New Technologies and Print Journalism Practice in Zimbabwe: An Ethnographic Study

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Doctor of Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

This study uses an ethnographic approach (participant observation in conjunction with in-depth group and individual interviews) to closely examine how Zimbabwean print journalists in the state-controlled and private press deploy new ICTs (the Internet; email; and the mobile phone) in their everyday professional practices. It explores how immediate conditions of practice and broader social circumstances set conditions for distinctive forms of new technology use, as well as how the technologies are impacting on traditional journalistic standards, values, and practices. The study rejects deterministic approaches to technology and argues that to understand the impact of new technologies on journalism practice in Africa, we must put journalists into a critical analytical context that takes into account contextual factors that coalesce to structure and constrain the uses of the technologies.

To conceptualise the structuring impact of context and the degree of agency available to journalists in their deployment of new technologies, the study reinvigorates the sociology of journalism and social constructivist approaches to technology. The findings of the study offer insider perspectives of the practices and cultures around new technology use in the newsrooms and point to complex individual and socially patterned explanations of the appropriations of the technologies.

While newsroom practices and cultures examined here broadly affirm early studies by showing: how new technologies impact on journalists' work routines; the news content they produce; the structure of their work environment; and their relationships with sources and readers, a closer analysis points to a number of contextual factors that collectively shape and constrain the uses of the technologies. These factors result in 'local context' appropriations that move beyond a simple substantiation of early studies. Thus, while the technologies offer journalists a wide range of resources and technological possibilities to work with, they also pose ethical and professional challenges. These and other findings highlight the deficiencies of deterministic or 'technicist' approaches to technology and their claims for a straightforward causal connection between technology and society. The study should thus be read as a challenge to the popular and utopian assumptions about the impact of new technologies on African journalism and as a dialogue with constructivist approaches that see technologies as inherently open to interpretive flexibility.

For my parents Smart and Judith Mabweazara

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction and background

The advent of new technologies (ICTs) in Africa in the 1990s 'sparked celebratory, almost utopian bliss' among their proponents (Banda et al. 2009: 1). It was accompanied by the 'hype about the continent's possibility of "leapfrogging" some stages of development' (ibid.). From the outset, the adoption of ICTs in various sectors was largely motivated by ideas of bridging the divide between the rich and the poor, and promoting socio-economic progress. In the context of journalism practice, new technologies were also seen as having the potential to increase journalists' work efficiency thus overcoming the barriers associated with 'traditional' means of journalism practice. However, the realisation of such over-hyped mono-causal explanations of the perceived potential of new technologies that disregard the contextual realities which shape the processes of ICT adoption and appropriation in Africa has largely remained elusive.

The present study departs from a deterministic approach and reinvigorates traditional sociological approaches to both journalism and technology to closely examine how Zimbabwean mainstream print journalists in the state-controlled and private press deploy new ICTs in their everyday professional practices. The study takes a critical view of what Slack and Fejes (1987: 202) describe as the 'optimistic naive' perspective, which sees the economically developing countries as having the most to gain from new ICTs. It is premised on the view that to understand the impact of new technologies on journalism practice in Africa, we must put journalists into a critical analytical context and begin to question the immediate and wider social context in which they deploy technologies. This approach finds root in the collective strengths of two broad theoretical concerns: the sociology of journalism and social constructivist approaches to technology. Although these theoretical bodies were conceptualised before the 'new media age' – in the 1970s and 80s – together they provide a basis for conceptualising the interplay between journalists, their everyday practice and the wider social factors that coalesce to structure and constrain the deployment of new technologies.

The early newsroom studies that crystallised in the sociology of journalism offer enduring insights into the working practices of journalists and thus provide a 'default setting' (Zelizer 2004) against which most news production studies have been rooted. As Paterson (2008: 2) contends, without these 'early ethnographic

investigations of news production, our understandings of journalism would be limited to what little we are able to glean from the observation of news content, or from what journalists say they do'. Similarly, social constructivist approaches to technology, which emphasise the social shaping and 'interpretive flexibility' of technology offer a frame in which technologies can be understood as not necessarily replacing existing social realities and dynamics in which they are appropriated, but rather as continuous with and embedded in them (Bijker 1995; Miller & Slater 2000). In deploying these influential theoretical frameworks I therefore acknowledge that journalism (and research into journalism) is not performed in a vacuum, independent of the shaping impact of contextual influences.

1.0 Research questions and methodological approach

Against the foregoing backdrop, the present research used a qualitative ethnographic case study approach to critically explore how Zimbabwean mainstream print media journalists draw on their lived circumstances to deploy new technologies in newsmaking practices. The term 'new technologies' was employed in reference to computer-based digital technologies, specifically: the Internet (the Web); email; and the mobile phone. Although practically the Internet and email are inextricably connected, in this study they were treated separately for analytical reasons.

The study comprised six newsrooms drawn from the dominant state-controlled Zimbabwe Newspapers Group (Zimpapers) (two dailies, *The Herald* and the *Chronicle* and two weeklies the *Sunday Mail* and the *Sunday News*) and the small but vibrant private weeklies owned by Alpha Media Holdings (*The Zimbabwe Independent* and *The Standard*). The newspapers are located in Zimbabwe's two major cities: Harare, the capital, in the North and Bulawayo, the second largest city, in the South. In investigating how journalists in these newsrooms deploy and appropriate new technologies, I examined how their immediate conditions of practice and broader lived circumstances set conditions for distinctive forms of new technology use, as well as the degree of agency available to them in deploying the technologies. The research further sought to understand how the technologies are impacting on traditional journalistic practices in terms of whether or not they are redefining established journalistic standards, values, and practices. The study was primarily concerned to answer the following interrelated questions:

i. How are new ICTs deployed by Zimbabwean mainstream print journalists in their day-to-day newsmaking practices?

ii. How do the immediate context of everyday practice and the wider lived circumstances in which the journalists operate influence the nature, form and extent of their deployment of the technologies?
iii. How is the deployment of the technologies impacting on or challenging traditional journalistic standards, values and practices?

To answer these questions, I adopted a qualitative ethnographic case study approach that employed participant observation in conjunction with in-depth group and individual interviews to offer 'thick' descriptions and 'insider' perspectives of practices and cultures of new ICT use in news production. The flexibility of ethnography enabled me to make sense of – and construct meanings out of – the ongoing interactions between journalists, their immediate context of practice and their wider social context. This methodological approach revealed the contingent nature of cultural production and facilitated a close understanding of the dynamics of newsmaking practices in which new technologies are deployed.

Overall, a minimum of 96 journalists were involved in the study, either through observation, interviews or a combination of all the methods. The figure represents the minimum number of journalists involved in the study since it was highly probable that some reporters were involved in observations or other interactions but were not counted due to their limited presence or lack of striking contribution to the focus of the study. It is important to highlight that the research's aim was primarily to understand particulars rather than generalising to universals, in keeping with the assumptions of qualitative research (see chapter 4 section 4.3.1). The study was 'concerned with *explanation* in a wider sense than measurement or causation' (Mason 2006a: 16, emphasis original). Interviewees were thus purposively sampled using theoretical sampling rather than random sampling. Of significance in the sampling procedure, however, was the need to select journalists from different desks in order to cover all key 'beats' across the newsrooms.

The scheduling of my fieldwork between June and December 2008, a period during which Zimbabwe went through unprecedented political turmoil at election time following the disputed first round of presidential elections and the subsequent runoff elections, was not without significance. In general, election time and periods of political upheaval in Africa are moments at which journalists traditionally reach a peak of professional hyperactivity. Similarly, the Internet, email and mobile phones

also reach the height of their deployment by journalists, civil society and citizens alike at this time. The timing of the fieldwork was, therefore, germane to drawing connections between the immediate conditions of practice and the larger structures that shape and constrain the appropriations of new technologies by mainstream journalists.

1.1 Research context and background

Since 1997 Zimbabwe has experienced unprecedented socio-political and economic problems which, as Bond and Manyanya (2003) conceive, signify the inextricable relationship between society, politics and economics. The socio-political and economic turbulence has had marked implications on the operations of the press and the general practice of journalism in the country. It is important, however, to point out that the scenario obtaining in Zimbabwe with respect to the press and journalism practice is neither unique nor exceptional to Zimbabwe, but rather mirrors the circumstances prevailing in most sub-Saharan African countries (Makumbe & Compagnon 2000; Ronning 2005).

Although Zimbabwe, like most countries in the region, faces major challenges of socio-economic development that manifest in poverty, disease and low level access to social services, including political turbulence (Kupe 2004), it nonetheless provides a good case for a close examination of the deployment of new technologies by mainstream journalists in sub-Saharan Africa for two main reasons. First, while the Zimbabwean media situation cannot be generalised to scenarios in individual African countries, its mainstream press remains a central and vibrant platform for the struggle for control of public discourse between the opposition and the incumbent elite. Second, relative to other sub-Saharan African countries, new technologies (the Internet, email and mobile phone) have proliferated and permeated key facets of social life in the country (see section 1.1.2). They constitute an important factor in shaping communications, not least the mainstream press's newsmaking practices.

The discussion that follows provides a brief overview of the mainstream press in Zimbabwe and its adoption of new technologies. It focuses on the state-controlled and the private press – both of which constitute the focus of the present research – and highlights the centrality of new technologies in their operations. These two sectors of the press offer a vantage point from which to closely examine the social practice of mainstream journalism in Zimbabwe. The discussion also shows how journalism

practice in Zimbabwe is shaped and constrained by the socio-political and economic context in which it is rooted.

1.1.1 A brief overview of the press in Zimbabwe and its adoption of ICTs

The Zimbabwean press today is characterised by a marked polarity between the state controlled 'public press' and the 'private press'. The former functions as a means to spread government policy and quash dissenting voices while the latter gives space to dissenting voices and subjects government policy to heavy scrutiny and criticism (Chavunduka 2002; Ronning 2005; Mano 2005). As Chari (2009: 10) puts it, '[t]he state media is unapologetic in its support for the ruling Zanu PF government while the private press seems to have signed a pact with the opposition to "hear no evil", "speak no evil" and "see no evil" regarding its affairs'. The conflicting editorial thrusts characterising these two broad sectors of the press mirror the political and ideological power struggles pervading public discourse in Zimbabwe. As a result, 'news reporting has become too predictable and readers are forced to read all the newspapers available in order to get the truth' (Chari 2009: 11).

By 2000 the state-controlled press had assumed a comfortable position in the mainstream media owing to the gradual and well-orchestrated muzzling of the private press by the government through the promulgation of prohibitive statutory instruments such as the Public Order and Security Act (POSA) and the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA) (Ronning 2005; Mabweazara 2006; Mukundu 2006). The domineering nature of the state-controlled 'public press' over the 'private press' has further been fostered by the country's failing economy, which has led to difficulties in attracting advertising, thus relegating major activity in the print media to media houses that survive through cross-subsidies. This has been particularly the case with most newspapers published under the government controlled Zimbabwe Newspapers Group (Zimpapers) stable (Chuma 2005; Mabweazara 2006). Thus, despite the economic problems facing Zimbabwe, the state-controlled press remains relatively stable and dominant.

Although the government is the majority shareholder, the ownership structure of Zimpapers consists of both private and government shares. At its formation, government shares were administered by the Ministry of Information through the now defunct Zimbabwe Mass Media Trust (ZMMT) which, as Ronning (1989: 10) observes, was headed by a group of 'eminent' Zimbabweans. The company publishes two daily newspapers: *The Herald* (Harare) and the *Chronicle* (Bulawayo), and five

weeklies: *The Sunday Mail* (Harare), the *Sunday News* (Bulawayo), *Manica Post* (Mutare), and the vernacular *Kwayedza* (Harare) and *uMthunywa* (Bulawayo). According to Moyo, L (2003) although these newspapers are referred to as national media, the reality is that most of them are regional papers mainly covering regional events.

In the late 1990s Zimpapers committed itself to raising editorial standards through the use of new technologies and related resources to produce the best quality of newspapers and thus sustain and increase the company's competitive edge. Prior to the adoption of new technologies, journalists at Zimpapers relied on telephones, face-to-face interviews, faxes and other traditional means of newsmaking, which sometimes resulted in delays in the publication of breaking news.[1] Zimpapers thus took the lead in harnessing the perceived power of the Internet in its newsmaking operations, following the increased use of the new technologies as journalistic tools throughout the developed world (Garrison 1998). In the early years of the Internet, Bornwell Chakaodza, then editor of *The Herald*, highlighted that new technologies held out immense promise: '...not least the elimination of the production problems that...caused late printing [of newspapers] and, consequently, vast irritation among...readers and advertisers'.[2]

With the setting up of Information Technology (IT) support units within its newsrooms, Zimpapers led the way in providing journalists with 24-hour access to the Internet. Although the Internet and email took a leading role in Zimpapers' move towards adopting new technologies, the mobile phone equally permeated the newsrooms in the late 1990s. As an acknowledgement of the centrality of the mobile phone in its operations 'Zimpapers instituted a facility in which it assisted its editorial staff to acquire mobile phones and deducted the money from their salaries over an agreed period of time'.[3] It further offered its staffers a modicum of airtime allowances. It is this investment in the promise of new technologies that makes Zimpapers a significant case study for the present research.

The relative stability of the 1980s saw the emergence of a small but vibrant class of the privately-owned press, which became increasingly outspoken against various policies of government (Chavunduka 2002; Ronning 2005). This period

[1] 'Zimpapers at the cutting edge', reported in *The Herald*, July 31, 1997.
[2] 'Deal sealed for $27m high-tech Zimpapers production system', reported in *The Herald*, July 28, 1998.
[3] Personal interview with Isaac Waniwa, Production Editor at the *Chronicle*, 31 October 2008.

followed a rapid deterioration in the country's economic situation, characterised by high unemployment and high inflation and accompanied by a serious decline in the government's popularity in the second half of the 1990s. Several of the private printing and publishing companies prospered and contributed to wide-ranging weeklies, monthlies and bi-monthlies both foreign and indigenous in origin. Among these were *Moto* magazine, *Parade* magazine (no longer operational), the *Horizon* magazine (no longer operational), *The Financial Gazette*, *The Zimbabwe Independent*, *The Standard* and the *Daily News* (no longer operational).

In the early years of independence, the private press enjoyed relative autonomy from direct interference by the government and the ruling party in terms of censorship and supervision. This was mainly a result of the state's professed commitment to 'media freedom' against the backdrop of reconciliation efforts, as well as of the political economy of donor funding (Chuma 2005). This privilege was to slowly diminish as the government gradually deemed the private press a serious threat.

The government subsequently made concerted efforts to muzzle the private press in the wake of increasing dissenting voices that found space in the private press as the country's economic problems worsened. As noted earlier, the promulgation of tough laws like the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA) in January 2002 saw the closure of newspapers like the Associated Newspapers of Zimbabwe (ANZ)'s *Daily News* and *Daily News on Sunday*. Some newspapers and magazines, however, succumbed to the biting economic environment (much to the relief of the government): examples are the *Horizon* magazine and the Associated Newspapers of Zimbabwe's *Dispatch* (Chuma 2005). *The Daily Mirror* and *The Sunday Mirror* suspended publication in March 2007 owing to escalating debt and a controversy suggesting that they had been taken over by the state security agents.

With these developments, the state-controlled press assumed dominance over the private press. Ronning (2005) argues that this scenario typifies the close relationship between politics and media in Africa, where state media are stronger than private media. He further contends that 'the history of the banning of the *Daily News* [in Zimbabwe is]...illustrative of many of the problems facing independent and critical journalism in Africa as a whole' (Ronning 2005: 158). Similarly, Makumbe and Compagnon (2000) observe that in Zimbabwe, as in many parts of Africa, the public press is more pervasive than the private press. They observe that Zimpapers is the most stable media organization in Zimbabwe and that its publications have a total

circulation ratio of 25: 1 to the private press. This scenario shows how marginal the impact of the private press is 'in relation to the vast state controlled newspaper empire' (Moyo, D 2007: 82).

However, some mainstream private newspapers have continued to offer pockets of resistance to the state's attempts at monopolising and controlling public discourse. At the time of writing this thesis, these private newspapers composed of three weeklies: *The Financial Gazette*, *The Zimbabwe Independent* and *The Standard*, all owned and controlled by individual entrepreneurs.[4] The present study focuses on the latter two sister weeklies – examples of a small but vociferous private press – owned by Alpha Media Holdings (formerly known as ZimInd Publishers), 'a private publishing house controlled by Trevor Ncube [who] also owns the *Mail and Guardian*, one of the leading newspapers published in South Africa' (Mukundu 2006: 28). As with Zimpapers's newspapers, the two weeklies have embraced new technologies as the 'backbone' to their operations. In terms of editorial thrust *The Zimbabwe Independent*, published every Friday, mainly targets business people but also publishes a significant amount of political news; *The Standard* (published every Sunday) has always been very critical of government (Moyo, L 2003).

Although all the newspapers studied assumed an online presence in the late 1990s, in 2007 *The Zimbabwe Independent* and *The Standard* refurbished and modernised their websites with interactive features that enable readers to contribute content to the newspapers. The private weeklies sought to use their websites to get leads and insights from their readers in the wake of the intensifying political impasse at the time (Moyo, D 2009). They also intensified their deployment of the mobile phone and the email technology to reinforce their links with sources (and readers) and for content exchanges with civic organisations such as the *Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition* and *Kubatana.net*. A focus on these two weeklies in this study is therefore not without justification.

It is important to highlight that the shrinkage of the private press and the generally tight control of the media environment has 'triggered an unprecedented mushrooming of [alternative online newspapers] on Zimbabwe...promising to unearth the truth and expose the corruption and human rights abuses by the Mugabe regime'

[4] However, as I concluded the present study, the government was in the process of considering applications for licences to publish newspapers from a number of private media houses including the Associated Newspapers of Zimbabwe (ANZ), the publisher of the *Daily News* and *Daily News on Sunday*.

(Moyo, D 2007: 84). A common feature of these online newspapers is their 'latent opposition slant' (Chari 2009: 11) and an ownership traceable to exiled Zimbabwean journalists scattered across the globe. These journalists resorted to the Web for organising themselves and publishing fearless political content that the government cannot stop.[5] Their mottoes and stated objectives, such as: 'to tell the real Zimbabwean story' (Zimonline.co.za); 'to provide you with the most independent uncensored news from Zimbabwe' (Zimdaily.com); and 'to tell the Zimbabwean story like it is without fear or favour' (Zimbabwejournalists.com) sum up their desire to provide alternative viewpoints on the Zimbabwe situation (Moyo, D 2007; Chari 2009).

Although these online newspapers began as initiatives by exiled Zimbabwean journalists, they have developed to include the participation of residents in Zimbabwe in many ways, including the sourcing of stories (Moyo, L 2009). Some journalists in both the state-controlled and private press act as underground correspondents for these foreign based media (Mano 2005).

The mushrooming of the news websites has provided competition to the mainstream press through their varied approaches to newsgathering and wide-ranging editorial positions. They have also promoted cut-throat competition in newsgathering as the mainstream publications are no longer just competing amongst themselves but also with Internet-based publications (Chari 2009). Part of the aim of the present study, therefore, is to examine the implications of these 'underground' online newspapers on the newsmaking processes of the 'traditional' mainstream newspapers operating within the ambit of state control.

Understanding the impact of the Internet, email and the mobile phone on Zimbabwean mainstream journalism also requires a brief history and overview of the technologies in the country as their permeation into the newsrooms is closely tied to wider ICT developments in the country.

1.1.2 The Internet, email and mobile telephony in Zimbabwe

Although Zimbabwe has endured a lengthy period of under-investment as a result of the protracted political and economic crisis, it has a relatively reliable telecommunications infrastructure that has made it 'part of the global information society dream' (Moyo, L 2009: 58). Early initiatives towards email and Internet

[5] 'Independent news websites mushroom', reported in *The Zimbabwe Independent*, November 04, 2004.

adoption were 'spearheaded by the academic community at the University of Zimbabwe through their links and collaboration with scholars and researchers...in Europe and North America' (Manzvanzvike 1994). Through these initiatives email technology was adopted in 1994 and the Internet followed three years later when the Zimbabwean government commissioned Global One, an international voice and data telecommunications carrier 'to erect a national and international Internet telecommunications network link to the United States and Points of Presence (POPs) in four major cities of Harare, Bulawayo, Gweru, and Mutare' (Moyo, L 2009: 59). Following these early developments, the government invested heavily in the expansion of the network to meet the rising demand for email and Internet services. It argued that the technologies were strategic for closing 'the gap between the information rich world and the information poor' (Research Council of Zimbabwe 1997).

