Power and participatory politics in the digital age : probing the use of new media technologies in railroading political changes in Zimbabwe
Mutsvairo, B.

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Author: Mutsvairo, Bruce
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7 EMERGING PATTERNS IN CITIZEN JOURNALISM

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7.1 Introduction

This chapter tries to explore the current trends in citizen journalism in Africa. A diverse range of citizen media has emerged in sub-Sahara Africa, though it is still less obvious than in the Western media landscape which has been radically altered by digital technologies. This research aims to identify emerging patterns in Africa, especially Zimbabwe, through in-depth and focus-group interviews with selected experts and citizen journalists, as well as through a review of the existing body of research. The research hopes to establish that digital nonprofessionals equipped with new technologies provide a powerful counter-narrative to the state-controlled professional media, even though they are still restricted to a subset of African countries.

Citizen journalism is a relatively new phenomenon even in developed countries, where according to Allan the term has only come into use since the mid-2000s;[401] this is truer still for Africa. The boundaries of citizen journalism are not yet clearly drawn, but the term is frequently used to denote non-professional, amateur publication of news items.[402] Often, the reporters are "incidental journalists" witnessing and capturing exceptional events.[403] As Allan argues, citizen journalism thus plays a particular role in crisis reporting.[404] Benkler argues that citizen journalism is a phenomenon of the emergence of a "networked public sphere" based on digitally networked technologies such as the Internet and mobile phones.[405] In the networked public sphere, "commons-based peer production", of which citizen journalism is a form, is enabled by two shifts in communication technology, writes Benkler: "The first element is the shift from a hub-

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401 Stuart Allan, 'Histories of Citizen Journalism' in S Allan & Einar Thorsen (eds.), Citizen Journalism: Global Perspectives, (New York, NY: Peter Lang, 2009) pp. 17-31.
402   ibid., p. 18.
403   ibid., p. 21.
404   ibid.
405 Yochai Benkler, The Wealth of Networks: How Social Production Transforms Markets and Freedom, (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2006).

and-spoke architecture with unidirectional links to the end points in the mass media, to distributed architecture with multidirectional connections among all nodes in the networked information environment. The second is the practical elimination of communications costs as a barrier to speaking across associational boundaries."[406] That is, digitally networked technologies allow people to become their own broadcasters and to reach unprecedented audiences at low costs.

Citizen journalism in Africa has so far attracted the least attention from researchers in comparison to the study of print and broadcasting journalism elsewhere. A growing body of relevant research has emerged over the last three years, however. Most of these are descriptive case studies, which show that a generally accepted theory of citizen journalism has not yet been developed, and even less so for Africa. However, some authors such as Banda,[407] as well as Goldstein and Rotich,[408] provide useful normative frameworks for the analysis of citizen journalism specifically in an African context. Most case studies chronicle single incidents of citizen journalism around exceptional events, such as the 2007-08 post-election crisis in Kenya,[409] whereas there are only few studies concerned with everyday citizen journalism, and no long-term studies. At the current state of research, three emerging foci can be discerned: studies which are concerned with the relationship between citizen journalism and democracy;[410] research into the interaction of conventional and citizen journalism;[411] and studies on the representation of Africa in the global media sphere.[412]

Media regulation and access to ICTs shape the environment for citizen journalism. In Zimbabwe, freedom of expression is highly restricted. Until recently, there were no

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406 Ibid, p. 212.
407 Frankson Banda, Citizen Journalism and Democracy in Africa, Highway Africa, Grahamstown, South Africa, 2010.
408 J Goldstein & J Rotich, 'Digitally Networked Technology in Kenya's 2007-08 Post-Election Crisis', working paper, Berkman Center for Internet & Society, (Cambridge, Massachusettes: 2008) http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/sites/cyber.law.harvard.edu/files Goldstein&Rotich_Digitally_Networked_Technology_Kenyas_Crisis.pdf.pdf, accessed 1 July 2011.
409 Maarit Mäkinen & Mary Kuira, 'Social Media and Postelection Crisis in Kenya', The International Journal
of Press/Politics, Vol. 12, No. 3 (2008) pp. 328-335; Goldstein & Rotich; E 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.
410 Banda; Goldstein & Rotich; Mäkinen & Kuira; Zuckerman; D Moyo, 'Citizen Journalism and the Parallel Market of Information in Zimbabwe's 2008 Election', Journalism Studies, Vol. 10, No. 4 (2009) pp. 551-567.
411 V Oteku, G de Bastion, R Schütz & G Bierhals, 'From the Birds Eye to the Grassroots View', working paper, New Thinking Communications (Berlin, 2010).
412 Melissa Wall, 'Africa on YouTube: Musicians, Tourists, Missionaries and Aid Workers', International Communication Gazette, Vol. 71, No. 5 (2009) pp. 393-407.

independent newspapers or broadcasters, and journalists often faced repression. Foreign broadcasts were frequently jammed.[413] However, the telecommunications market has been liberalised, allowing several private ISPs to operate in the country. As a consequence, Zimbabwe has one of the highest Internet penetration rates on the continent, at 11.5 percent of the population.[414] However, in 2009, there were only 100,000 fixed Internet subscriptions, fewer than one per 100 inhabitants.[415] About a quarter of these subscriptions provided broadband access.[416] At 60 percent in 2010, the rate of mobile phone subscriptions is comparable to other countries in the region.[417] All operators now offer mobile broadband, and its use is growing rapidly, according to a 2010 Opera study.[418] Irrespective of the model, Internet connections are still extremely slow, with broadband being capped at 256kbps. While offline media are heavily censored, the OpenNet Initiative has found no evidence of Internet filtering in Zimbabwe.[419]

