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*“According to social media...”*

**Examining the influence of social media on  
political reporting within Zimbabwe’s  
mainstream media**

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## DECLARATION

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## DEDICATION

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For my late father, Dazzman Manavhela Ndou, whose dying wish was that I pursue education at all costs. I am awed by how far into my future his voice has echoed; for whenever my resolve faltered, his memory propelled me.

Also, in fond memory of my mother Virginia ‘MaChoeni’ Lamola, whose strong work ethic and resilience I strove to emulate.

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I wish him the courage to live as he believes – and to be free.

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*Ndolivhuwa n'wana wa miyanga!*

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## ABSTRACT

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The Internet's liberative qualities have been hyped by a number of Zimbabwean scholars who argue, on the basis of the existence of online alternative media that carries political content, that democratisation can be technology-led. Given that the question of source selection is connected to the democratising potential of the Internet (Lecheler and Kruikemeier, 2016) by some scholars – this study interrogated the liberative potential of the Internet by tracing the social media sourcing patterns of four daily newspapers within Zimbabwe's polarised mainstream media. Using a mixed methods approach which deployed Actor-Network theory as a preliminary methodological tool, this study collected and evaluated empirical data drawn from 146 social media sourced political stories published over a 30-month period and the responses from semi-structured interviews with purposively sampled participants – to account for the human and non-human actors in the news production network. A social constructivist analytical lens was then used to appreciate the contexts in which social media sourcing was being adopted in newsrooms, which revealed how unique circumstances had triggered unprecedented reliance on social media as a political news source. Those unique circumstances involved an escalation of factional fighting within the ruling ZANU PF that morphed into a propaganda war, which was waged through *The Herald* newspaper by one faction and through social media by the other faction. The public feud, which played out on social media, forced political reporters to gather story ideas from social media and overly rely on a few tech savvy elite sources. In these circumstances, social media's influence on the political news agenda was overstated as it was conflated with the influence of a news event (ZANU PF factionalism) and the influence of social media users (high-ranking ZANU PF members) who could not be ignored. It is hoped that the findings of this study will contribute

towards filling the lacuna in terms of scholarship demonstrating the influence of social media within Zimbabwe's political narratives.

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# CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

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## 1.1 Introduction

Past and recent scholarship on Zimbabwe's media landscape has demonstrated that mainstream media has been, and still is, state-captured (public media) or state-persecuted (private media). A number of scholars have unpacked the relationship between Zimbabwe's mainstream media and politics. For instance, Chuma (2013) has observed that the bifurcated nature of national politics spills into the realm of journalism. This observation chimes with Mabweazara (2011)'s assertion that news-making practices in the Zimbabwean press are a reflection of the wider political culture in the country. It has been claimed that mainstream media is "characterised by a marked polarity between the state-controlled public press and the private press" (Mabweazara 2011, p.100). For Ndlela (2010, p.90) "communication has also been hampered by the repressive contexts within which the media in the whole country operate", which contributed to media polarisation.

Media polarisation in Zimbabwe became more pronounced after 2000 following the enactment of a raft of laws and the restructuring of public media institutions (Chiumbu, 2004). According to Mazango (2005) several developments occurred including, (i) the centralisation of an enhanced Information Ministry in the President's office to lead a new and invigorated project of media control; (ii) the use of monopoly broadcasting as a tool to legitimise ruling party hegemony; (iii) the promulgation of harsh media laws in combination with other extra-legal tactics to control journalists and the private press; and (iv) the deployment of the state owned newspaper oligopoly to serve government propaganda objectives more patriotically. These developments resulted in a polarisation of ideas and a clear shrinkage of alternative voices and political space in the country (Mazango, 2005) as

the pervasive state media empire was used to advance the ruling party's political interests to the exclusion of the majority of citizens (Moyo, 2007). Consequently, scholars such as Leijendekker and Mutsvairo (2014, p.1037), asserted that the "traditional media landscape [in Zimbabwe] is one of the most repressed around the world". That repressive environment affected the state media and the private media in contrary, but equally devastating, ways. It is against such a political context that the present study endeavored to test claims regarding the democratising potential of the Internet by examining whether and how social media has influenced political reporting in Zimbabwe's mainstream media. As a background for the present study's investigation, an overview of the environment in which mainstream media operates is outlined below.

### **1.1.1 State-capture of the public media (a mouthpiece of ZANU PF)**

According to Moyo (2010), Zimbabwe's state-owned media has always been openly biased in favour of the ruling ZANU PF party. This bias dates back to the colonial era, when the Rhodesian Front government put the media at the centre of its strategies to win the 'hearts and minds' of the black majority (Frederikse 1982; Mazango 2005; Ureke, 2016). Therefore state-capture of the public media was not a new phenomenon that emerged after 2000. In the post-independent era, "state control and regulation of the media has loomed large in ZANU PF's plan to consolidate its slipping power" (Mazango, 2005, p.41). What is significant about the post-2000 period is how "the Department of Information and Publicity *intensified spin* [added emphasis] to save the beleaguered regime in the face of an interminable barrage of local and international criticism" (Chuma, 2005, p.56). The intensified spin was a radical response to what has come to be known in popular commentary as the 'Zimbabwe crisis', marked by a confrontation between President Robert Mugabe's ZANU PF party and its array of antagonists (Chari, 2013; Mazango, 2005).

According to Mano (2008), the ZANU PF government maintained that the media must help defend Zimbabwe so that it does not become a [British] colony again but in reality ZANU PF's policies led to the narrowing of news media space. Apart from narrowing the news media space, ZANU PF's policies entrenched the state-capture of public media resulting in "an emasculated public press [that] could not in itself prevent or even postpone any of the processes and events leading to the Zimbabwe crisis" (Chuma, 2005, p.58). So severe was the emasculation of the public media that "both personnel and content" were expected to "rigidly conform to the policies dictated by the Minister" (Mukasa, 2003, p.172). Since both personnel and content were required to rigidly conform to the policies dictated by the Minister (Mukasa, 2003), the "opposition political parties and civic organisations [were] systematically denied access to these communication channels, despite the fact that they are, in principle, 'public' media" (Moyo, 2007, p.82). The state media's systematic denial of access to opposition political parties and civic organisations still subsists and is perpetuated by sourcing practices that are biased in support of ZANU PF and government.

Measures to control the public media's narrative were put in place and they included a tumultuous restructuring exercise in the public media, primarily at the ZBC, ZIANA and Zimpapers, and that saw hundreds of journalists, including senior editors, losing their jobs in retrenchments or similar shake-ups (Chari, 2013). At the state broadcaster, Chiumbu (2004, p.30) chronicles how "almost immediately, many programmes not emanating from Zimbabwe were taken off air and in their place, documentaries about the liberation war and programmes on land filled the airwaves". These rapid and unparalleled media changes were part of an elaborate and well executed *ZANU PF policy of harnessing the media to further its own agendas* [added emphasis] and this aspect was perfected after the year 2000 as popular discontent threatened the party's grip on power (Chitando, 2005).

According to Ruhanya (2014, p.21), the government has had a firm grip on the public media, “with two major daily sycophantic newspapers; *The Herald* and *The Chronicle*, published in Harare and Bulawayo, the country’s first and second largest cities, respectively”. This study examined the influence of social media on political reporting using these two state-controlled newspapers, *The Herald* and *The Chronicle*, as case studies to explore the democratising influence of the Internet.

### 1.1.2 State-persecution of private media (an ally of the Opposition)

The repressive media laws that were introduced were not aimed at the state media because the state media was already under the direct control of the Information Minister (Mukasa, 2003; Chari, 2013). That direct form of control could not be exerted upon the private media. Thus the ZANU PF government used repressive laws to interfere with and criminalise the operations of the private press (Moyo, 2012). According to Moyo (2012) journalists and the private media were systematically harassed after the government muscled into law the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA) in 2002, with the aim of muzzling print media. Delaney (2013, p.4) contends that, “the process of destruction of the free press began with massive police surveillance of journalists backed by draconian laws”. Despite the repressive laws and media crackdown some private newspapers survived these challenges and continued to offer “pockets of resistance to the state’s attempts at monopolising and controlling public discourse” (Mabweazara, 2011, p.101).

Chari (2011) contends that the *Daily News* and editorially similar newspapers carried the mantle of venting popular discontent and that politically; they also shared a close ideological affinity with the MDC [added emphasis] and positioned themselves as allies of the opposition. According to Ruhanya (2014, p.136), “...the paper [*Daily News*] became a mouthpiece for opposition

[added emphasis] and civic actors opposed to Mugabe's dictatorship". Taking a similar position, Ndlela (2010, p.89) contends that:

...*Daily News* gave voice to oppositional discourse [and] made an enormous contribution by opening up political communication spaces in the country and provided access to alternative interpretations of unfolding events.

According to Chari (2009, p.10), whilst public media served the political interests of ZANU PF those in the private press appeared "to have signed a pact with the opposition to 'hear no evil', 'speak no evil' and 'see no evil' regarding its affairs". Moreover the private press, despite being curtailed by harsh media laws, quite ironically continued to be vigorous and outspoken as demonstrated by constant denunciations of the government (Mazango, 2005).

The adversarial reportage by the private press did not go unnoticed as indicated by then Information Minister Jonathan Moyo during the second reading of the AIPPA Bill in parliament in January 2001. At the second reading of this Bill, Moyo elaborately explained that it "was aimed at plugging the serious ethical lapses in the media industry that had led to 'crusading journalism', 'campaign journalism' and 'advocacy journalism'" (Mazango, 2005, p.49). While *the private press assumed an anti-government editorial perspective* [added emphasis], the state-controlled public press was manifestly partisan and politicised in its support for government policy (Mabweazara, 2011).

In response to stringent laws, private press reportage took on what some scholars have referred to as a 'militant journalism', which brought these media onto a collision course with an increasingly beleaguered state (Chari, 2011). The state-persecution of the private press culminated in arrests of journalists, death threats, bombing of offices and printing press at the *Daily*

*News*, which was forcibly shut down in 2003, whilst publications such as the *Tribune* were closed down in 2004 and the *Weekly Times* in 2005 (Delaney, 2013). Delaney (2013) argues that the Criminal (Codification and Reform) Act of June 2005 further narrowed the space for journalists, making it a criminal offense to publish any information deemed prejudicial to the state or insulting to the president with prison sentences set as high as 20 years, much harsher penalties than previously administered under POSA. POSA was a piece of legislation that was introduced in 2002 titled the Public Order and Security Act, whose Sections 15 and 16 blatantly stated that it was an offense to publish or communicate false statements prejudicial to the State and undermine the authority of or insult the President (Delaney, 2013). According to Mazango (2005), it was undeniable, at the time, that what remained of the *independent press in Zimbabwe existed under an increasingly trying environment governed by harsh media legislation* [added emphasis]. Consequently, the practice of journalism in the country became likened to walking in a minefield (Mazango, 2005).

The harsh media legislation noted by Mazango (2005) over a decade ago still obtains to this day as the year 2018 “passed without the envisaged media law and policy reforms” that were expected to be implemented in line with the 2013 Constitution (<sup>1</sup>MISA-Zimbabwe, 2018, n.p). This study examined the influence of social media on political reporting and thereafter endeavored to establish the democratising potential of the Internet using the private-owned dailies, *The Newsday* and *The Daily News* as case studies.

The researcher’s use of the term ‘democratising potential of the Internet’ in the context of this study is briefly discussed in Section 1.1.4 of this Chapter.

### **1.1.3 Insights on political sourcing drawn from Zimbabwean scholarship**

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<sup>1</sup> A ‘2018 State of the Media’ Report by Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA) Zimbabwe charter, <http://crm.misa.org/upload/web/state-of-the-media-report-2018.pdf> [Accessed 14 December 2018]

In examining the influence of social media on political reporting within mainstream media and endeavoring to establish the democratising potential of the Internet, this study places news sourcing at the heart of its inquiry. Prior to, during and in the aftermath of the 'Zimbabwe crisis' the public media showed bias in its source selection as "nationalist intellectuals" were afforded preferential, "easy and unfettered access to the Zimbabwean public" (Tendi, 2010, p.5). According to Tendi (2010, p.5) these "nationalist intellectuals" who "entered the public arena to defend ZANU-PF" were featured prominently "on TV discussion shows, prime time news and in the press". Furthermore, sustained 'nationalist' columns penned by ZANU-PF ideologues such as Tafataona Mahoso, Munyaradzi Huni and others, became the mainstay of government-controlled media (Moyo, 2010). Given that such preferential source selection practices have been maintained in state media over the years, the present study seeks to explore whether social media can influence political sourcing, which could in turn, have an effect on political reporting.

The private media was equally biased in terms of its sourcing practices. According to Chuma (2008, p.34),

In probably seeking to present an 'alternative' voice devoid of the sycophancy of the state media, the 'oppositional' press became cheerleaders of the opposition MDC in the same way the state media related to Zanu-PF.

As cheerleaders of the opposition MDC, the private media used sources that gave "unqualified support" (Chari, 2007, p.41) to the opposition as its "brand of journalism saw the future of the country in MDC hands" (Chuma, 2008, p.27). According to Chuma (2008, p.27), after 2000 the private press engaged in 'oppositional' journalism that "sought to delegitimise Zanu-PF and the state". Through biased sourcing practices, the private media offered news coverage that "foregrounded almost exclusively the economic and

political blunders associated with Zanu-PF rule” (Chuma, 2008, p.27). Correspondingly, Chari (2009, p.10) argues that whilst public media served the political interests of ZANU PF, those in the private press appeared “to have signed a pact with the opposition to ‘hear no evil’, ‘speak no evil’ and ‘see no evil’ regarding its affairs”.

Subsequently, the private media was as blatant as the state media in its selective sourcing practices and this perpetuated the polarisation in Zimbabwe’s mainstream media. In a study by Chibuwe (2016, p.1665) examining the news frames used by *The Herald* and the *Daily News* he found that the “*Daily News* mostly used anti-ZANU PF people” whilst “*The Herald* made use of ZANU PF analysts and experts”.

Sourcing practices are at the heart of media polarisation in Zimbabwe’s mainstream media because “sources of news expose a newspaper’s ideological leanings and give salience to a certain point of view at the expense of others” (Chibuwe, 2016, p.1665). Against the background of deeply polarised political reportage (stemming from biased, exclusionary and elite sourcing practices) this study examined the influence of social media sourcing within Zimbabwe’s mainstream media, in light of the much-vaunted democratising potential of the Internet.

#### **1.1.4 Defining ‘democratising potential of the Internet’ in this study**

In making his case against the democratic influence of Internet on journalism, Markham (2009, p.2) noted that ‘democratisation’ is a highly contested term. He asserted that in the context of his study the term was “to designate not the advance of normative principles of equality, freedom or justice, but simply agency to effect change in the public realm” (2009, p.2). Following Markham (2009), this study deploys the term in a similar way, to designate not the advance of normative principles of equality, freedom or justice, but simply agency to effect change in the realm of political reporting within

mainstream media. This study explored whether social media has the agency (or influence) to effect change in political reporting within mainstream media - and what the nature or extent of that agency (or influence) might be.

According to Alexander (2003, p.6), the democratic theory suggests that,

Liberalisation of the information space – characterized by decreasing government control over the media, *multiplication of voices* (added emphasis), and increase of citizens' access to information – should promote democratisation.

The idea that 'multiplication of voices' is a characteristic of a democratic or democratising state is in tandem with this study's investigation into whether social media sourcing can or has led to a multiplication of voices in political stories within mainstream media. As stated by Knight (2012, p.71), the "mythology of the Internet" posits that it is "an equal place where all voices are equal, and have equal access to the public discourse, a kind of idealized 'public sphere'". The idea that the Internet facilitates multiplication of voices where all voices are equal provided a useful entry point for this study to reflect on whether social media has led to sourcing practices that include a multiplicity of voices, treated and presented as being equal.

To delineate the contours of this study, the researcher appropriates Phillips (2010)'s submission regarding what the term 'democratising potential of the Internet' entails from a sourcing perspective. According to Phillips (2010, p.88), the Internet's democratising potential entails the Internet's "ability to bring the voices of ordinary men and women into the mainstream process of news construction". Hence, in tracing the social media sourcing practices of the four daily newspapers, this study considered whether social media facilitated an expansion or multiplication of news sources, beyond partisan elites, by bringing 'the voices of ordinary men and women' into the mainstream media's political reportage.

According to Franklin and Carlson (2011, p.2) to be a news source “is to have the power to speak publicly”, it is “to have the power to define the world” and “the power to respond” hence “a change in source selection might affect the quality of news coverage” (Lecheler and Kruikemeier, 2016, p.159). This study assumed that a change in political source selection might affect or influence the quality of political news coverage in Zimbabwe’s mainstream media. Based on this assumption the researcher undertook a study to examine the influence of social media sourcing in political reporting.

### **1.2 Purpose of Study: *According to Social Media...***

The purpose of the study is to establish whether social media sourcing influences political reporting and go a step further by using the findings, to test claims regarding the democratising potential of the Internet. By tracing the social media sourcing practices of four daily newspapers, this study assessed whether and how social media as a news source may have effected change on the political news beats of mainstream media.

The specific aims of this research were:

- (a) To trace the social media sourcing practices of mainstream media
- (b) To examine the influence of social media on political reporting
- (c) To establish whether social media can ‘<sup>2</sup>democratise’ political news beats

Lecheler and Kruikemeier (2016, p.167) contend that, in general, recent studies “have not been euphoric regarding the democratising potential of online news sources”. The purpose of this study is to contribute to scholarship regarding the influence of social media on mainstream media’s sourcing practices, particularly in the political news beat. Additionally, the

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<sup>2</sup> In the context of this study, the term ‘democratize’ is used to mean the ways in which social media sourcing has facilitated or can facilitate the inclusion of non-elite and non-partisan voices (i.e ordinary men and women) as political news sources within mainstream media news construction processes.

findings of the study are intended to prove or disprove claims regarding the democratising potential of the Internet, as the Internet is thought to expand visibility “to ordinary, non-elite, sometimes non-trusted sources” who become ‘*digitally empowered sources*’ (Silva, 2018, p.2; original emphasis). According to Silva (2018, p.2) the term *digitally empowered sources* (original emphasis) takes “into account that they include the traditional ones that gained added value in the digital environment”.

In order ascertain the influence of social media on mainstream media’s political sourcing practices research questions informed by the above aims were formulated. What follows is a detailed discussion demarcating the scope of the study and then a section on the research questions and research design.

### **1.2.1 Demarcating the scope of the study**

In this section, I outline the focus and demarcate the scope of this study. It is essential to outline the academic contours of the study because it has drawn from several strands of theory and research including newsroom studies particularly sourcing, theories on technology and society as well as various studies on Zimbabwe’s mainstream media. I chose an interdisciplinary approach to the research because the study’s concerns intersect and overlap with various empirical approaches from different scholarly fields.

### **1.2.2 Mainstream media case studies: Four daily newspapers**

This study adopted a case study approach to interrogate the social media sourcing practices of mainstream media in Zimbabwe, with specific regard to political reporting.

Michaelsen (2011, p.12) argues that, “authoritarian regimes generally subject ‘big’ media (press, radio, television) to mechanisms of state control and

ensorship of varying strictness”. Given the mechanisms of state control (i.e direct interference and repressive media laws) affecting Zimbabwe’s mainstream media, this study examined the liberative potential of social media sourcing within mainstream media’s political news beat. Since “social media have been hailed as liberative in contexts of political repression” (Chibuwe and Ureke, 2016, p.1247), this study sought to examine the extent to which polarised mainstream media that is deeply polarised and whose political reporting largely derives from biased sourcing practices (aimed at advancing partisan political interests) can be influenced by social media.

Using four Zimbabwean daily newspapers, namely – *The Herald* and *The Chronicle*, as well as – *The Newsday* and *The Daily News* – as case studies, this study traced social media sourcing practices in order to establish the influence of social media on political reporting in Zimbabwe. These four newspaper titles were identified on the basis of their supposed political biases that manifest in partisan political news that is constructed through selective sourcing practices. The state-controlled titles, *The Herald* and *The Chronicle* are considered to be mouthpieces of ZANU PF, whilst *The Daily News* and *The Newsday* have been viewed as being sympathetic towards the opposition in general.

### **1.2.3 Political reporting in the Zimbabwean context**

Political journalism has been described as “the most ‘sacred part’ of journalism” and the political beat reporters have been characterised as “aristocrats” of the newsroom (Neveu, 2002, p.23). This characterisation highlights that the political beat is one of the most prestigious beats and is the most visible in media coverage (van Dalen, 2015). Through the beat system, gatekeeping within newsrooms can be exercised. According to Meyers (1992, p.82) “the beat not only defined the news by determining what got covered and how, but it guaranteed that news which did not fit the beat was ignored”. Although Mabweazara (2010a, p.134) notes that the beat

system “has a central function” in Zimbabwean newsrooms, there are no specialised beat reporters for politics. Rather news reporters who are senior tend to be entrusted with the responsibility of reporting on political issues. In practice, political reporting in the four newsrooms is not the product of a specialised team of political beat reporters but the result of discretionary editorial assigning of news reporters who cover politics on an ad hoc basis. Considering that politics is always a priority in the four newspapers, news reporters who get assigned to cover politics tend to be at the top of the newsroom hierarchy.

Both *The Herald* and *The Chronicle*, have a designated political editor who does not have any reporters that directly report to him. Instead the role of these political editors routinely involves employing interpretive journalism to frame or slant the political issues of the day in line with the paper’s editorial policy. At the *Newsday* there is no political editor and no reporters designated as political beat reporters, hence the news reporters write the political stories. A similar set up prevails at the *Daily News* where news reporters get assigned at the discretion of editors, to do political coverage. Thus in practice, political reporting is not treated as a specialised beat but it is conflated with the news beat, since newsworthy stories tend to also be political in nature or to center on political elites.

In Zimbabwe, political reporting has always been embroiled in controversy (Mabweazara, 2011). In the case of state media, political reporting is characterised by political interference. Over the years, objective and factual political reporting has been neglected in favor of “what the [ZANU PF] party dictated” (Mukasa, 2003, p.176). Apart from dictating what political issues should be reported, the ruling ZANU PF party has routinely placed loyalists at the helm of state media entities (Mukasa, 2003); and appointed war veterans and party supporters to control the ZBC (Chuma, 2005, p.47). By having government-appointed managers, most of whom were committed to serving the interests of the ruling party (Mukasa, 2003), ZANU PF has entrenched a

pro-government and pro-ZANU PF political reporting culture within the state media. The demonisation of opposition political parties, the silencing of dissenting voices and the flourishing of hate journalism in which “Zimbabweans are divided into patriots and traitors” (Ranger, 2005, p.14), have also been defining characteristics of political reporting in the state media.

Studies by Chibuwe (2016) and Maodza (2017) have detailed how state media, particularly *The Herald*, was leveraged by its handlers to gain an upper hand in factional fights that erupted within ZANU PF as part of its internal succession battles. In these factional fights (firstly during the Gamatox-Weevils era mentioned in Chibuwe, 2016; and then in the G40-Lacoste period referenced by Maodza, 2017) *The Herald*'s political reporting uncharacteristically attacked top ZANU PF officials instigated by whichever faction was in charge at the Ministry of Information, where direct interference in daily newspaper management (Rusike, 1990) is the norm. Political reporting in state media is frequently dictated by the whims of the ZANU PF party, through the Ministry of Information. Severe penalties (including being fired, demoted or transferred) are inflicted upon editors and journalists who do not toe the party line (Mukasa, 2003; Chuma, 2005).

Gatekeeping at the state media is most evident in political news reporting owing to external and internal pressures that determine what should be reported. In political reporting especially, “*editorial decisions were clearly influenced by proprietors*” (Mabweazara, 2011, p.104, added emphasis) as evidenced by the case of *The Herald* and its factional reporting (Chibuwe, 2016; Maodza, 2017). Chuma (2005, p.56) has detailed how at the Zimpapers stable, editors met with ministerial wrath for displeasing the major shareholder:

The Minister of Information personally took to rapid interventions on a regular basis, and between 2000 and 2003 he fired at least five editors

(including deputy editors) from the Herald, Sunday Mail, Sunday News and The Chronicle. In most cases, *editors were fired because they were perceived to be not aggressive enough in their defence of the government and the ruling party* [added emphasis].

In Zimbabwe's private media, political reporting is characterised by an unwavering anti-government editorial stance. Objective and factual political reporting is neglected in favor of adopting an 'oppositional' journalism (Chuma, 2005). It has been stated that the private media "excels in making nasty comments about the government and the ruling Zanu PF (supposedly this is what sells the papers) but it cannot contribute in any way to the national debate...there is little analysis on offer" (Makumbe and Compagnon, 2000, p.205). The combative nature of the private media's political reporting was regarded as a means of standing in "opposition to Mugabe's dictatorship" which "puts the independent press on the side of the oppressed masses" (Mukasa, 2003, p.179). Other scholars have challenged the idea that the independent press was on the side of the masses. For instance, it has been argued that "the private press was generally anti-government, but not necessarily pro-people or pro-democracy" (Chuma, 2005, p.57). According to Chuma (2005) the private media tended to align itself with special interests organised largely along class and to a lesser extent along racial lines that were unanimously anti-government.

Crusading has also been a defining characteristic of the private media, as it remains committed to maintaining an adversarial anti-government stance, presumably as part of fulfilling its watchdog role. Like the state media, recruitment within the private media has also seen MDC opposition party sympathizers and loyalists being entrusted with covering political news, thus biases become apparent. Ruhanya (2014, p.22) argues that there have been "profound cross-membership links between the opposition MDC and some *Daily News* journalists, to the extent that the two were inseparable" [added emphasis]. The fact that the *Daily News* "was from the outset highly critical of

the government and was edited by an outspoken government critic, Geoffrey Nyarota” (Chuma, 2005, p.53) explains these cross-membership links. The political allegiance of *Daily News* staff to the MDC is further highlighted by the fact that Nyarota went on to contest in the 31<sup>st</sup> July, 2013 elections on the MDC ticket (although at the time he had left the paper). Ruhanya (2014) also notes that the *Daily News*’s former political editor Luke Tamborinyoka became Director of Information for the MDC-T and was spokesperson for the party’s late President, Morgan Tsvangirai.

The cross-membership links that Ruhanya (2014) observes between *Daily News* journalists and the MDC are also evident in other newsrooms and with other political parties. For instance, <sup>3</sup>three state media journalists (ZBC reporters Tendai Munengwa and Andrew Neshamba as well as *Sunday Mail* Features and Opinion Editor, Garikai Mazara) threw their hats in the ring in the party primaries in hopes of representing ZANU PF as candidates in the 2018 elections. All three journalists were and still are employed by the state media. At the *Newsday*, political reporter, Richard Chidza contested in the MDC primary elections in 2013 but was unsuccessful. Other examples include former ZBC bureau chief, Makhosini Hlongwane who was elected as the Member of Parliament for <sup>4</sup>Mberengwa East in the July 2013 harmonised elections on a ZANU PF ticket and was later appointed Minister of Sport and Recreation. These cross-membership links partially explain why political reporting in Zimbabwe is biased, with objectivity and professionalism often being ignored.

Despite the presence of partisan journalists and editors in both the private and state media, it must be noted that, there is generally limited professional

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<sup>3</sup> Article in Zimbabwe Mail titled ‘ZBC Reporters, Sunday Mail Editor Submit Applications To Run As Zanu-PF Candidates’ <https://www.thezimbabwemail.com/politics/zbc-reporters-sunday-mail-editor-submit-applications-to-run-as-zanu-pf-candidates/> [Accessed on 15 May 2018]

<sup>4</sup> Article in *Newsday* titled ‘MPs seek to compel government to introduce new currency’ <https://www.newsday.co.zw/2015/05/mps-seek-to-compel-govt-to-introduce-new-currency/> [Accessed 15 May 2018]

autonomy that can be exercised within the political beat, by those journalists who are committed to professionalism and objectivity. The observation by Djerf-Pierre and Weibull (2008, p.209), that the rise of interpretive journalism is “the most significant change in political journalism” is applicable to the Zimbabwean context – particularly, if interpretive journalism is understood from the viewpoint of Patterson (1993). According to Patterson (1993, p.67 cited in Salgado and Strömbäck, 2011, p.145) in interpretive journalism,

Facts and interpretation are freely intermixed... Interpretation provides the theme, and the facts illustrate it. The theme is primary; the facts are secondary.

Following Patterson (1993) political reporting in Zimbabwe is characterised by the intermixing of facts and interpretation whereby interpretation provides the theme and the facts illustrate them. In political reporting within Zimbabwe’s mainstream media “the theme is primary; the facts are secondary” (Patterson, 1993, p.67, as cited in Salgado and Strömbäck, 2011, p.145), as both state media and private media advance the propagandist agendas of political elites. Mano (2005) argues that Zimbabwean journalists tend to follow the whims of the editors, who themselves are at the mercy of media proprietors, in both the state media and private media. According to Mano (2005), there is a tendency in Zimbabwe to believe that private media owners are more liberal and hold the public interest at heart. However, Mano (2005, p.66), contends that three particular cases illustrate how private proprietors manipulate journalism:

Firstly when, in 2002, Zimbabwean telecommunications tycoon, Strive Masiyiwa obtained 60 percent shareholding at ANZ, *he instituted far reaching editorial changes* (own emphasis). Masiyiwa appointed his own man, Sipepa Nkomo, as Chief Executive. Geoffrey Nyarota was fired soon after, and was replaced by Francis Mdhlongwa who, in turn,

crippled The Financial Gazette by luring most of his former subordinates.

Mano (2005, p.67) notes that the private media serve as an important counterbalance to state-controlled media, hence “*there is need to be equally vigilant of the controls coming from private media owners in Zimbabwe*” [added emphasis]. Given that “the relationship between politics and media is a power relationship” (Street, 2010, p.10), power in Zimbabwe’s mainstream media resides with the political elite and media proprietors who interfere and exert pressure. Mukasa (2003, p.176) contends that notwithstanding efforts by a handful of journalists to assert their independence and professionalism, “the press in Zimbabwe has historically developed as institutional partners with a coalition of business and government whose economic and political interests are generally articulated in the editorial columns of the press”. As such, Mukasa (ibid) argues that the ruling elite class has used the same instruments as their colonial predecessors to protect their interests; namely suppression of free speech, free press, and multi-party democracy, hence it is within this context that political reporting in Zimbabwe’s press must be viewed and understood.

According to Mano (2005, p.56), not only are mainstream media journalists subject to control by political elites, media owners and their superiors but they also undergo “a thorough ideological repositioning” in the norms of the profession “*according to press proprietors’ policies and politics*” [added emphasis]. A key hypothesis of this study was that social media sourcing within political reportage of Zimbabwe’s mainstream media is manifestly constrained or motivated by the political goals of the media organisations. Such a hypothesis presupposes that the ways in which social media influences political reportage are not technology-led but are instances of appropriation intended, ultimately, to advance the political goals of mainstream media organisations.

#### 1.2.4 Defining 'social media' in the context of this study

Hermida (2012, p.660) submits that social media “is a nebulous term since it can refer to an activity, a software tool or a platform”. In the context of this study, the term social media is used with specific reference to two platforms, namely Twitter and Facebook, which were relevant to this study’s objectives. As platforms, both Twitter and Facebook exemplify attributes associated with social media, which include participation, openness, conversation, community and connectivity (Hermida, 2012). These attributes of Twitter and Facebook “are largely at odds with the one-way, asymmetric model of communication that characterized media in the twentieth century” (Hermida, 2012, p.660). The fact that both Twitter and Facebook are at odds with the one-way, asymmetric model of communication (Hermida, 2012) makes them ideal for this study that explores whether social media sourcing can or has led to a multiplication of voices in political stories within mainstream media.

Another definition of social media that aligns with the focus of this study is given by Bohler-Muller and van der Merwe (2011, p.2) who contend that:

Social media refers to web-based tools and services that allow users to create, share, rate and search for content and information without having to log in to any specific portal site or portal destination and these tools become ‘social’ in the sense that they are created in ways that enable users to share and communicate with one another.

The above definition emphasizes the affordances of social media tools and services, i.e what social media enables users to do: to create, to share, to rate and to search for content and information as well as facilitating users to share and communicate with one another. A key feature of social media such as Twitter and Facebook is that “end-users feel enabled and encouraged to participate in the creation and circulation of media” (Lewis 2012, p.853). Thus social media (in this case Facebook and Twitter) can facilitate a multiplication

of voices (Alexander, 2003) from “ordinary, non-elite, sometimes non-trusted sources” that become ‘*digitally empowered sources*’ (Silva, 2018, p.2; original emphasis) and that can be brought “into the mainstream process of news construction” (Phillips, 2010, p.88). To examine the influence of social media on political reporting, this study focused on Twitter and Facebook because “social media are potentially a channel for sources to influence journalism” (Skogerbø et al, 2016, p.191).

This study examined the influence of social media on political reporting in Zimbabwe’s mainstream media with specific reference to two social media platforms, Facebook and Twitter. Hence, political stories that may have been sourced from social media platforms other than Facebook and Twitter are not catered for in this study although their existence is noted.

Twitter is ideal for this study because it has the capacity to increase the diversity of voices in the news by including both unknown and well-known sources (Broersma and Graham, 2013) and it also facilitates the dissemination of online information from a variety of official and unofficial sources, skipping the professional filter of news organizations (Hermida, 2010). This study explores whether, in the Zimbabwean context, the use of Twitter as a news source by mainstream media increased the diversity of voices in political news (by including non-elite voices) and whether those non-elite voices are treated and presented as being equal.

Using an ethnographic approach to investigate the use of new technologies (ICTs) in Zimbabwean newsrooms, Mabweazara (2010a) demonstrated how Facebook has been routinely used as a news source in Zimbabwean newsrooms. Hence, Facebook is ideal for this study because of its early adoption by Zimbabwean journalists (see Mabweazara, 2010a, 2011, 2013). More relevant to this study, is that Facebook has been used as a news source by political reporters in Zimbabwe. Ahead of Zimbabwe’s July 2013 election, two Facebook pages, namely Baba Jukwa and Amai Jukwa, were

used as news sources by mainstream media in its political reportage (Chibuwe and Ureke, 2016). This study builds on existing research by further exploring whether mainstream media's sourcing of Facebook increased the diversity of voices in political news (by including non-elite voices) and whether those non-elite voices are treated and presented as being equal.

According to Bane (2017), when a tweet is used in news coverage, whether as a primary source that started off a story or as an illustrative quote, it is not always attributed. This is because some political reporters consider it redundant to mention Twitter as the source because they believe that it does not matter where a politician said something (Bane, 2017). Whilst this researcher appreciates that there is a difference between a social media platform and a social media user, in the context of this study, the distinction will be ignored when reference to 'social media source' is made. Thus social media platforms and social media users who post on the platforms are conflated and the term 'social media source' will apply interchangeably or simultaneously to the platform used and the user being cited. Facebook and Twitter (the platforms) are therefore considered 'social media sources' in the sense that they carry content (posted by users) that reporters may incorporate in their news stories. Whilst users are considered 'social media sources' in the sense that it is their views that have been harvested from social media platforms.

Although one would not refer to stories gathered telephonically as 'telephone-sourced stories' or regard it as 'SMS sourcing' if a reporter got a story via a text message, for the purpose of this study, source attribution is conflated and ascribed to both the user and the medium. This conflation uncritically borrows from political news stories covered in the study that give source attribution to both the social media platform and the social media user simultaneously, for instance; "Posting on his Facebook, Professor Jonathan Moyo said....". So social media sourcing in this study collapses

both the user and the medium under the referential phrase of 'social media source'.

### **1.2.5 Timeframe: Investigating social media sourcing over 30 months**

This study examined the influence of social media in political reporting within Zimbabwe's mainstream media with particular focus on a 30-month period starting from 1 January 2015 to 30 June 2017. It was necessary to confine the study, which is exploratory in nature, to a specific time-frame because "studying online sourcing, and social media use in particular, remains a moving target" according to Lecheler and Kruikemeier (2016, p.163). Since studies on the use of social media are like moving targets, Lecheler and Kruikemeier (2016, p.163) stress that:

We must be cautious when drawing conclusions on the influence of social media at this point in time: [because] there is the strong possibility that all available observations may have to be adapted in the future, given the rapid adoption and spread of social media use in many countries.

By confining this study to a specific time frame, I intended to keep the moving target (that is social media use or its influence) still long enough to examine it and explore the implications of social media sourcing within political reporting. In confining the study to a specific time frame, I contend that exceptional circumstances obtained within that 30-month period, which invite scrutiny into how social media influenced the political story in Zimbabwe.

According to Hladík and Štětka (2017), social media themselves become a specific environment for production and dissemination of information, which gains importance especially in exceptional circumstances. Those exceptional circumstances involved an escalation of factional fighting within the ruling

ZANU PF party. This infighting morphed into a propaganda war, which was waged through *The Herald* newspaper by one faction and through social media by the other faction. The public battle between warring ZANU PF factions, which played out on social media, forced political reporters to gather story ideas from social media and overly rely on a few tech savvy elite sources. As this precise set of circumstances (i.e intensified factional fighting within ZANU PF that triggered a public battle waged on social media and in the press, culminating in expulsions and a coup) is unlikely to recur, the findings of this study are unlikely to be replicated beyond this time frame. The findings of this study may be generalizable in some respects whilst in other respects; they are bound to the exceptionality of the circumstances detailed above. Some of the results found in this study would most likely not be replicated given a different set of intraparty circumstances.

By situating the study within a specific time frame, I also endeavored to place and present the study within a specific intraparty context and political moment. Some of the factors that drove social media sourcing as a newsgathering practices during the 30-month period under study were rooted in the intraparty conflicts within political parties in general, and ZANU PF in particular. Under a different set of circumstances and given a different political context, the outcome of this study may indeed have afforded a different conclusion.

### **1.3 Research Design**

This study examined the influence of social media on political reporting within Zimbabwe's mainstream media bearing in mind that "so far, the available data contradict expectations regarding the democratising and disruptive power of online sourcing techniques" (Lecheler and Kruikemeier, 2016, p.160).

This study entered the debates on the democratising potential of the Internet by examining the influence of social media on political reporting within Zimbabwe's mainstream media. The present study hoped to test claims regarding the democratising potential of the Internet by engaging with these five research questions:

**RQ1:** How prevalent is **social media sourcing** in Zimbabwe's mainstream media political reportage?

*(Assuming that prevalence of social media sourcing can give an indication of the extent to which political news desks in Zimbabwe's mainstream media are being penetrated, and possibly influenced, by the use of social media)*

**RQ2:** What determines **source selection practices** for Zimbabwe's mainstream media political reportage in relation to social media?

*(Assuming that the political goals of news organisations have a greater determinant effect than social media does with regards to which sources are selected by political news desks given state-capture of public media and private media's alliance with opposition politics)*

**RQ3:** What is the extent of **institutional gatekeeping** regarding social media sourcing within Zimbabwe's mainstream media political reportage?

*(Assuming that gatekeeping measures within media institutions constrain the extent to which social media can influence political reporting as strict editorial and content control measures are in effect within the political news desks.)*

**RQ4:** Can social media drive the **political news agenda** in Zimbabwe's mainstream media?

*(Assuming that social media can pressure media organisations to cover, respond to or rebut political narratives disseminated through*

*social media by elites and ordinary users in order to protect and advance the political goals of the media organisation)*

**RQ5:** Can social media **‘democratise’ political news sourcing** in Zimbabwe’s mainstream media?

*(Assuming that the term ‘democratise’ is understood in the context of this study to mean whether and how social media sourcing facilitates the inclusion of non-elite and non-partisan voices (i.e ordinary men and women) as political news sources in political stories within mainstream media)*

This researcher opted for multi-methods because a mixed method or multi-methodology approach combines qualitative and quantitative research to provide a better understanding of a research problem or issue than either research approach alone (Bulsara, 2015). The study also used an ANT lens as a starting point to ensure a non-reductionist analysis that is sensitive to the complex interplay between multiple elements (Dahlberg, 2004). In this study, ANT’s symmetrical analysis was considered ideal for methodological triangulation because it is an analysis that focuses on all the various kinds of (human and non-human) actors that make a difference in the production of media texts (Plesner, 2009), hence it served as *a starting point* (own emphasis) in assessing the four daily newspapers under this study. The theoretical framework used in this study is discussed below.

### **1.3.1 Sociology of journalism and Theories on Technological change**

This research is a sourcing study that draws from scholarship on the sociology of journalism, gatekeeping theory and social constructivism. In engaging with debates on the democratising potential of the Internet, this research was braced by theories of technological change including technological determinism, which posits that technology shapes society, and social constructivism, which maintains that society shapes technology.

These arguments are centered in this study in order to ascertain whether social media (as an aspect of communication technology) deterministically shapes political reporting in Zimbabwe or whether the political, regulatory and media contexts obtaining in Zimbabwe shape how social media (as an aspect of communication technology) is incorporated in political reporting.

Some of the ongoing and emerging debates in the realm of newsroom studies related to the effect of technological innovations tend to lean towards either technological determinism or social constructivism. According to Parmelee (2013), three schools of thought regarding how news media are affected by technological innovation have been advanced by: the reformists, the traditionalists and the selectivists. Of these three schools of thought, the reformists appear to assume more technologically deterministic viewpoint by arguing that new technologies can cause a major shift in how reporters do their job (Kawamoto 2003; Pavlik 2000). However, traditionalists take a more social constructivist approach, arguing that news media are not transformed fundamentally by technological innovations (Reich 2005; Rosenberry 2005) because journalistic routines and professional values endure regardless of technological stimulation (Singer, 2005).

The enduring journalistic routines and professional values noted by Singer (2005) as being impervious to technological stimulation are credited for causing a 'conservative revolution' among journalists by Reich (2005, p. 552) whose study found that *the Internet does not seem to fundamentally alter how journalists source stories* [added emphasis]. On the other hand Reich (2005)'s study on newspaper reporters found that the Internet was greatly influential when it came to finding story ideas. This study examined how social media as a technological innovation has influenced political reporting in mainstream media and these three schools of thought provided a frame for understanding the phenomenon obtaining in Zimbabwe's mainstream media.

In examining the influence of social media in political reporting within Zimbabwe's mainstream media, this study drew from various theoretical perspectives that attempt to account for the effects of technological innovation in newsrooms. Amid these varying perspectives regarding the effects of technological innovations on the news media, Hladík and Štětka (2017, p.5) stress that:

The (potentially) transformative effects of social media on professional routines *are distributed unevenly across newsrooms* [added emphasis], news organizations, and national journalistic cultures. Such results make a compelling case for further research into the penetration of social media as news sources in traditional media, with particular attention paid to possible variations in topical, national, and technological contexts.

The above assertion by Hladík and Štětka (2017) underscores the need to investigate the penetration of social media as news sources, which this study does by examining Zimbabwe's mainstream media using a case study approach to account for possible variations in newsroom contexts obtaining in public media and private media.

### **1.3.2 Deducing 'social media influence' in the context of this study**

A social constructivist approach undergirds the researcher's evaluation of how social media potentially alters source selection, gatekeeping practices and the news agenda at the four newspapers. As a starting point, the researcher deploys the term 'influence' to denote any change (in even the slightest degree) that can be attributed to the deployment of social media as a news source. Being cognizant of the fact that social media does not have a deterministic effect on news media, this study assumes that social media does alter political reporting. The nature and extent of that alteration is what this study explores.

The researcher grappled with how the 'influence' of social media could be measured or even deduced, given the cause and effect assumptions inherent in such a term. This study used three strands of analysis as 'benchmarks' to assess whether and how social media exerted any influence. The three strands of analysis deployed were sourcing studies, gatekeeping theory and agenda-setting theory. Through these three strands of analysis, the study endeavored to obtain evidence that would demonstrate that social media as a news source had in some way altered the (i) source selection (ii) gatekeeping practices (iii) news agendas of *The Herald*, *The Chronicle*, the *Newsday* and the *Daily News*.

Assuming that "tweets [and Facebook posts] do trigger news stories" (Broersma and Graham, 2012, p.417), the influence of social media can be deduced by examining whether any social media post triggered political stories at the four newspapers. This study borrows from Hladík and Štětka (2015, p.10) who "distinguished triggers of news (the type of source without which the news could not exist) from secondary sources (the source illustrates or supports news triggered by another source)".

Using source selection as a basis for deducing the influence of social media is useful if social media posts demonstrably trigger the news (by being the type of source without which that particular news could not exist). In cases where social media posts are secondary sources, the argument that social media can influence political reporting is harder to sustain because the particular news can exist without the social media post. Thus, this study pays particular attention to source selection where social media sources trigger the news. Using the concept of social media sources as 'triggers of news' would not fully address the question of whether or not social media influences political reporting in Zimbabwe's mainstream media. Hence this study also deployed gatekeeping to benchmark the influence of social media.

The gatekeeping theory can be viewed as a constructivist approach in so far as it assigns agency to newsroom staffers much in the same way that Mr. Gates in David Manning White's (1950) seminal study, is presented as exercising agency in selecting what to publish. Various perspectives on gatekeeping have been proffered over the years, starting with White (1950, p.384) who observed how:

From reporter to rewrite man, through bureau chief to 'state' file editors at various press associations' offices, *the process of choosing and discarding is continuously taking place* [added emphasis].

White (1950) maintained that news selection operated *on the basis of choices* [own emphasis] made by individual editors acting as gatekeepers who subjectively classify items by deciding what counts as news (Reese and Ballinger, 2001). If news selection operates on the basis of choices made by newsroom staffers adhering to editorial policies, then social media sourcing in political reporting is subjected to the same gatekeeping, wherein reporters and editors select certain items as news based on the choices made. Whilst the concept of gatekeeping, as advanced by White (1950) focused on the individual and emphasized the lone newspaper editor's role in choosing what to print, scholars like Breed (1955) extended the concept to account for how powerful publishers exert their influence in shaping the news (Lewis et al, 2010). Essentially, Breed found that "*the publisher set policy and the reporters followed it*" Zelizer (2004, p.53; added emphasis), and to that extent, publishers could set parameters for institutional and editorial gatekeeping by way of newsroom policy.

In the context of this study, gatekeeping theory aligns with the social constructivist approach because it demonstrates that social media does not have a deterministic effect on news media. This is because social media, like any other technology, "is not an independent factor influencing journalistic work from outside" (Deuze, 2007, p.153). Gatekeeping in this regard,

interrogates the process by which various factors within newsrooms (such as routines, editorial policies, journalists preferences, proprietorial demands, etc) determine which social media sources are selected or rejected in the construction of political news stories.

According to Messner and Distaso (2008), the focus of agenda setting research has been on the selection of sources by news media and the impact sources can have on the construction of news. Given that Zimbabwe's mainstream media operates in contexts where "editorial and political constraints weigh down on the practice of professional journalism" (Frere 2014 cited in Mabweazara, 2014, p.48), it is plausible that these same editorial, proprietorial and political forces greatly determine the political news agenda by enforcing gatekeeping measures. Hence, gatekeeping was also a key preoccupation in this investigation of how social media influences political reporting in Zimbabwe's mainstream media. Whilst the present study was not focused on agenda setting per se, it did grapple with social media's role in the construction of news stories within political news desks in mainstream media. In examining the influence of social media on political reporting, the study contended with the question of whether and how social media can drive or has contributed to the political news agenda, so as to deduce its influence.

### **1.3.3 Actor-Network Theory and mixed methods**

Dahlberg (2004) cautions that studies which explore some aspect of media technology and its adoption (such as the present study) must avoid falling back on deterministic causal explanations or accounts that do not adequately capture how media technologies involve multiple interests, unintended consequences, institutional and technological (material) rigidity, and possibilities for alternative uses. This study was undertaken using mixed methods and it also deployed Actor-Network Theory (ANT) as a methodology because "ANT can help us understand the role of objects in journalistic

mediation” (Foletto and Araújo, ND:2). According to Foletto and Araújo (ND, citing Primo and Zago, 2015) the role of objects in journalistic mediation is a notion that has been set aside in journalism studies by the adoption of a deterministic perspective of what journalism should be, and not what reality shows that it is. ANT was deployed as a method in this study to capture the role of objects in journalistic mediation of politics in Zimbabwe.

By adopting an ANT-informed analysis the study initially placed a “symmetrical focus on various kinds of actors [that] may put technologies to the front of a media analysis” but did so “without privileging technology; [so that] the relations between new ICTs and other actors *become empirical questions* [added emphasis]” (Plesner, 2009, p.614). The empirical research in this study was undertaken in two phases using mixed methods.

By using a mixed methods approach, this study seeks to avoid a deterministic or over-simplified exploration of how social media might or has had an influence on political reporting in Zimbabwe’s mainstream media. Although mixed methods can be labour intensive as they involve multiple stages of data collection, the process of integrating quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis in a single study or a program of enquiry (Creswell et al, 2003) mixed methods can provide greater breadth of perspectives around a given issue whilst combining approaches helps overcome deficiencies in one method. Apart from aiding the researcher to overcome deficiencies in one method, adopting mixed methods helped to mitigate the researcher’s biases owing to the researcher’s insider status, which is discussed in the section below.

#### **1.3.4 Disclosure of the researcher’s positionality**

One of the most influential elements about the research process is the concept of positionality, because researchers are always positioned although the disclosure of that positionality has not always found its way into the final

research process (Qin, 2016). In conducting this study, I could not escape the influence of my professional background as a former journalist and senior manager within state-controlled media. Drawing upon 8 years of casually observing how political reporting in state media newsrooms was conducted; I had some understanding of the key factors that shape political reporting from a state media context. In particular, I was privy to several cases where ZANU PF elites, through the Ministry of Information, exerted pressure on and interfered with state media to dictate political reporting.

I became aware of these cases through anecdotal tales and casual personal testimonies shared by colleagues reporting on political issues in the various Zimpapers newsrooms. I had no personal experience of political pressure or interference because during my employ at Zimpapers, I held positions that did not require me to write or edit political stories. Specifically, I held the positions of entertainment reporter, then magazine and gender editor, and then social media editor and lastly, head of digital at Zimpapers. Since I had no direct experience of covering politics, I took at face value the anecdotal tales and casual personal testimonies shared by colleagues who wrote for, edited or managed political news at Zimpapers. Although I never thought to confirm these anecdotal tales and casual testimonies, they are consistent with the findings of several studies (Mazango, 2005; Chuma, 2005; Chari, 2009, 2013; Ureke, 2016; Mukasa, 2003; Chiumbu, 2004; Chitando, 2005; Mano, 2008; Mabweazara, 2011) that have detailed the capture of state media by the ZANU PF government.

Whilst I had a prior connection to Zimpapers, the beat system operating within newsrooms generally compartmentalizes operations within the respective beats. Owing to this compartmentalization, I had no direct experience or intimate knowledge of how political reporting operated at *The Chronicle* in Bulawayo, especially since I was employed by its sister publication, *The Sunday News*. In Harare, I held senior positions that allowed me access to editors responsible for political content at *The Herald* and I

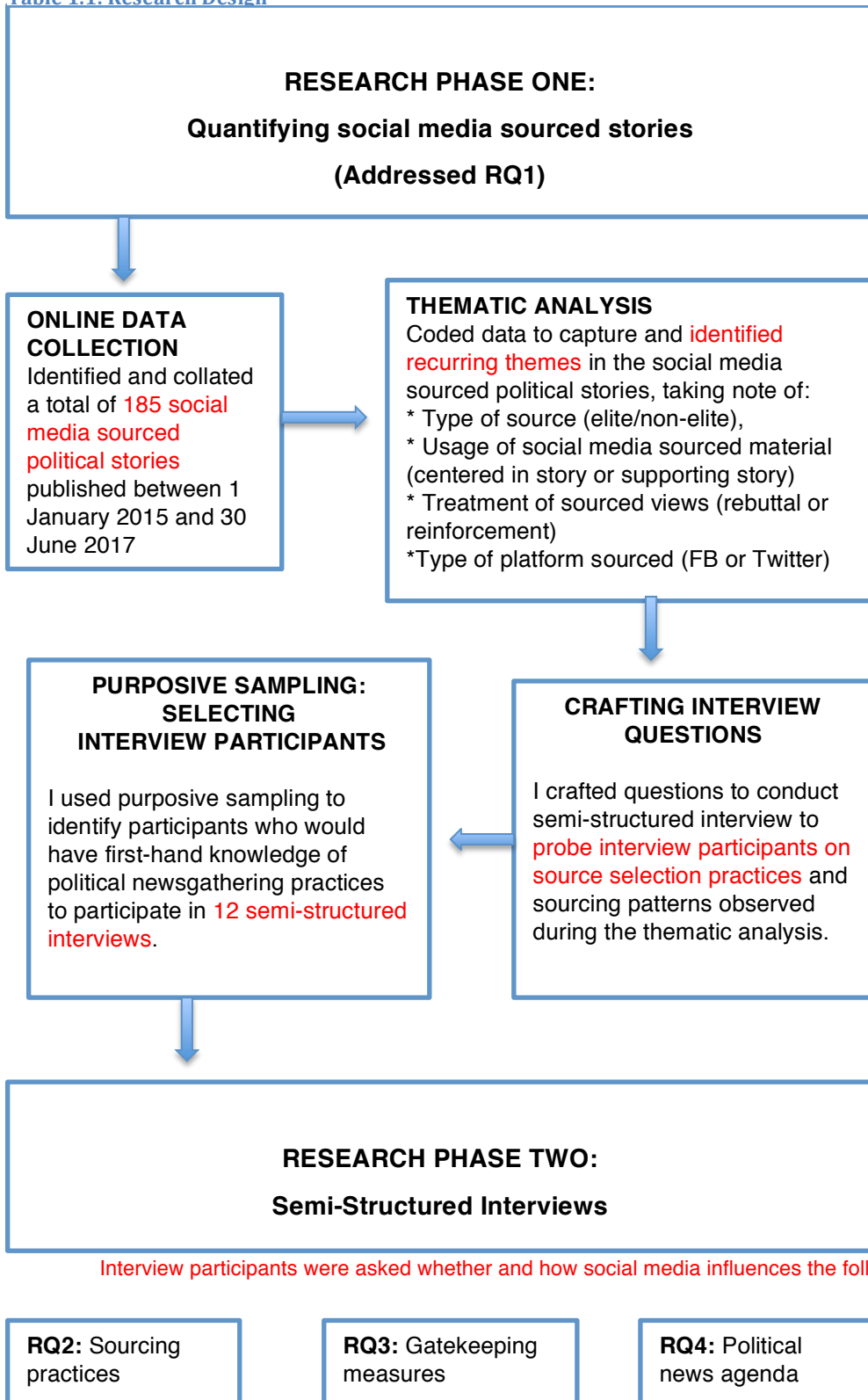
shared a workspace with key desk editors, enabling me to casually observe how they operated. Although I can be ascribed 'insider status' due to my prior connection to Zimpapers, I do not identify as an insider with regard to the political news beat as I have never been a political reporter or editor or participated in the editorial diary meetings of either *The Herald* or *The Chronicle*. Hence I had no prior experience to draw upon in conducting this study. Crucially, the fieldwork for this study (which included face to face semi-structured interviews) was conducted in September 2017, at which time I had left the employ of Zimpapers, allowing for some element of detachment.

With regard to claiming insider status, Wiederhold (2015) argues that a meaningful difference exists between those researchers who connect with their participants due to general commonalities and those researchers experiencing the specific *mutual* familiarity (original emphasis) of sharing a history. Therefore, whilst I can claim membership to the same professional background, as a Zimbabwean journalist and as a former employee of Zimpapers, I do not share the mutual familiarity of reporting on political affairs in the state media context. This lack of prior experience in political reporting proved helpful in allowing me to defer to the expert opinions and insights of the research participants who were former colleagues.

Whilst this professional background was not at the fore of my mind when I conceived of this study, my having been embedded in state-controlled media for nearly a decade shaped some of my prior assumptions. Data collected during the semi-structured interviews served to either confirm or contradict my prior assumptions about political reporting. Relying on multiple accounts from various participants helped to corroborate and strengthen the findings of the study. My background as a journalist and as a contributor/columnist for private media publications (*The Standard* and *The Southern Eye*) also helped me to gain access to key research informants in the private media.

Polarisation has been an enduring characteristic of Zimbabwe's mainstream media and this polarity has been most pronounced in the political news beat. When debates surrounding the democratising potential of the Internet caught my attention, I was initially enthusiastic about the claim that the Internet has liberative potential. My optimistic assumptions about the liberative potential of the Internet could not be sustained once I reviewed literature on technological determinism and social constructivism. My prior connections to Zimpapers and the journalistic sector had indirect implications on the methodology I adopted and influenced aspects of the research design, which will be discussed in detail in Chapter 4. The study was conducted in sequential phases as illustrated in Table 1.1 below.

Table 1.1: Research Design



Data from semi-structured interviews was subjected to inductive content analysis informed by ANT to identify roles of actors in the political news production network

## 1.4 Conclusion

This chapter gave a background to the study by outlining the polarised media landscape in Zimbabwe, highlighting the repressive regulatory regime and the political context in which political reportage occurs. The study examines the influence of social media on political reporting within Zimbabwe's mainstream media and does so by tracing the social media sourcing practices of four daily newspapers. Therefore, this is a sourcing study – specifically social media sourcing. It focuses on Zimbabwe's mainstream media political news beat to establish the influence of social media and prove or disprove claims about the democratising potential of the Internet.

The relevance of this study is underscored by the fact that “claims about how social media tools influence the way journalism is practiced in various African political environments have not yet been thoroughly and empirically explored” (Lemke and Chala, 2016, p.171). It is anticipated that this study will make an empirical contribution to claims about how social media tools influence the way journalism is practiced in Zimbabwe's specific political context, which can encourage similar investigations in other African countries with differing political contexts.

In tracing and interrogating the social media sourcing patterns of four daily newspapers over a 30-month period, the study harnesses theories of technological change to test the deterministic claims regarding the democratising potential of the Internet. The study is braced by empirical research drawn from sociology of journalism scholarship and is also underpinned by theories of technology and social change. What follows is a review of the literature on scholarly debates surrounding technology and society broadly and then specifically engages with scholarship on the democratising potential of the Internet in the context of alternative online communicative spaces centered on Zimbabwe.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

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### 2.1 Introduction

In endeavoring to examine the influence of social media (an aspect of new communication technologies) on political reporting (a news beat in journalism), this study wades into ongoing debates on whether and how technology influences journalism. The question of how social media influences political reporting in Zimbabwe is a question that intersects with the broader scholarly debates, which have tended to fall within two dichotomous approaches, namely technological determinism and social constructivism. Technological determinism is an approach that highlights “technology’s power as a crucial agent of change” (Smith and Marx, 1994, p. ix) and “leaves no space for human choice or intervention” (Wyatt, 2008, p.169). However, a well-documented narrative disputing a technological-deterministic Africa has since emerged (Chitanana and Mutsvairo, 2019) because “technologies are not seen as determining [African] society” (de Bruijn, Nyamnjoh and Brinkman, 2009, p.11). The present study takes the position that social media does not have a deterministic effect on political reporting within Zimbabwe’s mainstream media.

Whilst technological determinism has been discredited, an instrumentalist approach to technology has featured prominently in African studies. The instrumentalist approach assumes that new communication technologies, by virtue of what they are, have the power to initiate changes (Feenberg, 1991). The proposition that technology has the power to initiate changes has provoked a flurry of studies aimed at proving or disproving that claim. These instrumentalist-oriented studies have been criticized for at least two reasons. Firstly, studies that take an instrumentalist approach are faulted for not centering human agency. As Nyamnjoh submits that, “it is regrettable that

scholarly focus has been rather on what ICTs *do to* Africans, instead of what Africans *do with* ICTs” (2005, p.9, emphasis in original). Recent research has either been too technologically deterministic or overly focused on the opportunities afforded by new technologies in political and democratic processes, (Atton and Mabweazara, 2011). Secondly, and with regard to journalism practice, studies that take an instrumentalist approach are faulted for overlooking specified social context. According to Atton and Mabweazara (2011, p.668), “the trend has mainly been to uncritically celebrate (or disapprove of) the impact of new technologies... (Berger, 1996, 2005; Chari, 2009; Kasoma, 1996) without reflecting on the situated nature of their impact”.

Human agency and context are central to how social constructivism engages with the relationship between technology and society. The social constructivist approach is premised on the notion that technology is inseparable from its social context (Mabweazara, 2010b). Apart from foregrounding context, constructivists also emphasize human agency because “human beings are purposive actors, who virtually all the time know what they are doing...and why” (Giddens 1984, p.258). According to Chiumbu (2012), constructivist approaches provide ways to refute technological determinism thereby sidestepping “utopian predictions that have been made about the impact of new technologies” (Mabweazara, 2015, p.4) in Africa.

This chapter proceeds by exploring perspectives on the technology-journalism nexus, focusing on theoretical approaches they have favored to make those appraisals. In a later section, the chapter discusses how Zimbabwean scholars have engaged with the notion that technology can transform society (or aspects thereof) to provide a context to this study. Finally, the chapter concludes by discussing online sourcing in mainstream media.

### 2.1.1 Approaches to the relationship between technology and journalism

Whilst some scholars have claimed that, “journalism has always been shaped by technology” (Pavlik, 2000, p.229); others insist that “technology, in isolation, has never made journalism better or worse” and therefore it “does not drive change” (Conboy, 2013, p.149). The observation that “journalism has changed along with the advent of digital technology” (Tong, 2017, p.2) aligns with the claim that “*the form and content of journalism is crucially determined by the available technology* [added emphasis] of news gathering, production and dissemination” (McNair, 1998, p.125). Contrary to the claim that the form and content of journalism is ‘crucially determined’ by the available technology, Örnebring (2010, p.68) argues that, “*technology is not a force ‘in itself’* [added emphasis]...it is adapted and implemented according to already existing value systems, and these value systems have cultural, social and economic roots”. Extending this argument, in the context of journalism in Zimbabwe, Mabweazara (2013, p.45), insists that:

Changes in [Zimbabwean] newsrooms, including the adoption of interactive and participatory practices, never occurs in a vacuum, rather multiple contextual factors come into play to shape and structure journalists’ attitudes, adoption practices and appropriations.

