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Power and participatory politics in the digital age : probing the use of new media technologies in railroading political changes in Zimbabwe
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Citation
Mutsvairo, B. (2013, June 13). *Power and participatory politics in the digital age : probing the use of new media technologies in railroading political changes in Zimbabwe*. Retrieved from https://hdl.handle.net/1887/20974

Cover Page

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Title: Power and participatory politics in the digital age : probing the use of new media technologies in railroading political changes in Zimbabwe
Issue Date: 2013-06-13

6 AFRICAN CITIZEN JOURNALISTS' ETHICS AND THE EMERGING NETWORKED PUBLIC SPHERE

Parts of this chapter are based on:

Mutsvairo Bruce, Columbus Simon, & Leijendekker Iris "Converging ethics in African online journalism and the emerging networked public sphere," 13th *International Symposium on Online Journalism* (University of Texas, Austin, US, 20-21 April, 2012).

6.1 Introduction

Citizen journalism is emerging as a powerful phenomenon across Africa. The rise of digitally-networked technologies such as the Internet and mobile phones is reshaping reporting across the continent. This change is technological – with social media platforms enabling new forms of publishing, receiving, and discussing stories – as well as cultural, with idiosyncratic conventions emerging on these platforms. This study surveys the ethical beliefs of citizen journalists in several sub-Saharan African countries. We find that they are driven by a sense of social responsibility and a wish to inform their readers and the general public. Citizen journalists show a clear anti-authoritarian strain and an antipathy towards government regulation, yet most see themselves as subject to the same ethics that guide traditional journalism. We then investigate the implications of these ethics for the emerging networked public sphere. The emergence of a digitally-networked public sphere has been hailed as a revival of bottom-up democracy in the West, but its consequences for African countries are rather ambiguous. We therefore set out to disentangle the possible relationship between citizen journalism and the emerging networked public sphere.

Internet access is scarcer in sub-Saharan Africa than anywhere else in the world: African Internet users account for barely more than 5 percent of the world's online population, and in many countries the Internet penetration rate still lies below 5 percent. However, the picture is changing rapidly as more and more people gain access. Mobile phone adoption has exploded all over the continent, so much so that today most Africans have access to a mobile device. In a number of countries, the introduction of 3G networks has also revolutionised the way by which many people access the Internet - while for most of

the previous decade cybercafés prevailed, more and more people now access the Internet via their mobile phones. In these countries – Kenya, Nigeria, Uganda, Tanzania and Zimbabwe, among others – a significant share of the population is now online.[291]

The rise of the Internet across Africa, just as anywhere else in the world, has not left journalism untouched. Newspapers and broadcasters across the country have started to publish content online. In many cases, however, African online journalism is merely repurposing content produced for the publishers' primary publications.[292] Nevertheless, practices pioneered by alternative media actors – such as the use of multimedia and increasingly immediate reporting – are adopted by mainstream journalists, so that there is a trend towards "networked-convergent journalism".[293]

The spread of Internet and mobile telephony has also led to the emergence of a new form of citizen journalism in many sub-Saharan African countries. While this movement and its impact is less obvious in Africa than in Europe and the US, vibrant online communities exist in many countries, and citizen journalists are increasingly using digital technologies such as blogs, SMS, social networks, microblogs, video-sharing platforms, and mapping to report and comment on a wide range of topics.[294] The role of citizen journalists has particularly been highlighted in times of crisis: in Kenya, during the violent election aftermath 2007, while social media were also used to incite riots, bloggers documented human rights abuses and created Ushahidi, a crisis mapping software.[295] In such situations, when reports from conventional media are absent, citizen journalists are not merely relaying critical information – blogs, microblogs and fora also serve as means to express emotions and as spaces for discussion.[296]

291 Simon Columbus & Rebekah Heacock, *Internet Access in Sub-Saharan Africa*, Berkman Center for Internet and Society, forthcoming.
292 Tanja Bosch, 'Digital journalism an online public spheres in South Africa', *Communicatio*, vol. 36, no. 2, 2010, pp. 265-275; and Okoth Fred Mudhai, 'Immediacy and openness in digital Africa: Networked-convergent journalisms in Kenya', *Journalism*, vol. 12, no. 6, 2011, pp. 674-691.
293 Fred Mudhai; and Fackson Banda, *Citizen Journalism & Democracy in Africa*, Highway Africa, Grahamstown, South Africa, 2010.
294   Bruce Mutsvairo & Simon Columbus, 'Emerging patterns and trends in citizen journalism in Africa: A case of Zimbabwe', *Central European Journal of Communication*, vol. 5, no. 1, 2012.
295   Joshua Goldstein & Juliana Rotich, *Digitally-networked technology in Kenya's 2007-2008 post-election crisis*, Berkman Center for Internet and Society. 2008, <http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/sites/cyber.law.harvard.edu/files/Goldstein&Rotich_Digitally_Networked_Technology_Kenyas_Crisis.pdf.pdf>
296   Ethan Zuckerman, 'Citizen media and the Kenyan electoral crisis', in S. Allan & E. Thorsen (eds.), *Citizen Journalism: Global Perspectives*, Peter Lang, New York, NY, 2009, pp. 187-196.

The rise of the Internet, and in particular of citizen journalism, has been hailed as the emergence of a "networked public sphere".[297] Digitally networked technologies enable ordinary citizens, the idea goes, to become their "own broadcasters and reach large numbers of people in unprecedented ways at trivial cost".[298] However, the application of this theory in the African context has been controversial. While Goldstein and Rotich argue that the fast adoption of mobile phones in Kenya has led to the emergence of a networked public sphere, this has been challenged by Marion Walton, who points out that many are still without access to communication technologies.[299] Goldstein and Rotich, however, also note that the emergence of a networked public sphere in Africa is, unlike in Western democracies, not necessarily linked to civic impulses; rather, digitally networked technologies can be utilised for such divergent purposes as to promote violence, to provide counter-narratives to the stories of oft-censored conventional media, and to more easily collect reports from witnesses of human rights violations.[300] Bosch, who entertains the notion of multiple public spheres in different online communities, in a similar vein points out that online discussions often fall short of the reasoned debate required for the formation of a public sphere, more resembling a "barroom brawl".[301]

6.2 Citizen Journalism in Africa

The term 'citizen journalism' has risen to broad attention since the mid-2000's,[302] albeit mostly in Western countries. In Africa, it is even more of a novel phenomenon. Along with its novelty comes an abundance of definitions, such that the boundaries of citizen journalism are hardly drawn yet. Often, the term is used to denote non-professional, amateur news publication;[303] the reporters are "incidental journalists" who happen to witness and capture, then publicise events.[304] Allan therefore argues that citizen

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297   Yochai Benkler, *The Wealth of Networks: How social production transforms markets and freedom*, Yale University Press, New Haven, Conn., 2006.
298   Joshua Goldstein and Juliana Rotich "Digitally Networked Technology in Kenya's 2007–2008 Post-Election Crisis." The Berkman Center for Internet and Society at Harvard University. September 2008 http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/sites/cyber.law.harvard.edu/files Accessed 11 May 2012
299   Marion Walton, 'Mobilizing African publics', *Information Technologies & International Development*, vol. 7, no. 2, 2011, pp. 47-50.
300   Joshua Goldstein and Juliana Rotich "Digitally Networked Technology in Kenya's 2007–2008 Post-Election Crisis." The Berkman Center for Internet and Society at Harvard University. September 2008 http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/sites/cyber.law.harvard.edu/files Accessed 11 May 2012 .
301   Tanya Bosch, Digital journalism and online public spheres in South Africa. *Communicatio, Vol. 36* No. 2, 2010 265-275.
302   Stuart Allan, 'Histories of Citizen Journalism', in S. Allan & E. Thorsen, *Citizen Journalism: Global Perspectives*, Peter Lang, New York, NY, 2009, p. 18.
303   ibid.
304   ibid., pp. 21.

journalism plays a particularly salient role in crisis reporting.[305] Indeed, much of the research on African citizen journalism consists of case studies on political crises.[306] The total body of research remains small, although useful Africa-specific normative frameworks for the analysis of citizen journalism are supplied by Goldstein, Rotich, and Banda. A comprehensive literature review is provided by Mutsvairo and Columbus.[307]