Citizen journalism often happens when amateur or untrained journalists engage in journalistic practice, a mission that often involves sourcing, interviewing, witnessing, writing and reporting news. The assumption and viewpoint that trained journalists often fail to tell people's real stories certainly has contributed to the rise of participatory journalism, whose presence has also been sustained by the consequent emergence of new media technologies. Citizen journalism, conclude Bowman and Willis, seeks to provide independent, reliable, accurate, wide-ranging and relevant information.[420] That's not always the case. Media scholars have questioned the transparency and objectivity of citizen-generated content. In turn, activists argue that mainstream media outlets, which

413 OpenNet Initiative, 'Zimbabwe', [web page] (2009) http://opennet.net/research/profiles/zimbabwe, accessed 30 July 2011.
414 International Telecommunications Union, 'Internet users.', ITU [web document] (2011) http://www.itu.int/ITU-D/ict/statistics/material/excel/2010/InternetUsersPercentage00-10.xls, accessed 28 July 2011.
415 International Telecommunications Union, 'Fixed Internet subscriptions', ITU [web document] (2011) http://www.itu.int/ITU-D/ict/statistics/material/excel/2010/FixedInternetSubscriptions00-10.xls, accessed 28 July 2011.
416 International Telecommunications Union, 'Fixed broadband subscriptions', ITU [web document] (2011) http://www.itu.int/ITU-D/ictstatistics/material/excel/2010/FixedBroadbandSubscriptions00-10.xls, accessed 28 July 2011.
417 International Telecommunications Union, 'Mobile cellular subscriptions', ITU [web document] (2011) http://www.itu.int/ITU-D/ict/statistics/material/excel/2010/MobileCellularSubscriptions00-10.xls, accessed 28 July 2011.
418 Jon von Tetzchner, 'State of the Mobile Web, December 2010', Opera, [web page] (2010) http://www.opera.com/smw/2010/12/, accessed 29 July 2011.
419 OpenNet Initiative, 'Zimbabwe', [web page] (2009) http://opennet.net/research/profiles/zimbabwe, accessed 30 July 2011.
420 Shane Bowman & Chris Willis, We Media: How Audiences are Shaping the Future of News and Information, The Media Center at the American Press Institute, (Reston, Virginia: Media Center, 2003).

over the years have been stricken by reporting scandals and fraud, have failed to meet that target as well. This only spurs the debate: What exactly is real journalism? When anyone can post 'news,' who should be trusted as the dependable flag-bearer of competent and reliable news? This is a global debate that has not excluded Africa.

This chapter is intended to identify trends and developments in African citizen journalism. A comprehensive literature review was undertaken to incorporate the state of research on citizen journalism in sub-Saharan Africa. From the case studies provided, dominant trends and developments in African citizen journalism are identified. Furthermore, to establish a general understanding of the current state of citizen journalism in Zimbabwe, snapshot in-depth and focus group interviews were conducted with up to 50 Facebook account-holders, bloggers and online activists living in the country. Those interviewed included university students and graduates, university lecturers, vendors, informal traders, bus drivers and politicians.

In a focus group interview, a small number of people sit together to discuss the topic of interest. For the purpose of this research, the group size was deliberately small to avoid any possibilities of participant members feeling intimidated. The idea was to get them to speak and express their opinions freely. Just as with in-depth interviews, the discussion was tape-recorded, then transcribed and analysed. Krueger and Casey say the researcher is supposed to listen not just to the content of focus group discussions, but also for emotions, ironies, contradictions and tensions.[421] Denzin and Lincoln state that focus groups apply to a situation whereby the interviewer asks group participants very specific questions about a topic having already done considerable research about it.[422] In our case, in-depth interviews were the primary source-gathering data before we engaged in focus-group interviews.

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[421] Richard Krueger & Mary.Anne. Casey, Focus Groups: A Practical Guide for Applied Research, (3rd edn; Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 2000).
[422] Norman Denzin & YvonnaLincoln. 'Introduction: Entering the field of qualitative research', in Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln (eds.), Handbook of Qualitative Research (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 1994) 1-17.

Of particular interest to this research are semi-structured interviews, which collect qualitative data by setting up a two-way, communication-based interview with the respondents, giving them enough time and scope to reveal their opinions. According to Christa Wessel, Fredric Weymann and Cord Spreckelsen, semi-structured interviews signify two corresponding aspects: (a) the interviewer is aware of the topics and (b) the interviewee has the opportunity to talk freely on a certain point. The use of semi-structured interviews was preferred largely because of their ability to get the respondent's opinion through the use of open-ended questions.[423] In-depth interviews are used in situations where one is eager to learn about the perspectives of individuals, as opposed to, for example, group norms of a community, for which focus groups are more appropriate.[424] While in both instances a researcher is keen on deeply exploring the respondent's point of view, feelings and perspectives, the two are separated by definition. With in-depth interviews, one person – or sometimes two – will be interviewed at a time, while focus groups look at group dynamics. The type of interview one uses provides another important distinction between the two. Whereas conducting a telephone interview is a possibility for in-depth interviews, it might be a difficult method to apply in focus groups.