In March 2008 the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) placed the number of Internet users in Zimbabwe at 1 351 000. This represented an Internet penetration rate of about 9.8 percent, a high figure relative to other sub-Saharan African countries (Internetworldstats.com 2008). Zuckerman (2009: 189) observes that: '[o]f major sub-Saharan African countries, i.e., discounting those with populations under a million, only Zimbabwe and South Africa have a higher net penetration'. Figure 1 below shows the position of Zimbabwe in sub-Saharan Africa's top five Internet users.

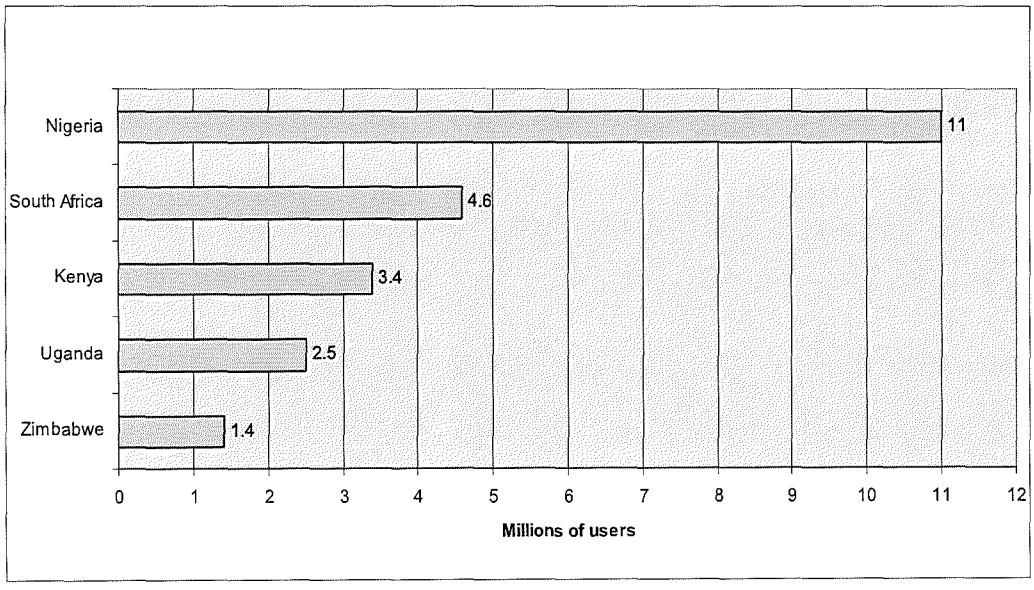

Figure 1. **Top 5 Internet users in sub-Saharan Africa as of June 2009**[6]

[6] Retrieved December 18, 2009 from: http://www.internetworldstats.com/af/zw.htm

The growing demand for Internet services in Zimbabwe has further been shown by the rise in the number of Internet Service Providers (ISPs) and the 'mushrooming of cybercafés in almost every corner of Zimbabwe's major cities' (Moyo, L 2009: 61). Between 2003 and 2004 the number of ISPs grew from fewer than 6 to 27 (*Internetworldstats.com* 2008) and in 2004 Harare alone 'had about 30 Internet cafes and [by] 2008 they were estimated to have doubled [in] number' (Chari 2009: 13). There appears sufficient access to the Internet in Zimbabwe to support its wider usage by journalists and the general public.

Although the Internet preceded the mobile phone in its popularity and penetration rate, in recent years demand for the mobile phone in Zimbabwe has outpaced that of the Internet. It has evolved from being an elitist status symbol to an indispensible tool accessed and used by the wider population. The rise in the number of mobile phone users is partly reflected in the rapid growth of its penetration rate in recent years. In February 2009, its penetration rate rose from 14 percent to 21 percent in August;[7] by December of the same year it had risen further to 30 percent, a rate that outpaces many sub-Saharan African countries.

The first mobile cellular service in Zimbabwe was launched in October 1996 through *NetOne*, a subsidiary to the Posts and Telecommunications Corporation (PTC), a company wholly owned by government (Muchemwa 2005). The government's monopoly in the sector was, however, dismantled in 1998 with the launch of two privately-owned mobile telephone companies, *Telecel Zimbabwe* and *Econet Wireless* in June and July respectively (Muchemwa 2005). The latter was launched after a lengthy legal battle for an operating license as the government sought to maintain its control of the sector. Muchemwa further observes that of the three companies, *Econet Wireless* commands the largest market share of 61 percent, while *NetOne* and *Telecel Zimbabwe* respectively command 23 and 15 percent.

Econet Wireless has consolidated its lead in the market over the years through astute product innovation and the introduction of new products such as SMS-based news headlines and stock exchange information (Muchemwa 2005). As it positioned itself as Zimbabwe's largest mobile phone operator, *Econet Wireless*'s subscriber base rose by 204 percent between December 2008 and December 2009 to reach three

[7] 'Hype ware as mobile operators jostle for supremacy', Reported in *The Standard*, October 17, 2009. Retrieved October 19, 2009 from: http://www.thestandard.co.zw/business/21791-hype-war-as-mobile-operators-jostle-for-market-supremacy.html

million.[8] While it trails behind *NetOne* in terms of the breadth of its network coverage, it has a network presence in most parts of the country, including remote rural areas. Its network coverage is also superior to that of *Telecel Zimbabwe*.

Although the government owned *NetOne* is second to *Econet Wireless* in terms of subscriber base, it has the best network coverage which extends throughout Zimbabwe, encompassing all major cities and towns, including mining and commercial farming areas, as well as some rural areas and growth points (small towns located in remote parts of the country designated for economic and physical development). The network has also penetrated all major highway corridors in the country (Muchemwa 2005). This wide coverage has found support in the government's goal to bridge the divide between rural and urban areas through deploying infrastructure to rural areas.

Of the three mobile phone network providers, *Telecel Zimbabwe* is considerably smaller although its network subscriber base has grown steadily in recent years from a modest figure of 1000 at its inception in 1998 to between 260 000 to 280 000 in September 2008.[9] The growth in subscribers has been attributed to the expansion of its network into major cities and towns, although its coverage remains relatively patchy when compared to other network providers. Its concentration in major cities and towns has meant very little network presence in remote and rural areas.

The pervasiveness of the mobile phone in Zimbabwe has given rise to a number of interesting communication initiatives. Pro-democracy movements that are constantly under government attack and censorship, such as the *Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition* and *Kubatana.net* have resorted to the mobile phone (and in particular to SMS) to mobilise and circumvent censorship. In the same manner, poor mobile phone users innovatively use the SMS and 'beeping' (dialling a number and hanging up before it is answered, in the expectation that the other person will call back) facility as a strategy to save money and remain connected with their key contacts.

Because of the high demand for the basic, core functions of the mobile phone, the three mobile phone network operators have tended to concentrate more on perfecting the core services to saturate the market and meet demand, before concentrating on other sophisticated products such as 3-G services. As one *Telecel*

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[8] 'Econet hits 3 million subscriber mark', Reported in *The Sunday News*, December 27, 2009. Retrieved December 28, 2009 from: http://www.sundaynews.co.zw/inside.aspx?sectid=5201&cat=8.

[9] Personal interview with Monica Malunda, *Telecel Zimbabwe*'s Public Relations Officer, 09 September 2008.

Zimbabwe commercial director pointed out, 'the industry is still in the capacity-building phase of [its] life cycle, [it] is still struggling to meet demand for basic telephony services'.[10] Mobile phone network operators have thus invested in developing prepaid mobile phone packages and the SMS facility, both of which have proved popular among users because of their low costs.[11]

In spite of the strides made in Internet, email, and mobile phone use in Zimbabwe, several challenges persist: the unstable economy; aging telecommunications infrastructure; government censorship; and poor Internet skills are some of the limitations that journalists (and the wider public) have to contend with in their attempts to effectively deploy the technologies. Thus, in spite of the enthusiasm associated with the technologies, there are numerous challenges threatening their diffusion and appropriation in the country (Muchemwa 2005; Moyo, L 2009).

1.2 Significance and justification for the study

There were a number of complex but interrelated reasons why I was drawn to examine the deployment of new technologies in the practice of mainstream journalism in Africa, with Zimbabwe as my case study. First, as noted at the beginning of this chapter, there are many utopian predictions made about new technologies in Africa that call for empirically-grounded research to test them. This is particularly so given the complexities and contradictions that obtain with respect to their diffusion and permeation into African newsrooms. Second, contemporary journalism studies in Africa has tended to shy away from 'close-up' empirical studies of everyday routines and practices of journalism (especially in the print media), preferring instead to emphasise issues around the democratisation of the media (including new technologies) and its role in political and democratic processes. A gap, therefore, remains uncovered in terms of theoretically mapping and empirically exploring 'the production of today's fast-changing and differentiated news ecology' (Cottle 2000b: 19) in Africa. It is not clear how African mainstream journalists have come to terms with the 'new media age' or the so-called global 'information society' (Duff 2000).

It is also noteworthy that the rapid developments in technology have seen a sharp rise in journalism research that interrogates the impact of new technologies on

[10] 'Mobile phone operators set to introduce new technology', Reported in *The Sunday Mail*, January 28, 2007.
[11] 'Telecel offers a trendy service', Reported in *The Sunday Mail*, May 13, 2008 (see also Moyo, D 2009: 556).

mainstream journalism practice in the economically developed countries of the North from a variety of theoretical traditions (see, for example, Pavlik 2000; Ursell 2001; Seelig 2002; Deuze & Dimoudi 2002; Singer 2003; Deuze 2003; Allan 2005; Lowrey 2006; Anderson & Weymouth 2007; Bivens 2008). While pockets of research are beginning to emerge from African journalism scholarship (as shown in Chapter 2), the research has largely lacked theoretical and empirical grounding in terms of examining how African mainstream journalists are forging 'new' ways to practise their profession in the light of technological changes in their newsrooms. It is not clear how they deal with these changes and, more importantly, how they have adjusted their professional notions in terms of which traditions have survived the impact of new technologies and which has needed rethinking.

Further, few studies have as yet sought to empirically discriminate between what could or should be universal professional values and what should be context-dependent practices with respect to the deployment of new technologies in mainstream journalism. This has meant that professional norms and practices that emerge 'in the context of particular [Western] social regulatory processes are applied out of context, sometimes awkwardly' in Africa (Ibelema 2008: 36). This empirical lacuna has given rise to utopian and speculative arguments on the impact of new technologies on African journalism practice and thus points to the significance and justification for the present research.

Theories and empirical studies developed in the West might appear to be applicable to the African context, but a closer look shows significant differences requiring nuanced theorising and research, since much of the research 'is often conducted in splendid oblivion of conditions in the Third World' (Berger 2000: 90). Adapting these studies to the African context in many instances creates problems as the studies 'cover only a small portion of the problems that face developing countries [and] most of the results are not applicable to the situations in developing countries' (Adams & Wood 1999: 307). It would be misleading, therefore, to assume that journalism practice is the same in the Third World as in the First (at least as regards the deployment of new technologies). As Mano (2004: 18) argues: 'African realities today are complex and multifaceted and resist any attempts to simplify them'. Nyamnjoh (1999: 15) concurs by arguing that African media research must be located 'in African realities and not in Western fantasies'. This approach is particularly urgent given that the performance of the press in Africa is all too often measured against the backdrop of Western professional values and standards; local contextual factors that

shape and underlie practices in Africa are often overlooked (Louw 2001; Nyamnjoh 2005a). These factors include the socio-political, economic and institutional contexts that are markedly different and often less clear-cut. As Kupe (2004) observes, African journalists work with significantly fewer resources (including technology). They have a lower status, are poorly paid and operate in multicultural countries that are at various stages of constituting themselves as nations in a globalising world.

My proposal, therefore, is for African journalism studies to be empirically rooted in African experiences and to acknowledge that journalists there do their jobs under immensely varied circumstances (Wahl-Jorgensen 2004). The significance of the present research thus lies in its attempt to contribute an African, specifically Zimbabwean, perspective on mainstream journalists' use of new technologies in newsmaking practices. It will avoid uncritically reproducing Western theories and will consider the multidimensionality of African realities. As Wahl-Jorgensen (2004: 352) further advises:

> To attain an understanding of the cultural specifics of journalism, and of what journalism could and ought to do in particular contexts, critical journalism studies must be empirical. It must seek to understand more fully the conditions under which journalists do their work.

Recent research in African journalism has either been too technologically deterministic or overly focused on the opportunities afforded by new technologies in political and democratic processes, rather than on news production routines and practices. The trend has mainly been to uncritically celebrate (or disapprove of) the impact of new technologies on journalism practice (see Kasoma 1996; Berger 1996; Berger 2005; Chari 2009) without reflecting on the situated nature of their impact on journalistic practices. The research has thus been informed by various academic and practitioner accounts of new technologies rooted in '*technological myopia* and *technological determinism*' (Cottle & Ashton 1999: 22, emphasis original) that overlook the differing political, economic, cultural and social circumstances in which the technologies are developed and assimilated (Miller & Slater 2000). As Nyamnjoh (2005a: 9) points out, 'it is regrettable that scholarly focus has been rather on what ICTs *do to* Africans, instead of what Africans *do with* ICTs' (emphasis original). The present research, however, departs from these technicist approaches and demonstrates that technologies are, in fact, *socially* and *culturally* shaped and that the nature and form of their deployment is inextricably *embedded* in the context in which they are

deployed. As Paterson (2008: 1) warns, journalism research can no longer take for granted that new technologies 'will change journalism immediately and dramatically'.

One can also point to the increasing research that focuses on the role of the new media in political and democratic processes. Writing from a Western context Atton (2009: 283-284) observes that most journalism studies have tended to 'emphasise the democratisation of the media and the participation of citizens...There are too few studies that deal with the everyday routines and processes of reporting and writing'. This observation is even more poignant in African journalism and media studies, which have tended to be skewed towards the role of new technologies in political and democratic processes. In Zimbabwe, for example, Moyo, L (2009) and Moyo, D (2007, 2009) examine the role of the new media in countering repression and propaganda. Mudhai et al. (2009), Wasserman (2005) and Mudhai (2004) theoretically and empirically focus on the relationship between the new media and democratic processes in Africa. These studies examine the impact of ICTs on political participation and in particular their potential to amplify the work done by social movements and activists. While these studies are by no means unimportant, (especially in a continent where democracy is perennially under threat), what is lacking is a close look at how African journalists have forged new ways of practising journalism in the context of technological changes in newsrooms as well as in the wider context of news production. As Cottle (2000a: 432) has it: 'we need to examine the fast changing ecology of news, its changing industrialised and technological basis and its response to the changing structurations of society'.

1.3 Thesis outline and structure

This thesis is divided into eight chapters. The first three chapters establish the background and theoretical foundations of the research. The present chapter describes the focus of the study. It articulates the research questions and outlines the significance and justification for the study.

Chapter 2 provides a wider contextual background of the study by situating it in emerging research on new ICTs in Africa. It explores trends and perspectives taken by ICT researchers and demonstrates the extent to which the study takes a new direction in its attempt to understand how Zimbabwean mainstream journalists deploy new technologies in their professional routines. In doing so, the chapter shows that research into new technologies and journalism in Africa in many ways follows the path taken by ICT researchers outside journalism. The chapter first problematises the

notion of the 'newness' of 'new' technologies in Africa and argues that there is a need to avoid getting trapped in generalised approaches that do not acknowledge the situated nature and form of ICTs in Africa as distinct from those in the economically developed countries of the North. Second, it discusses research on new technologies and journalism in Africa, as well as exploring the emerging discourses on new technology deployment in Africa and research emerging from outside Africa. The chapter also examines emerging research on the mobile phone in Africa.

Chapter 3 presents the theoretical and conceptual framework of the study. It argues that traditional theoretical and methodological approaches to journalism and technologies retain their relevance in providing conceptual frames for understanding how new technologies are deployed by journalists in specific socio-cultural contexts. The chapter argues that we need not necessarily formulate new theoretical and conceptual frameworks when confronted with new trends in established fields of study such as journalism. Instead, there is more to gain from deploying traditional theories by identifying possible synergies between the 'old' approaches and the 'new' phenomena. Accordingly, the social constructivist approaches to technology and the sociology of journalism are adopted as theories that offer a fruitful direction for mapping an approach for critically examining how Zimbabwean mainstream journalists make use of new ICTs. The chapter makes a case for non-reductionist approaches to technologies through a critique of the technological determinism thesis. It also discusses sociological approaches to news production and concludes by outlining a critical sociological framework for the study.

Chapter 4 outlines the qualitative methodological approach employed in the study's empirical research. It begins by discussing methodological concerns and issues regarding new ICT research among social scientists. It also focuses on the centrality of ethnography in news production studies and then shifts focus to specific methodological issues that underpin the research design and procedure. These comprise: the philosophical underpinnings of qualitative research; the case study strategy; and research techniques and sampling procedures. The chapter also provides a rationale for triangulation and concludes by discussing the data analysis procedures and ethical considerations.

The findings of the study are presented in Chapters 5, 6 and 7. Chapter 5 discusses the newsmaking practices and professional cultures that underpin the operations of journalists in the newsrooms studied. It puts into perspective the journalists' self-understanding of their day-to-day practices and the impact of wider

socio-political and economic pressures on professional practices. The chapter establishes at a general level the centrality of new technologies in the newsrooms' daily practices and sets the backdrop for discussing the specific uses of the Internet, email and the mobile phone in subsequent chapters.

Chapter 6 draws on observation and interview data to critically examine the specific uses of the Internet and email in everyday journalistic routines. It gives a detailed exploration of the patterns and trends of the deployment and appropriation of the technologies and their impact on practices and professionalism.

Chapter 7 focuses on the deployment of the mobile phone in the dynamics of everyday newsmaking processes. It highlights how the technology has assumed a taken-for-granted role in the routine operations of journalists and, in particular, how it is redefining newsmaking practices. The findings suggest that the technology has acquired new meanings in the social context of its appropriation by the journalists.

Chapter 8 concludes the thesis by giving a critical assessment of the study's findings in relation to the questions it set out to answer. It recapitulates and evaluates the significance of the study's findings and attempts to show its implications for further research. It also reflects on some of the issues raised in the study's theoretical and literature review sections.

CHAPTER 2

'New' ICTs in Africa: situating the study in emerging research

2.0 Introduction

Research on new ICTs in Africa is limited, fragmented and typically undertaken as isolated and disconnected projects (Adam & Wood 1999; Gillwald 2003). The research is, to use Katz and Aakhus's (2002) phrase, 'ordinarily slender'. More notably, as regards the present study, there is very little research on new ICTs and mainstream journalism practice despite the fact that, in general, journalists happen to be among the largest ICT users in Africa (Mudhai & Nyabuga 2001; Nyamnjoh 2005a; Mchakulu 2007). Against this background, this chapter gives a wider contextual background of the study by providing an overview of new ICT research in Africa. It explores the trends and perspectives taken by different researchers in this field. By discussing new technology research in the broader African context, I do not take for granted the important differences between African countries nor do I assume any homogeneity in the countries themselves. My interest is in demonstrating the extent to which the present study takes a new direction in its attempt to understand how mainstream journalists in Africa – and Zimbabwe in particular – use new technologies in their professional routines. In doing so, I attempt to show that research on new ICTs and journalism in Africa, in many ways, follows the path taken in research outside journalism.

