumers hold more positive attitudes toward citizen journalism, but do not show a significant identification with professional journalistic values, while general news consumption is positively related with affirmation of professional journalistic values”.

With social media also comes a new economic structure. Livingston and Bennett (2003) argue that the economic pressures imposed by this technological model of production is threatening traditional gatekeeping based on reporter judgment and professional editorial standards that define the quality of news organizations. As Cottle and Ashton (1999) argue, technological convergence inside media organizations is causing a drastic reconfiguration of newsrooms, at the same time that is transforming traditional professional practices. The allocation of resources has changed in recent years, creating new work teams within newsrooms and de-skilling or simply eliminating others. In light of the above assertions, this study seeks to explore both the positive and negative implications of social media on journalism practices in Zimbabwean newsrooms, with particular reference to WhatsApp.

WhatsApp and its Impact on Journalistic Practices

WhatsApp messenger is a cross-platform mobile messaging application that allows exchange of

messages, sharing media including voice messages, videos and photos among others (Steele, 2004). WhatsApp is the fastest and most reliable platform for news sharing and reporting (Bahri, 2020). The social media platform has immense advantages such as allowing users to send and receive not only text, but also share real-time locations, images, voice recordings, documents and videos (Church and de Oliveira, 2013). WhatsApp also opens possibilities for audience involvement in news production (Bahri, 2020). The other advantage of WhatsApp is that it allows a new reciprocity (Lewis, Holton & Coddington, 2014). This often takes place in private spaces that are negotiated based on trust of each other and of the technology, by soliciting tips and updates on these apps (Barot & Oren, 2015, Cooper 2007). Reporters can witness events from multiple vantage points, follow stories at a distance and integrate user-generated content into their coverage (Mabweazara, 2011). WhatsApp ensures a close connection with journalists, sources, the obtainability of information and the reshaping in the temporalities of news making (Bahri, 2020). WhatsApp has generated massive social changes in the behaviour and lifestyle patterns of the media consumer (CiacuGrasu, 2008).

WhatsApp has allowed for secure communication channels with sources who may be at the risk of surveillance (Crandall *et al.*, 2013). One of the basic benefits of WhatsApp is that journalists can talk to their sources, without needing to worry about external tapping. Therefore by using WhatsApp privacy is guaranteed (Bahri, 2019). The perceived security of information sent through WhatsApp, implied by the End-to-End Encryption (E2EE) technology since 2014, has promoted rapid growth of the application (Bahri, 2020). According to Endeley (2018, p.95) this encryption “allows for data between communicating parties to be secure, free from eavesdropping and hard to crack”.

WhatsApp usage for journalistic purposes, however, has its own shortcomings. For instance, in WhatsApp messenger, a lot of information passed has been found to be untrustworthy. The App has also been used to spread fake news faster, through forwarded messages, which are posted in chat groups (Nyamai, 2021).

Despite these shortcomings, WhatsApp has emerged as the primary source of news for many people worldwide. Hardley *et al.* (2021) found out

that, as at July 2021, WhatsApp became the most popular global mobile messenger app worldwide, with approximately two billion monthly active users, outranking Facebook messenger at 1.3 billion users. WhatsApp is most frequently used by people in Latin America and Africa, presenting an important opportunity for emerging, smaller newsrooms looking forward to expand their distribution (Oliver, 2021).

The tremendous growth rate of WhatsApp worldwide, including Africa, makes it a vital journalistic tool for African newsrooms. Therefore, the need to study usage of WhatsApp in African newsrooms cannot be overlooked. Hence, this paper seeks to interrogate the impact of WhatsApp on the newsgathering, dissemination and consumption practices of the Zimbabwean print media, using the *Chronicle* and *NewsDay* newspapers, as a case study.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

The Network Theory

The Network theory that was developed by Manuel Castells is very instrumental to the understanding of the use of social media in journalism. His research enables one to deduce the potential of new media to shape society. The articles, *The Rise of the Network Society* (1996), *Communication, Power and Counter-power in the Network Society* (2007), *A Network Theory of Power* (2011) and *Communication Power* (2013) have created a powerful knowledge source for studies of this nature. This study therefore turns to Castells' theory to explain and better understand the change in journalism brought about by the technological revolution of the 21st century.

Webb (2016) notes that the Network theory as applied to modern society focuses on the power of social media to transform societal practices. According to Castells “the media have become the social space where power is decided” (Castells, 2007, p.238). Castells has developed a ground theoretical framework to understand the awareness of social and political change in our time through understanding the networks that connect our society. These networks have changed dramatically through the introduction of new communication technologies. Castells identifies the internet as a “universal tool of interactive communication” (Castells, 2000, p.9). The network theory highlights how society is connected through interconnected nodes and through the technological revolution, it has become even more

important to understand how these networks work to connect us in ways never experienced before. According to Castells, “we have entered a new technological paradigm, centred on micro-electronics and based on information technologies” (Castells, 2009, p.9). Networks are a form of social organisation that have existed for centuries but have taken on a new meaning in the information Age by becoming information networks, powered by new information technologies (Castells, 2007).