The notion that changes do not occur in a vacuum anchors this present study, which proceeds from the premise that “technology is not an independent factor influencing journalistic work from outside” (Deuze, 2007, p.153). Whilst it is sound that “the history of journalism develops with the history of technology” (Primo and Zago, 2015, p.39), the adoption of innovation is not just determined by the availability of the required technology but is also shaped by the broader social context in which the technology is used (Domingo, 2006). From this perspective, the history of journalism develops with the history of technology, within a broader social context in

which the technology is used. This is because neither history nor technology, exist in a vacuum.

The claim that, “journalism has changed along with the advent of digital technology” (Tong, 2017, p.2) is supported by numerous studies (Berger, 2005, Mabwezara, 2010a; Mabwezara, 2011; Mabwezara, 2013; Mare, 2013; Mare 2014; Obijiofor, 2003; Jordan, 2013) focused on the African context. What has been contentious for scholars is what to attribute that change to – technology or human actors within specified social contexts who use the technology. Determinists would submit that, “technology has, for better or worse, exerted a fundamental influence on how journalists do their jobs” (Pavlik, 2000, p.229). Such a deterministic analysis of what drives change would, “subordinate human action to the determining forces of technology” and dismally fail to “reveal the human goals and judgments, which explain why and how a technology is applied” (Ursell, 2001, p.178). Rejecting the attempts to attribute change to either technology or to human actors within a specified social context, a third approach has been proposed. Storck (2011, p.7) contends that, “any new invention with transformative and disruptive potential [it] must be viewed as dialectical in nature” because this is not the first time a technological innovation has been used as or thought to be a tool for change.

From a dialectical perspective, Tong (2017, p.3) argues that it is vital to move beyond the false dichotomy of technological determinism or social constructionism because:

The intertwined relationship between technology and society makes it unnecessary and impossible to completely distinguish the influences of technology from those of society. *Digital technology and society are both the cause and consequence of each other* [added emphasis] in

their interwoven relationship, and they develop in the interaction between them.”

The assertion by Tong (2017, p.3, added emphasis) that, “the intertwined relationship between technology and society makes it *unnecessary and impossible to completely distinguish the influences* of technology from those of society” conflicts with the stances assumed by several African scholars. These African scholars see value in distinguishing the influences of technology from those of society to avoid “the ill-conceived ‘technicist’ understandings of digital technologies, which assume a straightforward causal connection between technologies and their deployment in society” Mabweazara, (2015, p.2). Contrary to Tong (2017)’s assertion, it is indeed both necessary and possible to distinguish (perhaps not completely but to a significant degree) the influences of technology from those of society. According to Kibere (2016, p.51), “it is evident that technology use and appropriation is a process that will vary from context to context” hence “it is important to critically engage with the layers of society that technology permeates and the relationships it has potential to configure”. Similarly, Mabweazara (2015, p.2), notes that there are “varying degrees of ‘technological domestication’ [which] are evident across wide-ranging contexts... as individuals and communities harness and adapt digital technologies to their lived realities in hitherto unimagined ways (see De Bruijn, Brinkman and Nyamnjoh 2009; Nyamnjoh 2005)”.

Tong (2017, p.3)’s claim that “digital technology and society are both the cause and consequence of each other” chimes with De Bruijn, Nyamnjoh and Brinkman (2009, p.12) who state that, “society and technology are interdependent”. Unlike Tong (2017), De Bruijn, Nyamnjoh and Brinkman (2009, p.12) put a finer point to their assertion by stressing that the nature of that interdependence is an evolving “dialectic process of *cultural and social appropriation*” [added emphasis]. The fact that it is a cultural and social

process presupposes that the ways in which technology and society intertwine will vary from one cultural and social context to another. Hence, it has been argued that, “the appropriation of ICTs in Africa is entwined in the socio-cultural fabric of Africans” (Atton and Mabweazara, 2011, p.669). If that is the case then, it is necessary and useful to explore how different social contexts influence the adoption of technology.

Scholars who support the dialectical approach insist that new technologies are used as a means of social change and development, and in the process of their usage, they themselves are changed (De Bruijn, Nyamnjoh and Brinkman, 2009). Correspondingly, Dahlberg (2004) finds the dialectical frame of analysis wherein media technologies are viewed as being both socially constituted and constituting helps overcome the problem of singular causation arguments. In the context of this study, it is possible that social media influences political reporting in mainstream media whilst mainstream media’s political reporting might also have an influence on political narratives that drive conversations on social media. In this sense, the relationship between social media as a communication technology and journalism may be seen as dialectical, each exerting some influence on the other in imperceptible or pronounced ways.

### **2.1.2 A dialectical appreciation of the technology-society nexus**

Tong (2017, p.7) contends that, “the domino effects caused by the introduction of digital technology in a social setting are undeniable”. What Tong (2017) regards as domino effects, has been characterised as “technological momentum” by Hughes (1994, p.112) who argues that:

...[a] technological system can be both a cause and an effect; *it can shape or be shaped by society* [added emphasis]. As they grow larger

and more complex, systems tend to be more shaping of society and less shaped by it.

Two important insights can be gleaned from Hughes (1994)'s assertion. The first insight is that when a technology is adopted rapidly, the momentum it generates as it gains widespread acceptance can make it seem to be more shaping of society than shaped by it. This rapid growth or technological momentum is then seen as having domino effects on society which is why "it is easy to mistake technology for an independent causal force determining both the pace and form of change" (Cottle, 1999, p.23). The technological momentum must never make us lose sight of the fact that technology (and the domino effects it may seem to trigger) is "a creature of our own making" (Cottle, 1999, p.23). As a creature of our own making, technology "inhabits, was born out of, remains dependent on, and is 'socialised' and put to work within determinant social environments" (Cottle, 1999, p.23).

Wyatt (2008) has articulated the second important insight that can be derived from Hughes (1994)'s assertion. According to Wyatt, when considered from a methodological level, Hughes' assertion suggests that social constructivist accounts are useful for understanding the emergence and development of technological systems, but momentum is more useful for understanding their subsequent growth and the acquisition of at least the appearance of autonomy. Following Hughes (1994)'s 'technological momentum' concept, technology and journalism may be seen as having an influence upon each other at different stages of transformation. At the height of its momentum and during the stages of explosive growth, technology appears to be autonomous and to be leading transformation, but at all times and at all stages technology is embedded within and facilitated by a given social context.

The concept of technological momentum could explain why in many instances earlier studies focusing on a technological innovation tend to be deterministic. For instance, according to Spyridou et al (2013), *earlier considerations* [added emphasis] on the impact of technological innovation on journalism assumed a deterministic impact of technology on the role and working practices of journalists. With reference to online journalism, Paulussen and Ugille (2008), highlight that *the early studies* [added emphasis], in particular, have been criticized because of the underlying ‘technological determinism’, which explained the observed changes in journalism as ‘caused by’ or ‘the effect of’ technological developments. It is conceivable that these studies take a technology’s momentum and explosive growth as evidence that the technology is autonomously changing society.

Storck (2011, p.6), argues that causation can be retrospectively ascribed because “it is only centuries later that we are able to fully comprehend the impact of a revolutionary and transformational invention”. In the African context, De Bruijn, Nyamnjoh and Brinkman (2009, p.13) reveal how, “from earliest publications on mobile phone technology and our own observations in the field, we realise that rapid changes are taking place and what is reality today will no longer be so tomorrow”. Therefore the present study is undertaken from the premise of caution given that a fuller appreciation of social media and its influence on political reporting in Zimbabwe’s mainstream media “comes with the retrospect of time” (Storck, 2011, p.7), because “studying... social media use in particular, remains a moving target” (Lecheler and Kruikemeier, 2016, p.163).

Whilst studies that examine the relationship between technology and society often seem preoccupied with what has changed, there is value in paying attention to what remains the same. McQuail (2007, p.28) contends that, “material and other forces always interact with each other to produce outcomes that are never fully determined or predictable”. Drawing from McQuail (2007)’s assertion, the present study proceeds from the premise that

the influence of social media on political reporting within Zimbabwe's mainstream media is neither fully determined nor predictable.

### 2.1.3 Constructivism in studying technology and journalism

According to Dahlberg (2004) there are three dominant deterministic approaches that researchers commonly adopt: social, instrumental, or technological. The preceding sections in this chapter have discussed them, and also briefly outlined the dialectical approach which collapses the technological determinism and social constructivism divide by proposing that technology and society mutually shape each other. The present study will not adopt a dialectical approach because such an approach is best suited for longitudinal studies that afford an opportunity to trace, over a period of time, how technology and society mutually shape one another.

From a constructivist perspective, technology is inseparable from its social context (Mabweazara, 2010b). By using a constructivist lens to examine the influence of social media on political reporting within Zimbabwe's mainstream media, this study aligns itself with what Porter and Hellsten (2014) term 'a social determination' which assumes that the sociopolitical context determines the potential of social media to make a difference. The social determination approach is best suited for this study because this study begins from the premise that the sociopolitical context obtaining in Zimbabwe (and under which mainstream media operates) largely determines the potential of social media to make a difference, specifically in political news reporting.

Adopting a social determination approach is important because in order to understand recent changes in the ways journalists work; *research must begin with reference to the contexts* (Dickinson et al, 2013; added emphasis). A

similar recommendation, to begin with context as a premise for conducting such a study, comes from Mackay et al. (1995) who argue that the starting point should not be a particular technological field, but a particular social context in which new technologies are used. The particular sociopolitical context in which social media, as new technologies, are being used is Zimbabwe's mainstream media, which Chuma (2013) aptly describes. According to Chuma (2013), Zimbabwe has a bifurcated media environment characterised by a genuflecting and patriotic state media on the one hand, and a vociferously oppositional private press fighting on the side of the political opposition on the other. Given the sociopolitical context described by Chuma (2013), this study hypothesizes that any use of social media in Zimbabwe's mainstream media "*is the consequence of decisions taken in specific newsrooms in particular circumstances* [added emphasis]" by journalists that may have a professional culture or may have knowledge and expectations about the Internet as a news medium (Domingo, 2008, p.681).

This study makes two assumptions. Firstly it assumes that Zimbabwean journalists are subordinate to editorial policies within newsrooms and any decisions they take in sourcing from social media are informed by the editorial policies of their employers. Secondly, it supposes that the editorial policies in newsrooms are contingent upon proprietorial and political interests, particularly where the political news desks are concerned. Thus, this study opts for a constructivist approach because "social media and other forms of media should be seen as tools embedded in contexts where power, politics, and economic disposition pre-exist" (Chitanana and Mutsvairo, 2019, p76).

Being cognizant of the fact that in a bifurcated sociopolitical context, Zimbabwean journalists tend to follow the whims of editors, who themselves are at the mercy of media proprietors (Mano, 2005) this study considers 'a instrumental determination' (Porter and Hellsten, 2014) approach to be a less

effective method of inquiry. This is because the instrumental determination approach assumes that *motivations and goals of users* [added emphasis] determine the potential of social media to make a difference (Porter and Hellsten, 2014). The assumption that the motivations and goals of users, in this case mainstream media journalists, can determine the potential of social media to make a difference presumes agency and autonomy on the part of such users (or journalists in this case). The degree of agency and autonomy that mainstream media journalists, especially in the political news beats, are likely to enjoy is constrained by a sociopolitical context in which media houses are either state-captured or state-persecuted. The limited professional autonomy of mainstream media's political journalists may foreclose an instrumental determination wherein the motivations and goals of users can realise the potential of the Internet or the potential of social media to make a difference.

Finally, Porter and Hellsten (2014) note that research favouring 'a technological determination' would assume that features unique to the media determine the potential of the media to make a difference. This type of determination has been prevalent among Zimbabwean scholars, some of whom have advanced arguments that carry strong resonance with the notion of 'liberation technology' as espoused by Larry Diamond. Diamond (2010, p.70) opined that liberation technology is "any form of information and communication technology that [because of the features it possesses] can expand political, social and economic freedom".

The next section provides an outline of scholarly standpoints on the influence of technology on Zimbabwe's communicative status quo, many of which derive from strands of technologically deterministic discourse that asserts the democratising potential of the Internet.

## **2.2 Democratising potential of Internet in Zimbabwe: Perspectives**

Here the debates on the democratising potential of the Internet are discussed in two parts, starting with those studies that were done in 2011 and prior, then followed by studies that were conducted in 2011 to date. This periodisation is intended to trace whether and if the debates have evolved in any significant way. As noted by Chitanana and Mutsvairo (2019, p.70),

Predominant assessments of social media and digital communication technologies in some earlier years focused on a binary divide between optimistic views that promised a tech-driven utopia and pessimist alarm for what was considered an impending dystopia.

Presenting Zimbabwean scholarship by periodisation can throw into sharp relief the ways in which the deterministic claims from earlier studies have been modified or abandoned altogether in the succeeding studies since studying the relationship between technology and society is akin to trying to hit a moving target. Foregrounding the studies from 2011 and as well as studies from 2012 going forward allows for an assessment of how scholarly sentiments have shifted over time, from earlier deterministic optimism to more recent studies that provide evidence that little has 'substantially' changed despite the advent of new communication technologies.

As noted in 2.1.2 of this section, there have been instances where earlier studies of a new technology and its introduction into a society have tended to lean towards determinism because of the rapidity (or momentum) of its adoption, which gives the impression that technology is autonomous. Given that some of the studies are over a decade old, this periodisation can help to account for the variance (since technological determinist explanations have largely been discarded in favor of constructivist ones) in ideas regarding the liberative potential of the Internet in the context of Zimbabwe.

### 2.2.1 Perspectives from scholarship published in 2011 and prior

According to Mazango (2005) having ownership and control of the largest share of the media market, enabled the ZANU PF government to dominate spaces of public communication, leading to shrinkage of the Zimbabwean democratic space (Moyo, 2007). Against the backdrop of a consistent build up of state monopoly of the mass media (Moyo, 2007), the emergence of alternative media platforms that effectively circumvented Zimbabwe's repressive media laws and broadened the communicative spaces was seen as evidence of the democratising or liberative potential of the Internet. In particular, Moyo (2006, p.81) contended that the "restricted democratic space has spawned a multiplicity of alternative public spheres... [whereby] the diaspora are creatively exploiting new media to resist state propaganda churned out through the mainstream media". The growth of the Internet and its digital public spheres was, according to Moyo (2009), largely motivated by Zimbabwe's authoritarian and repressive political environment.

The view that new media was enabling resistance to state propaganda tallied with Moyo (2009, p.58)'s contention that the Internet had facilitated new methods of communication and sharing information that were understood to be "*marking the nascent stages of a digital communicative democracy in Zimbabwe*" [added emphasis]. Other scholars shared Moyo (2009)'s optimism regarding the democratising potential of the Internet. At varying intervals, scholars argued that new technologies stood as mobilizing tools both socially and politically in Zimbabwe; that the Internet lowered the threshold for entry into the deliberative arena by reducing the fear of authoritarian regimes which normally induced self-censorship; and that the days of total government control of the media in Zimbabwe are entering their twilight zone due to technological changes (Ndlela, 2010; Moyo, 2007; Mazango, 2005). This unqualified optimism seemed like "a wave of belief in the magically transforming power of technology" (Carey, 2005, p.445) and was arguably reminiscent of the "rhetoric of the technological sublime"

(Carey, 2005, p.443) or the “cyberutopianism” that Morozov (2012) warns against among pundits.

According to Morozov (2012, p.26), “the Net is NOT inherently liberating; its liberating potential may shrink or grow depending on the circumstances”. Hence a claim such as the one made by Mazango (2005) predicting that the days of total government control of the media in Zimbabwe were entering their twilight zone due to technological changes was indicative of a romantic view of new technologies. Scholars such as Loudon and Mazumdar (2013, p.53) have, in accord with Morozov, argued against a romantic view of new technologies whereby – “they are inherently democratic, favour the freedom-lover over the terrorist, or that they favour oppressed citizens over oppressive governments”. Zimbabwean scholars (see Moyo, 2005; Ndlela 2010; Moyo, 2011) have interrogated the democratising potential of the Internet with respect to how alternative media (incorporating citizen journalism, blogging and news websites) enable citizens in the Diaspora and within Zimbabwe to overcome the restrictions of an authoritarian regime. These scholars present arguments that suggest that these new technologies inherently favour the oppressed citizens over the oppressive Zimbabwe government.

With reference to the emergence of activist blogs, Moyo (2011) presents new technologies as favouring the oppressed as he argues that Zimbabwe citizens are no longer helplessly bombarded with messages by mass media. Moyo (2011, p.746) contends that, “...as is normally the case in authoritarian environments, the internet in Zimbabwe thus became (and continues to be) the platform through which most of these subaltern or anti-state discourses are articulated and exerted.” Moyo (2011, p.751) suggests that the Internet can be liberative because alternative media, such as blogs, can “threaten the survival of the political elite” by disseminating news that potentially shakes the foundations of Zimbabwe’s hegemonic project by foregrounding the anti-establishment discourses. What Moyo (2011) does not appear to take into

account is that the same Internet can also be appropriated by political elites to ensure their continued survival.

With regards to alternative media in Zimbabwe, Ndlela (2010) argues that the prevalence of online newspapers actively engaged in political commentary focused on Zimbabwe *is indicative of the liberating function of new technologies* [added emphasis] for pro-democracy movements contesting established structural constraints. According to Ndlela (2010), these websites were *driven by a focused political agenda* [added emphasis] aimed at democratic reforms in Zimbabwe. Although the intent of these politically driven websites may indeed be to trigger democratic reforms in Zimbabwe, there is no evidence to suggest that they have succeeded in doing so. The democratising potential of the Internet, such as it may seem, was clearly limited despite the existence of some online websites that carry “*radical political content*” which according to Moyo (2007, p.101) “*stresses resistance to dominant viewpoints and campaign against repression*” [added emphasis].

To believe in the democratising potential of the Internet in the context of Zimbabwe is to believe that Zimbabwe’s authoritarian and repressive political environment, could be impacted by the existence of “websites driven by a focused political agenda” carrying ‘radical political content’ which stress “resistance to dominant viewpoints and campaign against repression” (Ndlela, 2010; Moyo, 2007). Whilst Kellner (1999) argues that we must not ignore the possibility and indeed the importance of using and controlling media technology for democratic ends, it is important to avoid instrumentalist and deterministic assumptions regarding the outcomes of such control and usage. Scholars have persuasively linked the growth of Zimbabwean cyber-public spheres to the shrinkage of democratic space but their anticipation that the existence of anti-government online platforms can help bring democratic changes in Zimbabwe has been rather instrumentalist and deterministic. The instrumentalist approach assumes that new

communication technologies, by virtue of what they are, have the power to initiate changes (Feenberg, 1991).

It can be argued that any instrumentalist assumption that new technologies, by virtue of what they are, have the power to bring democratic change in Zimbabwe fails to take into account that new technologies such as “social media are not decisive: they can be repressed by governments as well as employed by government to motivate their supporters” (Storck, 2011, p.7). In the context of Zimbabwe, the mainstream media operates under very restrictive conditions and according to Michaelsen, (2011, p.13), “the extent to which a regime monitors information circulation determines the maneuvering space of media” such that “so-called ‘hard’ authoritarian regimes leave room only for small or clandestine media”. Since authoritarian regimes leave room only for small or clandestine media, dissenting voices on the Internet tend to be radical. According to Moyo (2011, p.758), the radicalism – in form and in content – of alternative media and citizen journalism must be seen as one informed by the political context of “state repression and violence”.

Owing to the restrictive media environment, Moyo (2009, p.552) found that the alternative media had formed a “parallel market of information”, that circumvented the state-imposed “information black-out” in traditional media following the disputed 2008 elections. This finding by Moyo is in sync with more recent accounts regarding the circumventive influence of alternative media as will be shown in the succeeding discussion.

### **2.2.2 Perspectives from scholarship published from 2012 to date**

The circumventive influence of alternative media also dubbed the “parallel market of information” (Moyo, 2009, p.552) must be appreciated in the sociopolitical context of Zimbabwe in order to fully comprehend its liberative aspects. Sabao and Chikara (2018, p.24) claim that up until around 2013,

when the government seemed to ease up, “the media regulatory framework in Zimbabwe has been regarded as one of the most draconian in the world, comparatively”. Although Sabao and Chikara (2018) claim that around 2013 “the government seemed to ease up”, the media regulatory framework they describe as “one of the most draconian in the world” still <sup>5</sup>subsists owing to failure by government to repeal those repressive laws. However the claim that the government seemed to ease up around 2013, is supported by Chibwe and Ureke (2016, p.1255) who point to the licensing of new private players in the industry, including *NewsDay*, *Southern Eye* and *The Zimbabwe Mail*, and radio stations ZiFM and Star FM.

The licensing of new private players in the industry (noted by Chibwe and Ureke, 2016) did not alter the regulatory status quo and Star FM, which is owned by Zimpapers, is arguably out-of-place. Nevertheless, it is in the context of “the gag of the stringent media laws and regulatory frameworks” (Sabao and Chikara, 2018, pp. 19-20), that alternative sites of information (websites, e-newspapers, social media and blogs) to the state-controlled media have been hailed and ascribed an emancipatory role.

Leijendekker and Mutsvairo (2014, p.1037) stress that although counter-hegemonic discourses have always been prevalent, as ‘illegal’ traditional media (e.g. pirate radio stations and underground newspapers), digitally networked technologies possess an unrivalled potential power because they have features that can greatly expand the reach, tenacity, and resilience of such counter-hegemonic forces. For instance, the blogosphere in Zimbabwe

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<sup>5</sup> In its ‘State of the Media’ report released on 25 January 2018 and reviewing the year 2017, MISA-Zimbabwe criticized the Government for failing to conduct media reforms noting that: As the year came to a close in 2017, laws such as the discredited Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA), used to license and regulate the media; the Official Secrets Act (OSA), to broadly embargo information held by public bodies and the Broadcasting Services Act (BSA), to hinder free establishment of private radio stations, remained entrenched in the country’s statutes. Other restrictive laws include the Public Order and Security Act, Censorship and Entertainment Controls Act (CECA), and the Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act. This should also be viewed against the government’s accelerated efforts to introduce the cybercrime laws, generally perceived as intended to curb free speech online. These laws essentially curtail citizens’ right to freedom of assembly and association, demonstrate and petition, including the right to freedom of conscience, as provided for by Sections 58, 59 and 60 of the Constitution as well as Sections 61 and 62 which protect the right to free expression, media freedom and access to information (MISA-Zimbabwe, 2018:1). [Accessed on 30 January 2018]; <http://crm.misa.org/upload/web/State%20of%20the%20Media%20Report%202017-%20MISA%20Zimbabwe.pdf>

has been identified as “a powerful contributor to critical social development and political reports” (Mutsvairo and Columbus, 2012, p.132).

The influence of the blogosphere in Zimbabwe is equally underscored by Moyo (2011, p.751) who, using Kubatana bloggers as case studies, insists that such blogs “disseminate news that potentially shakes the foundations of Zimbabwe’s hegemonic project by foregrounding the anti-establishment discourses that threaten the survival of the political elite”. The rise and influence of social media, citizen journalism and other forms of alternative media has largely been attributed to the need to counterbalance ‘regulated’ information flow by a dominating non-democratic hegemony (Sabao and Chikara, 2018, p.24).

More recent studies reinforce some of these early claims regarding the liberative capabilities of alternative media, in several respects. For instance, the causality between a repressive media regulatory framework and the rise of circumventive alternative media has been reiterated. According to Sabao and Chikara (2018, p.24) social networking sites have supplanted traditional communication channels where the flow of information had become “highly regulated often bordering on government propaganda”. The circumventive and liberative influence of alternative media is linked to the idea that the Internet has been an important counterpublic for Zimbabweans in the context of repressive media laws (Manganga, 2008).

Secondly, causality between the authoritarian political status quo in Zimbabwe and the Internet’s potential to democratise discourses has also been highlighted. For Mutsvairo and Sirks (2015, p.330), “ICT technologies are revolutionizing the way we communicate, interact and gather information” and “enable activists to act outside of traditional power structures” (2015, p.332) whilst also serving as a check on state power (Moyo, 2009) by helping “activists build up their case against tyranny” (Mutsvairo, 2014, p.51). Leijendekker and Mutsvairo (2014, p.1043) posit that the rise of alternative

networks of information appear to “have limited the ability of the Mugabe regime to publicly endorse violence”. Nevertheless, in the case of authoritarian contexts, Leijendekker and Mutsvairo (2014) concede that the democratisation of public discourse does not necessarily lead to the democratisation of political decision-making in the absence of (effective) mechanisms of representation and accountability. According to Mutsvairo and Sirks (2015, p.331), “if in real life the government does not allow people to freely speak or form organization, then the assumed quest for democracy is inherently limited if not absent”.

Mhiripiri and Mutsvairo (2014, p.412)’s study on how social media influence diplomatic opinion-formation on the Zimbabwe situation, found that “social media sites maintain a monitoring role especially over the excesses of government”. For Mhiripiri and Mutsvairo (2014) the use of new technologies helped publicise extra-legal activities and human rights abuses since “Internet weakens the ability of political regimes to exercise effective control over the flows of information that cross their borders” meaning that “local events take on international repercussions” (Soriano, 2013, p.336). Mhiripiri and Mutsvairo (2014)’s study arrives at conclusions that correspond with Soriano (2013, p.336) who contends that:

The new technologies make it possible to evade government censorship, permitting local activists to inform international public opinion, and to become involved in the domestic affairs of their countries. Unlike the traditional mass media, net users can move around with greater anonymity than journalists, and be present at events and in scenarios that government censorship bans accredited professionals from.

Despite finding that “the exposure arguably restrained the regime operative excesses” (2014, p.403), Mhiripiri and Mutsvairo admit that, “it is still not clear whether the democratising element of the Internet in Zimbabwe could

be linked to the public sphere discourse” (2014, p.411). Their hesitancy to proclaim any democratising effects of the Internet in Zimbabwe is consistent with post-2011 scholarship that is not inclined towards romanticising new technologies whilst acknowledging their liberative potential within limited and specified contexts.

Sabao and Chikara (2018, p.18) claim that “the role of social media in citizen political participation and protests in Zimbabwe is a new phenomenon” whose “impact and communicative potential were recently tested in nationwide protest stayaway organised through the FB and Twitter movement under the #ThisFlag handle/brand”. According to Sabao and Chikara (ibid) the social media movement named #thisflag, led by a Pastor Evan Mawarire managed to rattle the Zanu-PF government into realising the potential of social media mass protests to the point that it eventually flighted threats to the citizenry over the use and ‘abuse’ of social media. Sabao and Chikara argue that the success of this movement in mobilizing the nation to a day of boycott of work on 6<sup>th</sup> of July 2016 evinces the power of social media in citizen advocacy in Zimbabwe (2018, p.18). In an op-ed reflecting upon the wave of cyber-optimism triggered by hashtag-driven protests in Zimbabwe, <sup>6</sup>Tendi (2016, n.p) reasoned that any expectation that social media can usher an end to Mugabe’s regime “ignores the realities of power” because “social media activism can never substitute for organized political activity on the ground”. For Sabao and Chikara (2018, p.18) the fact that the “Zimbabwean government has since enacted into law a Cyber Security Law” is “an act seen as responding to fears of social media”.

Although Sabao and Chikara (2018)’s suggestion that the Zimbabwean government’s enactment of a Cyber Security Law is in response to the #thisflag movement’s activities is plausible, it is debatable whether the government’s response was a sign of fear of social media. What could be a

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<sup>6</sup> Miles Tendi, (2016) Why a hashtag isn’t enough for a revolution in Zimbabwe  
<http://foreignpolicy.com/2016/07/15/why-a-hashtag-isnt-enough-for-a-revolution-in-zimbabwe>

more persuasive explanation for how the Zimbabwe government responded is Stern (2017, p.915)'s observation regarding how "amid previous protests in authoritarian regimes, governments did not react passively, but rather took measures to impede online communication" when challenged. By enacting the Cyber Security Law, the Zimbabwe government may have been following a script used by other authoritarian regimes that equally "took these measures to inhibit communication that might facilitate the coordination of anti-regime collective actions and to limit the spread of news about the protests" (Stern, 2017, p.915). This reality, that authoritarian governments are not passive, should mitigate any overly optimistic expectation regarding the democratising potential of the Internet. Another reality is that the Internet is not a space characterised by "anti-regime homogeneity" (Makombe, 2017, p.65).

The absence of "anti-regime homogeneity" noted by Makombe (2017) derives from the fact that "political activism does not just move in one direction" (Soriano, 2013, p.337). According to Soriano (2013, p.337), measures aimed at demanding liberties and participation co-exist with the fans of authoritarianism, who use cyberspace in order to demonstrate support for their governments or the official ideology, promoting a toughening of their policies or assisting with the persecution of dissident net users. This assessment by Soriano (2013) corresponds with the existence of pro-ZANU PF supporters who were against the #thisflag movement even as the #shutdownzimbabwe stayaway protest unfolded.

Mutsvairo (2013, p.1) argues against romanticizing new technologies noting how "the continued availability of new media technologies have forced some to thoughtlessly suggest, without bothering to give any empirical evidence whatsoever, that the Internet can help bring democratic changes in Zimbabwe". For Mutsvairo (2013), the sociopolitical context is important. Mutsvairo (2013) argues that in the case of Zimbabwe, new media may certainly be helping advance democratic change, but it could also be argued

that it takes a combination of factors including the political climate in the country, infrastructure, access to the Internet, and literacy.

In their study of the Facebook blogger (i.e Baba Jukwa), Mutsvairo and Sirks (2015, p.339, added emphasis) concluded that:

...despite his openly novel ability to engage ordinary people in the discussion of issues of wide public significance, it is a far-fetched submission to conclude that his blog entries had increased democratic participation or helped democratise the public space *since Mugabe's power and policies thereof appear equally intact and none of his policies have been changed by Baba Jukwa's exposes.*

For Mutsvairo and Sirks (2015) technology is only an enabler because although online participation could encourage change, it still requires someone to be prepared to put digital ideas into practice, offline – and in the case of Zimbabwe, that has not happened yet. Bearing this in mind, one might argue from an instrumentalist perspective, that in the end technology is merely an instrument, open to noble and nefarious purposes (as noted by Diamond, 2010). Chitanana and Mutsvairo (2019, p.68) argue that, “without necessary political power and facing a heavily fortified state, it remains improbable that digital activists will effectively use social media to push a democratic agenda”.

This study examines the influence of social media in political reporting against the background of scholarship that has been ambivalent in addressing the question of whether the Internet's liberative potential is manifest in the 'offline' Zimbabwean context and whether it suffices to democratise the political order. The scholarly ambivalence is understandable given that the Internet's offline influence is hard to quantify, linear causality is difficult to capture since “outcomes [of the effects of communication technology] are never fully determined or predictable” (McQuail, 2007, p.28).

### 2.2.3 Online sourcing in mainstream media

This study investigates the social media sourcing practices at four Zimbabwean newspapers, specifically focusing on political reporting. Similar sourcing studies have demonstrated that in a digital world, journalists now increasingly use social media, search engines, websites, wikis, and online encyclopedias as news sources (Lecheler and Kruikemeier, 2016). According to Van Leuven et al (2018, p.803), “the increasing use of online sources has impacted, yet perhaps not drastically changed, all aspects of journalistic news production”. This assertion is supported by Lecheler and Kruikemeier (2016, p.158), who state that “it is unlikely that the Internet has not changed news sourcing techniques, and with it the complex relationship between journalists and (elite) sources”. For Thorsen and Jackson (2018, p.3), “it is without question, [that] the availability of online sources and social media has shaped recent sourcing practices”. What these claims indicate is that there is scholarly consensus that online sources and online sourcing has some degree of influence on journalism. The nature and extent of that influence has been explored by a number of scholars.

According to Paulussen and Harder (2014), social media has become a popular, if not indispensable, tool for newsgathering in various domains because journalists’ monitoring of social media platforms has become a part of their daily newsgathering routines. With specific reference to Twitter, scholars have argued that it has the capacity to increase the diversity of voices (Broersma and Graham, 2013) however that capacity does not always amount to anything because Twitter is adopted and normalized to existing sourcing practices (Lasorsa, Lewis, and Holton 2012). The view that Twitter is normalized to existing sourcing practices is in sync with Lecheler and Kruikemaier (2016)’s observation that online sources complement rather than replace traditional sourcing practices and newsgathering techniques.

Von Nordheim et al (2018, p.811) argue that, “social media are now fully embedded as technological infrastructures in journalistic work routines”. This study interrogates whether social media are now embedded in journalistic work routines at the four newspapers that serve as case studies for this research. In particular, the study interrogates whether social media sourcing in Zimbabwe’s mainstream media has impacted aspects of journalistic news production such as source selection, gate keeping and agenda setting. Additionally, the study considers whether social media sourcing has democratised by including diverse, non-elite and non-biased voices.

Kruikemeier, Lecheler and Hermans (2018, p.798) define online journalistic news sourcing techniques as the use of the Internet for gathering information for news stories. This study investigates the use of the Internet for gathering information for political news stories over a 30-month period. According to Knight (2012, p.63), “while the impact of technology on news production and dissemination has been extensively studied, its influence on sourcing practices is under-researched”. Since it has been claimed that, “without sources, there is no journalism” (Dimitrova and Strömbäck, 2009, p.75), the use of social media as a news source is worth interrogating.

Crucially, tracing the social media sourcing practices of the four daily newspapers in this study is ideal because scholarship on sourcing routines connects with three aspects of news construction namely; agenda setting, gatekeeping and framing – which parallel the research questions this study seeks to address. According to Knight (2012, p.62) sourcing routines have been discussed “in terms of the selection of sources *especially in how this links to agenda-setting and hegemonic control of the public discourse* [added emphasis]”. In the context of this study, sourcing is discussed in terms of the selection of sources, especially in how source selection links with agenda setting and control of the political news beat.

Although “the use of sources is a given in contemporary journalism practice” according to Dimitrova and Strömbäck (2009, p.78), “journalists typically have ultimate control over the construction of their stories”. This study considers whether the use of social media as a news source has any implications on how political reporters construct their stories. Since it is ultimately journalists that select their sources within a particular socio-political and organizational context (Dimitrova and Strömbäck, 2009) the process of journalism must be placed in the wider socio-political and economic environment (ibid). By placing the process of social media sourcing within the wider socio-political and economic environment, “we do not attribute the nature of change to technology alone but rather the convergence of many forces that may be contingent upon local circumstance at any one time” (Fenton, 2010, p.5). For this reason, the first research question that this study addresses relates to the *prevalence* of social media sourcing in Zimbabwe’s mainstream media, presuming that social media sourcing may be contingent upon each individual newsroom’s circumstance and priorities at the given time.

Following Phillips (2010)’s contention that the practices of sourcing can be a key measure of shifting discourse and power within the media, this study will trace the source selection practices of the four daily newspapers’ political news desks to understand the varying editorial contexts under which social media sourcing occurs. It is important to trace the source selection practices already existing within the four newspapers’ political news beats because “technology has been rarely identified as an independent force initiating changes in newsroom routines” (Moon and Hadley, 2014, p.291). In fact, Dickinson et al (2013:6), contend that research must specifically take into account the structural, social and cultural milieus in which journalists are located, into which these so-called ‘disruptive’ technologies (‘disruptive’ in a loosely transformative sense) are inserted and fitted, and, ultimately, how they are understood by the local inhabitants of these contexts and put to use.

## **2.3 Conclusion**

This chapter has discussed the ongoing debates on technology and society, resolving that the constructivist or social determination approach is best suited for this study because the adoption of innovation in the newsroom is not just determined by the availability of the required technology, but it is also shaped by the broader social context in which the technology is to be used (Domingo, 2006). This chapter also considered the perspectives of various Zimbabwean scholars regarding the democratising potential of the Internet against the background of a repressive environment.

The following Chapter discusses the theoretical framework underpinning this study especially sociology of journalism, which according to Mabweazara (2010b), reveals factors 'internal' to journalism as a profession. Drawing from theories of technological change, this study focuses on the Actor-Network Theory (ANT) which offers "a robust theoretical framework for a holistic analysis of innovation in journalism that places technology into the social context of decisions on practices and formats within the newsroom" (Schmitz and Domingo, 2010, p.1157).

## CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

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### 3.1 Introduction

According to Mabwezara (2015), the body of theory known as the sociology of journalism has a long and winding history that draws on a number of distinct theoretical approaches, and it has generally been defined as concerned with the ways in which news organizations manage the processes through which information is gathered and transformed into news. This study adopts sociology of news as a theoretical lens to examine the ways in which *The Herald*, *The Chronicle*, the *Newsday* and the *Daily News* manage the processes through which information is gathered and transformed into news. Since, sociology of journalism traces and attempts to organize into coherent schemata the pressures that encourage journalists to follow familiar and repetitive patterns of newsmaking (Mabwezara, 2015), it can help to illumine the sourcing practices in mainstream media. Sociology of journalism can help illumine the sourcing practices in mainstream media because it engages directly with the questions of what constitutes news and what factors shape it, and broadly argues that news is a social product shaped by the interactions among media professionals, media organizations and society (Schudson 2005; Mabwezara, 2015).

This chapter discusses the theoretical basis of the present study by assessing Zimbabwe's mainstream media through sociology of journalism. The chapter also considers the source selection practices of mainstream media and the organizational controls that obtain in newsrooms. The gatekeeping theory is also deployed in this study to better understand the institutional mechanisms employed to control newsroom practices, processes and final content output.

According to Mabweazara (2015, p.112) the sociology of journalism, has been criticized for its failure to consider the influences of new technologies, as well as changes in social and political processes to news production routines, “however its diverse traditions provide valuable insights into various factors that influence the operations of journalists as well as shape the news outcome”. To compensate for the weaknesses of sociology of journalism as a theory, this study also appropriated the actor-network theory (ANT), which perceives technology is one factor, but not the absolute determinant, in news production. The chapter concludes by reflecting on the value of ANT as a methodological lens for the present study.

### **3.1.1 Situating Zimbabwe’s mainstream media in sociology of journalism**

Mabweazara (2010b) has argued that sociology of journalism’s emphasis on the ‘institutional’ and ‘professional’ factors to newsgathering places importance on the ‘internal’ workings of news production which have implications on how journalists deploy new technologies in their professional routines. This assertion provides ample justification for the deployment of sociology journalism in the present study, which seeks to examine the influence of social media sourcing on political reporting within Zimbabwe’s mainstream media. An advantage of deploying the sociology of journalism is its insistence that there is need to understand the dialectical nature of news production and its relationship to the wider system of the news production processes (Mabweazara, 2010b).

According to Skovsgaard (2014), a sociological approach can be useful in understanding organizational contexts that potentially limit the professional autonomy of journalists, namely these three: a) the political goals of the organisation; b) the economic goals of the organisation; and c) the structures and routines of the organization. In the context of this study, a sociological approach can be useful in understanding the organizational contexts that

potentially limit the autonomy of journalists at *The Herald*, *The Chronicle*, the *Newsday* and the *Daily News* since journalists are embedded in organizations and answer to superiors in a hierarchical structure (Cook, 1998 cited in Skovsgaard, 2014, p.346).

Scholars like Evetts (2003; 2006) have helpfully distinguished between organizational professionalism (a discourse of control, external to the occupational group, that is used by managers to define professionalism as compliance with employer goals and standards) and occupational professionalism (the more traditional form of professionalism, internal to the occupational group, emphasizing individual autonomy, ethical standards, and broad socialization). Interrogating organizational professionalism in the context of Zimbabwe's mainstream media could provide insights into the nature of supervisory controls used by editors to demand compliance with the employer's goals and standards. According to Mano (2005), Zimbabwean journalists conform to both subtle and direct pressures exerted by their immediate managers, to ensure compliance with newsroom policies, which suggests that such journalists do not have complete autonomy. The effect of organizational professionalism (noted by Evetts 2003; 2006) is highlighted by Schudson (2019, p.150), who argues that in the end it does not matter who the journalists in news organizations are because:

If organizational theorists are correct... whoever they are, they will be socialized quickly into the values and routines of daily journalism and will modify their own personal values 'in accordance with the requisites of the organization' (Epstein 1973: xiv).

The open and subtle organizational pressures exerted within Zimbabwe's publicly and privately owned newsrooms exemplify the sociological concept of "social control" (Zelizer, 2004, p.53) in journalism. Sociology of news debates regarding social control in the newsroom state that professionalism is negotiated by a complex set of factors, according to Mano (2005). For

instance, Breed (1999, p.79) advances three reasons why journalists do not inevitably conform within newsrooms: Firstly, due to the existence of ethical journalistic norms to which journalists adhere. Secondly, newsroom subordinates are vested with more 'liberal' attitudes than the publisher, making conformity difficult. In most cases such subordinates can invoke journalistic norms to justify anti-policy writing, however in the context of political reportage, it usually is the preserve of the more senior newsroom staffers who are trusted to, not only adhere to but also, defend policy Breed (1999). Thirdly, ethical taboos prevent publishers from openly commanding subordinates to follow laid down policy Breed (1999). Lewis (2012, p.841) notes that literature on the sociology of journalism can be divided into two distinct yet complementary streams of thought: theories about how journalists construct the nature of reality in society, and theories about how journalists construct the nature of themselves as a profession (Anderson, 2008a). The ways in which journalists resist conforming to newsroom policies are connected to how they construct the nature of themselves as a profession.

The three reasons that Breed (1999) puts forward to explain why the conformity of journalists in newsrooms is not automatic correspond with the concept of occupational professionalism (the more traditional form of professionalism, internal to the occupational group, emphasizing individual autonomy, ethical standards, and broad socialization) advanced by Evetts (2003; 2006). Although Breed (1999)'s three reasons for why conformity in newsrooms is not automatic are persuasive – the Zimbabwean scenario shows that certain pressures supersede the desire to uphold professional and ethical ideals. For instance, instead of adhering to ethical journalistic norms and invoking these norms to resist conforming to newsroom policies as submitted by Breed (1999), many journalists in Zimbabwe's mainstream media tend to "internalize...the values of their employers. They cooperate... rather than risk a fall out with the proprietor" (Mano, 2005, p.68).

Although Breed (1999) rightly notes that ethical taboos prevent publishers from openly commanding subordinates to follow laid down policy, it can be argued that the notion of what is considered 'ethical taboos' is not uniformly shared across contexts and continents. The Zimbabwean context, for instance, is ostensibly typified by newspaper owners who are regarded as "vindictive and ruthless" and consequently, Zimbabwean journalists remain "vulnerable to pressures exerted by their proprietors", Mano (2005, p.65). In terms of using social media sources within the print press, it is likely that the private intentions of the political journalists who harvest content online are limited by the constraints imposed by organizations.

According to Breed (1999), journalists' actions are bound within the policy set by the publisher. This point is aptly captured by Mano (2005, p.63) whose respondents revealed how:

The move from one newsroom to another was not without an effect on professional journalism and freedom.... Conformity to media policies was seen as inevitable and necessary.

In fact, Mano (2005, p.62)'s respondents who sought jobs across the media divide said they sometimes found work in newsrooms with media policies that conflicted with their own sense of professional norms, but the need to earn 'decent salaries' and get 'attractive benefits' made them conform. Principally "better remuneration was the main reason why Zimbabwean journalists switched newsrooms" Mano (2005, p.62). Respondents in Mano (2005)'s study admitted that they sometimes found work in newsrooms with media policies that conflicted with their own sense of professional norms. This is consistent with the assertion that, "journalists familiar with the organisation are able to consciously adapt and adjust to its values and goals to avoid open conflict and unpleasant consequences, but without internalizing and agreeing with them" (Breed, 1955 cited in Skovsgaard, 2014, p.348). In internalizing the values and goals of the organisation,

journalists' autonomy is curtailed as they conform to the political goals of the organisation.

Studies by Mabweazara (2011) and Mano (2005) on press freedom, newsmaking practices, proprietorship and professionalism in the Zimbabwean press have persuasively demonstrated that “journalists internalize the values, goals, and structures of the [media] organisation through a process of socialization” as “news organisations limit their direct control of work in favour of more covert control of the autonomy of journalists” (Skovsgaard, 2014, p.348). In his study, Mano says that respondents openly acknowledged conforming to both “subtle” and “direct” pressures exerted on their jobs by their immediate managers, who in turn took orders from the proprietors (2005, p.57). Furthermore, Mano (2005) reasons that having to contend with open and subtle pressures in both publicly and privately owned newsrooms, especially political and economic pressures, led to Zimbabwean journalists having to change jobs in order to reject and resist ‘unprofessional’ newsroom policies.

Given that “journalists at mainstream publications everywhere accommodate to the political culture of the regime in which they operate” (Schudson, 2019, p.150), it is conceivable that journalists adhere to newsroom policies that determine whether or not social media sources are used, and also which ones are selected. Investigating the influence of social media on political reporting presupposes that the incorporation of social media content might become a routinized aspect of mainstream media’s newsgathering practices in Zimbabwe. One of the research questions that this study will grapple with has to do with the factors that influence social media sourcing decisions. To address this question, it is essential to consider scholarship on sourcing.

### **3.1.2 Source selection practices and organizational control in Zimbabwe**

Mano (2005, p.56) contends that the socialization process that journalists undergo upon joining newsrooms is akin to “a thorough ideological repositioning... in the norms of the profession according to press proprietors’ policies and politics [added emphasis]”. This process of ideological repositioning in line with what press proprietors policies and politics dictate corresponds with Evetts (2003; 2006)’s concept of organizational professionalism, which emphasizes a *discourse of control* that is used by managers to define professionalism as compliance with employer goals and standards [added emphasis]. More importantly, this repositioning “constitutes an important part of the staff-cloning process in any newsroom” according to Louw (2001, p.163), and it involves “learning who news editors and editors consider to be ‘appropriate’ contacts...this will be learned by having contacts ‘passed-on’ and by encountering disapproval when “inappropriate” contacts are used”.

Mabweazara (2011, p.109) asserts that sourcing practices in Zimbabwean press are characterized by “the selective use of sources that only serve to consolidate the newsroom’s political interests”. Through a process of socialization, journalists come to know what the media owners want them to do and specifically, what sources to choose in order to advance the organization’s preferred narrative. Advancing preferred narratives leads to sourcing practices that exclude certain voices, for instance, Moyo (2007, p.82) notes how “opposition political parties have been systematically denied access” from public media as journalists selectively use sources in order to advance the political interests of their employer. In both the public and private media, journalists cannot just quote anyone they wish to because the processes of sourcing stories in the newsrooms involve “carefully selecting and cultivating new sources whose political orientation rubber stamp the newspapers’ editorial slants” (Mabweazara, 2011, p.108).

Remarking on the dearth of ethical practices in Zimbabwe, Chari (2009) notes that there is a tendency by the Zimbabwean mainstream and online media to

use unidentified sources even in stories that are not so controversial. Chari (2009) attributes these inadequate sourcing practices to pressure from deadlines, lazy journalism, pure fabrication and more relevant to this study – a lack of news sources. Broersma and Graham (2013) maintain that journalists need expert knowledge when they gather and verify news, and explain and contextualize events and developments – therefore failure to access sources, for whatever reason, compromises the quality of news. In some cases Zimbabwean journalists may fail to access news sources because political polarization in the country makes it difficult for journalists to get comments from hostile news sources, according to Chari (2009, p.71) who argues that:

Government officials and ruling Zanu (PF) politicians often refuse to be interviewed by private media, while government owned media journalists also have a hard time trying to get comment from opposition politicians who also view the state owned media as an adversary.

It is common for politicians or government officials to switch off their cell phones once they recognize that the caller from the other end of the line is from an ‘enemy side’ (Chari, 2009). Consequently, “faced with deadlines and with no other alternative, journalists are forced to speculate and in some cases simulate interviews” (Chari, 2009, p.71). The refusal by potential sources to grant interviews to journalists who work for organizations that they consider as hostile has also been raised by Mano (2005). According to Mano (2005, p.63) “a number of news sources in Zimbabwe restrict their interviews to publications of their liking and in most cases along political lines” with the exception of “openly accessible news sources” like Dr Lovemore Madhuku, a local constitutional reform activist.

Not only do potential news sources grant interviews selectively; they also tend to cut ties with journalists who change employers (Mano, 2005).

Essentially, potential news sources who have strong political views tend to be very selective in granting interviews such that changing jobs usually meant that scribes lost contact with some of their established news sources (Mano, 2005). The fact that when journalists change newsrooms, they may lose contact with established news sources as they restrict their interviews to publications of their liking shows how “deeply naturalized” the “divisions in the sourcing practices” in Zimbabwean press run (Mabweazara, 2011, p.109).

It has been argued that media institutions are important in political processes because they mobilize bias (Mazango, 2005) and a key aspect of mobilizing bias lies in selective sourcing practices because “the choice of contacts [is] fundamental to defining the shape and position of the... news-frame” (Louw, 2001, p.163). It has been established that newsroom policies do impose selective sourcing practices thus creating a rift in media coverage in Zimbabwe and journalists are “consciously and knowingly involved in this polarized newsmaking culture” (Mabweazara, 2011, p.105).

The fact that journalists are knowingly and consciously involved in Zimbabwe’s polarised newsmaking culture reinforces the view that journalists internalize their in-house policies and succumb to organisational controls by being selective in sourcing. Sources are a key ingredient in all forms of professional journalism and as a cornerstone in journalistic work; sources provide information, background and broader contexts that journalists draw upon in the construction of journalistic texts (Ekman and Widholm, 2015). Media sociologists argue that reporters are confronted by a plurality of sources of information located at different places at varying times, and requiring different means to access them (Mabweazara, 2015). In fact, McNair (1998) insists that a focus on sources is seen as the best way (or perhaps the only one) to connect the study of journalism to the larger society. From this perspective it is possible to connect this study into the social media sourcing practices of political reporters to the broader issue of

whether the political news agenda in mainstream media can be Internet-driven and the implications such a shift might have on the political status quo.

For the purposes of this study, a focus on sources is a means of establishing what motivates political reporters to use social media as news sources. Also, the present study seeks to determine the extent to which new communication technologies might have altered established source selection norms. On one hand, scholars suggest that journalistic routines and professional values endure regardless of technological stimulation (Singer, 2005) and conversely, others predict that new technology will drive changes in newsgathering routines (Williams and Carpini, 2000). The consensus point among scholars is the understanding that news production is a highly regulated and routine process shaped by organisational pressures as well as the wider social setting, which encourage the routinisation and standardisation of news journalism (Mabweazara, 2015).

Mabweazara (2011) argues that a close analysis of Zimbabwean press shows the entrenched influences of the political and economic environment, which manifest themselves in: editorial policies and proprietary demands, source cultivation, selection and deployment among others. Furthermore, the cultivation, selection and deployment of sources in the Zimbabwean press have a defining impact on the character of newsmaking practices and professionalism as sourcing routines are entrenched in the dynamics of the political context as journalists selectively refer only to those sources that consolidate their newsrooms' political positioning (Mabweazara, 2011). The inclination to carefully select sources whose political orientation rubber stamps the newspapers' editorial slants can have a bearing on how political reporters select sources on social media.

Moon and Hadley (2014) note that technology has been rarely identified as an independent force initiating changes in newsroom routines. Rather,

various features, such as individual differences among journalists, institutional characteristics, and pressure from market or ideology, interplay with technology in affecting newsroom routines (Moon and Hadley, 2014, p.291) including routines such as source selection. Although reporters rely more on the Internet for news gathering, fact checking, conducting research, contacting sources and obtaining story ideas (Pavlik, 2000); some studies have shown that journalists are cautious about using online sources due to issues of credibility and verification (Garrison, 2000).

This discussion has traced the offline source selection practices in Zimbabwe's mainstream media, noting that it is selectively done in accordance with organizational biases; that potential news sources also grant interviews selectively, preferring to appear only in papers whose editorial slants resonate with the news source's own political convictions. It is likely that these offline sourcing practices might inform whom reporters may select as sources online. What follows is a discussion on gatekeeping practices as insofar as they can be used as content control measures within newsrooms.

### **3.1.3 Gatekeeping as an institutionalized mindset of content control**

In the context of this study, gatekeeping is framed as a specific form of power that is wielded within newsrooms and that governs every facet of news production, including source selection. According to Lewis (2012, p.845), gatekeeping is "a mind-set of content control"; hence it involves exercising decision-making power regarding what "to include and exclude in the news media" (Bro and Wallberg, 2015, p.93). Gatekeeping theory has been analyzed from various perspectives but the bias of the present study is to focus on the power that gatekeepers exercise with regard to selecting political news sources and to assess "on what values the selections and rejections of gatekeepers are based" (Bro and Wallberg, 2015, p.93). According to Moon and Hadley (2014, p.291), "while the initial study defined

gatekeeping as an individual decision (White, 1950), now organizations themselves are regarded as gatekeepers (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996)". The notion that organizations themselves can be regarded as gatekeepers is useful to this study because Zimbabwean media organizations have editorial agendas that shape source selection practices by ensuring the exclusion or inclusion of certain views. Bro and Wallberg (2015, p.93) have noted that, the "capacity to select and reject content for publication has become a popular way of portraying the function of news reporters". In the present study, it is the capacity to select and reject sources that is foregrounded, with the focus being on those who wield the most power to make those decisions.

According to Bro and Wallberg (2015), when the concept of gatekeeping was originally introduced within journalism studies, it was employed to describe a process where a wire editor received telegrams from the wire services and from these telegrams the wire editor, known as Mr. Gates in David Manning White's (1950) seminal study, selected what to publish. More recent and modified definitions of gatekeeping have emerged because "telegraphy has been succeeded by new technologies, and they have inspired new practices and principles when it comes to producing, publishing and distributing news stories" (Bro and Wallberg, 2015, p.93). For instance, Shoemaker and Vos (2009, p.75) have submitted that gatekeeping refers to "the process by which countless occurrences and ideas are reduced to the few messages we are offered in our news media".

For Broersma, den Herder and Schohaus (2013, p.388), gatekeeping is a power that resides with journalists because "while sources decide what could be published, *journalists eventually determine what will be published and who will get a voice in the news* [added emphasis]". In the case of political reporting in Zimbabwe's mainstream media, it is the editors and sometimes the proprietors that wield the power to choose what will be published and who will get a voice. Whilst the concept of gatekeeping, as advanced by White (1950) focused on the individual and emphasized the lone

newspaper editor's role in choosing what to print, scholars like Breed (1955) extended the concept to account for how powerful publishers exert their influence in shaping the news (Lewis et al, 2010). Essentially, Breed found that "*the publisher set policy and the reporters followed it*" (Zelizer, 2004, p.53; added emphasis), and to that extent, publishers wielded the power to set parameters for institutional and editorial gatekeeping by way of newsroom policy.

The primacy of newsroom policy as a mechanism for gatekeeping has also been highlighted by Shoemaker et al (2009, p.73) who define gatekeeping as the process by which "reporters and editors select, write, edit, position, schedule, repeat and otherwise massage information to become news as *dictated by their respective newsroom policies* [added emphasis]". The newsroom policies set by publishers are designed to make sure that content that deviates from their set policies is excluded. One explanation as to why gatekeeping parameters set by publishers are adhered to can be drawn from Breed (1995)'s study which focused on factors that influence news reporters and editors. According to Bro and Wallberg, (2015, p.100), Breed who had worked as a news reporter himself, described a process of "newsroom socialization" that constrains reporters and makes them orient themselves toward the inside workings of the newsroom.

Newsroom policies entrench and institutionalize a collective mindset of content control such that gatekeeping goes beyond "how journalists select, report and display their work" (McElroy, 2013, p.757) and more broadly considers the "overall process through which the social reality transmitted by the news media is constructed" (Shoemaker et al., 2001, p.233). When gatekeeping is conceived as the overall process through which news is constructed "newsroom practices [become] less singular and more complex than Mr. Gates' habits and [are] influenced by other factors, including newsroom norms; ownership; competition; official and corporate sources; and public sentiment" (Shoemaker and Vos 2009; Shoemaker and Reese

1996; Reese and Ballinger 2001; Cassidy 2006, cited by McElroy, 2013, p.757).

Scholars have considered White (1950)'s study to be flawed in that it was "designed and depended upon a particular technology i.e the telegraph" (Bro and Wallberg, 2015, p.95). According to Bro and Wallberg (2015), criticism of White is that his theory suggests a simplistic function where gatekeepers are left with "decisions about what is in or out" (Reese and Ballinger 2001, p.647), as if gatekeeping is a single stage in isolation from other factors (Wanta, 2009) and "is a process heavily influenced by individuals" (Shoemaker and Vos 2009, p.33). Despite such scholarly misgivings, Shoemaker and Vos (2009) contend that since gatekeeping was first applied to the news setting (Snider, 1967; White, 1950), studying the role of journalists as information arbiters has been one of the most enduring lines of communication research. The present study will consider gatekeeping as the wielding of power by journalists, editors (and sometimes proprietors) at the source selection stage of the news production process, specifically the power to exclude certain voices in the construction of news.

Bro and Wallberg (2015, p.100) contend that, Mr Gates talked about news stories that were "slanted to conform to editorial politics" thus suggesting that gatekeeping for reporters is a guided process whereby newsroom policies set the parameters of what kind of content to include or exclude. The more established definition of gatekeeping is that it is a process of exercising "control [of] the gates through which content is released to their audience" (Bruns, 2005, p.11). The present study is however not focused on how Zimbabwe's mainstream media control the gates through which content is released but rather it seeks to understand control of the gates through which sources are excluded or included in the construction of political news.

Studies such as Johan Galtung and Marie Ruge (1965)'s have endeavored to explain what gatekeepers select and reject through the study of the criteria

they use—what White termed “standards of taste” (Bro and Wallberg, 2015, p.100). It can be argued that the study of criteria in the context of news organizations would entail studying the newsroom policies that set a criterion regarding what sources are selected or rejected. Such an argument would support the view that studying gatekeeping (from the perspective of how newsroom policies dictate what content should be included or rejected) concerns itself less with the effects of news reporting and more with understanding “the often complex interplay of factors, forces and influences that can affect the actions and attitudes of various gatekeepers in the news media” (Bro and Wallberg, 2015, p.100). Among the complex interplay of factors, forces and influences that can affect the actions and attitudes of various gatekeepers is the emergence of a new medium i.e the Internet that has offered researchers a fresh angle from which to interrogate the function of gatekeeping. This study’s primary concern is not with online gatekeeping but rather with institutional gatekeeping mechanisms that govern how print reporters and editors select or reject content, in the process of incorporating social media content into mainstream news stories.

The influence of social media on political reporting in Zimbabwe’s mainstream can be ascertained by establishing the following factors all linked to gatekeeping; i) the prevalence or frequency with which social media content is incorporated in print press, ii) the primacy or salience afforded to social media content when it is incorporated, and iii) the justifications given for using or rejecting social media content. To answer these questions, it is essential to understand the multiple contexts in which news gathering and news production occurs in Zimbabwe.

Zimbabwe’s mainstream media operates in contexts where “editorial and political constraints weigh down on the practice of professional journalism” (Frere, 2014 cited in Mabwezara, 2014, p.48). The editorial constraints that weigh down on the practice of professional journalism operate through newsroom policies that influence source selection. McNair notes that

proprietary controls are “exercised...through the appointment of like-minded personnel in key management positions who are delegated to carry out [the] boss’s will” (1998, p.107) and where mainstream media is concerned, the boss is the publisher who sets policy. The need to gate-keep and exercise content control is evident in how online editors of Zimbabwe’s two leading mainstream media organisations – Zimpapers and Alpha Media Holdings – by their own admission – ensured that they “keep a close eye on political content likely to trigger hostile responses from various centres of power” (Mabweazara, 2014, p.57).

Away from the online platforms, it is reasonable to assume that the same fear of triggering hostile responses from various centres of power compels editors to maintain vigilance in exercising content control by deciding what content to include or reject in Zimbabwe’s print press. Skovsgaard (2014, p.347) argues that the importance of the editor derives from the fact that his/her role is to more or less openly impose “the will of the organisation” in compliance with the dictates of the newsroom policy set by the publishers. It is necessary to grapple with questions on the decision-making powers within newsrooms as these can shed light on how, why, when and where social media content of a political nature makes it into Zimbabwe’s print press.

What follows is a social constructivist-informed discussion on the appropriation of social media in the newsroom that will, hopefully, aid in understanding the phenomenon in Zimbabwe’s context.

### **3.1.4 Social media sourcing in the newsroom: A constructivist perspective**

To understand recent changes in the ways journalists work, Dickinson et al (2013), suggest that research must begin with reference to the contexts. This recommendation corresponds with social constructivist approaches that take into account localised social and cultural realities that shape and constrain

the deployment and appropriation of technologies in specific contexts (Lievrouw, 2002). In the Zimbabwean context, for instance, the sourcing practices of the print press that determine who is “included or excluded as news actors in the media” (Deuze 2005, p.453) are “heavily shaped and constrained by the newsrooms’ political inclinations” (Mabweazara, 2011, p.108). Assuming that journalists default to newsroom policies and internalized gatekeeping that “can be deployed to sustain operational closure, keeping outside forces at bay” (Deuze 2005, p.447) – it can be argued that the incorporation of social media content in print press is “far from technologically determined” (Cottle, 1999, p.23).

Instead of being technology-led, these changes remain “deeply embedded within, and powerfully shaped by corporate contexts” (Cottle, 1999, p.23). In the case of Zimbabwean press, the incorporation of social media content is therefore likely shaped by “sourcing routines [that] are linked to the journalist’s internalisation of their editorial policies and proprietary expectations” (Mabweazara, 2011, p.109).

Another indication that journalistic practices such as the incorporation of social media content in print press is not technology-led is the fact that even when harvesting content online; journalists generally fall back on professional defenses by clinging to enduring values, taking tentative steps to change, and then – even when opening the gates to participation – they tend to co-opt participatory practices to suit traditional routines and ideals (Williams et al, 2011). Although this is a persuasive view, there is nothing to suggest that this is true of all journalists or that it is indeed the case in all contexts hence this study will consider how far this view is consistent with how Zimbabwean political reporters harvest and incorporate social media content. Singer et al (2011) note that news professionals keep playing a pivotal role in the news production process and its different stages of information gathering, selection, verification, presentation and dissemination of the news, so it is possible that these same stages are adhered to in the incorporation of social

media content. Bearing this in mind, it can be argued that the incorporation of social media content in mainstream media takes place within a context of adherence to “proprietary demands codified through formal and informal editorial policies” (Mabweazara, 2011, p.104) – and “conforming to long-established and quite stable professional standards and routines” (Paulussen and Harder, 2014, p.543).