The chapter unfolds by first problematising the notion of the 'newness' of 'new' ICTs and argues that there is need to avoid lapsing into generalised approaches to new ICTs that do not acknowledge the contingent nature of their manifestations in Africa and the wider economically developing world – as encapsulated in the notion of 'digital divide', which I also briefly discuss. Secondly, the chapter discusses emerging research on new technologies and journalism in Africa, drawing parallels with research from outside Africa as well as relating it to the focus of the study. In further placing the study within the broader ICT research context in Africa, the chapter also focuses on 'mixed' opinions about the impact of ICTs and their deployment in Africa. It concludes by focusing on the mobile phone, research into which is only just emerging in African ICT academic inquiry.

2.1 Problematising the 'newness' of ICTs in Africa

Although the term *new technology* has widely been used as a collective singular noun, as if it refers to coherent entity, it is in fact, an enormously general and vague term which, according to Lister et al. (2003) has to be understood and used in its plural sense. Writing about mass communication in Africa, Mytton (1983: 1) argues that: 'Most [researchers] describe the situation in the developed, wealthy countries as if what happens there were somehow typical of human communication in general'. Thus, many writings on new ICTs in Africa and the broader developing world have made very little attempt to define or place the term 'new ICTs' into perspective with precision, hence generalisations and assumptions have characterised its use. The term has often been used as though it is self-explanatory and has some kind of universal applicability in diverse geo-political contexts (Lister et al. 2003; Selwyn 2004). In short, no significant attention has been paid to the quality and form of new technologies being deployed in the developing world compared with those being deployed in the developed world.

In general, new technology theorists and other commentators tend to be polarised over the degree of the newness of ICTs (Lister et al. 2003). In the African context, this question is even more convoluted. There is a temptation to simply list the latest developments in media technologies and call these 'new'. This approach is inadequate as it prevents an understanding of what may be different degrees of 'newness' among and across various media (Flew 2002) and geo-political contexts.

Another tendency among scholars in the developing world and beyond is to discuss new ICTs as if there is some homogeneity in terms of the nature and form in which they manifest themselves across regions. This mistake is perhaps predicated upon the understanding of the 'complex of nation-states and their arrangement in the global space' (Sasole 2003: 389) as a single world system. According to Sasole (2003: 378), 'one popular argument is that [new technologies offer] a completely new array of commercial and cultural advantages to all, *world wide*' (emphasis added). Lister et al. (2003: 11), however, contend that: 'calling a range of developments "new", which may or my not be new or even similar, is part of a powerful ideological movement and a narrative about progress in Western societies' which suggests a polarity in technological advancement between the developed North and the developing South. These generalisations about the 'new' technologies, mainly directed towards the potential they wield, as Sasole (2003: 378) observes, negate the 'actual material

distribution in the current world order, which suggests a different picture' – disparities between the economically developed North and the developing South as encapsulated in the notion of the 'digital divide'. Hamelink (1997: 19) construes this scenario as follows:

> It may well be an illusion to think that the ICT-poor countries can "catch up" or keep pace with advances in the most technologically advanced societies. In the North the rate of technological development is very high and is supported by enormous resources...The situation may improve for poorer countries but the disparity between North and South is not likely to go away.

Hamelink's assertion cements the observation that the newness of technologies is relative and contingent upon a particular context and that technological revolutions themselves are historically relative (Lister et al. 2003). In fact, the distinct developments of the mobile phone between the developed and the developing countries offer a good example for this observation. In the economically developed countries 'third generation (3G) mobile phones include broadband Internet connection, multimedia messaging, text messaging, mobile pictures and more importantly location awareness' (de Souza e Silva 2006: 109). Conversely, in a significant number of economically developing countries, mobile phones continue to be used primarily for voice communication, as portable telephones, hence 'for cell phone manufactures like Nokia, Africa offers a market for less sophisticated models of phones' (Mudhai 2003). Under these circumstances, 'affirming that mobile devices are *new* interfaces through which communities are formed seems odd' (de Souza e Silva 2006: 109, emphasis added). Thus, as Jankowski et al. (1999: 6) posit:

> The notion of newness – in reference to 'new' media is a relative concept. It, too, demands critique, particularly in the light of the complex and diverse histories of technological change – change which affects both hardware and soft ware, institutions and practices.

This understanding sensitises us to the analytical distinction between the 'old' and 'new' technologies, but more importantly, diffuses common generalisations and assumptions by placing 'new' technologies in Africa within context. In the words of Nyamnjoh (2005a: 4), Africa's creativity simply cannot allow for simple dichotomies or distinctions between *old* and *new* technologies, 'since its people are daily modernising the indigenous and indigenising the modern with novel outcomes. No technology seems too used to be used, just as nothing is too new to be blended with

the old for even newer results'. For this reason, as Silverstone (1999: 11) advises, 'new media technologies, in their supposed novelty, have to be tested not just against the old, but in the context of both the past and present, against the social and the human'.

As already noted, in the present study 'new' technologies refer specifically to the Internet, email and the mobile phone. Although these technologies have gained wide usage globally, in Africa there is a sense in which they hold some semblance of 'newness', which renders them distinct from the scenario obtaining in the economically developed countries (see Nyamnjoh 2005a). The point to note is that some ICTs, which have long been overtaken by the dramatic changes in technology in the economically developed countries, still retain their 'newness' in the economically developing countries as they remain a 'pipe dream' for most people both in terms of access and application. As Mutula (2005) observes, most communication technologies are still not accessible to remote parts of sub-Saharan African countries. Indeed, as Sasole (2003) suggests, the very notion of the 'digital divide' renders this awareness important and helps explain the uniqueness of the broader African context with respect to new technologies. In the discussion that follows, I therefore take a brief glimpse at the notion of the 'digital divide'.

2.1.1 The 'digital divide'

The concept of the 'digital divide' became the subject of scholarly focus among researchers concerned with the unequal access to, and use of, the new media in the middle of late 1990s (van Dijk 2006). It is a heavily contested concept whose definition has been far from being homogenous or univocal (Gunkel 2003). Attempts to reach a consensus definition point to the complexity of the nature of the divide itself. Its common usage has, however, been in reference to 'the gap between those who do and those who do not have access to new forms of information technology' (van Dijk 2006: 221-222). It gives prominence to infrastructural (technical) discrepancies and the question of physical 'access' to computer mediated technologies between regions. Although most often the technologies referred to are computers and their networks, other digital technologies such as the mobile phone have also been incorporated in recent debates. It has to be stated, however, that even within this common usage of the concept, there has been considerable equivocation as its meaning has changed from study to study thus prompting Gunkel (2003: 504) to argue that 'the "digital divide" is originally and persistently plural'. Its meaning has

historically shifted from simplistic notions of 'technical' differences between economically rich and poor countries to sophisticated approaches that go beyond simple technical differences (van Dijk 2005; 2006).

Most scholars concerned with the social problem of the digital divide appear driven by 'technicist' approaches (see Gyamfi 2005; Ojo 2005). Both Gunkel (2003) and van Dijk (2005; 2006) argue that the term 'digital divide' echoes some kind of technological determinism. Thus, the origins of technological inequalities are commonly located in the 'specific problems of getting physical access to digital technology and that achieving such access for all would solve particular problems in the economy and society' (van Dijk 2006: 222). The weaknesses of this approach, as van Dijk (2005) further argues, lies in the fact that it still has to be demonstrated that people cannot live as normal citizens without using digital technology as numerous old technologies and media are available to do the same things.

A number of researchers warn against the pitfalls of the digital divide metaphor. For van Dijk (2005; 2006), the metaphor suggests a simple divide between two clearly divided groups with a yawning gap between them. In addition, it suggests that the gap is difficult to bridge, and gives the impression that the divide is about absolute inequalities between those included and those excluded. However, '[a]lthough the digital divide is often characterised as the gap between the 'information haves' and 'have-nots', it is not the case that one either possesses information or does not. Instead, 'there is significant variability in the forms of information which one possesses and the modes of access and use' (Gunkel 2003: 506). As Mutula (2004: 122) observes, the popular understanding of the digital divide 'fails to address issues of *use* and *quality of access* that have become increasingly pertinent' (emphasis added). The 'digital divide' is more sophisticated than the definition implies. Thus, despite the centrality of the popular definition and understanding of the digital divide, 'to base our conceptualisation of inequalities...solely in terms of a polemic set of technologically "rich" and "poor" individuals is too limited and rudimentary an analysis' (Selwyn 2004: 345). Taking this argument a step further, Gunkel (2003: 507) posits that '[a]lthough the dichotomies of the digital divide have been expedient for describing sociotechnological differences, the binary form necessarily risks oversimplifying the situation and neglecting the important variations that exist in the object of study'.

It is necessary, therefore, that we attempt to move beyond the prevailing dichotomous notions of the digital divide towards a more elaborate and realistic

understanding of inequalities in the information age. As van Dijk (2006: 223) avers, there is a need 'to reframe the overly technical concept of the digital divide and to pay more attention to social, physiological and cultural backgrounds'. In taking this direction, some researchers have extended the notion of 'access' to include '(digital) skills or competencies and media or technology use and applications' (van Dijk 2006: 224). Others suggest that the digital divide should be seen as a 'social stratification' which indicates that the 'divide' is not really a binary division, but a continuum based on different degrees of access to information technology (Gunkel 2003: 507). Thus, a broader and more inclusive definition considers the multidimensional inequalities in 'access' and use of the technologies between regions by seeing the 'digital divide' as a reflection of a more complex problem that mirrors widespread illiteracy, poverty, infrastructure, management, policy 'regimes', health, content and other socio-economic and political issues (Adam & Wood 1999; Roos & Jordaan 2006). The 'inequalities are indicative of larger, structural inequalities between Africa and the developed world' (Wasserman 2005: 174; see also Gyamfi 2005; Ojo 2005). Consequently, the notion of the 'digital divide' not only refers to inequalities in new technology access but also to the vast differences between regions of the world.

This multidimensional conception of the digital divide, as the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) (2002) observes, recognises the so-called 'new' or 'quality' digital divide that is not attributable to the lack of equipment or connections but to the present form of the technologies – changing from '*basic* to *advanced* communications and from *quantity* to *quality*' (emphasis added). Consequently, as Roos and Jordaan (2006: 4) submit, this sophisticated understanding of the 'digital divide' necessitates the question of why it exists in the first instance. They argue that:

> It is generally acknowledged that wealthier countries can afford to *experiment with* and *adopt new* technology. As these technologies become less expensive, they will be adopted by poorer nations. Therefore, the divide occurs [in part] because of the naturally slow diffusion of technology. (emphasis added, see also Etta & Parvyn-Wamahiu 2003)

This understanding is central in the light of the fast changing nature of technology, where '[a]s soon as the laggards have caught up, the forerunners have already moved further ahead and are using...more advanced technology' (van Dijk 2006: 232). For van Dijk (2005: 49) an important distinction regarding physical access to new

technologies is the type of computer or the type of network connection accessed by users in different contexts. For him:

> It goes without saying that access to a traditional home or game computer, an old PC, or a small computer in a PDA or other handheld device is not the same as access to a powerful, advanced multimedia machine. The same goes for a 28 or 56 KB modem dial-up link to the Internet as compared to a broadband "always on" connection via cable, satellite, or DSL. (van Dijk 2005: 49)

Issues to do with 'access conditions, access points, and types of hardware, software, and services available for particular users make a tremendous difference to the potential applications and the level of inequality between users' (van Dijk 2005: 49; see also Gunkel 2003). It is, therefore, misleading to use the term 'new ICTs' as though they manifest themselves homogeneously across regions. As 'older' and well-established technologies become available and affordable, it appears as if the divide decreases, but when 'new' technologies are introduced, the weaker side of the divide (Africa and the wider economically developing world) experience further marginalisation (Roos & Jordaan 2006). As noted earlier, in the economically developed countries new ICTs are developing at a phenomenal rate: mobile phones, for instance, are driving the processes of media 'convergence' alongside the Internet in developments less pervasive in Africa where new ICTs are often subject to economic and infrastructural hindrances (Nyamnjoh 2005a). This means that their nature and form and the way they are used has to be viewed in relation to these realities.

There is a need to acknowledge that the term 'digital divide' is 'originally equivocal, irreducibly plural, and constantly flexible. It names not one problem, but a changing constellation of different and not always related concerns' (Gunkel 2003: 516). Although the concept is undoubtedly controversial, it brings to attention the complexities and nuances of inequalities in access to particular technological opportunities. It has been successful in bringing the subject of unequal access to new technologies on the agenda of scholarly discussions, among other strategic platforms (van Dijk 2005).

For the present study, the term 'digital divide' marks an awareness of the distinct 'worlds' in which new technologies are deployed and appropriated. As Gunkel (2003: 510) rightly observes '[n]o matter how the digital divide has been

defined, it assumes radical and persistent differences between distinct socioeconomic forms and defines these differences technologically'.

To further situate the study, the next section focuses on emerging research on new technologies and journalism in Africa. It draws parallels with research emerging outside Africa.

2.2 New ICTs and journalism in Africa

Research on new technologies and mainstream journalism practice in Africa can be loosely divided between researchers who see new technologies as a 'goldmine' that presents African journalists with new opportunities for improved practice (Berger 1996) and those who see new technologies as challenging and threatening traditional normative practices of journalism (Chari 2009). The former observe that, despite the problems African journalists face with regard to new technologies, they are making every effort to use them for professional purposes. Amongst these scholars, Berger (2005: 1) examines how Southern African journalists deploy new technologies and argues that they are 'are far from being mired in "backwardness" or passively awaiting external salvation in regard to attempts to use ICTs'. Nyamnjoh (2005a: 4) concurs, arguing that Africans are determined to be part of the technological revolutions of the modern world and 'the way forward is in recognising the creative ways in which Africans merge their traditions with exogenous influences to create realities that are not reducible to either but enriched by both' (see also Nyamnjoh 2005b). Similarly, Mudhai and Nyabuga (2001), writing from a Kenyan context, note that journalists were among the early adopters of the Internet that and they seem to have been successful in publicising its many positive aspects in other sectors.

Mchakulu (2007) takes a more empirical approach, investigating the impact of new technologies (mobile phones, computers and the Internet) on the professional practices of Malawian journalists. He focuses on the way the journalists' use of new technologies has resulted in the transformation of the 'profession into one that is more mobile'. For him, despite the limitations posed by the financial costs of accessing new technology services, the journalists see the technologies as indispensable to their work. He, however, argues that, while these technologies have helped to improve and mobilise Malawian journalists' professional practice, 'it is a fallacy to believe that all their work can be done through technological intervention as physical space and face-to-face meetings remain essential and under-gird journalists' professional practice' (see also Adamolekun 1996).

Focusing on the impact of specific technological features on journalism practice, Mudhai (2004) and Kupe (2003) emphasise the centrality of the interactivity of online editions of African newspapers, which allow users to comment, give feedback or vote on controversial issues. These scholars contend that the interactivity of new technologies has enabled journalists in Africa to move closer to engaging with readers – it is changing news production processes and our understanding of who produces news (see also Kupe 2006). Esipisu and Kariithi (2007) concur by positing that 'the rapid development of new technologies has challenged the traditional definition of journalism, forcing the mainstream or mass media to adapt or face extinction'. For Moyo, D (2009) the ability to engage with news and with other news consumers is giving readers greater influence over the material covered in the newspapers while at the same time providing journalists with an opportunity to access ideas and leads from the readers. It is important to point out that the debate on the impact of interactivity on journalism has been explored in greater depth in Western journalism scholarship. Pavlik (2000: 235-236), for example, argues that we are seeing the emergence of a 'two-way symmetric model of communication [in which] the flow of communication is...much more a dialog between both or all parties to communication'. For him, the interactivity of the new media is 'bringing about a shift in the relationships between or among news organisations and their publics' (Pavlik 2005: 246).

Some scholars focus on the generation of news content by everyday citizens, otherwise not professional journalists, who collect and share information through platforms afforded by the digital media – a practice commonly known as *citizen journalism*. They argue that 'the citizen journalist is to some extent resisting the formal or institutional ways of packaging information, while at the same time responding to the nature of the technology at hand' (Moyo, D 2009: 7). These sentiments echo Atton's (2007) observation in the British context that citizen journalists present a challenge to media power since mainstream journalists no longer wield a monopoly of news production. Similarly, Hermida and Thurman (2007) contend that editors of the British news media are undergoing an uncomfortable transition as they struggle to integrate content produced by ordinary people in their professional news structures: '[w]hile there has been a change of attitude towards user-generated content, there remains a reluctance to relinquish the traditional gatekeeping role of journalists' (Hermida & Thurman 2007).

The mobile phone has also assumed a central position in these debates. Scholars argue that the technology is being used to varying degrees by citizens to contribute to newsmaking. Individuals with mobile phones and other media tools are able to capture 'news' in real or close-to-real time – much more immediately and rapidly than professional journalists (Verclas & Mechael 2008). The SMS (text messaging) function, in particular, is seen as 'the most potent tool for alternative communication in the developing world today' (Moyo, D 2009: 6) as it is 'less expensive (and more reliable) than making a phone call or using voice mail services' (Verclas & Mechael 2008: 11). In this sense, it is posited that the 'mobile phone [is facilitating] professional journalism and [allowing] citizens to participate in the process of reporting' (Verclas & Mechael 2008: 8). Bivens (2008: 119) observes that in Zimbabwe '...information sent from mobile phones makes up some of the only news coverage mainstream media organisations can acquire'. Similarly, Esipisu and Khaguli (2009: 66) note that in the 2008 Zimbabwean elections, the '*SMS was about the only tool available* to the opposition parties, as the country's mass media – owned by government – offered limited or no coverage of opposition messages' (emphasis added).

Although these largely optimistic scholars confirm and highlight the centrality of new technologies in African journalism practice, they seem to overlook the complexities entrenched in the professional and organisational worlds in which African journalists operate. They therefore miss the deeper and more sophisticated nuances of how journalists are deploying new technologies. Furthermore, they do not locate journalism within 'journalism scholarship', in particular, the sociology of journalism, which broadly constitutes the standard against which inquiry into journalism has been evaluated (see Seelig 2002; Zelizer 2004). Consequently, they overlook factors internal to journalism as a profession and a discipline and focus instead on factors external to the profession, which (notwithstanding their importance) only serve to explicate how the broader social formation shapes the deployment of new technologies by African journalists. As Aviles and Leon (2002) advise us, the role of technology should be understood not only within its social and cultural factors, but also within its professional context too.

Despite the optimism, the foregoing researchers are not blind to the challenges facing African journalists in effectively deploying new technologies. In particular, they highlight that the technologies used by African journalists are limited and in many cases the journalists have to share limited resources. In most African

newsrooms, for example, only a few terminals are connected to the Internet hence journalists take turns to use the Internet (Hlatshwayo 2005; Nyamnjoh 2005a). With regard to mobile phones, the disincentive for the journalists is that most of them are not subsidised by their work places for using personal mobile phones for professional purposes. Rather, only senior journalists are given meaningful monthly airtime allowances (Berger 2005; Mabweazara 2005a). This scenario reinforces Dutton's (1996) observation that the new media tend to be implemented in ways that follow and reinforce prevailing structures of power and influence within organisations (see also Obijiofor 1996).

Scholars sceptical of the diffusion of new technologies into journalism practice tend to emphasise the challenges and threats that the technologies pose to the normative standards of journalism. Chari (2009) argues that the euphoria and opportunities associated with the Internet in Africa have tended to eclipse the ethical dilemmas and challenges associated with the medium. For him, the Internet has fundamentally transformed journalism practice as '[j]ournalists no longer feel compelled to adhere to the ethical canons' (2009: 1) of the profession. Factual errors, fabrications and plagiarism have become much more prevalent than before (Chari 2009). In the same line of thought, Mudhai and Nyabuga (2001) posit that the problem of plagiarising stories from the Internet and the difficulties faced in trying to authenticate online sources raises questions of news accuracy and credibility. Kasoma (1996: 95) expresses misgivings by arguing that the 'the information superhighway has made journalists practise their profession in a hurry as they strive to satisfy the world's craving for more and quicker news' resulting in 'the humaneness of journalism' increasingly giving way to the expediencies of cut-throat financial competition.