In Africa more than elsewhere, participation in citizen journalism hinges on scarce access to information and communications technologies (ICTs);[308] consequently, citizen journalists can be expected to be mostly better-off, more highly educated, and living in urban areas.[309] Over the last decade, the growing adoption of mobile phones has vastly increased access to ICTs for many Africans, and they have been noted as a key technology for citizen journalists in Africa;[310] most recently, Internet-enabled mobile phones are also enable increasing access to the latter medium. Despite these advances, citizen journalists in Africa today are often experienced ICT users with extensive experience in using social media.[311] Blogs and Twitter are commonly used outlets for citizen journalists, as well as the social network Facebook; but uses of mass SMS and emails for citizen journalism have also been reported.[312]

Reporting news is quite naturally a major part of citizen journalism. Especially in the crisis situations predominantly studied, which come with an absence of reports from traditional media sources, citizen journalists take a role in relaying critical information.[313] In some cases, this involves dedicated research on issues that are ignored or suppressed

305   ibid.
306   In Kenya: Maarit Mäkinen & Mary Wangu Kuira, 'Social media and postelection crisis in Kenya', *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, vol. 13, no. 3, 328-335; Goldstein & Rotich; and Zuckerman; in Zimbabwe: Dumisani Moyo, 'Citizen journalism and the parallel market of information in Zimbabwe's 2008 election, *Journalism Studies*, Vol. 10 No.. 4, 2009, pp. 551-567.
[307] Bruce Mutsvairo, Simon Columbus Simon. "Emerging patterns and trends in Citizen Journalism in Africa: A case of Zimbabwe." *Central European Journal of Communication* Vol. 5, No. 1 (8), 2012, pp. 23-37.
308 Marion Walton Mobilizing African Publics.
Information Technologies & International Development Vol. 7 No. 2, 2011, pp. 47-50
309   Joshua Goldstein and Juliana Rotich "Digitally Networked Technology in Kenya's 2007–2008 Post-Election Crisis." The Berkman Center for Internet and Society at Harvard University. September 2008 http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/sites/cyber.law.harvard.edu/files Accessed 11 May 2012
310   Ibid
311   Ibid
312   Dumisani Moyo Citizen Journalism and the Parallel Market of Information in Zimbabwe's 2008 Election. *Journalism Studies Vol. 10* No. 4 pp. 2009, 551-567.
313   Ibid

by mainstream media,[314] but Moyo has also pointed out that this "parallel market of information" can be fraught with falsehoods and uncertainty. However, citizen journalists do not only report news, but also comment on it. Punditry has been noted as a common feature on citizen media outlets,[315] as has the expression of emotions, for example by means of political jokes.[316] Social media, in particular blogs and fora, also have a strong discursive component and have been turned into "spaces for discussion",[317] which in crisis situations serve to connect those in the country with the Diaspora.[318]

Mutsvairo and Columbus have argued that in Africa, citizen journalism takes place counter, parallel to, and interlinked with mainstream journalism, noting a growing convergence between conventional and citizen journalism. Bloggers and microbloggers take up and link to stories published in the online editions of newspapers,[319] but in return traditional media also take leads from citizens, going as far as reprinting blog articles without permission.[320] Tools and practices pioneered by citizen journalists have also found their way into the portfolios of some media publishers, as when journalists write blogs in an explicitly less formal tone, or when online editions of newspapers provide platforms for readers to report stories – what Banda calls "institutional citizen journalism".

There is also a much debated relationship between citizen journalism and democratization and empowerment.[321] Goldstein and Rotich, in particular, have proven wary of technological determinism. They employ a terminology of "civic" and "predatory" impulses (borrowed from Diamond) which are amplified by digitally

314 Joshua Goldstein and Juliana Rotich "Digitally Networked Technology in Kenya's 2007–2008 Post-Election Crisis." The Berkman Center for Internet and Society at Harvard University. September 2008 http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/sites/cyber.law.harvard.edu/files Accessed 11 May 2012

315   ibid.; Ethan Zuckerman, E. (2009). Citizen Media and the Kenyan Electoral Crisis. In S. Allan & E.Thorsen (eds.), *Citizen Journalism: Global Perspectives* New York, NY: Peter Lang.

316   Dumisani Moyo Citizen Journalism and the Parallel Market of Information in Zimbabwe's 2008 Election. *Journalism Studies Vol. 10* No. 4 pp. 2009, 551-567.; Oteku, V., de Bastion, G., Schütz, R., & Bierhals, G. (2010). From the Birds Eye to the Grassroots View. Working paper, *newthinking communications*

317   Ethan Zuckerman, Citizen Media and the Kenyan Electoral Crisis. In S. Allan & E.Thorsen (eds.), *Citizen Journalism: Global Perspectives* New York, NY: Peter Lang, 2009 pp 187–196.

318   Dumisani Moyo Citizen Journalism and the Parallel Market of Information in Zimbabwe's 2008 Election. *Journalism Studies Vol. 10* No. 4, 2009, pp.551-567.;

319   Oteku, V., de Bastion, G., Schütz, R., & Bierhals, G. (2010). From the Birds Eye to the Grassroots View. Working paper, *newthinking*

320   Joshua Goldstein and Juliana Rotich "Digitally Networked Technology in Kenya's 2007–2008 Post-Election Crisis." The Berkman Center for Internet and Society at Harvard University. September 2008.

321   Frankson Banda, F. (2010). *Citizen Journalism & Democracy in Africa* Grahamstown, South Africa:Highway Africa.

networked technologies. Indeed, during the aftermath of Kenya's 2007 election, the tools and practices of citizen journalists were utilised both to incite violence and to document it. Similarly, Moyo warns that citizen journalism, while at times providing critical information, by spreading untruths may be fueling "panic and disorder".[322]

Thanks to its global ubiquity, social media engagement has become a critically important strategy for political candidates the world over. For some, social media deserves some credit for offering a helping hand in the deconstruction of authoritarian regimes, thereby presenting opportunities for democratisation (Gaier and Smith, 2011). Others are quite adamant that social networking sites are dictating the online outlook of today (Boyd and Ellison, 2007). Given the new digital messaging landscape, it would appear as if new media tools have become contemporary society's equivalent of samizdat, the underground network which was used by Soviet-era activists to disseminate anti-government materials.

Indeed, the increased use of social media and blogs by pro-democracy activists in Zimbabwe and in the Diaspora has forced some to suggest that online activists are using sites such as Facebook to voice their discontent with the government.[323] However, the significance of this active participation has been largely ignored by scientific researchers. Empirical work is therefore lacking here. While social media sites have been credited with determining the political discourse in some parts of the world, including the Middle East, we conclude based on this research they have largely been used for non-political campaigns in Zimbabwe. While accepting social media's role as an alternative space for political engagement, we argue that the use of Facebook among Zimbabwean youth is more of a lifestyle than a form of political activism. These conclusions are based on an ethnographical study of 20 Facebook pages belonging to or run by social and political activists in Zimbabwe and abroad. We observe that online political activity, which has largely been sponsored by pro-democracy activists living abroad, has not translated into offline action on the ground. While members of civil society in Zimbabwe has embraced

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322   Dumisani Moyo Citizen Journalism and the Parallel Market of Information in Zimbabwe's 2008 Election. *Journalism Studies Vol. 10* No. 4 pp. 2009, 551-567.;pp. 562.

[323] Bruce Mutsvairo & Lisa Kleeven "Seeking self-determinism through social media: A critical analysis of representation issues for Zimbabwean youths," *International conference on youth and media* (University of Westminster, London, England, March 12-13, 2011)

the social media to reach, organise and mobilise their supporters, they have notably struggled to attract meaningful political reforms – though it is too early to completely dismiss their endeavors as a failure. It seems like as long as Mugabe is in power or should he be replaced by a more traditionally-oriented leader like he is, it is going to be difficult to realise the full potential of social media. Indeed people will be allowed to voice their concerns online, but we should not forget that it all comes down to concrete action: online-based activism should be translated into real-time, face-to-face action in Zimbabwe. Our observation is given the past unsuccessful attempts to topple the government through "people power", it still is too early to suggest Mugabe will be removed from power through Facebook-enabled mass protests against his regime.