In-depth interviews provide an ultimate model for investigating personal, sensitive and confidential information, as stated by Punch.[425] In-depth interviews therefore bring in flexibility that one may not find in focus groups. More time needs to be invested to bring a group of 10 people together than just talking to a single person. Moreover, dealing with a group interview may need a skilled moderator or interviewer as tensions may run high, especially if conflict groups are put together. In-depth interviews are more personalised and therefore perhaps easier to handle for a less experienced researcher, who only has to focus on the person being interviewed. From our experience, there are more commonalities between the two. This may be in their design as well as execution. The role of the researcher is unchanged in both methodologies. The researcher engages with

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[423] Christa. Weßel, Frédéric Weymann, Cord Spreckelsen ., Streamlining Qualitative Research Methods for Medical Informatics - A Methodological Approach in Engelbrecht R, Hasman A (ed.), European Notes in Medical Informatics. Ubiquity: Technologies for Better Health in Aging Societies (2006) pp. 371-376.
[424] Natasha Mack, Cynthia. Woodsong, Kathleen MacQueen, Greg Guest, and Emily. Namey, Qualitative Research Methods: A Data Collector's Field Guide FLI (2005).
425 Keith Punch, Introduction to Social Research: Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 2005).

participants, posing questions in a neutral manner and listening attentively to what is being said and possibly asking follow-up questions. The researcher therefore has to acknowledge that his role is that of a moderator while the interviewees are experts.

Finding a sample that exhaustively represents the entire population is a problem found in both in-depth interviews and focus groups. While it is our responsibility to clearly spell out the target groups of people to be interviewed and explain reasons for their inclusion, we always expect observers to question the representativeness of the sampling. For example, how does talking to 50 people represent the views of the entire nation? Thus the problem related to sampling affects both methodologies. Moreover, one has to transcribe all data obtained from the interviews, which is a time-consuming process of transforming the oral speech into written text. Justifying tape-recording and transcribing the data, Bryman argues that qualitative researchers do not just need to focus on what people say but also in the way in which they say it.[426] Verbatim transcription means everything recorded in the transcript is typed up, including coughing or pauses. Transcribing the interview is important as other interviewees may request to see the interview. However, in both instances confidentiality needs to be respected.

7.2 Citizen Journalism in sub-Saharan Africa

Banda's eponymous book on citizen journalism and democracy in Africa provides a first exploration of citizen journalism as a phenomenon that can be found across the continent. The author focuses mostly on institutionalised citizen journalism, i.e. platforms provided by media companies or non-governmental organisations. Drawing on case studies from South Africa, Eastern (Kenya and Uganda) and Western Africa (Nigeria and Ghana), as well as the Maghreb (Algeria), Banda examines five questions related to citizen journalism in Africa: its context, technological basis, uptake by conventional media, financial viability, and democratic value. He places citizen journalism in a context defined by the globalisation of democratization and an increasingly deregulated, over-

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426 Allan. Bryman, Interviewing in qualitative research: Social Research Methods, (2nd edn.; Oxford, UK, Oxford University Press, 2004) p. 321.

commercialised media landscape, as well as the "rapid emergence and adoption" of novel ICTs.[427]

As Banda writes, "citizen journalism thrives in a context of democratic pluralism", where freedom of expression and access to information are guaranteed; value that can be encoded in both legislative and technological architecture. This contextualisation reflects the author's view that citizen journalism is both shaping and shaped by technology,[428] in that it incorporates social and technological impacts on the emergence of citizen journalism. Nevertheless, he asserts that citizen journalism is a "product" of novel technologies, which have, in part, also shaped its form; for example, social media have facilitated "dialogical communication".[429] Some conventional media have begun to take up such formerly alien practices from citizen journalism, e.g. in the *South African Mail* and *Guardian*'s "Thought Leader" blog which is open for citizen contributors. Banda finds that these institutional forms of citizen journalism – where platforms are provided, and sometimes edited, by a commercial media company or non-governmental organisation – are most prevalent in Africa, more so than non-institutional citizen journalism. Although a business model for such platforms is not yet in sight, Banda asserts that some are founded with commercial considerations in mind; others, however, are meant to promote public debate. In the absence of financial viability, Banda argues that their sustainability should be understood in terms of "democratic sustainability": a media supported by the willingness of citizens to take up communicative spaces afforded by ICT. Citizen journalism promotes democratic citizenship through citizen participation in media production and broader public affairs, and it increases media plurality.[430] In this view taken by Banda, citizen journalism and democracy are interrelated and facilitate each other.