For these critics, African journalists should pay particular attention to accuracy and take great caution when using Internet content. Thus, Mudhai (2004) warns that the news media in Africa need to display more commitment towards content creation rather than taking the shortcut of filling space with stale material from the Internet. These sentiments echo some views from Western journalism scholarship, where scholars have 'accepted the discourse of the [new media] as the major player in redefining and rethinking "traditional" journalism' (Deuze & Dimoudi 2002: 86). Deuze (2003: 203) writes: 'we can now identify the effect that [the new media] has had on the profession and its culture(s)'. Writing from an American context, Pavlik (2005: 245) observes that with the permeation of new technologies into journalism:

'new ethical problems are arising or old ethical concerns take on new meaning'. Thus, as in the developed world, journalists have had to contend with the challenge of verifying online communication such as emails and posts in newsgroups in an environment where verification of information is extremely difficult due to the often anonymous, fast-paced communication involved (Deuze 2003; Allan 2005).

Other researchers observe that new technologies are reconfiguring newsroom relationships and traditions. They argue that ICTs are redefining the typical trend whereby new comers would share information – from contacts and approaches to news stories – with veterans and vice versa (Mukendi 2005). The argument is that new technologies have turned journalists into individualistic people and have reduced the chances of colleagues communicating face-to-face.

Citizen journalism in particular has also received scathing criticism. Some critics derisively argue that embracing citizen journalism is 'like handing a man off the street a scalpel and authorising him to perform surgery' (Foss 2008) as citizens are under no professional obligation to use professional norms such as accuracy and balance. Similarly, some researchers have argued that citizen journalism blurs the distinction between ordinary people and professionals. Goldfain and van der Merwe (2006: 104-115), in particular, argue that the major weakness of citizen journalism 'is the lack of quality control' hence they have not built up the trust enjoyed by the traditional media.

The limitations of the research explored in this section challenges researchers to closely examine how African journalists deploy new technologies in situ. To achieve this, we need a conceptual framework that maintains sensitivity to the professional and social dynamics in which African journalists operate.

Since the broader objective of this chapter is to place the present study within a broader African new ICT research frame, the next section examines research emerging outside journalism. This not only locates the extent to which new technologies have been adopted in the practice of journalism by comparison with other sectors, but also demonstrates that research into new technologies and journalism, in many ways, echoes research outside journalism.

2.3 The promise of new ICTs for Africa: mixed opinions

Some scholars have argued that the impact of the Internet in Africa is disproportionately greater than its overall spread and that this is partly a result of the unique socio-political, economic and cultural factors that need to be examined in

region-based ICT research (Mudhai 2004). It is also important to note that although the sometimes marginal impact of the new technologies on African realities has led to their omission in discussions on the media in Africa (Nyamnjoh 2005a), mixed opinions about the opportunities and challenges they offer for Africa are manifest (Obijiofor 1996). Scholarly opinions can generally be divided into three categories as follows: those who celebrate new technologies' 'promise' for Africa in ways that resonate with the deterministic discourses of the so-called 'information society'; those who express pessimism; and those who adopt a more cautious and predominantly sociological approach that transcends both the celebratory and pessimistic approaches to new technologies. Collectively, these scholars span diverse sectors ranging from politics to development related issues. I critically examine the three categories in turn below.

Scholars who celebrate new ICTs' promise for Africa argue that the technologies can support the necessary social and economic transformation in Africa and the wider economically developing world (Adamolekun 1996; Etta & Parvyn-Wamahiu 2003). For these scholars, demands for greater job performance, economies of scale and competitive advantage are seen as requiring a 'modernisation' of old systems in order not to be left behind in world development (Adamolekun 1996: 32). Lesame (2005b: 8) argues that mobile phones, for instance, are not only 'bridging the digital-divide in African countries, but [they] are also performing development functions beyond the expectations of the mobile users'.

The underlying assumption for these scholars is that ICTs are requisite for the development of Africa. Madden (2005: xi) thus posits that unless ICTs are widely adopted, 'developing countries will remain unable to compete in the New Economy where the sources of advantage are...the fast adoption of new technological innovation' (see also Adam & Wood 1999; Etta & Parvyn-Wamahiu 2003). In similar vein, Adamolekun (1996: 27) argues that 'the economy has truly become global and it is only wise [for Africa] to hook on to the information superhighway to remain relevant'. Garman (2003: 2) observes that in Africa 'every "new" technology that comes along is embraced with passion, [and] hailed as a saviour for all human ills, and is seen as full of promise alone'.

Following this line of thought, Hedley (1999) observes that both technological infrastructure and the African people's will to make a difference in ICT use are growing and it is possible to reduce the North-South gap to provide greater cultural

balance, and improve the quality of life for African people. Nyamnjoh (2005a: 4) aptly espouses this determination, arguing thus:

> ...because Africa is part of the world, and because its backwardness is less the result of choice than of circumstance, ordinary Africans are determined to be part of the technological revolutions of the modern world, even if this means accessing the information superhighway on foot, horseback, bicycles, bush taxis and second-hand cars, or relying on lifts and the generosity of the super-endowed in the latest sports and fancy cars.

Nyamnjoh's account cements Polikanov and Abramova's (2003: 43) view that Africa is 'a region with very specific "patterns of distribution" and a certain testing ground for the social impacts of new technologies'. However, his romanticisation of African people's determination 'to be part of the technological revolutions of the modern world' (Nyamnjoh 2005a: 4) calls for a close empirical interrogation that pays attention to how socio-cultural dynamics impact on localised uses of the ICTs, as the present study attempts to do.

These celebratory approaches tend to be overly prescriptive and do not take into account the situated nature of the contexts in which the new technologies are deployed in Africa. They place emphasis on what the technologies can do for users and sideline the question of what the people are doing with the new technologies in their respective socio-cultural, political and economic contexts. Thus, as Adesina (2006) argues, while ICTs offer tremendous potential, their predominance in the current development discourse tends to obscure the real problems and impediments Africa faces by failing to address the multidimensional nature of the development crisis.

Contrary to these 'expressions of faith' in new technologies some scholars argue that developing nations have to be extremely careful in contemplating to join the 'bandwagon' in the 'information superhighway' which is navigated through new technologies. Adamolekun (1996: 34-35) warns thus:

> If we must know...[the information superhighway] is full of several booby traps for unwary and unprepared information wayfarers. The sheer great immediacy and drama we now experience and the speed at which we can view what is happening world wide...makes it extremely difficult to easily process the data we have on our hands at any given time.

These sentiments are echoed by other ambivalent Afrocentric scholars who argue that with the emergence of new technologies Africans are becoming increasingly less analytical consumers and more passive on-lookers. Mutula (2004: 126) argues that in Africa:

> ...technology is evolving without successfully integrating with its local cultural practices. For example, ICT deployment has not taken into consideration the continent's poor power infrastructure and inefficient electricity supply. Similarly, software applications are based on Western models and do not take into account local cultural sensitivities.

Woherem (1993) concurs by arguing that much of the technology in Africa (especially sub-Saharan Africa) was transplanted without the provision for re-engineering to suit local conditions. Some critics further argue that the dominance of English on the Internet may result in the cultural marginalisation of groups whose languages and cultures do not exist on the Internet. They contend that this could have a homogenising effect on local cultures (Lesame 2005a; see also Okigbo 1995).

Odufa expresses similar pessimism at the use of mobile phone text messages (SMS) in the Nigerian context. He argues that the short language used in SMS is making Nigerians 'ruder by the day' (cited in Lesame 2005a: 211-212). For him, short messages eliminate the human elements of ordinary conversation and impact negatively on human and written communication because people no longer want to express themselves in normal language, preferring shortened versions of language via text messages (ibid.). This view echoes Rogerson (2003)'s position that mobile phones are having significant impact on the use of language. He submits that 'we are seeing a simplification of language which endangers our linguistic culture and heritage, and results in a loss of nuance, meaning and subtle shades of difference'. For this reason Adamolekun (1996: 35) calls for the need to 'recognise the responsibility to help [African] people understand, evaluate and appreciate the advantages and disadvantages of each technology, and also take due care to use each one appropriately and strategically'.

Adopting a more cautious sociological approach that neither celebrates nor disparages the diffusion of new technologies into the African context, Wasserman (2005: 174) asserts that:

> Just as one should avoid a crude technological determinism in exploring the positive potential of new media such as the Internet, one should also not

> overstate the negative aspects...and lose sight of the innovative use of these technologies...on the [African] continent.

He further suggests that when assessing the potential new technologies hold for Africa, 'connectivity problems should prevent overly optimistic analyses' (ibid.). Thus, whether one takes an optimistic or pessimistic view of ICTs in Africa, the question of 'real access' including connectivity as well as the necessary skills and technological literacy, should be considered seriously (Wasserman 2005: 165). Consequently, the particularities of the specific users and the context within which they deploy the technologies will have to be taken into consideration when assessing the impact of new technologies in Africa (Wasserman 2005). This approach calls for a nuanced, predominantly sociological, understanding of new technologies which avoids taking a position for or against their potential impact on society.

For some scholars who follow this direction, while 'it is no exaggeration to say that some African countries are already in the league of multimedia, interaction, real-time, digital and narrow band [and in some countries broad band] information systems' (Adamolekun 1996: 32), it is equally true that given the socio-economic conditions prevailing in Africa, new technologies have not yet necessarily permeated all sectors (Okigbo 1995). Thus, as Adamolekun (1996: 30) further observes, many people are still ignorant of the new technologies: 'they still go about their daily chores the way they know best' – using the well known and established traditional methods of communication. The most important tools of this system are face-to-face communication (Nyamnjoh 2005a). These views find support in the theory of 'amplifications' which suggests that the 'new' media only serve to 'enlarge and accelerate processes already in place in societies and organisations rather than create entirely new forces' that radically break from the old ways (Wasserman 2005: 165).

Thus, notwithstanding the promise new technologies hold for Africans, the traditional modes of communication remain in force. New technologies have, for instance, barely replaced face-to-face communication which is well suited for a 'largely illiterate population in African countries' (Adamolekun 1996: 31). Following this observation, one can surmise that the deployment of new technologies in Africa is far from supplanting the traditional forms of communication. Rather the new technologies are complementing the traditional forms of communication and the nature of the connection is structured by the context in which the technologies are deployed. This scenario informs the need to reconstitute the notion of the 'digital

divide' (discussed earlier) to incorporate the 'divides' within and among the people of Africa (Kupe 2007).

Despite the mixed opinions on the opportunities new technologies offer for Africa, their potential benefits and contributions are never disputed by both critics and advocates (Obijiofor 1996; Ojo 2005). The Internet, email and mobile phones have particularly been found to be empowering tools for individual users, regardless of their profession (Adam & Wood 1999). Thus, regardless of the challenges faced by Africans, there are significant attempts at adopting and deploying new technologies in different settings although '[their impact] on users has not been well documented' (Adam & Wood 1999: 307).

The indicators used to reach these conclusions, such as Internet subscriptions, the relatively high and rapidly growing use of public access services such as cybercafés have, however, been contested (Etta & Parvyn-Wamahiu 2003; Ojo 2005). Nonetheless, the indicators and the conclusions reached provide a backdrop against which one can examine the deployment of new technologies in Africa by drawing attention to the distinctiveness of Africa which structures the nature and form of the deployment of new technologies.

The following section gives a broad overview of emerging discourses on the deployment of new technologies in Africa. It places emphasis on the limits and insights emerging from the research, which spans different settings and contexts and draws parallels with the goals of this study.

2.4 Local context appropriations of ICTs in Africa

Localised uses of technologies are defined by the broader social structure in which they are used. Journalism as a practice is inextricably attached to this wider social context whence news is sourced (Williams & Edge 1996; McNair 1998; Lievrouw 2002; Flew 2002). It is therefore imperative to examine the use of new ICTs in arenas outside journalism. As Lieuvrouw and Livingstone (2002: 1) observe, new technologies 'have become everyday technologies, thoroughly embedded and routinised in the societies where they are...used'. Thus, the deployment of new ICTs within the larger society has implications for their deployment in 'situated' news making processes.

As the discussion in the preceding section shows, awareness of the value of new technologies in Africa has been on the increase. Changes in perception from initial resistance and mystification to an understanding of the value of the

technologies is a notable development (Adam & Wood 1999). However, as Adam and Wood further note, awareness of the value of new technologies did not lead to their 'immediate application' (Adam & Wood 1999: 311) or the substitution of older technologies, as was the case with typewriters and computers. The adoption of the technologies involved a substantial learning cycle and a level of investment that was difficult to achieve. For many institutions, it was initially difficult to cope with the need for continuous change in skills (Adam & Wood 1999). However, as noted earlier, emerging research shows how Africans have adopted and are deploying new ICTs in various settings and sectors.

For Nyamnjoh (2005a), the appropriation of ICTs in Africa (notwithstanding the problems faced) is entwined in the socio-cultural fabric of Africans. He highlights the high degree of innovation among Africans in the appropriation of the limited ICT resources available to them. Prominent among the enthusiasts in ICT deployment are journalists and aspiring journalists who use the Internet to research and send stories to their local newsrooms and beyond (Nyamnjoh 2005a; Etta & Parvyn-Wamahiu 2003).

Nyamnjoh notes that the innovative use of new technologies among Africans hinges on the local cultural values of solidarity, interconnectedness and interdependence. These values make it possible for people to access the Internet and its opportunities without necessarily being directly connected. In many situations, it suffices for an individual to be connected in order for whole groups and communities to benefit (Nyamnjoh 2005a). Citing the example of the Cameroonian city of Bamenda where the ICT infrastructure is 'grossly inadequate' and defective, he observes that people:

> literate and illiterate alike, eager to stay in touch with relations, friends and opportunities within Cameroon and in the diaspora, daily flood the few Internet points with messages to be typed and emailed for them. Replies to their emails are printed out, and addressed and pigeon holed for them by the operators...What is note worthy, however, is that the high connection charges do not seem to affect those determined to stay in touch with the outside world. (Nyamnjoh 2005a: 205)

The same is true of other technologies such as cell phones. Diasporic Africans or migrants collectively supply a free phone to someone in a village whom they can call to give and receive messages from family and friends. Nyamnjoh (2004: 54) writes about the phenomenon of 'single-owner-multiple-user' in West Africa where most

cell phone owners tend to serve as 'points-of-presence' that link their community with others paying or simply passing through them to make calls to relatives, friends within or outside the country. Thus, although Internet connectivity and cell phone ownership in Africa are lower compared to other regions, Africa's cultural values of sociality, interconnectedness, interdependence and conviviality make it possible for others to access ICTs and the opportunities they bring without necessarily being connected or owning the technologies themselves (Nyamnjoh 2005a). This scenario finds support in Adam and Wood's (1990) view that people always adapt and learn and constraints are not set aside as problems and difficulties, but are faced as challenges.

Nyamnjoh further contends that the creative appropriation of new technologies among Africans 'is not only informed by cultures amenable to conviviality, interdependence and negotiation, but also by histories of deprivation, debasement and cosmopolitanism' (Nyamnjoh 2004: 54; see also 2005a). These sentiments are, to some measure, echoed by researchers who highlight how African journalists (operating in ICT-impoverished newsrooms) yield benefit from ICTs through sharing limited resources. With reference to Southern African journalists, Berger (2005: 9) notes that 'even as regards unwired computers, in many cases journalists queue to share these rather than have personal workstations'. Hlatshwayo (2005: 72) concurs, noting that Swaziland journalists share 'information on how to use the Internet effectively in their practice...all [is] done in the spirit of the early adopters who [share] innovations with their colleagues'.

Adam and Wood (1999) discuss the impact of ICTs in sub-Saharan Africa in the context of the concrete, historical and environmental circumstances of the individual users. Using a grounded theory approach they focus on users within their ICT applications contexts and identify diverse aspects of the impact of ICTs which include 'actions centred around users' (Adam & Wood 1999: 310) and their reactions to the technologies. They argue that the creativity of users and their actions within a variety of cultural, social, political and economic settings are crucial elements in the application of ICTs, yet they are the least addressed; the 'social relationship between various actors and the creativity of users in dealing with constraints' (ibid.) are integral to the effective deployment of new ICTs. Thus the deployment of ICTs is influenced by a combination of factors (intrinsic and extrinsic) to users' situated circumstances. While intrinsic factors are entrenched in specific professional or individual contexts, the extrinsic factors fall within the 'larger matrix of social and

economic relations between...institutions and groups and are often difficult to control by actions centred around users' (Adam & Wood 1999: 310).

Adam and Wood take into account the agency of the individual user of ICTs within the broader ecology of social relations which structure one's actions in the wider social formation. They suggest that any assessment of the deployment or impact of new ICTs has to take this broader perspective into consideration. They conclude that:

> Leapfrogging in ICT will depend on the attitudes and abilities of the users and policy makers and the ability of each country to overcome the large number of social, political, technical, infrastructural and economic challenges. (Adam & Wood 1999: 314)

As observed earlier, some researchers have examined the appropriations of new technologies in Africa from a political point of view, foregrounding the opportunities which the technologies offer as alternative arenas for articulating political issues that otherwise would not find space in mainstream communication channels. Drawing on the Zambian and Kenyan civil society's use of ICTs in political participation, Mudhai argues that civil society organisations in Africa are among the largest ICT users. He writes:

> Despite limitations of resources and cost of Internet access, larger numbers of African NGOs, both on the continent and in the Diaspora, are making effective use of Internet communications tools, including e-mail and the web. (Mudhai 2004: 319)

Mudhai emphasises that the deployment of new technologies by the African civil society is invariably shaped by the socio-political environment in which they operate. He argues that the environment structures the nature and form of the appropriations of the technologies for political purposes (Mudhai 2004). For Mudhai (2004: 320), when assessing the use of new technologies in Africa, 'attempts should be made to take into consideration local conditions' or the 'structured contingency' (ibid.) of the circumstances in which the technologies are deployed. This approach is similar to the present study, though the latter shifts the focus to journalism and broadly draws on sociological approaches to journalism and technology to critically examine how Zimbabwean mainstream print journalists deploy new technologies in their day-to-day professional roles.

Writing from a South African context, Wasserman (2005: 174) takes an approach similar to Mudhai to explore the potential of new technologies to 'amplify' the work done by social movements and activists. He concludes that activist groupings on the African continent are innovatively using new technologies. Moyo, L (2009) examines how media institutions, civic organisations and the ordinary citizens are using the new media for information gathering, dissemination and presentation to advance their struggles for democracy and human rights in Zimbabwe.

While there are apparent differences between ICT studies rooted in politics and the present study, it is important to note that the studies independently draw important conclusions which suggest that if ICTs are to work, they have to be structured around the needs and perspectives of their users who are situated within specific social, cultural and political contexts. Moyo. L (2009), for instance, argues that the uses of the new media technologies in Zimbabwe are, to a certain extent, subject to social shaping where the dominant social forces use the technologies in ways that promote discourses which protect their political and economic interests. This conclusion, in part, reinforces the sociological thrust to both technologies and journalism taken up in the present study.

It is important to note that new technology research in Africa has generally given more attention to the Internet and its associated applications; very little attention has been given to the mobile phone. This is despite the mobile phone's pervasiveness and high penetration rate in most African countries (Etta & Parvyn-Wamahiu 2003; Mutula 2005; de Bruijn et al. 2009). Although I have briefly pointed to the significance of the mobile phone in Africa, it is important to discuss emerging discourses on its adoption and appropriation.

2.4.1 Mobile phone use and culture in Africa

The growth in the use of mobile phones in Africa in recent years has attracted the attention of social scientists, with most researchers observing that the use of mobile phones has grown to outnumber landline and Internet use (International Telecommunications Union 2002; Mutula 2005; Owens 2006). Etta and Parvyn-Wamahiu (2003), highlight that the mobile phone penetration rate has risen sharply with the total number of subscribers reaching 24 million in 2001. Similarly, de Bruijn et al. (2009: 11) observe that '1 in 50 Africans had access to a mobile phone in 2000 and by 2008 the figure was 1 in 3'. For these researchers, the rise in mobile phone uptake in Africa 'demonstrates the unmet need for basic voice services, which state-

run fixed network operators have been unable to fulfil in their long years of monopoly' (Etta & Parvyn-Wamahiu 2003: 22). The portability of the mobile phone and its inherent suitability for remote areas with poor infrastructure and unmet demand for telephone access has also been key in driving the growth in its use (Scott et al. 2004). The technology has thus 'provided a panacea for the endless challenge of providing universal access to landline telephony services, given the slow and often-paralysed diffusion of fixed telecommunications networks [in Africa]' (Moyo, D 2009: 556). Governments have also been more 'forthcoming in liberalising cellular markets than [in] loosening decades-old stranglehold on the fixed networks' (Mudhai 2003).