Social media is unique in that it allows users to create and search for content and information without logging in to any specific portal site. Kaplan and Haenlein believe social media is "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content."[324] Other scholars prefer to place emphasis on the social network sites' ability to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system.[325]

To understand the emergent digital forces, we need to first accept the notion that globalisation has played an important role in forcing individuals out of traditional bases of social solidarity including parties, churches, and other mass organisations.[326] Ghannam pinpoints that social networks play an active information-providing role for activists and citizens. Furthermore he claims they "mobilize, entertain, create communities, increase transparency, and seek to hold governments accountable."[327]

Among several reasons Boyd considers to be behind citizens' motivation for participation in public life are identity development, status negotiation, community maintenance, and,

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[324] Andreas M.Kaplan, Michael Haenlein, "Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of social media", Business horizons, Vol. 53 No. 1 2010, pp.59-68

[325] Danah boyd and Nicole Ellison. "Social Network Sites: Definition, History, and Scholarship." *Journal of Computer Mediated Communication Vol. No. 13 No. 1 2007*

[326] Lance Bennett W, Alexandra Segerberg, Digital media and the personalization of collective action. Information, Communication, & Society 14: 2011, pp. 770-799.

[327] Jeffrey Ghannam, Social Media in the Arab World: Leading Up to the Uprisings of 2011. A Report to the Center for International Media Assistance, February 3, 2011. Washington, D.C pp. 4

yes, civic engagement." [328]   Boyd further argues that most online activists are no longer accustomed to using chat rooms or bulletin boards for interacting with strangers. Instead they choose to hang out online with people they already know. In the case of Zimbabwe and Africa in general, mobile phone usage has been expanding rapidly, transforming not just the economies of scale but also the way people interact socially.[329] A new study confirms rising rates of Internet penetration in Africa, singling out Kenya, Nigeria, Uganda, Tanzania and Zimbabwe. These developments have had a significant impact in spearheading online social activism continentally. Yet there is nothing new about the use of technologies to sustain activism. Shirky argues that Martin Luther "adopted the newly practical printing press to protest against the Catholic Church, and the American revolutionaries synchronized their beliefs using the postal service that Benjamin Franklin had designed"[330]

6.3 The digitally networked public sphere

With the emergence of digitally networked information and communication technologies (ICTs), such as the Internet and the mobile phone, has come "the rhetoric of the technological sublime", or, in other words, a Utopian belief in their democratising potential.[331] Associated with a reshaping of the public sphere, ICTs are hailed as a revival of bottom-up, participatory democracy in the West. However, their consequences for African countries are less clear. This section therefore considers conceptualisations of the digital or "networked public sphere"[332] and the necessary preconditions for it to function well, while particularly focussing on what this implies for African countries.

Originally conceptualised by Habermas, the public sphere is a discursive arena where private people come together as a public to freely discuss matters of mutual

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[328]   Danah Boyd "Can Social Network Sites Enable Political Action?" In Allison Fine, Micah
    Sifry, Andrew Rasiej and Josh Levy (Eds.) Rebooting America. Creative Commons. 2008, 112-116
[329] Mirjam de Bruijn & Inge Brinkman "Communicating Africa" Researching Mobile Kin Communities,
Communication Technologies, and Social Transformation in Angola and Cameroon' *Autrepart* (57/58)
2011
[330] Clay Shirky The Political Power of Social Media, Technology, the Public Sphere, and Political Change
Council on Foreign Relations, Inc http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/67038/clay-shirky/the-political-
power-of-social-media Accessed 17 June 2012
331Carey cited in Nathaniel Poor, 'Mechanisms of an online sphere: The website Slashdot', *Journal of
Computer-Mediated Communication*, vol. 10, no. 2, 2006.
332Yochai Benkler *The Wealth of Networks: How Social Production Transforms Markets and Freedom*
New Haven,2006 Conn.: Yale University Press.

interest.[333] Presumably led by the strength of the argument, the rational-critical debate ideally results in consensus or public opinion, which then serves as a mediator between private citizens and the state, and constitutes democratic control of state activity.[334]

Although widely recognised as an indispensable resource, this conceptualisation of the public sphere has been criticised as it does not seem to fully take into account how systems of exclusion may be embodied in a public sphere.[335] As Fraser points out, what should and what should not be regarded as a matter of public interest does not naturally or logically follow from the subject itself, but rather becomes a common concern through the process of debate.[336] However, to participate in the debate marginalised groups "must assume the discourse of the dominant group (…) and this may include disregarding what to them are crucial issues".[337] In this manner, the public sphere may leave concerns of the subordinate classes unaddressed, and thereby perpetuate existing systems of domination. A related yet distinct strand of criticism questions the possibility of a common interest for all citizens. They posit that like-minded individuals will organise themselves in separate public spheres, which all vie for the attention of the political arena. Poor comes to the same conclusion on more practical grounds. He simply questions a singular public sphere's ability to function on the basis of deliberation, given the size of population.

Regardless of whether there is one overarching public sphere or separate distinct ones, in practice, the nature of a public sphere is highly dependent on information and communication tools. After a period of a weak public sphere during the era of the traditional mass media, the emergence of new ICTs, such as the mobile phone and the Internet, has supposedly reshaped and strengthened the public sphere, aptly termed the "networked public sphere" by Benkler. These technologies have made possible "multidirectional connections among all nodes in the networked information

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333   Jürgen Habermas, 'Political communication in media society', *Communication Theory*, Vol. 16, 2006, pp. 411-426.
334   ibid.
335   Nancy Fraser, 'Rethinking the public sphere: a contribution to the critique of actually existing democracy', *Social Text*, vol. 25/26, 1990, pp. 56-80.
336   ibid.
337   Alinta L. Thornton, 'Does the Internet create democracy?', *Exquid Novi: African Journalism Studies*, vol. 22, no. 2, 2001, pp. 126-147.

environment" at trivial costs.[338] As a result, more information and voices are able to reach a larger audience, and like-minded individuals are better able to organise. Or, in Benkler's words, ICTs have drastically improved the generative and reactive capacities of individuals, thereby enabling them to "be active participants in the public sphere as opposed to its passive readers, listeners, or viewers".[339] Particularly the Internet, with its anarchic nature, feedback loops, and comment sections,[340] has been associated with the potential for a more varied and inclusive public discourse, more transparency, and the capacity of cooperative actions, such as civic journalism and civil society campaigns.[341]

However, in order for a public sphere to function properly it must satisfy several conditions, which include environmental factors as well as behavioural norms. Although there is interdependency between the various factors, they will be discussed separately for the purpose of clarity. With respect to the environmental factors, two seem particularly relevant for our current purposes. First of all, individuals must be able to speak freely about any topic. This implies that the public sphere must be autonomous from state and economic power,[342] and that individuals' rights to free speech must be protected.[343] In the African context this is not something that can be taken for granted, as for example, in the case of Zimbabwe, where the government has attempted to restrict basic political and civil rights, particularly in online spaces, since the dawn of the millennium.[344] The second environmental condition concerns equal access to the public sphere among different members of society. To have access to the networked public sphere naturally calls for the need to have access to digitally networked technologies. This is not only dependent on penetration rates, but also on the availability of leisure time, literacy, and – with respect to the Internet – often also on English language

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338   Yochai Benkler *The Wealth of Networks: How Social Production Transforms Markets and Freedom* New Haven,2006 Conn.: Yale University Press.
pp. 211.
339   ibid., p. 212.
340   Alinta Thornton, Does the Internet create Democracy?.*Ecquid Novi: African Journalism Studies, Vol. 22* No. 2, 2001 pp.126-147. p. 139.
341   Yochai Benkler *The Wealth of Networks: How Social Production Transforms Markets and Freedom* New Haven,2006 Conn.: Yale University Press..
342   Nathaniel Poor, Mechanisms of an Online Public Sphere: The Website Slashdot. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication, Vol. 10* No. 2, 2006, article 4.
343   Jürgen Habermas, 'Political communication in media society', *Communication Theory*, Vol. 16, No. 4, 2006, pp. 411-426.
344   Last Moyo, 'Repression, propaganda, and digital resistance', in F. Banda, O. F. Mudhai, & W. J. Tettey (eds.), *African Media and the Digital Public Sphere*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, NY, 2011, pp. 125-142.