Kenya's 2007-08 post-election crisis, which was marked by widespread riots and a media shut-down, has been the subject of several case studies. Banda and Mäkinen and Kuira both provide short, descriptive accounts, as does Zuckerman. A concurring, but

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427   Frankson Banda, Citizen Journalism and Democracy in Africa, Highway Africa, Grahamstown, South Africa, 2010.pp. 7-9.
428   ibid., pp. 35-41.
429   ibid., p. 73.
430   ibid., p. 75.

theoretically more sophisticated case study is provided by Goldstein and Rotich. They draw on the concept of the networked public sphere put forward by Benkler, which describes two shifts in mass communication enabled by digitally networked communication technologies; namely towards many-to-many communication at costs of near zero, or, in the terms of Goldstein and Rotich, the emergence of tools that "allow us to become our own broadcasters and reach large numbers of people in unprecedented ways at trivial cost".[431] It is worth noting that the application of Benkler's theories to the African context has been criticised as being oblivious to the lack of Internet access still prevalent on the continent.[432]

Within this theoretical framework, Goldstein and Rotich analyse a threefold use of digitally networked technologies during the crisis: of SMS to spread violence, of blogs to provide a counter-narrative to conventional media, and of maps to document and draw awareness to human rights violations.[433] In all of these media, however, the authors find tensions between "civic" and "predatory" impulses.[434] SMS calling for ethnic violence were spread after the announcement of election results on January 1, 2008, drawing on the capacities of bulk SMS tools and simple forwarding mechanisms. Goldstein and Rotich find SMS to be "remarkably useful for organizing this type of explicit, systematic, and publicly organized campaign of mob violence".[435] As Zuckerman reports, the Kenyan government reacted by disabling bulk SMS tools and asking mobile network providers to send out messages calling for peaceful behaviour.[436]

Kenyan bloggers covered the election process as citizen journalists, initially without anticipating the subsequent violence.[437] As Goldstein and Rotich point out, the country

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431 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 10 May 2011 , p. 3.

432 Marion. Walton, 'Mobilizing African Publics', Information Technologies & International Development, Vol. 7, No. 2 (2011) pp. 47-50.

433 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 10 May 2011 p. 3.

434 Larry Diamond, 'Civic Communities and Predatory Societies', delivered at Culture Matters: A Forum on Business, Education, and Training Professionals (Washington D.C., 2001)

435 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 10 May 2011 , p. 4.

436 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. , pp. 194.

437 ibid., pp. 189-191.

has one of the most active blogospheres in Africa.[438] When the government ordered a ban on live broadcasts, these bloggers intensified their efforts, actively researching incidents of violence. Zuckerman reports that some bloggers published articles written by guest authors, some of whom were entirely new to the medium.[439] Bloggers published information on incidents that were not covered by conventional media, for instance concerning the involvement of foreign troops, thus filling the gap in coverage left by newspapers and radio stations either censored or self-censoring under pressure from the government.[440] During the time of the crisis, web traffic from Kenya vastly increased, and bloggers reached further audiences when radio stations began to relay their articles.[441] Besides their importance as sources of news and commentary, blogs – through their comment sections – also became "spaces for discussion".[442] Among the incidents reported by bloggers were human rights violations and their consequences, such as refugee movements.

During the crisis, Ushahidi was developed as a tool to map such incidents. The software links Google Maps with various means of reporting incidents to be displayed on the map, including via SMS, email, and Twitter. Zuckerman argues that Ushahidi is best understood as "a form of collaborative citizen journalism", in which reports from vastly dispersed and independent witnesses are pulled together on a central platform.[443] Goldstein and Rotich understand the platform in Benkler's terms of "commons-based peer production", allowing a new form of cooperation as it has "significantly lowered the cost of participating in a global civic campaign from anywhere on the planet with only a mobile phone signal".[444] Goldstein and Rotich have concluded that the emergence of a networked public sphere in Africa is, unlike in Western democracies, not necessarily

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438 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 10 May 2011 , p. 8.

439 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.
p. 191.
440   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 10 May 2011 , p. 8.
441   ibid.
442   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, p. 195.
443   ibid., p. 192.
444   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 10 May 2011 pp. 6-7.

linked to "civic" impulses; instead, digitally networked technologies are more likely to be utilised to promote violence as well as to provide counter-narratives to the stories of oft-censored conventional media, and to more easily collect reports from witnesses of human rights violations.[445]

Moyo provides an analysis of citizen journalism during another election aftermath, the delayed announcement of election results following Zimbabwe's general elections in 2008. The election had been preceded by "intimidation, torture and violence" from long-term dictator Robert Mugabe's ZANU-PF. Moyo posits that as government and electoral commission failed to provide information about the outcomes of the hotly contested election, citizen journalism gave rise to a "parallel market of information".[446] This "information gap provided fertile ground for various alternative forms of communication to take centre stage", feeding on and from "an increasingly hungry rumor mill". As Moyo argues, the parallel market of information "became the dominant source of a mix of information and disinformation". However, while being "often replete with supposition, speculation and fiction",[447] this market nevertheless filled the information gap and enabled citizens to discuss the situation and to "engage in different scenario building and conjecture".[448]

Moyo defines citizen journalism broadly, to include blogs, emails, and SMS, arguing that "these are communications meant for dissemination to many (often unknown) recipients".[449] The inclusion of SMS also reflects the relative prevalence of mobile telephony over Internet usage in Zimbabwe,[450] a factor which is similarly true for all of sub-Saharan Africa. That notwithstanding, Moyo explicitly points out that definitions of citizen journalism grounded in "the idea of equal access to these new technologies of freedom [i.e. digitally networked communications technologies] [...] become[s] particularly problematic in the African context, where diffusion of these technologies has

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445   ibid., p. 9.
446   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., p. 552.
447   ibid p. 553.
448   Ibid, pp. 553.
449   ibid., pp. 555.
450   ibid.