The Network Theory presented by Castells can be used to explain how the characteristics of social media make them valuable newsroom tools. The major transformation of the communication system is the fact that “the production of messages are self-generated, the retrieval of messages are self-directed, the reception and remixing of content from electronic communication networks is self-selected” (Castells, 2013, pp.14-15). Social media also have the ability to create weak ties, they have a high level of anonymity and online communication is egalitarian by nature. These inherent qualities in social media provide a space for citizens to mobilise (Castells, 2013).

It can be argued that the greatest strength of the network theory lies in the fact that it is a relatively modern theory that is very applicable to the 21st century media and communication environment. However, it employs western theoretical underpinnings in analysing social media use and communication. The current study will seek to explore the use of social media for journalistic purposes, from a Zimbabwean and African viewpoint.

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

The study made use of mixed methodology (both quantitative and qualitative). This mixed approach was chosen because the two approaches complement each other, thereby increasing the depth of understanding a study can yield. According to Mason (2006) mixed methodology offers potential for generating new ways of understanding the complexities and contexts of social experience and for enhancing our capacities for social explanation and generalization. The study gathered data using

questionnaires, which were distributed to a total of 15 journalists, 10 from the *Chronicle* and 5 from *NewsDay*. A total of 60 questionnaires were also distributed to media consumers, comprising of National University of Science and Technology (NUST) students in the department of Library and Information Science.

The study also gathered data through in-depth interviews with two editors, 1 from the *Chronicle* and 1 from *NewsDay*. A key informant interviewee, was also interviewed. The researcher used purposive sampling in selecting respondents to the questionnaires and interviewees. Only those who were deemed to be knowledgeable about the cultural arena or situation being studied were chosen (Rubin & Rubin, 1995).

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

The Impact of Whatsapp on News-Making Processes and Consumption Practices

The findings depict that WhatsApp has a profound impact on the news-making processes and news consumption practices, in Zimbabwean newsrooms. The responses to questionnaires administered to journalists and news consumers, as well as interviews with editors of both the *Chronicle* and *NewsDay*, clearly revealed that WhatsApp has a strong impact on news-making processes and consumption practices. Of the 60 news consumers that responded to the questionnaire, 53 (88,3%) indicated that they use the medium as a news source. The remaining 7 (11,6%) were not clear if they use the medium for news purposes or they just use it to communicate with contacts on their cellular phones. This finding underlines the importance of WhatsApp as a source of news in an African context. It also resonates with the findings of Oliver (2021) which depict that, WhatsApp is most frequently used by people in Africa as a source of news, thereby presenting opportunities for newsrooms to utilise the platform for content distribution. A total 8 (53,3%) journalists said they believe the value of WhatsApp in the news-making process lay in dissemination of information, 4 (26,6%) said in news gathering and 3 (20%) were of the view that WhatsApp was valuable for news consumption.