speaking skills.[345] Despite the rapidly growing usage of ICTs, access is still skewed towards males and urban residents in Africa.[346]

The required behavioural norms include those linked to the promotion of a rational-critical debate, the inclusiveness of the public sphere, and the minimization of harm in a politically sensitive context. In line with Habermas, one of the most important characteristics for a strong public sphere is that it should foster rational-critical debate that leads to a common judgment and action.[347] First, this implies (inter)activity on behalf of the participants of the public sphere. Thornton particularly warns for the possibility that the Internet may become dominated by advertisements and public relations interests, where politicians are "sold as commodities, citizens are viewed as consumers, and issues are decided with staged events and quotes pre-worded by publicity specialists".[348] Rather, a strong public sphere should consist of active participants that continuously react to one another. Second, the discussion should be led by the strength of the argument, which implies that the quality of the argument should be checked and the status of the speaker should be disregarded. Third, this discussion should lead to some sort of consensus. However, although this seems theoretically admirable, Bosch notes that in practice one must find a balance between "informal kinds of consensus" and deliberation free of status.[349] In her case-studies she found that participants were more likely to reach consensus if the website or blog owner posited him- or herself as a discussion leader. Similarly, where deliberation was left to run its natural course, no consensus seemed to be reached.[350] Finally, the consensus that is presumably arrived on from the rational-critical-debate represents public opinion, and should lead to action.

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345   Alinta Thornton, Does the Internet create Democracy?.*Ecquid Novi: African Journalism Studies, Vol. 22* No. 2, 2001 pp.126-147., p. 133.
346   Martin Hilbert, 'Digital gender divide or technologically empowered women in developing countries? A typical case of lies, damned lies, and statistics', *Women's Studies International Forum*, vol. 34, no. 6, 2011, 479-489.
347   Matthew D. Barton, 'The future of rational-critical debate in online public spheres,' *Computers and Composition*, vol. 22, 2005, pp. 177-190.
348   Martin Hilbert, Digital gender divide or technologically empowered women indeveloping countries? A typical case of lies, damned lies, and statistics. *Women's Studies International Forum, Vol. 34* No. 6, 2001 pp. 479-489
349   Tanya Bosch, Digital journalism and online public spheres in South Africa. *Communicatio, Vol. 36* No. 2, 2010, pp 265-275. pp. 273.
350   ibid.

Moreover, in light of the previously mentioned criticism that public spheres may embody systems of exclusions, participants should be able to introduce topics that were previously unquestioned.[351] However, Bosch notes that in Africa citizen journalism and online journalism are often "dependent on traditional outlets for content delivery".[352] In this sense, they tend to be reactionary, and have to enter the discourse of the dominant powers.[353]

Lastly, although not originally included in previously discussed conceptualisations of the public sphere, in the African context of ethnic conflicts, it may be particularly important to be wary of sensitive or harmful content. As the Kenyan post-election crisis of 2007/2008 illustrates, ICTs can be used both to promote civil rights campaigns as well as to incite violence, and Goldstein and Rotich have posited that the digitally networked public sphere may serve civic and predatory impulses, thus not necessarily aligning with democratic values.

6.4 Traditional theories of press

The authoritarian doctrine is a normative theory of press originally conceived by Siebert, Peterson and Schramm.[354] Under this theory, press is tightly controlled by the government and operates to encourage solidarity and union in the nation. Interference through challenging, questioning or criticising the workings of the government is not permissible. The press's role, instead, is to strength the power and authority of the head of state or government. It is a theory under which "the press as an institution is controlled in its functions and operations by organised society through another institution, government."[355] Baran and Davis define it simply as a "normative theory advocating the

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351   Matthew DBarton, The future of rational-critical debate in online public spheres. *Computers and Composition, 22, 2005* pp. 177-190. p. 185.
352   Tanya Bosch, Digital journalism and online public spheres in South Africa. *Communicatio, Vol. 36* No. 2, 2010, 265-275. p. 270.
353   ibid.
354   Fred S. Siebert, Theodore Peterson, & Wilbur Schramm, *Four Theories of the Press: The authoritarian, libertarian, social responsibility and Soviet Communist concepts of what the press should be and do*, University of Illinois Press, Champaign, IL, 1963.
355   ibid., p. 10.

complete domination of media by a government for the purpose of forcing those media to serve the government."[356]

The authoritarian theory of press is best understood in a comparative analysis with other theories, which as suggested by Siebert, Peterson and Schramm are the libertarian theory, the social responsibility theory and Soviet Communist concept. Severin and Tankard say the libertarian theory of the press holds that the press is fundamentally there to inform the public and protect their rights and liberties.[357] A clear distinction between the authoritative and libertarian concepts is offered by John Stuart Mill, who asserts that for the latter, which has also been called the "free press theory", to function well, there needs to be no authoritative state intervention.[358] Unlike the authoritarian concept, this theory thus clearly does not allow for government ownership of the press. Associated with several Western democracies, it unequivocally states that the right to publish is a right that is essential for the success of any democracy. Siebert, Peterson and Schramm conclude the theory took a "philosophical view that man is rational and able to discern between truth and falsehood and, therefore, can choose between a better and worse alternative". Again, unlike the authoritarian doctrine, ownership under the libertarian theory of press exclusively private.

The social responsibility theory is considered an offshoot of the libertarian concept, sharing plenty of similarities; nevertheless, one clear distinction is that it places moral and ethical restrictions on the press. While the former guns for absolute freedom, the latter believes in freedom with responsibility. Considering under this theory that journalists are accountable to the public and government, state intervention – just as is the case with the authoritarian doctrine – can thus be necessary and justified. Siebert, Peterson and Schramm also note that "freedom of expression under the social responsibility theory is not an absolute right, as under pure libertarian theory....One's right to free expression must be balanced against the private rights of others and against

356   Stanley J. Baran & Dennis K. Davis, *Mass Communication Theory: Foundations, Fermend and Future* (3rd ed.), Wadsworth, Belmont, 2009, p. 118.
357   Werner J. Severin & James W. Tankard, *Communication Theories: origins, methods, and uses in the mass media*, Pearson, New York, NY et al., 2010.
358   John Stuart Mill, *Collected Works of John Stuart Mill* (ed. J. M. Robson), University of Toronto Press, Toronto, CA, 1963, pp. 44-45.

vital social interests." As noted by the Commission on Freedom of the Press in 1947, the

press has an important role to play in the development and stability of modern society

and, as such, it is imperative that a commitment of social responsibility be imposed on

mass media. Hence Jennifer Ostini and Anthony Fung's analysis that social responsibility

model is based on "the idea that media have a moral obligation to society to provide

adequate information for citizens to make informed decisions".[359]

The Soviet Communist theory of press, which was developed during the Bolshevik

Revolution in 1917, shares plenty of similarities with the authoritarian press theory.