been characteristically slow and unequal".[451] However, while noting Zimbabwe's relatively low Internet penetration as an obstacle to blogs gaining relevance, Moyo also points out high growth rates in Internet usage across the African continent.[452]

Mobile phones served to fulfill several information needs during the election aftermath. They enabled people within the country to share information about the situation on the ground with the Diaspora, which in turn relayed news from international media not accessible in Zimbabwe.[453] Mainstream media also utilised SMS and emails to receive information from citizens, in particular in regions inaccessible to journalists for economic or security reasons.[454] However, Moyo asserts that "most of the shared text messages [...] were in the form of jokes", which served as "discreetly packaged news" where outspoken criticism of the government could be dangerous, and provided political commentary.[455] In addition, SMS were used to inform fellow citizens about ongoing events, including vote counts, often in connection with the request to forward the information, according to Moyo "an emerging critical feature of citizen journalism" as it "enables a viral spread of information".[456]

According to Moyo, Zimbabwe's blogosphere has a multifold bridging function. While bloggers on the ground provide eyewitness accounts, those in the Diaspora "both amplify and comment" these reports. In addition, blogs also link traditional and citizen journalists;[457] in many cases, bloggers break stories that go unreported by mainstream media.[458] Moyo makes a distinction between the roles played by personal and institutional blogs during the election aftermath.[459] Personal blogs relayed "personal experiences, opinions and emotions", but their authors also acted as "monitorial citizens".[460] Moyo notes that when relaying information, this was presented as unverified, i.e. in a style

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451   ibid., pp. 554-555.
452   ibid., p. 559.
453   ibid., p. 556.
454   ibid., p. 556-557.
455   ibid., p. 557.
456   ibid., p. 559.
457   ibid.
458   ibid., p. 560.
459   ibid.
460   ibid.; cf. M Schudson, The Good Citizen: a history of American civil life (New York, NY: Free Press, 1998.)

suggesting "that the readers should do their own cross-checking and verification".[461] In line with this observation, institutional blogs written by professional journalists provided them "with the opportunity to temporarily escape from the institutional formalities and constraints placed by mainstream media and become a citizen journalist".[462] However, Moyo notes that exactly because citizen journalism is not bound to any particular ethics or set of rules, it "could worsen things by spreading untruths and half-truths which could lead to panic and disorder".[463]

A study focussed on the roles taken by conventional and citizen journalism comes from Oteku et al. The authors analysed media reports on Kenya's 2010 constitutional referendum, which in contrast to the 2007 election remained peaceful; the study is thus interesting because it is less prone to hindsight bias as retrospective analyses of incidents of outstanding citizen journalism. Oteku et al. find that in the presence of extensive news coverage from conventional media, citizen journalists played a merely complementary and less prominent role than in 2007-08.[464] Nevertheless, blogs and microblogs were used to report the voting process, e.g. using Twitter hashtags such as Kenya Decides.[465] An Ushahidi-based platform, Ushaguzi, was employed by a civil society organisation to compile and map reports from social media users.[466] The study notes in particular that "mobile services seem to have become an established part of Kenya's new media system".[467] The authors group these uses into three categories, namely personal expression, provision of background information, and aggregation of news published by other media.[468] The latter two uses, in particular, involved "cross-linking to other media",[469] thus supporting the thesis that citizen journalism has become "an integrated part of the media system".[470]

461   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., p. 561.
462   ibid., p. 562.
463   ibid.
464   Oteku, V., de Bastion, G., Schütz, R., & Bierhals, G. (2010). From the Birds Eye to the Grassroots View. Working paper, *Newthinking communications*
p. 11.
465   ibid., p. 9.
466   ibid.
467   ibid., p. 11.
468   ibid.
469   ibid.
470   ibid., p. 8.

Wall has studied the representation of Kenya and Ghana on the video-sharing platform YouTube. Her findings dispute claims of diminished boundaries in the digitally networked public sphere.[471] The study examines videos uploaded on YouTube and tagged as dealing with Kenya or Ghana in 2007 and finds only several hundred such videos;[472] these numbers can be expected to be much higher today. Wall finds that most of the videos were posted by Westerners, and that videos posted by Westerners on average were viewed more often than those posted by people in Africa or by Africans in the Diaspora.[473] Entertainment, in particular music, and tourist experiences were the most common contents, each making up about one-third of the videos; further categories included aid work, religious contents, news, and commercials.[474] With regard to citizen journalism, the news category, which includes videos of generally informational content, is of particular interest. This category constituted a minor share of the videos, 4 percent in Kenya and 10 percent in Ghana.[475] Most of these videos were produced by non-African television channels, only one each was from Kenyan and Ghanaian television, and no videos made by citizen journalists are mentioned.[476]

Wall's analysis builds on post-colonial studies which understand Africa's representation as constructed by Western observers who "employ their gaze to create an Other", which "has enabled them to exercise dominion over Africa for centuries".[477] She notes a discussion on the possible opportunity provided by new media for Africans to create and distribute representations of the continent themselves, although marred by unequal access to information and communications technology.[478] However, Wall concludes that her findings seem "to suggest that these new technologies and new global information channels will continue to support Western dominance", although African news producers might gain access to Western audiences in the future.[479] She writes that "YouTube enables the average westerner in particular to become a chronicler of other peoples in faraway lands just as travelers and missionaries 'discovered' Africa in previous