Thus, the shift in attention to the mobile phone by researchers has been a direct result of its rapid spread and impact in Africa compared to the Internet, which has tended to represent the most widely discussed, and perhaps most significant manifestation of the new media (Flew 2002; Lievrouw & Livingstone 2002). Some scholars have suggested that empirical enquiry into the mobile phone has been slow partly due to 'complexities of conceptualisation' (Mudhai 2003) and the absence of a clear method, theory or concept to closely examine its appropriations in specific settings. Cooper et al. (2002) argue that part of the theoretical lacuna has resulted from the mobile phone's close connection with the older more routine and mundane technologies like the fixed phone:

> In comparison with other technologies, the mobile phone has somewhat equivocal status, and is difficult to conceptualise. It seems to belong to the category of 'new media', but much of that literature is not pertinent, for mobile phones, resembling in part its ancestor the fixed-line phone seems relatively transparent, at least at an intuitive phenomenological level: speaking on the phone appears so natural that the mediating technology is often forgotten. (Cooper et al. 2002: 288)

In general, there seems to be consensus among new ICT researchers in Africa that no other technology, not even the Internet has changed lives and work as much as the mobile phone (Mudhai 2004). Writing from a Sudanese context, Brinkman et al. (2009: 83) point out that '[i]n its brief history, the mobile phone has had consequences for the way in which social differentiation is conceptualised. Some people regard it as an "equalising" force...lessening the gap between the rich and the poor'. Nyamnjoh (2005a: 209) argues that 'the dramatic increase in the sale and theft of cell phones is

an indication that this technology has been eagerly grasped by [Africans] exploring ways of denying exclusion its smile of triumph'. For Nyamnjoh, the mobile phone has become the long arm of village communities, capable of reaching even the most distant and reluctant 'sons and daughters of the soil' (2005a: 209) trapped in urban spaces with requests for the development of the home village. Poor and urban dwellers in townships and informal settlements are using the mobile phone 'creatively' to stay in touch with relatives and maintain healthy communications with their roots (Nyamnjoh 2004; 2005a).

Nyamnjoh further notes that the distinctive cultural characteristics of Africa have influenced the adoption and appropriations of the mobile phone and even those who cannot afford the costs involved are benefiting 'thanks to the solidarity of the local cultures' (Nyamnjoh 2005a: 209). Expressing similar sentiments Scott et al. (2004) and Gray (2006) state that informal sharing with family members and friends provides access to mobile services even to those who cannot afford to acquire their own. Consequently, for these researchers, when examining mobile phone use in Africa, it is not enough to just look at its spread (its teledensity) but to also examine the cultural context within which it is deployed. The appropriation of the mobile phone is, thus, no exception to the axiom that: 'cultural characteristics play an important role in how people make sense of their social reality' (Campbell 2007: 346).

The pervasiveness of the mobile phone in Africa has resulted in innovative and creative appropriations in diverse contexts and settings through increasing the options and possibilities of obtaining information (Pelckmans 2009; Bivens 2008). Some scholars note that the mobile phone has been adapted to the local context needs and situations of African users. Thus, in addition to the prepaid system of low denomination 'scratch cards' perfectly matched to the economic situation of many Africans (Gray 2006), mobiles offer potentially cheap means of communication especially through the use of Short Message Service (SMS) and 'beeping'. The 'beeping' culture, in particular, constitutes a typical example of how local-context-factors shape mobile phone use in Africa.

According to Donner (2005) 'beeps' are used to convey complex messages; the caller may intend the receiver to call back or may just use it to indicate 'safe arrival at destination'. Pelckmans (2009: 28-29) submits that 'beeping' is a practice that 'puzzles many foreigners...as it is embedded in a context of different economic resources tied up with ideas about reciprocity, such as who takes care of or is in

charge of whom' given that people who are normally 'beeped' are those considered to always have (air time) money at their disposal. This observation further reinforces the view that technologies are 'transformed under the influence of local creative usages' (Brinkman et al. 2009: 88), and, more specifically, that 'ideologies of phone use are embedded in...prevailing social norms' (Pelckmans 2009: 46; see also Nkwi 2009).

The text message (SMS) has been termed 'the most potent tool for alternative communication' in Africa (Moyo, D 2009: 556). This is mainly because of its affordability by the wider majority and its expediency and reliability in contexts where poor network connectivity makes it difficult to make a phone call or use voice mail services. Gerber (2005: 34) observes that in South Africa, during the 2001 Christmas period, the use of the SMS to send Christmas messages 'surpassed the use of traditional cards by 200 percent'. He surmises that this was mainly due to its convenience and low cost. Some researchers note that the SMS technology is also being leveraged to varying degrees by the mainstream press in Africa especially 'as a tool for interacting directly with readers' (Moyo, D 2009: 556).

In repressive African countries, the SMS also 'has been used as a mobilising tool that allows cheap, fast and unrestricted dissemination of information' (Moyo, D 2009: 556-557). Citing Zimbabwe as an example, Esipisu and Khaguli (2009: 66) note that during the 2008 general elections the 'SMS was about the only tool available to the opposition parties, as the country's mass media...offered limited or no coverage of opposition messages'. This point is also explored by Bivens (2008: 119) who observes that in Zimbabwe 'information sent through the mobile phones makes up some of the only news coverage mainstream media organisations can acquire'. Similarly, Moyo, D (2009) points to the creative appropriations of the SMS technology by Zimbabwean citizens to exchange information in the wake of delays in the announcement of election results in 2008.

It is important to highlight that overemphasis on the diffusion and appropriation of mobile phones among Africans masks unresolved issues such as the high costs of mobile phone handsets, access to electricity, and the distribution of rich content via voice and short messages – summed up in the notion of the 'digital divide' discussed earlier in section 2.1.1. Mudhai (2003) thus calls for sensitivity to the wider socio-economic complexities of Africa by acknowledging that mobile phones are strategically deployed within the wider framework of other related ICTs rather than in isolation. For Mudhai, the focus for the developing world should not be on the 'leap frogging-craze or on the buzzwords of 3G and MMS (multimedia messaging service)

but on [the use of] basic phones offering basic services' in keeping with the socio-economic conditions of Africa.

There is consensus among scholars that Africa's communication landscape has undergone tremendous change since the introduction of the mobile telephone and that the technology is 'fulfilling ordinary Africans' aspirations for a voice, as well as [the] continent's desire to bridge the technology gap that's stranded it at the margins of the Information Age' (Mark 2001). There is the need, however, to empirically examine some of these views. It remains to be seen, for instance, how specific mobile phone uses and cultures manifest themselves in situated African contexts (de Bruijn et al. 2009).

2.5 Conclusion

While acknowledging that critical research into new technologies in Africa is slender, this chapter has broadly attempted to give a wider contextual background of the present study by providing an overview of new ICT research in Africa. It has explored the trends and perspectives taken by different researchers in this field and demonstrates that new ICT research in Africa can generally be divided between celebratory discourses that echo the sentiments of technological determinists and pessimistic researchers that simply cite the negative aspects of technologies without critical reflection (Obijiofor 1996). The bulk of the research does not follow a sociological approach that seeks to understand the situated impact of new technologies. In the same manner, research into the interface between new technologies and journalism in many ways follows the path taken in new ICT research outside journalism. It seems that most of the studies are based on the extrapolation of the technologies' impact on journalism in the economically developed world with few studies following a sociological path that penetrates the basic occupational and professional characteristics of the profession in situated African contexts. Consequently, the present study aims to examine the use of new technologies by Zimbabwean mainstream journalists from a micro-sociological perspective that is underpinned by social constructivist approaches to both journalism and technology.

The next chapter presents the theoretical and conceptual framework underpinning the study.

CHAPTER 3

Theorising newswork: framing an approach to understanding the use of new ICTs by African journalists

3.0 Introduction

This chapter provides a critical sociological approach for closely examining how mainstream journalists in Africa deploy new technologies in news production. I argue that in order to understand the impact of new technologies on mainstream journalism practice in Africa, we must put journalists into a critical and analytical context that draws on traditional approaches to both technology and journalism, and begin to question the social relations within which the journalists operate. Thus, while new technologies often invoke claims that new technology research is different from other forms of social science investigation and, so requires unique theoretical and methodological approaches, the chapter shows that changes in approaches are not necessarily always progressive as there is more to gain through the application of traditional methodologies and practices. Therefore, we need not reinvent the wheel by developing new theoretical frameworks when confronted with new trends in established fields of study such as journalism (Deuze 2005). Instead, there is more to gain from deploying traditional theories and identifying possible synergies between the 'old' approaches; the 'new' phenomena and the socio-cultural context in question. However, in doing so, as Rice and Williams (1984) warn, we need to look at the traditional approaches untraditionally. Accordingly, the social constructivist approaches to technology and the sociology of journalism occupy a central part of the chapter as theories which offer a possible direction for mapping an approach for critically examining how mainstream print journalists in Zimbabwe make use of new technologies.

The chapter acknowledges that while the centrality of the sociology of journalism has been contested, it remains a large part of the 'default setting' of journalism inquiry and is referenced widely as the established beginning of journalism studies (Zelizer 2004; Seelig 2002). This theoretical tradition is motivated by sociologists and journalism researchers who seek to understand journalism as a social phenomenon. Schudson, in particular, provides a useful working typology that looks at key trends in the sociology of journalism research. His methods enable a closer examination of journalistic work in non-deterministic ways.

Although research in new technologies has witnessed a shift from technological determinism to social constructivist perspectives, particularly in the 1980s and 90s, technological determinism has continued to implicitly inform the research to date, and this has been particularly pervasive in Third World contexts (Mackay et al. 1995; Woolgar 1996; Williams & Edge 1996; Lievrouw & Livingstone 2002; Lieuvrouw 2004; Wellman 2004; Berger 2005). This chapter suggests that obsession with technological determinism or the 'technicist' workings of the 'information society' that exclusively give privilege to technology simply will not take our understanding far enough (Webster 2000; Henwood et al. 2000; Flew 2002). It is in this light that a wider political sociology of the operations of technologies in society seems even more necessary when posing questions about how journalists in an African context make use of new ICTs.

Against this backdrop, the rest of the chapter unfolds by first making a case for non-reductionist approaches to technology through a critique of the technological determinism thesis. Secondly, it discusses the sociology of journalism and concludes by proposing a framework in terms of which the present study interrogates the impact of new technologies on mainstream print journalism practice in Zimbabwe.

3.1 Towards non-reductionist approaches to new technologies

A wide debate has emerged around how technology relates to society and, particularly, the extent to which it conditions social change. Given the discrepancies in the debates, it is wise to avoid falling into the trap of generalising. In particular, it is important to be aware of the weaknesses of one persuasive approach that has emerged – technological determinism. Up until the late 1970s, this approach provided the dominant explanatory framework in popular accounts of society's use of technologies (MacKenzie & Wajcman 1992). Even though the theory was advanced well before the 'new media age', its critique provides a point of departure for the development of a conceptual framework rooted in its antithesis – the social constructivist thesis.

Technological determinists like Marshall McLuhan argue that particular technical developments, communications technologies or media (or, most broadly, technology in general) are the sole or prime causes of changes in society (Flew 2002; Lievrouw 2002). The theorists view technology as an independent factor developing solely according to an inner technical logic. They have therefore limited their scope of inquiry to monitoring social adjustments emerging from technological progress (Williams & Edge 1996; Flew 2002).

Writing about printing as a 'technology of liberation', one of the most influential proponents of the technological determinism school, Ithiel de Sola Pool (1983: 14) argues that it possesses technical characteristics that make it conducive to individual freedom in such a way as to affect the course of human history. He sees technology as an emancipator which, by itself, and inevitably, will bring freedom, prosperity and enlightenment (de Sola Pool 1983). This line of thinking, however, overlooks the difficulties in the use of new information technologies and their frequent failure to deliver predicted and desired outcomes (Williams & Edge 1996).

Despite its weaknesses, technological determinism has dominated Western models of communication studies which see the use of the new technologies by journalists *inter alia*, as requisite for the development of the Third World, in part, because such theoreticians see it as a tool for overcoming the 'traditionalism' they believe to be a barrier for development (Slack & Fejes 1987; Lievrouw 2002). This has resulted in calls for the increased flow of information to help promote modernisation and self-reliance (Slack & Fejes 1987:202; WSIS 2003). Adherents to the technological determinism theory favour new technologies over traditional means of newsgathering and journalism practice, primarily because, for them, new technologies have the potential to increase journalists' work efficiency and speed (Pavlik 1996). In this line of thought, Reddick and King (1995: 3) submit that:

> The Internet has an array of tools which can enable reporters to access important documents, government data, privately-held information, the world's greatest libraries, expert sources and government officials – without ever leaving their desks.

Although disciples of technological determinism argue for the new technologies' ability to enhance journalistic potential, the position taken up in the present study is that new technologies must be viewed in relation to the socio-cultural, political and economic context in which they are deployed. This way we are able to closely examine the multidimensional factors that shape and constrain the use of technologies by those with only limited access, as well as those who are unable to effectively use them, a scenario broadly prevalent in most developing countries (see Nyamnjoh 1996; Nyamnjoh 2005a; Berger 2005; Mabweazara 2005a). As Castells (2001: 247) points out:

> The differential use of the Internet in the developing world is related to the kind of content that users can find on the Internet, and to the difficulty for

people without sufficient education, knowledge and skills to appropriate the technology for their own interests and values.

Sparks (2001) follows this line of thought in his observation that Internet content providers in the developed world are very much concentrated in a few metropolitan areas. For him, this concentration considerably biases the usefulness and appropriateness of Internet use for much of the world.

With regard to the present study, the conclusions reached by technological determinists only provide a celebratory approach to journalists' use of new technologies and therefore reduce the complexities involved in journalism practice to the 'effects' of the technologies on journalists. This mono-causal explanation hides important dynamics at play in the appropriation of new technologies by journalists in particular social contexts by overlooking the peculiarities of the specific realities within which journalists use new technologies. In fact, studies rooted in technological determinism tend to hide the important dynamics at play in the appropriation of new technologies by journalists in specific circumstances. The influence of human factors and social arrangements in which all innovation is situated are completely disregarded (Duff 2000; forthcoming 2011). Thus, the protracted difficulties in the use of ICTs and their frequent failure to deliver predicted and desired outcomes are overlooked (Williams & Edge 1996). In the context of the present study, a deterministic approach would prevent the researcher from closely examining factors such as: lack of appropriate skills; prohibitive costs and inequitable access to technologies; legal and regulatory challenges; and poor telecommunications infrastructure, all of which shape and constrain the use of new technologies in the economically developing world (see the 'digital divide' discussion in Chapter 2 section 2.1.1).

It is important to note, however, that even though technological determinism is usually referred to 'in a crude, undifferentiated manner' (Lawson 2007: 33), it is common to find discussions that attempt to differentiate between *hard* and *soft* technological determinism (Smith & Marx 1994). This distinction is 'based upon a spectrum of technological determinisms – with movement along the spectrum involving the degree of agency, or the power to effect change, attributed to technology (Lawson 2007: 33). Thus, at the *hard end* of the spectrum technology is seen as having certain intrinsic attributes that allow little scope for human autonomy or choice, and at the other, *soft determinism* emphasises scope for human agency (Smith & Marx 1994; Lawson 2007). This differentiation of technological determinism has,

however, been criticised for being theoretically obscure. For Lawson (2007: 33), 'the immediate problem with such accounts...is that it is not clear why [soft determinism] should be considered to be deterministic at all' given its emphasis on 'human interventions and choice' (ibid.) in technology use.

Despite technological determinism's popular influence among those concerned with the relationship between technology and society, it has increasingly been subject to critical review by many scholars rooted in social constructivism (Bijker 1995; Williams & Edge 1996; Woolgar 1996; Mackay et al. 1995; Lievrouw & Livingstone 2002). The term 'determinism', in particular, has been seen as negative and reductionistic by many social scientists who often use the word as a term of abuse. Dahlberg (2004) thus calls for a non-reductionist analysis that is sensitive to the complex interplay between multiple elements of determinism. For him, entrapment in technological determinism risks losing a larger and more broadly enabling theoretical perspective available in examining deeper social, cultural political and economic factors that shape the deployment of new technologies in specific contexts. This approach acknowledges the multidimensionality of the diverse contexts in which new technologies are deployed and therefore enables a rigorous and critical understanding of their social impact.

The present study takes into account the multidimensionality of determinism as suggested by Dahlberg (2004) and avoids employing one perspective that would result in a narrowly defined study that uncritically celebrates the adoption and use of new technologies in journalism. This approach opens up a more nuanced perspective broadly rooted in the antithesis of technological determinism – *social constructivist* approaches to technology, which take into account the social and cultural realities that impact on the deployment of technologies in specific contexts. As Flew (2002) rightly advises, it is much better to see technologies as social and cultural forms instead of autonomous forces acting on society for good or ill.

Social constructivist approaches draw on a broad range of academic traditions with different theoretical frameworks. Taken together, they share a critical approach towards technological determinism and investigate the ways in which social, institutional, cultural, political and economic factors enhance or inhibit technological use by different groups in society (Bijker 1995; Williams & Edge 1996; McNair 1998; Lievrouw 2002). By emphasising the influence of society on technology, rather than the reverse, social constructivists have attempted to understand the complex relationship between societies and technology (Lievrouw 2002). Social constructivist

approaches underpin a broad range of sociological approaches to news journalism (Tuchman 1991), thus constituting an appropriate theoretical arena for developing a critical approach for understanding how journalists in specific news production contexts use new technologies.

The theorists favour a 'social context approach' useful in directing the researcher to the cultural, educational, socio-economic, organisational and demographic differences that contribute to distinct ways in which ICTs are deployed in journalistic roles (see Mackay et al. 1995; Lievrouw & Livingstone 2002). The starting point, social constructivists argue, should not be a particular technological field, but a particular social context in which technologies are used. A central adage for their research, as Bijker (1995: 6), puts it, is that 'one should never take the meaning of a technical artefact or technological system as residing in the technology itself, instead one must study how technologies are shaped and acquire their meanings in the heterogeneity of social interactions'. Social factors are not merely incidental to the nature and direction of technology deployment; they are intimately tied to it (Woolgar 1996). Thus, the use of ICTs should be seen as constrained or enhanced by a broader range of social, economic and cultural factors. These assumptions acknowledge the interplay of social and technical elements and hence constitute an appropriate guide for mapping a framework to investigate the deployment of new technologies in journalistic routines.

One version of the arguments proffered by social constructivists views technology as embodying the various social factors involved in its design and development. In this way of thinking, technology is regarded as a 'frozen assemblage' of the practices, assumptions, beliefs, language, and other factors involved in its design and manufacture (Woolgar 1996). According to Woolgar, this perspective offers significant new understandings of the impact of technology, as it suggests that the social relations which are built into the technology have consequences for its subsequent usage. Users of technology thus confront and respond to the social relations embodied within it. If we are to understand the impact of new technologies and the conditions for their success and failure, we must therefore give a central role to considerations of the user by posing questions around what generates and sustains the user's expectations and what influences their responses to the technologies.

To illustrate the 'interpretive flexibility' of technology and the wide variety of possible uses, Woolgar (1996) posits that it is useful to refer to technology as a 'text'. For him, this metaphoric understanding of the 'sociality' of technologies offers an

opportunity for giving a new focus to the analysis of the deployment of new technologies. Acknowledging the fact that the actual situation is much more complicated than the metaphor suggests, Woolgar (1996: 92) argues thus:

> When construed as a *text*, technology is to be understood as a manufactured entity, designed and produced within a particular social and organisational context...On the consumption side, the technology is taken up and used in contexts other than, and broadly separate from, its production (emphasis added).