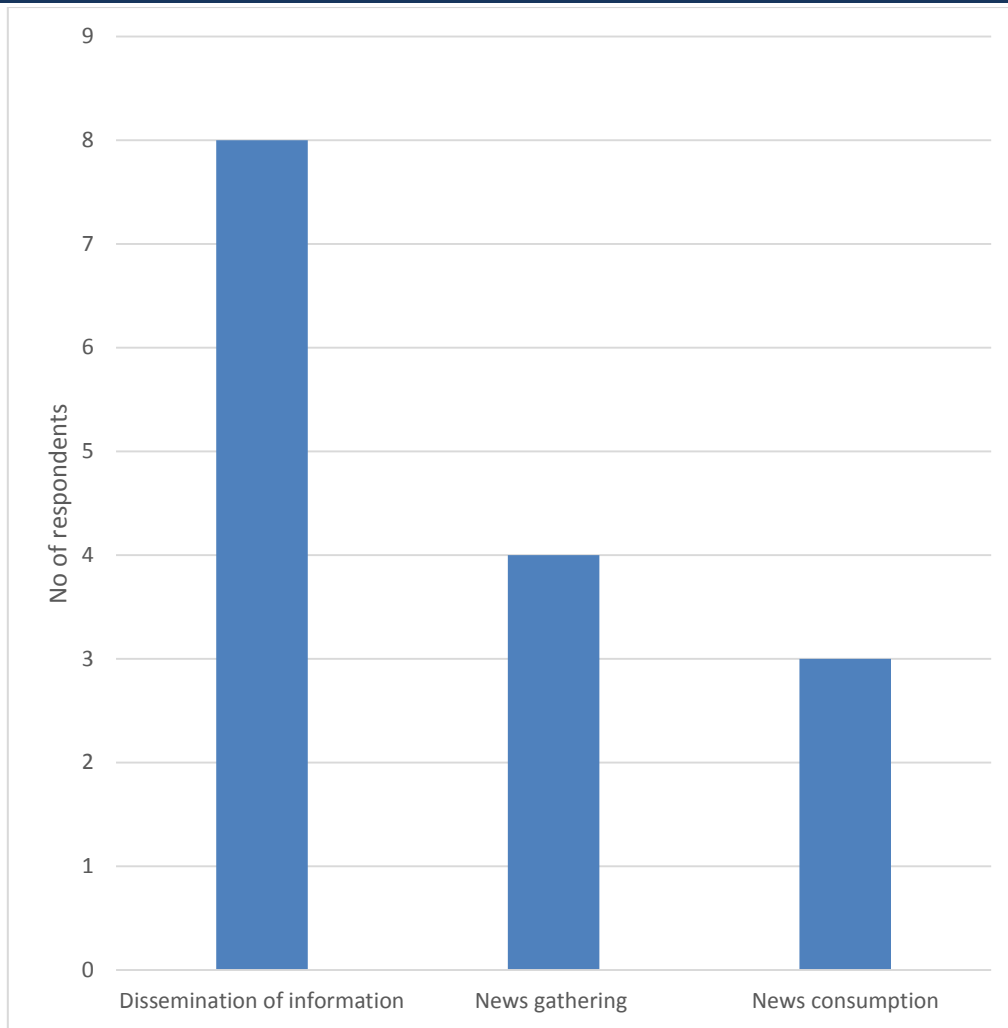


Fig 1 - A graph showing journalists perceived value of WhatsApp in News-making

Fig 1 (above) illustrates that the majority of journalists believe that the most important journalistic role of WhatsApp is dissemination of information. This is in tandem with the assertion that WhatsApp is the most reliable platform for news sharing and reporting (Bahri, 2020). The finding however, also depicts that the news-making process is still approached from a hypodermic needle or magic bullet understanding of communication (Shearon, 1995). This is the problematic wrought into the idea of news values where journalists are seen as all powerful and having the power to determine what news is (Wahl-Jorgensen, *et al*, 2016; Schultz, 2007; Lasorsa, Lewis and Holton, 2012; Stromback, Karlsson and Hopman, 2012; Galtung and Ruge, 1965). There is little thinking about the media as conversation and dialogue (Marchionni, 2014). In a lot of scholarly work, new media technologies are seen as altering the news-making process into a dialogue whereby the audiences have as much stake as the journalists (Hornmoen and Steensen, 2014). In placing a lot of emphasis on the news

dissemination role of the WhatsApp, journalists seem to endorse the idea that only they have the power to decide what is news.

However, in an interview, the *Chronicle* editor said WhatsApp has made the news making process interactive as reporters are able to share diary items through journalists groups. The editor pointed out that Zimpapers, the country's biggest media house, which houses *The Chronicle*, has several internal WhatsApp groups for journalists, where they share diary items, discuss stories and ways they can make follow ups. He further revealed that:

WhatsApp is used for newsgathering and dissemination, and for our online desk. We also have WhatsApp groups for journalists and maintain a WhatsApp line for readers' feedback.

There are numerous implications of WhatsApp on news-making processes from a media point of view, and the most important one is that it has expanded media spaces. As part of other social

media platforms, WhatsApp has played a significant role in the growth of online desks in newsrooms. These are groups of journalists and editors who are dedicated to curating and disseminating information on online spaces that include the newspaper's website, twitter, Facebook and WhatsApp. These stories are disseminated simultaneously, and the mediums complement each other. This is heavily reliant on the concept of convergence.

The *NewsDay* editor posited that WhatsApp has proved more appropriate for the new age newsroom, as compared to telephone. The telephone has for a long time been central to the newsgathering process. However, the *NewsDay* editor believes WhatsApp is more appropriate than the telephone and is of great assistance in the newsgathering process. He further notes that:

One can interview sources via WhatsApp, especially when people are in meetings. Even press statements and video material can be sent via WhatsApp, this includes pictures and sound.

As a new technology, WhatsApp is unobtrusive and journalists can ask a source for a snap comment on a story that they would be working on. WhatsApp, therefore, allows for multi-tasking and the source can send a brief comment in the midst of attending to other business. According to the *NewsDay* editor, the fact that interviews can be conducted on WhatsApp, appointments set up on the platform, means that WhatsApp is more effective than other newsgathering medium. The fact that WhatsApp is malleable as both a social medium and a medium for 'serious' work means that the relationship between journalists and sources are also altered. The journalist is able to 'soft talk' a source to give them a comment even when he or she is in the middle of doing something. The interview is therefore no longer an event on its own, but can be 'slipped' in the middle of undertaking other tasks. The implication of WhatsApp, then is that, it alters the interview as a specific news making event. This demonstrates the transformational power of social media, as propounded in the Network theory. As Webb (2016) notes the Network theory as applied to modern society focuses on the power of social media to transform societal practices.

The key informant interviewee notes that WhatsApp has been embraced by almost all media houses, as it makes their work easier. He points out that:

The implications of WhatsApp on media organisations has been significant, even letters to the editor are now sent via WhatsApp. Stories appearing on WhatsApp end up in print media. Almost all print media organisations have opened WhatsApp lines.

In a sense, WhatsApp is configuring the news-making process in terms of encouraging participatory input from audiences. The WhatsApp platform has a positive connotation which has made the news-making approach more interactive (Garcia *et al*, 2015). The study ascertained that, news consumers now have a larger influence through participating in news-making processes, using WhatsApp. For instance, letters to the editor have always been there, however new technologies have made it easy to send them by eliminating postage costs and time involved. The editors of the two newspapers revealed how WhatsApp has impacted on the news-making process by opening and expanding other (online) spaces for news-making and how it has had a huge impact on relations between sources and journalists. The key informant interviewee argued that the implications of WhatsApp on the news-making process do not only target specific areas in the newsroom or in media organisations but touch the entire process.