Whilst the influence of social media on mainstream media reportage in general, and on political reporting in particular, is unknown – scholars such as Moyo (2007, p.91) have stated, with regards the rise of alternative media, that the news websites on Zimbabwe “often...set the agenda for the mainstream media in Zimbabwe... by coming first with the stories partly because of the speed and instantaneous publishing enabled by new communications technologies”. In short, Moyo (2007) contends that not only have news websites on Zimbabwe had an impact on mainstream media; they have shown a demonstrable power to set the news agenda for mainstream media.

One might argue that Moyo (2007)’s assertion is indicative of a seemingly instrumentalist assumption that new communication technologies by virtue of what they are have the power to initiate changes (Feenberg, 1991). According to Dahlberg, for techno-determinist commentators the properties of a particular technology predetermine social outcomes hence following Moyo (2007)’s argument, the properties of alternative media, namely speedy and instantaneous publishing, predetermine or set mainstream media’s news agenda. Moyo (2007)’s argument does not account for the agency of mainstream media’s editorial teams who have the capacity to ignore alternative media narratives and set their own news agenda. Finnegan (1975, p.108 cited in Chandler, 2014, n.p) insists that “the medium in itself cannot give rise to social consequences - it must be used”. Following this logic one could argue that alternative media as a medium cannot give rise to outcomes such as setting a news agenda for mainstream media unless it is used (or

rather taken into account) by mainstream news editors. Scholars like Woolgar (1996) maintain that the nature and direction of technology deployment is intimately tied to social factors; or in other words; technology is socially embedded so “institutional change never occurs simply by implementing new technologies” (Friedland and Alford, 1991 cited in Revers, 2014, p.809).

According to Fairclough (1995, p.204) the products that the mainstream media sell, are “the outcomes of specific professional practices and techniques” and to discount these professional practices and techniques by categorically ascribing to news websites the power to set agendas for mainstream media would be overly deterministic. However, Moyo (2007)’s assertion that news websites often set the agenda for mainstream media might be a tenable assertion in the context of setting a ‘forced agenda’. A ‘forced agenda’ as demonstrated in Akinfemisoye (2013, p.17)’s Nigeria-focused study derives from instances where: “‘alternative’ journalism can negotiate spaces within the mainstream media by providing a ‘forced agenda’ for them [mainstream media] to run with”. However, despite the existence of a ‘forced agenda’, journalists tend to respond by reasserting control – normalizing alternative media formats to meet existing needs (Singer, 2005).

Moyo (2007, p.91) giving an example of the power of alternative media and its impact on mainstream media wrote:

The government controlled newspaper, *The Herald*, for example, was recently compelled to respond to a report on NewZimbabwe.com that three American and British universities were considering revoking honorary degrees conferred on President Mugabe over human rights violations in Zimbabwe.

The above example fits in with the idea that alternative media can provide a ‘forced agenda’ for mainstream media to run with but the decision on how or

whether to run with the 'forced agenda' is informed by contextual factors. On the basis of the above example, it is possible to see how social media users can generate provocative content that allows users to negotiate spaces within mainstream media and ultimately provide a 'forced agenda' for mainstream media to run with. A case in point would be the anonymous Baba Jukwa character whose Facebook page forced mainstream media to incorporate his/her posts in news stories due to the immense public interest generated. But even as journalists incorporate new media (such as Facebook posts) and related new practices (such as dialogue with social media users), the gravitational pull is toward normalization and the transfer of professional and organizational norms to digital media rather than rethink why those established conventions exist in the first place (Hermida, 2012). This 'gravitational pull' toward normalization and the transfer of professional and organizational norms to digital media demonstrate, as noted by Chandler (2014), that the mere existence of a technology does not inevitably lead to its use. The appropriation of social media within newsrooms, and by extension the influence of social media on political reporting, cannot be taken as given or wholly inevitable.

Despite the fact that alternative media – and possibly social media – can provide a forced agenda for mainstream media to run with, Mutsvairo (2013a) maintains that there is still a long way to go before the platforms can have a direct influence on the Zimbabwean political climate. If one considers new communication technologies, including alternative media, to be 'actants' or social and cultural forms instead of 'autonomous forces' acting on mainstream media for good or ill (to paraphrase Lievrouw, 2002) – it is easy to challenge the efficacy of a 'forced agenda'. This is because the existence of a forced agenda does not guarantee that mainstream media will run with it, or that even if mainstream media runs with it, they won't subvert the message to make sure it conforms to the organisation's preferred news framing and agenda.

A case in point is how Wardle and Williams (2010), in their study of the BBC Hub, found that the existence of user generated content did not necessarily mean it would be incorporated into the news agenda as whatever content was supplied by the audience was treated only as potential material for news by the BBC Hub. Likewise the existence of a forced agenda will not necessarily translate into the pursuit of that agenda on the part of mainstream media. These findings buttress the point that “technologies must be viewed in relation to the multidimensional factors that shape and constrain the use of technologies” (Mabweazara, 2015, p.109) – factors such as the number of actors that are involved simultaneously in the production of news (Dickinson et al, 2013).

Advancing the Social Shaping of Technology (SST) concept, Williams and Edge (1996, p.875) maintain that, “social setting shapes technologies as much as vice versa” hence “it is therefore clearly unhelpful to treat technologies and their social contexts as separate phenomena”. Moreover, SST stresses the negotiability of technology – particularly “the scope for particular groups and forces to shape technologies to their ends and the possibility of different kinds of ‘technological’ and ‘social’ outcomes” (Williams and Edge, 1996, p.867). Extending the concept of ‘negotiability of technology’ one can contend, following after Dahlberg (2004) that media technologies are socially shaped as well as shaping. This study seeks to ascertain the extent to which social media has shaped or influenced political reporting and it does so by situating itself within the context of mainstream media’s newsrooms being cognizant of the social embeddedness of technology (Dahlberg, 2004).

Dahlberg (2004) argues that an emphasis on the social impact of technology must be part of any communications research however such *research must avoid the tendency to reify media technology* as an autonomous causal agent [added emphasis], proceeding as if it acted on social life from above with its own independent logic and momentum. Cynthia Cockburn concurs with this

viewpoint stressing that “it is taken as given that technology is not a prime mover, that it is socially shaped” (2003, p.32). In conformance with social constructivist perspectives, this study begins from the premise of context and it does so in accordance with Mackenzie (1999)’s stance of rejecting the assumption that technological change is an independent factor, impacting on society from outside of society, so to speak. In this instance, the study interrogates the assumption that social media, as an aspect of technological change, is an independent factor, impacting on newsrooms from outside newsrooms. This study will consider how social media is incorporated within the specific context and set parameters of newsroom policies especially where political reporting is concerned.

It can be argued that the appropriation of social media in Zimbabwe’s print newsrooms occurs within specific contexts of political interference and proprietorial pressures that have significantly constrained newsgathering and sourcing practices as well as limited the professional autonomy of print media journalists and editors. The central hypothesis of this study, informed by the aforementioned context, is that the incorporation of social media content in Zimbabwe’s print press is subordinate to newsroom policy thus existing newsroom conditions are an important precondition to how new technologies, such as social media, are adopted. This hypothesis borrows from Chandler (2014)’s view that socio-cultural determinists present technologies and media as entirely subordinate to their development and use in particular socio-political, historical and culturally-specific contexts.

Although the context in which technologies are adopted and deployed is singularly important from a social constructivist stance, it is vital to consider “a theory of complexity” that rejects a deterministic “one-to-one correspondence between the causal agent and its effects” as proposed by Menger and Aronowitz (1996, p.8). This theory of complexity viewpoint echoes Dahlberg (2004)’s sentiments on the need for a non-reductionist analysis that is sensitive to the complex interplay between multiple elements.

A multi--determinations or mutual constitution analysis, according to Dahlberg (2004) is one that recognizes how each so--called determining factor is itself embedded within and constituted by a system of inter-linked constitutive processes.

The idea of interlinked-constitutive processes is reminiscent of the 'actor network theory' (ANT) which views technology as an 'actant' according to Dickinson et al (2013) and is a sociological approach that emerged from science and technology studies advanced mainly by scholars Latour (1992; 2005) as well as Michel Callon (1991) and John Law (1987) among others. The actor network theory, when applied to the study of news production, holds that technology is itself an actor in a network that includes journalists, their sources, technicians of various sorts, the media organizations that employ them, as well as audiences and users (Hemmingway, 2008). Considering Castells (2011)'s assertion that the impact of technology can only be understood in complex interaction within a system comprising all elements, an evaluation of the Actor Network Theory which "connects to the research traditions of social constructivism as it focuses on how daily practice shapes the configuration of society" (Domingo and Wiard, 2016, p.397) seems prudent.

### **3.2 ANT: Viewing technology as an 'actor' not the 'absolute determinant'**

According to Cressman (2009, p.1), the actor-Network Theory (ANT), which derives from Science and Technology Studies (STS), is "notoriously difficult to summarize, define or explain" because "one person's use, or reading, of ANT may differ considerably from others". Nevertheless, Domingo and Wiard (2016, p.397) maintain that ANT has contributed to three intertwined Journalism Studies research areas namely:

...(1) the analysis of technological innovation in the newsroom by acknowledging the agency of technical artifacts in their interactions

with journalistic work processes, (2) the understanding of the dynamics of the news coverage of controversies and how news narratives are co-constructed through the interactions of a plurality of actors, (3) the explanation of the evolution of journalism as a contingent but rather stable institution, shaped by power struggles over its role in society that are reproduced in everyday news practices by professional journalists, their sources and their publics.

In the context of this study, ANT could be useful in ensuring a non--reductionist analysis of the influence of social media on political reporting in Zimbabwe's mainstream media by "acknowledging the agency of technical artifacts in their interactions with journalistic work processes" in technological innovation progressions within newsrooms (Domingo and Wiard, 2016, p.397). When applied to the study of news production, the actor-network theory holds that technology is itself an actor in a network that includes journalists, their sources, technicians of various sorts, the media organizations that employ them, as well as audiences and users (Hemmingway, 2008). In borrowing the actor-network perspective, journalism scholars were looking for new frameworks to interpret the processes of adoption of digital technologies in journalism.

One particularly useful feature of the actor-network approach is that "it gives primacy neither to people nor to technology" Plesner (2009, p.612) hence researchers do not have to presuppose what is going to happen, everything is possible (Domingo and Wiard, 2016). Moreover because the actor-network theory is "a theory that treats the realm of technologies as bound to the human world in ways other than that of instruments, tools or social weapons" (Prior, 2008, p.304) it allows for analysis that goes beyond an instrumentalist view of media technology. It is important to depart from viewing media technologies as instruments or tools as this "idea of media technology as a neutral tool tends to assume a technical fix logic, which sees the development and use of machines of various kinds as the answer to social

and political problems” (Street, 1992, p.158). According to Dahlberg (2004) research tends to either emphasize technological uses (instrumentalism), the effects of the technological artifact (techno-determinism), or the social context (social determinism). The actor-network theory is an approach that could, to paraphrase Dahlberg (2004), adequately account for how media technologies involve multiple interests, unintended consequences, institutional and technological (material) rigidity, and possibilities for alternative uses. However, ANT’s principle of generalized symmetry is a major drawback.

Rudy and Gareau (2005) note that ANT takes an interest in symmetrical contributions of humans and non-humans to technoscientific articulations, and for those purposes, it chooses to treat human agency in a non-judgmental way and effectively equate it to non-human agency hence ANT assumes a homogeneity between human and natural agency that is problematic. For a study that postulates that proprietorial power and political interference within newsrooms is a crucial factor in social media sourcing by print press, a theory that is based on symmetrical contributions and impartiality is somewhat limiting. However the idea that “ANT takes the strong stance that humans, natures, and technologies ought to be treated—at least initially—as equal participants, which are all enrolled in a network” Rudy and Gareau (2005, p.3) means that a preliminary analysis can be undertaken using ANT as an analytical tool and the insights gleaned thereafter can be interrogated further. According to Dahlberg (2004) STS, which in general strongly emphasizes mutual constitution, does provide a useful starting point for non--reductionist research, particularly when it is sensitive to the broader social systems involved.

Since “emphasis on interactions is one of the key characteristics of actor-network theory” (Domingo and Wiard, 2016, p.398), it can serve as a useful starting – but certainly not a final – point for this study as it involves a sensitivity to the broader social systems involved. Owing to its emphasis on

interactions, scholars like Anderson (2011) have suggested that actor-network theory (ANT) can be used to study the dynamic production of news by focusing attention on the entire ensemble of technological devices, human actors, documents and not merely the newsroom alone. This attention to the diversity, or 'heterogeneity' (Braun 2011), of the actors and resources in play ultimately captures dynamics that might elude one using a traditional media sociology framework. Since all these actors are part of a production process and all exert their influence upon it, Dickinson et al, contend that when "viewed as one actant in a network, technology cannot, any more than can journalists or any other actants, have determinant effects on the news production process" (2013, p.5).

From an actor-network perspective, everything can be considered an actor-network, "reducible neither to an actor alone nor to a network...an actor-network is simultaneously an actor whose activity is networking heterogeneous elements and a network that is able to redefine and transform what it is made of" (Callon 1987, p.93). The hyphen between actor and network points to an important principle of ANT according to Domingo and Wiard (2016) because any actor in a network may eventually be analyzed as a network itself. This aspect makes ANT a useful analytical lens to study the influence of social media on political reporting in Zimbabwe's mainstream media because each contributory factor can be analyzed as an actor within a network taking into account Dahlberg (2004)'s observation that over-emphasizing a particular determination can lead to narrow or distorted understandings.

Dahlberg (2004) argues that despite the differences of approach, where Internet research is concerned limitations arise from two common and overlapping problems: separating technology from its social context, and narrowly focusing upon a single aspect of determination. Adopting actor-network theory as an analytical lens can help overcome what Dahlberg (2004) regards as the problem of singular causation arguments wherein one factor

can become a fixed variable in a linear relationship with outcomes. Cressman (2009, p.10) argues that “ANT provides a research trajectory that can reveal complexities and contingencies that are too often overlooked in accounts of technology” whilst Cresswell et al (2010) point out that ANT must be used pragmatically with an appreciation of its shortcomings. What follows is brief overview of the shortcomings of ANT.

### **3.2.1 ANT as methodology rather than theory**

Perceiving actor-network theory as a methodology rather than theory has been suggested by scholars such as Sayes (2014) who argues that an interpretation of ANT that places an appropriate emphasis on the primacy of methodology goes a significant way to minimizing or deflecting some of the most important criticisms that have been made of the position over the past three decades. Sayes (2014, p.136) insists on the importance of ‘methodological bracing’, and by methodological bracing he refers to “assumptions, ideas, or stipulative claims [that] are incorporated into analysis; methodology can be distinguished from social theory, insofar as the latter is typically understood as strict, general, and substantive claims”. In this regard, actor-network theory can be conceived as a methodological lens by which assumptions, ideas or stipulative claims are incorporated into analysis. Conceived as methodology, ANT “provides the framework to analyze the increasingly complex and intertwined landscape of the production, circulation and usage of information without imposing theoretical models that assign roles to the different actors” (Domingo and Wiard, 2016, p.401).

The important criticisms that Sayes (2014) suggests would be minimized by perceiving ANT as more methodology than theory include its contentious assertions that nonhumans have agency. According to Cresswell et al (2010) ANT’s main feature, is its focus on inanimate entities and their effect on social processes, wherein an actor is thus defined as the source of an action

regardless of its status as a human or non-human. According to Domingo and Wiard (2016, p.406), Bruno Latour has often regretted that he and his colleagues decided to name their proposal actor-network theory, as it is too ambiguous and apt to be misinterpreted (1999; 2005). Rather than perceiving ANT as a theory – a model to explain the world – ANT is “a very crude method to learn from the actors without imposing on them an a priori definition” (Latour, 1999, p.20). In the context of this study, conceiving of ANT as a method of interrogating how social media has impacted on mainstream media’s political reportage would be informed by the idea that “technology should be treated analytically as an actant tightly integrated in networks with other actants, without being assigned particular forces or consequences” (Plesner 2009, p.604). The aim of adopting ANT as a methodological lens in this study is to refrain both from essentializing the ‘effects’ (Plesner, 2009) of social media and from forgetting to include them in the analyses of journalistic work practices related to political reportage.

Plesner (2009) argues that as a methodological lens, ANT can provide an empirical, symmetrical account of how new communication technologies (such as social media) are part of actor-networks alongside other types of actors. By not restricting agency to humans only, ANT “gives primacy neither to people nor to technology” but rather “tries to create an analytical sensibility towards their interwoven-ness, seeking to avoid ‘the twin pitfalls of sociologism and technologism’” according to (Plesner 2009, p.612).

The idea of ascribing agency to nonhumans according to ANT critics such as Schaffer (1991, p.182) is to commit “the heresy of hylozoism, an attribution of purpose, will and life to inanimate matter, and of human interests to the nonhuman”. Critics such as Bloor (1999, p.91) argue that although nonhumans do exercise a limited ‘causal agency’ they “do not possess the level of agency imputed by ANT”. According to Sayes (2014), criticism of the conception of nonhumans that we find in ANT has tended to read methodological claims as though they are propositions of the type

propounded by traditional social theory. As far as Sayes (2014, p.144) is concerned, ANT's position on nonhumans is that they do not have agency by themselves, *if only because they are never by themselves* (original emphasis) because the very notion of an actor–network assumes the assembling together of a network of actors of variable ontologies, of variable times, and of variable spaces. Any actor – which, of course, includes nonhuman actors – is seen as necessarily a part of a more or less structured network (Sayes, 2014).

This study will not endeavor to exhaustively unpack the critiques and debates around ANT as a theory but will leverage on its usefulness as an analytical framework by selectively applying tenets of ANT that are pertinent to tracing the associations that lead to social media incorporation in Zimbabwe's mainstream media's political reportage. According to Cresswell et al (2009) purist applications of ANT remain uncommon and even when used, they tend to be the subject of considerable debate so whilst a case for such 'authentic' ANT studies (i.e. those that adhere to the strict and original principles of ANT without modification) continues to be made, such a purist approach is not suited to conduct the present research. A purist application of the ANT theory will not be undertaken in this study because ANT is characterized by an exclusive emphasis on case studies and empirical observation, leading to situations where researchers simply report what they see and intangible elements like values and norms are not recognized (Radder, 1992). Therefore because intangible elements like values and norms are not recognized – what the social is, or how it is conceived – become impoverished when we understand the tools of social research to consist of surveys, interviews, opinion polls, participant observation, statistical analyses, and so on (Callon, 1987).

Cresswell et al (2010, p.10), argue that the difficulty in using ANT on its own primarily lies in its methodological rules whose "toolbox does little to inspire an understanding of the social that accounts for human experience outside

of pre-established categories or models”. The result of the quantitative leveling that results from using ANT exclusively is an impoverished understanding of the sociotechnical due in part to a conceptual and methodological limitation of what the social, and social research, can potentially consist of (Cresswell et al, 2010). Whilst Cresswell et al (2010)’s are concerned that using ANT exclusively can lead to an impoverished understanding of the sociotechnical, Sayes (2014) stresses that *the conception of nonhumans that we find in ANT seems to be one that provides a useful starting point* (added emphasis) for providing a proper rendition of the complexity of the associations we form with others and with nonhumans.

The conception of nonhumans found in ANT is a useful starting point for this study because “if we were to proceed with the belief that non-humans never acted, or never added anything that was sociologically relevant, one aspect of analysis would automatically be foreclosed” (Sayes, 2014, p.145). However, this conception of nonhumans is just a starting point, and as already stated, this study will not entail a purist application of ANT theory, because “ANT does not easily lend itself to dialectical sociotechnical interpretations” (Cresswell et al, 2010, p.10).

Despite its limitations, an Actor-Network Theory-based approach is conceptually useful in helping to appreciate the complexity of reality (including the complexity of organisations) and the active role of technology in this context, according to Cresswell et al (2010). In the context of newsrooms, an ANT-informed study would look at how a new technology is brought into the network by some actors, carrying proposed definitions (how the technology is to be used) and new configurations of the network with it (Schmitz and Domingo, 2010). Thus ANT can be viewed as a framework that furnishes us with the tools to better attend to the minute displacements, translations, practices, riots, processes, protests, arguments, expeditions, struggles, and swap-meets – no matter what the actors involved may look like (Sayes, 2014). By acknowledging that technical artifacts are also actants,

members of an actor-network, which have embedded definitions and strategies that have to be taken into account to understand the evolution and structure of the network, ANT departs from conventional sociological approaches (Schmitz and Domingo, 2010).

The ANT perspective, according to Sayes (2014), asks that we remain open to the possibility that nonhumans add something that is of sociological relevance to a chain of events: that something happens, that this something is added by a nonhuman, and that this addition falls under the general rubric of action and agency hence it is the action itself that is the important thing to trace. In ANT action is always 'interaction' (Sayes, 2014, p.140) – which is to say that it is shared with variable actors, of variable ontologies, of variable times, of variable spaces, and of variable durability (Latour, 1996b: 239). Plesner (2009, p.612) equally notes the openness of the ANT approach, which “gives primacy neither to people nor to technology”. Plesner (2009) underlines the virtues of this approach: “this would seem to make [ANT] a particularly suitable approach to focusing on the role of technology in newswork” because ANT can effectively explain the processes of ‘naturalization’ of change, that is, how innovations end up being assumed as the natural way things are to be done, (Schmitz and Domingo, 2010, p.1160). One of the biggest strengths of ANT is its radical anti-determinism according to Schmitz and Domingo (2010) and it is this anti-determinism that makes it a useful methodological tool to gather preliminary data on whether and how social media influences political reporting in Zimbabwe’s mainstream media.

### **3.3 Conclusion**

According to Domingo et al (2014), ANT has, so far, been mainly applied in journalism studies to study the adoption of digitisation in newsrooms and how it interplays with journalistic professional identities and practices (Hemmingway 2008; Micoć, Masip, and Domingo 2013; Plesner 2009; Schmitz and Domingo 2010; Spyridou et al. 2013). Domingo et al (2014, p.3)

argue that these studies “demonstrate how change is a process of constant negotiation between the journalists, the tools they use and other members of news organisations in charge of strategic decisions (the marketing department, the IT department), through everyday interactions and practices.” From Van Loon (2011)’s point of view, ANT’s most important contribution is not the rediscovery of technology, but rather its methodology that allows the thorough description of the processes in which the social settings are shaped. In the context of this study, ANT’s most important methodological contribution is to ensure that “beyond specific actors involved in [social media sourcing] processes in the newsroom other contextual actors [do not get] neglected” (paraphrasing Schmitz and Domingo, 2010, p.1164).

Schmitz and Domingo (2010, p.1169) have argued that from an epistemological point of view ANT requires a commitment of the researcher to social constructivism and the acknowledgment of individual action as the basis for social structures as ‘the best antidote to technological determinism’ because “these principles regard change as the normal status of organizations, rather than as a revolutionary moment”. In this study semi-structured interviews were used to collect data related to individual actions of the specific actors involved in approving social media sourced stories (i.e editors) and those who chose to use social media sources (i.e journalists). In this manner the social media sourcing practices of the four daily newspapers are traced from a constructivist perspective and understood as part of newsgathering processes that are “embedded in the everyday practices” of the newsroom (Schmitz and Domingo, 2010, p.1169). Since the network of actors with decision-making power and influence necessarily goes beyond the newsroom (Schmitz and Domingo, 2010) ANT is useful to integrate “macro-structural factors into the analysis without many complications, by tracing the links between the actors within an organization and external actors” (Mico’ et al., 2013, p.124). The integrative approach that ANT allows connects well with the mixed methods used in conducting this study.

## CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

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### 4.1 Introduction

According to Bulsara (2015), a mixed method or multi-methodology approach combines qualitative and quantitative research to provide a better understanding of a research problem or issue than either research approach alone. In line with this perspective and in the interests of achieving the research's objective – this study deployed a mixed methods approach to avoid a deterministic or over-simplified exploration of how social media might or has had an influence on political reporting in Zimbabwe's mainstream media. Although mixed methods can be labour intensive as they involve multiple stages of data collection, they can provide greater breadth of perspectives around a given issue whilst combining approaches helps overcome deficiencies in one method (Creswell et al, 2003).

Mixed methods also involve triangulation whereby variation in data collection leads to greater validity, whilst answering the research question from a number of perspectives and also ensuring that there are no 'gaps' to the information or data collected (Bulsara, 2015). For this study, two sequential stages of data collection were carried out in order to trace the social media sourcing practices of the political news beats of four daily newspapers focusing on a 30-month period, from January 2015 to June 2017.

This study seeks to address the following five research questions through the use of mixed methods to ensure there are no 'gaps' to the information or data collected:

**RQ1:** How prevalent is *social media sourcing* in Zimbabwe's mainstream media political reportage?

**RQ2:** What determines *source selection practices* for Zimbabwe's mainstream media political reportage in relation to social media?

**RQ3:** What is the extent of *institutional gatekeeping* regarding social media sourcing within Zimbabwe's mainstream media political reportage?

**RQ4:** Can social media drive the *political news agenda* in Zimbabwe's mainstream media?

**RQ5:** Can social media '*democratise*' *political news sourcing* in Zimbabwe's mainstream media?

The above research questions can be investigated using a variety of approaches however given the exploratory nature of this study; methodological triangulation informed by ANT (which was discussed in detail in the previous chapter) will be adopted.

This chapter proceeds by discussing how my insider status influenced how I approached the research design and methodology. I then outline the research activities that I undertook sequentially, in phase one and phase two of the study. The chapter concludes with a discussion on the research challenges encountered.

#### **4.1.1 Reflections on insider research**

According to Greene (2014) insider research is research that is conducted within a social group, organization or culture of which the researcher is also a member. The researcher would hold prior knowledge and possess understandings of the group they wish to study and hence must be able to mitigate any potential bias (Greene, 2014). As disclosed in chapter 1, the researcher was occupationally a member of the mainstream media that this

study investigates; specifically I was employed by the Zimbabwe Newspapers Group (1980). When I commenced this study in 2015, I held the position of Group Social Media Editor before being promoted to Head of Digital Services, a position I held until the end of 2016.

In terms of deciding on the methodological approach, one of the concerns that weighed heavily on my mind was how to ensure the trustworthiness of the data that I intended to gather; and ensure that it was as accurate as possible. As a first step, I knew that there were social media sourced political stories but I had no idea how many there were. I also knew that there were debates regarding the democratising potential of the Internet and I wondered if the fact that social media content was being incorporated into political stories meant that political reporting in Zimbabwe's mainstream media might become more diverse, more democratised. To investigate this, I opted for a mixed method approach that would enable me to answer the research question from a number of perspectives and also blunt any potential for bias on my part by using ANT for methodological triangulation (detailed in 4.1.2).

My insider status afforded me several advantages, which Greene (2014) has highlighted. Firstly, I had the advantage of pre-existing knowledge of the context of the research (Greene, 2014) so I did not have to worry about orienting myself with the research environment and/or participants. I was also able to “project a more truthful, authentic understanding of the culture under study” (Merriam, Johnson-Bailey, Lee, Kee, Ntseane, & Muhamad, 2001:411) especially during the semi-structured interviews where I had a good rapport with the research participants who viewed me as one of their own. With regard to studying *The Herald* and *The Chronicle*'s social media sourcing practices, I had the advantage of being able to “understand the cognitive, emotional, and/or psychological precepts of participants as well as possess[ing] a more profound knowledge of the historical and practical happenings of the field” (Chavez, 2008, p.481). Having been employed by Zimpapers for close to a decade and having held positions of responsibility

at various levels I had knowledge of the historical and practical happenings of the political news reportage.

Another advantage of my insider status was my familiarity with the group and social setting, particularly at Zimpapers newsrooms, as I knew how to approach individuals. Thus my former Zimpapers colleagues were willing to accommodate me, and they seemed to welcome the opportunity to discuss issues with someone who understands (Greene, 2014). Related to the ease of interaction that I had, I also enjoyed access as I had contacts. This proved very helpful in securing the participation of editors and news editors who run the newsrooms, and were knowledgeable expert informants. Of the 10 individuals that I interviewed for this study, only two were not known to me but they knew of me just as I knew of them.

Insider research comes with several disadvantages, according to Greene (2014). Firstly, critics of insider research argue that member knowledge is the result of “subjective involvement – a deterrent to objective perception and analysis” (Aguiler, 1981, p.15 cited in Greene, 2014, p.4). According to Greene (2014, p.4),

It is argued that the perception of the insider researcher is narrowed, as too much is familiar; research at home limits the analysis of social and cultural structures and patterns (Aguiler, 1981); and the researcher may become normalized to an extent that threatens to impede analysis.

My lack of personal experience with regard to political reporting in mainstream media, helped to mitigate my familiarity because I was genuinely learning things I didn't already know since I had never been a political reporter. This lack of knowledge on my part also empowered the participants to voice their opinions authoritatively as they knew far more about the subject than I did.

Insider research is frequently accused of being inherently biased, as the researcher is considered to be too close to the culture under study to raise provocative questions (Merriam et al., 2001). For my part, being close to the culture under study is what motivated me to raise provocative questions and to undertake this research in a bid to resolve those questions. I admit to having been personally invested in understanding how or if social media might democratise sourcing practices and whether it was possible to bridge the polarized divide in Zimbabwe's mainstream media. To ensure that my being invested did not compromise my ability to engage critically with the data, I chose content analysis as a methodological approach because "content analyses focus on the finished news product, and only take into account those source actors that have passed the gates of journalistic source selection" (Johnson, Paulussen and Van Aelst, 2018, p.871). Using finished news product as my data meant that my analysis would have to be informed by what the empirical data showed and not what I had assumed was the case.

#### **4.1.2 Using ANT for methodological triangulation**

According to Cohen and Manion (1986, p.254), triangulation can be defined as "an attempt to map out or explain more fully the richness and complexity of human behavior by studying it from more than one standpoint". Turner and Turner (2009) argue that triangulation is the means by which an alternate perspective is used to validate, challenge or extend existing findings and it is used when the field of study is difficult, demanding or contentious. The difficulty or complexity in this study lay in that it has no specific precedence in the Zimbabwean context and is therefore somewhat exploratory.

Denizen (1978), identifies four forms of triangulation namely: data triangulation, investigator triangulation, theory triangulation and methodological triangulation. Data triangulation involves the use of

heterogeneous data sources for example qualitative and quantitative, whilst investigator triangulation involves the use of multiple researchers in an empirical study, whereas theory triangulation refers to the use of more than one theoretical framework in the interpretation of the data and lastly, methodological triangulation involves using more than one method to gather data (Turner and Turner, 2009).

Methods triangulation can be a means of achieving “a more detailed and balanced picture of the situation” (Altrichter et al, 1996, p.117 cited in Turner and Turner, 2009, p.1) or phenomenon one is studying. This is because methods triangulation will elucidate complementary aspects of the same phenomenon and often the points where these data diverge are of great interest to the qualitative researcher and provide the most insights (Patton, 1999). Using an ANT-informed analysis as a starting point will help to ensure a non-reductionist analysis that is sensitive to the complex interplay between multiple elements (Dahlberg, 2004). ANT’s symmetrical analysis is ideal for methodological triangulation because it is an analysis that focuses on all the various kinds of (human and non-human) actors that make a difference in the production of media texts (Plesner, 2009), hence it served as *a starting point* [own emphasis] in assessing the four daily newspapers under this study.

#### **4.2 Research phase 1: Conducting online archival search**

To address the first research question regarding the prevalence of social media sourcing in political reporting within Zimbabwe’s mainstream media, an online data collection exercise which involved searching digital newspaper archives (i.e websites) to gather political news articles that used social media as a source. The decision to collect news articles via the online platforms of these four newspapers rather than via physical copies from physical archives was motivated by ‘the practical benefits’ that other researchers have discovered which include “improvements in speed, access, volume and convenience” (Nicholson, 2013, p.61) especially as the researcher was

domiciled in a different country. Gathering political news articles from the websites of the four newspapers offered ease of access, bypassed the red tape in terms of accessing physical archives, and afforded greater convenience, as there was no need to travel to physically travel to gain access. Some methodological reservations have been raised regarding the use of digital archives for research purposes, as there is still no absolute guarantee of stability (Nicholson, 2013) with digitized material. As noted by Willis (2002, p.298), “a website or digitisation project could change or collapse between the completion of an article and its publication”.

In this study, *The Herald* website was completely revamped after the data collection exercise had been completed meaning that the url search range (illustrated in Table 4.1) used to capture the data became distorted overnight. However, the alteration of the platform has little methodological implications since the content is still retained on the platforms and is still retrievable – albeit the url links of the stories may be changed. This aligns with Nicholson (2013, p.62)’s observation that “one of the core features of digital newspaper archives – the ability to perform basic keyword searches across multiple titles – is unlikely to change”. According to Nicholson (2013, p.66) when we want to find something in a conventional newspaper we tend to approach it using a top-down approach, thus:

We start by selecting what we hope is the correct publication and then pick out what we hope will be the correct volume or issue. Next, we look at headers for potentially useful columns or articles. Finally, we read through the text of what promises to be a relevant article.

For this study, the search for information began by visiting the websites of the four newspapers under study whose url links are well known to the researcher. The four websites were easy to navigate as they have clearly categorized sections. One of the drawbacks in collecting news articles online from the websites of the four dailies under study was the likelihood of

missing some stories, which might not have been uploaded or could have been miscategorised (e.g if a political story was mistakenly tagged as a sports or business story, there is a high likelihood that the search parameters used would miss it).

**Table 4.1: Online data collection: Web searches**

PUBLICATION	URL SEARCH RANGE	# WEB PAGES
<b>HERALD</b> <a href="http://www.herald.co.zw">www.herald.co.zw</a>	<b>From: 01/01/2015</b> <a href="https://www.herald.co.zw/category/articles/top-stories/page/618/">https://www.herald.co.zw/category/articles/top-stories/page/618/</a>  <b>To: 30/06/2017</b> <a href="https://www.herald.co.zw/category/articles/top-stories/page/157/">https://www.herald.co.zw/category/articles/top-stories/page/157/</a>	461
<b>Newsday</b> <a href="http://www.newsday.co.zw">www.newsday.co.zw</a>	<b>From: 01/01/2015</b> <a href="https://www.newsday.co.zw/news/page/552/">https://www.newsday.co.zw/news/page/552/</a>  <b>To: 30/06/2017</b> <a href="https://www.newsday.co.zw/news/page/135/">https://www.newsday.co.zw/news/page/135/</a>	417
<b>Chronicle</b> <a href="http://www.chronicle.co.zw">www.chronicle.co.zw</a>	<b>From: 01/01/2015</b> <a href="http://www.chronicle.co.zw/category/s6-demo-section/c37-top-stories/page/412/">http://www.chronicle.co.zw/category/s6-demo-section/c37-top-stories/page/412/</a>  <b>To: 30/06/2017</b> <a href="http://www.chronicle.co.zw/category/s6-demo-section/c37-top-stories/page/180/">http://www.chronicle.co.zw/category/s6-demo-section/c37-top-stories/page/180/</a>	232
<b>Daily News</b> <a href="http://www.dailynews.co.zw">www.dailynews.co.zw</a>	<b>From: 01/01/2015</b> <a href="https://www.dailynews.co.zw/articles/news?pg=290">https://www.dailynews.co.zw/articles/news?pg=290</a>  <b>To: 30/06/2017</b> <a href="https://www.dailynews.co.zw/articles/news?pg=80">https://www.dailynews.co.zw/articles/news?pg=80</a>	210

During the online data collection exercise, a total of 1, 320 web-page searches were carried out. The data collection exercise was aimed at quantifying the number of social media sourced political stories that were published by the four daily newspapers over the 30-month period covered in the study in order to establish the prevalence of social media sourcing.

#### 4.2.1 Data collection: Steps taken in conducting online archival search

Navigating *The Herald* and *The Chronicle* during my online archival search was easier than navigating the *Newsday* and the *Daily News* websites because of my insider status as a former Head of Digital at Zimpapers. In my former role as Head of Digital, I was responsible for supervising web administration and digital content on both websites. Despite the ease of navigation, the online archival search process was tedious because it had to be done manually over a period of 6 weeks (beginning from May 2017 to mid-June 2017). At the time I conducted the online archival search, I was no longer an employ of Zimpapers but my intimate knowledge of, not only the platforms but also, the content uploading protocols, worked to my advantage. A short while after I had completed my online archival search, both websites for *The Herald* and *The Chronicle* were revamped. This website revamp process unfortunately distorts the url links search range parameters that I had established during my data collection process. This development highlighted the challenge of using digital archives for research purpose as noted by Willis (2002, p.298), “a website or digitisation project could change or collapse between the completion of an article and its publication”. Nevertheless the change in the structure of the website did not affect the data that I had collected and the archived articles are still hosted on the websites, albeit under altered url link webpage numbers.

The first step I took in conducting the online archival search for *The Herald* and *The Chronicle* was to go to the homepages of the respective publications. For *The Herald* I went to [www.herald.co.zw](http://www.herald.co.zw) and for *The Chronicle* I went to [www.chronicle.co.zw](http://www.chronicle.co.zw). I then went to the ‘Top Stories’ category on *The Herald* and for *The Chronicle* I went to both the ‘Top Stories’ and ‘Local News’ categories. My judgment in selecting these categories was informed by my insider knowledge, on two levels. On the first level, my

technical knowledge of the <sup>7</sup>website wireframes of the two Zimpapers websites enabled me to easily locate and understand how the content was organized according to category, and how it was searchable through tabs and tags. I also understood how the search function could be used to filter for specific key words. I therefore had the advantage of having the technical ability to navigate the websites, easily locate the categories that had the type of stories I was looking for and to also search the archived stories in those selected categories.

On the second level, my judgment was informed by my insider knowledge of the editorial protocols regarding the primacy of political content at Zimpapers. I knew that content on both *The Herald* and *The Chronicle* websites was organized to mirror the newspaper editions hence front page stories in the print edition were transferred online as 'Top Stories' to retain their salience. I also knew, from my knowledge of the editorial practices at Zimpapers, that political stories at *The Herald* took precedence over hard news covering non-political issues; hence stories that are regarded as a priority when updating the websites are political ones. Moreover, political stories at *The Herald* use official, elite sources from both Government and the ruling ZANU PF party that made their placement in the print editions and digital platforms very delicate. To illustrate how delicate the placement of political stories is at *The Herald*, an editor was promoted and then <sup>8</sup>fired 5 weeks into the job for placing a story about President Emmerson Mnangagwa's return on page 2, in violation of the customary rule (that began under former President Robert Mugabe) of always placing any story about

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<sup>7</sup> A website wireframe is a visual guide that represents the skeletal framework of a website and it is created for the purpose of arranging elements to best accomplish a particular purpose. The purpose is usually being informed by a business objective and a creative idea (see Brown, Dan M. (2011). *Communicating Design: Developing Web Site Documentation for Design and Planning* (2nd ed.). New Riders Press. ISBN 978-0321712462). In the case of *The Herald* and *The Chronicle*, my knowledge of the wireframe meant that I could understand the priority of content according to arrangement, I understood the information, rules and functions of technical aspects of the website.

<sup>8</sup> The article titled 'HERALD editor fired over Mnangagwa story; leaves after just one month on the job' was carried by the NewZimbabwe online news site <https://www.newzimbabwe.com/herald-editor-fired-over-mnangagwa-story-leaves-after-just-one-month-on-the-job/> [accessed on 25 January 2019]

the President on the front page, always accompanied with his picture and always prominently positioned.

My judgment proved correct as the political stories were all treated as 'Top Stories' on *The Herald* website, which is the flagship publication of Zimpapers. Its sister paper, *The Chronicle* had two tabs (or categories) under which political stories were filed. Under the 'Top Stories' tab, *The Chronicle* uploaded its front-page stories, which typically comprised one hard news non-political story, one human-interest story and one political story (often picked from *The Herald* bureau). Unlike, *The Herald*, *The Chronicle* is less used as a vehicle for pushing ZANU PF party interests or government propaganda because it has less prominence and circulation than *The Herald* that is published in the capital city of Harare, where political powers reside. The political stories filed under the 'Local News' tab of *The Chronicle* were few and typically covered the goings on within the ZANU PF party at the regional level. An exception to this was when *The Chronicle* carried social media sourced stories about Professor Jonathan Moyo, the stories would be given salience regardless of whether the issue was political or not.

In terms of identifying social media sourced political stories, I proceeded in two steps. Firstly, with *The Herald*, I started checking for stories from February 2015, despite the fact that the search range was from 01 January 2015. This is because I knew, from my insider status, that *The Herald* did not use social media as a news source for political stories, given their sensitivity. I therefore knew that there would be no political story published by *The Herald* in January 2015 that was social media sourced. I reasoned that should check stories from February 2015 instead, because that was the month when Professor Jonathan Moyo joined Facebook and Twitter, a development that was awarded front-page prominence by *The Chronicle* who covered the story. *The Herald* carried the story but did not generate it; instead they lifted it from *The Chronicle* and by-lined it as 'Bulawayo Bureau'. This posed a challenge for me because I wanted to capture that *The*

*Herald* had published a social media sourced story but I realized that *The Herald* had not actually produced the story internally so it did not reflect the social media sourcing practices of *The Herald* but those of *The Chronicle*. I resolved this challenge by not capturing that story under *The Herald*, as that would distort the findings, though marginally.

The second step in terms of identifying social media sourced political stories was to conduct a manual search web-page by web-page. For *The Herald* and *The Chronicle*, the search filter was set at a maximum of 15 articles per web page. This meant that I was able to do a continuous scroll through 15 story thumbnails at a time, before clicking 'next' to navigate to the following web page. On the two websites, each story had a headline; a bit of text, typically the first two introductory sentences and a prompt to 'read more' in order to see the whole story. Apart from the headline and the introductory text of each story, there was an accompanying thumbnail, which is a compressed image that represents a larger one. The thumbnails helped to immediately deduce who/what the focus of the story was, and made the search process easier as I could immediately recognize the likely sources used in a story. This is because the images used in political stories are constantly recycled on the website, such that recognizing the image instantly helps to catalogue the theme, thrust or focus of a story if one is familiar with how state media frames articles.

Conducting the manual search, web-page by web-page, involved scrolling down the archived stories, paying attention to the headlines, the opening sentences and the accompanying images to determine whether a story was likely to have been sourced online. With *The Herald* and *The Chronicle*, it was easy to deduce whether a story might contain online sources because there is a limited number of official and elite sources that dominate political stories and apart from Professor Jonathan Moyo and Savior Kasukuwere (at the time), none of those usual sources were active online. Like flipping through the pages of a newspaper, the scrolling process allowed me to survey the

headlines and stories and immediately capture whether a story might have social media sources. Each web page had 15 stories and for *The Herald*, I perused through 6915 stories after surveying 461 web pages that fell within the dates of the study. For *The Chronicle*, I perused through 3480 stories after surveying 232 web pages that fell within the 30-months period covered by the study. Social media sourced political stories were identified by conducting the search month-by-month and then systematically separated from the rest for further coding.

**Table 4.2: Online web searches conducted**

	URL SEARCH RANGE: FROM 01/01/2015	URL SEARCH RANGE: TO 30/06/2017	TOTAL WEB PAGES	STORIES PER WEBPAGE	NUMBER OF STORIES SORTED THROUGH
HERALD	<a href="https://www.herald.co.zw/category/articles/top-stories/page/618/">https://www.herald.co.zw/category/articles/top-stories/page/618/</a>	<a href="https://www.herald.co.zw/category/articles/top-stories/page/157/">https://www.herald.co.zw/category/articles/top-stories/page/157/</a>	461	15	6915
CHRONICLE	<a href="http://www.chronicle.co.zw/category/s6-demo-section/c37-top-stories/page/412/">http://www.chronicle.co.zw/category/s6-demo-section/c37-top-stories/page/412/</a>	<a href="http://www.chronicle.co.zw/category/s6-demo-section/c37-top-stories/page/180/">http://www.chronicle.co.zw/category/s6-demo-section/c37-top-stories/page/180/</a>	232	15	3480
NEWSDAY	<a href="https://www.newsday.co.zw/category/news/page/552/">https://www.newsday.co.zw/category/news/page/552/</a>	<a href="https://www.newsday.co.zw/category/news/page/135/">https://www.newsday.co.zw/category/news/page/135/</a>	417	30	12510
DAILY NEWS	<a href="https://www.dailynews.co.zw/articles/news?pg=290">https://www.dailynews.co.zw/articles/news?pg=290</a>	<a href="https://www.dailynews.co.zw/articles/news?pg=80">https://www.dailynews.co.zw/articles/news?pg=80</a>	210	25	5250

A similar process of online archival search was carried out with the *Newsday* and *Daily News*. Although the two websites were different in terms of their design and wireframe, I was able to find my way around with relative ease, owing to my technical skills in understanding how tabs work and how content is organized on a website. The *Newsday* website presented the most difficult challenges in terms of locating the content I was seeking as its political content is placed under one generic tab of ‘News’. Challenges regarding this undifferentiated bundling of content are elaborated on in section 4.2.2, where I detail research obstacles I encountered. It took me 5 weeks (mid-June to end of July 2017) to complete the online search as the ‘News’ tab of the *Newsday* had the highest number of stories (12 510 to be specific) to forage through. Each webpage contained 30 stories organized in two rows of 15 (unlike *The Herald* and *The Chronicle* which had 15 stories organized in a single row per web page).

Three factors proved helpful in searching the *Newsday* archived content. Firstly, the *Newsday* website organized archived content chronologically in

accordance with what was uploaded first. This meant that stories that were prominent (typically political) would be grouped together making it easy to scroll past content that about other issues (e.g health or crime and courts). The second factor was that stories carried bylines and as I was very active on social media I could recognize which reporters had an affinity for sourcing social media because their stories were most likely to contain social media sources. If I saw a story by a reporter I knew was not active online, I had lesser expectation of the story having social media sources (it helped that the pool of reporters who wrote political stories was small). Thirdly, the *Newsday* headline writers sometimes cited the source in the headline that made it easier for me to infer whether the source's views could have been sourced through traditional or digital means.

Owing to space constraints in the print editions, the newspapers typically carried not more than 4 political stories per edition and this limit transferred to the online platforms where stories were simply copied and pasted. Hence searching for political content in the archives of the *Newsday* and *Daily News* was time-consuming when I knew I was trying to locate at least 4 stories on any given date, and those stories would be lumped together with other news articles. On the *Daily News* website I conducted a total of 210 web-page searches and surveyed a total of 5250 stories. The process I followed mirrored that of the other three publications. The *Daily News* was also the paper I was least familiar with so recognizing reporters by byline (as I had done with the *Newsday*) was not very helpful, moreso as *Daily News* has the least active staff on social media. I conducted the online archival search in 3 weeks (mid-July to first week of August 2017). I conducted the online search web-page by web-page, surveying the stories month-by-month and capturing the stories that met the criteria as detailed in the section below.

#### **4.2.2 Content analysis in research phase 1**

The online data collection exercise captured a total of 185 political stories where social media mention occurred as either (a part of) the topic of the story or as a source of information from those stories (using criteria derived from Paulussen and Harder, 2014). Of these 185 stories, only those stories that carried direct quotes from social media sources were selected for further analysis and those stories were 146 in total.

The 146 social media sourced political stories collected from the websites of the four daily newspapers were then subjected to systematic coding and categorising of text to analyse the content of narrative data to identify prominent themes and patterns amongst themes (Powers and Knapp, 2006). These social media sourced political stories were analysed using a “summative approach to qualitative content analysis [that] starts with identifying and quantifying certain words or content in text with the purpose of understanding the contextual use of the words or content” (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005, p.1283). In this study, the summative content analysis was used to identify the social media sourced stories that carried direct quotes. Thus the results show, for example, in how many social media sourced political stories were published over the course of 30-months within four newspapers.

The summative analysis was also deployed to capture the contextual use of the social media content, specifically tweets or Facebook posts, within the political stories. The contextual usage of the tweets or Facebook post was important to establishing whether the content could be regarded as being influential in the story or was just used to “flavour news stories with quotes that express the opinions or experiences of a range of sources” (Broersma and Graham, 2013, p.460).

In order to probe the editorial motivates which guide social media sourcing and how social media sourced content is framed when it is incorporated into political stories, the latent content analysis was employed. Latent analysis is

part of the summative approach in that it goes beyond mere word counts to a process of interpretation of content (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005). The summative and latent analysis was conducted on the 146 stories and that analysis enabled the researcher to code and analyse the data according to (i) the recurring themes; (ii) the manifest sourcing patterns; (iii) the function of social media sourced material (i.e whether it's used as the center of the story or to support a story); (iv) the type of actor cited (i.e is it an elite source or ordinary user) and (v) the treatment of the social media sourced material (i.e whether it's used/framed to rebut, reinforce or reveal a story).

A specific set of variables (in Table 4.3 below) was used to undertake coding using the content analysis approaches outlined above.

**Table 4.3: Variables for coding**

<b>THEME</b>	<b>MANIFEST SOURCING PATTERNS</b>	<b>FUNCTION OF SOCIAL MEDIA SOURCE IN THE STORY</b>	<b>TYPE OF SOCIAL MEDIA ACTOR</b>	<b>FRAMING</b>
(i.e is a story about ZANU PF, MDC-T/N/Renewal or Government or elections, factionalism or any other political discourse)	(i.e does story reveal how social media sourced info was obtained, verified or whether clarification was sought)	(i.e are they part of the story or do they function as only primary/non-primary news source)	(i.e politicians, government authorities, business representatives, civil society actors, experts, celebrities, athletes, ordinary citizens, and other.)	(i.e are social media utterances or events being covered being framed to suit editorial 'angling'?)
<p>Approach partly adapted from research methods found in Paulussen, S. &amp; Harder, R. A. (2014). 'Social media references in newspapers: Facebook, Twitter and YouTube as sources in newspaper journalism'. <i>Journalism Practice</i>, 8(5), 542-551.</p>				

According to Weber (1990), the specific type of content analysis approach chosen by a researcher varies with the theoretical and substantive interests of the researcher and the problem being studied. Content analysis was used to assess the 146 social media sourced political stories because content analysis is an approach to empirical research based on pre-existing material and it is an established methodological framework whose traditional concepts can be extended by researchers to apply to the online world (Herring, 2010). Specifically, this study adopted a summative content

analysis approach because it combines quantitative (i.e quantification) and qualitative elements (i.e latent content analysis) in interrogating the same data set. Moreover, adopting latent content analysis based on a process of quantification ensures an empirical premise from which to draw inferences from the data collected. This was important because the researcher was aware that her insider status might unconsciously bias her. By adopting latent analysis, the researcher had an empirical premise from which to draw inferences from the data collected but more importantly from which to develop semi-structured interview questions for the second phase of the research.

From the variables outlined (in Table 4.3 above), framing is included to allow the researcher to analyze how social media sources are ‘treated’ once incorporated into mainstream media’s political news stories. The framing is important because it can give indications to the possible editorial motives behind social media sourcing, for example, is the social media content incorporated as part of refuting, endorsing or challenging a given narrative (or editorial slant)? The function of social media sources in the story is another important variable as it could offer insights into the ‘weight’ that is awarded to social media sourced content – which could reveal attitudes towards social media as a credible source.

According to Lecheler and Kruijemeier (2016) most existing research on digital sourcing offers only very limited insights into how online news sources are treated once they are selected. This study, which seeks to examine the influence of social media on political reporting, might peripherally grapple with the question of the extent of journalistic agenda-setting ‘power’ that social media can be claimed to hold. By addressing how social media sources are incorporated (or used in news frames) – “are they integrated as direct quotes, paraphrases or do they play a more indirect role in news production” (Lecheler and Kruijemeier, 2016, p.165), it would be possible to

probe whether and how social media might set the journalistic agenda for mainstream media.

The 146 social media sourced political stories were subjected to content analysis because content analysis “examines the product rather than the process” (Manning, 2001, p.48) of journalism – making it a suitable method to dispassionately examine these political media texts. The insights drawn from the content analysis were useful in crafting questions for semi-structured interviews with purposively sampled key informants.

### **4.3 Research phase 2: Semi-structured interviews**

In the second stage of the data collection exercise, semi-structured in-depth interviews were undertaken. Participants for the interviews were identified through purposive sampling, which is a type of non-probability sampling that is most effective when one needs to study a certain domain with knowledgeable experts (Tongco, 2007). In-depth interviews are valuable qualitative methods “when researchers are trying to discover, rather than measure, technological influences on society” (Parmelee, 2013, p.294). In the present study, the research examined the influence of social media on political reporting within Zimbabwe’s mainstream media; hence in-depth interviews were conducted to collect data from knowledgeable experts.

The semi-structured interviews were designed to elicit reflection and responses on various aspects of the economic, political and cultural forces within newsrooms that shape the incorporation of social media in political reporting in Zimbabwe’s mainstream media. The effectiveness of interviewing as a qualitative method is that interviews are principally useful for understanding and putting the participant’s experiences into context (McNamara, 1999). Since the questions were crafted using insights drawn from a content analysis of the 146 social media sourced political stories

carried by the four publications – the responses from the informants allowed for triangulation to further validate the findings from the content analysis.

Insights and perspectives drawn from the participants' responses to the interview questions aided in addressing four research questions of the study:

**RQ2:** What determines *source selection practices* for Zimbabwe's mainstream media political reportage in relation to social media?

**RQ3:** What is the extent of *institutional gatekeeping* regarding social media sourcing within Zimbabwe's mainstream media political reportage?

**RQ4:** Can social media drive the *political news agenda* in Zimbabwe's mainstream media?

**RQ5:** Can social media '*democratise*' *political news sourcing* in Zimbabwe's mainstream media?

Since the above research questions relate to practices (i.e sourcing), to institutional norms (i.e gatekeeping), to agenda setting (i.e editorial decisions on what is news) and to technological effects (i.e democratising political sourcing) – semi-structured interviews were best suited to collect data. Wessel, Weymann and Spreckelsen (2006) maintain that 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. Similarly, McNamara (1999) argues that interviews are principally useful for understanding and putting the participant's experiences into context.

#### 4.3.1 Identifying interview participants through purposive sampling

Purposive sampling, according to Tongco (2007), *involves inherent bias* [added emphasis] that contributes to its efficiency in identifying knowledgeable experts. In the context of this study, 10 participants were carefully considered on the basis of the firsthand knowledge they possessed with regards to political news sourcing and reporting at their respective newspapers by virtue of being political writers or political desk supervisors or editors of the publications. The semi-structured interviews provided an opportunity to probe into the editorial processes and decisions that informed the social media sourced political stories that were identified during the first phase of data collection. These interviews were done to more exhaustively uncover the ways social media has influenced daily work practices and journalistic norms, (to paraphrase Parmelee, 2013, p.292) especially in the political news beat.

Of the 10 interviewees, the following 4 waived confidentiality and gave their full consent to being identified in this study.

**Table 4.4: Interviewees who consented to being identified**

Interviewee	Position	Publication	Confidentiality waived	
Caesar Zvayi	Editor	<i>The Herald</i>	Gave full, informed and written consent to being identified	
Mduduzi Mathuthu	Former Editor	<i>The Chronicle</i>	Gave full, informed and written consent to being identified	
Nqaba Matshazi	Former Deputy Editor	<i>Newsday</i>	Gave full, informed and written consent to being identified	
Gift Phiri	News Editor	<i>Daily News</i>	Gave full, informed and written consent to being identified	

Of the 10 interviewees, 6 interviewees participated in the study on condition of total anonymity and their wishes have been respected hence their names and the names of publications they work for will not be disclosed. Instead they will be identified by codes deriving from their job titles and the type of media house they work for (i.e private media or state media). For example, an interviewee who holds the post of news editor or political editor will be

identified generically as a ‘desk editor’ (DE) without specifying the beat they cover, whilst the type of media house they work for ‘state media’ (SM) or ‘private media’ (PM) is indicated to ensure the reader can place the interviewee’s comments into proper perspective.

**Table 4.5: Interviewees who requested anonymity**

<b>Interviewee</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Publication</b>	<b>Confidentiality</b>	<b>Code</b>
Anonymous	Editor (E)	State media	Consented on condition of strict anonymity	E_SM1
Anonymous	Assistant Beat Editor (ABE)	State Media (SM)	Consented on condition of strict anonymity	ABE_SM1
Anonymous	Assistant Beat Editor (ABE)	State Media (SM)	Consented on condition of strict anonymity	ABE_SM2
Anonymous	Editor (E)	Private Media (PM)	Consented on condition of strict anonymity	E_PM1
Anonymous	Editor (E)	State Media	Consented on condition of strict anonymity	E_SM1
Anonymous	Online Staffer (OS)	Private Media	Consented on condition of strict anonymity	OS_PM1

Assessing the influence of social media on political reporting in Zimbabwe’s mainstream media entails examining decision-making processes (shaped by various external and internal factors) within newsrooms on what and how content will be presented, framed, included or excluded in media narratives. Owing to the rigid editorial controls exerted on mainstream media’s political news desks, the study identified three categories of participants on the basis of their firsthand (and thus expert) knowledge of their newsrooms’ political news beat. According to Tongco (2007), choosing a purposive sample is fundamental to the quality of data gathered; thus, reliability and competence of the informant must be ensured. This study drew interview participants from the political writers/reporters, political desk editors and editors of the four daily newspapers that are part of this study because the input of participants with firsthand knowledge of day-to-day routines that guide political newsgathering and reportage at each of the four daily newspapers was imperative. The responses from the semi-structured interviews were

used to validate the findings from the first phase of the research and to also generate greater insight into social media sourcing practices.

#### 4.3.2 Research challenges

The overall research process involved several component tasks namely, quantification of media articles and coding of media articles, semi-structured interviews and analyses responses from semi-structured interviews, and then conventional content analysis of all the data. Some tasks were carried out sequentially to ensure that findings from one phase, could feed into the next task – for example, the quantification process to establish prevalence of social media sourcing in political stories also helped capture bylines to identify the most relevant research participants for the study. Challenges in terms of data collection were encountered in the first phase of the research.

Firstly, *The Herald's*<sup>9</sup> political content is usually timeously uploaded because it is considered a sensitive beat and awarded greater primacy over other news beats. Conveniently, *The Herald's* political stories, when transferred to the online platforms, are always placed in the prime category of 'Top Stories' to mirror their 'Front Page' and Page Two' salience in the print editions. Accordingly, the url search range for *The Herald* was fixed to "www.herald.co.zw/[category/articles/top-stories/page/...](http://www.herald.co.zw/category/articles/top-stories/page/...)" which confined the search parameters to a single news category. *The Herald's* website does not have a dedicated 'Politics' tab although it does use 'Politics' tags for stories that are political. It is possible that some stories might fall through the cracks in terms of getting uploaded, but the likelihood of such a fate befalling a political story is slim given the vigilance of *The Herald's* editor in terms of accounting for and following up on such content for his paper's website. Although *The Herald* recently changed its website, it retained the same news categories and hence, prime political content is still filed under 'Top Stories'.

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<sup>9</sup> Drawing from the researcher's work experience as a former head of the Zimpapers Online team from 2015-2016.

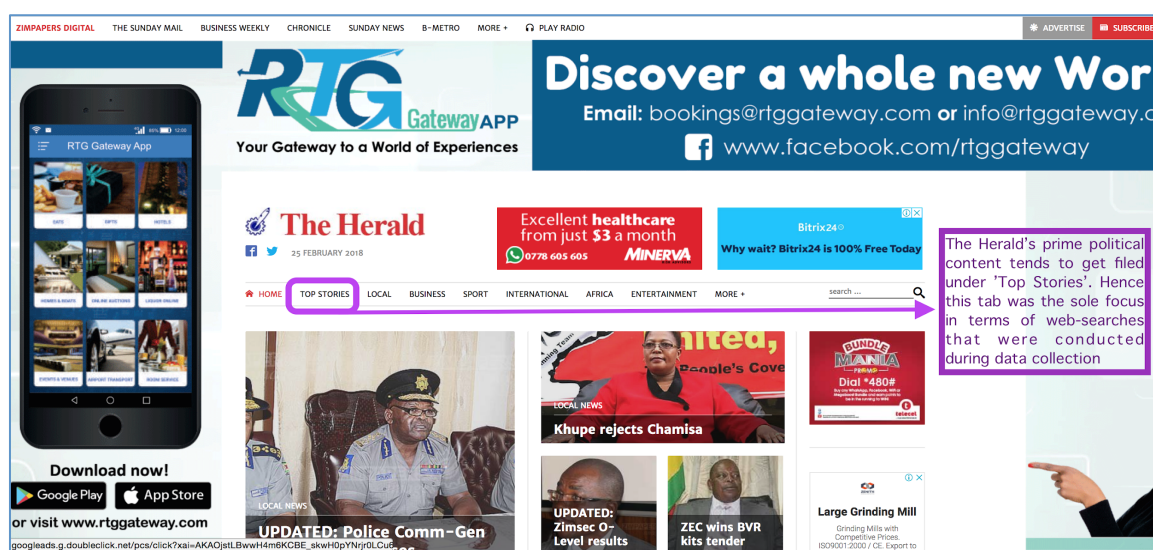


Figure 4.1: Screenshot of *The Herald* website, indicating ‘Top Stories’ tab

Unlike *The Herald*, the layout of the *Newsday* website has a broad and undifferentiated ‘News’ tab that houses stories from the following beats: hard news, crime and courts, political stories and sometimes includes international stories – all bundled up under the one tab. This presented a challenge during the course of data collection because it meant sifting through a broad selection of content from other news beats to identify political stories and then go a step further to read and check if they met the parameters of the present study. It also meant that the data collection exercise took longer because the url search range fixed to a broader category of undifferentiated news articles filed under “[www.newsday.co.zw/news/page...](http://www.newsday.co.zw/news/page...)” Whilst there is a possibility that some political stories might have mistakenly been omitted and weren’t all uploaded, the possibility is slim as *Newsday* boasts of a <sup>10</sup>multi-award-winning online team that was created as part of AMH’s <sup>11</sup>‘Digital First’ strategy that it adopted in 2013 as part of a new business model. Although this doesn’t guarantee that no stories were left out, it does reassure that the possibility is slim.