The central idea of this metaphor is that technologies are socially constructed; this foregrounds questions about the extent to which the character of this socially constructed technology influences its use. Clearly, the metaphor is inspired by interpretive approaches to audience/texts relationships which provide a conceptual picture of the range of views about the relationship between technologies and their users. The approaches do so mainly through their position that the character and capacity of 'texts' are nothing but the 'attributes' (Woolgar 1996: 93) given to them by their readers within a specific socio-cultural context. Confronted with 'texts', the reader will draw upon any available resources to make comprehensible the task of making sense of the text. Viewing technologies as texts therefore highlights the social contingency of the processes involved in the deployment of new technologies by journalists. According to Woolgar (1996), it points to the importance of preconceptions of the user embodied in the technology (text), which means users can only adequately apply the technology if they conform to the community of social relations which the technology makes available.

The notion of technologies as texts draws attention to the complex social relations mediating between technologies and users. It opens up new ways of understanding the complex range of responses to and interpretations of technologies by illuminating features of the social dimensions involved in the use of new technologies by journalists, without necessarily falling back on assumptions of a linear dependency between technologies and their users.

As Hine (2000) observes, work in the sociology of technology and in media sociology sustains a view of technologies as thoroughly socially shaped. Consequently, in order to fully understand and appreciate how journalists use new technologies in specific social contexts, we must we must place them in a critical and analytical context and question the social relations within which they operate. It is

important, however, to point out that while acknowledging the significance of insights brought forth by social constructivists (mainly that technology is inseparable from its social context), we must guard against uncritically lapsing into 'social determinism', as some aspects of social constructivism do. This would yield narrow or distorted understandings in much the same way as technological determinism (Dahlberg 2004). As Marx (1997) warns, we must be careful not to take the social constructivists' claims for 'indeterminacy' too far, as this may lead to an understanding of technology so general and vague that it becomes almost completely vacuous and resistant to valid description. Such an understanding according to Dahlberg (2004), would mean that we are unable to say anything of any real interest or value about a technology or about technology in general. We therefore need to avoid lapsing into a simplistic notion of social determinism.

It is important to reflect on how the social constructivist approaches to technology offer ways of developing a framework that enables a critical understanding of how journalists deploy new technologies in their specific contexts of practice. As noted earlier, a practicable approach seems available in integrating the social constructivist approaches with the sociology of journalism. Accordingly, in the subsequent discussion I present an overview of academic research and theorising around the sociology of journalism as a way of locating the approach taken up in the present study. This overview casts light on 'internal' and 'external' factors that shape journalistic processes and routines. It illuminates ways of examining how new technologies are deployed in journalistic routines rooted in specific contexts.

3.2 Theorising newswork: foregrounding the sociology of journalism

Journalism as an academic field of study has theoretical traditions and roots which have sought to explain the 'mechanics' of its operations. Zelizer (2004) observes that sociology has long existed as the background setting for evolving journalism scholarship, and the sociology of journalism, in particular, constitutes the ongoing standard against which inquiry into journalism has been evaluated. Any attempt to critically understand the operations of journalism should thus avoid taking the status quo for granted by paying homage to these traditional theories. As Reese and Ballinger (2001: 654) point out, considering the history of a field 'shows the power of prevailing paradigms and their boundary-defining assumptions'.

In general, the sociology of journalism has concerned itself with the ways in which news organisations manage the processes through which information is

gathered and transformed into news, and the pressures that encourage journalists to follow familiar patterns of news making (Manning 2001). 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 organisations and society. This understanding is rooted in the assumption that journalism relates to the societies within which it is produced – that it both acts on and is acted upon by the surrounding social environment. Tuchman observes that the sociology of newsmaking originates from the epistemological principles of phenomenology, symbolic interactionism and ethnomethodology, which broadly argue that reality is a social construction mediated by processes that can be identified and analysed (Tuchman 1978; 2002). This constructivist approach has played a key role in the work of the sociology of journalism theorists, and has demonstrated that newsrooms have a high degree of routinisation and that their methods of gathering, selecting and narrating news are standardised throughout all the media (Tuchman 1991). All mass media, therefore, tend to construct news with very similar particularities such as the privileging of institutional sources and conflicts over positive situations, thus legitimising the status quo (Schudson 2003).

There have been several attempts to organise this research into coherent schemata. These have not followed a single and consistent path as the research has a long history that draws on a number of quite distinct theoretical approaches, from political economy through organisational theory to social constructionism (Manning 2001). Michael Schudson (2000; 2003; 2005) has attempted to provide a useful working typology that looks at the main trends of the sociology of journalism. (I will turn to his typology shortly.)

Literature on the sociology of journalism can be traced back to a number of American sociologists in the 1930s, in particular Robert Park. Since the late 1960s however, there has been a steady rise of studies that seek to question, at a number of levels, the forces behind news production processes. This body of research, emerging mostly from Anglo-American scholarship, has been broadly termed the 'sociology of news' and has helped to explain how news is constructed by individuals within social and occupational settings (Reese & Ballinger 2001; Zelizer 2004). The research includes (at the most basic level) the personal views and roles of media workers and (at successively higher levels) the media routines, media organisations, external pressures, and ideology (MacGregor 1997).

Reese and Ballinger (2001: 642) locate the origins of the sociology of journalism in the 'gatekeeper theory' postulated by David Manning White in his seminal work: *The Gatekeeper: A Case Study in the Selection of News* (1950) and Warren Breed's *Social Control in the Newsroom* (1955). In applying the gatekeeper metaphor to journalism, White saw news selection as operating on the basis of choices made by individual editors acting as gatekeepers who subjectively classify items by deciding what counts as news (Reese & Ballinger 2001; Zelizer 2004). He examined the personal reasons given by a newspaper editor for rejecting potential news items. On the other hand, Breed's study foregrounded the sociological concept of 'social control' (Zelizer 2004: 53) in journalism. Recognising that no society could exist without social control, he noted that journalists' actions were bound within the policy set by the publisher (ibid.).

These pioneering studies were useful in the conceptualisation and development of a critical theoretical corpus around news production processes. By examining news construction processes, the studies presented potential challenges to the 'taken for granted' nature of news journalism (Reese & Ballinger 2001: 642). They ushered a revolutionary approach to news as a 'manufactured' (ibid.) product and inspired a number of scholars, mainly sociologists outside journalism and communication studies, to explore the processes involved in the manufacture of news.

The gatekeeper concept, for instance, has provided a useful metaphor for the relation of news organisations to news products through its emphasis on the role of individual biases in news selection decisions (Manning 2001; Louw 2001). The insights provided by this approach remain pertinent as ever before. It has, however, been criticised for fixing the complexity of news production to one point along a circuit of interactions by attributing news outcomes solely to the gatekeeper. This way, it overlooks other important processes involved in newsmaking hence leaving news 'sociologically untouched' (Schudson 2005: 174). Consequently, researchers explored a wider range of other possibilities beyond the role of individuals. Ideas emerged around whether news values were a derivative of organisational functions, institutional ownership and regulation or the dynamics of the wider body politic. One of the first places to be studied was the newsroom.

In the 1970s, several sociologists, mainly in America, analysed the process of newsmaking by extending and contextualising the gatekeeper analysis into the whole media company structure, its roles and routines. The units of analysis were no longer the news or the journalists, but the whole media organisation as a complex institution.

Researchers focused on practices and organisational cultures, reflecting an increasing prominence of institutionalist and neo-institutionalist theories of organisational behaviour (Tuchman 1991; Jacobs 1996; MacGregor 1997; Tuchman 2002). To explain both the complexity of the news production process and the extent to which common features can be found in diverse news organisations, theorists emphasised the necessity to look beyond the qualities of particular individuals as the preceding studies had done. They highlighted the need to consider institutional and organisational routines and their place in the wider environment including the political influence and their capacity to control information (Zelizer 2004).

The key object of the researchers was to deconstruct the myth of media 'objectivity' by showing that there are structural factors that make the media over-represent the official versions of events, thereby obscuring social reality instead of revealing it (Tuchman 1978; Manning 2001; Tuchman 2002). Particular attention was also paid to methodological approaches to studying news and news organisations; ethnography emerged as the main tool used by researchers to analyse the production routines in newsrooms. By examining both structure and agency, scholars working within this paradigm contributed immensely to an understanding of news production and news institutions. News institutions came to be understood as 'functioning bureaucracies or factories' (Manning 2001: 51) with given inputs and outputs and organisational rhythms. Journalists in the institutions were also seen as trained or socialised to work according to standardised rules or practices (ibid.).

The importance of particular structures of ownership and control and the extent to which the broader ideological climate shapes the thinking of journalists, editors and news sources alike, also came to the fore (MacGregor 1997). The key point of consensus among scholars was the understanding that news production is a highly regulated and routine process shaped by organisational pressures, which encourage the routinisation and standardisation of news journalism. Following this line of thought Manning (2001: 54) asserts that:

> Each form of news output may function to a different cyclical rhythm but it is [the organisational pressure], more than anything else, which shapes how each news worker goes about her or his work, and which determines both the constraints and opportunities of the job.

Journalists' operations were thus viewed as constricted by organisational demands and expectations. To meet deadlines as matters of routine and survival within the

organisation, journalists developed a number of techniques and practices to accommodate and negotiate the demands of the newsroom (Jacobs 1996). This illustrated the interface of human agency and social structure. That although journalists may make their own news, they do not make it as they please, under conditions chosen by themselves, but under circumstances 'directly given and determined by the rhythms of the news organisation they work for' (Manning 2001: 54).

From the foregoing discussion it is clear that research into newsmaking has identified work in the news institutions as the main determining factor of news content. These insights have, however, not gone without criticism. According to Jacobs (1996), theorists have tended to overlook the important relationship between news production and the broader routines of everyday life. This relationship is mainly emphasised by scholars concerned with the reception of media texts (see Ang 1990; Schroder et al. 2003) and those rooted in the sociology of work. Scholars rooted in the sociology of work, in particular, maintain that:

> The spheres of work, employment and home are all necessarily intertwined and to separate them as if they could exist independently is to misconceive the complex reality of work and misunderstand the significance of the relationships which it embodies. (Grint 1998: 2)

Thus, for these scholars, work (including news production) lies within the social relations and interpretive processes that sustain it (Grint 1998). In support of this view, Lowrey (2006: 477-500) draws on the 'systems framework' from the sociology of occupations to examine the relationship between blogging and journalism. He argues that journalism exists within a network of other occupations that encroach into each other's jurisdictional areas with a variety of external and internal factors shaping these fluid processes. Factors external to the occupation include the organisational division of labour, revenue needs and relationships with other institutions. Internal factors include the degree to which journalists define the problems and threats posed by other occupations such as blogging and the success with which they solve the problems.

Jacobs further asserts that the dynamics of the everyday life in which news institutions are embedded have been shown to significantly affect the organisation and operation of the institutions. In highlighting the weaknesses of the institutionalist approaches, he contends that:

> While they have pointed to the importance of typification and indexicality, they have not really considered the processes of negotiation, trust and reflexivity, particularly as they are employed by news workers when working with sources...And, while they have treated the demands of news work as practical and strategic problems to be solved, they have not considered how these same problems are mediated by the routine factors of everyday [life]. (Jacobs 1996: 375)

Fishman (1980: 141) similarly posits that news is constructed out of 'an amorphous world of happenings' and that there are different cultural traditions from which journalists can draw their work which are beyond the confines of the news institutions (Schudson 2000; 2003; 2005) addresses these traditions in his discussion of cultural factors that impact on journalism practice, as I shall discuss later.)

In further theorising newswork, some scholars have focused on professional journalistic values as key factors that determine the news outcome. They argue that professional values legitimise and neutralise the personal biases and working routines of journalists through a positioning characterised by detachment from the society represented in the news and by a striving for authoritativeness in the news (Fishman 1980; Soloski 1997; Heinonen 1999). The concept of objectivity and the routines it shapes are viewed as mechanisms meant to neutralise the personal ideologies of journalists and ease their adaptation to the editorial bias of a given medium. In this sense, professionalism serves organisational interests through affirming the institutional processes in which newswork is embedded (Tuchman 1978). It is also a strategy directed towards the readers to gain credibility and to be able to reach an extensive and heterogeneous audience (Schudson 2000). Schudson (2005: 181) further notes that the need to 'write "accurately" about actual – objectively real – occurrences in the world' is equally constraining. Tuchman (1978: 83) adds that journalists themselves state that: '[F]inding facts entails demonstrating *impartiality* by removing oneself from a story...demonstrating that one does everything possible to be *accurate* so as to maintain *credibility* and avoid...reprimands and libel suits (emphasis added)'.

The imperatives of impartiality, accuracy and credibility highlighted above are rooted in the codes of journalistic practice and operate in the background of the problems and tasks associated with the profession; they provide the abstract system of knowledge that allows the differentiation of journalism from other 'crafts' (Tumber &

Prentoulis 2005: 64). According to Schudson (2000), journalists are socialised into these unwritten values and rules of the profession mainly through the influence of their supervisors and peers in the newsroom. Professional values, partly codified through ethical codes, have built a 'self-identity' (Schudson 2000: 187) for journalists with which they try to defend their social function and protect their autonomy, even though the daily routines in the newsrooms provide a picture of the profession that does not match the ideals in many occasions. This professional culture defines journalists' social mission and their conception of news, and, thus, legitimises the standard routines of news production (Heinonen 1991; Manning 2001).

Scholars rooted in this paradigm, which places emphasis on the impact of journalistic professional values on the news outcome, have thus brought to the fore the professional settings in which journalists work, delineating how journalists craft their identities through values, ethical behaviour and socialisation patterns. What emerges from the literature is a growing recognition that journalists develop standards of action collectively with others and that those standards in turn structure journalists' approaches to news (Zelizer 2004). Following Warren Breed's early writings on social control in the newsrooms, some studies have suggested that, in addition to professional values, organisational policies also structure the operations of journalists although they tend to be informal and accessible to journalists only through socialisation (Ettema et al. 1997).

In the 1990s, the sociology of journalism researchers broadened the scope of the field by examining news production from the viewpoint of news sources and their links with journalists, rather than from an institutional or professional point of view. Scholars argued that reporters are confronted by a plurality of sources of information located at different places at different times and requiring different means to access them. These scholars argued that an emphasis on the role of sources is the best way (or perhaps the only one) to connect the study of journalism to the larger society (Schlesinger 1990; McNair 1998). The interface between journalists and their sources of news thus came to be seen as a critical area of focus, with the associations between the two being perceived as structuring newsmaking processes.

The significance of these reporter/source studies lies not only in their examination of the dynamics of news production, but also in their evaluation of the 'power of media institutions' (Schudson 2000: 184). Schudson further notes that the sociology of news has shown that reporters tend to privilege institutional sources with 'social hegemony' (ibid.). This is mainly because institutional sources have the

appropriate infrastructure to guarantee a reliable and steady supply of the raw materials of news production (Schudson 2000). At the heart of the study of sources are the relations between the media and the exercise of political and ideological power, especially by central social institutions that seek to define and manage the flow of information in a contested field of discourse (Schlesinger 1990; Atton & Wickenden 2005). Thus, the potential of diverse sources to access the news media is a highly contested process: not all potential sources provide the raw materials of news to news institutions.

What emerges from the diverse perspectives discussed above is that the practice of news journalism is far from merely mirroring 'what happens in the world'; instead it involves a process of 'manufacture' or 'fabrication' (Manning 2001: 50) that is historically contingent. As McNair (1998: 64) aptly sums it up:

> [J]ournalism, like any other form of cultural production, always reflects and embodies the historical processes within which it has developed and the contemporary social conditions within which it is made. Concepts such as objectivity and balance have complex socio-historical roots which reflect the values and ideas of the societies in which they emerged. In this sense, too, journalism is a social construction.

This, however, is not to suggest that journalists deliberately fabricate stories or lie. Rather, it is to point out that the production of news involves the routine gathering and assembling of certain constituent elements and the process is mediated by diverse factors that impact on and shape the news outcome (Schudson 2000). As shown above, this basic understanding has been translated into multiple research directions and many studies have accumulated within the field. In the next section I review Schudson's typology of the sociology of news which details the key trends in the sociology of news research. Emphasis is placed on the *social organisational* and *cultural* approaches which, I shall argue, enable a close examination of journalistic work in non-deterministic ways.

3.3 Michael Schudson's typology of the sociology of journalism

To understand the social context in which Zimbabwean journalists use new ICTs, I draw on the sociology of journalism proposed by Michael Schudson (2005). In his review of the sociological approaches to journalism, he has provided a useful working typology that looks at four main approaches to sociological research into journalism

under the following categories: *political*, *economic, social organisational* and *cultural*. The *political* and *economic* approaches to news relate the outcome of the news process to the structure of the state and the economy. By discussing the *political* and the *economic* factors separately, Schudson departs from his earlier position (Schudson 2000), in which he conflates the two under the *political economy* approach. He argues that the *political economy* approach overlooks the fact that economic and political spheres are interrelated by drawing on the traditional Marxist approach which argues that economics constitutes the primary base and politics constitutes the secondary superstructure. For Schudson this has led to analysis of media institutions that condemns them for their profit orientations and overlooks the way other factors such as political institutions and markets structure their operations. He writes:

> The conventionalised opposition in media studies...between 'political economic' and 'cultural' approaches has too often neglected the specific social realities that can be observed at the point of news production. This is where news sources, news reporters, news organisations, editors and the competing demands of professionalism, the market-place and cultural traditions collect around specific choices of what news to report and how to report it. (Schudson 2000: 175)

Rohle concurs, arguing that:

> While [the political economy approach's] discussion of economic structures seems vital to any critical analysis of news media, it simultaneously risks adopting a limited focus that excludes both disconfirming evidence and prevents the analysis of more subtle negotiations of power relations. (2005: 410)

Similarly, McNair (1998: 16) argues that the term *political economy* 'has become too restrictive for an era when both the economic and the political pressures on journalists...are more intense and potentially overpowering than ever before'.

The observations highlighted above, in a sense, affirm the sociality of the political and economic factors that impact on newswork – they are key constituents of the broader socio-cultural sphere and they both influence and are influenced by activities within this broader socio-cultural sphere. A discussion of the *social organisational* and *cultural* approaches, therefore, inevitably takes *political* and *economic* factors into consideration. As McNair (1998) notes, sociology asserts that there is something innately *social* about all phenomena which are its objects of study

– that there are social factors and processes underpinning diverse phenomena in society. The approach taken up in the present study, therefore, merges the *political* and *economic* approaches with the *social-organisational* and the *cultural* approaches discussed below. By taking this path, however, in no way do I intend to dilute the importance of the political and economic approaches as valid explanatory frameworks in their own right. As Schudson (2005) rightly notes, attention to specific explanatory frameworks varies depending on the aspects one wants to explain.

The *social organisational* and *cultural* approaches are taken up mainly because of their aptness as explanatory frameworks of the processes of news production relevant to the context of this study. The two approaches provide a backdrop for the development of a conceptual structure that can help explain how journalists make use of new technologies within a particular social setting. Further, these approaches point to the need to understand the dialectical nature of news production and its relationship to the wider system of the news production processes. This macro-sociological approach, in my view, provides a broad framework for the micro-social approach that the present study uses to enquire into Zimbabwean journalists' deployment of new technologies within their everyday lived circumstances. Schudson (2005) has developed the two approaches in greater depth, broadening them beyond the limitations of the institutional and professional studies of the 1970s and 1980s. In discussing these approaches Schudson draws on the older theories, clearly reinforcing the fact that the insights provided by the older field of news production processes still have enormous relevance today. The *social organisational* and *cultural* approaches are not without weaknesses, however, nor do they exhaust the factors that contribute to news production (see section 3.3.3 below). Schudson (2005) himself warns that the approaches, taken together or separately, can hardly fully exhaust the processes of news making.