However, in questionnaires, journalists expressed ambivalence over the implications of WhatsApp in the news-making process, with 7 (47%) answering "Not exactly" to the question: Do you think your news-gathering needs are satisfied by WhatsApp? 3 (20%) of the journalists said Yes and 5 (33%) said No. This ambivalence is also observable in the huge disagreement over the effects of WhatsApp in terms of improving the process of newsgathering. 7 (47%) of the journalists answered in the affirmative, 1 (6%) disagreed and 7 (47%) said "not really". This ambivalence is attributable to resistance to adopt new media technologies such as WhatsApp by some journalists, especially the older journalists, whose responses generally depicted a negative attitude towards WhatsApp. This is not unique to Zimbabwean newsrooms, since it has been argued that some journalists in various parts of the world, have put up furious resistance, adamantly refusing to subordinate their sacred professional ethics and idealistic civil morals to what they see as profane, polluting logic of market technology (Alexander, Breese, and Luengo, 2016).

The Various Uses of WhatsApp in News Gathering and Consumption

The study also established the various uses of WhatsApp, in news gathering and consumption. The responses to the questionnaire administered to journalists were as follows: 4 journalists (26,6%) indicated that they use the platform to search for news stories in groups, 2 (13,3%) indicated that they use it to paste stories on WhatsApp groups and threads to generate

debate and probably get more diary and follow ups, 2 (13,3%) indicated that use the platform to read stories pasted in groups, 6 (40%) indicated that they contribute to debates and discussions that ensue around stories, 1 (6,6%) indicated that she uses WhatsApp for all the above. As the statistics indicate, there are a variety of activities that journalists do on WhatsApp as part of the “rituals” that they engage in, during the news making process.

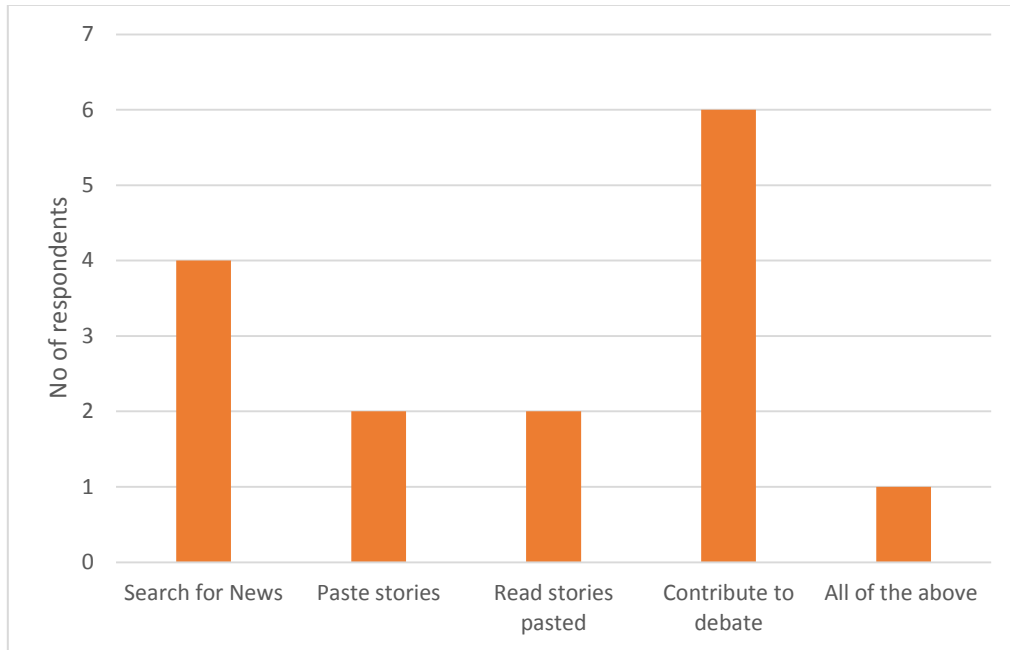


Fig 2 - Specific use of WhatsApp by journalists in News-making

The study also sought to ascertain the implications of WhatsApp on news awareness among consumers and the responses were as follows: 24 (40%) of the respondents said WhatsApp had

greatly increased their news awareness and 29 (48.3%) said the platform had slightly increased their news awareness and 7 (11.6%) said nothing has changed.