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.newsday.co.zw/2017/07/newsday-website-still-best/>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.newsday.co.zw/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/AMH-PRESS-RELEASE-27X5.pdf>

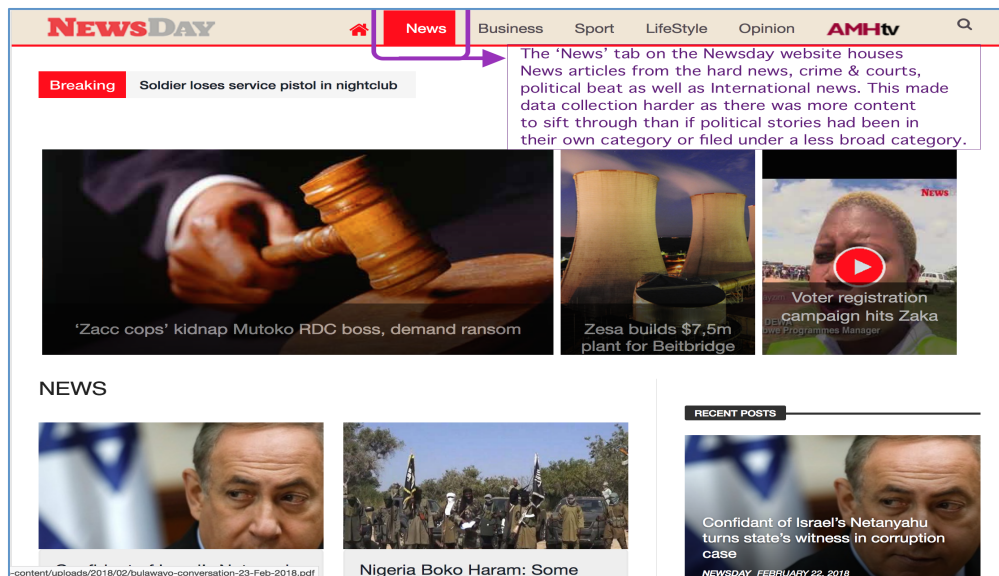


Figure 4.2: Screenshot of Newsday website, showing broad 'News' tab

The *Daily News* website was more differentiated than the Newsday with 9 tabs for 9 individual categories of content. The political stories are filed under the 'News' tab, which includes hard news stories. This category was easier to navigate during the course of data collection, as there was clear classification of content – “[www.dailynews.co.zw/articles/news/page...](http://www.dailynews.co.zw/articles/news/page...)” The likelihood exists that during the course of 30-months some political stories might have not been uploaded particularly as *Daily News* appears to pay less attention to its digital platforms compared to other publications. In a bid to presumably drive street sales the *Daily News* updates its website later than other publications and posts news snippets with an instruction to online readers to ‘*Read full story in today’s paper read*’ (as illustrated below). Complete stories are often updated much later and the possibility of the task (i.e uploading complete versions of the news snippets) being overlooked is considerable.

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## Mnangagwa flees into exile

FUNGI KWARAMBA AND ANDREW KUNAMBURA • 9 NOVEMBER 2017 10:01AM • 7 COMMENTS

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**HARARE** - Former Vice President Emmerson Mnangagwa has fled into self-imposed exile — vowing to come back and dislodge President Robert Mugabe from power, and also angrily accusing the long-ruling Zimbabwean leader of destroying and running the country like his private property.

Mnangagwa, who was fired from his government post on Monday — confirmed in a scathing statement that he had gone into exile.

Sources told the Daily News last night that the former VP had fled the country on Tuesday night, after an earlier attempt to sneak into neighbouring Mozambique via Forbes Boarder Post was foiled by authorities earlier that day.

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**POPULAR THIS WEEK**

1. 'Chamisa now unstoppable' 30,532
2. Ousted Mugabe breaks silence 27,331
3. Elizabeth leaves soon after Tsvangirai's burial 22,131
4. It'll be Chamisa vs ED 16,316
5. Major blow for ousted Mugabe 15,868

Figure 4.3: Screenshot of Daily News teaser story, readers redirected to print

*The Chronicle* has over the years shown strong bias towards human-interest stories, with coverage of gruesome crime stories being awarded primacy such that political stories are sometimes relegated in favor of attracting more traffic to the site through non-political content. Political stories are usually filed under 'Top Stories' (particularly those from the Harare Bureau, which are pro-establishment) and under 'Local News'. Accordingly, the url search range that was used to locate political stories was under the 'Top Stories' category as "www.chronicle.co.zw/category/top-stories/page..." As is the case with *The Herald*, it is possible that some stories might have erroneously not been uploaded, but the likelihood of such a fate befalling a political story is slim given the vigilance of the editors when it comes to a beat as sensitive as the political news beat.

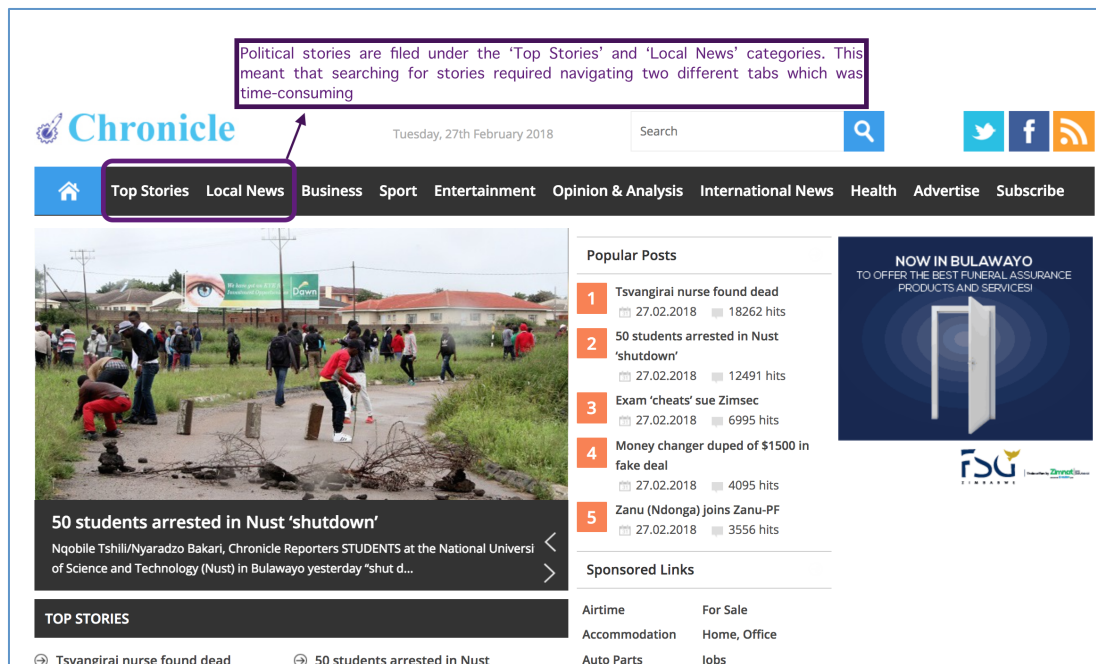


Figure 4.4: Screenshot of The Chronicle's website, 'Top Stories' & 'Local News'

Securing the consent and cooperation of potential participants was also a challenge because politics is a volatile issue in Zimbabwe and some preferred potential participants were reluctant. Owing to the sensitive nature of the research, which will explore political news production process and how social media influences political reporting, the researcher guaranteed the privacy and confidentiality for all participants was of utmost importance. Although four interviewees preferred to waive confidentiality and have their views attributed directly to them. To overcome the reluctance of participants who desired strict confidentiality the following measures were taken: (i) anonymity of participants was guaranteed (ii) participants are referred to by codes unless they expressly request otherwise (iii) I asked mutual contacts to vouch for my discretion and leveraged on my past record of maintaining strict academic confidentiality whereby no participants from my past research has ever had their confidentiality compromised by me. I also ensured that I fully explain my motives for undertaking the research and help participants to understand that I am invested in protecting their confidentiality.

Flexibility was also an important factor in improving the success rate for participants responding to the study. First to secure participation the interviewees signed a form giving their informed consent to be part of the study. Interviews were conducted face-to-face, and with the consent of the interviewees, they were audio recorded whilst written notes were also taken during the interviews. Interviews were arranged in spaces requested for by the participants ensuring that they felt comfortable and safer.

#### **4.4 Conclusion**

This chapter outlined the methodological framework used in this study. In order to examine the influence of social media on political reporting in Zimbabwe's mainstream media this study adopted a mixed methods approach. The advantages of a mixed method approach is that it can provide greater breadth of perspectives around a given issue whilst combining approaches helps overcome deficiencies in one method (Creswell et al, 2003). The need to use an approach that can offer a greater breadth of perspectives around a given issue arose from a desire to avoid a deterministic or over-simplified exploration of how social media influences political reporting in Zimbabwe's mainstream media. An additional preoccupation of this study was establishing whether claims regarding the democratising potential of the Internet hold true in the context of social media's potential to democratise political news sourcing in Zimbabwe's mainstream media.

Since mixed methods also involve triangulation whereby variation in data collection leads to greater validity (Bulsara, 2015), a second set of data was collected in the form of semi-structured in-depth interviews. The interview questions were derived from insights drawn from content analysis of the 146 stories collected in the first stage of data collection. This allowed for a triangulation of findings from content analysis by measuring them against the responses of knowledgeable experts. Participants for the interviews were

identified through purposive sampling, which is a type of non-probability sampling that is most effective when one needs to study a certain domain with knowledgeable experts (Tongco, 2007). Since the effectiveness of interviewing as a qualitative method is that interviews are principally useful for understanding and putting the participant's experiences into context (McNamara, 1999), this sequential approach helped to strengthen validity of content analysis findings. According to Bulsara (2015) mixed methods allow the researcher to answer the research question from a number of perspectives and also ensure that there are no 'gaps' to the information or data collected. The next chapter presents the findings of the study.

## CHAPTER 5: RESEARCH FINDINGS

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### 5.1 Introduction

This chapter shares the findings of the research. It details the data that was collected and analyzed following two sequential research activities namely, an online archival search and the conducting of semi-structured interviews. The first section details the findings from the social media sourced political stories that were coded and then analyzed using summative content analysis. The findings include the social media sourcing trends that emerged from the data as well as the political themes that were recurrent in the social media sourced political stories. In addition, the findings reveal the type of social media actor that gets selected as a source and shows the function of the social media sources are assigned when incorporated into political stories.

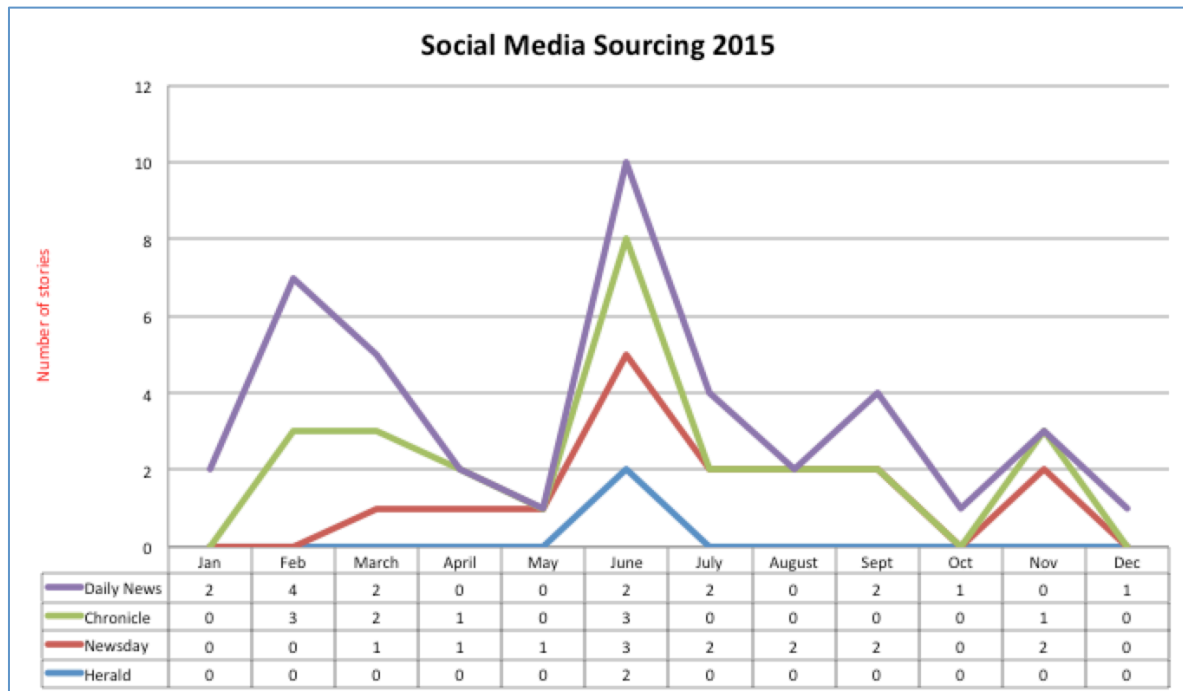
The manifest patterns that emerged from the social media sourcing are also revealed along with the source-journalist and source-institution source relations that were noticed. Findings regarding the media framing of social media sourced content are also shared in this chapter. Drawing from the content analysis of the data, the newsgathering and sourcing practices of the four newspapers are traced from an actor-network theory perspective. Using actor-network theory as a method, the findings demonstrate how media proprietors, editorial policies, social media and various humans (i.e. journalists, sources, editors and users) are all actors in the news production network. The chapter also shares findings on the social media sourcing practices within the four newsrooms, focusing on existing attitudes, routines and policies as revealed by data gathered from semi-structured interviews with expert informants. The day-to-day social media sourcing routines in newsrooms as well as the newsroom attitudes towards using social media as

a news source are also highlighted. The chapter concludes by sharing findings on the social media policies and sourcing guidelines in newsrooms, drawn from data collected through semi-structured interviews.

### 5.1.1 Social media sourcing trends for political reporting: 2015 to 2017

During the first stage of data collection, 146 social media sourced political stories were identified and the trends are broken down by year and publication as illustrated in the charts below. In 2015, the *Daily News*, *The Herald*, *The Chronicle* and *Newsday* each published 303 daily editions (from Monday to Saturday). Out of the 303 editions published by each of the four newspapers; the *Daily News* carried only 16 social media sourced political stories and the *Newsday* carried just 14 were social media sourced political stories. Out of all the political stories carried in the 303 editions of *The Herald* only 2 were social media sourced, while *The Chronicle* carried only 10 social media sourced political stories.

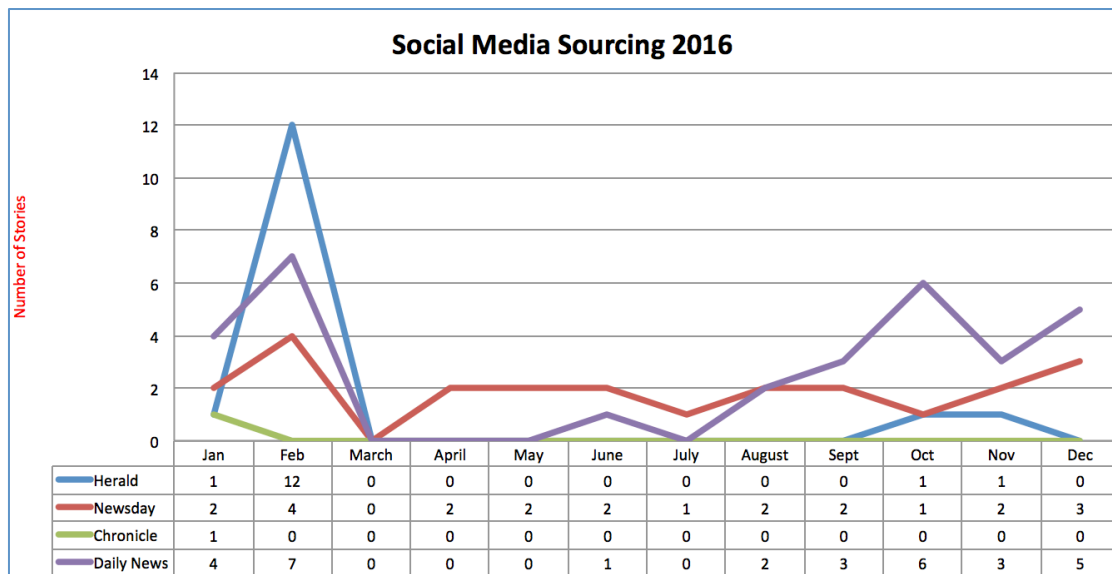
Table 5.1: Social media sourcing prevalence in 2015



In 2015, the four newspapers published a total of 1212 daily copies, and in these 1212 daily copies; only 42 social media sourced political stories were carried in total. Thus, social media sourced political stories appeared in 3.42% of the daily copies published by all four newspapers in 2015.

Given that there were <sup>12</sup>251 working days and 53 Saturdays in 2016, the *Daily News*, *The Herald*, *The Chronicle* and *Newsday* each published 304 daily editions (from Monday to Saturday). Out of the 304 editions published by each of the four newspapers, the *Daily News* carried 31 social media sourced political stories and the *Newsday* carried 23 were social media sourced political stories. Out of all the political stories carried in the 304 editions of *The Herald* 15 were social media sourced, while *The Chronicle* carried only 1 social media sourced political story.

**Table 5.2: Social media sourcing prevalence in 2016**

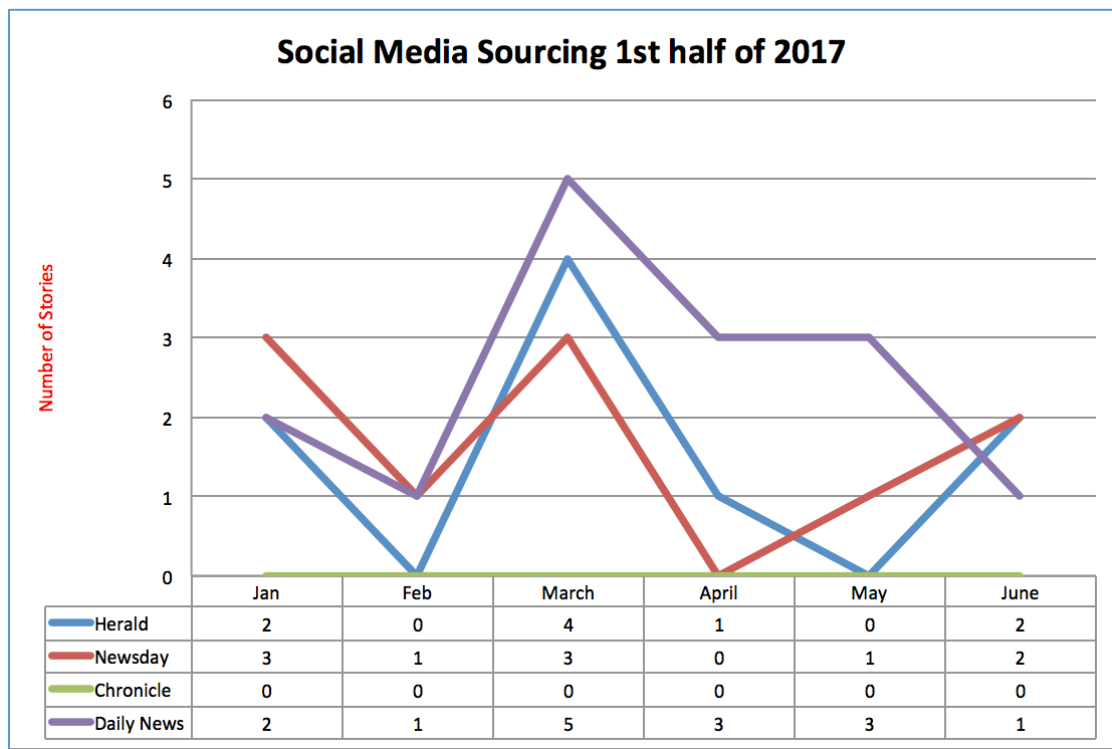


In 2016, the four newspapers published a total of 1216 daily copies, and in these 1216 daily copies; only 70 social media sourced political stories were carried in total. Thus, social media sourced political stories appeared in 5.75% of the daily copies published by all four newspapers in 2016.

<sup>12</sup> As recorded by Calendar-12 [https://www.calendar-12.com/working\\_days/2016](https://www.calendar-12.com/working_days/2016)

Given that there were <sup>13</sup>125 working days and 25 Saturdays in the first half of 2017 (from 01 January to 30 June), the *Daily News*, *The Herald*, *The Chronicle* and *Newsday* each published 150 daily editions (from Monday to Saturday). Out of the 150 editions published by each of the four newspapers, the *Daily News* carried 15 social media sourced political stories and the *Newsday* carried 10 were social media sourced political stories. Out of all the political stories carried in the 150 editions of *The Herald*, 9 were social media sourced while *The Chronicle* carried 0 social media sourced political stories.

**Table 5.3: Social media sourcing in first half of 2017**



In the first half of 2017, the four newspapers published a total of 600 daily copies, and in these 600 daily copies; only 34 social media sourced political stories were carried in total. Thus, social media sourced political stories appeared in 5.66% of the daily copies published by all four newspapers in first half of 2017.

<sup>13</sup> As recorded by Calendar-12 [https://www.calendar-12.com/working\\_days/2017](https://www.calendar-12.com/working_days/2017)

An underlying quantitative-informed assumption in this study was that prevalence of social media sourcing could be a key and definitive indicator of social media's influence on journalistic practice. The findings, however, show that using enumeration as a means of determining the prevalence of social media sourcing in the political news beat is an inadequate instrument to assess the influence of social media on political reporting. Quantification is an ill-suited methodological tool because it fails to capture the subtle and layered ways in which social media and political journalism meld, in practice. Going by these figures, a case for the prevalence of social media sourcing in political reporting within Zimbabwe's mainstream media cannot be sustained however a qualitative exploration of the influence of social media yields rich insights.

What follows is an outline of the political news themes that emerged from an analysis of the data collected online. A finer discussion on the data collected in the first phase via the mainstream media's websites will be done in the next Chapter.

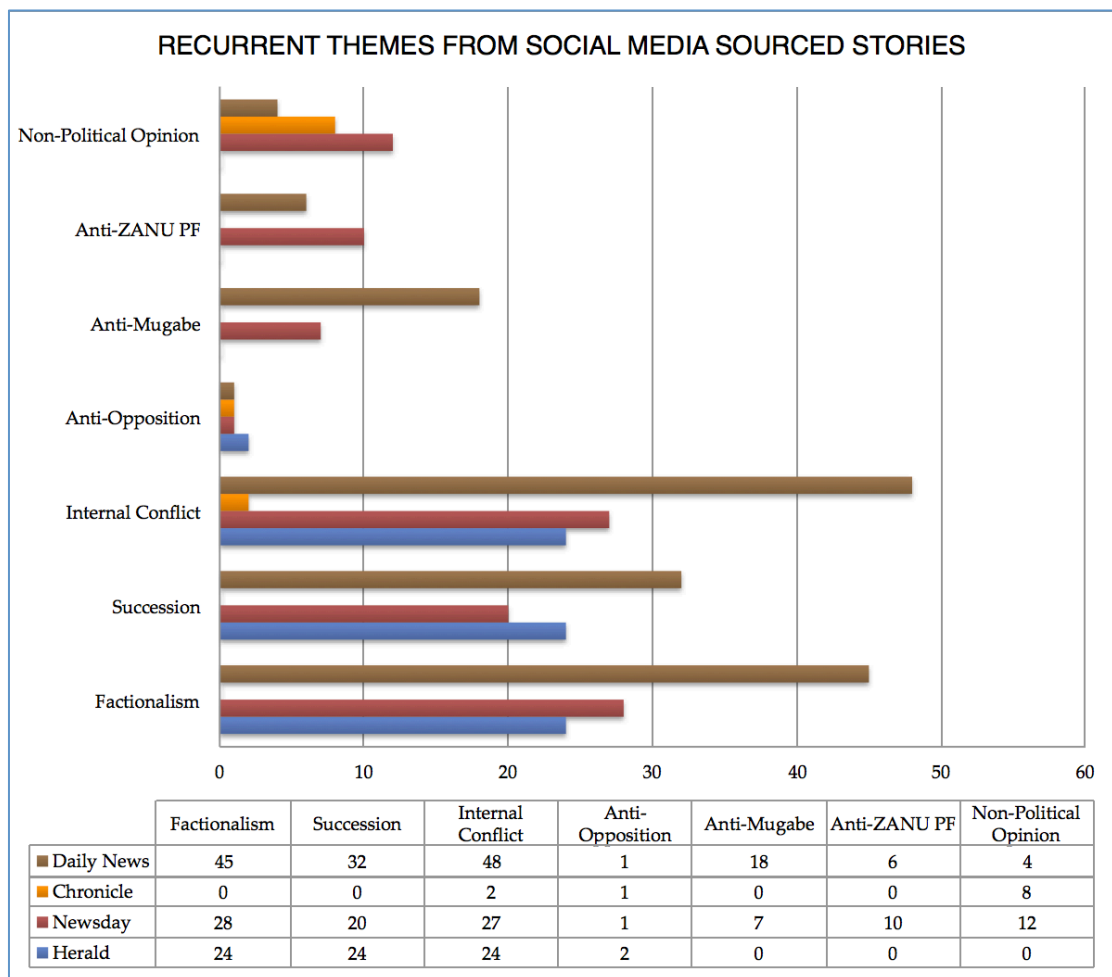
### **5.1.2 Political themes from social media sourced stories**

A close examination of the social media sourcing trends during the 30-month period under study revealed that the social media content that was cited as news sources fell under 7 themes (three of which carry a great degree of overlap). Themes of Factionalism, Succession and Internal Conflict overlap as they generally relate to the same kind of fracturing within a given political party. Unless stated otherwise, the theme of Factionalism, in this study, should be understood as any story about ZANU PF's G40 and Lacoste battles or political figures, recrimination and counter-recrimination, 'successionist' accusations and counter-accusations (these also played out around coverage of the Command Agriculture policy). Factionalism, as a theme, appeared in 97 of the social media sourced political stories, whilst 101 stories focused on the internal conflict within ZANU PF as a theme. The

succession theme appeared in 76 stories of the social media sourced stories. The *Daily News* and *Newsday* carried 25 stories with an anti-Mugabe theme, as well as 16 stories with an anti-ZANU PF theme. There were 5 stories with an anti-opposition theme. There were 24 stories that had non-political themes that are based on social media posts by politicians.

The empty spaces between the graph's bars on the anti-Mugabe and anti-ZANU PF themes depict that neither *The Herald* nor *The Chronicle* carried stories with those themes. In other themes, *The Chronicle* is not represented because the political stories published by *The Chronicle* focused mostly on non-political opinions proffered by elites on social media and thus did not align with most of the themes that other publications focused on.

**Table 5.4: Political themes in mainstream media**



*Daily News* carried the most anti-Mugabe and anti-ZANU PF themed social media sourced stories whilst *The Chronicle* and *Newsday* carried the highest number of non-political elite opinion (i.e stories based on the views of political elites commenting on non-political issues). *The Herald*, as will be demonstrated in the next Chapter, provides the most convincing case study for the influence of social media (and how intensely mainstream media has become sensitized to it) because of how it covered ZANU PF's G40 and Lacoste factional fights. *The Herald* also provides the most convincing case study for the role that other factors, apart from social media, play in ultimately determining which sources are selected, whether digital or conventional.

### 5.1.3 Type of social media actor and function of social media sources

Lecheler and Kruikemeier (2016) have argued that the rise of social media has by no means ended the dominance of elite sources in news media coverage. This study finds this assertion to be true as far as social media sourcing patterns in political reporting within Zimbabwe's mainstream media is concerned. In the context of this study, elite sources are defined as "elite actors such as governments, politicians and experts" whose stature places them above "non-elite actors such as ordinary citizens and alternative voices" (Van Leuven et al, 2018, p.800). Over the course of the 30-month period under study, *Daily News* published 62 social media-sourced stories. In those stories, *Daily News* used 72 social media sources and just 11 were ordinary users, whilst 61 were elite sources. This means 84% of the social media sources used by the *Daily News* during this period were elite sources.

The top three most cited social media sources were Jonathan Moyo (cited 35 times); Energy Mutodi (cited 11 times) and Justice Wadyajena (cited 3 times) – all of whom were <sup>14</sup>ZANU PF political actors.

Over the course of the 30-month period under study, *Newsday* published 47 social media sourced stories. In those stories, *Newsday* used 58 social media sources and just 3 were ordinary users, whilst 55 were elite sources. This means 95% of the social media sources used by *Newsday* during this period were elite sources. The top three most cited social media sources were Jonathan Moyo (cited 33 times); Justice Wadyajena (cited 4 times) and Energy Mutodi (cited 2 times) – all of whom were ZANU PF political actors.

Over the course of the 30-month period under study, *The Chronicle* published 11 social media sourced stories. In those stories, *The Chronicle* used 15 social media sources and just 2 were ordinary users, whilst 13 were elite sources. This means 87% of the social media sources used by *The Chronicle* during this period were elite sources. The top three most cited social media sources were Jonathan Moyo (cited 11 times); <sup>15</sup>Saviour

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<sup>14</sup> Jonathan Moyo was at the time a member of the ZANU-PF Politburo (the ruling party's highest decision making body) holding the post of Secretary for Science and Technology within the party. He was also MP for Tsholotsho and Minister of Higher and Tertiary Education from July 2015 following a cabinet reshuffle saw him moved from his tenure at as Minister of Information. In the ZANU PF factional fights, Jonathan Moyo was the frontman for the G40 faction which was aligned with former First Lady Grace Mugabe. [https://www.pindula.co.zw/Jonathan\\_Moyo](https://www.pindula.co.zw/Jonathan_Moyo) [accessed 13 August 2018]

At the time, Justice Wadyajena was the ZANU PF Member of Parliament (MP) of the Gokwe-Nembudziya constituency having won the seat during the July 31st election of 2013. He was also Chairperson of the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Youth, Indigenisation and Economic Empowerment overseeing the operations of the Youth, Indigenisation and Economic Empowerment ministry and it was through this position that he took on G40-aligned ministers including Savior Kasukuwere who was former principal of the Youth ministry and Patrick Zhuwao who was the principal of that ministry at the time. Justice Wadyajena was a vocal Lacoste faction member who declared his allegiance to the then VP Emmerson Mnangagwa in ZANU's factional fights. [https://pindula.co.zw/Justice\\_Mayor\\_Wadyajena](https://pindula.co.zw/Justice_Mayor_Wadyajena) [accessed 13 August 2018]

At the time, Energy Mutodi was as ordinary member of ZANU PF whose bid to represent ZANU in the July 31 elections of 2013 had failed after he was beaten in party primaries for the Goromonzi South constituency which was won by Beatrice Nyamupinga. Energy Mutodi's allegiance was self-declared as he supported the VP Emmerson Mnangagwa aligned Team Lacoste faction within the ZANU PF party. Mutodi is also a businessman and musician. [https://www.pindula.co.zw/Energy\\_Mutodi](https://www.pindula.co.zw/Energy_Mutodi) [accessed 13 August 2018]

<sup>15</sup> At the time Savior Kasukuwere was Minister of Local Government, Rural Development and National Housing, a Politburo member and the ZANU PF national political commissar. He was also ZANU PF's member of Parliament for Mount Darwin South constituency having won in the 31 July 2013 elections. Savior Kasukuwere was aligned to the G40 faction within ZANU PF that supported former First Lady Grace Mugabe. [https://pindula.co.zw/Saviour\\_Kasukuwere](https://pindula.co.zw/Saviour_Kasukuwere) [accessed 13 August 2018]

Kasukuwere (cited 1 time) and <sup>16</sup>Obert Gutu (cited 1 time) – the first two were ZANU PF political actors whilst the last one was an MDC-T political actor.

Over the course of the 30-month period under study, *The Herald* published 26 social media sourced stories. In those stories, *The Herald* used 30 social media sources and none of them were ordinary users, so all 30 were elite sources. This means 100% of the social media sources used by *The Herald* during this period were elite sources. The top three most cited social media sources were Jonathan Moyo (cited 28 times); Energy Mutodi (cited 1 time) and <sup>17</sup>Job Sikhala (cited 1 time) – the first two were ZANU PF political actors whilst the last one was an MDC-T political actor.

Given the dominance of elite sourcing across the four daily newspapers during the period under study, it is unsurprising that social media sources were largely the basis or premise of the story as the elite sources acted as ‘initiators’ or ‘instigators’ of the news story. This potential that elite sources on social media have to ‘instigate’ a story, carries resonance with agenda setting, which will be discussed in detail in subsequent Chapters.

According to Van Leuven et al (2018, p.799), “online sourcing practices (especially the use of social media) have frequently been associated with a democratization of news access for non-elite actors, potentially leading to more diverse voices and a more balanced representation of issues in the news.” Exploring the possibility that online sourcing can lead to democratization of news access for non-elite actors in Zimbabwe’s mainstream media was the goal of **RQ5** which queried, “Can social media **‘democratise’ political news sourcing** in Zimbabwe’s mainstream media?”.

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<sup>16</sup> At the time, Obert Gutu was the national spokesperson of the main opposition MDC-T party. His nomination by the MDC-T to be mayor of the capital city, Harare, was blocked in 2013 by ZANU PF’s Ignatius Chombo who as Local Government Minister at the time, insisted that only elected Councillors could be Mayors. He is also a lawyer. [https://pindula.co.zw/Obert\\_Gutu](https://pindula.co.zw/Obert_Gutu) [accessed 13 August 2018]

<sup>17</sup> At the time, Job Sikhala was an ordinary MDC-T member who held a high profile in the party as a former MDC-T MP who had defected and then rejoined. He was an extremely vocal anti-Mugabe voice within the opposition ranks and is among the first crop of opposition leads who were influential in the formation of the main opposition the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). [https://pindula.co.zw/Job\\_Sikhala](https://pindula.co.zw/Job_Sikhala) [accessed 13 August 2018]

This research discovered that during the 30-months period under study, there was a preponderance of elite actors in social media sourced political stories suggesting that social media had not democratised political news sourcing. This is because in this study, “news access for non-elite actors, [that could have] potentially [led] to more diverse voices and a more balanced representation of [political] issues in the news” (Van Leuven et al, 2018, p.799) was not evident.

The fact that a considerable number of social media sources appear to be the basis of certain political stories suggests that social media has an agenda-setting effect on mainstream media – triggering offline coverage of issues that are raised by elite actors online. Further exploration of these findings will be undertaken in subsequent Chapters.

## **5.2 Social media sourcing: Manifest patterns from political news articles**

Researchers rarely get the opportunity to “observe at first hand the sensitive transaction point at which information is exchanged between sources and reporters” (Reich, 2006, p.501) unless the exchange is taking place in the context of structured pre-arranged gathering such as a press conference. According to Lecheler and Kruike-meier (2016), journalists traditionally gather information in a mix of what can be called ‘structured’ and ‘unstructured’ news-gathering techniques. Lecheler and Kruike-meier (2016, p.159) contend that:

Structured techniques refer to coordinated media activities arranged within press strategies developed by (political) actors, such as press conferences, interviews, and photo ops. Unstructured, or spontaneous, sourcing techniques traditionally refer to stake outs, phone inquiries, observation of an event, and background research (e.g. Sellers and Schaffner, 2007).

In the context of Zimbabwe, political news sourcing practices, i.e the exchange of information between political sources and political reporters, has typically been “a sensitive transaction point” (Reich, 2006, p.501) often transpiring far from the public gaze. Structured information gathering techniques used by political journalists have, in the context of Zimbabwe, been premised on the degree of amicability existing between a given media organization and the potential source. Access to political sources and getting official comment is arduous.

It is not uncommon for press conferences, which would ordinarily be regarded as ‘open to all press’, to be exclusive and accessible only to favored media houses thereby <sup>18</sup>impeding journalists from other media houses from executing their duties. For instance, in October 2017, MISA-Zimbabwe issued a statement after private media was barred by security details from covering a press briefing that had been convened by the then Vice President (now current President) Emmerson Mnangagwa convened at his Ministry of Justice, Legal and Parliamentary Affairs offices. <sup>19</sup>MISA-Zimbabwe (2017, np) pointed out how “the press conference was called by Mnangagwa in his official capacity as Vice President of the country and not as a private citizen” therefore “he waived the right to be selective on who covers or does not cover the event”.

Where attempts to gather information through the structure of interviews are made, journalists also encounter obstacles if the source they want to access harbors animosity or mistrust toward the media organization that the journalist works for. This means that the relations obtaining between a potential source and a media organization (i.e source-institution relations)

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<sup>18</sup> According to *Daily News*, Zimbabwe National Editors Forum (Zinef) described it as unconstitutional for journalists from the private media to be denied entry into a 05 October 2017 Press Conference addressed by then vice president and former Justice, Legal and Parliamentary Affairs minister, now current President Emmerson Mnangagwa despite being lawfully accredited. <https://www.dailynews.co.zw/articles/2017/10/07/mnangagwa-slammed-for-barring-private-media>

<sup>19</sup> Statement on MISA-Zimbabwe posted on its website on 6 October 2017 after the barring of private media from a press briefing convened by Mnangagwa <http://zimbabwe.misa.org/2017/10/06/misa-zimbabwe-statement-barring-private-media-vice-president-mnangagwa/>

matter as much if not nearly more than the relations obtaining between a specific journalist and their contact (i.e source-journalist relations).

It can be argued that the media organization a reporter works for has a bearing on the level of access they are likely to be granted or denied depending on the political source. A content analysis of the 146 social media sourced stories that were examined in this study reveals various aspects of source-institution and source-journalist relations that can be instructive in understanding the context in which social media sourcing occurs.

### **5.2.1 Source-Institution and Source-Journalist relations**

The way in which sources relate to media institutions has a bearing on how they will interact with journalists from those particular institutions. According to Maurer and Beiler (2017, p.3), “political actors in their role as news sources control the amount and the quality of information they are willing to give journalists” but their willingness to give out that information is contingent upon various factors. For instance, “political homophily as well as personal trust between a journalist and a political actor enable the exchange in the first place or are at least a great facilitator” (Maurer and Beiler, 2017, p.5).

A number of empirical examples drawn from the 146 stories, which make up the primary data for this study, highlight how the degree of hostility or homophily between a source and a media institution can shape the specific source-journalist relations that determine the willingness of a source to disclose information.

Table 5.5: Source-Institution relations

RECRIMINATIONS, INSULTS AND NAME-CALLING	
Source versus media house:	Media house versus source:
<i>Newsday</i> described as ‘such a useless newspaper’ by Jonathan Moyo in <i>The Chronicle</i> edition of 01/04/2015 story titled: ‘PAPER ‘CONCOCTED’ CABINET STORY	Jonathan Moyo accused of ‘hobnobbing with hostile forces’ by <i>The Herald</i> in its edition of 05/01/2017 in a story titled: ACTING PRESIDENT SLATES PRETENTIOUS FIFTH COLUMNISTS
<i>The Herald</i> described as ‘notoriously stupid’ by Jonathan Moyo in the <i>Daily News</i> edition of 19/12/16 story titled: ZANU PF BIGWIGS MAUL STATE MEDIA	Goodson Nguni subtly referred to as ‘a fool’ by <i>The Herald</i> editor in a comment carried by <i>Newsday</i> in its 28/05/2015 edition in a story titled: ‘MOYO PLOTTING AGAINST MUGABE’
<i>The Herald</i> told it ‘can go to hell’ by Jonathan Moyo in <i>The Herald</i> edition of 18/03/17 story titled: MOYO RAILS AGAINST HERALD FOR QUERYING TWEET	Jonathan Moyo harried by <i>The Herald</i> over a request for comment. <i>The Herald</i> revealed ‘Over the past two days, our news crew had been calling, texting and e-mailing Prof Moyo to substantiate his claims and ‘yesterday had to publicly post questions on his Twitter timeline asking him to respond’ in its edition of 12/07/2017 in a story titled: MOYO FAILS TO BACK CHIWENGA THESIS CLAIMS
<i>Newsday</i> reports that Saviour Kasukuwere ‘vented his anger at top scribes at the State-controlled <i>Herald</i> newspaper’ in its edition of 17/01/2017 in a story titled: KASUKUWERE SLAMS ‘FACTIONALISM FANNING’ HERALD SCRIBES	
<i>Newsday</i> reported that Saviour Kasukuwere ‘attacked State media journalists after being infuriated by some articles published by <i>The Herald</i> newspaper’ on 28/03/2017 in a story titled: KASUKUWERE ATTACK UNCALLED FOR: MISA	

Responses from interviewees also shed some light on how source-institution relations or source-journalist relations impact the quality of stories. According to a state media assistant beat editor (ABE\_SM1) interviewed on 18 September 2017:

The problem in the newsroom one that I have noticed is that our reporters in the Herald, because of this factionalism that is there some of them become participants. For example, when Kasukuwere insulted Share at the Mt Darwin event he called him ‘son of a bitch’. When there was a function in Bindura where people were demonstrating against Kasukuwere the editor specifically said “I want Share to cover that story” but already we knew that Share and Kasukuwere had bad blood. So there was no way this guy was going to go on the ground and do a professional job because already their relationship was as good as none. (Extract from semi-structured interview 18/09/2017)

The claim that the editor purposely assigned a reporter who had been verbally abused by a source to cover an event where that source was being denounced suggests there was some hostility between Kasukuwere and *The Herald*.

**Table 5.6: Source-Journalist relations**

<b>INTIMIDATION AND INDIFFERENCE TOWARDS JOURNALISTS</b>	
<b>Accessible but unwilling sources:</b>	<b>Unreachable or unhelpful sources:</b>
<i>Newsday</i> failed to get a comment from (former) VP Phelekezela Mphoko who <u>'declined to comment'</u> and <u>abruptly switched off his mobile phone when this reporter (Xolisani Ncube) identified himself'</u> carried in <i>Newsday</i> edition 05/09/2015 story titled: DEFIANT PROF MOYO DIGS IN	<i>Daily News</i> failed to get a comment from Jonathan Moyo who <u>'ignored a text message from the <i>Daily News</i>'</u> . Revealed in <i>Daily News</i> edition of 26/06/2015, story titled: CONFUSION SWIRLS OVER JONATHAN MOYO
<i>Daily News</i> failed to get a comment from Jonathan Moyo who <u>'refused to comment yesterday saying he was attending lectures'</u> . Carried in the 10/10/2016 edition of <i>Daily News</i> , story titled: ZANU PF IMPLODES OVER MOYO'S GRAFT PROBE	<i>Newsday</i> failed to get a comment from Jonathan Moyo who <u>'could not be reached for comment on his mobile phone, while text messages sent to him on Wednesday were not responded to at the time of going to print'</u> . Carried in <i>Newsday</i> edition of 25/09/15, story titled: 'CHILDISH' JONATHAN MOYO UNDER FIRE
<i>Daily News</i> failed to get a comment from Energy Mutodi who <u>'said there was no need for him to amplify what he had put on his Facebook page. "Ukaonachinhu, handitiunogotorasezvachiri (When you see something, you take it as it is)," Mutodi said'</u> . Carried in <i>Daily News</i> edition of 06/01/2015, story titled: 'MNANGAGWA TO TAKE OVER IN MARCH'	<i>Newsday</i> failed to get a comment from Savior Kasukuwere who <u>'declined to comment', instead turning his frustrations on this reporter (Richard Chidza) after he introduced himself. "Haaawe! Nxaaa!" he said before terminating the call.'</u> Carried in <i>Newsday</i> edition of 25/02/2016, story titled: MNANGAGWA ALLIES DRAGGED TO DISCIPLINARY HEARINGS
<i>The Herald</i> edition of 29/03/2017 fails to get a comment from Savior Kasukuwere who called <u>'senior reporter, Felix Share, "a son of a b****h"'</u> , story titled: MISA ZIM, ZUJ SLAM KASUKUWERE	

According to Reich (2006, p.498), “obtaining news information to build a news item is not a one-time act, but rather a relatively structured process extending over long minutes, often hours and (less frequently) days”. For this reason, political journalists are reliant on sources. Depending on which media house a journalist works for, sources may consent or decline to proffer the requested information. Social media enables journalists to bypass the need to ‘request’ information from political sources if those sources decide to post it online. However, sources may still refuse to elaborate or comment further on their posts if political journalists seek clarification.

The findings of this study indicate that source-journalist relations can be fraught with tensions since elites derive authority from their position as elites and use their status to speak (Carlson, 2009).

Table 5.7: Sources snubbing journalists

SOURCE-JOURNALIST RELATIONS – SNUBS	
In its edition of 03/11/2015, <i>Newsday</i> revealed that it failed to get a comment, as ‘ <u>The Zanu PF MP yesterday did not respond to questions sent to him by NewsDay.</u> ’ Story titled: WADYAJENA LIVID WITH ZHUWAO	In its edition of 11/08/2016, <i>Newsday</i> revealed that it failed to get a comment, as ‘ <u>Moyo did not answer his phone from Tuesday and Wednesday when a comment was sought from him.</u> ’ Story titled: GOVT MINISTERS IN TWITTER WARS
In its edition of 04/11/2016, <i>Daily News</i> revealed that it failed to get a comment, as ‘ <u>Kasukuwere had not responded to a text message seeking his response by the time of going to print.</u> ’ WADYAJENA ATTACKS KASUKUWERE	In its edition of 28/06/2017, <i>Newsday</i> revealed that it failed to get a comment, as ‘ <u>Moyo did not respond to messages sent to him by NewsDay seeking his comment over Chiwenga’s threats.</u> ’ MOYO HITS BACK AT CHIWENGA
In its edition of 10/07/2017, <i>The Herald</i> that it failed to get a comment, as ‘ <u>Cde Kasukuwere immediately switched off his cellphone when contacted for comment yesterday.</u> ’ Story titled: KASUKUWERE LETS CAT OUT OF BAG	In its edition of 12/07/2017, <i>The Herald</i> revealed that it failed to get a comment, ‘Over the past two days, our news crew had been calling, texting and e-mailing Prof Moyo to substantiate his claims without success’. Story titled: MOYO FAILS TO BACK CHIWENGA THESIS CLAIMS

The above are examples of the source-journalist relations obtaining in the four newspapers in this study as embedded within some of the stories. Maurer and Beiler (2017, p.14) argue that, “political actors reward journalists for their political orientation with privileged treatment” such that “political actors are selective when it comes to choosing partners from the media side”. This assertion is consistent with sourcing narratives embedded in several social media sourced political stories where sources reportedly resorted to switching off their phones or terminating calls as soon as reporters identify themselves. The lack of cooperation on the part of sources means that political journalists who work for media houses that are considered to be ideologically conflicting to the political sources’ preferences

are deliberately obstructed in the course of carrying out their duties. This presents an additional obstacle for journalists attempt to gather information.

When faced with uncooperative sources, mainstream media tend to embed, within news articles, disclosures pertaining to the “hardly visible social arena in which reporters and sources exchange information” (Reich, 2006, p.504) by informing the reader of efforts made to obtain comments. Whether this is intended to satisfy the reader that a genuine effort was made by the publication to hear both sides or to get an official response is unclear. However, some publications use these revelations to shame uncooperative sources making them appear guilty on the basis of their refusal to engage with media. As will be discussed later, this study finds that in the social media age, sources can also appropriate the same shaming tactics by publicly exposing what transpired behind the hardly visible social arena in which reporters and sources exchange information (Reich, 2006).

### **5.2.2 Media framing of social media sourced content**

The largely obstructive nature of political sources means that political journalists fall back on an interpretive style of journalism that affords them the latitude to speculatively fill in the gaps through deploying a preferred interpretation or framing of issues and events. This interpretive style of journalism ensures that “journalists have power over the content of the news stories” (Strömbäck and Nord, 2006, p.154) although they have limited power over the willingness of sources to cooperate in granting them the first hand information they require to write stories. Through social media “official sources may instigate the news and direct the attention of the reporters toward particular events and issues, *without controlling the ultimate story*” (Cook, 1998, p.105, added emphasis).

The idea that sources do not control the ultimate story is demonstrated by how social media sourced material is framed when it is incorporated into

mainstream media, as media organizations may choose their own interpretation and construct meaning – with or without the cooperation of sources. Although the various media organizations may use the same social media sources, their framing of the social media posts tends to differ based on the editorial agenda they are pushing. This study found instances where media organizations interpretatively (or speculatively) construct meaning out of social media posts with or without cooperation or consent of sources.

On 27 June 2017, Professor Jonathan Moyo tweeted a cryptic message that read: “Kuvhunduka chati kwatara hunge une katurikwa” which can be loosely translated to mean, “it is the guilty that panic”. The *Newsday* and the *Daily News* carried stories based on that tweet, and these stories demonstrate how social media content can be distorted through framing.

The *Newsday* ran with a story titled ‘Moyo hits back at Chiwenga’ on 28 June 2017. *Newsday* quoted the tweet by Professor Jonathan Moyo, and they rightly characterized it as ‘cryptic’. Despite admitting that the tweet was cryptic, *Newsday* still went ahead and proffered an interpretation of the tweet and went on to confidently frame it as a response (they described as ‘hitting back’) to comments made by then Commander of the Zimbabwe Defence Forces (ZDF) General Constantino Chiwenga (now Vice President). The comments by Retired General Chiwenga had been reported in an exclusive interview that he had granted to the state media, leaving the private media with no choice than to source Retired General Chiwenga’s views from the state media. According to *Newsday* “Moyo did not respond to messages sent to him by *NewsDay* seeking his comment over Chiwenga’s threats.” Hence, despite the lack of cooperation from the source (i.e Moyo), the paper went ahead with the story and opted for conjecture in lieu of the source’s actual point of view.

The *Daily News* ran with a story titled ‘Chiwenga after Jonathan Moyo’ on 28 June 2017. *Daily News* also quoted the tweet by Professor Jonathan Moyo,

which they also described as cryptic and then went on to frame it as a challenge to Chiwenga. The *Daily News* presented its own preferred interpretation of the tweet boldly informing its readers that, “Moyo dared Chiwenga, setting the stage for more drama in the coming weeks.” It is uncertain whether the paper sought further clarification from Moyo to get a clearer picture of what his tweet meant but the paper went full steam ahead, citing direct quotes from the Chiwenga interview, which had been published by state media who had been favored with an exclusive interview.

As discussed earlier, one of the recurring themes in the political stories within this study is factionalism hence both *Newsday* and *Daily News* covered the story using factionalism as their interpretive lens. The interpretive approach is a style of journalism that, according to Patterson (2000a, p.250), “empowers journalists by giving them more control over the news message” because “whereas descriptive reporting is driven by the facts, *the interpretive form is driven by the theme around which the story is built* [added emphasis]”. The fact that both *Newsday* and *Daily News* interpreted the cryptic tweet as a response to Chiwenga suggests that they were using a shared theme. Hence one manner of news framing that recurred throughout the dataset was the use of interpretive journalism to speculatively construct meaning and marshal offline sources that were used to buttress a paper’s preferred interpretation.

Quizzed on how publications construct meaning from social media posts, former deputy editor of *Newsday*, Nqaba Matshazi (interviewed on 18 September 2017) reasoned that:

*Meaning, context is always inferred* [added emphasis]. It doesn’t matter if I’m talking to you directly, it was always inferred you’re looking at the context of what has been said prior to that. If I were to tweet about football without mentioning football, it’s easy to connect that someone is talking about football. Even if you have someone on

the record they can still say they were misquoted or say you took what they said out of context even if it's on the record...because meaning is inferred. (*Extract from semi-structured interview 18/09/2017*)

Despite Matshazi's view that meaning can be inferred, thus allowing journalists to assume the interpretative role of analyst rather than observer simply presenting the facts, there are instances where the media have contacted sources to seek clarity as to what they might have meant in their social media posts.

Sometimes meaning is constructed by seeking clarity from the sources. Social media posts can often be open to interpretation and since accuracy is highly regarded in journalism, it stands to reason that journalists have an obligation to afford their sources the opportunity to clarify their views so that they are captured and reflected accurately in news reports. According to the <sup>20</sup>Reuters handbook of journalism, 'accuracy entails honesty in sourcing' and upholding this standard would require journalists to earnestly enquire from sources what they actually mean when they post what they post, moreso on platforms like Twitter where there are character restrictions. From the primary data comprising of 146 social media sourced political stories obtained in this study, the lack of cooperation from sources presents a challenge to journalists in terms of how to construct meaning of social media sourced content.

In certain instances, attempts to get clarity prove unsuccessful and journalists either drop the story or proceed speculatively, making inferences and being interpretative in their style of reporting. However, in some cases journalists are able to get hold of sources although some may refuse to cooperate in terms of elaborating further on their social media statements.

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<sup>20</sup> As sourced on the Reuters website <http://handbook.reuters.com/?title=Accuracy> [retrieved 18 March 2018]

SEEKING CLARITY FROM SOURCES	
Non-cooperative:	Cooperative:
In <i>Daily News</i> edition of 06/01/15: A source refused to elaborate on his social media posts. “ <u>Mutodi said there was no need for him to amplify what he had put on his Facebook page.</u> ” “Ukaonachinhu, handitiunongotorasezvachiri (When you see something, you take it as it is),” Mutodi said. He went on to ask why the <i>Daily News</i> had sought his further comment when what he had said was “in black and white”. 'MNANGAGWA TO TAKE OVER IN MARCH'	In <i>Daily News</i> edition of 11/07/15: A source consented to elaborate on his social media posts. “Asked by the <i>Daily News</i> yesterday if he was not advancing tribalism, regionalism and division in Zimbabwe, <u>Mutodi said, “My post is not divisive at all. It is based on research. These are facts and facts can never be divisive.</u> MUTODI'S CLAIMS GET MORE BIZARRE
In <i>Newsday</i> edition of 25/09/15: A source refused to elaborate on his social media post. “Contacted for comment, <u>Wadyajena said he would not speak beyond Twitter as what he had said was enough.</u> ” ‘CHILDISH’ JONATHAN MOYO UNDER FIRE	In <i>Newsday</i> edition of 08/01/16: A source consented to elaborate on his social media post. “Yesterday, <u>Moyo, however, told NewsDay that he stood by his remarks as the statement was not only targeting civil servants, but all classes of workers.</u> ” BONUSES NOT A RIGHT: PROF MOYO
In <i>Newsday</i> edition of 03/11/15: A source did not respond to requests for clarification: “ <u>The Zanu PF MP yesterday did not respond to questions sent to him by NewsDay to clarify his comments.</u> ” WADYAJENA LIVID WITH ZHUWAO	In <i>Newsday</i> edition of 02/06/16: A source consented to elaborate on his social media post. “Contacted for clarity, Moyo, in an emailed response to <i>NewsDay</i> , said he was not apologizing”. DZAMARA WAS ABDUCTED: MOYO
In <i>The Herald</i> edition of 18/03/17: A source refused to elaborate on his social media post. “ <u>Professor Jonathan Moyo yesterday evaded questions as to why he posted a list of alleged donations made by President Mugabe to Tsholotsho flood victims, excluding 1 000 bags of maize-meal as announced by Matabeleland North Provincial Minister of State Cde Cain Mathema.</u> MOYO RAILS AGAINST HERALD FOR QUERYING TWEET	In <i>Newsday</i> edition of 19/08/16: A source consented to elaborate on his social media post. “ <u>When asked to clarify his tweets, Moyo told NewsDay, “. . . at issue is a specific and isolated incident involving unlawful violence that deserves to be wholly condemned as a specific incident without any reservation whatsoever since it violates constitutional rights and risks tarnishing the image of both the police and the country.”</u> MOYO SLAMS POLICE BRUTALITY
In <i>The Herald</i> edition of 10/07/17: A source refused to elaborate on a social media post. “ <u>Cde Kasukuwere immediately switched off his cellphone when contacted for comment yesterday.</u> KASUKUWERE LETS CAT OUT OF BAG	
In the <i>Newsday</i> edition of 05/09/15: A source did not respond for requests for clarification: “ <u>Moyo, who was not available on his mobile phone to clarify his statements, further told a follower that there was no chance of him appearing before a disciplinary hearing.</u> ” DEFIANT PROF MOYO DIGS IN	

Table 5.8: Journalists seeking clarification from sources

Sometimes meaning is constructed through conflation. The data from this study indicates that there are instances where publications use conflation to construct meaning or to frame their stories. For private media journalists who face more barriers in accessing political sources in Government (all of whom belong to the ZANU PF party), keeping tabs on the social media activity of high-level politicians has been a boon. Whilst they may fail to access the politicians directly, the social media posts of those politicians can be regarded as fair game and used as fodder for stories. As noted by Hladík and Štětka (2017, p.2), mass media are “apparently eager to treat unilateral statements distributed via SNSs as news sources in their own right”. How they frame those statements is of particular relevance to this study that seeks to examine the influence of social media on political reporting. The following examples drawn from the data collected in this study indicate a pattern of conflation where the utterances of a politician are transferred to mainstream print media and presented as reflecting the institutional views of that politician’s party – as exemplified by a story carried in the *Newsday*.

On 28 June 2017, *Newsday* carried a story titled ‘ZANU PF admits MDC-T headache’. *Newsday* quoted the tweets of Professor Jonathan Moyo, which they characterised as ‘observations’. However, despite characterising the tweets as ‘observations’, the *Newsday* went on to claim that, “The ruling Zanu PF has admitted that the Morgan Tsvangirai-led MDC-T poses a serious challenge to its bid to retain power in next year’s general elections”. The fact that *Newsday* presented Jonathan Moyo’s tweeted ‘observations’ as the official position of his political party shows a conflation in which the observations of an individual party member are given institutional weight and made to be representative of the party as a whole. In this manner of framing, Jonathan Moyo and ZANU PF are conflated to become one and the same – in order to turn his tweets into a news story with some meat on it. The story relies solely on Moyo’s tweets and no mention is made of whether or not an effort was made to seek clarity on whether what Moyo tweeted was representative of an official ZANU PF position given that Moyo was not the

party spokesperson. Instead, the story is framed through conflation, and then two official sources from the opposition parties are invited to comment on the tweets, whilst the originator of those tweets (i.e Moyo) is not part of the story, beyond his harvested tweets.

Sometimes meaning is constructed by ignoring the initiating source. In certain instances, media organisations with an agenda can deliberately forego the need to seek clarity from a source regarding what they mean so as to exercise interpretive power. Responding to a question on how meaning is constructed from tweets and whether sources are contacted to clarify on what their social media posts mean, an assistant beat editor working for the state media (coded as ABE\_SM1) in an interview conducted on 18 September 2017 stated that:

For example with Prof [Jonathan] Moyo because normally whoever would have said the reporter should do the story will give the reporter the parameters within which to do the story *he can be quoted out of context but the story would have served its agenda* [added emphasis]. Maybe if he says, 'command lies, command outputs over emphasized' *we don't dig deeper to ask Prof Moyo if he is saying it was ballooned out of realistic targets* [added emphasis] we don't bother to phone him we simply say "ah Jonathan Moyo has condemned Command Agriculture" and *then we will look for analysts who will condemn Jonathan Moyo for the tweet* [added emphasis]. So the issue is not even really on the context from which it was said, the person will just focus on part of the tweet then *we look for people whom we know that they will attack him and then we do the story* [added emphasis].  
(Extract from semi-structured interview 18/09/2017)

The above disclosure is supported by a number of stories carried in the state media vilifying Jonathan Moyo, by instigating traditional sources to denounce him whilst denying him a right of reply. A more detailed discussion will be

had on the subject of Jonathan Moyo and how mainstream media used his social media posts as a news source. For now, it should suffice to give an example of the kind of reportage described by the interviewee (coded as ABE\_SM1) quoted above.

On 22 March 2017, *The Herald* carried a story titled: 'Command Agric: Provinces speak •Ministers unanimous on bumper crop •concerned about storage space'. *The Herald* published the adversarial story to discredit Professor Jonathan Moyo's claims regarding a Government programme dubbed 'Command Agriculture' which was being spearheaded by then Vice President Emmerson Mnangagwa who was part of a rival ZANU PF <sup>21</sup> faction. *The Herald* story marshaled an array of voices, traditionally sourced, to counter Moyo's tweets including 8 Provincial Ministers namely: Minister of State for Matabeleland North Provincial Affairs, Cde Cain Mathema; Midlands Minister of State for Provincial Affairs Cde Jason Machaya; Masvingo Provincial Minister Shuvai Mahofa; Mashonaland Central Minister of State Advocate Martin Dinha; Mashonaland East Minister of State, Brigadier-General (Rtd) Ambrose Mutinhiri; Mashonaland West Minister of State Faber Chidarikire; Manicaland Minister of State for Provincial Affairs Manditawepi Chimene; Matabeleland South counterpart Minister Abednico Ncube. The story carried the views of so many contrary voices as if they were calling upon a line up of rebuttal witnesses to totally discredit the tweeted views of Jonathan Moyo.

Commenting on whether and how *The Herald* seeks clarity and constructs meaning from social media sources, the editor, Caesar Zvayi shared:

In some cases we call and in some cases depending on the subject, we quote [social media posts] and *look for responses from other people* [added emphasis]: Sometimes we phone them and say

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<sup>21</sup> Numerous reports claimed that *The Herald* had been captured by the pro-Mnangagwa 'Lacoste' ZANU PF faction and deployed to attack members of the pro-Grace Mugabe 'G40' ZANU PF faction.

‘Minister you have posted this this, can you clarify’ we do that. But sometimes the <sup>22</sup>140characters is adequate depending on the subject and we then quote and then look for responses from other people. It depends on the subject, *we can ask for further clarification or we can just develop the story further* [added emphasis] and look for responses from other people. (Extract from semi-structured interview 25/09/2017)

The fact that some publications are happy to develop the story further without seeking clarification from a source conforms to Broersma and Graham (2013)’s observations with regards to how tabloid newspapers engage with social media sourced content. According to Broersma and Graham (2013, p.461) “tweets seem to be taken at face value” and when “there are no signs that the source or other sources were contacted to verify [the tweeted] information” it might “indicate ‘sloppy journalism’ and erodes journalism as a practice of verification.” A private media online staffer (coded as OS\_PM1) who was interview on 17 September 2017, weighed in on the ethics of sourcing social media comments without the consent of the source or after failing to obtain further clarification from the source regarding what they meant:

People will still say he refused to comment, which is a popular comment with journalists. *They will say he refused to comment but he posted on Twitter... blah blah* [added emphasis], so misrepresentation is really a fact and a story like that is not worth writing. But still journalism has got to tell the story so *how do you ignore a tweet that has got an impact maybe on a policy because this is a politician who is telling everyone but refusing to talk to you* [added emphasis]; this is a public figure so do we ignore it because it’s in the public interest, or you write the story and you analyze it and say *he could have meant*

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<sup>22</sup> This interview was conducted when Twitter still had 140-character limit, which is what is being referenced in this instance.