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471   Melissa Wall, Africa on YouTube: Musicians, Tourists, Missionaries and Aid Workers,
International Communication Gazette 71/9 (2009) 393–407 p. 393.
472   ibid., pp. 395-396.
473   ibid., pp. 398-399.
474   ibid., p. 400.
475   ibid., p. 404.
476   ibid.
477   ibid., p. 394.
478   ibid., p. 395.
479   ibid., p. 404.

centuries", thus not disrupting the representation of Africa in the media. Rather, "age-old inequities still exist and still allow westerners to dominate", and YouTube might even allow more of them to do so.[480]

7.3 Participatory Journalism in Africa: Issues at stake

Within any given context, citizen journalism aims to strengthen people's use of home-grown media ideas to increase quality information dissemination capacity using readily available multiple digital platforms The Internet is not available to every sub-Saharan African. When it is available, it is normally accessed in urban areas, leaving rural residents isolated from active and potential participation. For Clemencia Rodriguez, independent media enable ordinary citizens to become politically empowered.[481] However, activists' ability to use new media technologies to empower citizens through publication, lobbying, networking and knowledge-sharing within their particular constituencies is often impinged by the fact that they either have no Internet access or lack the required skills. Anti-West African regimes, keen to maintain control of the media, are suspicious of the NGOs that normally provide ICT training. They keep a close eye on these activists, further deterring others from participating. Moreover, participants have to work in an environment where there is a lack of equipment, inadequate infrastructure and few resources.

Traditionalists are worried that citizen journalists are not true journalists. Professionalism is central to the success of any media outlet, which is why journalism training, not just in Africa, is encouraged. Citizen journalists normally do not worry about ethics. The problems do not end there. The use of colonial languages also means that vernacular languages are largely ignored. More than 80 percent of South Africans consider English their second language, and their inability to work in their native language curtails their activity. This reality is often ignored by Western groups willing to fund citizen journalism initiatives. Traditional media also have disparaged citizen journalists as lacking objectivity or quality. Despite the criticism, new media players have

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480   ibid., p. 405.
[481] Clemencia. Rodríguez, Civil Society and Citizens Media: Peace Architects for the New Millennium, In *Redeveloping Communication for Social Change: Theory, Practice, Power* (ed.) Karin Wilkins (Boulder, CO: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000) pp. 147-160.

completely changed the rules of the game. In fact, several traditional media outlets including CNN, BBC and *New York Times* have occasionally used citizen journalists as sources, further underlining their importance.

Although the body of research on citizen journalism remains small, it reveals several trends in both technology use and social practices. Participation in citizen journalism remains dependent on access to information and communications technology, in particular for Africans.[482] Accordingly, citizen journalists can be thought of as being predominantly better-off, more highly educated, and living in urban areas,[483] although there is need for a dedicated demographic study to support this assumption. However, mobile phones have been noted as a key technology for citizen journalists in Africa,[484] and with growing mobile phone adoption, more and more Africans become technologically enabled to become reporters. That notwithstanding, at the moment citizen journalists are often long-term ICT users who have extensive experience with social media.[485]

Citizen media outlets, such as blogs and Twitter, but also mass SMS and emails, have been found to be utilised in multifaceted ways. Citizen journalists are relaying critical information, in particular in the absence of reports from conventional media.[486] This can involve dedicated research to publicise issues ignored or suppressed by mainstream media.[487] However, this "parallel market of information" can be fraught with falsehoods and uncertainty, and verification will often be left to the reader.[488] In line with the perception of citizen journalism as providing a more personal perspective, punditry has been noted as a regular feature of citizen journalism.[489] Several authors have also noted

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482   Marion Walton, 'Mobilizing African Publics', Information Technologies & International Development, Vol. 7, No. 2 (2011) pp. 47-50..
483   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 10 May 2011
484   ibid
485   ibid
486   ibid
487   ibid
488   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.
489   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 10 May 2011

the expression of emotions as a prevalent use, for instance through political jokes.[490]

Blogs and fora, in particular, have also been turned into "spaces for discussion",[491] which can connect those in the country with the Diaspora.[492]

Citizen journalism takes place counter,[493] parallel to,[494] and interlinked with[495] mainstream journalism. Several authors note a growing convergence between conventional and citizen journalism. Bloggers and microbloggers link to and relay news stories published by online editions of newspapers,[496] but conventional media also take up leads from citizens, for example those relayed by SMS.[497] In Kenya, newspapers have even occasionally been found to have reprinted blog articles without permission.[498] Some media publishers have integrated tools and practices from citizen journalism into their portfolios, such as having journalists write blogs in a less formal tone, or providing platforms for non-journalists to report stories.[499] However, these forms of institutional citizen journalism[500] remain exceptions.

Although citizen journalism is linked to democratization and empowerment,[501] research has shied away from technological determinism, rather pointing out different utilizations of the underlying technologies. Goldstein and Rotich's terminology (borrowed from Diamond) of "civic" and "predatory" impulses that are amplified by digitally networked technologies is particularly helpful to understand this issue. As they show, the tools and practices of citizen journalists have been used both to incite violence and to document it.

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490   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..

491   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

492   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.

493   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 10 May 2011

494   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.

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

496   ibid

497   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

498   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 10 May 2011

499Frankson Banda *Citizen Journalism and Democracy in Africa* (Grahamstown, South Africa: Highway Africa, 2006).