Oyedele argues that the theory "which evolved from Marxist – Leninist – Stalinist

thought, with mixture of Hegel and 19th Century Russian thinking, the chief purpose of

the press is to contribute to the success and continuance of the socialist system, and

especially to the dictatorship of the party".[360] Journalists are thus there to transmit

government policy and not to aid in searching for the truth. The Soviet Communist model

is seen as an extreme application of authoritarian ideas—in that media are "totally

subordinated to the interests and functions of the state".[361] In assessing the relationship

between the authoritarian model with other theories, it is relevant to take note of Siebert

et al.'s view that "in fact practically all Western Europe... utilized the basic principles of

authoritarianism as the theoretical foundation for their systems of press control".[362]

While Siebert et al.'s largely normative four theories of press paradigm have remained

the dominant source for the scientific study of the press worldwide, the advent of the

Internet and new technologies make it equally timely to disentangle its original

hypothesis. Its framework is considered "obsolete and inapplicable for contemporary

analysis", argue Ostini and Fung.[363] Conceptualizing the work by Siebert et al., Benson

dichotomises their work with the endorsement of ethnocentrism, thereby justifying the

359   Jennifer Ostini & Anthony Fung, 'Beyond the Four Theories of the Press: A new model of national media', *Mass Communication and Society*, vol. 5, no. 1, 2002, pp. 41-56.
360   I. Bayo Oyedele, 'Press Freedom: A conceptual analysis', *Journal of Social Sciences*, vol. 11, no. 2, 2005, pp. 101-109.
361   Jennifer Ostini & Anthony Fung, 'Beyond the Four Theories of the Press: A new model of national media', *Mass Communication and Society*, vol. 5, no. 1, 2002, pp. 41-56.p. 42.
362   Fred S. Siebert, Theodore Peterson, & Wilbur Schramm, *Four Theories of the Press: The authoritarian, libertarian, social responsibility and Soviet Communist concepts of what the press should be and do*, University of Illinois Press, Champaign, IL, 1963., p. 9.
363   Jennifer Ostini & Anthony Fung, 'Beyond the Four Theories of the Press: A new model of national media', *Mass Communication and Society*, vol. 5, no. 1, 2002, pp. 41-56.p. 42.

central need for objectivity in news. This inherent need for objectivity is one area considered outdated and incomprehensible by the disciples of the web. For others, objectivity is indeed slowly becoming a thing of the past largely due to the rise of online journalism.[364] Few will be opposed to the idealistic need for objectivity be it for professional or citizen journalists. But others have chosen to focus on the overall ethical dilemmas posed by online-based journalism.[365] Among several issues raised by these scholars are the commercial-based pressures caused by the immediacy factor, issues surrounding accuracy and authenticity of news.

Accuracy and impartiality are universally accepted as standard norms for any practicing journalist.[366] Journalism ethics is defined as a species of applied ethics that examines what journalists and news organisations should do, given their responsible role in any given society.[367] Kaplan contends that good journalism involves the abolishment and potential influence of own ideas and values when researching and publishing a story.[368] Furthermore, objectivity boosts reliability.[369] It is also Ward's conviction that truth and objectivity are the main pillars of good journalism since the need to present two sides of the story remains apparently universal.[370] Objective reporting involves presentation of provable news free of personal evaluation or assumptions.[371] In the traditional sense, these definitions would mostly work. However, it is almost impossible to maintain this assumption especially when one looks at the presentation of African news online. Web-based journalism is a fast-paced environment, which means journalists are constantly

364   Richard F. Taflinger, *The Myth of Objectivity in Journalism: A commentary*, Washington State University, 1996, < http://www.wsu.edu/~taflinge/mythobj.html>. Accessed 17 May 2012
365   Cecilia Friend & Jane B. Singer, *Online Journalism Ethics: Traditions and transitions*, ME Sharpe, New York, NY, 2007; and
       Mark Deuze & Daphna Yeshua, 'Online journalists face new ethical dilemmas: Report from the Netherlands', *Journal of Mass Media Ethics*, vol. 16, no. 4, 2001, pp. 273-292.
366   Faridah Ibrahim, 'Press freedom and ethics with accountability: Premises and constraints', presented at the International Conference on Free and Responsible Journalism, Port Dickson, 27-31 January, 2010, <http://www.ssig.gov.my/ssig/kcent/material/1-PRESS%20FREEDOM%20%20SSIG-%20dr%20faridah%5B1%5D.pdf> accessed 16 May 2012
367   Stephen J. A. Ward, *The invention of journalism ethics: The path to objectivity and beyond*, McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal, CA, 2005.
368   Richard L. Kaplan, *Politics and the American Press: The Rise of Objectivity, 1865-1920*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK, 2002.
369   Paul E. Fischer & Robert E. Verrecchia, 'Reporting bias', *The Accounting Review*, vol. 75, no. 2, 2000, pp. 229-245.
370   Ward, S. J. A. *The invention of journalism ethics: The path to objectivity and beyond* .Montreal, 2005 Canada: McGill-Queen's University Press.

371   Werner J. Severin & James W. Tankard, *Communication Theories: origins, methods, and uses in the mass media*, Pearson, New York, NY et al., 2010.

under pressure to complete their new stories in order to remain competitive. The quest for objectivity is the main loser of this development.

Ethical guidelines are the capstone for most media associations and groups of journalists, as they have adopted these guidelines and attempt to achieve them in practice (Cline, 2009). Several journalistic organisations have adopted codes of conduct, which ensure that their professional conduct remains intact.[372] Ghana was one of the premier African countries to establish a code of ethics, with the Ghana Journalists Association (GJA) introducing a colonial era one in 1949. The codes are developed and approved by media organisations as evidence for self-regulation, thereby accepting the calls for autonomy.[373] "Ethics substantially defines the duties of an individual towards his own self and towards other people and is a personal responsibility", argues Demir.[374] In the African context, the audiences are perceived to be largely poor, illiterate, uneducated, of diverse language and cultural background and difficult to reach.[375] Faced with dilemma of working without proper and permanent gatekeepers, African journalists often compromise the important journalistic requirement of responsibility. It is acceptable common practice to acknowledge the source of a borrowed news article. Findings of a study conducted in Nigeria concluded that the advent of the Internet was making it possible for journalists to freely cull and publish articles from other the website without paying any royalties or acknowledging the source of the article.[376]

Traditional ethics of journalism include a commitment to truthfulness, accuracy, wisdom, courage, justice, temperance, objectivity, impartiality and public accountability.[377] A peaceful vote in Kenya was followed by a demoralising political, economic, and humanitarian crisis ignited by President Mwai Kibaki's declaration that he had won the

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372   David Pritchard & Madelyn Peroni Morgan, 'Impact of Ethics Codes on Judgements by Journalists: A natural experiment', *Journalism Quarterly*, vol. 4, pp. 934-941; and
        Alexander Pleijter & Annemarie Frye, *Journalistieke gedragscode: leiband of leidraad?* [Journalistic code of ethics: leading-string or guideline?], Radboud University Nijmegen, 2007.
373   Yehiel Limor & Itai Himelboim, 'Journalism and moonlighting: An international comparison of 242 codes of ethics', *Journal of Mass Media Ethics*, vol. 21, no. 4, 2006, pp. 265-285.
374   Muge Demir, 'Importance of Ethic, Credibility and Reliability in Online Journalism', *European Journal of Social Sciences*, vol. 24, no. 4, 2011, pp. 537-545.
375   Hildah Mupfurutsa, 'Ethical and professional issues in African journalism', <http://www.ephrem.org/dehai_archive/2005/sept-oct05/0424.html>.
376   Uche Nworah, 'How the Internet is affecting the practice of journalism in Nigeria', *Nigeria Village Square*, <Retrieved from http://www.nigeriavillagesquare.com/articles/uche-nworah/how-the-internet-is-affecting-the-practice-of-journalism-in-nigeria.html>.
[377] M. Zahidul Haque, 'Ethics of journalism', *Eye on Ethics*, <http://www.eyeonethics.org/2008/02/26/ethics-of-journalism/>

presidential election held on December 2007. More than 1000 people were allegedly murdered during the ethnic clashes, further presenting media analysts with another chance to examine the role of journalism ethics in the wake of the digital revolution. Notably, the Kenyan government's move to inexplicably delay announcing the election winner evoked tensions across the country even though it was its decision to impose a ban on live broadcasts that left many perplexed. While some foreign media continued to broadcast live, local media did not dare to resist the ban.[378] The ban presented bloggers with an opportunity to flex their muscles as the political crisis intensified. Zuckerman credits the growing middle-class population for the rising number of digital activists in the country. The Ushahidi crisis-mapping project gathered momentum as several people, including Kenyans abroad, flocked to its site hoping to get first-hand reports on the crisis. The reports generated by the blog were passed on to journalists and aid organisations to enable them get the correct picture of the crisis.[379] If Macharia's claims are to be believed then there is a bigger chance journalists working for the foreign media may also have been tempted to use information from this "trusted" source. Whether facts were verified is another matter, potentially bringing ethical and credible journalism into disrepute as a blog was used as a primary source for such a crucial news item.