*this or he meant that – some will find it unethical [added emphasis].  
(Extract from semi-structured interview 17/09/2017)*

When examined from a sociology of journalism perspective using summative and latent content analysis – the 146 stories that constitute the primary data of this study inadvertently reveal the behind-the-scenes news production processes that lead to the final product. The newsgathering and news production processes behind political reporting, in particular, indicate that a variety of actors contribute to the final product, i.e the political news story. For instance, the role of source-institution and source-journalist relations in determining the ease or difficulty of political newsgathering is manifest in how journalists from some media houses enjoy preferential access to elite sources whilst the rest contend with being ignored, insulted, having their calls dropped and being greeted with expletives upon identifying themselves to a source.

Additionally, the array of mediating technologies used by journalists to make contact with sources such as SMS, phone calls, emails and even social media points to how non-human actors or artifacts facilitate certain aspects of newsgathering. The role of editors in assigning specific reporters to cover specific stories also reveals that newsgathering decisions, including social media sourcing, are not technology-led. The ability of journalists or editors to frame or interpret social media sourced views in a manner they see fit is consistent with claims made by Ericson, Baranek and Chan (1989, p.339 cited in Berkowitz, 2009, p.104) who argued that “journalists retain meaning-making power through controlling the presentation of source information through the construction of a news text”.

Semi-structured interviews that were conducted with knowledgeable purposively sampled interview participants, some who preferred to be identifiable and others who desired to remain anonymous, provide more insight into how social media influences political reportage. An ANT-informed

analysis of the qualitative primary data drawn from the semi-structured interviews follows in the next section.

### **5.3 Tracing newsgathering and sourcing using actor-network theory**

Using ANT to analyze the responses from the semi-structured interviews ensures a holistic analysis that places social media, as a technology, into the social context of decisions on practices and formats within the newsroom (to paraphrase Schmitz and Domingo, 2010, p.1157). The social context in which newsgathering and news production decisions are made is key to understanding social media sourcing practices and to evaluating the influence of social media on political reporting. Using an actor-network approach can be especially beneficial to trace the power relationships between the different actors (Schmitz and Domingo, 2010) involved in the development of a political news story in a newsroom. Hence this section considers “the interaction between technology, working routines and product features: how technical artifacts are integrated into and adapted to the newsroom needs and to what extent the journalists redefine their practices in the process” (Schmitz and Domingo, 2010, p.1158).

Some questions for the semi-structured interviews were drawn from analysis of the 146 social media sourced political stories that comprise the primary data in this study. However, the respondents were also invited to share their thoughts on the five research questions that this study grappled with. What follows are responses from the interviewees on whether or not social media influences political reporting. Following the example of Schmitz and Domingo (2010, p.1162) who, in their study of the innovation processes in online newsrooms, used ANT as an analytical tool – this section applies ANT “to identify relevant actors in the newsrooms studied and interpret their role” in political news reporting so as to establish the influence of social media.

### 5.3.1 Media proprietors and editorial policies as actors

The distinction between actors and actants that has been made by certain scholars is especially useful in deploying ANT as an analytical lens. According to Westlund and Lewis (2014, p.13):

*Actors* refer to humans working within media organizations (e.g., journalists, technologists, and businesspeople), though it may also include social actors wielding influence from beyond the organization (e.g., citizens contributing to news production). *Actants* includes all nonhuman technologies such as algorithms, applications, networks, interfaces, content management systems, and other material objects that are enrolled in media work, whether programmed to work from inside, outside or across organizational boundaries.

For Primo and Zago (2015, p.39):

Journalism isn't produced solely by the social relations among editors, journalists and sources, but also by *non-humans actants (such as e-mails, softwares, search engines, socials networks, among others)* [added emphasis], which participate in the process, transforming it (Plesner, 2009).

This section considers media proprietors and editorial policies (created and enforced by humans) as actors.

Although every interviewee in this study responded in the affirmative to the question: **Has social media influenced political reporting?** – it soon became clear based on their responses to other questions that social media was not as deterministic as they may have first assumed. One explanation for this inconsistency could be that the interviewees had not really applied themselves to the question of whether social media really is influential and

when probed further they came to realise that in the context of their everyday practices, many decisions were taken that significantly blunted whatever influence social media may have. If social media sourcing is considered to be the result of decisions and the power relationships between actors “in a localized social setting” (Schmitz and Domingo, 2010, p.1159), the experiences of knowledgeable interviewees provide an opportunity to follow “specific stages, or ‘moments’ different actors negotiate their attributes, roles and goals in order to reach a specific outcome” (Spyridou et al., 2013, p.79). What follows is a discussion on how media proprietors can influence the specific outcome of news production process, especially where political reporting is concerned.

An illustrative case of how media proprietors can be actors in the news production network can be drawn from how state media reacted to one of the biggest stories of 2015. On 4 February 2015, a story broke and went viral on social media regarding how former President Robert Mugabe had stumbled and fallen at the Harare International airport. When asked to reflect on how state media covered that incident the following responses were proffered by the interviewees:

According to Caesar Zvayi (editor of *The Herald*) in an interview conducted on 25 September 2017:

The story of the President falling at the airport was covered differently by state media because of what I mentioned earlier in terms of ownership. *Zimpapers is 51% owned by the Government and the Principal said* [added emphasis], “Ah the President stumbled at the airport but fortunately he didn’t fall flat on his face, he put out his hand and broke the fall. (Extract from semi-structured interview 25/09/2017)

At the time when this incident transpired, Mduduzi Mathuthu was the editor of *The Chronicle* and in an interview conducted on 7 September 2017, his more detailed recollection chimes with the statements made by Zvayi:

“It was a very very difficult situation for us in the state media because *we didn’t know whether we had to run with the story or not* [added emphasis] because everyone else was talking about it on the Internet, our readers were talking about it on the Internet and not doing anything about it would have become a problem because while we are a state newspaper, clearly we have ignored an important significant story that has happened right under our noses and it wouldn’t make sense to a reader and it would really look very suspicious or just look terrible for our publications. So what did we have to do in that situation? *At the time the Minister of Information was Professor Moyo who came up with his own theory that ‘no, the President had not fallen down he actually broke the fall...’ so that was the narrative that was put out by state media* [added emphasis] which was not to say we didn’t see what happened, we have seen what happened and we have seen how the social media people are framing it but from our perspective or *from the Government’s perspective the President didn’t actually fall he was very quick to put his hand down and break the fall – which was the narrative provided by the Minister* [added emphasis].”

*(Extract from semi-structured interview 07/09/2017)*

When asked what the procedure was for reporting on a scandal of the magnitude of Mugabe’s fall, an editor of a state media weekly (coded as E\_SM1) who was interviewed on 12 September 2017 volunteered the following:

For such stuff [i.e the President falling] *we wait for official comment from the Government to guide you and then you know how to respond* [added emphasis]. Basically there is *the Minister of Information and*

*that is the point person* [added emphasis] and that is the person who gives direction to state media. It then depends on what kind of narrative he wants. (Extract from semi-structured interview 12/09/2017)

Mugabe's fall in 2015 made for a good case study in terms of probing which actors were involved in how state media covered the event and whether social media had any influence. It can be argued that social media 'forced' state media to respond by covering the story, their angle notwithstanding. However another equally illustrative case indicates that there are instances in which state media does not succumb to the pressure of a forced social media news agenda, because coverage seems to be influenced more by instructions from higher ups than from autonomous editorial decision-making. The case of the former First Lady, Grace Mugabe allegedly assaulting a South African woman on 13 August 2017 was treated differently by state media despite the fact that it went viral on social media and was covered by mainstream media outlets in Zimbabwe, South Africa and across the globe. State media ignored the Grace Mugabe assault scandal and maintained a total blackout on the matter.

Caesar Zvayi explained why there was a state media blackout on the scandal of the former First Lady, from his perspective as an editor of the flagship publication of Zimpapers:

The [former] First Lady issue in South Africa happened at a time when there were serious internal fights in ZANU and *it was the editorial judgment that we are better off leaving that story* [added emphasis] to pan out elsewhere and we were not there, we try to get 'what has happened' but no one was forthcoming so we don't know what happened so we couldn't use conjecture as the Herald a paper of public record and *also issues of ownership* (added emphasis). *That was my decision, that we let it pan out* [added emphasis]. We took a

lot of flak on social media. We knew there would be a backlash but *the social media backlash was preferable to any official backlash* [added emphasis] that might have come because remember we had come from Chinhoyi where *the* <sup>23</sup>*First Lady had publicly said we write negative things about her* [added emphasis] and she is doing a lot of good work that we are not covering, and she had dressed down Charamba, and this is in the public domain. The very next week the debacle in South Africa happened. *Now as the editor you can decide to put your head on the block or just get the bite of social media* [added emphasis]. You can put that on record. So that is the challenge with ownership. (Extract from semi-structured interview 25/09/2017)

From this response it becomes evident that political pressure and intimidation can be considered as actors in the political news production network, because when they are successful they lead to editorial apprehension. According to Maodza (2017, p.55) “the remarks by Grace Mugabe at the Chinhoyi rally admonishing <sup>24</sup>Charamba left *The Herald* in an editorial quandary.” Given such a quandary, humans who exercise agency, such as the editor who decides to ignore a story to avoid political backlash, illustrate that a sense of self-preservation can inform editorial decisions in a state-captured media institution. The status quo of the ZANU PF party, which was characterised by factional fights during the period covered by this study, is also an important factor that shaped media coverage. Due to the factional fights there was no official source available that could provide ‘guidance’ to state media or articulate the desires of the proprietor regarding how to frame the narrative. The above factors have nothing to do with social media, and

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<sup>23</sup> The incident Zvayi refers to was carried in the *Daily News* edition of 30 July 2017 in a story titled ‘Grace roasts, ED, Charamba’ -: <https://www.dailynews.co.zw/articles/2017/07/30/grace-roasts-ed-charamba>

<sup>24</sup> George Charamba referenced as ‘Charamba’ was Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Information and also the Spokesperson for then President Mugabe. On 30 July the *Daily News* carried a story detailing how the then First Lady (who was considered to be part of the G40 faction of ZANU PF) had blamed and attacked Charamba (who was considered to be part of the Lacoste faction) for instigating anti-G40 stories that were appearing in *The Herald*.

yet they each weighed greatly in terms of influencing the agenda of the paper as far as the former First Lady scandal was concerned.

A major characteristic of Zimbabwe's private media has been its standing as an ally of the opposition and a critic of the ruling ZANU PF party. Scholars have variously described private media's reportage as a 'crusading journalism', 'campaign journalism' or 'advocacy journalism' (Mazango, 2005, p.49) and even a 'militant journalism'. Far less scrutiny appears to have been paid to the bias of private media in its support of the opposition than has been paid to state media and its bias towards ZANU PF. Indeed, some scholars such as Ruhanya (2014, p.252) have valorised the bias of the private media arguing that, "at the turn of the 21st century, the private media and the *Daily News* in particular, rose to become oppositional and activist in the manner in which they confronted the authoritarian practices of the state". In 18 September 2017 interview with Nqaba Matshazi (the deputy editor of *Newsday*), he revealed how proprietorial pressure can be applied in very subtle and seemingly innocuous ways:

*The AMH owner doesn't interfere in the day-to-day [added emphasis], to say write a story about this or write a story about that, but there are some subtle things he will do like when he shares things he considers interesting and that will remain at the back of your mind that maybe this is a story you should carry. Newsday has probably carried more stories on Nkosana Moyo than any other paper. And it's no secret that Trevor is in Nkosana's team [added emphasis], he has never said to write about it ... but he will be sending us messages to say 'check this out' or 'have you seen this'....so it's 'understood'. I would say the wishes of the owner supersede the economic considerations and the owner directs the political considerations [added emphasis]. I think it's the same as Zimpapers, where as much as you want to make profit, profit imperative is not what directs them, what is important to Zimpapers is making sure the major shareholder is happy [added*

emphasis]. It's the owner first and the rest is subservient. There is a quote from Rupert Murdoch that isn't about social media or sourcing but it goes "I didn't come this far not to interfere". (*Extract from semi-structured interview 18/09/2017*)

It can be argued that social media alone does not have a deterministic effect on newsgathering but rather factors such as proprietorial preferences are always at the back of the mind of editorial teams.

According to Caesar Zvayi (editor of the Herald interviewed on 25 September 2017):

These newspapers will call themselves 'independent media' but there's nothing called independent media, as long as it is mainstream media. *Trevor Ncube owns AMH so his framing of Zimbabwe, his views of Zimbabwe influences the editorial policies of those papers* [added emphasis]. *The Government has a 51% stake in Zimpapers and their framing of events influences the editorial thrust of this* [added emphasis]. He who pays the piper calls the shots. (*Extract from semi-structured interview 25/09/2017*)

In other words, newsgathering practices including social media sourcing within political desks are conducted with the political disposition of the owner in mind.

The primacy of editorial policy in news-gathering processes, including social media sourcing, has been illustrated by scholars such as Chibuwe and Ureke (2016) following their study of how mainstream media sourced the Facebook posts of the anonymous bloggers known as Baba Jukwa and Amai Jukwa. According to Chibuwe and Ureke (2016, pp.1254-55), the "Facebook posts were reproduced in the mainstream media only to the extent that they corresponded with the editorial policies of the same media". The fact that the

use of social media posts by the anonymous Baba and Amai Jukwa characters as news sources “perpetuated the already polarised media industry in which state-controlled media were pro-ZANU-PF, while the private were pro-MDC” (Chibuwe and Ureke, 2016, p.1255) demonstrates that sourcing decisions are not technology-led but emanate from editorial policy.

Proprietorial controls can be exercised through editorial policy and according to McNair (1998, p.107); such a policy is then enforced “through the appointment of like-minded personnel in key management positions who are delegated to carry out [the] boss’s will”. In the case of *Daily News* for instance, the appointment of new personnel had a dramatic effect on their newsgathering practices, including sourcing. In a 20 September 2017 interview, Gift Phiri, the news editor of the *Daily News* revealed how the coming in of a new editor in chief had discouraged the use of unnamed sources:

Here we actually don’t use unnamed sources when we do there must be a very good compelling reason – *that is the policy which has come with our new boss* [added emphasis], we used to use a lot of unnamed sources but we have got a <sup>25</sup>new Editor in Chief so he is not into unnamed sources. (*Extract from semi-structured interview 20/09/2017*)

The function of editorial policies as an actor within the news production network is one that was reiterated by several interviewees to explain editorial decisions such as source selection, framing and gatekeeping. According to an editor of a state media weekly (coded as E\_SM1) who was interviewed on

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<sup>25</sup> Daily News announced the appointment of Hama Saburi as Editor in Chief on 01 June 2017 – <https://www.dailynews.co.zw/articles/2017/06/01/saburi-appointed-anz-editor-in-chief>

12 September 2017, the presence of social media does not significantly alter newsgathering and news production rituals insofar as:

The editorial policy does not change simply because we are now harvesting comment from social media. We will still use stuff from those whom we feel *they are in sync with our editorial policy* [added emphasis].... Unless that person has said something we feel would be useful to our story then we will source it. (*Extract from semi-structured interview 12/09/2017*)

This suggests that social media sourcing is done with consideration for the editorial policies of the organisation that a journalist works for. Hence editorial policies, can in this sense, be viewed as a major actor in the network of news production.

Editorial policy also guides source selection as it permeates every newsgathering decision and guides the news production processes. Social media sourcing is constrained by editorial policy, and thus whatever influence social media may have on political reporting can be mitigated. Some interviewees in this study shared what factors they consider when sourcing from social media, especially where political reporting is concerned.

For instance, an assistant beat editor working for the state media (coded as ABE\_SM2) interviewed on 08 September 2017, stated that reporters in the newsroom know which sources to select whether they were using offline or online sources.

They know straight away that if maybe I follow let's say Obert Gutu's comments on a ZANU PF story he will say something that we cannot use...but *if I follow someone like* <sup>26</sup>*Mahoso you know he will come up*

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<sup>26</sup> Dr Tafataona Mahoso was the pro-ZANU PF Chairman of the Media and Information Commission, a body that was created to control the media in Zimbabwe at the behest of Jonathan Moyo. In February

*with something that is pro-ZANU PF [added emphasis]. (Extract from semi-structured interview 08/09/2017)*

This suggests that journalists approach social media sourcing observing the same sourcing preferences and biases they adhere to offline.

An assistant beat editor working for the state media (coded as ABE\_SM1) interviewed on 18 September 2017, disclosed that sometimes source selection is dictated by the editor especially when the story is a political one:

At times when a story comes from the editor, especially the political story, it might come with *specific names of analysts who are supposed to be contacted he will say 'I want you to talk to A, B, C, D...don't talk to these ones – talk to those ones'* [added emphasis]. So even if people were going to comment on social media, still there will be that gatekeeping role to say *'this person has said this, lets ignore him, lets pick these ones'* [added emphasis] because its all about setting agenda really especially these days to say *'which source is serving our agenda best'* [added emphasis] If the source later on changes his or her colors they naturally disappear from our news stories, kuti *'ah no that one has turned rogue' – the term used is 'rogue' – let's not talk to him let's find those that will comment in a manner that we want* [added emphasis]. (Extract from semi-structured interview 18/09/2017)

The above disclosure emphasizes how guarded the political news beat in state media is since source selection seems to involve a vetting exercise done at the highest editorial level. Furthermore, the fact that certain sources can be dropped when they are perceived to no longer be serving the editorial agenda being pushed by the publication suggests that gatekeeping in terms of which voices are captured in political news stories is fortified. This

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2007, a high court judge, Justice Rita Makarau ruled that Mahoso was biased after his commission attempted to block the registration of the Daily News private papers.  
<https://www.voazimbabwe.com/a/a-13-56-74-2007-11-01-voa75-69001022/1467768.html> [accessed on 15 August 2018]

revelation also reinforces that social media has not democratised political news sourcing in Zimbabwe's mainstream media as there is no source diversity or inclusion of the views of non-elite actors. The fact that *The Herald* retained its usual highly selective and biased sourcing practices even when sourcing from social media supports the claim that sometimes new technology "amplifies existing ways of doing things" (Deuze, 2008, p.11) and supplements existing practices, taking time to seep into the organizational culture (Artwick, 2014).

### **5.3.2 Social media as an actor**

According to (Schmitz and Domingo, 2010), ANT departs from conventional sociological approaches by acknowledging that technical artifacts are also actants, members of an actor-network, which have embedded definitions and strategies that have to be taken into account to understand the evolution and structure of the network. In the context of newsrooms, ANT would account for how "a new technology is brought into the network by some actors, carrying proposed definitions (how the technology is to be used) and new configurations of the network with it" (Schmitz and Domingo, 2010, p.1159).

By all accounts, from the perspectives of the interviewees, social media has increasingly become influential in newsgathering, thus making it a key actor in the network of news production.

Social media enables access to views of uncooperative sources. As has been alluded to in earlier discussions, one of the findings in this study drawn from an analysis of the 146 stories which constitute the primary data is that political sources can be uncooperative, hostile and combative when approached by journalists from a media house that does not share their political inclinations. Social media as an actor in the news production network is credited with facilitating access to sources that might otherwise

have refused to grant interviews. A state media editor of a weekly (coded as E\_SM1) who was interviewed on 12 September 2017, suggested that social media can make certain sources accessible, thereby making certain stories possible:

Of late social media sourcing has become a regular occurrence especially on 'hot' stories: *most journalists actually source from social media in instances where they cannot get some characters to comment on stories* [added emphasis], they source from what those people will have said on social media and they attribute social media. When there was a story where Prof [Jonathan Moyo] was accused of embezzling money, he wasn't there to respond to journalists or perhaps they didn't look for him but *most of the stories that carried his side of the story was actually what he would have written on Twitter* [added emphasis]. The same with Sandi-Moyo, when she was having problems in the party leading to her being relieved of her duties in the women's league...once she was under attack from her party members she created a Twitter account to respond to accusations to say 'I did not do this, or that' so people would write what she was accused of and then as a comment they'd say '*she was not available for comment but on her Twitter she said*' [added emphasis]. So the stories carried her comment in the form of what she was saying on Twitter. *(Extract from semi-structured interview 12/09/2017)*

Drawing from social media sourced political stories, it is clear that social media enables journalists from across the divide to gain access to the same source if that source uses social media to share their views. This means that social media levels the playing field in terms of source access since journalists who would have ordinarily been barred from interviewing a source or otherwise excluded can simply capture their views from their social media platforms.

According to Carlson and Franklin (2011, p.7) “technology has altered the conditions of access” because it can “radically realign the universe of preferable sources”. In the case of Zimbabwe one clear exemplar of how technology has altered the conditions of access to sources is that habitually excluded media organizations can now gain access to the views of elite sources who would ordinarily not give them the time of day. Examples of publications who have benefited from social media-facilitated source access include *Newsday* and *Daily News* who both relied on social media sourcing to capture the views of a source that either would not cooperate with them or that was inaccessible.

**Table 5.9: Social media access to uncooperative sources**

SOCIAL MEDIA ACCESS TO UNCOOPERATIVE SOURCES
In its edition of 05/09/2015, <i>Newsday</i> sourced from social media after failing to access a source. <u>“Moyo, who was not available on his mobile phone to clarify his statements, further told a follower that there was no chance of him appearing before a disciplinary hearing.”</u> DEFIANT PROF MOYO DIGS IN
In its edition of 26/06/2015, <i>Daily News</i> sourced from social media after being ignored by a source. <u>“Moyo blasted one Asian man who had mentioned in a tweet he had been “fired” saying that his ancestors were idiots who had colonised Africa. In another twitter conversation, Moyo was asked where he was tweeting from, and he replied from “cyberspace.” Moyo also ignored a text message from the <i>Daily News</i> concerning his dismissal.</u> CONFUSION SWIRLS OVER JONATHAN MOYO
In its edition of 12/06/16, <i>Newsday</i> said sourced from social media after its efforts to get a comment were fruitless. <u>“A Twitter user asked Moyo for his response to the column and in a hard-hitting response, the Higher Education minister, ironically, said he would not respond to the columnist, because this could cause a relapse in his illness. “It is known he is unwell and his battle is a seesaw. I want him to fully recover and not relapse. He has my best wishes and my prayers 100%,” he said in the loaded response. Efforts to get a comment from the two were fruitless yesterday.</u> MOYO, CHARAMBA IN WAR OF WORDS

The above examples also reveal the role of social media users in baiting elite sources into responding to issues. This will be discussed at greater length in the next section elaborating how ordinary social media users are also actors in the network.

Social media enables use of named sources. The use of unnamed sources has been a problematic feature in political reporting whereby journalists choose to “facilitate a flow of unattributed – and therefore unverifiable – claims into the news” (Carlson, 2011, p.6). The presence of elites on social media presents an opportunity for journalists to be able to name their sources; especially those sources that they might not have ordinarily have managed to gain access to.

An assistant beat editor working for the state media (coded as ABE\_SM2) interviewed on 08 September 2017, described how his paper managed to run with a story about infighting within the MDC-T based on video footage that had been posted online thus affording the chance to be able to name a source:

Traditionally most political stories will have unnamed sources so you just say ‘party insiders’. But now with social media, I don’t know whether it’s that people get overexcited and they will tend to post something and you realise that most of these posts will be pulled down less than an hour later so *if you see the post you have to take a screenshot and then you can have a source that you can quote* [added emphasis]. Like this Khupe issue, someone posted those videos when they were allegedly assaulted on Facebook and I think it was about 10mins after it occurred. *It was on a Sunday and I heard someone the other side [of the newsroom] saying ‘ah ah, can you see what’s happening’*. And then we were able to download those videos but an hour later the post was put down but *we had the videos and the name of the person who posted* [added emphasis] so *when we*<sup>27</sup>*wrote our story we were able to name someone* [added emphasis] and we were also able to put the videos to authenticate the story. So that the following day when they made up and said nothing of that sort

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<sup>27</sup> The Chronicle edition of 07 August 2017 carried a story on a physical altercation that transpired at the MDC-T offices after a video of the incident was posted on Facebook by a party member who later took it down: <http://www.chronicle.co.zw/video-violent-clashes-at-mdc-t-bulawayo-offices/>

happened there would be proof. (*Extract from semi-structured interview 08/09/2017*)

Another assistant beat editor working for the state media (coded as ABE\_SM1) in an interview conducted on 18 September 2017 shared similar sentiments regarding how social media sourcing enables journalists to name actual sources:

In the *Herald* newsroom when someone posts it on social media *the editor says it's evidence enough* [added emphasis], it's evidence enough that someone said something unlike saying 'my source told me something' and then the editor asks 'who is the source' and then you say 'I'm not so comfortable saying my source' – you compare that to someone who would have posted something to his Twitter account. *So you run away from unnamed sources or party insiders* [added emphasis]. (*Extract from semi-structured interview 18/09/2017*)

Based on the interviewee's responses and also by the numerous instances in which mainstream media organizations opt to construct their own meanings without seeking clarity from the sources whose social media posts they are citing – it can be argued that social media posts are treated as being 'on-the-record' comment, that can carry official weight. As long as social media posts are treated as being 'on-the-record' comments, social media sourcing will be considered a boon for journalists who can enjoy greater credibility when they write stories with named rather than unnamed sources. This, however, does not mean audiences will consider social media sourced news stories as carrying the same weight as traditionally sourced stories – which is a discussion that goes beyond the scope of the present study.

Although the preferences of proprietors and the guidelines of editorial policies can be considered highly deterministic in the newsgathering and news production process, it can be argued that journalists are highly

sensitized to social media in ways that can trigger unconscious bias that they may be oblivious to. One way in which social media can affect the news agenda of mainstream is through a 'forced agenda' which according to Akinfemisoye (2013, p.17)'s Nigeria-focused study derives from instances where: "'alternative' journalism can negotiate spaces within the mainstream media by providing a 'forced agenda' for them [mainstream media] to run with". However, despite the existence of a 'forced agenda', journalists tend to respond by reasserting control – normalizing alternative media formats to meet existing needs (Singer, 2005).

In the case of Zimbabwe's mainstream media, instances where social media 'forces' the hand of mainstream media in terms of covering issues they might have otherwise ignored include the fall of former President Robert Mugabe mentioned earlier which 'forced' state media to respond. Social media is however not always successful in forcing an agenda on mainstream media as evidenced by the fact that state media ignored the viral story of Grace Mugabe.

Several interviewees conceded that social media couldn't be ignored. According to Caesar Zvayi (editor of *The Herald* interviewed on 25 September 2017):

A classical example [of social media's agenda setting capabilities] is what happened over the weekend where social media posts urged people to stock up on food because shortages were looming and people in Harare and elsewhere in Zimbabwe heeded those calls and rushed to the supermarkets buying basic commodities in bulk. And then *mainstream media carried the story of that panic hoarding which had originated from social media* [added emphasis] information circulating which triggered the panic, covering the hoarding and the cash shortages, price increases and the fears of looming shortages. Those stories also had a political angle. As compared to mainstream

media, social media is ubiquitous and diverse and you can access it at any time so *social media is really running away with the ball and we have to catch up* [added emphasis] because with mainstream media the paper comes out midnight and some don't even have money to buy it. I think *it's a colossus that no conventional media can afford to ignore*" [added emphasis]. (Extract from semi-structured interview 25/09/2017)

Similar sentiments regarding the pervasiveness of social media in the consciousness of news staffers as well as users were echoed by, Mduduzi Mathuthu former editor of *The Chronicle* in an interview conducted on 7 September 2017.

I generally think *you can't ignore big stories that the Internet is reporting* [added emphasis] and that [Mugabe's airport fall] was one case. *Our response was driven by social media* [added emphasis]...knowing that the world has seen this thing... Newsgathering has changed, more organisations accept that this is the case, stories will come from anywhere, any editor that tries to ignore that fact is going to be irrelevant: You find more and more journalists are sitting in the newsroom and when you're sitting in the newsroom *one of the sources of news that is always at your disposal is social media* [added emphasis] and there's a lot that's happening on social media. (Extract from semi-structured interview 07/09/2017)

For the *Newsday's* deputy editor, Nqaba Matshazi (interviewed on 18 September 2017) whatever agenda setting influence social media may have is significantly counteracted by the fact that it will remain subordinate to editorial policy, which pervasive at every stage of newsgathering and in every step of the news production process. According to Nqaba Matshazi, social media can still potentially trigger a story:

Social media has the potential to trigger a story, to make mainstream media pay attention to certain issues. If something is pushed by social media it can easily be appropriated by mainstream media. What social media has done is give us leads; *those leads are subordinate to the editorial policy* [added emphasis]. (Extract from semi-structured interview 18/09/2017)

According to the news editor of *Daily News*, Gift Phiri, (interviewed on 20 September 2017) social media can and has set the news agenda, and using his media organization as an example he shared:

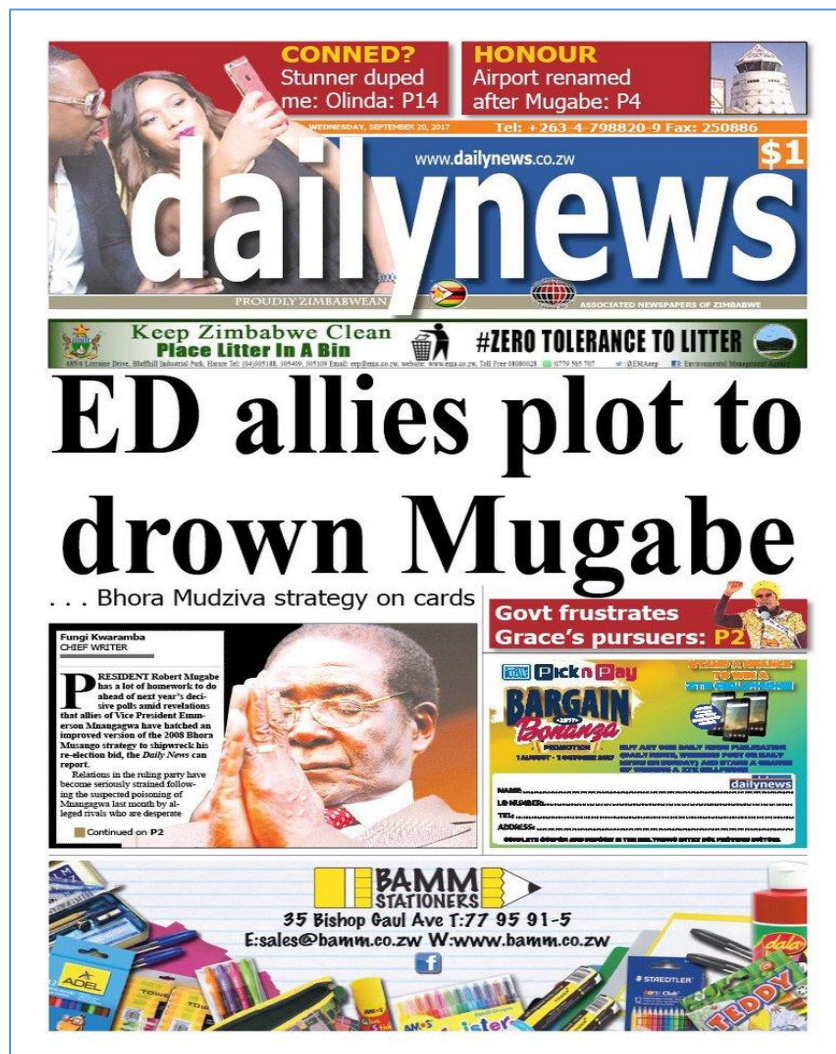
I think *we are one of the newspapers that really ran with the Baba Jukwa [anonymous Facebook blogger] story* [added emphasis]. The guy was dropping newsworthy hints about what was going on in ZANU, he was a very useful idiot so to an extent we found the information very useful and some of the information passed the credibility test so really we would try to crosscheck some of the things and we were extremely happy that most of the material passed even though some of the material had its own slanting related to the factions. I think he was just one media warrior who really was different from the rest the only one that compares is maybe Jonathan Moyo. (Extract from semi-structured interview 20/09/2017)

To illustrate his paper's reliance on social media, Phiri further mentions that:

Also we have got some politicians who are fond of posting things on social media especially Twitter, given the succession politics in ZANU PF. *We have got new sources like Jonathan Moyo who are quite active on Twitter* [added emphasis] they drop hints about the happenings in their party and *you derive news stories from their tweets* [added

emphasis]. I think in <sup>28</sup>today's paper we have Prof Jonathan Moyo speaking on this so-called 'Bhora Mudziva' plot from Lacoste faction it's actually a story idea, which came from his tweet. So we get very useful information from social media [added emphasis]. We use social media extensively in political news but also across all our news desks. (Extract from semi-structured interview 20/09/2017)

Figure 5.1: Daily News front-page story developed from tweets



The admission by the abovementioned private media desk editor that his paper derives story leads from tweets accords with the view of Nqaba

<sup>28</sup> The story the interviewee was referring to was titled 'ED allies plot to drown Mugabe' and was carried in the *Daily News* <https://www.dailynews.co.zw/articles/2017/09/20/ed-allies-plot-to-drown-mugabe>

Matshazi (interviewed on 18 September 2017), deputy editor of *Newsday* who suggested that social media does give mainstream media story leads but that does not necessarily translate to the setting of a news agenda as the editorial policy holds primacy.

The fact that social media can give mainstream media staffers story leads means that the means by which journalists gain access to social media are worth surveying. The following section considers, in brief, how artifacts factor in with regards to newsgathering and news production processes.

Artifacts are actors in the news production network. According to Primo (2014, p.44) artifacts are traditionally not considered as an actor in journalism but:

...as soon as the Internet connection breaks, for example, several associations would cease to exist, inside and outside the newsroom...journalists would have difficulties relating to each other, assignment editors and the public would be separated...with the absence of the Internet, in this example, the multiplicity of silent digital actors suddenly becomes noticed.

Embedded within the 146 social media sourced stories that constitute the primary data for this study are subtle references to 'silent digital actors' that become noticeable when an ANT-informed analysis is brought to bear. In narrating their efforts to contact sources and get official comment, the political stories also mention the technologies they use in their attempts to access sources. According to Reich (2005, p.555) news is negotiated between reporters and sources and "it tends to be obtained through a negotiation-enabling device-mainly the telephone". What Reich (2005) terms 'negotiation-enabling-devices' are, in the context of this discussion, regarded as actors within a network of news production.

In outlining the attempts made to get a comment from a source, some political stories contain mention of the kind of devices used by the reporter. This suggests a reliance on artifacts that are ‘silent digital actors’ in newsgathering.

**Table 5.10: Mediating technologies as silent actors**

<b>STORY</b>	<b>METHOD USED TO CONTACT SOURCE</b>	<b>ENABLING ARTIFACT</b>
MNANGAGWA ALLIES DRAGGED TO DISCIPLINARY HEARINGS <i>(Newsday, 25/02/16)</i>	The source (Kasukuwere) is said to have terminated the call when contacted for comment.	- Either landline or mobile phone.
KASUKUWERE LETS CAT OUT OF BAG <i>(The Herald, 10/07/17)</i>	The source (Kasukuwere) is said to have switched off his cellphone when contacted for comment.	- Either landline or mobile phone.
MOYO MUM ON CABINET DEBACLE <i>(Newsday, 26/06/15)</i>	The source (Moyo) was said to not have been picking calls.	- Either landline or mobile phone.
CONFUSION SWIRLS OVER JONATHAN MOYO <i>(Daily News, 26/06/15)</i>	The source (Moyo) was said to have ignored a text message from the <i>Daily News</i> .	- Mobile phone
DEFIANT PROF MOYO DIGS IN <i>(Newsday, 05/09/15)</i>	The source (Moyo) was said to have not been available on his mobile phone.	- Either landline or mobile phone.
MOYO FAILS TO BACK CHIWENGA THESIS CLAIMS <i>(The Herald, 12/07/17)</i>	The source (Moyo) did not respond to calls or texts or e-mails or questions that were posted on his Twitter timeline.	- Either landline or mobile phone. - Internet-enabled device such as desktop computer, laptop, iPad or smartphone. - Availability of wifi (facilitated through a modem) or mobile data (facilitated through network service provider)
<b>INTERVIEWEE</b>	<b>MENTION OF MEANS OF SOURCE CONTACT</b>	<b>ENABLING ARTIFACT</b>
Caesar Zvayi (Herald editor, 25 September 2017)	“We try to phone a Minister...They know our numbers and ignore our calls. So we can go and post on their social media to say ‘Minister we have been trying to reach with these questions...1, 2, 3.”	- Either landline or mobile phone. - Internet-enabled device such as desktop computer, laptop, iPad or smartphone. - Availability of wifi (facilitated through a modem) or mobile data (facilitated through network service provider)
A private media desk editor (coded as DE_PM1), 20 September 2017	Some of these guys you try to go the conventional way, try to engage them through the phone, they are not forthcoming.	- Either landline or mobile phone

Although the above-mentioned silent digital actors are a mere snippet drawn from the primary data both the news stories and the statements made by

interviewees, it appears that with regards to political sourcing “most contacts are carried out using mediating technologies” (Reich, 2006, p.505). If that is the case, then the role of silent digital actors or negotiation-enabling devices such as Internet-enabled desktops, laptops, iPads, smartphones (used to send emails, access social media platforms) and landlines as well as mobile phones (used to make and receive calls, send texts) in newsgathering is worth noting. According to Reich (2005) examining the technologies used by journalists to acquire data and to contact sources may shed light on an invisible side of the news, or in this instance, on the silent digital actors who contribute to the network of news production.

The role of silent digital actors has been pondered by Reich (2005) who argued that new technologies have probably changed the ways in which reporters themselves get updated; track competitors’ work; communicate with newsrooms; and transmit, search, and store data. For Reich (2005, p.565) silent digital actors may eventually lead to “a reconfiguration of the journalistic ‘reality’ into a new interface or a new mental landscape ‘supersaturated’ with mediated messages”. The idea that silent digital actors can create a new mental landscape or reconfigure journalistic reality accords with statements by interviewees who acknowledge that they are very sensitized by social media and tethered to their devices as a means of staying connected.

I’m very active on social media. *When I wake up, I reach for my iPad [added emphasis] and check my Twitter account to see what has been trending and then I do the same on Facebook and other online sites [added emphasis].* I also check active users like Matigary, Prof Moyo and see what conversations are going on. *I check my Facebook and Twitter throughout the day [added emphasis]. (Extract from semi-structured interview with Caesar Zvayi, 20/09/2017)*

The fact that the editor of a national paper checks his social media as soon as he wakes up and conducts these checks repeatedly throughout the day suggests a high level of preoccupation with online discourses that would alter his mental landscape or journalistic reality in subtle ways. Similarly, one private media weekly editor interviewed on 21 September 2017 (coded as E\_PM1) divulged that:

I think social media has become an important listening post. Usually *when we have done the paper I have this nagging feeling ‘what if something is actually trending on social media’* [added emphasis].  
(*Extract from semi-structured interview 21/09/2017*)

This disclosure by the private media editor reveals a sense of anxiety that can cause mainstream media practitioners to feel compelled to check what is trending on social media to make sure they have not been scooped or if they have been scooped – to get a chance to immediately ride the wave of whichever hot topic or issue that would have gone viral.

For other newsroom staffers, social media may not trigger feelings of anxiety but relief. Although the silent digital actors or mediating technologies that are part of the network of news production are hardly acknowledged by interviewees, their presence is manifest in the journalistic routines that they (i.e artifacts) routinely facilitate. For instance, whilst no interview mentioned how important having a computer or laptop or smartphone and Internet access was to political newsgathering, they do mention carrying out activities (such as conducting interviews on Facebook or Whatsapp) that would be impossible to execute without these various artifacts. For instance, Gift Phiri, the news editor of *Daily News* narrates how they make use of mediating technologies as part of their day-to-day newsgathering routine:

*We conduct interviews on Facebook* [added emphasis]; it is much easier because it replaces phones, there are serious cost implications

with phones. Phones are a bit expensive unlike social media, which is virtually free. When conducting interviews on Facebook you also get written text, which is much easier to handle than recording someone and then transcribing, so *we use it extensively* [added emphasis].  
(Extract from semi-structured interview 20/09/2017)

The extensive use of Facebook to find story leads, to contact sources and to interview them would not be possible without the silent digital actors in the form of artifacts which facilitate these activities. The inherent weaknesses of using the Internet for newsgathering or social media as a news source such as the poor quality of information; limited reliability, believability, and accuracy; as well as time constraints, lack of training, and navigation and design faults (Reich, 2005) – are concerns that fall outside the scope of the present study.

Assuming that social media sourcing in political reporting “*is the consequence of decisions taken in specific newsrooms in particular circumstances* [added emphasis]” by journalists that may have a professional culture or may have knowledge and expectations about the Internet as a news medium (Domingo, 2008, p.681) – the next section considers human actors found within the network of news production.

### **5.3.3 Editors, journalists, users and sources as actors**

In her study of how Facebook and Twitter have impacted on newsroom routines and cultures at two South African weeklies, Jordaan (2015, p.32) argued that although “journalists might have viewed these media as separate from their usual activities, routines and cultures within the newsroom” in reality “being immersed in social media forced the journalists to alter the way they approached news selection and presentation, even if they did not reflect internally about it”. From Jordaan (2015)’s perspective, social media may not ‘force’ an agenda on mainstream media journalists but it alters how they approach news selection because their immersion in social media can create

unconscious bias. In this section, the influence of social media – whether overt or covert – is considered within the context of social media sourcing in political reporting.

Editors are actors in the news production network. The power hierarchy in newsrooms places editors at the top of the totem pole because “in a news organization it is the editor who functions both as a professional and as a member of the news organization’s management” (Soloski, 1989, p.219). The editor, as “the executive in charge of the news operation” is a significant actor in the network of news production (Soloski, 1989). Using a variety of methods including editorial meetings, story assignments, reprimands and supervision of the paper’s production – the editor ensures that his journalists follow the paper’s editorial policies (Soloski, 1989).

Soloski (1989)’s outline of the role of the editor sufficiently illustrates how editors are actors in the network of news production. Soloski (1989, p.220) contends that:

The editorial meeting is also crucial for understanding how *the editor controls the content of the newspaper* [added emphasis] because it is during these meetings that *he decides which stories to cover or ignore* [added emphasis]....his involvement in the story selection process minimizes confrontations with reporters over [editorial] policy issues. *It is easier for the editor to control story assignments than to have to kill or tone down a story* [added emphasis] after it has been written. Reporters see story assignments as part of the editor’s professional responsibilities.... By controlling assignments, the editor ensures that the important stories, which are more likely to have [editorial] policy implications, are covered by the more trustworthy reporters.... Although the editor is not involved in the day-to-day editing process, he does edit all stories that deal with controversial issues.

In the context of a study examining the influence of social media on political reporting, the functions of the editor as outlined by Soloski (1989), suggest that crucial decisions such as what stories to cover or ignore, what reporters to assign to stories and the editor's gatekeeping role of being the one who clears the most sensitive stories – position editors as significant actors in the news production network.

On the 28<sup>th</sup> of May in 2015, the *Newsday* carried a story which contained a comment from the editor of *The Herald*, Caesar Zvayi in which he was responding to accusations by a senior ZANU PF party official that state media editors were destroying the party at Professor Jonathan Moyo's bidding. In the story, titled 'Moyo plotting against Mugabe', *Newsday* quoted Caesar Zvayi as follows:

Only a fool would believe Prof Moyo is a journalist at *The Herald*. *I am the editor of the paper, I preside over the diary* [added emphasis]. Herald reporters write all stories in *The Herald*," he said. "I don't know what an anti-Zanu-PF story is because we write issue-based or event-based stories. *If anything we are accused of being a Zanu-PF mouthpiece* [added emphasis].

The above quote illustrates how Caesar Zvayi, as editor of *The Herald*, acknowledges and owns those functions outlined by Soloski (1989) as being the functions of an editor, including presiding over diary meetings where the story selection process is done. It also suggests that no political story - whether social media sourced or not - sees the light of day without his say so.

When asked how social media sourced political stories are assigned, an assistant beat editor working for the state media (coded as ABE\_SM1) in an interview conducted on 18 September 2017 responded thus:

The editor normally... I don't know, I am not sure if it will be from his head or someone tells him, tips him off about the tweet inengeyapostwane (that would have been posted by) the politician but *normally it comes via the editor, it doesn't follow the normal channel where you come and discuss 'Prof Moyo tweeted this or whatever'* [added emphasis] it will simply come as a phone call from the editor to news desk saying *'give this or that reporter this story'* then the reporter does the story outside the normal newsgathering and writing channel [added emphasis]. (Extract from semi-structured interview 18/09/2017)

The fact that the editor decides what stories to include in the paper, which reporters to assign to certain stories and that he has the discretionary power to operate outside normal newsgathering and writing channels suggests that he wields significant control over the content of the newspaper. This description from the above state media assistant beat editor is consistent with the findings in a study by Maodza (2017, p.66) that found that:

...there was a major shift in news sourcing tradition at *The Herald* with political reporters who wrote the stories that scandalised the G40 members confirming that most of the times the story ideas on developments in ZANU-PF did not originate from them. They said such stories came directly from *The Herald* editor as "special projects" and after normal working hours when other journalists would have gone home for the day.

It was not uncommon, according to Maodza (2017, p.61), for newsroom managers below the editor to be bypassed in the news production process involving stories on ZANU-PF factionalism as selected political reporters were instructed to report directly to the editor. This led to a scenario that one assistant news editor described in the following way, "you would wake up the following morning to find them [anti-G40 stories] in the newspaper" (Maodza (2017, p.61).

Whilst editors wield significant control over the content of the newspapers, they are also predisposed to carrying out the will of the proprietors. In a 1990 article written by Anthony Bevins and published in the *British Journalism Review*, Bevins (1990, p.14) quotes <sup>29</sup>Anthony Howard, a former deputy editor of *The Observer*, as having stated that “I should have realised that, *without any overt pressure being applied* [added emphasis] there had developed a tendency to anticipate Mr Rowland [the proprietor]’s wishes and to cater for his interests.” This sentiment was especially striking as it chimes with the views expressed by a private media weekly editor (coded as E\_PM1) interviewed on 21 September 2017. When asked about how much professional autonomy editors enjoy this particular editor of a weekly private media publication shared the following:

You’re working in an environment where you believe and think you are autonomous – you think everything you think you can write it in the paper and *on the surface of it, no one is stopping you. But then you are operating within certain parameters*, [added emphasis] though sometimes you have no idea what they are so I think that’s the editorial policy. For example, some time last year [2016] someone from our side tweeted that a certain minister is the worst minister, whom they described as a snake-oil salesman, one of the first people to respond was the owner of our papers and he said ‘I don’t agree with you Chief, I think (that minister) is quite a hardworking chap’. The colleague did not go on with his conversation after that comment. It’s obvious they could not be disagreeing with the owner of the paper, moreso on a public platform like Twitter. In reality, parameters had been set for him, for us all. So even for the hard news, we may write what we like, what we think we like, but the moment the owner or Charamba in the case of Zimpapers says to you, *‘Eish, but I think these days so-and-so is doing a good job’* you’re obliged, *whether you*

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<sup>29</sup> Bevins quotes Anthony Howard statement from *The Independent* on 1 April 1989. Article citation: Bevins, A. (1990). The crippling of the scribes. *British Journalism Review*, 1(2), 13-17.

*think about it or not it's working in the back of your mind* [added emphasis]. Even how we cover that minister in future stories will be informed by the knowledge that the owner of the paper likes this person. (*Extract from semi-structured interview 21/09/2017*)

The above statement illustrates how editors (to paraphrase Anthony Howard cited in Bevin, 1990) may develop a tendency to anticipate the proprietor's wishes and to cater for his interests, even without any overt pressure being applied.

Journalists are actors in the news production network. Although editors are custodians and enforcers of the editorial policy, they are not present to observe at first hand the sensitive transaction point at which information is exchanged between sources and reporters (Reich, 2006). In the ongoing debates regarding the nature of journalist-source relations, Reich (2006) modifies Gans' dance metaphor in a way that is very instructive for the present study. Whereas Gans (1980, p.116) argued that the relationship between sources and journalists resembles a dance where it takes two to tango hence "either sources or journalists can lead, but more often than not, sources do the leading". Reich (2006, p.509) amends this metaphor by arguing that although "sources do control 'more often than not' the initial invitation to dance; after the dance has begun, it is the reporters who take command and invite other dancers to follow."

It can be argued that political sources in Zimbabwe may initiate or trigger a news story by divulging certain information on social media however, according to Eriksson and Östman (2013, p.308):

In news construction, the different perspectives collated from additional sources (Reich 2006) can be played out against each other, or contextualized in a way that implies criticism of the initiating

political source, even if the politician was not aggressively questioned in the initial interaction with the journalist.

Journalist-source relations provide some insights into how journalists are actors in the network of news production. What follows is a discussion on the varying types of journalist-source relations that were identified in the primary data, which comprised of 146 social media sourced political stories.

Some journalists adopt adversarial approach to questioning sources. According to Eriksson and Östman (2013, p.309), adversarialness is mainly applicable to the content of the questions as it “captures instances where the questioning implies a standpoint that is in opposition to the agenda represented by the politician being questioned”. For Eriksson and Östman (2013), this form of journalistic aggressiveness is often performed in prefaces to questions, where journalists may describe problems with policy proposals, highlight discrepancies between politicians’ words and their actions, or refer to opinions that run counter to views presented by the politicians being questioned. This is referred to as “a hostile preface” (Eriksson and Östman, 2013, p.309).

An example of how a story can be contextualized in a way that is adversarial and that implies criticism of the initiating political source is how *The Herald*, on 17 March 2017, confronted Professor Jonathan Moyo over his tweets regarding donations that had been allegedly done by President Mugabe. After he tweeted a list of goods that were supposedly donated by the President to Tsholotsho flood victims, Professor Moyo was treated as an initiating source. On 18 March 2017, Professor Moyo shared communication he had received from a Herald journalist on his Twitter account to query why *The Herald* held him accountable for verifying donations, a duty he considered to be that of the Civil Protection Unit (CPU). The reporter’s questions had a hostile preface and thus seemed adversarial, as the reporter had asked, “We want to check from you if indeed the President has made the

donation in question. If he didn't *was your post meant to humiliate and embarrass the President* [added emphasis]?"

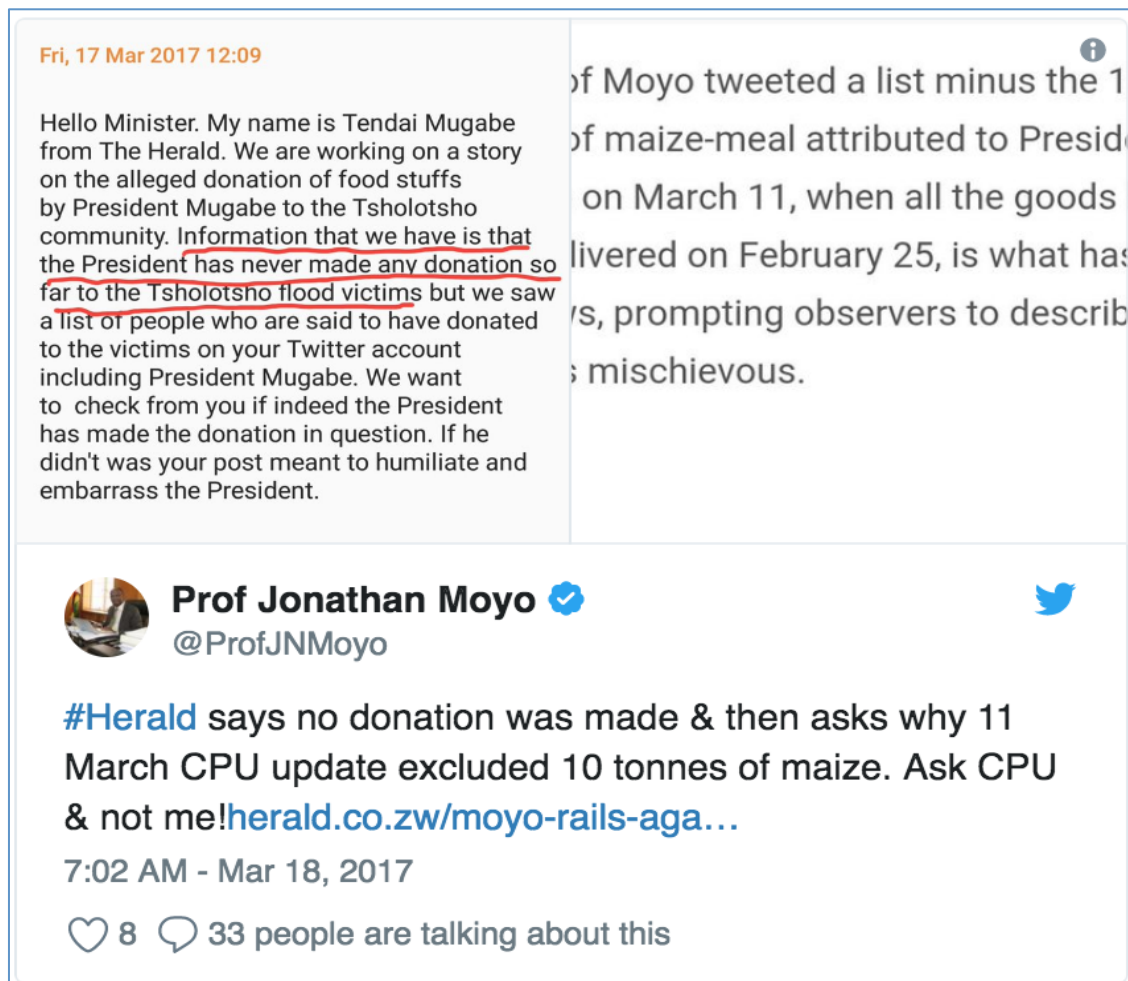


Figure 5.2: Source challenging a journalist's framing

Private media, namely the *Daily News* and *Newsday* had also used Moyo's tweeted list of Mugabe's purported donations as initiating sources to run with stories that were extremely critical of the President.

In a story titled 'Anger over Mugabe cyclone donations' carried in the *Daily News* edition of 14 March 2017, the paper marshaled an array of 5 sources (drawn from analysts and opposition figures) to comment on the information provided by the initiating source (i.e Professor Moyo). The sources lined up by *Daily News* proceeded to criticize Mugabe on the strength of Moyo's tweeted list, claiming the donations were 'a mockery and an insult' that they

were ‘a very big joke’ that was in ‘extreme bad taste’ showing ‘arrogance of the highest order’ and also ‘vulgar’. Moyo, who was the initiating source, was not invited to comment as the paper preferred to run with the different perspectives collated from additional sources. This exclusion of the initiating source is in sync with the observation made in the study by Metag and Rauchfleisch (2016, p.14), who found that although a politician’s tweet might “have triggered the journalistic story, but the tweet’s message may not necessarily be included in the media coverage after all.” In the case above, the *Daily News* did not use the Jonathan Moyo’s tweet message but opted to line up other sources. The manner in which the social media sourced views of the initiating source were ultimately excluded, proves Reich (2006, p.509)’s point that while “sources do control the initial invitation to dance” once “the dance has begun, it is the reporters who take command and invite other dancers to follow.”

This sequence of events also demonstrates the accuracy of one private media weekly editor (coded as E\_PM1)’s observations captured in an interview that was conducted on 21 September 2017. According to the private media weekly editor:

I have really looked at Jonathan Moyo as an interesting study because he throws out all sorts of information. *He doesn’t wield untrammelled power over how his messages are decoded* [added emphasis] and how they reach the [mainstream media’s] market. There is editorial intervention which guarantees that his messages or that of any politician sent out using social media are not necessarily able to deliver the ‘magic bullet effect’ if you will. I think the editorial intervention is also severely undermined by the diminishing reach that traditional media has. (*Extract from semi-structured interview 21/09/2017*)

The fact that there is editorial intervention that can alter a politician's message and the idea that social media sources do not 'wield untrammelled power' over how their messages are decoded reinforces the view that "official sources may instigate the news and direct the attention of the reporters toward particular events and issues, without controlling the ultimate story" (Cook, 1998, p.105).

The *Newsday* used Moyo's tweets as an initiating source to do a story in which they quoted President Mugabe's spokesperson disputing that the list of donations tweeted by Moyo had emanated from the President. In a story titled, 'Mugabe fumes over donation' carried in the 17 March 2017 edition of the *Newsday*, the paper sought and obtained comment from the President through his spokesperson, the paper had also sought clarification from Moyo and used additional clarifying tweets he had posted on the matter before citing an opposition source from the *Daily News* story. What this illustrates is how Moyo, as the initiating source, had no control over what the ultimate story would be regarding the donation list that he had tweeted because "journalists colour the news stories with their own interpretations of what the politicians say and do, or why they do it" (Strömbäck and Nord, 2006, p.143). This incident illustrates how using social media can backfire and have unintended consequences for an initiating or instigating source.

Additionally, the *Newsday* story makes reference to how "Former Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai's MDC-T reportedly scoffed at Mugabe's donation, describing it as an "insult" to the people of Tsholotsho" thus quoting the *Daily News* story without actually directly mentioning *Daily News* (which is a competitor) as a source. This demonstrates the use of other news outlets as sources (Sigal 1973), which happens to be a common, albeit hidden, practice in journalism (Davies 2008) that, according to Knight (2012, P.61) has been surprisingly 'rarely discussed' in research into sourcing practices.

Some journalists use the accountability questioning approach. According to Eriksson and Östman (2013, p.310), “accountability questions ask politicians to offer an explanation for taking a particular course of action or adopting a policy position”. There are two types of accountability questions: the first type (Why did you...?) asks for a rationale, whereas the second type (How could you...?) asks for a rationale with the implied expectation that it is not possible to offer a reasonable justification (Eriksson and Östman, 2013). To Eriksson and Östman (2013, p.310), “both forms are considered aggressive because they usually imply that the politician is responsible for a state of affairs assumed in the framing of the question to be undesirable”.

An example of accountability questioning can be found in a story carried by the *Daily News* in its edition of 11 July 2015 titled ‘Mutodi's claims get more bizarre’. In the story, the reporter – Lloyd Mbiba – shares a comment where the source was clarifying on his social media statements. However, the manner in which Mbiba had framed the question to the source suggests an accountability approach in which the journalist feels the source should ‘own up to’ or take responsibility for their utterances. According to the story:

*Asked by the Daily News yesterday if he was not advancing tribalism, regionalism and division in Zimbabwe [added emphasis], Mutodi said, “My post is not divisive at all. It is based on research. These are facts and facts can never be divisive.*

Asking a source if they are not advancing tribalism, regionalism and division in Zimbabwe by posting certain views on social media can be taken to “imply that the politician is responsible for a state of affairs assumed in the framing of the question to be undesirable” (Eriksson and Östman, 2013, p.310). The fact that journalists can frame questions in any way illustrates how “journalists can use politicians as sources and still retain power over the content and the framing of the news” (Strömbäck and Nord, 2006, p.151).

It can be argued that the approach used by journalists to engage with sources can also have a bearing on the source's willingness to cooperate or grant them interviews. This means that reporters who are known to be adversarial or who deliver their questions using hostile prefaces may encounter resistance. As highlighted by an assistant beat editor working for the state media (coded as ABE\_SM1) in an interview conducted on 18 September 2017:

*There are reporters who when they call certain guys in ZANU PF, they will never answer their calls [added emphasis], even if they ask them questions at a press conference they will never respond to them so that then shows the level of professionalism on the part of the reporters involved or maybe the level of emotions on the part of the politician. They are so emotional that they cannot see that reporter as a reporter but rather as an activist [added emphasis]. The tendency nowadays because of factionalism is people are becoming participants and some of them say it publicly to say 'I think if Lacoste gets in or I think if G40 gets in...' so you have a situation where a reporter becomes somehow a politician as well and their stories are then driven by that mindset [added emphasis], they are involved in the stories. (Extract from semi-structured interview 18/09/2017)*

The fact that some sources regard certain journalists as 'activists' suggests that they do not trust those journalists to be professional in how they cover issues. Trust between political journalists and sources, in the Zimbabwean context, is often a question of whether the political source trusts the media house that the particular journalist writes for.

However, in the extraordinary circumstance of intraparty conflict such as factionalism within the ZANU PF party, some sources regard certain journalists with suspicion if those journalists are viewed as having close relations with their rivals in the party. An example of how mistrust corrodes

the journalist-source relations is how on 29 March 2017, *The Herald* carried a story narrating how a minister and ZANU PF member verbally attacked one of their reporters and made threats against the paper's editor as well as another minister and ZANU PF member whom he held responsible for how state media was covering him. In the story titled 'MISA Zim, ZUJ slam Kasukuwere', *The Herald* narrated how:

Zanu-PF political commissar Cde Saviour Kasukuwere has come under fire from media organisations for charging at and *threatening Herald journalists with unspecified action for what he termed negative coverage* [added emphasis]. In an expletive-filled tirade during an unsolicited interview with journalists on the sidelines of a Command Agriculture Field Day at Chaminuka Training Centre in Mt Darwin last week, *Cde Kasukuwere said he was ready to take The Herald reporters, the editor Caesar Zvayi and Information, Media and Broadcasting Services Minister Dr Chris Mushohwe head on* [added emphasis]. According to media reports, *Cde Kasukuwere verbally abused The Herald's journalists after complaining over the coverage that he received* [added emphasis] going to the extent of calling senior reporter, Felix Share, "a son of a b\*\*\*\*h".

The reaction by this minister suggests that he now viewed *The Herald* and any reporters associated with it as "political actors and not simply media professionals who follow only a news logic" (Maurer and Beiler, 2017, p.14). The idea that sometimes journalists start to behave like political actors is reinforced by an assistant beat editor working for the state media (coded as ABE\_SM2) in an interview conducted on 08 September 2017.