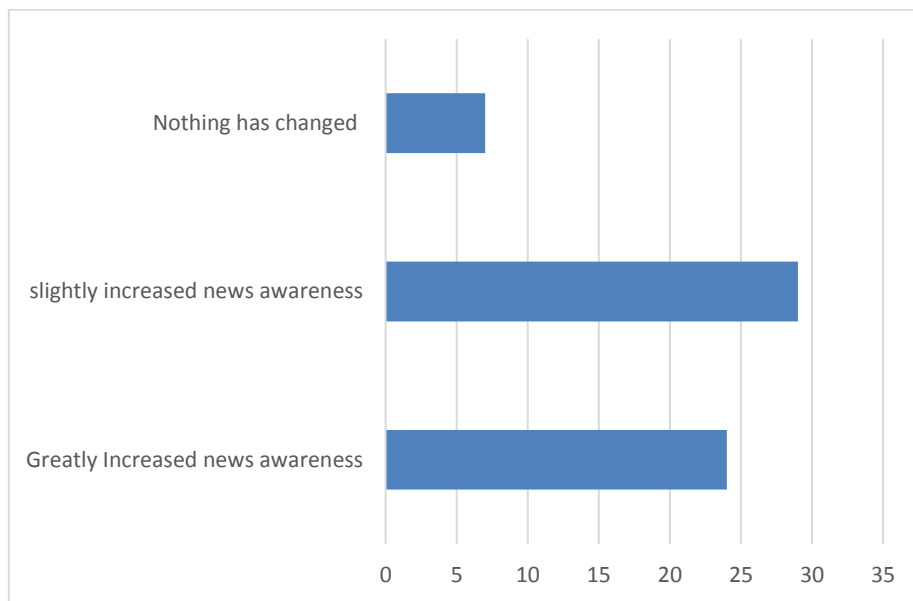


Fig 3- Implications of WhatsApp on news awareness

The study also revealed that news consumers engage in a lot of activities, that in terms of online journalism, qualifies them as some kind of citizen journalists. In that they are able to 'curate' content and paste it on WhatsApp groups for discussions, the news readers play the role of an 'editor' who selects what others can read.

The study further established that the most important way, WhatsApp is used for in the news-making process is conducting interviews with sources. This is because interviews on WhatsApp can include audio, video, text and other content that is otherwise not easily used on other mediums. The *Chronicle* editor emphasised that from a journalistic point of view, the importance of WhatsApp in news making is that it lends itself well to the task of conducting interviews with sources. He asserted that:

We do a lot of interviews and stories on WhatsApp. Reporters can file their stories to the newsroom using WhatsApp and can get information from people using WhatsApp.

The editor also pointed out that, another specific way in which WhatsApp is deployed in the *Chronicle* newsroom is for the purposes of looking for diary items and chatting with sources through WhatsApp groups. He further clarified that the latter one is a way of cultivating and building a source base, and also maintaining it. The editor further pointed out that WhatsApp is of great value in terms of time management and the breaking of stories. WhatsApp as a medium is something that one can indulge in while doing other tasks. He illustrated that it is possible for a journalist to conduct an interview on WhatsApp while moving between their home and the office, so that when they get to work they would be having a story.

The *NewsDay* editor advanced that the specific ways in which his newspaper uses the WhatsApp medium in gathering and disseminating news include using it for interviews, requesting for details of possible sources, setting up interview appointments, and getting other material such as

pictures and documents that can be sent in word or pdf formats. These are all materials that are central to the process of news reporting. The *NewsDay* editor further posited that:

WhatsApp is the safest news gathering tool for our newspaper, which has been labelled anti-government, since it provides End-to-End encryption, which enables us to communicate with our sources, in a manner that is secure and free from eavesdropping by state agents.

The above assertion implies that, private newspapers have resorted to WhatsApp, as a way evading state surveillance.

He also advanced that WhatsApp had become an essential newsgathering tool because, it can be accessed from anywhere, even in the absence of internet and the costs are minimal compared to other mediums.

On the other hand, the key informant interviewee advanced that:

WhatsApp has complemented the print media and taken away monopolies. It has in a sense liberated the news industry. It has empowered the citizen of Zimbabwe and newspapers are now doing follow up on stories uploaded on WhatsApp.

The extent to which WhatsApp has been embraced in news-making and consumption

It would seem like the Zimbabwean media has significantly embraced WhatsApp, but is cautious of its negative implications such as encouraging unethical news practices and the circulation of fake news. 2 (13,3%) of the journalists who responded to the questionnaires said they strongly agree that WhatsApp is an important tool in newsgathering, 8 (53,3%) agreed that it is an important tool, 1 (6,6%) indicated that he is not sure, 4 (26,6%) said they disagree, and none strongly disagreed. 5 (33,3%) of the journalists said they actively disseminate their stories on WhatsApp, 5 (33,3%) said they do not disseminate their stories on WhatsApp and the other 5 (33,3%) said they do but not always.

Table 1 – Frequency of journalists’ use of WhatsApp for diaries

	Number of journalists	Percentage
Journalists who do not frequently use WhatsApp for diaries	11	73,3%
Journalists who frequently use WhatsApp for diaries	2	13,3%
Quite frequently use WhatsApp for diaries	2	13,3%

What is interesting is that 11 (73,3%) journalists indicated that they do not frequently use contents circulated on WhatsApp to generate stories or diary items, two (13,3%) indicated they frequently do that and two (13,3%) indicated that, they quite frequently use content on the platform to generate story ideas. WhatsApp has become so woven into the daily routines, be they work related or at home in general communication, that it boggles the mind how journalists are able to tell if at all they use the platform to generate diaries or not. This calls for a high level of consciousness on the part of journalists on what they do with the platform, which, deceptively has managed to slip into our daily routines so much that at times we use it without realising it.

For the news consumers, WhatsApp topped the list of the major sources of news with, 21 (35%) of the respondents citing it as their first choice for news; 11 (18.3%) chose Facebook, 9 (15%) the *Chronicle*, 7 (11,6%) chose *NewsDay*, 6 (10%) chose the *Daily News*, 4 (6,6%) chose the *Herald* and 2 (3,3%) chose Twitter. The respondents cited

a number reasons for preferring WhatsApp as a news source. 56% of the news consumers who chose WhatsApp, said they used it as a source of news because it is more accessible as compared to other sources, 32% said it is cheaper than other sources, 8% said it is faster than other sources, and 4% said because it is more reliable than other sources. The findings depict that WhatsApp is not the only social media platform that is preferred by media consumers, as Facebook emerged as the second most preferred source of news. This clearly shows that social media platforms are slowly surpassing traditional media platforms like newspapers, as preferred sources of news, in a Zimbabwean context. This can be attributed the advantages of social media such accessibility and cost, as cited above, with reference to WhatsApp. However, as the statistics indicate, Twitter is the least preferred source of news, this can be attributed to the fact that, very few media consumers have access to it, as it is still largely viewed as an elitist social media platform in a Zimbabwean context.