Limitation of harm, which largely involves the preservation of certain details from reports with the aim of avoiding harm to someone or an organisation's reputation, is one principle often highlighted as a journalism norm. The otherwise popular newzimbabwe.com news site's editorial independence and responsibility came under heavy scrutiny after November 2010 when it published an AIDS victim's death certificate on its website without the permission of his family. The document supplied to the website's editor by the Zimbabwean government was meant to offset rumors that the country's dreaded spy agency was behind the victim's death. It can be argued that the website acted irresponsibly by publishing the death certificate as this may have caused

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378   Joshua Goldstein and Juliana Rotich "Digitally Networked Technology in Kenya's 2007–2008 Post-Election Crisis." The Berkman Center for Internet and Society at Harvard University. September 2008. .
379   Anthony Kariuki Macharia, 'At a crossroad: Kenyan blogger comes to the rescue', Inwent, <http://www.inwent-iij-lab.org/projects/2010/wordpress/2010/at-a-crossroads-kenyan-blogger-comes-to-the-rescue/>.

pain and grief to the victim's family, something that the online newspaper could have

easily avoided to remain within the tenets of good journalism.

6.5 Citizen Journalism ethics

Whereas journalism ethics have a long tradition and are manifested in the codes of

unions, agencies and publishers, the ethical foundations of citizen journalism have been

much less explored. Perlmutter and Schoen found that even among top-ranked American

political blogs, some of which are professional outlets, few have formal or informal codes

of ethics.[380] In the United States, there have been two notable early attempts at creating a

"bloggers' code of ethics". Blood focuses on journalistic bloggers and attempts to provide

guidelines to raise their credibility.[381] Dube similarly sees bloggers as comparable to

journalists and provides a code of ethics that is adapted from the guidelines of the Society

of Professional Journalists, listing advice for honesty and fairness, minimizing harm, and

accountability.[382] However, these two early formulations depart little from traditional

journalism ethics and are only within limits specific to the medium.

A more audacious attempt was formulated by Kuhn, who set out to "identify through a

dialogic process those values held most deeply by those who chose to blog regardless of

the specific functions they perform as bloggers and build a normative code

accordingly".[383] He particularly stresses the use of blogs for many-to-many

communication, as opposed to the one-to-many communicative fashion of journalistic

bloggers in Blood and Dube's conception. Consequently, Kuhn used a dedicated blog to

elicit responses from readers; however, his sample size is unfortunately rather small.

Kuhn finds that in his sample, bloggers identified themselves and their readers, rather

than society at large, as 'stakeholders' in their blogs; while at the same time they

considered blogs as "vehicles for social change, a challenge to our mainstream media,

and tools that can be leveraged for political and social gain".

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380   David D. Perlmutter & Mary Schoen, "'If I Break a Rule, What Do I Do, Fire Myself?" Ethics codes of independent blogs', *Journal of Mass Media Ethics*, vol. 22, no. 1, 2007, pp. 37-48.
381   Rebecca Blood, *The Weblog Handbook: Practical advice on creating and maintaining your blog*, Basic Books, New York, NY, 2002.
382   Jonathan Dube, *A bloggers' code of ethics*, 2003,<http://www.cyberjournalist.net/news/000215.php Accessed 17 May 2012>,
383   Martin Kuhn, 'Interactivity and prioritizing the human: A code of blogging ethics', *Journal of Mass Media Ethics*, vol. 22, no. 1, 2007, pp. 18-36.

In Kuhn's study, bloggers named 'free expression' as the value most important to them with regard to blogging, followed by 'factual truth', followed by transparency, accountability, and minimising harm to others. Etiquette was mentioned regularly, but ranked as rather unimportant. When asked for imperative "dos", they named providing credits or links to other blogs, being honest and grounding opinion in fact, and disclosing biases as most important for bloggers, whereas knowingly spreading misinformation, posting information unsupported by facts, and violating copyright laws were highlighted as "don'ts".[384] Kuhn particularly notes that the dos and don'ts also include prescriptions to "sustain the discourse on blogs" and "avoid actions that might discourage participation in blog discourse", consistent with his emphasis on dialogue and many-to-many communication.[385]

Kuhn's findings tie in with a larger study by Cenite et al., which asked personal and non-personal bloggers about their ethical beliefs and corresponding practices.[386] They found that personal bloggers valued attribution most, followed by minimising harm, truth-telling, and accountability. Non-personal bloggers valued attribution and truth-telling highest, followed by minimising harm, and accountability.[387] Differences between groups were significant for truth-telling, valued more highly by non-personal bloggers, and minimising harm, valued more highly by personal bloggers.[388] Cenite et al. also found that non-personal bloggers practice ethical practices related to truth-telling, accountability, and attribution more than personal bloggers.[389] However, the findings of this study are limited by the fact that answers were restricted to these four categories, excluding the interactive factor Kuhn has emphasised.

There has been no research specifically on the attitudes and ethical practices of African citizen journalists so far. If mentioned in the literature on ethics at all, citizen journalists

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384   ibid., p. 31.
385   ibid., pp. 31-32.
386   Mark Cenite, Benjamin H. Detenber, Andy W. K. Koh, Alvin L. H. Lim, & Ng Ee Soon, 'Doing the right thing online: A survey of bloggers' ethical beliefs and practices', *New Media & Society*, vol. 11, no. 4, 2009, pp. 575-597.
387   ibid., p. 586.
388   ibid., p. 587.
389   ibid., p. 588.

are portrayed as negative examples of unethical behaviour. As Kasoma writes, "if untrained citizens become journalists, they are oblivious about principles of ethics. This [...] puts the entire media institution at risk with governments".[390] Some authors have noted practices in which citizen journalists differ markedly from professional codes of ethics. For example, Moyo, writing about Zimbabwe, notes that "when the bloggers refer to 'the news in now' or 'unconfirmed reports', they are not necessarily trying to convince the reader that they have done some investigation in the manner professional journalists verify facts, but merely to indicate that the information has been derived from the grapevine and hence suggest that the readers should do their own cross-checking and verification of stories published." Concluding from this observation, Moyo warns that in the absence of any particular ethics, citizen journalists could, by spreading untruths, lead to "panic and disorder".

6.6 Methods

To study the set of ethics citizen journalists in Africa subscribe to, we used an online survey. Citizen journalists were found through the alternative news platform Global Voices, which summarises the discourse in non-Western blogospheres, and contacted through mail addresses on their respective blogs. We explicitly excluded non-African expatriates and the African Diaspora from this study. Despite the fact that the targeted number of respondents was originally 80, the survey was filled in by 20 participants, of whom all but three self-identified as citizen journalists. The response rate can be attributed to the willingness of citizen journalists to share their views with strangers digitally. As shown below, the number of participants was quite representative considering the fact that we were targeting three English-speaking countries with a history of political dictatorships: Zimbabwe, Kenya and Uganda. Only one participant explicitly denied this. However, half of the participants also identified as journalists in the more general sense, and eight claimed to work as media professionals. All but one of the participants claimed to have both a blog and a Twitter account.

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390   Keyan G. Tomaselli, '(Afri)ethics, communitarianism and libertarianism', *International Communication Gazette*, vol. 71, no. 5, 2009, pp. 577-594.

Due to the small number of active citizen journalists in most African countries, we decided to include all of sub-Saharan Africa in this study, acknowledging the complications that come with generalizing across the continent. Since the survey was conducted in English, responses were focussed on English-speaking countries. Most responses came from Kenya (5), Uganda and Zimbabwe (4 each); further responses came from six different countries, all in Africa.

In the first part of our survey, we assessed attitudes towards several ethical questions. In total, this part consisted of 19 prompts with Likert scales. The questions encompassed three major themes: traditional theories of press, journalism ethics, and press freedom. First, we asked who journalists and citizen journalists should serve, testing public, communitarian, and authoritarian perspectives. Second, we investigated the issues of attribution and objectivity. Third, we asked about Internet regulation and press freedom. The second part of the survey consisted of three prompts for qualitative statements, asking about citizen journalists' motivation, values of objectivity, and differences and traditional and citizen journalists' ethics.