500   ibid.

501   ibid.

Similarly, Moyo warns in the absence of any particular ethics, citizen journalism could have adverse effects as it might contribute to the dissemination of untruths fuelling "panic and disorder".

7.4 Current state of affairs: Zimbabwe

Facebook pages belonging to the following individuals were studied in April 2011 with the aim of identifying the kind of messages they post and the reactions they get. These individuals were and are still either my "friends" on the social network site or they just did not restrict access to their pages. Evidence from this study showed that religion and sport, especially football, seemed to receive more attention than politics. For example on 18 April, which is the Zimbabwean national independence, you would have expected politically-linked messages to dominate the cyberspace. Instead, 19 posts on this day alone contained the word "God" or were simply direct quotations from the Bible. Participants, including politicians, post religiously-influenced messages, which is not surprising considering Zimbabwe is a deeply conservative Christian nation. Messages posted by journalists such as Chofamba Sithole are almost always politically based. Academics, mostly Alex Magaisa, whose messages almost attract reaction every time he posts, also write politically-charged messages. There is also room for humor though. Jokes targeting and apparently belittling ZANU PF members or Mugabe specifically were also very common. I looked at pages owned by these prominent Zimbabweans. It should be noted that I did not verify whether, for example, a page claiming to be Tsvangirai's, was indeed his.

Table 7.1:Facebook posts in the following categories in April 2011

Politics	Religion	Sport
88	112	95

Figure 7.1 Prominent Zimbabweans on Facebook

Morgan Tsvangirai	Leader of Movement for Democratic Change (MDC)
Tendai Biti	Minister of Finance
Obert Gutu	Deputy Minister of Justice, Legal and Parliamentary Affairs
Walter Mzembi	Minister of Tourism
Welshman Ncebe	Leader of the splinter MDC party
Job Sikhala	Leader of another splinter MDC party
Nelson Chamisa	Minster of ICT technologies
Promise Mkwanazi	Youth leader of the main MDC party
Abednico Bhebhe	Senior Politician for the main MDC party
Charles Ray	United States Ambassador to Zimbabwe

Chofamba Sithole	Leading Zimbabwean journalist
Chris Gande	Leading Zimbabwean journalist
Constantine Chimakure	Leading Zimbabwean journalist
Barnabas Thondhlana	Prominent Zimbabwean Journalist
Beloved Chiweshe	Civil Society and former student activist
Blessing Zulu	Leading Zimbabwean journalist
Den Moyo	MDC politician and activist
Dorcas Chibanda	Zimbabwean journalist
Douglas Mwonzora	Member of Parliament for the main MDC party
Innocent Gonese	Member of Parliament for the main MDC party
Farai Mungazi	Zimbabwean journalist
Fungai Kanyuchi	Zimbabwean journalist
Gabriel Shumba	Human Rights activist
Alex Magaisa	Zimbabwean academic
Grace Kwinje	Leading MDC politician and activist
Heal Zimbabwe Trust	Human rights activist
Edward Chindori-Chininga	ZANU PF Member of Parliament
Hugo Knoppert	Human rights activist
Innocent Gonese	Member of Parliament for the main MDC party
Isdore Guvamombe	Journalist at *The Herald*
Kucaca Phulu	Human rights lawyer
Kumbirai Mafunda	Zimbabwean journalist
Mechanic Manyeruke	Prominent gospel singer
Madock Chivasa	Human rights activist
Usain Sibanda	Reverend
Robson Sharuko	Zimbabwean journalist
Mcdonald Lewanika	Human rights activist
MDC Mbare	Constituency Facebook page for Mbare
Mdudusi Mathuthu	Zimbabwean journalist
Miles Tendi	Zimbabwean academic
Moses Mudzwiti	Zimbabwean journalist
Munyaradzi Makoni	Zimbabwean journalist
Obrien Rwafa	Zimbabwean journalist
Okay Machisa	Human rights activist

Zimbabweans buoyed by the easy availability of mobile phones have revolutionised and pioneered a new concept of citizen-led news-gathering and content-sharing responsiveness. Twitter, popular across the globe, has yet to find its ground in Zimbabwe. Facebook, on the other hand, has become increasingly popular. Based on the findings and assessment, it will likely continue to dominate other social network platforms in terms of recognition. With accounts already opened by virtually all sectors of society from vendors to leading politicians, including the president and prime minister, it is safe to conclude that Facebook will continue to increase its popularity among citizens. The key question is: why are people on Facebook and what do they use it for? Interestingly, the majority of these participants (from the interviews) said they used Facebook as a way of knowledge improvement rather than for social purposes. Students said they used Facebook to get updates on course assignments or to ask friends on questions related to their courses while vendors said they used Facebook to stay in touch with relatives and friends abroad. The interviews did not suggest any evidence of political participation

even though this could be because Zimbabwean in general tend not to discuss their political preferences with strangers. While Zimbabwe's repressiveness of free speech is internationally well documented, citizens said they felt more free to share content and openly criticise the status quo digitally than any other way. As noted, an array of politicians has also embraced the social network platform. While I could not independently verify whether a registered account for the president and prime minster were indeed maintained by these political leaders, I confirmed that ministers including David Coltart and Walter Mzembi were active users of Facebook.