Table 2 – Preferred news source for news consumers

News Source	Number of Respondents
WhatsApp	21
Facebook	11
Chronicle	9
NewsDay	7
Daily News	6
Herald	4
Twitter	2

Linked to consuming news on WhatsApp, most news consumers i.e 44 (73%)) said they also generate their own news content and spread it via WhatsApp. This could be through generating their own press statements or organisational communication and spreading it on WhatsApp, with the hope that journalists will pick it and make it news. 16 (27%) of the news consumers said they

always come across news stories that appear in print media publications such as the *NewsDay* and the *Chronicle* shared on WhatsApp and vice versa, they also see content shared on WhatsApp as press statements appearing in newspapers as stories. Overall in terms of the implications of WhatsApp on news consumption, with particular focus on the *Chronicle* and ,the *NewsDay*, 43 (71,6%) of the

respondents said consumers now read stories earlier than before, 7 (11,6%) said there are no marked implications at all, and 10 (16,6%) said they are not sure of any changes. This shows that although, at some level WhatsApp may seem like a polarising medium; it generally has huge implications on the news-making process.

Whatsapp and Its Impact on the Quality of Journalism

It is clear that no matter how ubiquitous the medium of WhatsApp has become, it still remains a tool that journalists use with caution and some are yet to take seriously as a news-making tool. The editors and the key informant interviewed concurred that, as much as WhatsApp might represent the future of news, practitioners must embrace it with caution. The *Chronicle* editor emphasised that as much as his media house has to change with times and adopt media technologies such as WhatsApp as they are meant for the media, there is a need to be cautious. He also warned against getting carried away by fake news on WhatsApp. It was generally ascertained that WhatsApp calls for a high sense of media ethics among journalists.

The *NewsDay* editor expressed similar sentiments, pointing out that, over-reliance on WhatsApp could lead one to getting fake news which might get journalists in trouble and involve the company in lawsuits. He also emphasised that the advent of WhatsApp, ushered the huge responsibility of verifying information. The editor cautioned that:

Even where pictures are concerned, it is becoming scarier. We now have photo-shopping software and this may lead to legal implications.

The theme of appearance versus reality is important as journalists experiment and work with fluid technologies such as WhatsApp. In a sense journalists are now practising journalism where technologies such as WhatsApp are encouraging what Mbembe (2015) calls “*the power of the false*.” There is so much material that appears to be true yet so false that journalists can publish as true and get into huge problems with authorities and people concerned.

The key informant interviewee posited that, as much as WhatsApp has impacted on the media in a lot of positive ways, newspapers must verify the information that they get or generate from WhatsApp. He notes that WhatsApp has become notorious for fake news and sometimes false leads. He went on to suggest that mainstream media can take precautions against this by seeking comments from people concerned and from authorities like the police. WhatsApp, therefore, has somewhat poisoned the media operating environment.

It was established that WhatsApp, to some extent, has negative implications on the journalistic skills of media practitioners. The two editors and the key informant interviewee, generally concurred that over-reliance on WhatsApp was in a way de-skilling seasoned journalists and preventing new journalists from developing essential journalistic skills. This was enunciated by the key informant interviewee as follows:

The advent of WhatsApp has led to the emergence of lazy journalism, characterised by poorly researched stories that are copied from WhatsApp. It is sad to note that, even seasoned journalists no longer utilise face-to-face news gathering tactics, therefore newer generations of journalists are no longer acquiring essential journalistic skills, from their mentors.

Impact of WhatsApp on the survival of newspapers

The other revelation that emerged from this study is that, although WhatsApp has to some extent, negatively affected traditional newspapers such as *Chronicle* and *NewsDay*, it has not significantly threatened their survival. One of the areas of contention in terms of the journalistic implications of social media, has been that it makes media content available for free to audiences and in the process, affects newspaper sales. Media organisations rely on selling media content and advertising spaces. In making content available for free, social media is seen as attacking the age-old media model of selling both content and advertising space. However, journalists believe it is not as simple as that. In a sense the new medium of WhatsApp is seen as complementing the legacy media of newspapers.