6.7 Results

Respondents' roles as media actors

The survey was filled in by 20 participants, of whom all but three self-identified as citizen journalists. Only one participant explicitly denied this. However, half of the participants also identified as journalists in the more general sense, and eight claimed to work as media professionals. All but one of the participants claimed to have both a blog and/or a Twitter account (Table 6.1).

The responses show that traditional and citizen journalism co-occur. A sizable number of prominent citizen journalists, those who engage in political discourse, also worked professionally with the media; most of these in online journalism. There is, however, a notable distinction between journalism and citizen journalism. While many self-described citizen journalists, including some who do not work professionally in the media sectors, also self-identified as journalists, other did not. This shows that 'citizen journalist' is a distinct category, with likely specific norms and values.

Table 6.1: Respondents' self-described roles as media actors

Question	Yes	No
I self-identify as a journalist.	10	9
I think of myself as a citizen journalist.	17	1
I currently make a living working for the media.	8	11
I primarily work for online media.	8	11
Do you have a blog, or write for a group blog?	17	2
Do you have a Twitter account?	16	3

Theories of the Press

We tested three clusters of two to three items on values identified in the literature as making up the distinctive core of three theories of the press. These three theories are the social responsibility, communitarian, and authoritarian theories of the press. Two of the clusters were found internally consistent (Social Responsibility and Authoritarian, Cronbach's alpha > .7); however, the Communitarian cluster scored below the threshold for reliability (Table 6.2). The analysis of the clusters reveals a tendency in favour of socially responsible journalism (combined mean = 2.39), and a strong antipathy against authoritarian claims (mean = 4.29). For each construct, a further item-by-item analysis was conducted.

Table 6.2: Theories of the Press (reliable constructs are marked *)[391]

Construct	Reliability	Mean	SD	Test Statistic	Significance
	Cronbach's Alpha			t	p
Social Responsibility	.775*	2.39	.95	-2.814	.011
Communitarian	.555			2	
Authoritarian	.722*	4.29	.81	6.984	.000

For tables 6.2-6.7, statements were rated on a five-point Likert scale (1 = very much agree, 5 = very much disagree). Results reported are from one-sample t-tests for difference from the neutral score 3.

The first cluster of three items (Cronbach's alpha = .775; combined mean = 2.39; standard deviation = .95; significant difference from 3 (one-sample t-test) at p = .011) tested the attitude towards socially responsible journalism, in which the "media have a moral obligation to society to provide adequate information for citizens to make informed decisions" according to Ostini and Fung. (Table 6.3). The results indicate a clear

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[391] Statements were rated on a five-point Likert scale (1 = very much agree, 5 = very much disagree). Results reported are from one-sample t-tests for difference from the neutral score 3.

preference for socially responsible journalism in the service of the public among citizen journalists.

Table 6.3: Social Responsibility[392]

Question	M	SD	t	p
As a journalist, your first duty is to serve the public.	2.20	.95	-3.760	.001
Whether a story is true is more important than who it serves.	2.50	1.28	-1.751	.096
As a blogger, your articles should first and foremost inform the audience.	2.37	1.17	-2.364	.030

The second cluster of three items (alpha = .555; mean = 3.41; SD = .78; p = .041) asked about the need for self-censorship in case that national security is threatened (Table 6.4). This set of questions relates to communitarian ethics, which as Tomaselli argues constrain freedom of the press to accord to the values of a community. Given the low Cronbach's alpha, individual t-tests were run for each question in this cluster. These yielded a highly significant finding for one question ("A journalist should not report a story that could endanger national security, even if it is true", mean = 3.90; s = .72; p < .001); but insignificant findings for both other questions. The significant item indicates that explicit self-censorship is refused by citizen journalists; however, the insignificant findings on the other questions raise the question what these actors perceive as self-censorship, and also how citizen journalists stand towards the ethic of minimisation of harm, which was not addressed in this study. Nevertheless, the data support a tentative rejection of communitarian ethics among citizen journalists. It was clearly significant for these journalists to be social responsible for the audience that they serve but a notable challenge was dealing with a dictatorship and working in a suppressive media environment. While for instance, they were interested in adding bylines to the stories they wrote as this would add transparency to their stories, they were equally reluctant to do so because they feared being victimised should they publish stories deemed anti-government.

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[392] Statements were rated on a five-point Likert scale (1 = very much agree, 5 = very much disagree). Results reported are from one-sample t-tests for difference from the neutral score 3.

Table 6.4: Communitarian Ethics[393]

Question	M	SD	t	p
A journalist should not report a story that could endanger national security, even if it is true.	3.90	.72	5.604	.000
Bloggers should be careful in what they publish, so as to not endanger national security.	3.22	1.11	.846	.409
Some self-censorship from journalists is necessary to preserve national security.	3.10	1.25	.357	.725

The third cluster of two items (alpha = .722; mean = 4.29; s = .81; p < .001) concerned the authoritarian theory of the press, which, as argued by Siebert et. al, stipulates that the press should be controlled by the government. The result shows a clear rejection of authoritarianism. Citizen journalists, it is indicated, see the government as a valid recipient of criticism.

Table 6.5: Authoritarian Theory of the Press[394]

Question	M	SD	t	p
The government should not be scrutinized by the media.	4.25	.91	6.140	.000
Criticizing the authorities is not permissible.	4.32	.89	6.479	.000

In conclusion, in the first part of our questionnaire we find that citizen journalists have a tendency towards public journalism. Journalism is seen as service to the public rather than to the authorities, and self-censorship is tendentially opposed even if it is in the name of national security.

Ethical Values

The second part of the questionnaire includes two clusters of three items on attribution (alpha = .383) and two items on objectivity (alpha = .592). Due to the low Cronbach's alpha in both clusters, individual t-tests were run for each individual question in both clusters, which yielded no significant results.

In each cluster, two questions respectively asked for journalists' and bloggers' need to abide to the given ethical construct. To further examine the differences between these items, a paired-sample t-test was run. For two items in the "attribution" cluster, on

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[393] Statements were rated on a five-point Likert scale (1 = very much agree, 5 = very much disagree). Results reported are from one-sample t-tests for difference from the neutral score 3.
[394] Statements were rated on a five-point Likert scale (1 = very much agree, 5 = very much disagree). Results reported are from one-sample t-tests for difference from the neutral score 3

bloggers' and journalists' need to disclose sources, respectively, no significant difference

was identified. A paired-sample t-test for both items in the "objectivity" cluster, asking

for bloggers' and journalists' need to cover multiple perspectives on an issue,

respectively, yielded no significant result either. Hence, the data do not allow a

conclusion on citizen journalists' ethics of attribution and objectivity; however, the large

standard deviations indicate that individuals might hold a wide range of perspectives on

these issues.

Table 6.6: Ethics of Attribution (1-3) and Objectivity (4-5)[395]

Question	M	SD	t	p
A journalist must always name his sources.	3.35	.99	1.584	.130
For a blogger, it is permissible not to disclose the source of his information.	2.53	1.26	-1.634	.120
Online media should always provide links to their sources.	2.80	1.11	-.809	.428
An article in a newspaper may cover only one point of view.	2.90	1.21	-.370	.716
As a blogger, it is important to always present multiple perspectives.	2.63	1.26	-1.278	.217

Government Control and Press Freedom

The third part of the questionnaire consisted of two clusters of three items on government

control of online media (alpha = .524) and two items on press freedom (alpha = .348).

Given the low Cronbach's alpha, individual t-tests were run for each item in both

constructs (Table 6.7). For government control, all tests yielded significant values (p

< .05 and < .001 for two of the questions). This shows a clear opposition towards

government control and censorship of online and in particular social media.

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[395] Statements were rated on a five-point Likert scale (1 = very much agree, 5 = very much disagree).
Results reported are from one-sample t-tests for difference from the neutral score 3.