3.3.1 The social organisational approaches to news production

The *social organisational* approaches draw primarily from sociology, especially the study of social organisation, occupations and professions, and the social construction of ideology. The approaches aim to understand how journalistic routines are constrained by social, organisational and occupational demands (Schudson 2005). They synthesise views from early studies (discussed above) which uncovered the internal workings of news production by establishing that news is a social construction that derives from professional and organisational practices (within and

without the newsroom) which tend to constrain the operations of journalists. The approaches, however, go further to consider the wider dynamics and influences of social, organisational and occupational practices in news production and so give nuanced perspectives on the everyday operations of journalists and the processes involved in news production. The approaches further allow us to focus on source relations or the reporter/official relationships which are pivotal in illuminating the social organisation of news (see Schlesinger 1990; McNair 1998), in a more incisive way. A key working assumption of these approaches (intimated in my discussion of the institutionalist perspectives above) is that members of an organisation modify their own values in accordance with the requisites of their organisations and the broader routines of everyday life (see Grint 1998; Lowrey 2000). Similarly, journalists are socialised into the values and routines of daily journalism hence the horizons of their operations are confined within the limits of the social, organisational and occupational experiences in which they are socialised (Fishman 1980; McNair 1998).

It is important to note that despite the diversity in national cultures, patterns of professional education, professional values and routines do not differ much among journalists. There are signs of a 'global', shared professional culture (Schudson 2000: 187). In support of this view Tuchman (1978: 182) observes that:

> ...recent interpretive sociologies...hold that the social world provides norms that actors invoke as resources or constraints as they actively work to accomplish their projects. Two processes occur simultaneously: On the one hand, society helps to shape consciousness. On the other, through their intentional apprehension of phenomena in the shared social world – through their active work – men and women collectively construct and constitute social phenomenon.

Tuchman's view demonstrates how the 'news frame', including its identification of 'facts', is embedded in social institutions. This line of thought finds support in Goffman's (1975: 1) idea of 'frames' which, in his view, 'allows its user to locate, perceive, identify and label...occurrences defined in its terms'. In this sense, social institutions provide the 'frames' within which journalists construct news.

What is fundamental in *social organisational* approaches is the emphasis placed on constraints imposed by organisations despite the private intentions of the individual journalists and the inevitability of the social construction of reality obtaining in any social system (Schudson 2000; Schudson 2005). As noted earlier,

these constraints come not only from the news organisations journalists work for directly but also from the daily associations that bring journalists from different publications under the influence of one another. Thus, as the sociology of work maintains, work, including journalism practice, 'is itself socially constructed and reconstituted' (Grint 1998: 2), it is dependent on specific social circumstances under which it is undertaken and how these circumstances and activities are interpreted by those involved. Thus, journalists' social interactions and associations contribute to a uniformity of approaches to news work as they are driven by a 'phobia' of not writing or doing what all other journalists are doing (Schudson 2000). In the United States, for instance, the daily associations of journalists at the clubs has led to the heavily criticised 'pack journalism', where reporters covering the same 'beat' or story tend to emphasise the same angle and view point (Schudson 2000).

In stressing that news is socially constructed, analysts from the *social organisational* perspectives also hold that news is not a gathering of facts that already exist but is defined organisationally. Reinforcing this view, Tuchman (1978: 4-5) argues that news:

> ...is inevitably a product of newsworkers drawing upon institutional processes and conforming to institutional practices. Those practices...include association with institutions whose news is routinely reported. Accordingly, news is the product of a social institution, and it is embedded in relationships with other institutions. It is a product of professionalism and it claims the right to interpret everyday occurrences to citizens and other professionals alike.

This emphasis on the 'institutional' and 'professional' factors of newsgathering accentuates the internal workings of news production which have an impact on how journalists deploy new ICTs in their professional routines.

It is important, however, to reiterate the point that there is a danger in envisaging the practice of news journalism as a production process solely shaped by bureaucratic routines and organisational imperatives. This perspective underestimates the extent to which individual journalists draw on their personal initiatives to achieve action in ICT use. Ettema et al. (1997: 44) argue that at the individual level there is at least the desire to utilise intellectual as well as technical skills and to escape from the constraints of 'objectivity'. This line of argument further finds support in Cottle's (2005) concept of 'thick journalism', which in his view, challenges conventional practice by moving beyond normative paradigms and pre-determined conventions to

permit dialogue and debate. 'Thick journalism' thus exemplifies journalists' propensity to act in their individual capacities beyond the conventionalised professional notions of objectivity. In the same manner, editorial experience, journalistic flair and the 'grit' of the investigative reporter have their place (Manning 2001: 53). Jacobs (1996) similarly avers that within the constraints of structure and bureaucratic routine inherent in news production, there remains scope for the interpretive skills of news journalists to influence their professional routines. Louw (2001: 155-156) takes this argument further by suggesting that 'it is possible for journalists to be simultaneously agents of the powerful and autonomous beings, that is they are not simply the play-things of the powerful, but are ensnared in webs of discourse and practice which set parameters on autonomy'.

Clearly, the *social organisational* approaches to news production fail to address the extent to which individual journalists (as social actors) shape the environment in which they interact (as well as the extent to which their own actions are delimited by institutional and social structures). This gap requires attention if we are to understand in depth how journalists in a specific context deploy new technologies for news production, as the present study seeks to do. However, we must acknowledge that the constraints on individual journalists originating from the wider context of practice are more difficult to characterise than the constraints of deadlines and story quotas emanating from newsrooms (Fishman 1980).

We now turn to the *cultural approaches* to news production. It is important to point out, however, that although I discuss the *cultural* and *social organisational* approaches separately, in practice the two are closely related (Tuchman 2002). It is more useful to view them as complementary if the task is to examine journalism practice in a specific socio-cultural context (as in the present study).

3.3.2 The cultural approaches to news production

Although there is a close relationship between the *social organisational* and *cultural* approaches to news, one notes, as Cottle (2000a: 438) observes, that sociological approaches to news 'tend to lack a sense of the *culturally mediating* nature of news approached not just as a cipher of social interests and political power, but in terms of its very constitution as a cultural medium of communication' (emphasis added). In this sense, *social organisational approaches* to news on their own, overlook the 'diverse ways in which "culture" variously conditions and shapes patterns and forms [of news production]' (Cottle 2000a: 438). While the *social organisational*

approaches suggest that news is 'socially constructed' and elaborated on in the interactions of various players in the newsmaking process (Schudson 2005: 186), the *cultural* approaches elaborate on these interactions by emphasising the fact that news is a 'relation' between occurrences and a 'given symbolic system' (Schudson 2005: 186). *Cultural* approaches therefore open up further insights into the nature of news production by emphasising the broader cultural context within which everyday interactions occur – the broader 'symbolic system, within and in relation to which reporters and officials go about their duties' (Schudson 2005: 186-187). Researchers rooted in the *cultural* approach 'are [therefore] sensitised to the symbolic role of news actors and how they *perform/enact* within the conventions and *textual structures* of news representations...and thereby contribute to and sustain wider *cultural myths* that resonate with *popular culture*' (Cottle 2000a: 428-429, emphasis original).

Cultural accounts to newswork broaden the scope of the analysis of news production to include aspects beyond organisational and professional spheres that journalists and news sources do not entirely control or anticipate (Schudson 2000). The approaches 'transcend the structures of ownership or patterns of work relations' (Schudson 2005: 187) by acknowledging that 'journalists live and work within an encompassing social and cultural context that powerfully and implicitly informs their attempts to make sense of the world' (Ettema et al. 1997: 44).

Cultural approaches provide frames for 'understanding journalists' vague renderings of how they know "news" when they see it' (Schudson 2005: 188) – their news sense or news values. This is important in light of the fact that penetrating this 'sacred' knowledge is difficult as the cultural knowledge that constitutes 'news judgement' is complex and differs across cultures (Schudson 2005: 189). For Schudson, the presuppositions of this knowledge:

> ...are in some respects rooted much more deeply in human consciousness and can be found much more widely distributed in human societies than...any other particular system of social organisation and domination can comprehend. (2005: 188)

In this light, news definitions and news values have their foundation in nation-specific political cultures: 'the central categories of newsworkers themselves are "cultural" more than structural' (Schudson 2005: 188). The Glasgow University Media Group (1976: 1) echoes these sentiments, arguing that: 'news is a cultural artefact: it is a sequence of socially manufactured messages, which carry many of the culturally

dominant assumptions of...society' (see also Cottle 2000a). Journalists are thus dependent on pre-conceived categories of culture which constitute the 'symbolic foundation' of the context in which they operate. As a result, they may 'resonate to the same cultural moods their audiences share even if they typically know little about their audiences' (Schudson 2005: 187). In this way, the *cultural* approaches find 'symbolic determinants of news in the relations between "facts" and symbols' (ibid.). The approaches are particularly important given that the filter through which news is constructed is 'the cultural air we breathe, the whole ideological atmosphere of our society, which tells us that some things can be said and others had best not be said' (Hoggart 1976: x, see also Schudson 2000; 2005). That 'cultural air' is, in part, a creation of the ruling elite and their political institutions, and resonates with the broader social context. Journalists therefore:

> ...breathe a specifically journalistic, occupational cultural air as well as the air they share with fellow citizens. [Their] 'routines'...are not only social, emerging out of interactions among officials, reporters and editors, but literally emerging out of [their interactions with]...traditions. (Schudson 2003: 193)

In this light, journalists seek to maintain and 'repair' – to use Lowrey's (2006) term – their social relations with colleagues and the broader social context whence news is sourced. Consequently, 'the reality [they] manufacture' (Schudson 2005: 190) works to maintain their cultural image as journalists in the eyes of the wider world.

From the discussion above it is clear that the *cultural* approaches to news production emphasise that there are aspects of news production that go beyond what the social organisational theorists propose and '[t]hese are the unquestioned and generally unnoticed background assumptions through which news is gathered and within which it is framed' (Schudson 2005: 189). The approaches bring to the fore the fact that 'among the resources journalists work with are the traditions...they inherit from their own cultures, with a number of vital assumptions about the world built in' (Schudson 2005: 190).

It is primarily the *sociological* and the *cultural* approaches to news production that mainly constitute the body of research mostly identified with the *sociology of journalism*. It also seems clear, as noted above, that most understandings of the generation of news merge the *cultural* approaches with the *social organisational* approaches (Tuchman 2002). As I have pointed out, it is more useful to view the

approaches as interrelated, given that the cultural and socio-organisational aspects of news are in practice interwoven. This position is aptly put across by Hall et al. (1978: 54) who argue that:

> An event only 'makes sense' if it can be located within a range of known *social* and *cultural* identifications. If newsmen did not have available – in however routine a way – such cultural 'maps' of the social world, they could not 'make sense' for their audiences of the unusual, unexpected and unpredicted events which form the basic content of what is 'newsworthy'. (emphasis added)

3.3.3 The limitations of the sociology of journalism

Each of the approaches I have discussed so far is a useful and valuable way of framing the operations of journalism. However, they are not without their weaknesses nor are they collectively exhaustive in explaining the operations of journalism in the 'new media age'. One major weakness is that the approaches are inclined to ignore the possibilities for change in the nature of news production, given that news production itself is in a constant state of flux (Jacobs 1996; Schudson 2000; Anderson & Weymouth 2007). The emergence of new technologies has, for instance, offered challenges to the entire field of the sociology of news due to the unsettling changes they have brought to the working practices and routines of journalists. They have also challenged existing lines of demarcation in the journalistic work place (McNair 1998; Anderson & Weymouth 2007). Similarly, Tumber (2006) asserts that the characteristic features of the new media and the changes in political and social processes are having a major impact on aspects of professional journalism. For instance, the flow of information from a proliferation of sources involving the public, challenges the expert role of journalists in the dissemination of information. In this sense, journalistic culture is transformed in ways that unsettle the public/journalist distinction.

It is important to point out that the unsettling impact of the new media on journalism, as noted above, has constituted the focal point of a number of journalism researchers (mostly emerging from the developed world). This has seen a growing body of research that examines the diverse ways in which the new media are impacting on journalism. One notes, for example, research that closely assesses the impact of new technologies on traditional journalistic routines and professionalism (Pavlik 2000; Ursell 2001; Seelig 2002; Singer 2003) and research that focuses on

emerging forms of online journalistic practices (Deuze & Dimoudi 2002; Deuze 2003; Allan 2005; Lowrey 2006; Anderson & Weymouth 2007).

This ever-growing body of research undoubtedly bears testimony to the changing world of journalism and points to the need to refocus the sociology of journalism. It is important to note, however, that the sociology of journalism has not only had to contend with the impact of the new media, but also faces the traditional weaknesses of the several unilateral approaches that it has failed to synergise (Schudson 2000). As Cottle (2000b: 21) argues: 'these "new(s) times" demand a "second wave" of ethnographic studies that deliberately set out to theoretically map and empirically explore the rapidly changing field of news production and today's differentiated ecology of new provision'. For Cottle (2000b: 34), much has changed, both theoretically and empirically, since early newsroom studies were carried out and 'the time is long overdue for similarly intensive and in depth researches'.

While my concern so far has been to discuss general trends in sociology of journalism research, it is important to reiterate that its diverse traditions provide important and valuable insights pertinent to the present study. Collectively, they point to the fact that journalism does not operate in a social vacuum as there are various factors in different social contexts that tend to influence the operations of journalists. This sociological observation provides an opportunity for possible synergies with the social constructivist approaches to technology and is useful in illuminating the analysis of how journalists deploy new technologies in their professional routines.

My aim in the next section is to integrate insights discussed in this section with social constructivist perspectives to technology and develop a more nuanced multi-dimensional approach that enables a rigorous sociological investigation into the deployment of new technologies by Zimbabwean journalists. The approach I put forward views the deployment of technologies by journalists as predicated on a matrix of interdependent and overlapping factors. It considers the role of reflexivity and sees news workers as negotiating their way through the organisation (newsroom) and other factors outside the news institution.

In mapping my approach, I identify critical areas that inform the possibilities and constraints in the deployment of ICTs by journalists. As has emerged in the discussion above, the framework is rooted in the need to look at a variety of *internal* and *external* contextual factors that influence, shape and in some instances control (on a number of levels) the journalistic profession and its practice. It is in this light that the sociology of journalism is of critical importance to this study as it directs attention

to the following key aspects: journalistic values, the practicalities and concerns of newsgathering, the influence of political environments and social values on news production. These factors not only inform journalism practice but the very processes of the adoption and appropriation of new technologies.

3.4 Framing a critical sociological approach

As noted above, in order to fully appreciate and understand news production processes in the age of the new technologies, an analytical framework that assists in examining the social relations within which journalistic texts are produced is necessary. The approach I propose acknowledges the complexity of the social context of news production and escapes from the reductionistic idea of fixing newsmaking at one point along a circuit of interactions without examining the circuit as a whole. As noted earlier, the framework is informed by the sociology of journalism and is rooted within the social constructivist critique of technology. I also draw insights from scholars who address theoretical and methodological issues within African communication studies. The focus is on overcoming the problems that result from simply focusing on one type of determinism, such as technological determinism.

I have demonstrated that technological determinism separates technology from its social context thus narrowly focusing on a single aspect of determinism. This notion of technologies as artefacts – autonomous from the context in which they are used – should be avoided. Within journalism, technology and its deployment should be viewed as part of a complex social and institutional matrix which stretches across a wide range of social institutions. The lines separating different technologies from one another and from society should thus be seen as relative and contingent upon a prevailing social consensus (Marx 1997). It is therefore important to view technologies as both 'socially constituted and constituting' (Dahlberg 2004), as discussed earlier. This calls for a non-reductionist approach that is sensitive to the complex interplay between multiple elements. Such a 'multiple-determinations' approach, as Dahlberg (2004) puts it, recognises that each determining factor is itself embedded within and constituted by a system of interlinked constitutive processes as illustrated in Figure 2 below. These processes and relationships are in no way linear or fixed, nor are they of equal influence.

The nature, strength and direction of the processes and relationships involved in the deployment of new technologies by journalists should be seen as open and not restricted to any particular determining factor. This is particularly important in light of

the fact that the practice of journalism itself is a culmination of a multiplicity of socio-cultural factors which make themselves known in the news institutions in the form of economic, bureaucratic and professional normative pressures, which define journalists' parameters of vision by constraining their autonomy (Fishman 1980; Ettema et al. 1997; McNair 1998).

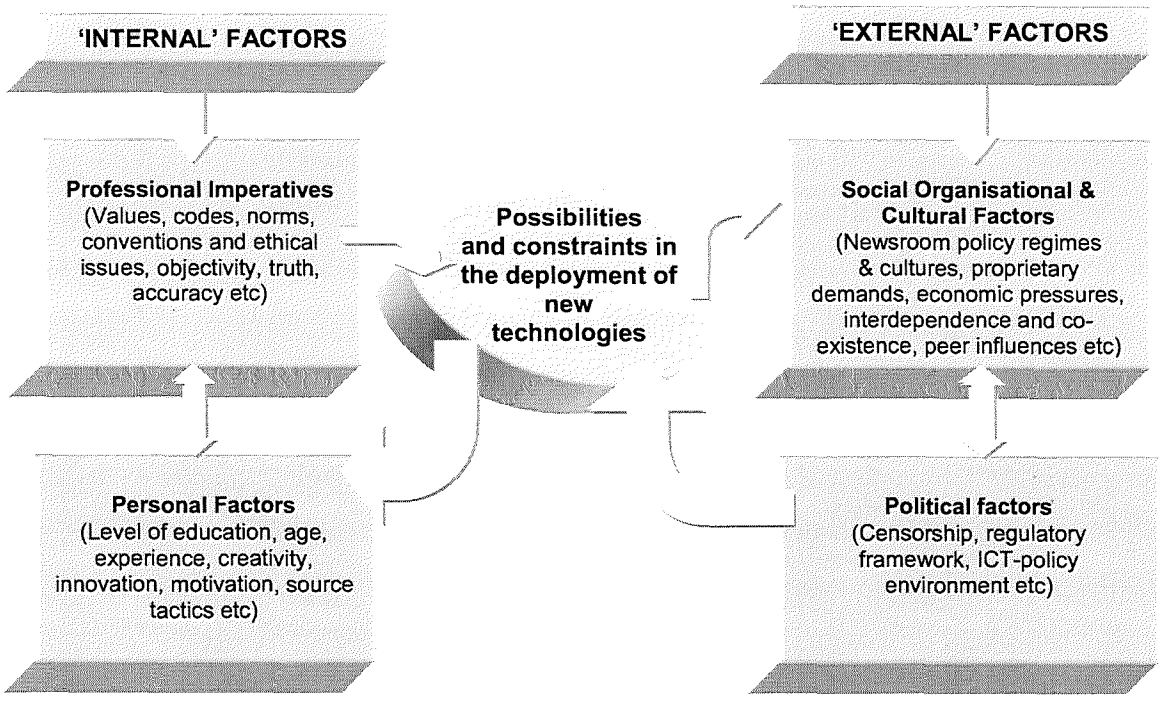

Figure 2. **Determinants of journalists' deployment of new technologies**

There are diverse *internal* and *external* factors that impact on the possibilities and constraints of the deployment of ICTs by journalists in any social context. This point of view finds support in Ettema et al.'s (1997) position that the analysis of news production must be pursued on several levels of analysis, and yet the activities at each level so interpenetrate that it is difficult to disentangle. Lowrey's (2006) examination of the relationship between journalism and blogging suggests a comparable model for understanding the relationship between journalism and the new media. For Lowrey, journalism exists within a network of other occupations that encroach on each other's jurisdictional areas with a variety of *internal* and *external* factors shaping these fluid processes. Indeed, Lowrey's approach is useful in explicating how journalism negotiates the new media in the broader sense taken up in the present study.

As Figure 2 attempts to show, there is need for sensitivity to the complex multi-dimensionality of the multiple elements of determinism that shape the use of

new technologies by journalists. Of critical importance is the fact that, although journalists aspire to independence – and most have it to varying degrees (see Jacobs 1996; Louw 2001; Manning 2001; Cottle 2005) – they can never be entirely 'free' from the circumstances within which their work is organised, regulated and consumed (McNair 1998). It is equally important to note that the factors impacting on journalists' deployment of new technologies are neither mutually exclusive nor exhaustive. In other words, journalists are subject to pressures from proprietors; political factors; professional imperatives; social organisational and cultural factors; the constraining or liberating possibilities of new technologies; personal factors; the economy; or 'source tactics' (McNair 1998) – often all at the same time. At times, the pressure from one direction may contradict that from another.