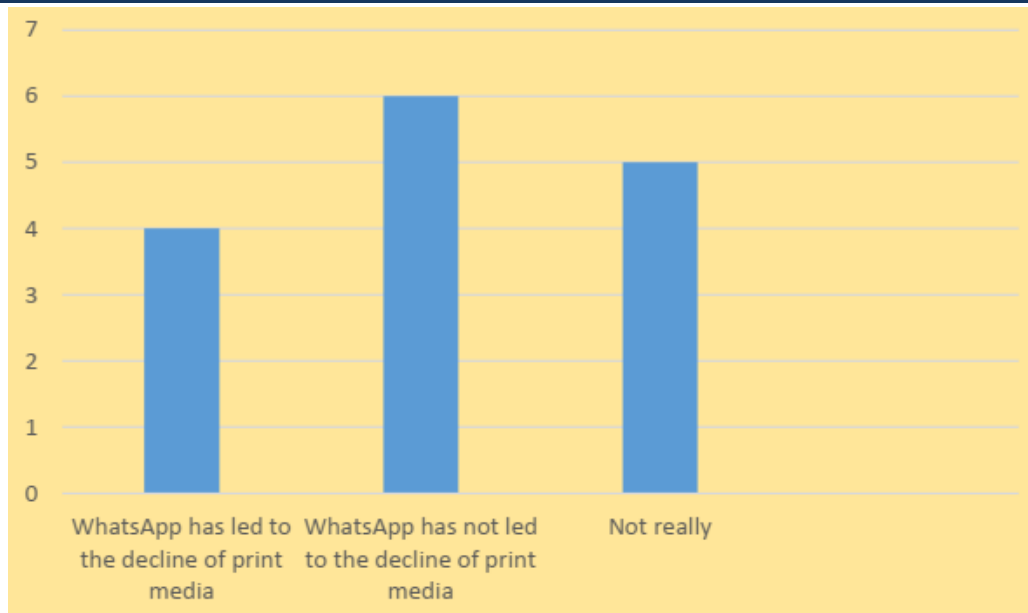


Fig 4. Perceived effect of WhatsApp on print media consumption among journalist

According to Fig 4 above, 4 (26,6%) of the journalists who responded to the questionnaires believed that the introduction of WhatsApp has led to the decline in the consumption of print media publications like *The Chronicle* and the *NewsDay*. However, 6 (40 %) of the journalists disagreed and 5 (33,3%) said 'not really'. 43 (71,6 %) of the news consumers who responded to the questionnaires said embracing WhatsApp as a source of news has led them to reading less of newspapers such as *The Chronicle* and the *NewsDay*, 6 (10%) said they still read newspapers as much as they have always done, and 11 (18,3%) indicated that they are not certain. According to Fig 5 below, it becomes clear that for most news

consumers (71,6 percent) the introduction or rise of social media platforms, such as WhatsApp, means that if they read stories on these platforms; then there is no need for them to get hold of a print copy.

The implications are that many people, therefore, see no need of buying a newspaper. The reasoning may also be linked to the curatorship (editing) role that is prominent in new media, readers believe that all important stories that they should pay attention to are taken from news websites and placed on WhatsApp. Once they read those stories on WhatsApp threads, there is no need to read the whole newspaper.

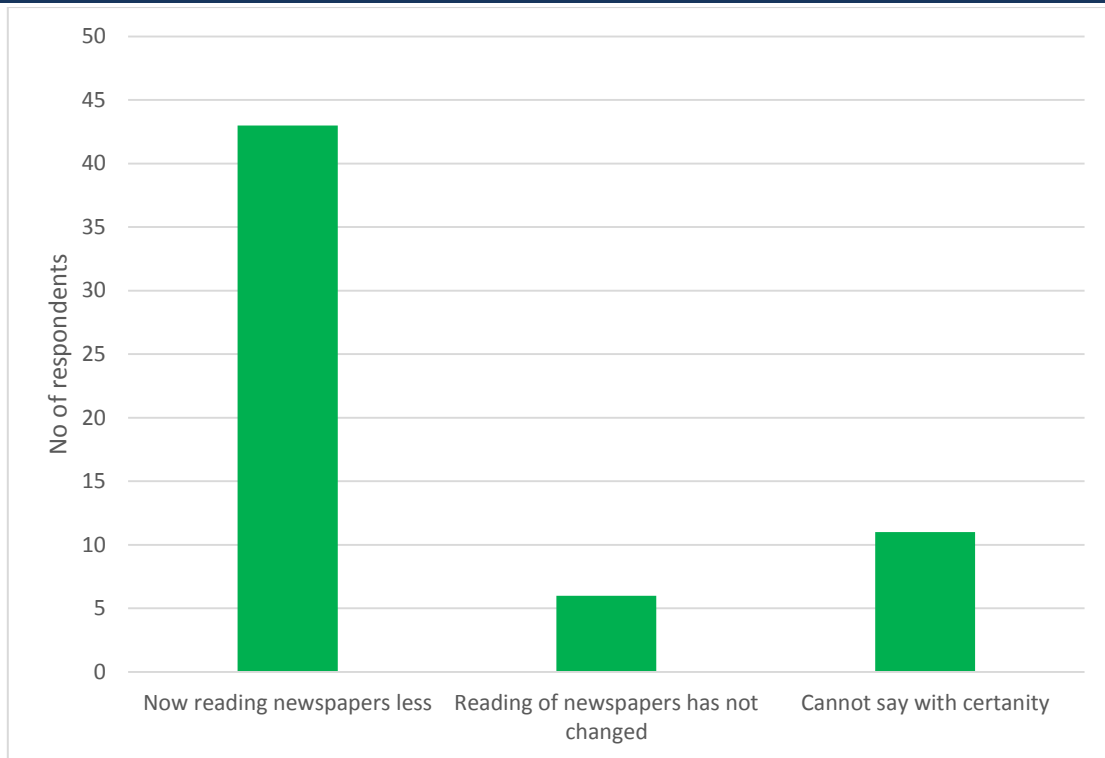


Fig 5 -Effects of whatsapp on reading of newspapers

The Newsday editor insisted that WhatsApp has been useful in driving traffic to the newspaper's website. He revealed that:

There have not been lots of negative implications on the consumption of news on our other platforms (hard copy and website) as links posted on the WhatsApp platform lead readers to opening the website to read the stories. The company is not losing in any way. The company is gaining a lot through websites than through hard copies.