Technology has always evaded the poorer and less educated people. Zimbabwe, which has sub-Saharan Africa's highest literacy rate, has made inroads thanks largely to the availability of mobile phone-based Internet. All 50 respondents from the interviews said they used their mobile phones as a way to access to the Internet, with only seven of them using personal laptops as the second option.

Citizen journalists have cashed in on these technological developments. Recent citizen-led accomplishments can be traced to *The Zimbabwean*, a newspaper published in Britain by exiled Zimbabwean editors. The paper's editor, as noted, says most of its content is provided by citizen journalists. As expected, most are not trained as media professionals. The bulk of other online newspapers, independently run by Zimbabwean journalists abroad, use citizens as their main source of news-gathering. The platform offers Zimbabweans a unique opportunity to interact and participate in events that shape their daily lives, thanks largely to new media technologies. To date, there have only been two known arrests made in connection with comments made on Facebook. An arrest warrant was issued against an opposition figure after he commented on his Facebook wall that President Mugabe had died in Singapore where he had allegedly gone for treatment. Another activist was charged with "subverting a constitutional government'' after posting a message on Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai's Facebook account that "what happened in Egypt is sending shockwaves to dictators around the world." Apart from these two isolated incidents, and based on my participant observation in politically-charged Facebook-based debates for five months, it looks like citizens are at least for

now free to openly express their political and social misgivings online. Activists and general citizens share stories critical of Mugabe and his party on Facebook. These are then followed by comments that denounce political repression. While some participants live abroad, I was able to talk to citizens who claimed they shared their views without any concerns. They used their real names, even though the majority of them said they would not broadcast the same views on TV or Radio. This shows that the adoption of ICTs in Zimbabwe, and potentially in Africa, is giving rise to an emerging reform-based alternative media that encourage, articulate and stimulate public participation.

Given the plethora of rigorous media laws that dominate the print and broadcasting sectors, the blogosphere cannot be ignored as a powerful facet contributing to critical social development and political reports. Civil society-funded and student-driven content of daily, weekly and monthly electronic periodicals, providing comment and debate on issues affecting the country, have been gathering momentum since 2000 at the beginning of the country's political and economic crisis. Since then, activists have put their knowledge of web 2.0 tools to good use on Zimbabwe-centred blogs and weblogs. They are widely shared on social networks with locals as well as millions of Zimbabweans living abroad. In the absence of private newspapers, my interviews with urban and rural dwellers show that blogs are providing an alternative voice. Seeking to fight off what it branded as imperialism, the government enacted harsh media laws in 2002. It expelled foreign reporters who refused to register with the state, and banned private newspapers perceived to be critical of its policies. This only encouraged the growth of the blogosphere. Popular blogs include Kubatana blogs, which largely provides commentary on politics and life in Zimbabwe. Content is drawn from its online community providing a large electronic archive of documents on Zimbabwean issues. It also covers Pambazuka News, which is a Kenya-based multilingual Africa-centred initiative of activists using citizen-generated content to create awareness on citizen rights and freedom.

7.5 Conclusion

This chapter has identified trends in citizen journalism in sub-Saharan Africa, and Zimbabwe in particular. Participation in citizen journalism remains dependent on access

to information and communications technology, in particular for Africans; but the increasing adoption of mobile phones and, in recent years, mobile Internet services, is lowering this technological barrier. Nevertheless, issues of (media) literacy and economic privilege continue to play a role, which is mirrored in the demographics of citizen journalists, who are mostly middle class, well educated, and living in urban centres. In particular in times of crisis, when reports from conventional media are absent, citizen journalists are relaying critical information; but blogs and microblogs are not merely news platforms, but also means to express emotions and spaces for discussion. Citizen journalism takes place counter, parallel to, and interlinked with conventional journalism. Depending on the situation it can contradict, replace, or amplify mass media narratives. While citizen journalism is often discussed in a context of democratisation and empowerment, the African reality is more complex. The neutral tools of citizen journalism can be used to increase participation in peaceful or in violent action. Several questions remain open at this stage of research. Citizen journalism has for the most part been studied in exceptional instances, when the use of social media in crisis situations rose to the fore. To understand the phenomenon more comprehensively, there is a need for studies on day-to-day citizen journalism in Africa. Furthermore, at the moment, there is no dedicated study on the demographics of citizen journalism in Africa, an issue that calls for quantitative as well as in-depth ethnographic studies. In general, the current body of research covers only a few countries in which citizen journalism seems particularly salient. Studies on other African countries, and indeed non-user studies, will be necessary to complement the picture.

What was important from this study was to show the diverse purposes for which citizens used Facebook. Zimbabweans in the Diaspora tend to post most of the politically-charged messages, confirming a conclusion that I make in chapter 8 that fear is still very much a stumbling block for those wishing to embrace the web for political reasons. Still, it would be wrong to suggest that Zimbabweans in the country are not actively participating politically. The majority of those doing it seem to have an activist background, however. You need to have the laymen on the street also posting political messages on Facebook to be fully convinced that "everyone" is participating. Traditionally-minded people, as

suggested by the number of ZANU PF aligned politicians, still do not think that Facebook is an ideal basis for political engagement. I share this view. You still want to talk to the grandmas in the rural areas who have never heard of Facebook, because in most cases these are the kind of people that vote. The youth – especially those opposed to Mugabe – tend to criticise his leadership but then do not vote because they are "convinced" elections are rigged long before the election day.