We have the G40/Lacoste issue. There was a time when *The Herald* took a position. *The Herald* seemed to be on the Lacoste side. *Everything Lacoste would be a lead story; they were attacking the so-called G40 left, right and centre* [added emphasis]. Then people who

were suspected to be part of the G40 like Kasukuwere, Moyo and Zhuwao would comment on Herald stories and attack the stories on their social media especially Jonathan Moyo and then the private media would go to town. So at the end of the day, the powers that be felt that it was important for us to cover such stories but then make sure we get official comment to dilute whatever. Because if we ignore them we would also lose credibility when everyone else can see it's the public domain, then we ignore like nothing happened. *(Extract from semi-structured interview 08/09/2017)*

The above comment, coming from a staffer within the state media is instructive in highlighting how the pursuit of a partisan agenda and bias within the newsrooms can be a greater motive for source selection and framing than social media. As illustrated above, although aggrieved politicians took to social media to rebut negative coverage or try to mount counterattacks – their social media narratives were not sufficient to shield them from unrelenting barrages of attacks from mainstream media outlets running with a partisan agenda.

Although journalism has developed certain routines on how to handle sources such as “how to contact credible sources, how to verify information obtained from these sources, and how to organize sources to produce balanced or objective news coverage” (Lecheler and Kruike-meier, 2016, p.158) these routines are subordinated by preferential sourcing where political reporting is deployed to mobilize bias. The following section considers how sources are actors in the network of news production.

Sources are also actors in the news production network. According to Lecheler and Kruike-meier (2016), journalists still gravitate toward elite sources, and do not show a decrease in traditional news sourcing techniques. This observation is consistent with the findings of this data as elite sources are the dominant instigators of social media sourced political

stories. This positions sources as fundamental actors within the network of news production. Skogerbø et al (2016) contend that for politicians and the like, social media have become alternative channels both for addressing and talking to citizens directly and for ‘dodging the gatekeepers’ of mainstream media by publishing stories and material that can be picked up by journalists or citizens (Skovsgaard and Van Dalen, 2013). In the case of Zimbabwe where accessing official sources is a challenge, the politicians who use social media to directly address citizens may do so intending to dodge the gatekeepers but in reality afford them opportunities to overcome the challenges of how to access them.

As noted by Mduduzi Mathuthu (former editor of *Chronicle*) interviewed on 07 September 2017,

*In Zimbabwe it's a very big problem to get a Minister to go on the record about anything" [added emphasis]. Editors are generally reluctant to just take a story, which says 'a source said, a source said, a source said', they would jump on anything that comes across as some of official kind of view or at least some source that they can attach a name to. (Extract from semi-structured interview 07/09/2017)*

The reluctance by editors to carry stories that have no named sources can be linked to Franklin and Carlson (2011, p.1)'s observation regarding how, “unattributed statements draw suspicion putting both journalists and readers ill at ease”.

According to Caesar Zvayi, editor of *The Herald*, in an interview conducted on 25 September 2017,

We know that Government policy is not announced through Twitter, they have their own Government gazette and circulars but *there is a cabinet minister who is notorious for posting Government policy on*

*Twitter, i.e Moyo and we tend to quote him [added emphasis] because he set up that account as a Government minister, in his official capacity so he posts stuff and sometimes we quote him from there. The likes of Kasukuwere and Chamisa we can also quote as long as we can verify that that is the authentic handle, we can quote and just say ‘when posting on his Twitter account yesterday he said this this this...’. But we don’t source from ghost accounts. (Extract from semi-structured interview 25/09/2017)*

Hence, though elite sources may use social media with the intent of dodging the gatekeepers of mainstream media – the fact that their views are placed on public platforms means that they become accessible to all media players thus open to a wide range of editorial interpretation.

According to Skogerbø et al (2016, p.191), “social media are potentially yet another channel for sources to influence journalism, as they allow sources to control staging and content” in ways that can “influence the agenda-building and agenda-setting processes of the news media.” This view is consistent with Blumler and Gurevitch (1981, p.478 cited in Maurer and Beiler, 2017, p.3) who argued that political actors in their role as news sources control the amount and the quality of information they are willing to give journalists and since most political decisions are prepared and taken in venues which are sealed off from journalists and the public’s eye, they can ‘ration the goodies’.

Apart from social media, sources may also desire to control staging and content to protect them from being misquoted as described by an assistant beat editor working for the state media (coded as ABE\_SM1) in an interview conducted on 18 September 2017;

Let’s say Jonathan Moyo posts something on Twitter, *our reporters do the traditional thing of phoning analysts [added emphasis] for an interview. When they phone those analysts – because those guys are*

*tired of being misquoted or being quoted out of context* [added emphasis] – we had a situation where we had MSU lecturers being quoted in political stories that had to do with ZANU factionalism – but *nowadays they prefer giving you the responses via Whatsapp* [added emphasis] to say “no I can only give you my response via Whatsapp and you write what I have sent you”. Rather than him giving you the response over the phone where you can adjust the words to suit your goal, *now they prefer to send written responses* [added emphasis], those who are still talking to us prefer responding via social media platforms – either Whatsapp or Facebook, rather than the phone thing because *they say the phone thing doesn't have a lot of evidence* [added emphasis] to say tomorrow you may say ‘but I sent you these responses, this is what I sent you but this is what you wrote’. So the level then of the reporter diverting from the responses sourced via Whatsapp or Facebook, the chances of the reporter diverting from the original to something else are very slim. (*Extract from semi-structured interview 18/09/2017*)

The fact that sources make it a condition of their cooperation that they be allowed to respond using a platform of their choosing (i.e Whatsapp in the above instance) suggests that they understand the power they have to control staging and content.

According to Franklin and Carlson (2011, p.1), modern news is unimaginable without news sources because “information arrives linked to the individuals and institutions that provided it” and in the Internet age, that information arrives linked not only to the individuals and institutions that provided it but also linked to the communication technology channels through which it was obtained or delivered. Carlson (2009, p.527) underscores the centrality of sources in journalism by highlighting that “sources do more than provide information; epistemologically, they serve as an essential form of evidence” hence they are indispensable actors in the network of news production.

Skogerbø et al (2016, p.197), observe how some studies show that “social media give sources the upper hand in setting the agenda of political journalism”.

Although social media can give sources the upper hand in setting the agenda of political journalism, it cannot provide sources with the upper hand in framing the ultimate story. As noted by Hernes (1978, cited by Skogerbø et al, 2016) through ‘media twisting’ of political news, journalistic practices almost inevitably provided journalists with the power to interpret and frame stories. The consequences of media twisting of social media sourced views have been dire for some political actors in Zimbabwe as they invite disciplinary action from their political parties. This suggests that while political elites are able to instigate news stories they are unable to anticipate how their messages will be framed or predict the outcome of stories that they instigated.

#### **5.4 Social media sourcing in practice: Existing attitudes, routines and policies**

According to Machill and Beiler (2009), journalists still rely heavily on traditional research methods and habits, such as phone calls and existing contacts, although the Internet has become the predominant source of news background, with journalists accessing archives and doing general research online. This section draws from responses gathered from semi-structured interviews conducted with purposively sampled participants who were considered to be knowledgeable of their respective newsroom cultures, particularly with regards to the political news beat, sourcing in general and social media sourcing in particular.

##### **5.4.1 Newsroom attitudes towards social media sourcing**

To understand the extent to which social media has been embraced within mainstream media, the semi-structured interviews were used to probe interviewees regarding the prevailing attitudes towards social media.

**Table 5.11: Newsroom attitudes towards social media**

<b>Interviewee</b>		<b>Newsroom attitudes</b>	
<b>THE HERALD</b>			
Caesar Zvayi, editor of <i>The Herald</i> , interviewed on 25 September 2017	My team, sadly are not very active [on social media]. Some reporters have Twitter accounts but they have never tweeted. I was actually telling my news editor ‘you must’. I forced him to be on Twitter to check on the trending stories. There are certain stories that I see and I phone the news desk ‘have you seen this?’ and they are not aware.		
<b>NEWSDAY</b>			
Nqaba Matshazi, deputy editor of <i>Newsday</i> interviewed on 18 September 2017	When it comes to our reporters, I want to use the term ‘mechanical’, they are on Twitter because they have to be I doubt they like it. In our case, they prefer FB because it’s more interactive and you’re talking to people you know. I’d say they are doing it for work because the company has a policy that they must be on Twitter.		
<b>THE CHRONICLE</b>			
Mduduzi Mathuthu, former editor of <i>The Chronicle</i> , interviewed on 07 September 2017	Every meeting that I remember going to there was a push – editors must go on social media to ‘market your products’. What that has done is you see editors just dumping links of stories and then just leave it at that.		
<b>DAILY NEWS</b>			
Gift Phiri, news editor of <i>Daily News</i> , interviewed on 20 September 2017	In our newsroom, the conventionally sourced story is typically valued more than a social media sourced one. I’m more or less an old fashioned journalist and I believe in shoe leather reporting where you walk to a source. To an extent it [social media sourcing] is a bit of a lazy way of reporting. But if you can use social media to buttress conventional reporting but not a story that is reliant only on social media. I’ve got a problem with such material but to add the social media content to a conventionally sourced story is better.		
<b>STATE MEDIA (ZIMPAPERS)</b>			
An editor of a state media weekly (coded as E_SM1) who was interviewed on 12 September 2017	Generally, every journalist is now active on social media. From a professional perspective a lot takes place on social media, a lot of debates. Some things that cannot be said on official platforms, so you get an idea when you actually follow social media. We actually have a policy that our reporters must be on social media.		

**The Herald and The Chronicle:** From the responses above it appears some of the newsroom staff at *The Herald* are not keen on adopting social media as a newsgathering tool. The fact that the news editor had to be ‘forced’ by

the editor to pay attention to social media shows a lack of interest in using social media for professional purposes, which might make such a news editor less receptive to reporters who pitch social media sourced stories. The fact that the editor insists that his news editor be on social media to check on what is trending suggests that social media is valued as a means of acquiring story leads. Although Zimpapers reportedly has made it a policy for reporters to be on social media, it appears to not be enforced as some staffers create accounts and do not actually use them. Additionally, Zimpapers editors (including those at *The Chronicle*) are encouraged to use social media to market their content.

**Newsday:** At the *Newsday* the use of social media is a professional requirement that has been institutionalized since reporters are obligated to be on social media. Although, from the response above, it appears there is no explicit guidance as to what they should do while ‘on social media’. However the instruction itself that they be ‘on social media’ suggests tacit approval and conveys an expectation that social media will be part of how reporters execute their duties.

**Daily News:** It can be argued that the *Daily News* was an early adopter of social media sourcing since as far back as 2013, they led with front page stories based on anonymous Facebook blogger Baba Jukwa’s posts. The preference for a hybrid approach to sourcing where social media sources are used together with traditionally sourced voices could indicate the extent to which the paper has refined its approach to social media sourcing drawing from their experiences.

#### 5.4.2 Day-to-day social media sourcing routines in newsrooms

Interviewees shared day-to-day social media sourcing routines or habits within their respective newsrooms. Insights into how social media sourcing

takes place within newsrooms illumines what editorial decisions and considerations are at play when social media is used as a news source.

**Table 5.12: Sourcing routines and source selection**

Interviewee	Sourcing routines and source selection
<b>THE HERALD</b>	
<p>Assistant beat editor working for the state media (coded as ABE_SM1) in an interview conducted on 18 September 2017</p>	<p>It's almost 100% elite sources. Maybe it's because they are pushed by the idea that prominence makes news. If someone ordinary says something on social media it's rarely attended to.</p> <p>What Jonathan Moyo has been doing for the past year or two...maybe its because of factionalism, whenever he posts something on social media, definitely as long as he's attacking the other faction, we will write about it.</p> <p>I think the politicians are now aware that if they post whatever on social media for whatever agenda, the Herald will pick it up and do a story.</p>
<p>An editor of a state media weekly (coded as E_SM1) who was interviewed on 12 September 2017</p>	<p>In our stable [Zimpapers] we have seen it happen so many times; whereby someone is fished from social media so that he is lampooned and they look for people to gang up on them.</p> <p>Most journalists actually source from social media in instances where they cannot get some characters to comment on stories, they source from what those people will have said on social media and they attribute social media.</p> <p>When there was a story where Prof [Jonathan Moyo] was accused of embezzling money, he wasn't there to respond to journalists or perhaps they didn't look for him but most of the stories carried his side of the story was actually what he would have written on Twitter.</p> <p>Also, the editorial policy does not change simply because we are now harvesting comments from social media, we will still use stuff from those whom we feel they are insync with our editorial policy.... unless that person has said something we feel would be useful to our story then we will source it.</p>
<b>THE CHRONICLE</b>	
<p>Assistant beat editor working for the state media (coded as ABE_SM2) in an interview done on 08 September 2017</p>	<p>Most of Prof Moyo's statements are quite provocative and most of his tweets draw a lot of backlash and that kind of interaction (the backlash) can be the basis of a story.... i.e there are some people who respond whom we might quote a bit. On social media if they are bombarded and bombarded and they feel the pressure so they are forced to address the issue even they didn't want to.</p> <p>I am at Zimpapers, and we don't speak ill of the Government. We've got many stories, political scandals involving the ruling party elite which we cant publish. We just know that so and so did</p>

this to so and so but we don't talk about it but it would be something that would make a juicy story that would sell but it's struck off on those grounds.

In some stories if it involves the ruling party, you know they are a major stakeholder and if he [Jonathan Moyo] makes a statement that the editors feel are against the policies of the ruling party you have to call the spokesperson or chairperson so that their view is also inputted.

At times it does happen, you just ring up a reporter and say 'can you go to Facebook and check the FB page of so and so and see what they've written just now, I think there's a story there'.

Source selection just extends from the traditional sourcing. They [i.e reporters] know straight away that if maybe I follow let's say Obert Gutu's comments on a ZANU PF story he will say something that we cannot use...but if I follow someone like Mahoso you know he will come up with something that is pro-ZANU PF. If we follow people like Gutu we check the tweets then if we find something to attack...we write a story to attack. Like when Gutu referred to ZANU PF politicians as 'baboons'.

#### **NEWSDAY**

Nqaba Matshazi,  
deputy editor of  
Newsday  
interviewed on 18  
September 2017

Sourcing for news is very elitist.

In our minds we still have the traditional mindset that it is better to talk to someone on the phone or talk to them in an interview, because one can question whether things that are written on Twitter are real. Even if someone uses an account that is verified they will insist, "...no call him" but it's on his Twitter. So we have traditional mindsets when it comes newsgathering, we are still locked in the past...so when someone says 'Jonathan Moyo said on Twitter...' they don't take it seriously, even the readers don't take it seriously.

We still go through the same processes of editorial gatekeeping....If a story about Jonathan Moyo is filed, everyone wants to look at it thoroughly and see did he really say that, is that what he meant, what did the preceding and succeeding tweets say...if it was a series of tweets its easy to follow (some reporter can be mischievous to just put something out of context) and if it's a FB post you decide to read the whole post to make sure the context is clear before I decide whether or not to use it. I doubt anything has changed in that regard.

Online staffer  
working for the  
private media  
(coded as OS\_PM1)  
in an interview done  
on 17 September  
2017

In terms of social media sourcing we have a grey area because we didn't have a social media policy for a long time. But we now expect people to ask for permission before harvesting people's comments but we don't do that with public figures. You will find sometimes our front page will actually be determined by what Jonathan Moyo or Saviour Kasukuwere says on Twitter – the two have not found issue with that. We do use social media to source a lot even on our FB page we pitch questions and it becomes some sort of a virtual vox pop.

The dilemma comes in when you are taking content from someone who might not have the legal recourse to challenge us for using

	<p>their content without their consent but what we have done is put a disclaimer on our FB page that if you post anything on the page we can use it in a story, emulating SA media organizations have done so that is where we are going. We are formulating the policy as we go. There is a grey area; it's a new area. Especially images, people take images for granted and people complain so now we know better and those are some of the areas that we are working on.</p>
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**DAILY NEWS**

<p>Gift Phiri, news editor of <i>Daily News</i>, interviewed on 20 September 2017</p>	<p>There are usually the lazy guys you know those people who trawl social media for stories sometimes because its a daily paper you know they don't have diaries but usually we don't encourage reporters to go to social media to get stories.</p> <p>You know we were being rapped about Energy Mutodi this guy, after weighing copy sales we have been tempted to put him on the front page especially those days when there was that mug, 'I am the Boss' mug, I think we took him too seriously after that episode where he was pictured with the VP which holding a mug written 'I am the boss', by inference, fed into the succession dogfight in ZANU PF. So the guy we thought what he is saying, perhaps he is some messenger of some sort of the team Lacoste faction so we really ran with what he wrote, but now funny enough when we were assessing copy sales, each time we put him on the front page our copy sales nosedived.</p> <p>There are personalities who sell newspapers, I will tell you for instance Grace Mugabe she is not on social media, or maybe she uses a pseudonym, I don't know. There are personalities who sell newspapers, there are people who use social media too much to a point where they are always churning out things almost on a daily basis and you know you got reporters who get tempted to follow such characters the likes of Energy Mutodi, who even got expelled from ZANU PF because of Facebook posts, for example he made those allegations that Sekeramayi poisoned the VP on Facebook and there were criminal charges, over and above the censure from ZANU PF and now he has lost his post in ZANU PF because of social media.</p> <p>Social media does not make sourcing inclusive, not at all. I don't think news is inclusive because one of the news values is prominence, isn't it? So I think people default to elites, so that is one danger that you leave out the voice of the rest of the classes. If you look at sources we have used from social media, they are mainly elites to be honest; I hardly see voices of insignificant people.</p>
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**The Herald and The Chronicle:** The preference for elite sourcing was evident in both *The Herald* and *The Chronicle* social media sourced political stories. Since the two papers routinely cross-publish each other's political

content, the pattern of sourcing is replicated in each publication, as Zimpapers does not speak ill of the government they select sources who understand this. As will be discussed in the next Chapter, Jonathan Moyo's tweets were frequently used to run adversarial stories bashing him. There is also indication that journalists resorted to 'camping' on the social media accounts of certain individuals hoping that, through social media sourcing, they would be able to bypass the obstacle of non-cooperative sources that refuse to grant them interviews. During the period under study, highly sought after sources such as Jonathan Moyo often refused to grant interviews, and when he did agree to grant interviews – it would be to selected journalists or selected publications – leaving the rest with little choice than to stalk his social media hoping for hints or clues. Preferential source selection practices that occur in offline contexts appear to be carried over to the online realm hence the possibility of social media allowing for a more inclusive or democratised approach to sourcing has not been clear. Some social media sourced stories are based on social media exchanges between politicians and ordinary users as ordinary users are able to bait, provoke and bombard office holders until they are forced to respond. *The Herald* carried numerous adversarial rebuttal stories in which they pit Jonathan Moyo's tweeted views against an array of counter-sources from within ZANU PF aimed at discrediting him – defaulting to sourcing political elites.

**Newsday:** At the *Newsday* there is an insistence on contacting sources to get them to comment on their social media posts as a means of verification. Although the paper does sometimes carry stories that do not give any indication of whether or not the source was contacted to elaborate on the views they would have shared on social media, from the available data – the *Newsday* has more mentions of its efforts to seek elaboration or clarification from sources that post views on social media. Moreover, according to the above interviewee, the *Newsday* also double-checks the full Facebook post (if it is a Facebook sourced story) or series of tweets preceding or succeeding the cited one (if it is a Twitter sourced story) as a means of

getting enough information to understand the context or to make inferences regarding the social media remarks were made. *Newsday* also shows a strong preference for elite sources and sometimes leads with social media sourced stories based on the posts of elites.

**Daily News:** At the *Daily News* reporters are discouraged from making social media their first port of call for finding story leads. Whilst the paper prefers elite sources who have prominence, they have sourced less elite sources when they supposed those individuals were closely linked to ZANU PF’s warring factions to have insider information, such as Energy Mutodi. From the data in this study, the *Daily News* is the first publication to use social media as a news source during the period under study – and to do so more frequently than the rest. One explanation could be that the *Daily News* has an anti-establishment editorial stance and since there is no shortage of anti-establishment opinions of social media, it becomes a rich platform to acquire views that are in sync with its editorial thrust.

### 5.4.3 Social media policies and sourcing guidelines in newsrooms

Interviewees shared what social media policies were in place in their media organizations as well as the kind of guidelines they had in place with regard to sourcing, especially social media sourcing.

**Table 5.13: Social media policy and sourcing guidelines**

Interviewee	Social media policy and sourcing guidelines
	<b>THE HERALD</b>
Assistant beat editor working for the state media (coded as ABE_SM1) in an interview conducted	There is no policy. In fact, I don’t think there is any policy regarding news sourcing. There is a policy around issues that touch around editorial policy but not necessarily on sourcing. It’s done in a haphazard manner. There’s no real policy or structure to say how do we take advantage of social media to come up with

on 18 September 2017	stories. Normally whoever would have said the reporter should do the story will give the reporter the parameters within which to do the story.
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An editor of a state media weekly (coded as E_SM1) who was interviewed on 12 September 2017	Nothing specific has been done on training on social media sourcing but they have been trained on using social media. But the journalism element is just a day-by-day kind of encounter where you query if what has been said is clear or inconclusive. So day-to-day they play it by ear to see if the things posted can be authenticated.
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**THE CHRONICLE**

Assistant beat editor working for the state media (coded as ABE_SM2) in an interview done on 08 September 2017	At desk level, we are the young ones and we encourage reporters to use social media as a source, but up-top we've got people who are really against social media. It depends who will be on duty that day. There are people that we know don't like social media sourcing so sometimes when a story comes and we think it is important and that person [who will not accept/clear a social media sourced story] is on the desk we don't submit it.
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**NEWSDAY**

Nqaba Matshazi, deputy editor of Newsday interviewed on 18 September 2017	<p>When it comes to source selection, there is a group of people I call the 'Dial-A-Quote'. Why do we have them? Because they are there and they are always ready to speak. But if you go beyond the Dial-A-Quote for traditional paper and onto social media it's the same people, same dialogue, same sources.</p> <p>I keep mentioning Jonathan Moyo because he is the most quoted person on Twitter and in the news stories there was a time when Herald was camped on his TL to find out what he's going to say.</p> <p>You've got Gutu and Kasukuwere once in a while he gets quoted and Morgan Tsvangirai who doesn't manage his own accounts...that's a version of Dial-A-Quote, they always have something to say. So if I am idle, I can just check those accounts, Moyo, Gutu, etc and I'll find they have had something to say.</p> <p>In private media you have got Eldred Masunungure he's a Dial-A-Quote, he's always there, he's got something to talk even if he has no clue what he's talking about, he can't say 'ah this one I don't know'. I think what happens in print [as far as sourcing practices/guidelines go] replicates itself online.</p> <p>I probably won't quote the ordinary person even if he/she says something profound, I might use it as a reference but I won't quote him/her directly. Even if I am doing a social media sourced story – I have no interest in him/her actually – I am still going to look out for elite sources unfortunately, not the grassroots people so that great idea of social media as an equalizer, those egalitarian ideas around social media, I think it's a mirage.</p> <p>Using social media for political stories; I like it because sometimes you are engaging with the source directly, removing the middle man (sometimes its also removing my job) and you get to deal with the person directly and sometimes you don't get the answer but at least there is a record and reference point of that interaction rather than a 'he said, she said or sources said'. You get it from the horse's mouth, so to speak.</p>
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**DAILY NEWS**

<p>Gift Phiri, news editor of <i>Daily News</i>, interviewed on 20 September 2017</p>	<p>Yes we do have a social media policy and all the staffers were made to sign it but its not really regulating sourcing its mainly dealing with issues like stopping reporters from scooping themselves on social media, divulging details of an assignment before the paper goes to print and pre-empting unpublished material or publishing unpublished material. This is what the social media policy seeks to achieve.</p> <p>There is a challenge that because of abuse of social media you find that there is a section of the newsroom that has been barred from using social media because some people were spending time on YouTube watching videos during working hours, things that have absolutely nothing to do with our line of work; so you will find platforms like FB are open to reporters during certain times like during lunchtime but the senior guys they can access round the clock. It's a really empowering tool in terms of the sourcing for our newspaper or our platforms.</p>
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**The Herald and The Chronicle:** Reporters who chase a social media sourced story of their own volition, appear to default to seeking out pro-Government sources whose views will be in sync with the editorial policy. Whereas, when reporters are assigned to do a story based on a social media post, they are given guidelines on how to do the story including what sources to use and how to frame the story. Reporters have limited autonomy when assigned to a story as they are given parameters, whilst those who chase a story of their own volition intuitively know which sources are acceptable. There is strict content control as gatekeeping is exercised at every point of the news production process starting with which reporters to assign to what stories. There is no specific training or policy on social media sourcing, and to that extent, reporters ‘play it by ear’. Social media is not embraced uniformly in newsrooms with some desk editors unwilling to place the same value on social media sourced stories as they do to traditionally sourced ones. In cases where senior editorial staffers are perceived as being anti-social media, stories that use social media as a news source tend to be parked until a more receptive senior editor is on duty to clear the story for publication.

**Newsday:** The *Newsday* appears to gravitate towards its usual ‘roster’ of sources (i.e analysts and commentators) thus rarely including the voices of ordinary people. Also, more than any other publication, the *Newsday* carries more crowdsourced social media instigated stories than the other publications, however the salience of such stories is rarely high as they do not feature prominent sources. Although it will carry reaction stories (i.e stories about how people on social media have reacted to a certain issue or event e.g Mugabe’s fall) those stories are sometimes placed on the online platform and not afforded any space in the print version.

**Daily News:** Although the *Daily News* is an early adopter of social media as a news source and also has the highest prevalence of social media sourcing during the period under study – it is also the only media house that has policies granting social media privileges by seniority, as it bars junior staffers from access except during lunch hours and breaks. It seems counterintuitive but the paper has argued that social media is abused as some newsroom staffers use their access to preoccupy themselves with activities that are not related to newsgathering or other professional duties. It is also the only media house that has an explicit gag order on its reporters regarding posting about their stories... which, one might argue, explains the somewhat subdued level of participation and interaction on social media by *Daily News* staffers compared to other media houses. From the data obtained, it also appears that the *Daily News* also tends to ‘recycle’ quotes from its preferred sources (i.e analysts or commentators). For instance, if they interviewed a source 3 months ago they can ‘recycle’ and engraft the same views in a current story as long as the theme is the same, suggesting a fixed editorial template on covering certain issues. The problem with this manner of recycling quotes suggests that the opinions of the source do not evolve or that they are static and also recycling quotes forces current stories to seem more self-referential (as past stories are used as continued validation of the paper’s narratives) than seriously explored. In other words, the *Daily News*’ style of reporting is a theme-driven one where “analysis replaces coverage

focused on individual events” which blurs the line between current events and historical ones (Barnhurst and Mutz, 1997, p.28).

In the 146 social media sourced stories that constitute the primary data collected in the first phase of this study, Professor Jonathan Moyo is cited 95 times, thereby accounting for 65% of the data set. Additionally, in every one of the semi-structured interviews conducted during this study, the interviewees mentioned Professor Jonathan Moyo repeatedly as an example of the kind of individual their publications was likely to source from.

A more detailed analysis of Professor Jonathan Moyo’s social media activity and how his social media posts travelled to mainstream media’s political pages is necessary to place the findings of this study in their correct context. By using social media as channels for direct communication with the public, sources can publish or withhold information on any platform and within any period that they prefer, according to Skogerbø et al (2016, p.197). The next chapter considers the ways in which Professor Jonathan Moyo used his social media channels for direct communication with the public and specifically the kind of information he chose to disclose or withhold during the period under study.

The chapter’s exclusive focus on Professor Jonathan Moyo is motivated by several factors. Firstly, the chapter is intended to exceptionalise him because he is arguably an exception rather than a rule in so far as how he engages with the media. Proceeding from the premise that Professor Jonathan Moyo’s social media disclosures were atypical for the average Zimbabwean politician, moreso one that belongs to the ZANU PF party – this study presents the findings pertaining to Professor Jonathan Moyo as warranting singular scrutiny – to avoid arriving at misleading and generalized conclusions.

Secondly, a Chapter is dedicated to Professor Jonathan Moyo as a way of isolating and accounting for the possible motives behind his social media activity to explain the mainstream media's motives for doggedly following his social media posts. Taking off from the premise that Professor Jonathan Moyo's social media activity was a reaction to an escalation in the factional fights within the ZANU PF political party which saw one faction appear to gain preferential access to the state media at the expense of its rivals – the study presents the circumstances leading to Professor Jonathan Moyo's social media onslaught as unique, unlikely to be replicated and hence unlikely to again trigger similar reaction or animation from the mainstream media. Thirdly, the following Chapter singles out Professor Jonathan Moyo in order to navigate the inherent contradiction of how his social media activity, particularly his confrontations with *The Herald*, seem to confirm technologically deterministic and instrumentalist claims about the qualities of social media on the one hand whilst simultaneously reinforcing the primacy of (a retaliatory) editorial agenda deployed in defense of apparent proprietorial interests, on the other.

## **5.5 Conclusion**

This chapter presented the findings of the research, which will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 7. One of the major findings was that social media did not appear to have democratised political news sourcing, as elite actors were the dominated sources in social media sourced stories. Although social media did not appear to have democratised political news sourcing, there was evidence that social media had democratised access to sources as journalists who are refused interviews by certain sources still manage to access their views on social media. In this regard, social media appears to enable access to views of uncooperative sources and also facilitates the use of named sources as opposed to anonymous ones. The study also found that social media can influence the news agenda by providing a forced agenda to mainstream media through the release and sharing of information

that prompts mainstream media to respond. Whilst the nature of mainstream media's response may vary from offering rebuttals or investigating further, the study found that there are instances where social media triggers certain stories. A large part of social media's ability to trigger political news stories in mainstream media derives from the fact that tech savvy elite sources choose to bypass traditional media and address the public directly on their social media platforms, leaving journalists with little choice other than to focus on the issues such elites highlight.

The research also found that technological or objects artifacts are an invisible and silent digital actors they were mentioned in some of the news stories as part of the journalists' narrative on how they gathered news for their stories. For instance, a number of social media sourced political stories divulged how the journalist had relied on artifacts such as mobile and fixed phones to call sources, used texts and emails as mediating technologies to gain access to sources. Following Reich (2005), the research found that examining the technologies used by journalists to acquire data and to contact sources could shed light on an invisible side of the news such as the silent digital actors who contribute to the network of news production. The study also found that editorial policies, proprietorial demands and newsroom superiors were more influential than social media in determining source selection whilst newsroom attitudes towards social media had a bearing on social media's potential to democratise political sourcing through facilitating the inclusion of non-elite voices. From what the study could ascertain, "the presence of 'ordinary people' in the [political] news [was] predominantly determined by contextual factors, rather than by technological changes in the news production process" (Van Leuven et al., 2018, p.803).

Another crucial finding was that social media sourcing for political news during the 30-month period under study was largely driven by a single source, i.e Professor Jonathan Moyo who was waging a public feud against his factional foes in ZANU PF and against *The Herald* newspaper which had

launched a vicious attack on him and other G40 members at the instruction of Team Lacoste. To properly contextualize and appreciate how social media, specifically how Jonathan Moyo's social media posts, influenced political reporting in the four daily newspapers, the next chapter places singular scrutiny on him as an elite source whose posts influenced a "reverse chain of causation" whereby his "social media [posts seemed] able to influence the agenda of traditional media" (Kruikemeier et al., 2018, p.217).

## CHAPTER 6: THE JONATHAN MOYO FACTOR

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### 6.1 Introduction

According to Maodza (2017, p.11), when “factionalism ripped ZANU-PF apart” in 2014 it triggered an unprecedented barrage of negative reportage by *The Herald* targeted at some senior ZANU PF officials – and the blame was laid at the feet of Jonathan Moyo, who as Minister of Information, Media and Broadcasting Services exercised direct control of Zimpapers. The reason Moyo got the blame is a status quo that goes back for decades and which was confirmed by a former Zimpapers chief executive officer Elias Rusike who asserted that “Zimpapers is effectively under the daily control of the Ministry of Information” (Rusike, 1990, p.80). Re-appointed in 2013, to serve a second stint as Information, Media and Broadcasting Services Minister, Jonathan Moyo “was accused by ZANU PF officials across the rank and file of the party of using *The Herald* to attack his perceived<sup>30</sup> opponents in the ruling party” and “even President Mugabe chastised Moyo on June 6, 2014 for using *The Herald* to fight other ruling party cadres he perceived as opponents” (Maodza, 2017, p.8).

On 28 May 2015, the *Newsday* carried a story titled ‘*Moyo plotting against Mugabe*’ in which a ruling party apologist accused him of using the media to destroy the party from within. The story reported that Goodson Nguni, the leader of the Zanu PF-aligned Federation of Non-governmental Organisations, made a string of allegations against Moyo in response to negative coverage he had gotten from *The Herald*, which had claimed that Nguni had leaked politburo issues to the *Newsday*. Moyo was forced to

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<sup>30</sup> According to Maodza (2017, p.8), among senior ZANU-PF officials, who accused Jonathan Moyo of using *The Herald* as a tool to fan factionalism, were then ZANU-PF Secretary for Information and Publicity Rugare Gumbo, Didymus Mutasa – who was then the ruling party’s Secretary for Administration – and Joice Mujuru. At the time Mujuru was Vice President in government and Second Secretary in ZANU-PF. Other ruling party notables who also cried foul over negative reporting by *The Herald* were Temba Mliswa (then Zanu-PF Mashonaland West Provincial Chairperson), Dzikamai Mavhaire, Munacho Mutezo and Tendai Savanhu, to cite a few.

respond and to come to the defense of *The Herald*, which he did by claiming the paper had an “unparalleled and proud record in support of the party, government and country in the national interest” [Newsday 28/05/2015, added emphasis]. On <sup>31</sup>6 July 2015, a cabinet reshuffle saw Jonathan Moyo being reassigned to the Higher and Tertiary Education, Science and Technology ministry – and effectively losing control over the state media.

This chapter considers how one faction of ZANU PF took control of *The Herald* to attack its rivals especially Professor Jonathan Moyo who responded by using social media to counterattack. The chapter details how the social media activities of Professor Jonathan Moyo, amongst other political actors, might have inspired political news stories within the four newsrooms.

### 6.1.1 *The Herald's* factional reporting: Dancing to Lacoste's tune

Given that *The Herald* constantly and uncharacteristically defiled senior government and ZANU PF officials (Maodza, 2017, p.15) during Moyo's tenure as Minister of Information, it came as no surprise when the same paper was used to launch a sustained counterattack (at the bidding of the then Vice President Emmerson Mnangagwa's Lacoste faction) on Jonathan Moyo and his G40 factional allies.

The escalation of the factional fights within ZANU PF intensified between 2015 to 2017 with *The Herald* leading the charge on behalf of the Lacoste faction and earning strong rebuke from the then First Lady Grace Mugabe who complained according to a *Daily News* story titled 'Grace roasts ED, Charamba' carried in its 30 July 2017 edition:

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<sup>31</sup> As reported in eNCA, among other publications:- <https://www.enca.com/africa/mugabe-moves-devil-incarnate-minister-reshuffle> [Accessed on 11 October 2018]

We are seeing in *The Herald* there are only specific people who are being publicised for good things only; some are left out. You think we are not seeing, we are seeing what you are doing. Don't do that...He (George) knows about my projects in Mazowe but he is not coming to write about that. He is busy writing nonsense and failing to write developmental stories. You must respect ministers and if they do something wrong, you must tell the president, you are junior to ministers so respect them, don't attack them," said the first lady. Moyo, the Higher and Tertiary Education minister, and Kasukuwere have accused the State media of pursuing a factional agenda and both have even sued the State media on defamation charges. (*Daily News*, 30/07/17).

At the center of the "public feud between *The Herald* and some senior ZANU-PF officials" (Maodza, 2017, p.10) was minister Jonathan Moyo, who wouldn't stop tweeting – and whom *The Herald's* Lacoste handlers could ill afford to ignore. Hence "whoever was in control of the newspaper between the rival ruling party factions" (Maodza, 2017, p.74) pushed for editorial retaliation in the face of Moyo's relentless tweeting. Blame for *The Herald's* attacks on a new set of senior ZANU PF officials (from the rival G40 faction) shifted from Moyo to George Charamba the Secretary for Information, Media and Broadcasting Services, who also doubled as Presidential spokesperson for the then President, Robert Mugabe.

In early 2016, at a time when this researcher was still an employee of Zimpapers, there came a directive that "<sup>32</sup>Munhumutapa has declared 'open season' on Jonathan Moyo" in a bid to shut down his damaging social media assaults targeted at the Lacoste faction. This directive triggered a series of biased stories that used Jonathan Moyo's tweets as a news source through which *The Herald* "deliberately framed the G40 faction members negatively"

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<sup>32</sup> Munhumutapa is a euphemistic reference to George Charamba whose offices and those of Information ministry are at the Munhumutapa building which houses several other government ministries and departments.

and “denied [them] an opportunity to respond to allegations that *The Herald* raised against them” (Maodza, 2017, p.44).

In a story titled ‘Moyo blasts Herald over Zanu PF wars’ published by the *Daily News* on 22 January 2016, the paper wrote that, “as Zanu PF’s deadly factional and succession wars continue unabated, *Higher Education minister Jonathan Moyo took to Twitter* [added emphasis] yesterday, querying *The Herald’s* coverage of the ruling party’s worsening infighting”. Jonathan Moyo, who had joined social media on 9 February 2015 – a development that was announced in <sup>33</sup>*The Chronicle* in a 10 February 2015 story that was also cross-published in *The Herald* – had resorted to using social media to attack and goad his political opponents in the Lacoste faction.

In the month of February 2016, *The Herald* responded by carrying several disparaging news stories and opinions that vilified Moyo for his use of social media.

**Table 6.1: *The Herald* articles criticizing Jonathan Moyo**

*The Herald* articles criticizing Jonathan Moyo’s social media activity in February 2016:

“Politburo to tackle social media abuse” (02 February 2016 – front page)  
“Police blasts social media abuse” (03 February 2016 – front page)  
“ZANU PF youths slam social media abuse” (04 February 2016)  
“Keep us out of your fights, Prof” (05 February 2016 – front page editorial comment)  
“Mutsvangwa, Moyo verbal tiff escalates” (05 February 2016)  
“Factionalism, social media on PB agenda” (09 February 2016)  
“Crunch Politburo Indaba on today (10 February 2016)  
“Politburo bans social media abuse” (11 February 2016)  
“Social media ban gets thumbs up” (12 February 2016)  
“Abide by Politburo directives” (16 February 2016)  
“ZANU PF stop kicking and start pulling, please (16 February 2016 – opinion piece)  
“Moyo trashes VP appointments” (25 February 2016)

<sup>33</sup> Reported in <http://www.chronicle.co.zw/prof-moyo-gets-started-on-twitter-facebook/>

When asked – during an interview conducted on 25 September 2017 – to explain why his paper had carried successive stories criticizing Moyo’s Twitter activity, *The Herald* editor, Caesar Zvayi revealed how,

*That coverage was triggered by the Principals [added emphasis]. This specifically refers to Jonathan Moyo, he was attacking colleagues including Vice President Mnangagwa and colleague ministers. He was blasting them on social media. So it was ZANU PF responding to one of its own [added emphasis] and then it framed our agenda there. Even the responses from ZRP, ZANU youths, war vets is all an extension of that same agenda from the Principals and framed by the politicians [added emphasis]. These politicians were responding to the agenda set by Moyo on social media, because Jonathan Moyo was attacking his colleagues. The President will say ‘please don’t discuss party matters on social media’ but Moyo would not desist. It is social media which triggered this whole conversation [added emphasis] even though the stories are conventionally sourced they are responding to and were triggered by the activities of Jonathan Moyo, one of their own, on social media [added emphasis].*

*(Extract from semi-structured interview 25/09/2017)*

Zvayi’s ambivalent diagnosis of what triggered *The Herald’s* coverage of February 2016 is illustrative of how difficult it is to assign causality to a single factor. On the one hand it can be argued that social media triggered or forced *The Herald’s* news agenda, in this instance, because social media provided the platform upon which Jonathan Moyo ruffled the feathers of ‘the Principals’ by attacking ZANU PF colleagues in defiance of party directives and the President’s instruction. On the other hand, it can be argued that *The Herald’s* news agenda in this case, had been instigated and driven by the proprietor (or ‘the Principals’) who wanted to see editorial retaliation to Jonathan Moyo’s tweets. The likelihood that the editorial retaliation unleashed upon Jonathan Moyo was driven by forces external to the

newsroom was also presented in a previously mentioned *Daily News* story titled 'Moyo blasts Herald over Zanu PF wars' which was published on 22 January 2016. The story sources Jonathan Moyo's views from Twitter quoting him as follows:

It is as curious as it is concerning that @HeraldZimbabwe now has references to "the anti-Mnangagwa cabal in Zanu PF". What or who is that?" he asked. (*Daily News*, 22/01/16)

According to the *Daily News*, Moyo's tweet (quoted above) came,

...as State media, *apparently acting under pressure from hawkish Information permanent secretary George Charamba* [added emphasis] appear to have taken a position in favour of the party faction behind embattled Vice President Emmerson Mnangagwa's mooted presidential aspirations. (*Daily News* 22/01/16)

The paper went on to quote an unnamed source confirming its claim that state media was acting on the orders of George Charamba,

A source within Zimpapers, publishers of The Herald and the Chronicle, said *editors at the stable had come under increasing pressure to take "a definitive position" in the post-congress Zanu PF's wars* [added emphasis].

There is clearly an instruction from *the 'ultimate editor-in-chief' (euphemism for Charamba)* [added emphasis] for Zimpapers to more and more take a definitive position on the party's infighting.

Many readers have noted that over the past few weeks *we are propping up one side and trashing the other side* [added emphasis], a turn that has been demanded by the 'ultimate editor-in-chief'," a Zimpapers staffer said.

Charamba has over the past few weeks used his Nathaniel Manheru column to threaten and excoriate the country's independent media for its coverage of Zanu PF's wars, while increasingly appearing to bat in Mnangagwa's corner. (*Daily News* 22/01/16)

The above story appears to reinforce the statement by Zvayi that 'the Principals' had triggered *The Herald's* hostile coverage of Moyo and is also consistent with findings by Maodza (2017) who claims that the active participation of *The Herald* in ZANU-PF fights was confirmed by none other than George Charamba, in an interview conducted on October 20, 2017. Maodza reported that, "according to George Charamba, the faction that appeared to have taken the lead at any given moment in the race to succeed President Mugabe automatically took charge of *The Herald* editorial" (2017, p.53). From July 2015, it became clear that *The Herald* was now dancing to the Lacoste faction's tune.

### **6.1.2 Tweeting for political survival: How Moyo skirted state media blackout**

Despite the barrage of articles where his social media activity was disparagingly referred to as 'frenzied tweeting', Jonathan Moyo refused to back down coming up with a hashtag #handeitione which loosely translates to 'bring it on'. *The Herald's* February 2016 all-out attacks on Moyo and subsequent state media blackout did not go unnoticed by the private media who, in various reports, speculated on what this spelt for Moyo's political fate. On 04 February 2016, in a story titled 'Zanu PF tightens noose on Moyo', *Newsday* reported that: "*Jonathan Moyo's political career appears to be on the edge* [added emphasis] as top government and Zanu PF officials recently used State media to berate him ahead of a politburo meeting next Wednesday, where his conduct is likely to top the agenda."

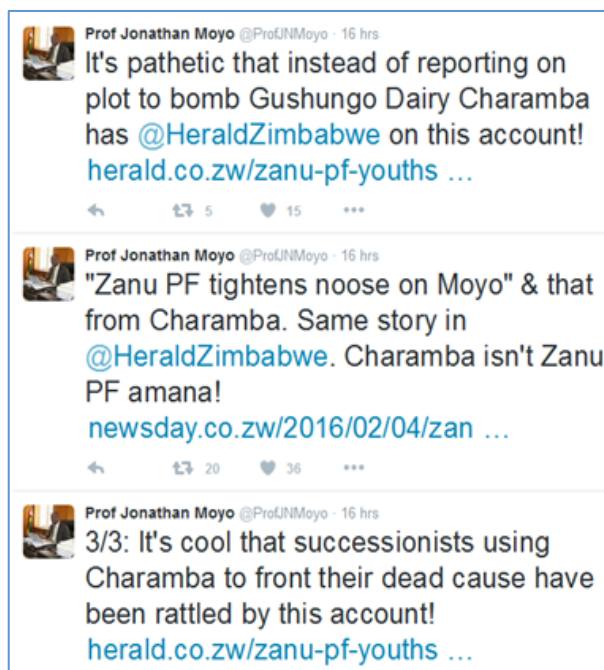


Figure 6.1: Jonathan Moyo reacting to Herald & Newsday's coverage

The *Newsday* story stated that Moyo was on the receiving end of “brickbats from top government and Zanu PF officials angered by his use of social media platforms”. Moreover, *Newsday* was quick to pick up on the state media blackout of Moyo stating,

*It seems Moyo has also been frozen out by State media [added emphasis] as his statement hitting back at Charamba and Mutsvangwa went unreported, while The Herald has also described his penchant for social media as “frenzied tweeting” [added emphasis]. Moyo previously had unchallenged control of State media [added emphasis], but their lack of enthusiasm at his statement could indicate shifting attitudes. (Newsday 04/02/16)*

The *Newsday* story also made an astute observation about the combative nature of Moyo's social media activity stating, “Moyo, who normally uses micro-blogging site Twitter to *lash out at opponents* [added emphasis] is *bracing for the war against him* [added emphasis].” The story goes on to quote Moyo's tweet as evidence that he is bracing for war:

Mutsvangwa thinks he can do to some of us what he did to Joice Mujuru with Charamba's and (The) Herald's help. Handei tione! (Let the action begin and see how it ends!),” he wrote yesterday.

(*Newsday* 04/02/16)

In lieu of a comment from Moyo, the *Newsday* story used his tweet as a comment.



Figure 6.2: Example of Jonathan Moyo's defiant tweeting

In his study on ZANU PF's factionalism and *The Herald's* political economy, Maodza (2017, p.47) persuasively argues that:

*The Herald* was setting an agenda to have the G40 members especially Jonathan Moyo and Saviour Kasukuwere dismissed from ZANU-PF or relegated to less influential positions in the ruling party... most of the stories were not based on events but involved *The Herald* instigating party organs and provinces.

The present study established that Jonathan Moyo used social media to circumvent the state media's blackout through which he was denied an opportunity to respond to allegations leveled against him.

Despite being frozen out by state media, Jonathan Moyo still secured coverage in mainstream media as private media reporters (many of whom ordinarily could not get easy access to him) used his social media posts as news sources and to get story leads and hints regarding where the ZANU PF factional wind was blowing.

In its edition of 04 February 2016, the *Daily News* carried a story titled 'Minister stole underwear' in which it sourced an exchange between Moyo and his Twitter followers:

Asked by his Twitter followers if his Zanu PF camp had been toppled by the Mnangagwa faction *given that he had been blacked out by State media* [added emphasis] amid *claims that Team Lacoste had now hijacked State information* [added emphasis], Moyo retorted: "Do you mean information or disinformation?" (*Daily News* 04/02/16)

Moyo's hostility towards *The Herald* was unsurprising as it became clear that "the faction that controlled *The Herald* at any given moment sought to use the newspaper to editorially annihilate the rival camp" (Maodza, 2017, p.55). Having employed similar tactics of using *The Herald* to obliterate his political opponents, Jonathan Moyo was alive to the political danger he was in.

In its edition of 08 February 2016, the *Daily News* carried three stories that each remarked on how vulnerable Moyo was in the face of a sustained attack by *The Herald*, at the alleged instruction of the Lacoste faction. In one story titled 'Charamba pushes for VP take over', the *Daily News* reflected on how,

Of late the *State media has turned its guns on Moyo* [added emphasis], something that the former Information minister says exposes Charamba, a former subordinate of his. (*Daily News* 08/02/16)

Despite being put in a vulnerable position with state media turning its guns on him, the *Daily News* noted Moyo's social media-fuelled obstinacy in a story titled 'Targeted Moyo remains defiant'. In that particular story, *Daily News* remarked on how masterfully Moyo was leveraging social media,

But even without access to State media, *Moyo has found social media a rich platform to attack and respond to his foes, with great effect* [added emphasis]. (*Daily News* 08/02/16)

In a story titled "'Team Lacoste' guns for Moyo", also carried in the *Daily News* edition of 08 February, the paper detailed how Moyo was putting up a spirited fight using social media. The paper wrote of how,

Unable to respond to *the unrelenting pummelling* [added emphasis] that they are receiving from Zanu PF's Young Turks — the Generation 40 (G40) — the ruling party faction aligned to embattled Vice President Emmerson Mnangagwa is once again agitating for Higher Education minister Jonathan Moyo to be expelled from the party. (*Daily News* 08/02/16)

The *Daily News* claimed to have discovered, through unnamed but 'well-placed Zanu PF sources', that:

Team Lacoste as the Mnangagwa faction is known, "is only too aware that it cannot match" the G40 in the propaganda war, notwithstanding the fact that *the camp now enjoyed unfettered control of State media* [added emphasis]. (*Daily News* 08/02/16)

Assuming that Professor Jonathan Moyo's social media activity was a reaction to an escalation in the factional fights within the ZANU PF political party, which saw one faction appear to gain preferential access to the state media at the expense of its rivals – this section has outlined the circumstances leading to Professor Jonathan Moyo's social media onslaught. When considering these circumstances as unique, unlikely to be replicated and hence unlikely to trigger similar reaction or animation from the mainstream media – it becomes necessary to consider whether social media was what drove the political news agenda during the period under study or whether it was the media's pursuit for a story on the most topical issue at the time, i.e factionalism.

## **6.2 Jonathan Moyo: the elite source that mainstream media could not ignore**

Although he was masterful in his use of social media, Jonathan Moyo largely closed off other avenues of accessing him as conventional approaches to sourcing his views were met, more often than not, with non-cooperation on his part. By routinely refusing to grant interviews or elaborate on what his social media posts (some of which were cryptic) meant, Moyo forced journalists to speculate and rely on an interpretive style of journalism. It appeared that Moyo was using social media to bait the media and set their agenda by directing their attention to issues he wanted them to focus on.

When asked to comment on the likelihood that Moyo was using social media to bait the mainstream media, the editor of *The Herald*, Caesar Zvayi, gave the following response in an interview conducted on 25 September,

Definitely, it's definitely there (the baiting) we have noticed a trend. If you are dealing with a clever politician, for example, Prof [Moyo] last week tweeted that his Gmail account was hacked and he had been locked out of the account and notified authorities that he was no

longer in control of the account. But the sentiment coming out of the ruling party was that Moyo had made a presentation accusing the VP Mnangagwa of all sorts of things. So sentiment coming from within ZANU party structures was that Mnangagwa had said he would respond so other party members didn't believe him and thought he was baiting the media claiming that he was locked out of the account so that whatever ED would come up with would be discredited on the basis that he was no longer in control of the account so as to mislead. Moyo has done it several times and he is not the only one. *Sometimes we can see that this is bait but if it creates news, we bite* [added emphasis]. (Extract from semi-structured interview 25/09/2017)

The fact that an editor could choose to take the bait of a politician who is using social media to dangle tidbits of information indicates that "social media are potentially yet another channel for sources to influence journalism, as they allow sources to control staging and content" (Skogerbø et al, 2016, p.191). However, it can also reinforce the fact that ultimately the decision to write and publish any story is entirely up to the editor.

Maurer and Beiler (2017, p.3) have argued that since most political decisions are prepared and taken in venues that are sealed off from journalists and the public's eye, they can "ration the goodies". This could offer one explanation as to why Jonathan Moyo's social media posts became a news source mainstream media could ill afford to ignore since most political decisions relating to factionalism within ZANU PF were prepared and taken in venues which were sealed off from journalists and the public eye. One example of a political decision that was prepared and taken in a venue sealed off from the journalists and the public eye was the removal of Jonathan Moyo as Information minister. Before it was announced that Moyo would be taking up the Higher and Tertiary Education ministerial post, the mainstream media was left fumbling without a clue as to what Moyo's removal from the

influential Information ministry meant, and as Moyo refused to grant them interviews, they camped on his Twitter timeline hoping he would drop hints.

### 6.2.1 Access denied: Why mainstream media opted to source social media

In an interview conducted on 07 September 2017, Mduduzi Mathuthu, the former editor of *The Chronicle*, remarked on the difficulty of accessing Jonathan Moyo as he frequently rebuffed requests for interviews. Said Mathuthu,

In my experience, those who have called Jonathan to say ‘can you expand’ – *he will hang up on you, send him an email and he will not respond* [added emphasis]. So he doesn’t go beyond what he has already put out on Twitter and I think there are other examples. So very few of them want to go on the record and expand on what they said on Twitter but I think opposition politicians, in particular, those on Twitter some of them who go there to discuss technical issues especially lawyers like Biti, Majome and others. You find they are more cooperative in terms of what they say to expand. *But then you find people who tweet issues that are cryptic so every newsroom has to do their own interpretation* [added emphasis] of what he has said. He doesn’t want to sort of simplify it for anyone, *you can try to call him and he doesn’t call back* [added emphasis]. So you might find, actually journalists get it wrong like *Newsday* did last week. He had put something on Twitter about Kwese TV and *they got it completely wrong about what he was saying but they had sent him questions to say ‘what do you mean’ and he was not forthcoming* [added emphasis]. (Extract from semi-structured interview 07/09/2017)

A narrative embedded within a *Daily News* story published on 26 June 2015, in which the writers of the story had unsuccessfully attempted to interview Jonathan Moyo, confirms the above observations by Mathuthu. In a story titled, 'Confusion swirls over Jonathan Moyo', a team of *Daily News* reporters detail how they camped at Moyo's office seeking his comment to no avail.

Recounting their abortive attempt to secure an interview with Jonathan Moyo, the three *Daily News* writers, namely Thelma Chikwanha, Bridget Mananavire and Maxwell Sibanda reported that,

Media, Information and Broadcasting Services officials yesterday claimed that Jonathan Moyo, who was booted out of Cabinet by President Robert Mugabe on Tuesday, was still in office even though *our news crew did not see him for the three hours we picketed his office yesterday* [added emphasis].

When the *Daily News* visited the minister's office on the 1st floor of Munhumutapa Building at 12:30pm up to approximately 3pm, we did not see Moyo.

*The door to his office was wide open. His secretary claimed he was tied up with government business* [added emphasis]. Moyo's aides were also conspicuously absent.

"Minister Moyo is in but he is tied up with something right now," his secretary told the *Daily News*.

There was however, no sign of Moyo up till the *Daily News* crew left the premises at 2:55 pm.

*He has also ignored inquiries on his dismissal* [added emphasis], and routinely insulted people who questioned him on social media.

Moyo has also not changed his social media profile, maintaining that he was "Zimbabwe's minister of Information, Media & Broadcasting Services". (*Daily News* 26/06/2015)

Why it required three reporters to show up seeking an interview is unclear but it could easily have been a case of there being strength in numbers as Moyo was known to be notoriously rude to reporters, especially those he had no ties with. The actions taken by the writers and detailed in the above *Daily News* story are consistent with “unstructured or spontaneous sourcing techniques that traditionally include stake outs, phone inquiries, observation of an event, and background research” (Lecheler and Kruike-meier, 2016, p.159).

From the narration above, the *Daily News* reporters attempted a stake out by camping at Moyo’s offices for 3 hours. They also observed activities that were going on at Moyo’s offices and narrated for their readers how the minister’s office was on the 1<sup>st</sup> floor of the Munhumutapa building, how the door to Moyo’s office was wide open, how Moyo’s aides were not present and what responses they got from Moyo’s secretary. All the above observations become the story in the absence of Moyo’s official comment. However the *Daily News* writers did not stop there, they also inform their readers that, “Moyo also ignored a text message from the *Daily News* concerning his dismissal.”

To prove their commitment to getting the story despite the lack of cooperation from the Moyo, the *Daily News* writers also checked Moyo’s social media accounts to see if he had posted something that could shed some light on his now unclear ministerial status. In the end, the *Daily News* had to be content with sourcing a Twitter exchange between Moyo and ‘one Asian man’. Thus having failed to gain access to the politician whose comment they sought, the *Daily News* relied on his tweets as substitutes as they informed their readers of how,

Moyo blasted one Asian man who had mentioned in a tweet he had been “fired” saying that his ancestors were idiots who had colonised Africa.

In another twitter conversation, Moyo was asked where he was tweeting from, and he replied from “cyberspace”. (*Daily News 26/06/2015*)

The *Newsday* also carried the same story on the same date and like the *Daily News*, the *Newsday* also fell back on sourcing from Twitter exchanges between Jonathan Moyo and some of his followers as opposed to actually interviewing him. In the *Newsday* story titled ‘Moyo mum on Cabinet debacle’, the reporter simply states that, “Moyo was not picking calls yesterday”, before revealing that there was some expectation that Moyo would at least post something about the matter on social media,

Many people had expected Moyo, very active on the micro-blogging site, Twitter, to at least shed light on what transpired, but the newly-sworn-in Tsholotsho North MP, has avoided debate on the issue.

The only time he got closer to debating the matter was when a blogger named as Maggs Naidu poked him saying: “It’s being said that @ProfJNMoyo was unceremoniously FIRED by #Mugabe. unsurprisingly – he’s an idiot!”

But Moyo shot back saying, “The real idiots are your ancestors who colonised Africa!” (*Newsday 26/06/2015*)

Although phrased differently, it is clear that both the *Daily News* and the *Newsday* sourced the same Twitter exchange from Jonathan Moyo’s timeline and incorporated it in their news stories to substitute for not having secured a direct comment from Moyo. What this demonstrates is that whilst Moyo could bait the media and influence them to cover certain issues – the ordinary users on social media could also bait Moyo and force him to comment on issues that the media was unable to obtain his comment on. Hence, mainstream media started to routinely feed off the social media exchanges between Moyo and his followers as a way of harvesting his views

without actually gaining access to the source they would have wanted to engage with directly. This sourcing trend shows how social media inadvertently granted access to a source's views where direct access had been denied and where traditional sourcing techniques were obstructed.

However, perhaps the most instructive example of how mainstream media reporters sought to bypass the non-cooperation of sources by simply harvesting their social media comments is that of *The Herald*. As already detailed above, *The Herald* was on a crusade to tyrannize Jonathan Moyo and eventually Jonathan Moyo was unwilling to entertain any requests for comment from *The Herald*. Describing how hard it was to obtain a comment from Jonathan Moyo in a story titled 'Moyo fails to back Chiwenga thesis claims' – *The Herald* edition of 12 July 2017 detailed how its reporters had been stalking Moyo to get a comment,

*Over the past two days, our news crew had been calling, texting and e-mailing Prof Moyo to substantiate his claims without success [added emphasis] and yesterday had to publicly post questions on his Twitter timeline asking him to respond to the queries [added emphasis], but he instead chose to retweet responses posted by his supporters before launching a tirade against The Herald through the New Zimbabwe.Com website. (The Herald 12/07/2017)*

The move by *The Herald* to demand responses via social media seemed to be an extremely combative approach to sourcing as they stopped short of trolling Moyo on Twitter:



Figure 6.3: The Herald uses Twitter to seek comment from Jonathan Moyo

Given the obvious intent of *The Herald* was to malign Moyo as much as possible, it is unsurprising that Moyo chose not to respond. According to Maurer and Beiler (2017, p.14), “political actors are selective when it comes to choosing partners from the media side”. That was the case with Moyo who ignored *The Herald’s* tweeted questions and chose to favor the NewZimbabwe.Com online news site with his response. Despite being

denied a comment, *The Herald* went on to source Moyo's response from the NewZimbabwe.Com platform quoting,

These people (*The Herald*) have no shame at all, they gave Chiwenga acres and acres of space to, without any shred of evidence to support his false and defamatory allegations calling me an enemy of the state, a homosexual, a war deserter, Baba Jukwa and blatantly lying that in my books I wrote that I would destroy ZANU PF from within and worse lying through his teeth that I got him (Chiwenga) sentenced to death at Mgagao in March 1975 when I was nowhere near Mgagao throughout 1975 let alone in March 1975. (*The Herald* 12/07/2075)

Hence even though Moyo had refused to cooperate with *The Herald's* request for a comment, the paper still managed to obtain his views online – where they would not have required his consent. *The Herald's* conduct supports Awad (2006, p.921)'s claim that sometimes “in journalism, maltreatment of sources seems to be part and parcel of the job” because of “the assumption that mistreating sources is an inevitable cost of newsmaking” and it is often done “in the name of the ‘public’s right to know’”. Awad (2006, p.923) argues that the assumption that mistreating sources is an inevitable cost of newsmaking “precludes a debate about journalists’ moral responsibilities”.

Possibly, Jonathan Moyo did not make for a sympathetic victim to the readers witnessing his maltreatment at the hands of *The Herald* given that “when he was Minister of Information, Media and Broadcasting Services, Jonathan Moyo used *The Herald* to scandalize and delegitimise Vice President Joice Mujuru’s contribution in the liberation struggle” (Maodza, 2017, p.66), as well as other former ZANU PF stalwarts that were sympathetic to Mujuru. Hence, Moyo, during his tenure as Minister of Information promoted a political reporting culture in which the maltreatment of sources became the customary way of handling perceived political

adversaries. So viciously did Moyo deploy *The Herald* against his political rivals that according to Maodza (2017) *The Herald* went as far as accusing Joice Mujuru of trying to kill President Mugabe through witchcraft and Joice Mujuru was subsequently dismissed from ZANU-PF and government.

To his credit, if it is fitting to give any, Moyo did not play the victim when the tables turned against him. Instead he took on mainstream media by exposing journalists who pestered him for interviews and shaming them when they invariably wrote speculative stories. From his Twitter handle, Moyo provided incisive rebuttals by ruthlessly taking apart news stories and exposing journalists who had often been regarded as authoritative. In the wake of Moyo's tweeting, precious few political and news reporters were spared his derision and stories that denigrated G40 or propped up the Lacoste faction were triggers for his #HandeiTione battle cry.