The *NewsDay* editor chose to take a broad view of issues. He posited that, if the vision of the company is to ensure that as much of its content is consumed, WhatsApp assists in multiplying the general readership of the newspaper. He added that, the only disadvantage is that of retrenchment since the circulation of hard copies would be reduced. The *NewsDay* editor, elaborated on the negative implications of WhatsApp on hard copy sales, he clearly pointed out that, it was hard for newspapers to make good profit from online content. He further argued that, the media business model still remains hard copy based, and decline in hard copy sales affects business in major ways. He added that, the decline in hard copy sales, has resulted in the retrenchment of newspaper sales staff. He however, pointed out that, having newspapers online is important for journalism, as most offices now use internet and newspapers are read online. He went on to reveal that, his

company has come up with a system where one can read online copies of their newspapers at a cost. This is an attempt to ensure that people read the hard copy, as well. The *NewsDay* editor, further pointed out that, there is a way of mapping the hard copy business model, on the online copies, where media content can be used to grow an audience and then 'sell' this audience to advertisers. He said:

In online media, adverts are done through google AdSense. The material used on websites must attract readership.

On the other hand, the *Chronicle* deputy editor argued that:

WhatsApp and other online media deprive media companies of revenue as people copy and paste stories via WhatsApp which means a lot of people get to read the stories without paying for the content.

He further argued that this is linked to the high rate of retrenchments in the media industry. This is the case in light of the model, which is based on the media making a lot of money from advertising. However, advertising on online platforms is still underdeveloped in Zimbabwe. Even if there are a lot of online content readers, media companies have not been able to ensure that they turn this huge readership into advertising revenue. Media outlets

end up failing to sustain their operations, and resort to the retrenchment of workers. This clearly shows that, WhatsApp has certainly imposed economic structures, whose impact on the Zimbabwean newspaper industry, cannot be overlooked. As Peterson (2003) advances, the way journalism occurs is closely intertwined with the technological transformations and economic conditions, in which the communication system operates.

On the contrary, the key informant interviewee advanced that, WhatsApp is not a threat to the newspapers but rather complements them. He pointed out that, WhatsApp plays a prominent role in breaking stories, which newspapers go on to follow up. In the opinion of the key informant interviewee, WhatsApp makes anyone with a smart phone and a WhatsApp software on their phone a potential journalist or reporter. He views WhatsApp as a platform that, further contributes to the evolution and disruption of what a journalist is. The key informant interviewee argued that newspapers like *NewsDay* and the *Chronicle* need to be innovative and find ways of deploying social media tools like WhatsApp to push their overall agenda and mission. He posited that:

People who are 35 years and above buy newspapers but younger people, now read online and vastly use WhatsApp. Print media has to respond by adopting WhatsApp and other social media platforms, although these are riddled concerns about accuracy and ethical reportage.

The Key Informant interviewee further argued that, WhatsApp, represents the future of journalism and news. According to him, news and journalism are likely to go online and tools such as WhatsApp are therefore better placed to be journalistic tools of the future.

CONCLUSION

Technologies inside Zimbabwean newsrooms are changing and journalism is changing with them. This paper has shown that, WhatsApp has ushered, Zimbabwean newsrooms into a new technological paradigm. An analysis of the responses, established that, WhatsApp has had a profound impact on news-making processes at the *Chronicle* and *NewsDay*. The social media platform, has also generated massive changes in the consumption practices of media consumers. The study further established that, WhatsApp has emerged as the primary news-making and consumption tool, due to numerous

advantages. These include its promotion of audience involvement in news production and the fact that, it allows for secure communication channels, without the risk of surveillance. It is also relatively cheaper and more accessible. The new media ecology, is however, fraught with challenges, which threaten traditional journalism. The study ascertained that, there are concerns that, WhatsApp is promoting unethical journalism, characterised by the production of fake news and misleading content. There are also concerns that, over-reliance on WhatsApp is eroding essential journalistic skills, which are the bedrock of the profession. The study further ascertained that, despite complementing newspapers, WhatsApp has, imposed economic structures, whose negative impact on the Zimbabwean newspaper industry cannot be overlooked. The findings reveal that, the advent of WhatsApp has triggered, a decline in newspaper hard copy sales, resulting in the retrenchment of some newspaper staff. However, the findings also reveal that, the technological and economic structures ushered by the advent of WhatsApp are not monstrous enough to annihilate traditional newspapers, such as the *Chronicle* and *NewsDay*. The survival of traditional media institutions, however, hinge on embracing social media platforms such as WhatsApp and innovatively utilising them. These social media platforms must, however, be embraced with caution. Their adoption must be accompanied by investment in the ethical training of journalists, in order to prevent ethical lapses, that dent the profession. It is also essential that journalists maintain some essential old age values and professional practices, so that they remain relevant, even at a time when over-reliance on 'WhatsApp journalism' is threatening to bastardise the profession.

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