Table 6.7: Attitudes towards Government Control (1-3) and Freedom of the Press (4-5)[396]

Question	M	SD	t	p
The government should have a tight control over online media.	4.30	.73	7.935	.000
Unconstrained social media endanger public safety.	3.58	1.12	2.251	.037
The government should censor online media if national security is endangered.	3.90	.74	5.288	.000
Press freedom should not be subordinated to any law.	2.95	1.13	-.203	.841
The freedom of the press must be weighed against other concerns, such as security.	3.05	1.19	.188	.853

Individual Motivation

The second part of the survey serves to further elaborate on the findings from the

questionnaire. The first question asked what motivates citizen journalists to report on a

story. By far the most common answer given was to "inform" their audience or the public

at large (n = 11); other factors that were named more than once included "truth" (n = 4)

and "raising awareness" (n = 3), as well as "justice", which included holding authorities

accountable. These answers serve to affirm that citizen journalists are motivated by social

responsibility. At the same time, they perceive their role as limited to reporting a

situation, leaving commenting (named once) and taking action to others.

The second question asked whether traditional and citizen journalists ought to be

objective in their reporting. The answers can be categorised as either yes (n = 8), no (n =

4), or yes, but while disclosing their opinion (n =4). Several of the responses frame

objectivity as a responsibility to the audience. As one citizen journalist remarked about

traditional and citizen journalists alike, "the information they share goes to influence the

opinion of readers online, therefore there is a duty of care expected from them". It is also

notable that none of the respondents made an explicit distinction between the need for

traditional and citizen journalists to be objective, instead, many pointed out that both

enjoy "public trust" and should act accordingly.

Differences between traditional and citizen journalists were investigated in the third

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[396] Statements were rated on a five-point Likert scale (1 = very much agree, 5 = very much disagree).
Results reported are from one-sample t-tests for difference from the neutral score 3.

question, which asked whether both ought to adhere to the same set of ethics. The vast majority of answer affirmed that there was no difference between them (n = 11), whereas some respondents saw some differences (n = 3). A few respondents also claimed that ethics either did not exist or were not needed (n = 3). As one respondent wrote, there is "no need for ethics on the Internet. It's free". The majority however contended that citizen journalists ought to work according to the same ethics that count for traditional journalists. Those who differed felt that the ethics for citizen journalists were "undefined" or less strict, leaving more freedom to them. As one respondent phrased it, "ethics of balance and fairness should apply, but in some cases there's no need for that balance and that's what citizen journalism benefits from."

Apart from the question what ethics journalists ought to live up to, respondents voiced perceptions on actual ethical or unethical behaviour. They report shortcomings on both sides; as one respondent wrote, "citizen journalists do not realize they have that responsibility, because they do not even know it exists. Some journalists are just in a hurry to be published and get paid, worry about ethics is the last thing on their mind." While it was generally acknowledged that citizen journalists might not be trained in journalistic ethics, traditional journalists were seen as being at least equally at fault; one respondent ever claimed that "traditional journalists, although professional trained, are generally more unethical and biased than bloggers who usually disclose their position up front."

6.8 Discussion

Participants were convinced as shown on Table 6.1 that they were citizen journalists. Their involvement in citizen journalism largely involved activities working as media players digitally. Interestingly, the majority of them did not consider themselves media players. While some of them openly consider themselves, "journalists" they do not noticeably work as journalists per se, but they supply information to blogs and several other online platforms. The participants admitted to having jobs outside the media landscape. They however shared the sense of responsibility, which is a key reference point here because one of the main criticisms that citizen journalism is facing worldwide

comes from the fact that unlike trained journalism professionals, they do not ethically behave or believe in disseminating information responsibly. It is very important to note that being responsible in an uncontrolled, free-for-all digital world is a difficult undertaking. Even worse, it is not possible to maintain a watchful eye on everything that is disseminated online. However, when citizen journalists openly declare their allegiance to ethics, it is notably important because it shows their clear intentions despite the fact that it may be very difficult to probe the extent to which they act responsibly.

What drives these citizen journalists to act socially responsible? Most of them do not use their real names when they write their stories so what would be their main motivation in ensuring fairness? Culture plays a role in all of this. Being socially responsible is one expectation that these citizens may have in a bid to avoid direct confrontations with officials. In countries where fear is a major issue for professional journalists, citizen journalists may also be concerned that should their identities be known, they may be thrown in jail or face arrests. Draconian media laws force citizen journalists into submission. They know that offending authorities could trigger problems. To do away with possibilities of offending officials, they choose to act responsibly. Lack of enhanced accessibility to the Internet could also come in as a strong factor influencing their eagerness to act responsibly. Most of the citizen journalists access the Internet in cafes, which are expensive. Considering most of them are not paid for their services, it is difficult to expect them to spend longer periods on the Internet. In fact most of them write their stories and then only get access to the Internet for sending or publishing them since Internet costs are so prohibitive.

Analysed through the perspective of the 'four theories of press', it is clear that African citizen journalists align themselves with the ethics of social responsibility. For most of the citizen journalists in our sample, informing their readers and the public is the main motivation for their work. They object to authoritarian tendencies and government regulation of social media. Nevertheless, our findings on practical journalism ethics are less clear. While most respondents claim that citizen journalists ought to be objective in

their reporting and align with traditional journalism ethics, our quantitative findings on questions of attribution and objectivity are less clear.

When interpreted in light of the behavioural requirements for a strong public sphere, it seems that the unwritten ethical codes of conduct of online journalists and bloggers (at least partially) contribute to a stronger public sphere. In the African context, arguably the most important challenge to a public sphere is that of the free press. While infractions against freedom of expression are rampant in many African countries, the Internet has remained mostly free of censorship.[397] Indeed, our data show that African online journalists and bloggers are critical of government regulation and authoritarian tendencies. Moreover, some of our respondents seemed particularly motivated to bring out truth, highlight different perspectives to a story, and bring about justice, which shows they are not afraid to bring up issues outside the boundaries of the dominant discourse. A particular question is whether the ethical norms of citizen journalists align with the values of a rational-critical debate, which is supposed to prevail in a strong public sphere. Bosch has seriously questioned whether online debates live up to this value, comparing them to a "barroom brawl". [398]Many of our participants responded that citizen journalists, just as traditional ones, ought to be objective in their reporting, although some pointed out that in practice, this value is often not adhered to. Since our quantitative data also does not yield a significant preference for objectivity in reporting, further research will be needed to identify how citizen journalists in Africa conceptualise and value objectivity.

Linked to the rational-critical debate in the networked public sphere is also the notion of many-to-many communication, or interactivity. Kuhn has argued that conceptualisations of citizen journalism ethics along the lines of traditional journalism ethics, which are based on one-to-many publishing, miss an important factor that sets apart digitally networked media. Indeed, citizen journalism outlets are often also used as

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397   Simon Columbus & Rebekah Heacock, *Internet Access in Sub-Saharan Africa*, Berkman Center for Internet and Society, forthcoming.
[398] Tanya Bosch, Digital journalism and online public spheres in South Africa.
Communicatio, Vol. 36 No.2, 2010 265-275.

"spaces for discussion".[399] However, most of our respondents emphasise informing

citizens as their main goal, whereas engagement and discussion with their readers are

hardly mentioned. There was no significant finding on the need to link to other sources,

which would contribute to the discourse in social media. Implicit in the aim of

informing others is a notion of a passive "reader" rather than a "prosumer", for whom

reading and writing are one process.[400] This passivity is hard to align with the notion of

a public sphere that is open to involvement from all.

If anything, the networked public sphere is still emerging in Africa. Although

advancements have been made, Internet usage is still low, and citizen journalists are few.

We find that those who perceive themselves as citizen journalists are motivated by a

sense of social responsibility and the wish to inform others. Despite criticisms, both in the

literature and from citizen journalists themselves, most value journalistic ethics. The

sense of social responsibility displayed by citizen journalists fosters the emerging

networked public sphere, which builds upon rational-critical debate. Although barriers of

access remain, the values held by the subjects of this study support such a debate. Further

research will have to investigate to what degrees these believes translate into ethical

practices.

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399 Ethan Zuckerman, Citizen Media and the Kenyan Electoral Crisis. In S. Allan & E.Thorsen (eds.),
Citizen Journalism: Global Perspectives New York, NY: Peter Lang, 2009 pp 187–196.
400Morgan Currie, *Felix Stalder: free culture vs. Culture flatrates*, Institute for Network Cultures, 2010,
<http://networkcultures.org/wpmu/weblog/2010/11/04/felix-stalder-free-culture-vs-cultural-flatrates/>.
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