### 6.2.2 Jonathan Moyo and the shaming of mainstream media journalists

Commenting on the great lengths that mainstream media have had to go to in order to secure comments from or be granted interviews by an uncooperative Moyo – the former editor of *The Chronicle*, Mduduzi Mathuthu interviewed on 07 September 2017, remarked,

You find an interesting case of *Newsday* and *The Herald* as well, they wanted to get a comment from Prof Jonathan, so they sent the stuff to his email, called his PA, *he is notoriously unavailable for journalists* [added emphasis], so they decided to post the questions to him on Twitter so they were tagging him 'heh Prof Jonathan we want to talk to you about this thing'. *He chooses not to respond to them but takes pictures of their tweeted questions and emailed questions and then puts them there and comments to say they can go away* [added emphasis]. It was quite comical because he clearly saw these questions and decided to ignore them.... *he thinks he has a bigger*

*audience, in a way, than these papers [added emphasis] so he can just talk to his 200k followers on Twitter. You are seeing an increasing reliance on Twitter especially on his part [added emphasis], rather than on official papers, which is quite strange. (Extract from semi-structured interview 07/09/2017)*

As noted by Mathuthu above, when comment was sought from him by mainstream media journalists Moyo would choose not to respond but take screenshots of their tweeted questions and emailed questions to share on his social media platform with a dismissive message. In disdainfully doing so, Moyo appeared to be asserting his power as an elite source. According to Strömbäck and Nord (2006, p.155), “one cannot study the content of the news alone to fully understand the power relationship between journalists and their political sources” because “if we believe that a particular institution, or a particular actor, has great power, we will behave differently than we would if we believed the institution or the actor to be powerless.”

By sharing screenshots of private communication he had received from journalists – many of whom addressed him in a very deferential manner whilst he responded by haranguing them in his social media posts – Moyo demonstrated that the journalist-source power relationship was in his favor. As discussed elsewhere in this thesis, the source-journalist relations often draw their tone from the relations obtaining between a source and a media organization. When *The Herald's* reporter, Sydney Kawadza, was assigned to do a story that required Moyo's comment, he sent a Whatsapp message to Moyo's friend and G40 colleague Saviour Kasukuwere (who was Minister of Local Government, Public Works and National Housing at the time) asking him to be his intermediary in securing an interview with Moyo. Kasukuwere forwarded the communication to Jonathan Moyo who shared it on Twitter.

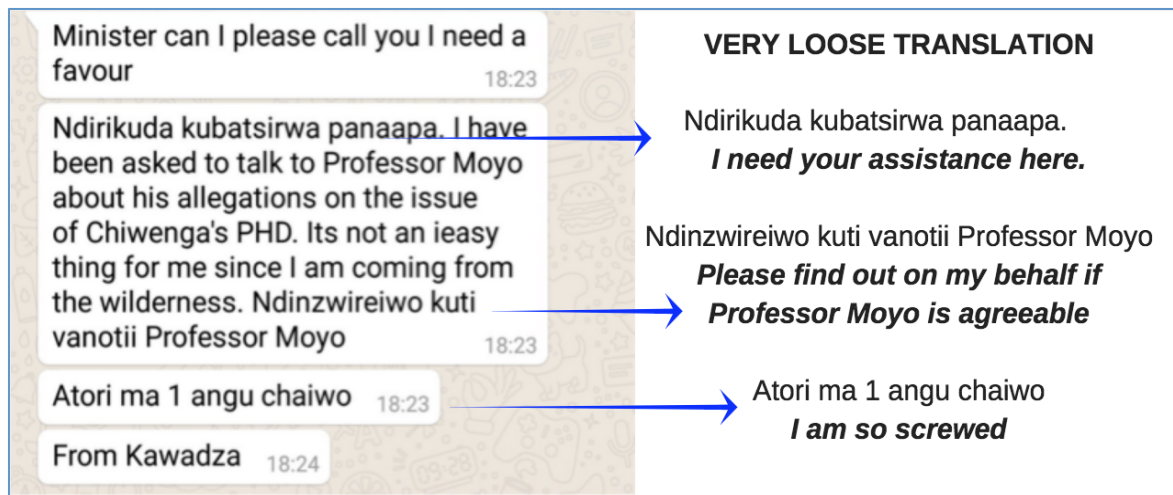


Figure 6.4: Jonathan Moyo shaming Herald reporter

The fact that Kawadza had opted to seek Kasukuwere’s help suggests that he felt he had better relations with Kasukuwere and also indicate some apprehension on his part with regards engaging Jonathan Moyo, especially knowing he worked for a publication that was actively demonizing Moyo. In the above Whatsapp message, Kawadza attempts to distances himself from the quest to demonize Moyo by stating, “I have been asked to talk to Professor Moyo” suggesting that it was not his idea and he was simply carrying out an instruction. Kawadza also says “Its not an easy thing for me since I am coming from the wilderness” suggesting that he knows that he won’t get a warm reception from Moyo and also implies apprehension on his part to carry out the assignment. Before signing off Kawadza tells Kasukuwere he feels like he is in deep trouble – and the fact that he is willing to disclose this to Kasukuwere implies that he considered Kasukuwere to be someone he could confide in frankly.

When Moyo receives this message from Kasukuwere he chooses to share with the public on social media to shame Kawadza. Inadvertently, Moyo exposed the kind of ill-treatment that journalists sometimes face when seeking to engage powerful elites in the discharge of their duties. Kawadza had initially attempted to reach out to Moyo and had approached Kasukuwere as a last resort since he had not received any response from

Moyo, who according to Mathuthu was ‘notoriously unavailable for journalists’. Moyo shared that private communication as well.

On 11 July 2017, *The Herald* carried an extremely distasteful cartoon of Moyo. In response to the vulgar cartoon and the combative manner in which *The Herald* had tweeted him demanding his comment – Moyo shared screenshots of the private communication that Kawadza had sent to him via email as well as the private WhatsApp message that had been sent via Kasukuwere.



Figure 6.5: Jonathan Moyo against Herald

The case of Kawadza was one of a few examples of how journalists can be demeaned when engaging with hostile and powerful elites. Social media sourcing can thus become a way of bypassing interacting with hostile sources where journalists find themselves at the mercy of the powerful.

The image shows a screenshot of a Twitter thread and a media inquiry. The top part is a tweet from Prof Jonathan Moyo (@ProfJNMoyo) posted 11 minutes ago. The tweet text is: "1/2 What's going on here? First, @NewsDayZimbabwe publishes this as its lead story. And then....wait!". Below the tweet is a preview of a news article from NewsDay Zimbabwe with the headline "Moyo, Charamba fight over Mnangagwa - NewsDay..." and a sub-headline "PRESIDENTIAL spokesperson, George Charamba has accused Higher Education minister Jonathan Moyo of seeking to sneak his 'personal tiff' with Vice-Presiden...". The article URL is newsday.co.zw. Below the tweet are icons for replies (1), retweets (2), likes (1), and a direct message icon.

The bottom part of the screenshot shows a media inquiry from NewsDay reporter Richard Chidza, dated 12 June 2017 at 09:15. The inquiry text is: "Good Morning Prof  
I hope I find you well. My name is Richard Chidza a reporter with NewsDay. I have just seen comments you made on your twitter profile regarding an article in the Herald written by a character going by the name Bishop Lazarus. You indicate that your support for VP Mnangagwa in 2004 (before he became VP) was mistaken could you please clarify. I also note that you seen to indicate that the writer is President Robert Mugabe's spokesperson George Charamba. Could you also please shed a bit more light on this."  
Thank you very much  
Chidza Richard  
NewsDay

Figure 6.6: Jonathan Moyo shaming Newsday reporter

On June 12 2017, *Newsday* carried a story titled ‘Moyo, Charamba fight over Mnangagwa’ written by Blessed Mhlanga sourcing from two anonymous state media columnists. In his story Mhlanga sourced the views of George Charamba whom he confirmed, “has been revealed as the author of an acerbic Herald column under the pseudonym, Nathaniel Manheru”. In his story Mhlanga also sourced another anonymous state media columnist writing under the pseudonym ‘Bishop Lazarus’ before including tweets by Moyo responding to the claims made by the columnist. In the story, Mhlanga quoted Moyo’s tweets thus,

*Moyo yesterday shot back at Charamba* [added emphasis], saying he had usurped the column from the usual writer, whom he identified as Munyaradzi Huni.

“Charamba, oops Bishop Lazarus, I’ve said it before and I’ll say it again: *My support for Mnangagwa in 2004 was wrong*, [added emphasis]” he tweeted.

Moyo described Charamba as “an ideological bankrupt and discredited wordsmith bidding for a discredited and cruel politician”.  
(*Newsday* 12/06/17)

It was Richard Chidza’s misfortune that on the same day that Mhlanga’s story was published, he sent Jonathan Moyo questions requesting for answers had already been addressed in Mhlanga’s story. Evidently, Chidza had not yet read his own paper and had therefore missed the lead story which already addressed questions he was putting to Jonathan Moyo, such as the identity of the anonymous blogger who was said to be Charamba and Moyo’s view that supporting Mnangagwa had been an error. In his message sent at 09:15am on that Monday morning, Chidza had indicated that, “*I have just seen comments made on your Twitter profile*” [added emphasis] suggesting that even though it was already after 9am, Chidza had not gotten round to reading his own *Newsday* paper where the lead story was a story based on the same Twitter comments he apparently was only noticing that

very morning. Hence Moyo's tweet caught the attention of two *Newsday* reporters, both of whom desired to write a story based on that tweet, and only one (i.e Blessed Mhlanga) succeeded.



Figure 6.7: Jonathan Moyo tweet that caught the attention of two *Newsday* reporters

Blessed Mhlanga used social media to look for story leads on Sunday 11 of June 2017 and stumbled upon Moyo's tweets, which he used to develop a story that the *Newsday* made its lead for Monday. Meanwhile, on Monday presumably hunting for a story idea, Chidza also turned to social media for inspiration and thus stumbled upon Moyo's tweets, which he hoped to source and develop as a news story. This incident clearly shows how reporters turn to social media as part of their newsgathering routine since it has proven to be a rich source of story leads. It also indicates how reporters easily gravitated to Moyo's timeline in their search for story ideas.

The Chidza incident demonstrates that “journalists need the information that news sources offer” and whilst typically “news sources need the attention and the visibility that journalists can provide” (Strömbäck and Nord, 2006, p.148) – in the case of Jonathan Moyo it became increasingly evident that he did not particularly seek out the mainstream media’s attention. Through his social media platforms, Jonathan Moyo was effectively self-publishing and thus less reliant on journalists to grant him any visibility especially since he could arguably reach a wider audience than could be reached by the<sup>34</sup> combined daily circulation of all the four daily newspapers.

Given that journalists needed the information that Jonathan Moyo had to offer (especially against the background of an ongoing ZANU PF factional fight) more than Jonathan Moyo needed access to their papers’ audiences – it was clear that the power relationship favored Moyo. For instance, when he was contacted by *Daily News* reporter, Andrew Kunambura, Jonathan Moyo once again posted the private communication he had received from a journalist on social media whilst berating the journalist for allegedly being part of a media organization that he felt was pushing a pro-Lacoste agenda.

It can be assumed that other journalists who saw how Jonathan Moyo repeatedly exposed private communication and humiliated journalists who dared to request interviews, seek comments and ask for clarifications were less inclined to risk approaching him. Thus it would be unsurprising if journalists felt that it was a safer bet to avoid an unpredictable and arguably rude but powerful elite source and simply resort to sourcing from that source’s social media account rather than risk being publicly dressed down.

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<sup>34</sup> Successive results from the Zimbabwe All Media and Products Survey indicate that The Herald is the most read daily newspaper. And since The Herald’s circulation does not exceed 40 000, it means the four daily newspapers’ combined circulation would not have surpassed Moyo’s then audience of over 200k followers <https://www.herald.co.zw/zimpapers-maintains-market-dominance-3/>



Figure 6.8: Jonathan Moyo shaming Daily News reporter

### 6.2.3 Sourcing Jonathan Moyo’s non-political opinions

When Jonathan Moyo joined social media, it was *The Chronicle* that felt the development merited a story and in the months that followed, it was *The Chronicle* that gave Jonathan Moyo sustained positive coverage by sourcing his social media posts. *The Chronicle* covered Jonathan Moyo in its sports and in its courts beats as they ran stories based on his opinions relating to sports and legal issues. When Moyo tweeted his disapproval of how the national soccer team was being managed after FIFA banned Zimbabwe from the 2018 World Cup, *The Chronicle* sports desk turned it into a story (titled ‘Sack Cuthbert: ministers’ - 13 March 2015). Similarly, when Moyo weighed

in on the question of what the legal age of consent to sex was, *The Chronicle* news desk included it in a story (titled 'Courts 'set' age of consent to sex at 12' – 09 June 2015).

*The Chronicle* was not the only publication that ran with Jonathan Moyo's non-political opinions as stories. Moyo's controversial statements on social media were fodder for reporters beyond the realm of the political news beat. His tweets were like irresistible sound bites; low hanging fruit for reporters desperate to file stories.

On 02 March 2015, the *Daily News* carried a story titled 'Moyo on wrong end of cricket argument' after Jonathan Moyo tweeted an incorrect Zimbabwe cricket team score during their World Cup match against Pakistan in Brisbane, Australia. What appeared to have drawn the *Daily News*' attention, as evidenced by the Twitter users they chose to quote, was the fact that Moyo's error was being interpreted as an extension of his supposed political dishonesty. According to the *Daily News* story,

#ZimCricket Much better bowling 2day as Chevrons continue 2 hold their ground against Pakistan who are 158-6 after 49 overs. Go Boyz Go!" Moyo tweeted.

He was, however, quickly corrected by The-Great-Heisenberg, who uses Twitter handle @BrianZW1.

@ProfJNMoyo Jonathan moyo you're lying. It's just 39 overs. This is sport not politics," *he bellowed* [added emphasis].

Tapiwa Bvekera also weighed in, *blasting Moyo* [added emphasis] for conveniently stating figures to suit his own desires.

@ProfJNMoyo not surprised, you can play with numbers to suit what you want. Wish you were keeping the scorecard.#nikuved #zimcric," Bvekera said.

The-Great-Heisenberg *continued the onslaught on the minister* [added emphasis]

@ProfJNMoyo you said 49. You're either half asleep yourself or you're wearing your spin doctoring cap. Take it off and enjoy the game," he tweeted. (*Daily News* 02/03/15)

The framing of the story seems to place emphasis on the fact that a minister was being disrespected. The use of descriptors such as how Moyo's Twitter followers supposedly 'bellowed' and were 'blasting' him and subjecting him to an 'onslaught' seem exaggerated. What is also significant about the above exchange is how, through social media, ordinary users had direct access to a Minister and also the opportunity to challenge his views.

On 02 August 2016, the *Daily News* carried a story about a Twitter spat triggered by Jonathan Moyo titled 'Moyo threatens EU ambassador'. The paper reported how Jonathan Moyo had threatened "to deal politically" with the European Union (EU) Ambassador to Zimbabwe Philippe Van Damme, whom he accused of using the social networking site to "play politics against Zanu PF" after Van Damme had commented on the presidential insult laws. On 10 September 2016, in a story titled 'Protesters must pay security deposit', the *Daily News* did a story based on Jonathan Moyo's tweeted view that "Zimbabweans intending to exercise their constitutional right to protest must first pay a security deposit in case they destroy property". This pattern of sourcing indicates how irresistible Jonathan Moyo was to mainstream media as he apparently checked every box of what an ideal source is – he was a member of the elite, very prominent, a Government official, open with his views including controversial ones and he stood by his word. He was a source the media could name and his tweets were usually topical enough to generate story leads.

To illustrate how Jonathan Moyo could be quoted for saying just about anything on any subject beyond the realm of politics, the *Newsday* on 13 August 2015 carried a story titled 'Nehanda's skull first before economy'. For

the story, the *Newsday* sourced Jonathan Moyo's responses to a follower he was having an exchange with on Twitter,

Commenting on his Twitter account *in response to a remark by one of his followers* [added emphasis] calling on government to concentrate on rebuilding the free-falling economy, Moyo said: "How can we focus on the economy when the skulls of Mbuya Nehanda and Sekuru Kaguvi are displayed in a British museum? These barbarians have been displaying the skulls of our First Chimurenga heroes and heroines in their libraries!" (*Newsday* 13/08/15)

Jonathan Moyo's tweets were also the source of a *Newsday* story published on 08 January 2016 titled 'Bonuses not a right: Prof Moyo' which divulged how,

*Moyo, posting on his micro-blogging Twitter account on Wednesday, said* [added emphasis] payment of bonuses should be for extra performance at work and not an entitlement.

"Well, I'm sympathetic to the view that a bonus should be for extra performance & not an entitlement!' and 'Leaving your jacket in the office to go & booze is not a legitimate basis for expecting bonus as an entitlement!'" wrote Moyo on his Twitter account. (*Newsday* 08/01/16)

The story went on to invite comments from the workers' unions such as the Apex Council, which is an umbrella body that brings together all public sector unions. *Newsday* also contacted Moyo seeking clarification on what he had tweeted and the paper carried his elaboration,

Yesterday, Moyo, however, told *NewsDay* that he stood by his remarks as the statement was not only targeting civil servants, but all classes of workers. (*Newsday* 08/01/16)

On 19 May 2016, the *Newsday* carried a story titled ‘Moyo, US ambassador in nasty social media spat’ after “Moyo accused [United States Ambassador to Zimbabwe Harry Thomas Jnr] Thomas, whom he described as “Dirty Harry”, of funding and founding a social media movement known as #thisflag campaign fronted by local cleric,<sup>35</sup> Evan Mawarire to expose the country’s endemic corruption.”

Meanwhile on 19 June 2015, the *Newsday* had carried a story titled ‘Mboweni demands Moyo apology’ when the former South African Reserve Bank governor Tito Mboweni demanded an apology from Jonathan Moyo who had referred to Mboweni as an “Uncle Tom” and a “charlatan” during a heated argument on social media.

On 10 June 2017, the *Newsday* carried a story titled ‘Moyo, Mahere in Twitter fallout’ after “Moyo snubbed activist and lawyer Fadzayi Mahere’s live Facebook streaming conversation, which was due to be aired on Thursday, alleging her technical team was unprofessional and dishonest”. Moyo went on to shame Mahere by posting screenshots of private correspondence he had had with her to set up the aborted Facebook Live conversation. Apart from the screenshots, he went a step further to tweet a link to a PDF [<https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B0lhZ1opacDdZ2NiS0JHmVJuSlk/view>] file that contained email exchanges between himself and Mahere, which he had stored on Google drive. Thus, Moyo did not only shame journalists by sharing private communication but also extended the treatment to any individuals that he felt provoked by.

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<sup>35</sup> Pastor Evan Mawarire (Evan Mawarire) is a Zimbabwean religious leader, Motivational Speaker, author and leader of the [This Flag Movement](#). In April 2016 he posted a video on Facebook with the title [ThisFlag](#) which went viral spurring the start of the [#ThisFlag](#) hashtag online. He would be later arrested early July 2016 after successfully calling for a national 'Stay Away' dubbed '[Shut Down Zimbabwe](#)'. Police summoned him to the Police station thereafter and on presenting himself he was arrested and taken to court the next day, however, the Magistrate [Pastor Evan Acquitted Of Attempting To Overthrow The Government](#). Extract from [https://pindula.co.zw/Pastor\\_Evan\\_Mawarire](https://pindula.co.zw/Pastor_Evan_Mawarire) [accessed 20 August 2018].

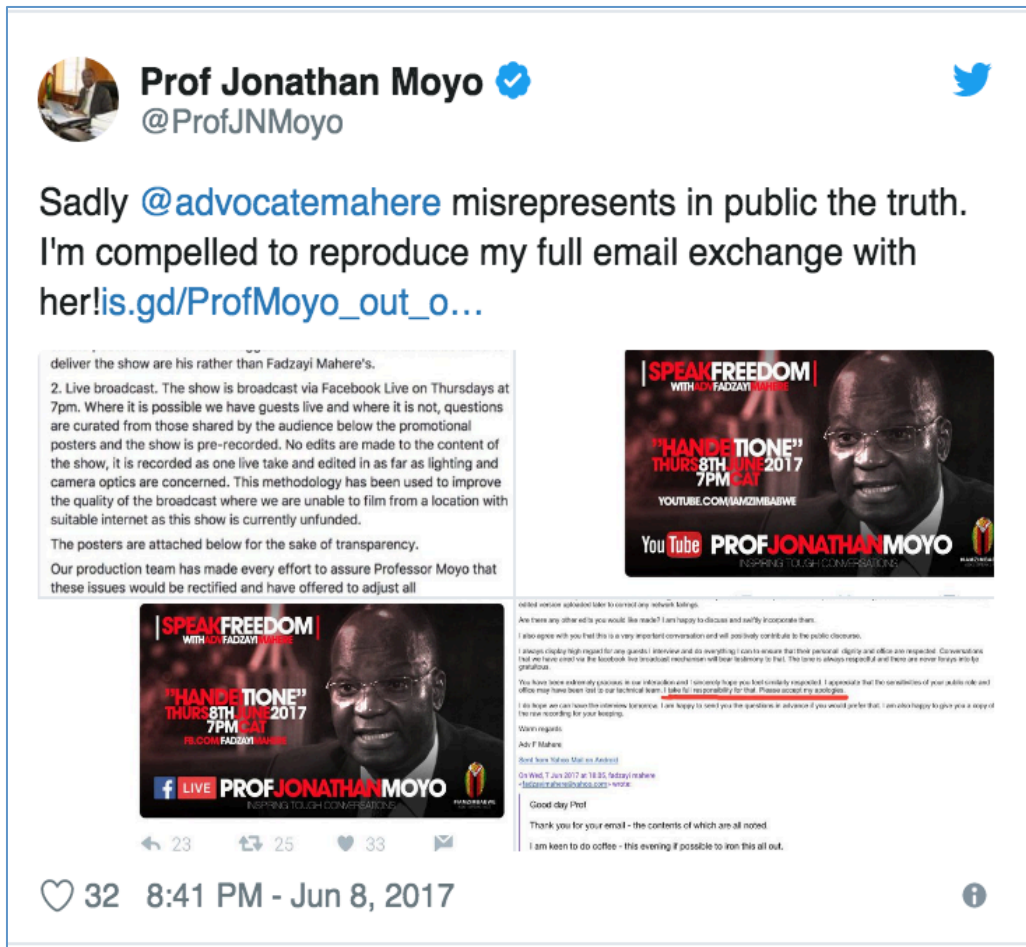


Figure 6.9: Jonathan Moyo shaming Fadzayi Mahere

Without having to pre-arrange a structured gathering such as a press conference, interview or photo-op – Jonathan Moyo’s mere presence on social media provided numerous opportunities for mainstream media to source his views. He became a source, which mainstream media (over)-relied on and increasingly news stories featuring his views found their ways into print publications. It is possible to attribute this surge in social media sourced stories that occurred during the period under study to the influence of social media, suggesting that the media’s sourcing preferences were technology-led.

#### 6.2.4 Variances in how state media treated Moyo as a source

Prior sections of this chapter have already highlighted the acrimonious

source-institution relationship that obtained between Jonathan Moyo and *The Herald* during the period under study, specifically from February 2016. The cause for this acrimonious source-institution relationship has also been detailed and attributed to the takeover of *The Herald* (and all of state media) by the Lacoste faction, as the internal fighting in ZANU PF escalated. To prove that social media sourcing was not technology-led in the two state media newsrooms, this section briefly reflects on the disparity between how *The Chronicle* and *The Herald* treated Moyo as a source. When Jonathan Moyo joined social media on 9 February 2015, it was *The Chronicle* that found the development worthy of a front-page announcement that was published on 10 February 2015. The story was cross-published by *The Herald* but not given the same prominence in that paper's print edition. The present study established that *The Chronicle* carried 11 social media sourced stories (between 10 February 2015 and 09 January 2016).

**Table 6.2: *The Chronicle* articles based on Jonathan Moyo's social media posts**

<i>The Chronicle</i> articles based on Jonathan Moyo's social media posts:	
"Gukurahundi: Moyo snubs VP Mphoko"	(20 February 2015)
"Politburo: Moyo defends First Lady"	(20 February 2015)
"I didn't flee struggle: Prof Moyo"	(21 February 2015)
"Sack Cuthbert: Ministers"	(13 March 2015)
"Zanu-PF eyes vacant seats"	(18 March 2015)
"Paper 'concocted' Cabinet story"	(01 April 2015)
"Courts 'set' age of consent to sex at 12"	(09 June 2015)
"HAND OF GOD"	(11 June 2015)
"Moyo tears into Al-Bashir pursuers"	(25 June 2015)
"Back to school for Prof Moyo"	(02 November 2015)
"MDC-T's Gutu in Zanu-PF 'baboons' storm"	(19 January 2016)

*The Chronicle* published social media sourced stories that were based on Jonathan Moyo's Facebook or Twitter posts, and generally portrayed him in a favorable light. On the surface of it, it would be unsurprising given that state media tends to favour ZANU PF elites with positive coverage (of course, in the factional fighting there was a clear departure from this sycophantic practice). What can be deduced is that the timing of *The Chronicle*'s adoption of social media as a news source coincided with

Jonathan Moyo's imminent electoral race. In 2015, *The Chronicle* carried 10 social media sourced stories based on Moyo's posts and of these, 9 were published between 10 February 2015 and 30 June 2015 (see Table 6.2) ahead of and just after the Tsholotsho North by-election. It can be presumed that it was not social media that drove the political news agenda or influenced *The Chronicle's* political coverage during this period, but rather the paper used social media sourcing to boost Jonathan Moyo's election campaign.

The close <sup>36</sup>ties that obtained between Jonathan Moyo and Mduzuzi Mathuthu, the former editor of *The Chronicle*, can also be an explanation for what drive the paper to adopt social media sourcing. Through social media sourcing, it appeared as if Jonathan Moyo's opinions could be injected into the *The Chronicle* with ease. It must however be noted that given his position as Minister of Information at the time (i.e prior to 23 June 2015 when he was removed from the post), Moyo would have had no trouble securing coverage in any state media publication. The source-institution relations between Jonathan Moyo and *The Chronicle* (during Mduzuzi Mathuthu's tenure as editor) were very warm. In 2016 when the Lacoste faction activated *The Herald* to attack Jonathan Moyo and members of the G40 faction, *The Chronicle* took no part in it, as it did not adhere to the customary practice of cross-publishing *The Herald's* leading political news stories. As it became evident that *The Chronicle* was not complying with the Lacoste faction's wishes, Mduzuzi Mathuthu was <sup>37</sup>forced out as its editor on 23 May 2016, and transferred to the *Southern Times* in Namibia. Apart from the one social media sourced story that *The Chronicle* had carried on 19 January 2016, the paper did not continue using social media as a news source for the duration

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<sup>36</sup> The close relationship between Mduzuzi Mathuthu and Jonathan Moyo is well-documented in the press, including in articles such as this one titled: 'Mduzuzi Mathuthu set to be fired as editor of Southern Times' published Nehanda Radio <https://nehandaradio.com/2017/01/11/mdudzuzi-mathuthu-set-fired-editor-southern-times/>. In the article, the writer alludes to a widely held belief that Mathuthu's "close relationship with the then Information Minister Jonathan Moyo was to many the reason why he was appointed to the post" of editor at *The Chronicle*. [Accessed 12 June 2018]

<sup>37</sup> Story published in VOA titled 'Chronicle Editor Mathuthu Ousted In Zanu-PF Infighting' <https://www.voazimbabwe.com/a/zimbabwe-politics/3337898.html> [Accessed on 12 June 2018]

of the period covered by the present study. After Mathuthu's dismissal, *The Chronicle's* new boss Innocent Madonko (who was appointed Acting Editor and later became the substantive editor) did not use social media as a political news source. It can be argued that the adoption of social media sourcing at *The Chronicle* during the period under study was not technology-led rather it was introduced to provide favorable coverage to Jonathan Moyo prior to and soon after his election campaign. Such an argument could be strengthened by an appraisal of an unpardonably obsequious article carried in *The Chronicle* following Jonathan Moyo's electoral victory, titled 'Hand of God' [<http://www.chronicle.co.zw/hand-of-god/>] in which, the readers are regaled with tales of Moyo's endless <sup>38</sup>virtues.

Thus, whilst *The Chronicle* had a pro-Jonathan Moyo social media sourcing strategy, *The Herald* adopted an anti-Jonathan Moyo social media sourcing strategy. The disparity in terms of the papers' social media sourcing patterns arose from the fact that divergent agendas were being pursued and conflicting interests were being served. Consequently, it was not social media that led the sourcing practices of either *The Chronicle* or *The Herald* but rather sourcing practices were shaped by the need to protect or advance the interests of specific political actors.

### 6.3 Conclusion

This chapter detailed the effect Jonathan Moyo's social media activity influenced political reporting in Zimbabwe's mainstream media during the period under study. It underscored how Jonathan Moyo successfully baited the media into responding to his social media posts, instigating news stories and getting journalists to focus on issues he drew the public's attention to.

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<sup>38</sup> The story mentions, among other virtuous qualities, how Moyo is "an unrelenting workaholic who finds sleep an inconvenience" and how "he had extravagantly lent hundreds of man-hours to applying substance and polish to Zanu-PF's election manifesto" and how "As the party's chief political strategist, Prof Moyo had burned the midnight oil – against serious internal and a determined external opposition – engineering a Supreme Court application which would force elections to be held in July 2013, dismantling an uneasy four-year coalition government with the MDC factions".

The influence that Jonathan Moyo's social media activity had on the mainstream media's news agenda arguably provides the most persuasive evidence to support the view that "the increasing use of online sources has impacted, yet perhaps not drastically changed, all aspects of journalistic news production" (Van Leuven et al., 2018, p.803). In the case of Jonathan Moyo, whilst he could bait the media (i.e influence the news agenda) his intended message was routinely distorted by *The Herald* thus demonstrating how "journalists have power over the content of the news stories" (Strömbäck and Nord, 2006, p.154) even when sources instigate the stories. As an instigator or initiator of news stories, Jonathan Moyo as a social media source directed the attention of private media to certain issues but was only quoted when his views aligned with the editorial policies and agendas of those publications. This indicates that social media sourcing is subordinate to editorial policies and agendas.

Additionally this chapter reveals mainstream media's over-reliance on a single elite source even with thousands of non-elite actors to source from. The case of Jonathan Moyo negates the assumption that "the use of online (social media) sources in the news production process could lead to a broadening of news access for a more diverse range of information actors" (Van Leuven et al., 2018, p.800). This pattern of sourcing suggests that social media's potential to democratise political news sourcing in Zimbabwe has not yet been realized as there is no significant diversity of sources in social media sourced political stories. This chapter also highlighted the role of source-journalist relations in facilitating or impeding newsgathering as journalists may be denied access by potential sources. The resultant news stories triggered by Jonathan Moyo's social media posts illustrated that "official sources may instigate the news and direct the attention of the reporters toward particular events and issues, without controlling the ultimate story" (Cook, 1998, p.105). What follows in the next Chapter is a finer discussion on the findings of this research and what those findings could point to.

## CHAPTER 7: DISCUSSION

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### 7.1 Introduction

This study interrogated the influence of social media on political reporting in Zimbabwe's mainstream media by tracing the social media sourcing patterns of four daily newspapers over a 30 month period and conducting semi-structured interviews with purposively sampled knowledgeable participants. This section discusses the findings of this study and, using evidence from the data, this section then addresses the five research questions put forward in the introduction.

The chapter discusses social media's influence on political reporting, drawing on the findings of the research. The existence of silent digital actors in news production and how they contribute to political reporting is also reviewed. The chapter also discusses the evidence found in this study regarding factors that determine source selection or that drive the political news agenda. The gatekeeping practices in relation to social media sourcing are also considered as well as the democratising potential of the Internet, based on the evidence this study discovered.

#### 7.1.1 Social media's influence on political reporting: Content homogeneity

According to Boczkowski and De Santos (2007), content homogeneity is understood as the extent to which different media focus on the same stories during a particular news cycle. In the case of Zimbabwe's mainstream media, the four newspapers examined in this study focused on the same story of ZANU PF factionalism and frequently monitored Jonathan Moyo's social media activity for story leads. It can be argued that social media was one of

the factors that contributed to the rise in content homogeneity during the 30 months under study. This is because journalists across the divide gained equal access to the same source material from elites who chose to post their views online. In this regard, social media can be said to have democratised journalistic access to those elite sources that used social media in a context where elite sources routinely refuse to cooperate with journalists who write for publications they do not like.

Content homogeneity, which occurs when “the stories one reads in one publication are likely to bear a stronger resemblance to the stories in the next publication than they would have in the past” (Schudson, 2003, p.109), was especially evident in media coverage that relied upon Jonathan Moyo’s tweets. Linked to content homogeneity was the sharp contrast in how the same set of facts (or in this case, the same tweets from the same user) were presented differently according to the editorial agendas of the respective newspapers – displaying the extent of media polarization. Whilst the newspapers covered the same themes, and even used the same social media sources, they stuck to their polarized interpretation of issues.

Examples of how homogeneity in sourcing led to content homogeneity in mainstream media is how on 28 June 2017, both the *Newsday* and the *Daily News* carried stories based on a single cryptic tweet from Jonathan Moyo which the publications went on to interpret in a very similar way. Based on Jonathan Moyo’s tweet the *Newsday* wrote, ‘Moyo hits back at Chiwenga’ whilst the *Daily News* wrote ‘Chiwenga after Moyo’. Apart from the fact that both publications used a single cryptic tweet as a substitute for a comment from Jonathan Moyo, both publications also used the state media’s exclusive interview with General Chiwenga as their source.

Another example is how on 26 June 2015, both the *Daily News* and the *Newsday* sourced a Twitter exchange between Jonathan Moyo and another user after they failed to get an official comment from Moyo. Both papers had

written a story about Jonathan Moyo being removed from the post of Information Minister with the *Newsday* story titled 'Moyo mum on Cabinet debacle' and the *Daily News* story titled 'Confusion swirls over Jonathan Moyo'.

Through Jonathan Moyo's timeline, journalists across the divide enjoyed equal access to the same information and developed stories from those tweets to satisfy varying editorial agendas. For his part, Jonathan Moyo seemed to use his Twitter to address the broader public but to also leave breadcrumbs for journalists directing their attention to certain issues. For instance, on 26 March 2017, Jonathan Moyo issued a press statement via Twitter, which the *Daily News* sourced for a story titled 'Moyo lays into Mnangagwa' that was published on 27 March 2017. Jonathan Moyo also used Twitter to share press statements from Saviour Kasukuwere as well, thus ensuring that access to the source material was open to any and all journalists.

**Prof Jonathan Moyo** Following  
 @ProfJNMoyo

Here's my press statement on today's lead story in @SundayMailZim!  
[sundaymail.co.zw/prof-moyo-bene ...](http://sundaymail.co.zw/prof-moyo-bene...)  
[sundaymail.co.zw/and-now-for-co ...](http://sundaymail.co.zw/and-now-for-co...)  
[sundaymail.co.zw/editorial-comm ...](http://sundaymail.co.zw/editorial-comm...)

I advised the Honourable Vice President that I had not attacked Command Agriculture anywhere but that, based on my first hand knowledge in light of my family's farming experience in Masowe and the harsh experiences of other farmers, I had questioned the shockingly politicised and personalised misrepresentation and exaggeration of Command Agriculture by the Herald, Chronicle, Sunday Mail and Sunday News. I gave Vice President Mnangagwa examples of many and very recent instances in which the Herald, Chronicle, Sunday Mail and Sunday News have persistently but without any evidence claimed that Command Agriculture is a \$500million initiative supporting maize production under 400ha that is poised to yield some three million tonnes of maize in what would be an unprecedented bumper maize harvest. Furthermore, I pointed out that I have expressed serious concern that the Herald and Sunday Mail had gone over the top and published false stories claiming that the Government had used the alleged success of Command Agriculture to institute a Command Economy as Government policy.

Against this backdrop, and given the negative political fixation that successors who control the public media have against me, it did not come as a surprise to see the scurrilously personalised Sunday Mail lead story today alleging that I am a beneficiary of Command Agriculture and accusing me of behaving like an MDC activist only because I questioned the misrepresentation and exaggeration of Command Agriculture routinely published by Zimpapers.

For the avoidance of doubt, I stand by everything I have said about the unanswered and very serious questions about the poor implementation of Command Agriculture and about the folly of public media lies that the Government has adopted a Command Economy. No amount of vilification will intimidate me to move from truth to lies.

The claim in today's Sunday Mail that I benefited from Command Agriculture demonstrates the ideological bankruptcy of successors who clearly don't even know the intended beneficiaries of Command Agriculture, as a contractual programme. In policy terms, Command Agriculture was designed as a 'Special Maize Programme for Import Substitution', and this in fact is its technical or policy name. In other words, this is one contractual maize input scheme that is intended to benefit the nation by getting farmers to produce for the state to eliminate maize imports. Each contracted farmer is supposed to give to the state five tonnes of maize per hectare.

The apparatus of Command Agriculture who are quoted in the Sunday Mail story claiming to have dealt with me in any way or that I signed for this or that input are, like their handlers, command lars who bark in the folly of wishful thinking. The fact that the Sunday Mail story acknowledges that my family farm "has one of the best maize crops in the food-producing hub of Mashonaland Central" is a tribute to my wife, Betty, who is the farmer in the family. She works very hard and honestly against untold adversities and I'm proud of her achievement given the odds she has to overcome. It's very telling that despite the begrudging acknowledgment that our family farm has one of the best crops in Mashonaland Central, the forces behind Command Agriculture could not hide their evil intentions to "investigate" this farm that has produced one of the best crops "for abuse of State resources". Very satanic, nothing new. We have suffered this evil and cruelty before. Somebody should tell these evil command fellows that the whole deal is a contract governed in terms of contract law.

5:27 PM - 26 Mar 2017

46 Retweets 48 Likes

Figure 7.1: Jonathan Moyo press statement on Twitter

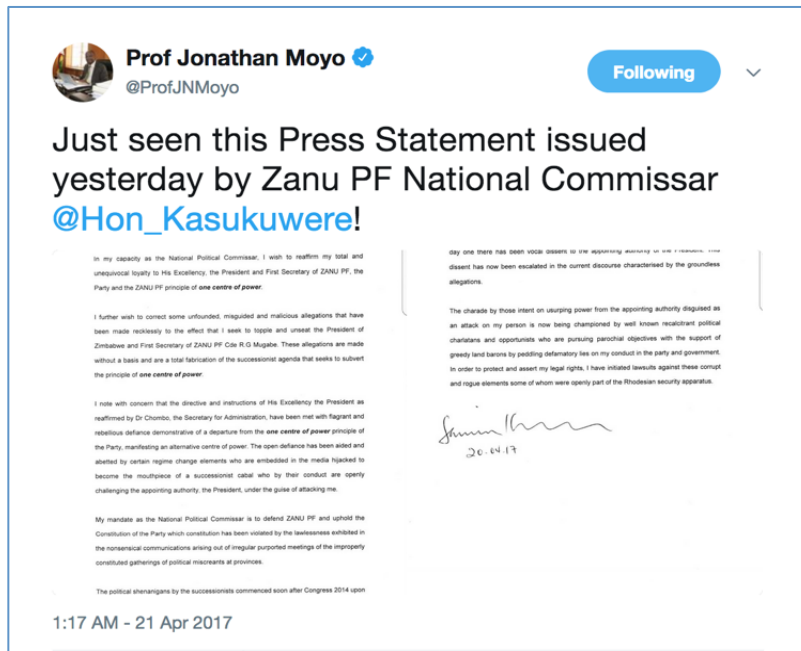


Figure 7.2: Jonathan Moyo shares Kasukuwere's press statement on Twitter

One of the earliest illustrations of how Jonathan Moyo’s social media posts led to homogeneity is a debate around the legality of spot fines and impounding of vehicles that was a common practice by the police.

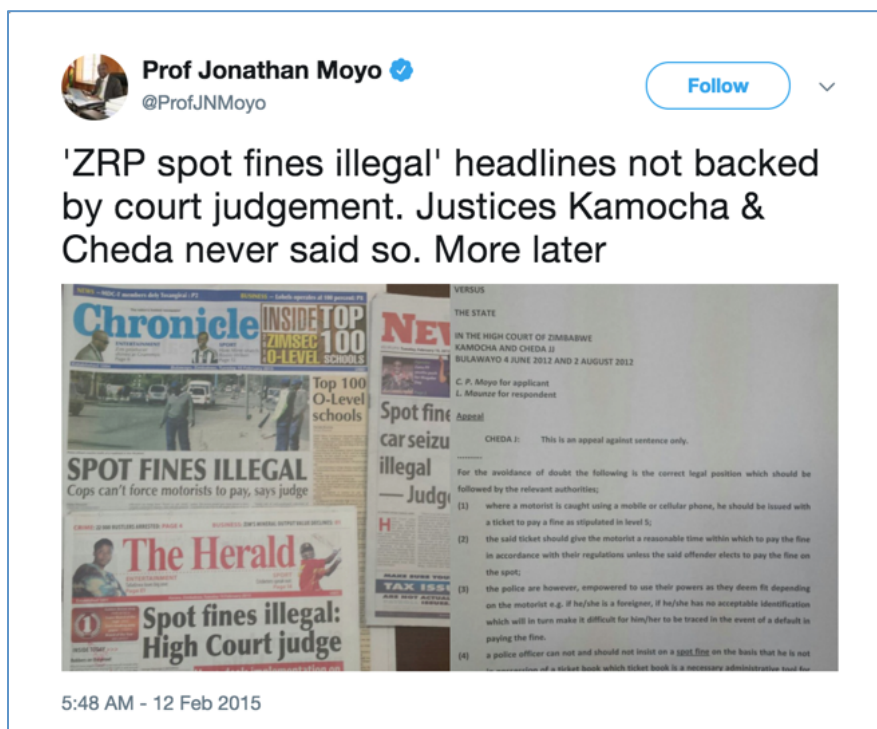


Figure 7.3: Jonathan Moyo criticizes media coverage on spot fines

In a story titled 'Police dig in on traffic spot fines' published by *The Herald* on 11 February 2015, the paper shared Moyo's opinion from his social media accounts that he had created just 48 hours prior (i.e on 09 February 2015);

Writing on his Facebook page yesterday, Information, Media and Broadcasting Services Minister Professor Jonathan Moyo concurred saying it was wrong for Justice Bere to speak as if he was making a ruling on the case.

Notwithstanding any legal or even factual merits that Justice Bere's statement might have, it must be said that it is not in the interest of the rule of law or of justice that the judge was apparently willing and happy to misdirect himself to the point of making a very serious personal pronouncement that had the false ring of a court ruling," he said. (*The Herald* 11/02/15)

A day later the *Newsday* followed suit by including Moyo's non-political opinion in a story titled 'Police in contempt of court over spot fines' published by *Newsday* on 12 February 2015. The paper reported how:

Information minister Professor Jonathan Moyo also waded into the debate with a social media post that attacked Justice Bere.

Moyo posted on his newly opened Facebook account that: "The judge was apparently willing and happy to misdirect himself to the point of making a very serious personal pronouncement that had the false ring of a court ruling." (*Newsday* (12/02/15)

On 13 February 2015, *The Chronicle* cross-published a Harare Bureau story titled 'Spot fines: Mnangagwa blasts ZRP' which sourced more of Jonathan Moyo's social media posts:

Information, Media and Broadcasting Services Minister Professor Jonathan Moyo, writing on Facebook last night, said, “while the media spotlight on ZRP spot fines has hogged the limelight, it has sadly not shed any light on an issue with immense public interest.”

“In fact the mainstream media has since last Tuesday created utter confusion through misleading reports about the alleged illegality of ZRP spot fines,” he said. (*The Chronicle* 13/02/15)

On the same day, 13 February 2015, *The Herald* placed on its website a story titled ‘Prof Moyo on spot fines debate’ which reproduced verbatim bullet points obtained from Jonathan Moyo’s Facebook post.

Assuming that “whom journalists cite in news stories indicates whom they value” (Walejko, 2008, p.146), it can be argued that Jonathan Moyo was a valued source across all four newspapers hence his social media activity attracted the attention of political journalists.

### **7.1.2 Social media’s influence on political reporting: Information subsidies**

Apart from the rise in content homogeneity, social media sourcing has also created a trend whereby journalists use social media sources as information subsidies. According to Knight (2012), if messages from information sources are incorporated by journalists in their work in ways that completely substitute journalistic newsgathering activities the messages constitute information subsidies. From the evidence obtained in this study, it can be argued that Jonathan Moyo was treated as an information subsidy as some journalists reduced their newsgathering activities to simply harvesting Moyo’s views online. This is evidenced by the fact that several social media sourced stories that were carried mainly in the *Daily News* did not have any offline

sources as they relied solely on the social media posts of Jonathan Moyo. For instance, on 21 February 2015 *Daily News* carried a story titled 'Moyo speaks on Mutasa's ouster' that was based entirely on Moyo's social media comments suggesting that no further newsgathering activity had been undertaken in writing the story. Similarly on 02 March 2015, *Daily News* carried a story titled 'Moyo on wrong end of cricket argument' which narrated Twitter exchanges between Jonathan Moyo and other users. Again, no other source beyond the tweets was obtained, suggesting that the journalist took the social media posts at face value and did not attempt to seek further clarification.

In certain instances where journalists have attempted to seek clarification from sources regarding social media posts, they have been rebuffed, as sources seem to expect their social media comments to be taken at face value. For instance, on 06 January 2015 the *Daily News*' writer Tendai Kamhungira included, within his story, an account of how his attempt to get further clarification from a source (i.e Energy Mutodi) had been rebuffed as the source expected the social media comments to be taken at face value. In the story, Kamhungira describes how,

When the *Daily News* contacted him yesterday, Mutodi said there was no need for him to amplify what he had put on his Facebook page. "Ukaonachinhu, handitiunongotorasezvachiri (When you see something, you take it as it is)," Mutodi said. He went on to ask why the *Daily News* had sought his further comment when *what he had said was "in black and white"* [added emphasis]. (*Daily News* 06/01/15)

The fact that the source felt his views posted on social media were stated 'in black and white' suggests that he felt there was no need for further elaboration. A similar reaction was recorded by *Newsday* journalists Moses Matenga and Richard Chidza who, in a 25 September 2015 story, wrote that when "contacted for comment, Wadyajena said he would not speak beyond

Twitter as what he had said was enough.” When journalists take at face value the social media posts of sources it can lead to copy-and-paste sourcing techniques where no additional newsgathering activities are undertaken. However, taking the social media posts of elites at face value could be the only recourse for journalists who are denied access by uncooperative sources whose recalcitrance constitutes a major professional obstacle since “the political journalist needs to know what is going on in the world of politics, needs this information fast and prefers to have it first-hand” (Van Aelst and Aalberg, 2011, p.74). For some political journalists, the social media posts of elite sources are the closest thing to getting first-hand information especially when their efforts to obtain comments or when their request for interviews are constantly ignored.

The trend of using social media sources as information subsidies that appear to completely substitute journalistic newsgathering activities is evident in cases where social media exchanges between elites and other users are wholly treated as news sources. This study found that elite sources are susceptible to being baited by ordinary users who challenge them or demand accountability. In the process of responding to ordinary users, elite sources also inadvertently provide journalists with material to source for their stories. On 15 September 2016, the *Daily News* carried a story titled ‘Top officials stole diamonds: Moyo’ which was based entirely on a series of Twitter responses that Jonathan Moyo had given to Twitter users who had confronted him over allegations that he was involved in land scams. The story disclosed that Moyo’s comments had been made in response “...to comments on Twitter that he received 70 hectares of land in a land scam”. Whereas Moyo would routinely refuse to grant journalists interviews or give comment, when confronted by ordinary users online, Moyo would get easily baited into responding thus his social media replies would be used by journalists as a substitute for his comment. That particular story also framed or interpreted Moyo’s tweets under the political theme of factionalism and

thus provided background on the ongoing feud between the G40 and Lactose factions as a context.

Similar coverage drawn from Twitter conversations between Jonathan Moyo and other users who bait him is evident in stories such as the *Daily News* story titled 'Moyo slams Matematanda' published on 20 September 2016 where it is reported how "...one of his Twitter followers, Solomon Harudzibwi, said, "@ProfJNMoyo if he is a dissident, what do you call the authors of the Tsholotsho declaration?" to which Moyo responded: "Some like me are repentant!"

Again the *Daily News* on 12 October 2016 used a social media exchange as a news source reporting how when "...responding to his Twitter followers who had taken him to task over his love-hate relationship with Zanu PF that has seen him being kicked out of the ruling party at one point, Moyo said he owed his return to the fold to President Robert Mugabe and Mutasa." The story developed from those Twitter exchanges was titled 'I respect Mutasa: Moyo'. It is likely that had the question been put to Moyo by a journalist in an interview, that journalist may very well have been rebuffed but because the question was put to Moyo on social media by other users, Moyo was baited into responding thus providing a story for *Daily News*.

In a similar manner of reportage, *The Herald*, on 25 November 2016, carried a story that sourced a Twitter exchange between Jonathan Moyo and another user reporting that when "...asked by one of his followers using the twitter handle @MafuriranwaL on why he was shifting goalposts, Prof Moyo responded: "A ruler that's not flexible enough to bend will break!". This exchange was included in a story titled 'Moyo trashes VP appointments'.

Since these social media exchanges involve more than one source, it is possible that some journalists do not feel the need to engage in newsgathering activities when the story they want to tell is a social media

dialogue that they can simply retell. This is the kind of sourcing practice that attracts accusations of laziness as the reporter will have simply copied and pasted social media exchanges and transferred them to print media. Another consequence of having elites choosing to use social media to express their opinions is that it can potentially weaken source-journalist relationships that can be undermined, as journalists no longer have exclusive access to the source. It can be professionally disadvantageous for journalists who may have spent years cultivating a cordial relationship with a source to end up having to share the same feeding trough of information posted on social media. Perhaps the only advantage could come in terms of being on good enough terms with a source to be able to seek and obtain clarification from the elite sourcing regarding views they will have expressed on social media.

### **7.1.3 Silent digital actors in political reporting**

This study investigated the influence of social media on political reporting and by so doing, interrogates the use of numerous silent digital actors or mediating technologies involved in the news production process, especially those that facilitate sourcing. The study found that embedded within the social media sourced stories were accounts of how the reporters communicated with their sources. Journalists would disclose any attempts at obtaining a comment and thus invariably reveal the kind of mediating technology or artifact they used. For instance, the readers would be informed of how the journalists called or texted or emailed a source as well as the outcome of that effort i.e whether or not the source was willing to comment.

By embedding narratives of how exactly they went about getting hold of a source, journalists simultaneously reveal the various silent digital actors (such as fixed telephones or cellphones, iPads, laptops or desktops) that facilitate news production. These are details that often escape the notice of the readers and are often included without the intention of recognizing the role

that artifacts play as actors within the news production process. In other words, it is unlikely that a reader will pause in the middle of reading the story to consider whether or not the stories they read in the paper would be possible if journalists did not have the artifacts that make their newsgathering work possible. Similarly, the journalists themselves are unlikely to pause in the middle of writing a story to consider the role that artifacts play in making their newsgathering work possible.

Mediating technologies such as telephones or cellphones are rendered invisible in the news production process, as they have become a normalized aspect of the newsgathering work. Using ANT as an analytical lens puts into stark relief the importance of what Reich (2005) refers to as negotiation-enabling devices, that is, those artifacts that make it possible for journalists to execute their duties. From an ANT perspective one is able to notice and account for the role artifacts, as nonhumans, play in the news production network because “if we were to proceed with the belief that nonhumans never acted, or never added anything that was sociologically relevant, one aspect of analysis would automatically be foreclosed” (Sayes, 2014, p.145). In this study, stories that mention how journalists attempted or managed to communicate with sources were taken as evidence of how silent digital actors are involved in the news production process. According to Reich (2005) examining the technologies used by journalists to acquire data and to contact sources may shed light on an invisible side of the news, or in this instance, on the silent digital actors who contribute to the network of news production.

From what this study has established, in the newsgathering process, “most contacts are carried out using mediating technologies” (Reich, 2006, p.505) in lieu of face-to-face interactions with sources. Embedded within the mainstream media’s political stories are repeated references to telephonic communication with sources, which sometimes do not yield the desired result. It is unsurprising that telephonic communication is the more prevalent

communication tool journalists across the four newspapers use because “telephones enable reporters to apply a rich set of interviewing techniques: negotiate source claims, confront them, pose questions, and ask for clarifications” (Reich, 2005, p.555). For instance, in a story carried in the *Newsday* edition of 25 February 2016, the reporter Richard Chidza narrates how a ZANU PF elite source (i.e Savior Kasukuwere) that he had contacted telephonically had (a) declined to comment (b) responded with an expletive and (c) terminated the call. On 26 June 2015, an unnamed *Newsday* staff reporter disclosed that the source he/she was trying to reach was not picking up calls, while on 05 September 2015, Xolisani Ncube advised *Newsday* readers that one source (i.e Jonathan Moyo) had not been available on his mobile phone to clarify his statements whilst another source (i.e former VP Phelekezela Mphoko) had (a) declined to comment and (b) abruptly switched off his mobile phone as soon as the journalist identified himself. Having sources hang up on journalists when contacted for comment is not an unusual thing as *The Herald’s* Farirai Machivenyika wrote, in a 10 July 2017 story, that a source (i.e Savior Kasukuwere) had immediately switched off his phone when contacted for comment.

This study found that texting as a means of contacting sources is a norm across the four daily newspapers as evidenced by a 25 September 2015<sup>39</sup>*Newsday* story written by Moses Matenga and Richard Chidza in which the pair reports that they had failed to get a comment from a source (i.e Jonathan Moyo) and that they had sent text messages to the source but had received no response. Using text messages to negotiate for interviews or seek comment is more likely to be done by a journalist who feels texting is ‘safer’ than calling, particularly if they anticipate a hostile reaction as use of “non-oral features, such as SMS” can be “uncommon among journalists” (Reich 2005, p.555) because the range of interviewing techniques a journalist can use via text is limited. Supposing the use of non-oral communication

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<sup>39</sup> *Newsday* story titled ‘Childish’ Jonathan Moyo under fire

options such as text messaging is a means to avoid oral interaction with hostile sources then the cellphone as a silent digital actor can act as a buffer thus helping journalists to navigate challenging aspects of their newsgathering work. From an ANT perspective the cellphone that enables texting becomes an actor within a network of news production contributing towards the execution of certain duties the journalists has.

In addition to telephonic communication and sending texts via cellphones, journalists also rely on textual communication channels such as email. According to Reich (2005, p.555) “textual data can be very useful for journalists, especially when they are constantly hooked-up to their telephones and cannot, or prefer not to, synchronize and interact orally with sources.” Sources in Zimbabwe have been known to request that questions be sent in writing and prefer to respond in writing when journalists seek comment. As attested to by a state media assistant beat editor, interviewed on 18 September 2017:

...we had a situation where we had MSU lecturers being quoted in political stories that had to do with ZANU factionalism – but *nowadays they prefer giving you the responses via Whatsapp* [added emphasis] to say “no I can only give you my response via Whatsapp and you write what I have sent you”. Rather than him giving you the response over the phone where you can adjust the words to suit your goal, *now they prefer to send written responses* [added emphasis], those who are still talking to us prefer responding via social media platforms – either Whatsapp or Facebook, rather than the phone thing because *they say the phone thing doesn't have a lot of evidence* [added emphasis] to say tomorrow you may say ‘but I sent you these responses, this is what I sent you but this is what you wrote’.

*(Extract from semi-structured interview 18/09/2017)*

The preference by sources to provide textual data stems from mistrust and fear of being misquoted because political views can attract serious consequences especially where sensitive matters such as factional fights are concerned.

The fact that sources from the MSU indicated a clear preference for non-oral communication in favor of providing textual data points to the extent of distrust sources have about being misunderstood or misquoted. Reich (2008, p.638) argues that news is a textual product of oral processes and that this “oral culture” allows reporters to omit, edit, select excerpts, and “tidy up” which “may explain the vast quantities of journalistic errors, misunderstandings, misquotes, and source statements taken out of context”. With oral interviews, the journalists get to use their discretion in cherry-picking quotes that they can either present in a balanced way or present in a biased manner. According to the above interviewee, MSU lecturers who were approached to comment on ZANU PF factionalism now “prefer responding via social media platforms – either Whatsapp or Facebook”, which suggests that sources can direct what technologies and tools journalists may use to gather information.

To adhere to the demands of sources that prefer receiving questions in writing and responding to questions in writing, journalists need to be in possession of or have access to the technologies and tools, which can facilitate the transmission and receipt of textual data.

Whether through iPads or laptops, cellphones or computers, journalists are able to send and receive textual data, which according to Reich (2005, p.555) “may speed up the transmission of information and avoid friction between the proposers of information (sources) and those who decide what to do with it (reporters)”. Textual data may be received via Whatsapp on mobile devices or via Facebook and email via devices that include laptops and desktop computers – all of which can be considered as silent digital actors that

journalists increasingly rely on in newsgathering. On 02 June 2016, the *Newsday* reported that it had obtained an emailed response from Jonathan Moyo after they had contacted him seeking clarity on comments he had made on Twitter. In the story titled ‘Dzamara was abducted: Moyo’, the *Newsday* quotes Moyo as having stated “I was explaining my BBC comments after I was asked to do so on Twitter”, which implies that the *Newsday* had picked up the story after following a Twitter exchange between Moyo and other users on Twitter who had asked Moyo to explain himself – and he had acquiesced to the requests.

From the findings of this study it appears Jonathan Moyo was often more willing to respond to questions directed at him by ordinary social media users than he was to entertain questions from journalists whom he regularly snubbed. In a story titled ‘Moyo fails to back Chiwenga thesis claims’ that it carried on 12 July 2017, *The Herald* informed its readers of the many attempts it had made over a period of two days to obtain a comment from Moyo. *The Herald* disclosed how, “over the past two days, our news crew had been calling, texting and e-mailing Prof Moyo to substantiate his claims without success, and yesterday had to publicly post questions on his Twitter timeline asking him to respond to the queries”. Embedded in this disclosure are the silent, taken-for-granted technologies and tools that *The Herald* and the other three newspapers employ in their newsgathering work. From the embedded disclosures within news stories of how reporters attempted to contact a source, technology seems to disappear in journalistic practices, as it blends into everyday routines (Primo, 2014). When considered from an ANT-based approach, such taken-for-granted technologies and tools can be appreciated as actors within the news production network that help the complexity and multifaceted nature of news production within organisations and the active role of technology in those contexts (Cresswell et al, 2010).

When placed under scrutiny *The Herald’s* account of the steps it took in trying to obtain a comment from Jonathan Moyo reveal that the paper

communicates with sources telephonically through either fixed landline or cellphone. Also it suggests that the paper does send text messages via cellphone to communicate with sources. The paper also uses laptops/desktop computers or other mobile device to communicate with sources. Beyond these devices and gadgets are other silent actors whose presence in newsgathering and news production work can be inferred such as electricity (to power computers) and wifi (to enable access the Internet).

What follows is finer discussion on the findings as they relate to the research questions that the study sought to address.

## **7.2 Addressing the research questions**

### **7.2.1 Prevalence of social media sourcing in mainstream media**

Proceeding from the assumption that there could be a correlation between the prevalence of social media sourcing and the influence that social media has on mainstream media, the first research question in this study sought to quantify the number of social media sourced political stories that appeared in four daily newspapers over a 30 month period. The study found that the number of social media sourced political stories that appeared in mainstream media during the period under study was very low. The conclusion that can be drawn from this low prevalence of social media sourcing in mainstream media's political reporting is that social media has not been influential. This conclusion would assume that influence is a quality that can be measured numerically, which was the researcher's initial supposition. The researcher assumed that prevalence could be a measure of influence in the sense that the more frequently social media is used as a source – the more it is likely to be of influence in mainstream media. As shown in Table 7.1 below, the social media sourced stories were too few to support the claim that social media is influential – from a quantitative perspective.

**Table 7.1: Prevalence of social media sourcing over 30 months**

	<i>The Herald</i>	<i>Daily News</i>	<i>Newsday</i>	<i>The Chronicle</i>
Number of editions in 2015	303	303	303	303
Number of social media sourced stories in 2015	2	16	14	10
Number of editions in 2016	304	304	304	304
Number of social media sourced stories in 2016	15	31	23	1
Number of editions in first half of 2017	150	150	150	150
Number of social media sourced stories in first half of 2017	9	15	10	0

If social media has some kind of influence, wouldn't mainstream media use it as a news source more frequently? This was the premise from which research question 1 was regarded. Firstly, what this study reveals is that political news sourcing is not necessarily dependent on social media as traditional newsgathering practices are still preferred, hence conventionally sourced stories are still far more prevalent than social media sourced ones. Journalists therefore have an unconscious bias towards conventional news-gathering techniques if they know that those stories will be valued more in their newsrooms.

Secondly, there still exists a strong bias towards elite sourcing in mainstream media, particularly in the political news beat and if elite sources shun social media then journalists will gravitate to those sourcing methods that enable them to contact them. Hence if elite sources do not use social media to share their views, political journalists are less likely to.

For instance, if an elite source indicates that they will not communicate via email, that avenue of sourcing via electronic mail becomes foreclosed hence

journalists will seek alternative mediating technologies with which to engage the source or try face-to-face interaction. Thus, if political journalists require specific sources – usually elite sources – to get information for their stories, then they will contact the elite source through their preferred communication channels. Therefore the fewer elite political sources there are on social media, the fewer the opportunities for social media sourcing to occur.

Thirdly, in the absence of elite sources on social media platforms – journalists do source other sources and ordinary voices that may not have been part of their usual ‘roster of sources’. However, this is also dependent on whether or not those ordinary voices are revealing information about topical issues that mainstream media is invested in. For instance, in this study an arguably low-level (at the time) member of ZANU PF, Energy Mutodi became a regular social media source for the *Daily News* as his posts revolved around the ZANU PF succession, which was topical. Similarly, the likes of Justice Wadyajena, another low ranking ZANU PF official, who is also a Member of Parliament for Gokwe-Nembudziya constituency caught the attention of mainstream media after posting about factionalism. Wadyajena was the third most cited social media source in the *Daily News* and the second most cited social media source in *Newsday* during the period under study. In conventionally sourced stories, the likes of Mutodi and Wadyajena would not ordinarily make the roster of preferred and regular sources because they do not sit in the politburo (which is the party’s highest decision-making body) and they do not hold positions in ZANU PF structures at the national level.

Preferred and regular sources within ZANU PF have tended to be senior party officials whose portfolios empower them to address the media and speak on behalf of the party (and sometimes Government, as there can be conflation of these two). In this regard, social media has expanded the source options but only where those sources express views that align with the political themes a media house is interested in. Although social media has the demonstrable potential to expand the source options in political

news reporting this study noted that it still falls short of democratising political news sourcing as non-elite actors are overlooked.

The political themes that were most prominent during the 30 months under study were succession and factionalism, within ZANU PF especially, and instances of intraparty conflicts within certain elements of the Opposition. Using social media, a number of party officials from within ZANU PF and from the Opposition took it upon themselves to express opinions contrary to their party lines or to divulge information outside the permitted structures. Political parties moved to gag their members from using social media to discuss party business but the leaks continued leading to disciplinary measures being taken including public censure, arrest, suspensions and dismissals. For instance, ZANU PF's <sup>40</sup>Energy Mutodi was arrested and subjected to disciplinary hearing within his party that led to his expulsion over a Facebook post commenting on how ZANU PF was handling the succession question.

The MDC-T's <sup>41</sup>Charlton Hwende was suspended after a disciplinary probe team found him guilty of making inflammatory statements on Facebook. In this context, mainstream media was drawn to the social media accounts of these perceived 'rebels' whose posts could often provide a glimpse into the internal conflicts within their political parties. For instance, the *Daily News* on 9 February 2015 carried a story diagnosing that "all is not well in Welshman Ncube's MDC, the party's embattled secretary-general, Priscilla Misihairabwi-Mushonga, has dared her colleagues to kick her out of the fledgling opposition party... *responding on* <sup>42</sup>*Facebook* [added emphasis] to a scathing letter from a party member against her". Nine days after this *Daily News* story, the *Newsday* reported on 18 February 2015 that Misihairabwi-

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<sup>40</sup> Story carried in *The Herald* titled 'Energy Mutodi arrested' <https://www.herald.co.zw/latest-energy-mutodi-arrested/>

<sup>41</sup> Story carried in the *Daily News* titled 'Tsvangirai suspends 5 over Bulawayo violence' <https://www.dailynews.co.zw/articles/2017/08/10/tsvangirai-suspends-five-over-byo-violence>

<sup>42</sup> Story titled 'War breaks out in Ncube's MDC' carried in the *Daily News* <https://www.dailynews.co.zw/articles/2015/02/09/war-breaks-out-in-ncube-s-mdc>

Mushonga had resigned. Thus by posting their views on social media, such party ‘rebels’ revealed the internal conflicts in their parties and gifted mainstream media reporters with the opportunity to write stories using information that they could attribute to named sources.

As depicted in Table 7.1, the data set addressing **RQ1** demonstrates that social media sourcing in political reporting within mainstream media is not very prevalent, but the low prevalence does not necessarily mean social media has a low level of influence. These findings reinforce the assertion made by Parmelee (2013, p.294) who maintains that, “*qualitative methods are valuable when researchers are trying to discover, rather than measure, technological influences on society that researchers might not consider*” [added emphasis]. Whilst this researcher sought to measure the influence of social media by counting the number of social media sourced stories over a 30 month period – a better and more fitting approach would have been to try and ‘discover, rather than measure’ this influence. Johnson, Paulussen and Aelst (2018, p.871) caution that, “studies on the influence of social media on journalistic sourcing practices should not only focus on the sources that make it into the news stories, but should also try to include the sources contacted in the preparatory news discovery phase”. Johnson, Paulussen and Aelst (2018, p.872) have outlined some of the limitations of the present study’s methodological approach:

On the one hand, *content analyses of news out-put suggest a rather modest influence of social media* [added emphasis] in the end product of the news production process. Survey research, on the other hand, describes the platform as a monitoring tool and unveils its relevance in the news discovery phase... Little research exists that links the latent functions of social media in the news discovery phase with the manifest appearance of social media references in the news content, that is as an outcome of the news gathering phase.

Hence, in adopting a quantification approach to account for the prevalence of social media sourcing in political reporting, the present study's RQ1 narrowly focused "the manifest appearance of social media references in the news content" (Johnson, Paulussen and Aelst, 2018, p.872).

Since this study adopted a mixed method approach, subjecting the data set to content analysis using ANT and conducting semi-structured interviews helped to address the weaknesses in the researcher's initial quantitative approach. The semi-structured interviews provided insights into "the latent functions of social media in the news discovery phase" (Johnson, Paulussen and Aelst, 2018, p.872), which functions may not necessarily be evident in the news out-put. As was revealed in Chapters 5 and 6 which covered the research findings – there is evidence that despite the low prevalence in verbatim or directly quoted social media sourced stories in political news - the journalistic newsgathering practices of source selection, gatekeeping and agenda-setting are intensely sensitized to social media in latent ways that attest to its influence.

### **7.1.2 Factors determining source selection in mainstream media**

As discussed above, the prevalence of social media sourcing is determined by offline factors such as the preponderance of conventional newsgathering practices, the unavailability of preferred elite sources on social media which obligates journalists to rely on conventional sourcing and also the limited range of political themes that mainstream media are drawn to. Whilst the researcher found that quantification was an ill-suited methodological tool because it failed to capture the subtle and layered ways in which social media and political journalism meld, in practice – a content analysis of the 146 stories that constitute the primary data for this study yielded rich qualitative insights that address the other research questions. This section discusses factors that determine the source selection practices of mainstream media when sourcing social media.

One of the major factors in source selection within mainstream media appears to be the editorial policy that determines what stories should be covered and which stories should be ignored. For instance, in the case of *The Herald* and *The Chronicle* the journalists are aware that they are not allowed to write stories that criticize the government or that praise the MDC or any other opposition party. This awareness means that journalists will seek out sources whose viewpoints will be in favor of the government or against the opposition. Similarly, the *Daily News* is decidedly anti-government in its reportage and its journalists will opt for sources that express anti-government opinions – of which there is no shortage on social media. These editorial realities provide insight into **RQ5** which queried whether social media can **‘democratise’ political news sourcing** in Zimbabwe’s mainstream media. In a context where the term ‘democratise’ refers to whether or not social media sourcing facilitates the inclusion of non-elite voices (i.e ordinary men and women) as sources, this study finds that social media has not facilitated much source diversity or inclusivity in mainstream media’s political reporting.

As a matter of editorial policy, the *Daily News* does not source voices that proffer pro-government perspectives, as their perspectives do not serve its agenda. Similarly, the *Newsday* does not carry stories that support or acknowledge any positives about the government and it does not accommodate viewpoints that approve of the government. This adherence to the editorial policy ensures that journalists anticipate what kind of sources will be acceptable in their respective newsrooms. Hence, when sourcing from social media, journalists stand guided by the editorial policies of their employers. Where journalists do include sources whose views are contrary to the editorial policy, they ensure that they provide rebutting voices in the story to counter.

Another factor that determines source selection practices in mainstream media are the wishes of the proprietors. Whilst these wishes are transmitted through the editorial policy, the proprietors may bring direct or subtle pressure to bear on editors to focus on certain issues. For instance, the *Newsday* owner is known to make comments about what stories or issues he thinks are of interest – and his opinion regarding what is interesting – sticks in the mind of his editors who anticipate the manner he might prefer a certain issue or story to be framed. When editors have to bear in mind the preferences or opinions of the proprietor, they are less inclined to accommodate sources whose perspectives do not chime with those of the proprietor.

In the case of *The Herald*, the editor took it upon himself to vet and weed out from the paper's existing roster of preapproved ZANU PF sources those sources that were deemed to have 'gone rogue' by supporting the G40 faction that was no longer in control of the paper. This is evidenced by the fact that *The Herald* editor would personally assign anti-G40 and anti-Jonathan Moyo stories to reporters with clear instructions on who those reporters should speak to and which sources they were to disregard. This practice by *The Herald* editor of disrupting the normal newsroom procedures by bypassing the desk editors and directly working with the reporters on 'special projects' to 'editorially annihilate' G40 at the bidding of the Lacoste faction is detailed by Maodza (2017). Whether sourcing from or responding to social media views, editors ensure that they gate-keep the political news beats in accordance to the editorial policy and the wishes of the proprietors thus any potential social media might have had to democratise sourcing is not realised.

Source selection practices are also determined by assigning editors and newsroom supervisors who can choose what journalist to assign to which stories and then set the parameters for how the story should be covered and which sources should be contacted. Depending on the political theme of a

story, reporters may anticipate the wishes of their supervisors and fall back on sources that are routinely used within the newsrooms. For instance, in a text message requesting an interview with Jonathan Moyo, *The Herald's* Sydney Kawadza wrote “*I have been tasked to engage you...*” [added emphasis] suggesting that it was not his idea to contact Moyo but rather he was following a directive that he had been given by whomever had assigned him the task. This shows that sourcing is not a random or haphazard process but it is the result of very calculated editorial decisions.

In an interview with Nqaba Matshazi, the *Newsday* deputy editor, he mentioned that there was a bias towards using ‘Dial-A-Quote’ sources that he described as sources that are always ready to comment on any issue at any time. These so-called Dial-A-Quote sources such as Professor Eldred Masunungure appear as regular commentators across private media publications including *Daily News* and *Newsday* but he also appears occasionally in state media such as *The Herald*, which cherry-picks his views when those views align with their preferred narrative. Although they may source from social media, private media journalists will also rely on the Dial-A-Quote sources knowing that they will be deemed acceptable by their supervisors. In following the newsroom norms of sourcing from Dial-A-Quote sources, social media’s potential to democratise political sourcing is not realised because “the practices of journalists and the traditions of coverage continue to ensure that traditional voices and sources are heard above the crowd” (Knight 2012, p.71).

The socialization of journalists within the newsroom is also a factor in source selection as journalists internalize the editorial policy and learn to anticipate what sources their supervisors will approve of. According to a state media assistant beat editor, journalists may follow opposition leaders on social media but will not use them as news sources unless they intend to attack such leaders because they know that attacking opposition leaders is acceptable to their employer. An example of this is how *The Chronicle*

sourced a tweet by <sup>43</sup>Obert Gutu to write a condemnatory story even instigating reaction from the ZANU PF spokesperson (who was and still is not on Twitter and would have been none the wiser had *The Chronicle* not prodded him for a response). Therefore in political reporting, the political party that a potential source belongs to is also a factor as journalists are socialized to report in a biased way and to do so by being selective with regard to which voices they include in their stories. Thus even when sourcing from social media, journalists tend to maintain that bias in terms of which voices they select to include in news reports, which means social media's potential to democratise sourcing is impeded. Although none of the four publications examined in this study have formal guidelines for source selection in general and sourcing on social media in particular, journalists seemed inclined to be selective in sourcing as they had internalized editorial the policy and understood what was expected of them.

Another factor that influences source selection is parallelism. According to Seymour-Ure (1974, p.173) parallelism is whereby a newspaper matches with a party and is so "closely linked to that party by organization, loyalty to party goals and the partisanship of its readers". Based on the findings of this study it can be argued that state media paralleled ZANU PF (Maodza, 2017) whilst the *Daily News* paralleled the MDC (Ruhanya, 2014). Source selection practices within the political news desks of the state media and the *Daily News* are thus informed by the respective newsrooms' loyalty to the agendas of ZANU PF and the MDC respectively. In other words, political parallelism determines what sources political journalists will reach out to, cultivate relationships with and give preferential or unfair coverage to. Social media sourcing would therefore be guided by the degree of parallelism between a source's political party and the media organization that a journalist works for. Thus typically a ZANU PF source would expect and usually obtain good coverage in *The Herald* and *The Chronicle* whilst an MDC-T source would

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<sup>43</sup> Story titled MDC-T's Gutu in ZANU PF baboons storm carried on 19 January 2016: <http://www.chronicle.co.zw/mdc-ts-gutu-in-zanu-pf-baboons-storm/>

expect and usually obtain favorable coverage in the *Daily News* and fair coverage in the *Newsday*. According to an online staffer from the private media (coded as OS\_PM1) who was interviewed on 17 September 2017, “political reporters have been complaining and private media complain that state media always get a chance to interview a minister and they don’t” indicating that sources have the power to shut out journalists who belong to media organizations that do not align with their political ideals.

Since social media sourcing occurs against the background of the above detailed factors, which determine source selection practices, its potential to democratise political news sourcing and facilitate inclusion of non-elite sources is stymied. It can be concluded that social media sources that are included in mainstream media’s political reporting are those sources whose views satisfy or fulfill at least four or more of the above conditions but mainly compliance with editorial policy and being part of the elite.

### **7.1.3 Gatekeeping and social media sourcing in mainstream media**

Whilst interviewees in this study maintained that editorial policy is supreme in their newsgathering and news production processes, there are instances where the barriers placed by editorial policy cannot withstand the whirlwind of a social media story gone viral. In those instances, the mainstream media’s gatekeeping efficacy is severely compromised as newspapers are forced to alter their diarized content to accommodate information that will have gone viral on social media. Editors are susceptible to social media’s viral content because any failure to report on what is trending can be construed as an inability to stay relevant. State media’s editorial policy directs that its publications must report in the national interest which is taken to mean they must give positive coverage of the President, the ruling ZANU PF party and the government. This policy was severely tested as editors did their utmost to keep negative information about the then President Robert Mugabe’s fall out of their pages as part of gatekeeping and content control.

Commenting on the pressure that the viral social media story placed upon the editorial gatekeeping, former editor of *The Chronicle*, Mduduzi Mathuthu, shared on 07 September 2017 how,

It was a very very difficult situation for us in the state media because *we didn't know whether we had to run with the story or not* [added emphasis] because *everyone else was talking about it on the Internet* [added emphasis], *our readers were talking about it on the Internet* [added emphasis] and *not doing anything about it would have become a problem* [added emphasis] because while we are a state newspaper, clearly *we have ignored an important significant story* [added emphasis] that has happened right under our noses and *it wouldn't make sense to a reader* [added emphasis] and it would really look very suspicious or just look terrible for our publications.

*(Extract from semi-structured interview 07/09/2017)*

Mathuthu's remarks indicate how social media can apply reputational pressure on mainstream media by making certain stories impossible to ignore. With their reputations at stake, editors and media organizations may be pressured to maneuver around their editorial policy to include stories they may have otherwise preferred to ignore. As will be demonstrated in this section, the gatekeeping role within mainstream media is severely tested by social media's viral content.

Firstly, social media has severely compromised the mainstream media's ability to place a media blackout on any subject and it even forces an agenda upon it in certain instances. Prior to the Internet, the state media might have easily gotten away with ignoring the then President's fall as inclusion of such a news item would go against its editorial policy which requires that there only be positive coverage of the President. However because the story was already in the public domain and were readers and other publics discussing

the topical issue online – the gatekeeping attempts of state media in the form of a media blackout would have been futile. With the guidance of the Minister of Information, the state media eventually included the news item about the then President’s fall, which went against their usual editorial stance. However, it is clear that social media does not entirely erode the gatekeeping impulses of editors especially when proprietorial pressure is brought to bear upon them. This was demonstrated by how the state media responded with a total media blackout on the scandal involving the former First Lady Grace Mugabe who was accused of assaulting a young South African lady,

Secondly, the competitive nature of journalism means media organizations are always in a contest to be the first with the news and to ensure they cover the most topical issues. Several interviewees in this study reiterated that ‘social media cannot be ignored’ and that it ‘is here to stay’ suggesting that content control measures within mainstream media are susceptible to trending social media content that can be included when editors fear being scooped. Another example of how gatekeeping as a content control mechanism is vulnerable to social media’s viral content is how the state media, which typically writes only pro-ZANU PF stories, was forced to not only acknowledge factional fights within the party but *The Herald* even became an active participant to try and neutralize the social media messages being pushed by the G40 faction. *The Herald* and its handlers could not simply ‘ignore’ what was being said on social media and in responding to it they also let it be known that all was not well within ZANU PF thus going against an existing policy whereby the party only received glowing coverage. The fact that social media can ‘force’ mainstream media to react or respond to viral content means that the gatekeeping power can be diminished to a certain extent. For instance, many of *The Herald*’s social media sourced stories were anti-Jonathan Moyo stories that were written as rebuttals. The fact that *The Herald* got so preoccupied with rebutting content that had been placed on social media by G40 members especially Jonathan Moyo proves

that certain stories will always slip through the editorial net when the proprietor's interests are endangered.

Thirdly, although mainstream media can be forced to run with a news agenda because something is trending or has gone viral on social media, the gatekeeping function can still be exercised by distorting the intended reading of the undesired social media content. By marshaling an array of preferred conventional sources to denounce the social media sourced views in a story, the mainstream media is able to reassert control over the narrative through framing even if it may have failed to control the instigation of that narrative. For instance, where *The Herald* could not control what narratives Jonathan Moyo instigated with his social media posts, the paper quoted his social media views and then invited reactions from a battery of sources to rebut, denounce, discredit and counter the unfavorable social media narrative.

Fourthly, the clearest area where gatekeeping has prevailed in mainstream media is in terms of source selection. The multiplicity of factors that come into play and that need to be satisfied before certain voices or views can be included in political news stories make source selection the most obvious stage for editorial interception and framing to be carried out. For instance, when it was attacking Jonathan Moyo, *The Herald* was very deliberate in corraling cherry-picked sources or witnesses who would counter Moyo including the police, the ZANU PF youths, the Provincial Ministers as well as the war veterans to erode and undercut the value of Moyo's social media views. Since "sources are not beholden to restrictions of neutrality" (Carlson, 2009.p.528), selective sourcing practices ensured that *The Herald* could line up as many opposing voices who would provide condemnatory statements as it desired to damage G40 in general and Jonathan Moyo in particular.

Interviewees in this study from across the media divide agreed on two things; that the editorial policy of their respective news organization was supreme and that social media can no longer be ignored. Since the editorial policy

cannot be violated, adverse social media content is included within the newspapers but strictly on the newspaper's terms. This means that adverse social media content is subjected to straitjacketed framing such that the preferred interpretation of the news organization prevails over the subversive messaging contained in the adverse social media content. For instance, *The Herald* carried negative comments about itself when it sourced Jonathan Moyo's statement from NewZimbabwe.Com but it framed those negative comments in such a way that Jonathan Moyo appeared to be the villain with *The Herald* presenting itself as a fearless watchdog unperturbed by the disdain of a politician. This study finds that while institutional gatekeeping is a means by which a news organization can exercise "control [of] the gates through which content is released to their audience" (Bruns, 2005, p.11), social media tends to pre-empt certain stories and once they go viral mainstream media's gatekeeping becomes an exercise of trying to control the narrative by opening the gates to release rebuttal content. And since rebuttal content necessarily has to carry mention of what it is that is being rebutted, mainstream media is forced to include adverse social media content thus it is forced into the agenda of constructing counter narratives.

Whilst Wallsten (2015, p.26) has argued that "the emergence of social media may lead journalists to diversify their sourcing practices and include the voices of non-elite actors in their reports", this study found that editorial gatekeeping was most effectively deployed in the area of source selection thus obstructing journalists who may have desired to diversify their sources.

#### **7.1.4 Social media and the political news agenda in mainstream media**

As discussed in the section above, this study finds that mainstream media is susceptible to social media influence when a story goes viral because even though they may have preferred to ignore it – they sometimes cannot. Instead they then run with the story using their own framing and interpretation to mitigate its undesired impact or account. In this way, any

social media sourced content becomes subordinated to the editorial policy and framing of the respective media organization. A number of factors create conditions wherein social media may set the news agenda or may instigate the pursuit of certain stories, particularly in political reporting.

Firstly, as detailed elsewhere, mainstream media has a strong preference for elite sources in political reporting and political sources are often unwilling to be placed on the record or to cooperate with journalists seeking comment. The views of elite sources that are hard to access become very sought after when such elite sources use social media to post their views online. The competitive nature of journalism is such that no paper wants to get 'scooped' so they are more susceptible to being baited by elite sources that share tidbits of information on social media.

Whilst elite sources such as Jonathan Moyo are able to instigate stories in mainstream media they have no control over what the ultimate message of that story will be and oftentimes it may even run counter to their desired narrative. For instance, whilst Jonathan Moyo may have set *The Herald's* news agenda by tweeting out of turn forcing a response from those he was attacking – his tweets were often carried out of context in the paper thus diminishing the message he might have intended to convey. Therefore although elite sources might be able to use social media to instigate stories but through media twisting of political news in which journalistic practices almost inevitably provide journalists with the power to interpret and frame stories (Skogerbø et al, 2016) they do not have power over the final story. So whilst elite sources can control where and how they reveal information that is sought after by journalists, they do not have any control over the final story a reporter will write using their opinions as fodder.

Secondly, except in the most exceptional of circumstances, mainstream media tends to prefer to ignore social media content that conflicts with their editorial policy or agenda. As revealed by a state media assistant beat editor

(coded as ABE\_SM2) interviewed on 08 September 2017, “We have a strict editorial policy. Sometimes we see stuff on social media that would make a good story but we just say ‘let’s ignore it’ because *here there is a real danger of going home if you overstep your bounds*” [added emphasis]. This suggests that editorial policy remains a fixed guideline that reporters adhere to whether they are sourcing online or offline. The fact that mainstream media can ignore certain content means that social media’s agenda setting potential is contingent upon other factors beyond the technology itself. For instance, *The Chronicle* largely ignored the ‘frenzied tweeting’ of Jonathan Moyo whilst *The Herald* was unrelenting in its criticism and coverage of it. Although both papers belong to the same organization, their news agendas with regards to covering ZANU PF’s factionalism were different as *The Herald* was following instructions from the proprietor whilst *The Chronicle*, having no clear guidelines on how to treat the subject, opted to steer clear of it save for the occasional <sup>44</sup>re-publishing of Harare Bureau’s anti-G40 stories.

It is possible that had *The Herald* not been explicitly pressured into responding to Jonathan Moyo’s tweets – the paper might have elected to occasionally ignore Moyo but that option was not availed to them by the paper’s handlers. It becomes debatable whether *The Herald*’s news agenda in its coverage of ZANU PF’s factionalism should be attributed to Jonathan Moyo who used social media to attack his Lacoste adversaries or whether it should be attributed to the Lacoste handlers who forced the hand of *The Herald* to retaliate.

At least three interpretations are available to the question of whether social media drove *The Herald*’s news agenda during the period under study. Firstly it can be argued that social media (as a platform) was not necessarily the determinant with regards to how *The Herald* responded because its editorial

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<sup>44</sup> The Chronicle re-published The Herald’s hit pieces on Moyo such as “Prof Moyo slammed” published on 28 November 2016 <http://www.chronicle.co.zw/prof-moyo-slammed/> and ‘War Vets call for Moyo to be sacked’ published on 04 July 2017 <http://www.chronicle.co.zw/war-vets-call-for-prof-moyo-to-be-sacked/> however this was only after its former editor Mduduzi Mathuthu had been removed. During his tenure as editor, Mathuthu did not cross-publish any stories that attacked Moyo.

agenda revolved around discrediting a specific individual – Jonathan Moyo. Therefore whether Jonathan Moyo had used social media or a different platform to fight his political foes - the outcome would have been the same as *The Herald* would have still pursued its retaliatory editorial agenda, at the bidding of its handlers. Relatedly (and as a second interpretation), it can also be argued that Jonathan Moyo was quoted in mainstream media because of WHO he was (an elite source within the highest echelons of ZANU PF) and because of WHAT he had to say (divulging factional conflict within the ZANU PF top structures) more than because of WHERE he chose to say it (on social media). In other words, had Moyo used any other medium other than social media the appeal of his message would have been the same because of who he was and what he was saying – and it had less to do with the communication channel he chose to use. Thus social media was not necessarily the driver of the political news agenda but rather it was a tech savvy elite source who baited the media online.

Conversely (as a third interpretation), it could be argued that social media made it possible for Jonathan Moyo's comments to have a damaging effect on his Lacoste adversaries and left them with no option but to retaliate using the only means they knew how – by deploying *The Herald* to propagandistically browbeat G40 and Jonathan Moyo. Given that this was not Jonathan Moyo's first time being in the crosshairs of state media's editorial propaganda, what shifted the balance in this latest confrontation between Moyo and state media was Moyo's savvy use of social media. In the past, having been expelled from the party in 2005, Moyo's only recourse in countering state media attacks against him was to publish via online platforms such as NewZimbabwe.Com and ironically in private media papers he had previously vilified.

Hence in the third interpretation, it can be argued that Jonathan Moyo in his latest run in with state media was in possession of an 'instrument' that he had not had before – social media. Moyo's background was that he came "to

the fore of Zimbabwe's politics during the drafting of the rejected 2000 government draft constitution, as spokesperson" (<sup>45</sup>Zaba, 2009) was then appointed Minister of Information in the President's Office and appointed to the ZANU PF central committee and then the politburo by former President Robert Mugabe. As reported by the *Zimbabwe Independent's* Faith Zaba, "Moyo fell out of favour of Mugabe when he allegedly masterminded the infamous Tsholotsho Declaration in November 2004 to re-arrange the Zanu PF presidium" hence "Mugabe blocked his nomination into the central committee and dropped him from the politburo" and then Moyo "was subsequently expelled as a cabinet minister and from Zanu PF in February 2005 after he stood for parliamentary elections as an independent candidate, defying a party decision to reserve the Tsholotsho seat for a female candidate". In the four years (from 2005 to 2009) that Jonathan Moyo was out in the political wilderness, he countered state media's sporadic negative coverage of him by relying on private media platforms to air his views and also on online news websites that welcomed any anti-Government commentators.

However, in 2015 when he was the target of factionalism-driven attacks from *The Herald* he had found a new platform to leverage in battling his political foes and the state media propaganda they had set upon him. Social media, unlike any other platform that Jonathan Moyo had previously relied on to launch political attacks and to defend himself from vilification, proved to have a far reaching impact. From this perspective, the possibility that social media was a defining factor in how Jonathan Moyo was able to set the news agenda or instigate coverage of ZANU PF factionalism becomes conceivable.

In a story titled "'Team Lacoste' guns for Moyo", carried in the *Daily News* edition of 08 February 2016, the paper insisted that the Lacoste faction were "unable to respond to the unrelenting pummeling" they were being subjected

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<sup>45</sup> Reported by Faith Zaba in the *Zimbabwe Independent* edition of 10 September 2009 in a story titled 'Exclusive: Jonathan Moyo rejoins ZANU PF'  
<https://www.theindependent.co.zw/2009/09/10/exclusive-jonathan-moyo-rejoins-zanu-pf/>

to by Jonathan Moyo who wielded his social media accounts as weapons in the factional fight. The *Daily News* also maintained that even with its “unfettered control of State media” the Lacoste faction was “only too aware that it cannot match” the G40 in the propaganda war, suggesting that by taking the propaganda war onto the social media terrain, Jonathan Moyo could arguably bait the media and set its news agenda because of the technology he had at his disposal. In the final analysis it can be argued that while Jonathan Moyo may have been able to set the state media’s news agenda, he benefited little as his tweets were distorted by the propagandistic framing of *The Herald*. Even when he declined to cooperate with *The Herald*, Jonathan Moyo’s social media comments were still used by *The Herald* to counter-argue G40 and to strengthen the opposing Lacoste views.

Additionally, the numbers speak for themselves. It can be argued that through social media, Jonathan Moyo, managed to set the political news agenda as his social media posts accounted for 65% of the social media sourced stories that were captured in this study. The fact that outside of Jonathan Moyo the other 35% of sources were mostly individuals with varying degrees of prominence and who can all be classified as elites suggests that there was little source diversity in social media sourced stories.

Although social media sourcing allowed for inclusion of voices that were not in the regular roster of sources that state media and private media used, those sources (e.g Energy Mutodi, Justice Wadyajena, Priscilla-Misihairabwi Mushonga, etc) were part of the political elite and could not be characterised as non-elites. A defining characteristic of sourcing that this study found is that both private media and state media carefully cherry-pick sources when writing stories. The criteria for which social media sources will be cherry-picked differs from one media organization to the next but a key element is whether that source is addressing a topical issue that resonates with the political themes the mainstream media is interested in. For instance, the likes of ZANU PF’s Energy Mutodi, MDC’s Priscilla Misihairabwi-Mushonga and

MDC-T's Charlton Hwende would not typically attract the attention of a political journalist seeking a story but when their Facebook posts divulged tensions within their parties, their views aligned with the theme of factional fights, which the mainstream media was preoccupied with.

It is possible that social media can drive the mainstream media's political news agenda through having certain themes trending rather than through the prominence of individual users. For instance, an anonymous Facebook blogger called Baba Jukwa was a major political news agenda setter for the *Daily News* in 2013 although the identity of the user was unknown. Baba Jukwa's influence cannot be attributed to any personal qualities he/she may have possessed, as the individual preferred anonymity but it can be attributed to the themes of the political content he/she posted online. The fact that a faceless blogger could trigger or instigate front-page stories in a daily newspaper can be attributed to the content of their social media posts that resonated with the editorial policy of the *Daily News* and the *Newsday*. This study finds that social media users who expressed anti-ZANU PF or anti-Mugabe sentiments and directed those sentiments at ZANU PF elites on social media (such as Jonathan Moyo or Savior Kasukuwere) attracted the attention of the *Daily News* and *Newsday* who incorporated those views as and when they buttressed their editorial policy and preferred narratives.

#### **7.1.5 Social media and democratisation of political news sourcing**

Following Phillips (2010, p.88), this study took the Internet's democratising potential to mean the Internet's "ability to bring the voices of ordinary men and women into the mainstream process of news construction". Hence, in tracing the social media sourcing practices of the four daily newspapers, this study considered whether social media facilitated an expansion or multiplication of news sources, beyond partisan elites, by bringing 'the voices of ordinary men and women' into the mainstream media's political reportage. This study found that whatever potential social media might have

to democratise sourcing through “allowing a greater diversity of sources including ordinary citizens into the news production process” to “establish greater diversity in viewpoints” (Van Leuven and Deprez, 2017, p.549) was severely constrained by numerous factors. The finding of this study is that social media “have not created a more balanced news access for elite and non-elite actors” (Van Leuven et al., 2018, p.800) owing to factors such as editorial gatekeeping, institutionalized sourcing bias and pressure from supervisors, editors and proprietors to seek sources who advance the papers’ editorial agendas.

Over the course of the 30-month period under study, *Daily News* published 62 social media-sourced stories. In those stories, *Daily News* used 72 social media sources and just 11 were ordinary users, whilst 61 were elite sources. This means 84% of the social media sources used by the *Daily News* during this period were elite sources. Of the 11 sources classified as ordinary users, 5 of them were <sup>46</sup>anonymous or unnamed and their social media posts had been paraphrased. The *Daily News*’s inclusion of non-elite sources is consistent with the assertion by Paulussen and Harder (2014, p.548) that “mostly social media references to unknown people are made in collective and anonymous terms, as a way to represent the voice of the public”. In the case of the *Daily News*, this study concluded that social media sourcing had not necessarily democratised the paper’s sourcing practices as elite and decidedly biased (i.e anti-government) sources are preferred.

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<sup>46</sup> For instance, *Daily News* carried a story on 31 January 2015 titled ‘Zanu war gets nastier, as another Baba Jukwa emerges’ which was based on the posts of an anonymous Facebook blogger <https://www.dailynews.co.zw/articles/2015/01/31/zanu-pf-war-gets-nastier-as-another-baba-jukwa-emerges>; the paper used that same anonymous Facebook blogger as a news source for a story published on 16 February 2015 titled ‘Baba Jukwa rises from grave’ <https://www.dailynews.co.zw/articles/2015/02/16/baba-jukwa-rises-from-the-grave>. On 07 September 2015, an unnamed social media group was used as a source for a *Daily News* story titled ‘Push to oust Kasukuwere’ <https://www.dailynews.co.zw/articles/2015/09/07/push-to-oust-kasukuwere> and on 12 September 2015 the paper used that same anonymous social media group as a source for a story titled ‘Pro-Mnangagwa group takes on Kasukuwere’ <https://www.dailynews.co.zw/articles/2015/09/12/pro-mnangagwa-group-takes-on-kasukuwere> whilst unnamed ordinary Twitter users were used as sources for a story published on 10 May 2017 titled ‘Macron win puts Mugabe’s age on spotlight’ <https://www.dailynews.co.zw/articles/2017/05/10/macron-win-puts-mugabe-s-age-on-spotlight>

Over the course of the 30-month period under study, *The Herald* published 26 social media sourced stories. In those stories, *The Herald* used 30 social media sources and none of them were ordinary users, so all 30 were elite sources. This means 100% of the social media sources used by *The Herald* during this period were elite sources which demonstrates that social media sourcing did not democratise *The Herald's* political news sourcing through the inclusion of non-elites in stories.

According to Loo (2007), the democratising influence of the Internet is only as effective as allowed for by a country's communication, legal and institutional structures, the public discursive culture and the people's readiness to actively engage in the political process using the Internet as the medium for this engagement. In short, the democratising influence of the Internet (or in this case social media) is only as effective as allowed for by the contexts in which it is deployed. In the case of newsrooms such as *The Herald*, social media's potential to democratise political news sourcing was entirely obstructed by the paper's gatekeeping measures that were reinforced through selective source selection practices. From what this study has established, social media as a news source was, "adapted and implemented according to already existing value systems" (Örnebring, 2010, p.68) within *The Herald* – and those value systems were rooted in always being at the propagandistic service of ZANU PF (in this case a particular faction) by attacking its political rivals (or in this case attacking a rival ZANU PF faction).

Over the course of the 30-month period under study, *Newsday* published 47 social media sourced stories. In those stories, *Newsday* used 58 social media sources and just 3 were ordinary users, whilst 55 were elite sources. This means 95% of the social media sources used by *Newsday* during this period were elite sources. Since the paper is critical of the Government and the ZANU PF party, it sourced the social media opinions of ZANU PF elites who expressed opinions that were unflattering about other party members. The

factionalism theme was the dominant theme among the social media sourced political stories that *Newsday* published and the paper did little to seek or include the views of non-elites preferring to use its regular elite sources. The potential of social media to democratise political sourcing was not evident in the *Newsday*.

According to Gronemeyer et al (2018, p.4) while the advent of the Internet heightened expectation that journalistic sources would become more diverse and that access to conventional media would be democratised, giving voice to ordinary citizens, this has not been observed in political news coverage (Gerhards and Schäfer, 2010). Similarly and to paraphrase Gronemeyer et al (2018), this study finds that social media which heightened expectation that journalistic sources would become more diverse and that conventional media would be democratised by giving voice to ordinary citizens has not been observed in any of the four newspapers that were examined in this research.

Over the course of the 30-month period under study, *The Chronicle* published 11 social media sourced stories. In those stories, *The Chronicle* used 15 social media sources and just 2 were ordinary users, whilst 13 were elite sources. This means 87% of the social media sources used by *The Chronicle* during this period were elite sources. This dominance of elite sources in social media sourced stories across all four newspapers demonstrates that “the practices of journalists and the traditions of coverage continue to ensure that traditional voices and sources are heard above the crowd” (Knight, 2012, p.71).

### 7.3 Conclusion

This study found that preference for elite voices prevails across all four newspapers despite ‘the mythology of the Internet as an equal place where all voices are equal, and have equal access to the public discourse, a kind of idealized ‘public sphere’ (Knight, 2012, p.71). Moreover, this study found that social media sourcing in mainstream media is not technology-led and has not facilitated diversity in sourcing because sourcing practices are “far from technologically determined” (Cottle, 1999, p.23). Rather social media sourcing was “*the consequence of decisions taken in specific newsrooms in particular circumstances*” (Domingo, 2008, p.681; added emphasis) and motivated by various editorial agendas, proprietorial interests and internalized newsroom cultures. The findings of this study indicate that social media’s potential to democratise political sourcing within Zimbabwe’s mainstream media has not materialized, as the organizational (or editorial) contexts remain the most influential factor in determining sourcing practices.

Whilst social media had an influence on the political news agenda as evidenced by the rise in content homogeneity, as well as the transference of issues from the social media accounts of elites such as Jonathan Moyo to the pages of mainstream press, it is apparent that social media had limited influence over the framing of stories. Social media’s limited influence on the framing of stories was due to the rigid editorial policies within the newsrooms that directed which preferred sources would be selected, ensured gatekeeping in terms of which sources would be excluded and determined how stories instigated by elites online would be interpreted. However, social media’s influence is most evident in the initial stages of newsgathering as mainstream media journalists have become intensely sensitized to it and routinely go online for story leads. Journalists frequently monitor the accounts of potential sources, track trending topics for fear of being scooped and gain access to the views of elites who may ordinarily refuse to grant them interviews.

This Chapter also offers a verdict on the democratising potential of the Internet, specifically social media. The findings of this study indicate that social media has not had a liberative or democratising influence on political news sourcing, and consequently on political reporting. Despite the “mythology of the Internet” as “an equal place where all voices are equal, and have equal access to the public discourse, a kind of idealized ‘public sphere’” (Knight, 2012, p.71), the findings of this study discussed in this Chapter indicate that elites are the preferred sources that political reporters gravitate toward. More importantly, this study finds no shift in the biased sourcing routines of mainstream media as both public and private media continued to prioritize partisan voices. The social media sourcing patterns of the four newspapers did not reveal multiplicity of sources (i.e the inclusion of ordinary non-elites) or diversity of views (i.e the inclusion of non-partisan commentators).

This chapter also highlights how silent digital actors contribute to the news production network and shape the working routines (such as online sourcing) of journalists. One of the findings in this study (drawn from an analysis of the 146 stories which constitute the primary data) is that political sources can be uncooperative, hostile and combative when approached by journalists from a media house that does not share their political inclinations. Through the use of silent digital artifacts (such as Internet-enabled mobile devices) journalists could rely on social media as an actor in the news production network to facilitate access to sources who might otherwise have refused to grant interviews.

The next Chapter reflects on the conceptual and theoretical perspectives that undergirded this study and offers a verdict on the liberative or democratising potential of social media drawing upon the findings of this study. Additionally, the Chapter considers the methodological approach adopted in this study particularly how combining interviews, content analysis and ANT

as a method aided in interrogating the influence of social media in political reporting within Zimbabwe's mainstream media. The chapter will conclude with the researcher's reflections on how this study contributed new knowledge on the appropriation of social media in political reporting in an African context broadly, and in a Zimbabwean context specifically.

## CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION

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### 8.1 Reflections on the key findings of the study

The specific aims of this research were to examine the influence of social media on political reporting; to trace the social media sourcing practices of mainstream media and to establish whether social media can ‘democratise’ the political news beat.

This study fulfilled the above aims and in so doing it contributes to the body of knowledge in several ways. Firstly, the study established that the influence of social media on political reporting could be severely blunted by the actions of human actors pursuing diverse agendas and interests.

Using the state media publications, the answer to **RQ5** “Did social media democratise political sourcing?” is that it did not and chances of social media democratising political sourcing (and by extension political reporting) are very remote. The findings of this study show that the editorial intent behind *The Herald’s* social media sourcing was to obey the directive given by its handlers who wanted the newspaper to take sides in ZANU PF’s factional battle between G40 and Team Lacoste (as detailed in 6.1.1 of this study). Had the Team Lacoste faction not gained control over *The Herald* and then pressured its editor and his team to respond to Jonathan Moyo and other G40 members, it is less likely that the paper would have been as invested in social media sourcing, let alone camping on Jonathan Moyo’s Twitter timeline. Whereas, *The Chronicle* had used social media sourcing to favor Jonathan Moyo with positive coverage, *The Herald* used social media sourcing to instigate its traditional sources to denounce Jonathan Moyo and carried stories that vilified him, frequently denying him the right of reply.

The findings of this study reinforce the view that state media (in this instance Zimpapers) is captured by ZANU PF's elites who are able to influence political coverage through the cooperation, complicity or coercion of state media's editors. Owing to this, social media sourcing is adopted and then adapted to maintain rather than transform the biased political reportage.

Another key finding of this study is that social media has the potential to democratise journalistic access to elite sources who post their views online. Despite operating in a polarized media environment, social media enabled journalists across the divide to gain equal access to the same source material from elites who chose to post their views online. This shows how social media democratised journalistic access to elite sources and it reinforces Carlson and Franklin (2011, p.7)'s claim that "technology has altered the conditions of access" despite barriers such as hostile or antagonistic source-journalist relations.

Although social media could help journalists obtain access to uncooperative sources, it could not compel them to source ordinary voices to ensure plurality and inclusivity in political reporting. All four publications that were case studies in this research preferred elite sourcing. Even though they could not control the final outcome of the stories, the dominance of elite sources gave credence to the notion that social media can influence the news agenda because elites were able to instigate or trigger news stories through social media. The social media posts of elite sources were mostly used as the basis or premise of stories rather than as supporting or additional material, which demonstrated that political journalists were treating social media as an information subsidy.

This study found that *Newsday* sanctioned the use of social media posts as story leads and it made an effort, more frequently than the other newspapers, to seek clarification and elaboration from those who would have posted. In this regard, social media sourced information was treated as though it were

raw material and thus subjected to the routine newsgathering activities that lead to the construction of a news story. In constructing the news story, the *Newsday* seemed to gravitate towards its usual 'roster' of sources (i.e analysts and commentators) thus balancing social media sourced views with those of its regular sources whose inclusion in the story ensured it aligned with the paper's editorial slant. Although *Newsday* did rely on its usual roster of sources, it often called upon them to respond to issues brought to the fore by elites on social media. The fact that traditional sources were being approached by mainstream media publications like *Newsday* (and *The Herald*) suggests that the social media posts of elite sources such as Jonathan Moyo and Energy Mutodi had an effect on the construction of political news during the period under study.

This study found that reinforcement was a key characteristic of the *Daily News's* approach to social media sourcing. In the absence of a formal policy on how to adopt social media, the *Daily News* appeared to source only those views that reinforce its own reportage and interpretation of events. The phrase, "As accurately reported by the *Daily News*...." recurs often in the publication's stories as it carefully cherry-picked those social media views that buttress its anti-ZANU PF reportage. When deployed in this manner, social media sourcing becomes a means of shoring up the paper's image and enables *Daily News* to present itself as a publication that resonates with and captures the people's views. In seeking out views that reinforce its own reportage of issues, the *Daily News* seems to use social media sources in an ornamental manner that does not interfere with or disrupt its editorial narratives.

Where the democratising potential of social media refers to whether social media sourcing can or has led to a multiplication of voices in political stories within mainstream media, this study presented case studies that showed that social media has not and will likely not democratise political reporting in Zimbabwe.

Although Jonathan Moyo's social media posts arguably influenced the news agenda, all four publications largely adopted a hybrid approach to sourcing where social media sources are used together with traditionally sourced voices thus regaining control over the narrative regardless of what message social media sources intended to convey. Through hybrid sourcing, the publications could invite their preferred traditional commentators to weigh in on and dilute the views of social media sources. Publications also asserted editorial control over the ultimate story by excluding the initiating source (e.g Jonathan Moyo in *The Herald*) by not affording them the opportunity to clarify or comment further beyond what they posted. Publications such as the *Newsday* and *Daily News* relied on interpretive journalism to frame social media content in accordance with their preferred editorial interpretations, a practice referred to as 'media twisting' by Hernes (1978).

## 8.2 Reflections on theoretical framework for this study

In assessing the influence of social media on political reporting in Zimbabwe's mainstream media, four theoretical concepts were used as yardsticks to evaluate what aspects of journalism practice were transformed by social media. As a sourcing study, this thesis deployed *gatekeeping theory* and *agenda setting theory* as well as *sociology of journalism scholarship* and *sourcing studies* as theoretical lenses.

In addressing **RQ2**, theoretical insights from sociology of journalism scholarship proved invaluable in recognizing and accounting for factors that influence social media sourcing in political reporting. **RQ2** looked at "What determines **source selection practices** for Zimbabwe's mainstream media political reportage in relation to social media?". Both the sociology of journalism scholarship and sourcing studies provided theoretical lenses with which to probe how decisions regarding social media sourcing are arrived at. Sociological perspectives on newsmaking aided in understanding how

journalists' efforts, including sourcing practices, are constrained by organizational and occupational demands. For instance, where source selection is concerned, this study found that political journalists adjusted to organizational contexts by "learning who news editors and editors consider to be 'appropriate' contacts" (Louw, 2001, p.163) and retained this awareness even when sourcing from social media.

Gatekeeping theory was crucial in addressing **RQ3** that focused on, "What is the extent of *institutional gatekeeping* regarding social media sourcing within Zimbabwe's mainstream media political reportage?". Shoemaker et al (2009, p.73) define gatekeeping as the process of 'selecting, writing, editing, positioning, scheduling, repeating and otherwise massaging information to become news' as dictated by their various newsroom policies. Gatekeeping theory provided a premise to examine institutional gatekeeping mechanisms that govern how Zimbabwe's mainstream media political reporters and editors selected or rejected social media content, in the process of social media sourcing. This study found that the clearest area where gatekeeping has prevailed in mainstream media is in terms of source selection. The exclusion of non-elite voices and preference for biased make source selection the most obvious stage for editorial interception and framing to be carried out in ways that subvert whatever message is contained in a social media post. By marshaling an array of preferred conventional sources to denounce the social media sourced views in a story, the mainstream media is able to gate-keep and reassert control over the narrative through framing even if it may have failed to control the instigation of that narrative.

The ability (mostly demonstrated by Jonathan Moyo) to influence the news agenda through sharing crucial information on social media made agenda-setting theory a crucial theoretical lens in this study. Through **RQ4** which asked, "Can social media drive the *political news agenda* in Zimbabwe's mainstream media?", agenda-setting theory provided a valuable lens to focus on the selection of sources by news media and the impact sources can

have on the construction of news (Messner and Distaso, 2008). This study found several instances where elite sources were able to instigate stories in mainstream media by making disclosures on social media about internal party affairs, attacking political rivals or making controversial statements. According to Parmelee (2013, p.293), “research indicates that tweets from political leaders, who are often followed by journalists, can influence which issues get covered by journalists and how those issues are presented”. The findings of this study partially reinforce this claim as tweets from a political leader (specifically Jonathan Moyo) who was followed by journalists tended to influence which issues got covered by the journalists. This study also found that mainstream media can ignore certain content (for example *The Chronicle* and *The Herald* had a media blackout on the former First Lady Grace Mugabe’s scandal following allegations that she assaulted a South African woman) which suggests that social media’s agenda setting potential is contingent upon other factors beyond the technology itself.

Apart from these four theoretical lenses, the study also relied on a conceptual framework derived from social constructivism and technological determinism perspectives.

The findings of this study aligned with social constructivism insofar as the specific contexts obtaining within the four newsrooms proved to either be the determining or constraining factors in the use of social media as a news source. Social constructivism proved to be a valuable entry point because constructivists do not “subordinate human action to the determining forces of technology” (Ursell, 2001, p.178) but rather attempt to “reveal the human goals and judgments, which explain why and how a technology is applied”. This study found that human actions (e.g newsgathering) within newsrooms were not wholly subordinate to technology, specifically social media. Rather, the human goals and judgments of actors such as editors, proprietors, sources and journalists revealed why and how the respective newsrooms adopted social media sourcing. The value of the constructivist approach in

this study is that it provided a conceptual lens to explore precisely how “the way journalists use new technologies is dictated by their social, cultural and political context” (Chari, 2018, p.68).

The technological determinism approach was not without its merits in the context of this study because the view that “fundamental changes in the overall societal context of communication could occur on the basis of new technology [such as social media]” cannot be entirely discarded (McQuail, 2007, p.31). By their own admission, several key informants in this study were strongly convinced that social media couldn’t be ignored, as it had a bearing on various aspects of daily newsroom routines and newsgathering practices such as finding story ideas and identifying ‘preferred’ narratives as well as ‘approved’ sources. However the extent and nature of social media’s influence varied from one newsroom to the next. The variations in adoption of social media demonstrated how social media (sourcing) is shaped by newsroom practices and also demonstrated that social media (users) can shape newsroom practices. For instance, in this study the most influential social media user accounting for 65% of the social media citations in social media sourced political stories (over a 30-months time frame) was Jonathan Moyo whose Twitter activity arguably influenced or triggered the news agenda on numerous occasions.

The dominance of Jonathan Moyo’s tweets in mainstream media’s political reportage suggests that “the new technological infrastructure available to journalists tends to influence editorial practice and roles” (Spyridou et al., 2013, p.91) as Twitter became an overly relied upon newsgathering platform where political journalists sought the views of inaccessible or uncooperative elite sources. This study found that in spite of the new technological infrastructure available to journalists at *Newsday*, *The Herald*, the *Daily News* and *The Chronicle* social media sourcing was adopted in highly prescriptive ways and it was aligned with and malleable to editorial policy.

Whilst accepting that new technologies (in this context, social media) have changed the ways in which reporters themselves get updated; track competitors' work; communicate with newsrooms; and transmit, search, and store data (Reich, 2005); this study found little evidence of “the subordination of [political] journalism to technology” (Örnebring, 2010, p.68). In mainstream media newsrooms, the potential for technology (in this case, social media) to subordinate political reporting “appears to be circumscribed by the conservative forces in journalism” (Hladík and Štětka, 2017, p.3) such as the values of editors in private media and the dictates of ZANU PF handlers in state media. Based on the findings of this study it is not probable to advance or sustain a technologically deterministic interpretation of how social media has influenced political reporting in Zimbabwe’s mainstream media. Rather, the findings of this study, are consistent with McQuail (2007, p.31)’s assertion that, “...it is people [within and beyond newsrooms] that choose both the technology and the message and it is in this choice that the source of [social media] effects can be found”.

The idea that it is people that choose both the technology and the message (McQuail, 2007), is consistent with the data collected via semi-structured interviews and from the 146 social media sourced stories that were subjected to content analysis. In addition, an ANT-informed appreciation of all the data from both semi-structured interviews and content analysis of the 146 stories provided greater insights.

### **8.3 Reflections on methodological approach**

The first research question (**RQ1**) was “How prevalent is *social media sourcing* in Zimbabwe’s mainstream media political reportage?”. Through **RQ1**, the study sought to establish the prevalence of social media sourcing in political reporting, assuming that there was a linear correlation between prevalence of social media sourced stories and the degree of social media’s

influence. As a first step in undertaking this study, the researcher identified, counted and coded the social media sourced stories that were published over a 30-month period. The study found that the number of social media sourced political stories that appeared in mainstream media during the period under study was very low (as shown in Table 7.1).

Quantification in **RQ1** proved to be an ill-suited methodological tool because it failed to capture the subtle and layered ways in which social media and political journalism meld, in practice. Fortunately, the study employed a mixed methods approach which enabled the researcher to compensate for weaknesses in one method by using another, namely a content analysis of 146 social media sourced political stories which yielded rich insights. According to Parmelee (2013, p.294), “qualitative methods are valuable when researchers are trying *to discover, rather than measure* [added emphasis], technological influences on society that researchers might not consider”.

Instead of trying to measure social media’s influence by counting the number of stories that incorporated social media sources, the researcher used content analysis to discover social media’s influence through coding journalistic texts according to specific variables (as shown in Table 4.3).

The variables that were used for data coding paralleled the second research question (**RQ2**), which considered whether social media could influence source selection. For instance, the data coding captured details such as ‘*Type of social media actor*’, which helped to identify the kind of sources that were sourced and whether they were elite or ordinary sources. Content analysis of the coded data revealed that elite sourcing was predominant across all four publications, suggesting that social media had not led to inclusiveness in sourcing.

The data coding variables also aligned with the fourth research question (**RQ4**), which considered whether social media could drive the news agenda.

For instance, data coding captured details regarding the '*Function of social media source*' in the story to understand whether the story was instigated/triggered by a social media source or not. Content analysis of the coded data revealed how elite sources could potentially drive the news agenda as instigators of news stories and showed that journalists sometimes treat social media posts as information subsidies (detailed in 7.1.2 of this study).

Additional information gleaned through data coding included '*Manifest sourcing patterns*' in stories, specifying where or how the social media content was obtained, whether clarification was sought and if verification was carried out. Data coding also captured '*Theme*' of the social media sourced stories and '*Framing*' as additional variables that were subjected to content analysis.

Since content analysis "examines the product rather than the process" of journalism (Manning, 2001, p.48), it left a gap because it could not illumine the news production processes that generated the 146 social media sourced stories. From a constructivist perspective, it was vital to understand the news production processes behind the stories because the way journalists adopt new technologies (such as social media sourcing) is dictated by their context (Chari, 2013). Conducting semi-structured interviews with purposively sampled and knowledgeable key informants filled this gap in information. The insights drawn from the content analysis were useful in crafting questions for the semi-structured interviews in order to triangulate and validate preliminary observations derived from the empirical data.

Cohen and Manion (1994, p.233 cited in Bush, 2002, p.85) argue that triangulation can be defined as "an attempt to map out or explain more fully the richness and complexity of human behavior by studying it from more than one standpoint". Bearing this in mind, combining content analysis and semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to have a better

appreciation of social media sourcing in political reporting. This is because triangulation is the means by which an alternate perspective is used to validate, challenge or extend existing findings (Turner and Turner, 2009). The study also deployed actor-network theory as a method in order to have an alternate perspective with which to validate, challenge or extend the preliminary observations drawn from the quantification exercise (for **RQ1**), data coding, content analysis and semi-structured interviews. Spyridou et al (2013, p.79) assert that two key concepts of ANT are the actor and the network and “actors can be humans or non-humans, for instance a technological tool or an organization... non-human actors, such as technologies, tools, knowledge and skills, structures, protocols and rules”.

Since the questions for the semi-structured interviews were crafted based on insights drawn from a content analysis of the 146 social media sourced political stories carried by the four publications – the responses from the informants allowed for triangulation to further validate the findings from the content analysis. The effectiveness of interviewing as a qualitative method is that interviews are principally useful for understanding and putting the participant’s experiences into context (McNamara, 1999); hence it was very valuable to this study.

Responses from the semi-structured interviews yielded a number of valuable insights and were especially useful in addressing the third research question (**RQ3**), which considered what the extent of institutional gatekeeping was with regard to social media sourcing at the four newspapers. Since the first four research questions related to practices (i.e sourcing), to institutional norms (i.e gatekeeping) and to what drives the news agenda (i.e editorial decisions on what to cover) – semi-structured interviews were best suited to collect such data.

Whilst responses obtained from the semi-structured interviews were instructive in their rich descriptive detail; the presence, function or role of

artifacts in newsgathering and news production processes was overlooked. If one accepts that “journalism isn't produced solely by social relations among editors, journalists and sources” but also includes “non-humans actants (such as e-mails, softwares, search engines, socials networks, among others) (Plesner, 2009)” (Primo and Zago, 2015, p.39), it becomes evident that conducting semi-structured interviews (as a method on its own) might not fully capture how journalism is produced. When the interview responses were re-examined using ANT as a lens, it became clear how technology is itself an actor in a network that includes journalists, their sources, technicians of various sorts, the media organizations that employ them, as well as audiences and users (Hemmingway, 2008).

The manner in which the key informants in this study overlooked the role of technology and artifacts in news production network reinforced Primo and Zago (2015, p.42)'s point that when it comes to defining journalism objects are set aside whilst, “technology is left outside, as something extraneous... even though no practitioner or scholar would deny that journalism and technological artifacts have always been interconnected”.

The presence of silent digital actors embedded in the data became conspicuous when ANT was used as an analytical tool. According to Primo and Zago (2015, p.38), “technology seems to disappear in journalistic practices, as it blends into everyday routines” and in this study, technology seemed to have disappeared from journalistic practices as the data obtained from the interviews and content analysis made fleeting mention of it. Upon deploying ANT as a method, the presence of technology in news work became visible enabling the researcher to appreciate “the role played by technological artifacts, understood as full-blown social actors, with transforming roles” (Primo and Zago, 2015, p.39).

Key informants in the semi-structured interviews claimed that social media had increasingly become influential in newsgathering, thus making it a key

non-human actor in the network of news production. As detailed in section 5.3.2 of the study, key informants revealed that social media as a non-human actor had facilitated access to uncooperative sources who post their views online. Social media was also credited for facilitating the use of named sources as journalists treated social media posts as being on-the-record comments by elites. As a non-human actor in the news production process, social media was also empowered sources and made it possible for them to influence the news agenda.

Although the key informants in this study acknowledged that social media was an actor in news production processes they maintained their focus on human agency, while other nonhuman actors were obscured (Primo and Zago, 2015). Hence ANT's most important methodological contribution in this study was to ensure that "beyond specific [human] actors involved in processes in the newsroom other contextual [non-human] actors [do not get] neglected" (paraphrasing Schmitz and Domingo, 2010, p.1164).

Deploying ANT as a method enabled this researcher to consider and appreciate, "the interaction between technology, working routines and product features: how technical artifacts are integrated into and adapted to the newsroom needs and to what extent the journalists redefine their practices in the process" (Schmitz and Domingo, 2010, p.1158). ANT as a method served only as starting point to capture and account for how technical artifacts are integrated into and adapted to the newsroom needs and to what extent the journalists redefine their practices in the process (Schmitz and Domingo, 2010).

When ANT was deployed as a method to analyse the 146 social media sourced stories that constitute the primary data of this study, the presence of silent non-human actors in the news production process became noticeable. In detailing the attempts made to get a comment from a source, some

political stories contained mention of the kind of devices used by the reporter, devices that can be regarded as

On their own, these devices or technical objects can be regarded as non-humans that do not have agency by themselves, if only because they are never by themselves (Sayes, 2014). Using ANT as a method allowed this researcher to remain open to the possibility that mediating technologies (as detailed in Table 5.10) are silent nonhuman actors that add something that is of sociological relevance to a chain of events (Sayes, 2014) or news processes that culminate in the publication of political stories. In the context of this study, mediating technologies such as telephones or cellphones that are rendered invisible in the news production process, as they have become a normalized aspect of the newsgathering work can be viewed as silent nonhuman actors. In this study, stories that mention how journalists attempted or managed to communicate with sources were taken as evidence of how silent digital actors are involved in the news production process. According to Reich (2005) examining the technologies used by journalists to acquire data and to contact sources may shed light on an invisible side of the news, or in this instance, on the silent digital actors who contribute to the network of news production.

By using ANT as a method was vital to sensitizing the researcher to not overlook the “intricate relation between digital technologies and journalists’ practices” (Primo and Zago, 2015, p.39). This study found that both non-human actors (such as silent digital actors detailed in section 7.1.3) and human actors were co-responsible for social media sourcing as a practice in Zimbabwe’s mainstream media but human actors had more influence than non-human ones as the final product in stories was determined by human actors.

## 8.4 Conclusion and recommendation for further work

According to Hladík and Štětka (2017), According to Hladík and Štětka (2017), social media themselves become a specific environment for production and dissemination of information, which gains importance, especially in exceptional circumstances.

In this study, those exceptional circumstances involved an escalation of factional fighting within the ruling ZANU PF party. This infighting morphed into a propaganda war, which was waged through The Herald newspaper by one faction and through social media by the other faction. The public battle between warring ZANU PF factions, which played out on social media, compelled political reporters to gather story ideas from social media and overly rely on a few tech-savvy elite sources. The perception that political reporting was social media-driven during this period is illusory insofar as a unique set of circumstances was obtaining at the time.

As this precise set of circumstances (i.e intensified factional fighting within ZANU PF that triggers a public battle waged on social media and in the press, culminating in expulsions and a coup) is unlikely to recur, the findings of this study are unlikely to be replicated beyond this time frame. The findings of this study may be generalizable in some respects whilst other respects; they are bound to the exceptionality of the circumstances detailed above. Some of the results found in this study would most likely not be replicated given a different set of intraparty circumstances.

By situating the study within a specific time frame, the researcher also endeavours to place and present the study within a specific intraparty context and political moment. Some of the factors that drove social media sourcing as a newsgathering practice during the 30 months under study were rooted in the intraparty conflicts within political parties in general, and ZANU PF in particular. Under a different set of circumstances and given a different

political context, the outcome of this study may indeed have afforded a different conclusion.

At the time this researcher completed working on this thesis, the political landscape in Zimbabwe had radically changed with the ousting of former President Robert Mugabe in November 2017. In what has been dubbed the Second Republic, this researcher notices a disinterest in social media sourcing although the current President Emmerson Mnangagwa ostensibly has very active social media accounts (on Twitter and Facebook).

Future studies may interrogate why mainstream media seems to be averse to sourcing reportedly 'PR-handled' accounts of elite sources – even when those handles are verified. Relatedly, the fact that very few elite sources have verified social media accounts also invites scrutiny on how mainstream media independently verify the authenticity of social media accounts against a background where impersonation is rife. The credibility dilemmas that arise from sourcing unverified accounts are worth exploring, as are the ethical infractions that can be committed when journalists choose to take social media at face value. Correspondingly, the lack of clear social media sourcing guidelines in mainstream media newsrooms that give rise to ethically grey practices where social media posts of individuals are misrepresented through conflation such that individual opinions are claimed to be representative of institutions rather than individuals.

Another possible line of interrogation would be to consider how social media users' baiting of elite sources inadvertently weakens the advantage elites have in using social media to circumvent mainstream media by directly addressing audiences.

Finally, the call by President Emmerson Mnangagwa exhorting ZANU PF supporters to embrace social media and defend the party online has seen an unprecedented rise of pro-ZANU PF sentiment on platforms that only a few

years back where dominated by pro-opposition voices – promises a rich line of inquiry when considered in the light of cyber-laws that would presumably gag social media. It might be worth considering whether ZANU PF and the government now accept that “the Internet is an enabling technology that amplifies power, and power can be used in support of democracy or against it” (Zaid, 2016, p.55) – hence Internet shutdowns may not be necessary?

For all the influence Jonathan Moyo appeared to have on political reporting during the period under study, since losing his position in government he has become a less sought-after source in mainstream media. Despite his continuing and often provocative use of Twitter, Jonathan Moyo has made fewer appearances as a social media news source for mainstream media. What this suggests is that, in the final analysis, it was not social media that drove the political news agenda over the 30-months where Jonathan Moyo accounted for 65% of the social media sourced stories. Rather it was the coinciding of a story every media house wanted to chase (i.e factionalism in ZANU PF and the related succession battle) with the decision by ZANU PF officials who held high-ranking government positions to wage battle publicly, thereby granting unfettered access to journalists who rarely got ministers to go on the record. Still, Jonathan Moyo's masterful use of social media made it possible for him to bait the media, hinting at the possibility that mainstream media is not impervious to social media's political content but reacts to it in one way or another.

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