The present study presents a nuanced sociological approach in which diverse factors intersect in the context of discursive struggles and contestations from a wide variety of competing perspectives. The eclectic nature of the sociological framework maintains an important degree of openness useful in providing insights into ways of critically examining how journalists in specific socio-cultural contexts use ICTs. It therefore implicitly suggests the need to maintain a certain degree of openness when examining the deployment of new technologies by journalists in particular contexts. Journalists in specific news organisations as well as journalists in their larger professional contexts, could be considered members of 'interpretive communities' (Berkowitz & TerKeurst 1999: 126) that shape both decision-making processes and news coverage. The contexts also have implications for how the journalists deploy new technologies in their professional routines.

The approach could be extended further to incorporate the metaphor of the text discussed earlier (see section 3.1). The metaphor reinforces the multi-dimensional nature of factors determining the use of new technologies by journalists. Given that technology is embedded within socio-cultural contexts, as social constructivists argue, it is proper to think of it as having 'interpretive flexibility' (Woolgar 1996: 92) while at the same time, like all texts, containing preferred readings open to various uses. Through this approach we are able to stress the interpretive flexibility of new technologies, understanding them not only as entities used within particular social and organisational contexts but also as manufactured entities, designed and produced within specific contexts (Woolgar 1996). As noted earlier, this brings to the fore the question of the extent to which the character of the technology influences its use within specific contexts, and opens avenues for critical and in-depth analysis by

researchers. The metaphor of the text also enables one to view technologies as having inter-textual relations with their users, thus foregrounding the fact that their use is dependent on a multiplicity of factors bordering on the 'interpretive repertoires' of the users. In this way, we cease to view the relationship between technologies and their users as being vertical – 'top-down' in nature – but as horizontal instead.

3.5 Placing the approach in the African context

The sociological approach developed above is central to investigating the use of new technologies by journalists in Africa. Attempts should therefore be made to take into consideration the pluralistic nature of local conditions – the everyday socio-cultural and lived circumstances of journalists. We should not overlook the social realities of African citizens' multiple identities and their cultural orientation to communal values (Nyamnjoh 2005a). In this sense, we acknowledge the uniqueness of Africa's journalistic culture by which social relationships and world views are maintained and defined. As the social constructivists theorists posit, this way of thinking affirms the fact that technology is used in socially structured contexts and, as Thompson (1988: 368) directs us, the first phase of cultural analysis is to 'reconstruct [the] context and examine the social relations and institutions, the distribution of power and resources, by virtue of which this context forms a social field'. For this reason, the everyday context in which African journalists use technologies should not be neglected, as human action is determined by various environmental conditions (Mudhai 2004).

We need to look at African journalism in context – its culture, institutions and the broader communication environment – and note the insights which these bring into the deployment and appropriations of new technologies. This approach allows us to view the use of new technologies by journalists in Africa as a multifaceted experience that can be evaluated quite differently in diverse socio-cultural, political and economic contexts. For Obieng-Quaidoo (1986: 91), socio-cultural, political and economic aspects are central to any attempt to understand African journalism. With this awareness, we can critically examine how new technologies are being used, and the ways in which they are being incorporated into the everyday lived circumstances of the journalists, which mediate their adoption and use of technologies (see Hine 2000).

By framing our understanding of the new technologies and journalism practice in Africa within a sociological perspective that seeks to understand the use of technologies in situ, we depart from research traditions that uncritically restrict

themselves to the positive or negative impact of new technologies on journalism practice. Given that the adoption and appropriation of new technologies is a derivative of a long circuit of interactions that cannot be minimised or limited to one point in this circuit, it is important to acknowledge that journalists' deployment of new technologies in their professional routines occurs in social contexts where shared meanings develop through ongoing social interactions.

3.6 Conclusion

This chapter has proposed a sociological approach that views the use of new technologies by journalists as socially shaped. This position is sustained by social constructivist approaches to technology and the sociology of journalism, both of which provide a wide-ranging research setting that enables us to focus on journalists' interactions within the social structures in which their professional routines unfold. Emphasis has thus been placed on examining the use of technologies in context, paying particular attention to the specificity of the context in which one seeks to understand aspects of the profession – the 'internal' and 'external' circumstances in which journalists practise. This social shaping approach offers prospects of moving beyond reductive approaches towards more nuanced and pragmatic approaches to understanding how journalists in Africa use new technologies.

Given that journalism as a social practice is inextricably linked to the diverse components of society (both by way of influencing and being influenced by them), any attempt to empirically understand the operations of journalism in specific contexts should thus pay particular attention to the socio-cultural, political, as well as economic 'rootedness' of the profession – the specificity of the context within which one seeks to understand the profession (Berkowitz & JerKeurst 1999). This position is critical for understanding how journalists make use of new technologies in African contexts. I have therefore attempted to demonstrate that pressure to develop a more in-depth account of how journalists deploy new technologies is at work in the field of sociology. In short, journalists' work routines are shaped by two differently constituted spheres of activity: the bureaucratically organised activities within the newsroom and constraints outside the newsroom, both of which have implications for how journalists deploy new technologies.

Through the sociological approach I have proposed, my general contention is that, in order to critically understand how journalists make use of new technologies in specific contexts, there is a need for perspectives that enable researchers to look at all

the dimensions of the news production processes – perspectives that go beyond the limited and institutional role assigned to political economy by some media sociologists. My approach finds support in the collective strengths of the sociology of journalism and social constructivist approaches to technology.

Chapter 4 below discusses and outlines the methodological approach employed in gathering empirical data for the study.

CHAPTER 4

Research methodology

4.0 Introduction

The methodological approach chosen when approaching any research problem 'depends upon the specific questions one wants to answer' (Tuchman 1991: 79). Thus, to critically examine how Zimbabwean mainstream journalists are deploying new technologies in their day-to-day newsmaking practices and whether the technologies are redefining established working practices and professional values, a qualitative case study approach that employs ethnographic techniques was deemed central. The flexibility of a qualitative approach (Bryman 1988; Denzin & Lincoln 1998) enabled me to capture the dialogical nature of ongoing interactions between journalists, their immediate context of practice and the wider milieu. Indeed, the very process of the social production of news demonstrates the profession's deep embeddedness in 'constructivism' which makes a qualitative methodological approach relevant (Tuchman 2002). The theoretical substance of the study also informed the methodological choices I made. The theory provided a basis for conceptualising the interplay between journalists, their everyday practice and the wider social, cultural, political, and economic factors that coalesce to structure or constrain the way journalists deploy new technologies.

Against this backdrop, this chapter outlines and discusses the study's research design and procedure. It begins by focusing on debates amongst social scientists regarding new ICT research and the centrality of ethnography in news production studies. It then shifts focus to specific methodological issues that underpin the research design and procedure as follows: the philosophical underpinnings of qualitative research; the case study strategy; the research techniques and sampling procedures. The chapter also gives a rationale for the multi-method triangulated approach deployed and concludes by discussing the data analysis procedures and the research's ethical considerations.

4.1 Researching new ICTs: some methodological issues and considerations

Before considering the specific methodological issues underpinning the present study, I examine debates among social scientists on the epistemological questions and

challenges that face new ICT researchers. I emphasise the need to draw on traditional methodological approaches, but to reconstitute them to fit specific research contexts.

Although new technologies have become a focal point for research and have gained recognition as a field of study, there seems to be no unanimity among social scientists in terms of the appropriate methodological approaches to follow in different research contexts. Rohle (2005: 404) observes that '[a]s a whole, new media studies are characterised by exceptional openness towards theory and method and up until now it seemed impossible to discern any obvious canon guiding research decisions in the field'. In the words of Hine (2005: 245), the research 'has been characterised by innovation and anxiety in equal measure'. Consequently, approaches to conducting ICT research are widely contested.

Some researchers propose that new technologies require 'new' methodological approaches that confront conventional disciplinary boundaries within the social sciences (see Williams et al. 1988, Toulouse 1998). They argue that the state of flux which characterises ICTs 'defies conventional research methodologies' (Toulouse 1998: 6) and, therefore, calls for new methodological approaches. This line of thought broadly identifies with the view that:

> ...a research field is in large part defined by the "disciplinary matrix" which includes sets of methods and research instruments. As a field becomes established...we might expect a proliferation of methodological publications, since the security of old solutions is undetermined and new ones must be found. (Hine 2005: 245)

Similarly, other scholars suggest that ICTs hold 'the possibility to challenge long-established "truths" by offering up new situations to think with, and arguing caution against a too easy accommodation of the [new technologies] within self-contained disciplines' (Hine 2005: 246). Indeed, the complex and diverse histories of technological changes that have affected hardware, software, institutions and practices (Jankowski et al. 1999) seem to have offered a valuable reflexive opportunity for traditional disciplines (Hine 2005). Livingstone (2002: 5-6) concurs, arguing that new technologies provide 'a new opportunity to rethink familiar issues and to raise, once more, important questions about the place of communication and information...in our everyday lives'.

Pursuing a similar line of thought, Sudweeks and Simoff (1999: 30) submit that 'traditional methodologies need to be adapted to...new research environments in

which communication technologies and socio-cultural norms challenge existing research assumptions and premises'. In their assessment of the state of innovation in ICT research methods, Jankowski and van Selm (2005) observe that modification of existing methods is more common than radical reconstruction. It is no surprise then that a considerable body of research mainly involving innovative approaches to methodology and a re-examination of some previously taken-for-granted ways of doing research is emerging. Among these researchers, some have tried to develop a kind of 'multimedia cyber-anthropology' (Paccagnella 1997) in which they recommend the use of digital practices such as email communication or participation in chatrooms to conduct forms of participant content analysis that are variously labelled: 'digital ethnography' (Murthy 2008), 'virtual ethnography' (Hine 2000) or 'network ethnography' (Howard 2002). Murthy (2008: 837) argues for a balanced combination of 'physical' and 'digital ethnography'. In his view, this approach 'not only gives researchers a larger and more exciting array of methods, but also enables them to demarginalise the voice of respondents' (Murthy 2008: 837).

However, conducting social research using the new technologies themselves raises its own challenges. In particular, the inability to make independent observations leaves researchers confined to analysing content presented to them by their research subjects, thus making it difficult for them to make autonomous analytic deductions as the research process unfolds. As Howard (2002: 555) puts it:

> It is especially challenging for a researcher to interpret the content of messages sent over new media, since many are text-based and can mean different things to recipients. Researchers can easily reinterpret or misinterpret these messages if they lack deep knowledge of the individuals and relationships involved. Moreover, it is difficult to reach this depth of knowledge with computer-mediated communication between the qualitative researcher and subjects.

Additionally, researchers cannot draw on contextual social factors to examine the issues at stake. In this sense, as Howard (2002: 559) further argues, for researchers who advocate doing ethnography online:

> ...going into the field is little more than a state of mind because there is so little convergence between their lives and the subjects' lives: there is no physical entry into or exit from the community. There is no territorially-based field site, and the social cues that are available are unbundled from much of the context in which the content was produced.

Researchers are thus reduced to covert participant observers shaping the 'digital field site' (Murthy 2008: 849) in methodologically unclear ways.

In light of the above observations, the present study demonstrates the continued relevance of traditional qualitative methodological approaches in investigating the deployment of new technologies in a 'real-world' context of journalism practice. I view fieldwork as involving observing formal and casual interactions, collecting stories from different perspectives, conducting in-depth interviews and collating information on how journalists' professional practices interface with new technologies.

Contrary to the idea of deploying traditional methodologies to research new technologies, some researchers argue that by using traditional methodological approaches to research new technologies, the 'very *newness* of the new [technologies] ...tends to get left out, while the features in common with the older [technologies] get researched' (Livingstone 2002: 19, emphasis added). Some of the distinctions of the 'new' and especially interactive media which are deemed to raise new challenges for research include:

> ...interactivity, or the exchange of communicator's roles...; de-massification; or the quality of personalised messages against mass-oriented ones and asynchroneity, or the ability to exchange messages at times convenient to the individual users of communication system. (Williams et al. 1988: 15)

For these scholars the 'new' qualities have the potential to change the way we adopt, implement, or react to new media and therefore should be considered in research designs. Clearly, such orientations draw on 'technicist' approaches which tend to separate technology from its social context of adoption and appropriation as discussed in Chapter 3.

The present study suggests the need to work within a framework that enables the researcher to view technologies in social rather than in purely technical terms (Livingstone 2002; Flew 2002), by emphasising the influence of social, cultural, political and economic realities. As Hine (2000: 33) puts it, '[t]echnologies possess interpretive flexibility, such that not only do relevant social groups view the technology differently, but the technology could be said actually to be a different thing for each'. We must, therefore, 'study how technologies are shaped and acquire their meanings in the heterogeneity of social interactions' (Bijker 1995: 6) as the

capacities of technology are never fixed. Apprehending what they can do is always a site for interpretive work hence it is equally open to *qualitative* or *interpretive* investigations (Hine 2001). In this light, new technologies do not necessarily render traditional methodological approaches irrelevant, but rather present an opportunity for researchers to reconsider 'old' approaches as possible tools for closely examining the 'new' phenomena. As Madge and O'Connor (2005) rightly observe, when deciding which methodological approaches to use in researching the complex relationship between societies and new technologies, 'change' is not necessarily always progressive: rather there is a need for researchers to practise their craft with some reflexivity. Thus, 'while we value innovation, we may be cutting ourselves off from useful resources' (Hine 2005: 245).

Consequently, if we are to understand how journalists within a particular setting deploy new technologies (as the present study seeks to do), we need to foreground the sociality of both journalism and technologies. This position leads to a more nuanced view of the relationship between journalism and new technologies, seeing it as a social practice entwined within a 'complex web of culture'. This theoretical point of departure necessitates a methodological approach that enables the researcher to closely examine the multidimensional aspects of the 'complex web of culture' – 'the whole way of life' (Willis 1990) – in which new technologies are deployed by journalists. Livingstone (2002: 15) succinctly captures this point:

> ...as socially meaningful phenomena, ICTs are not pre-given, fully formed, automatically determining of the manner of their use, but rather their meanings depend on the complex, contingent ways in which they are, over time, inserted into specific contexts and practices of use.

In choosing research methodologies for my study, I drew on methodological precedents rooted in a generation of emerging new technology studies that view technologies as embedded in everyday life (see Wellman & Haythornthwaite 2002) and a similar broad range of traditional sociological research into journalism production that draws on qualitative research designs anchored in ethnographic approaches (see Tuchman 1991), as discussed in the preceding chapter.

It is important, however, to note that researching the 'fluid' processes of journalism practice and new technology use, including the ethical challenges behind observing journalists using new technologies can be a demanding task to a first-time

ethnographer. Howard (2002: 550) succinctly captures these challenges by noting that:

> [s]ome organisational forms can be difficult to study qualitatively because human, social, cultural, or symbolic capital is transmitted over significant distances with technologies that do not carry the full range of human expression that an ethnographer or participant observer hopes to experience.

Similarly, the '...discomfort, uncomfortable ethical dilemmas, the difficulty of managing a relatively unobtrusive role, and the challenge to identify the "big picture" while finely observing huge amounts of fast-moving and complex behaviour' (Tjora 2006: 430) are some of the more ingrained challenges of deploying traditional ethnography to research ICTs in use. It is these challenges, in particular, those of observing ICT practices that have prompted some scholars, as noted above, to argue that ICT or digital practices defy 'conventional research methodologies' (Toulouse 1998: 6) and, therefore, require new methodological approaches.

In the next section, I give a brief overview of traditional research into journalism production, highlighting the relevance and importance of the methodological insights provided by these studies for the present research.

4.2 Ethnography: an enduring research tradition in news production studies

The early studies of news production constituting a body of work referred to as the sociology of journalism based their research on extensive and intensive periods of newsroom observations and interviews (see Fishman 1980; Tuchman 1991; Hansen et al. 1998; Cottle 2007). These studies represent a substantive literature, rich in empirical detail and the theorisation of the mechanics and cultures of news production. Although today the field of news production and journalistic practice is fast-changing, ethnographies of news production retain their relevance: they continue to provide methodological insights and background knowledge to contemporary news production research (Hansen et al. 1998; Cottle 2007). The studies provide insights into approaches for attending to 'the normally invisible workings of news media' (Cottle 2007: 1) and therefore constitute enduring methodological antecedents relevant for contemporary news production studies.

There is disagreement among scholars, however, as to what counts as 'ethnographic', as the term does not seem to imply any single method or type of data analysis. This complexity has been accompanied by changes in the conceptual

emphasis of what constitutes 'ethnography' over time. Luders (2004), for instance, observes that only recently has ethnography as a term begun to replace the term 'participant observation'.

Despite the definitional inconsistencies surrounding the term 'ethnography' there seems to be consensus among researchers on its epistemological concerns, which derive mainly from its roots in qualitative research. Lindlof (1995: 20) observes that ethnography is a matter of the epistemic position of the researcher that finds explanation in its roots: '*ethno* (people) and *graphy* (describing)'. Thus, ethnography involves a holistic description of cultural membership. Although it is often described as a method, it actually encompasses a range of approaches, all of which inscribe a particular relationship between the researcher and the researched. It therefore brings a variety of techniques of inquiry into play: attempting to observe things that happen, listen to what people say and question people in the setting under investigation (Walsh 1998). Hammersley and Atkinson (1995: 1) succinctly conceive of ethnography as

> ...a particular method or set of methods which in its most characteristic form...involves the ethnographer participating overtly or covertly in people's daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, asking questions – in fact, collecting whatever data are available to throw light on the issues that are the focus of research.

From the foregoing views one can surmise that the *raison d'etre* of ethnography's epistemology is the connection between the researcher and the researched. It seeks to 'investigate in particular the perspectives of participants, the nature and forms of their knowledge, their interactions, practices and discourses' (Luders 2004: 225) aiming to draw connections between practices, experiences and the context (within which both the participants and the researcher find themselves). This entails the immersion of the researcher in the field of study – observing what happens; listening to what is said; asking questions in order to gain in-depth understanding of the cultural issues at stake (Hammersely & Atkinson 1995).

For news production researchers, as highlighted above, this calls for extensive and intensive periods of newsroom observations and interviews. To this extent, ethnographic approaches reveal the contingent nature of cultural production and provide us with an understanding of the dynamics and embedded nature of cultural processes surrounding newsmaking. They invite a deeper and possibly more humanistic understanding of newsmaking cultures, practices and performances of

media producers and how these give expression to the complexities and contingencies involved in news production (Cottle 2003; Cottle 2007). In this sense, they capture the complex multidimensional nature of media production consequently enabling the researcher to closely examine how journalists practically 'mediate a complex of forces (economic, political, regulatory, technological, professional, cultural, normative, etc.) that variously facilitate, condition and constrain' (Cottle 2003: 4) their professional routines including the deployment of new technologies.

Of importance here is the fact that ethnographic research methods are always negotiated in the circumstances in which they find themselves. This flexibility and sensitivity to cultural contexts is tied to qualitative research's 'trademark': the need to remain loyal to the phenomena under study (I discuss this shortly).

As noted earlier, the present study's research design and procedure is qualitative in nature. It adopts a case study approach that employs ethnographic research techniques. In the following sections, I discuss the research's design and procedure, beginning with the philosophical underpinnings of a qualitative research design.

4.3 Research design and procedure

4.3.1 The qualitative research tradition: some philosophical underpinnings

The qualitative research tradition has had a long and chequered history dating back at least to the 1960s. Although different qualitative approaches have their own analytical and explanatory conventions and processes, in this section I draw loosely on a broad inductive logic that informs much of qualitative thinking. I discuss the epistemological foundations of this research tradition, focusing mainly on its differences with its alternative; quantitative research.

The goal of qualitative research is to access 'insider' perspectives characteristic of members of a culture (or subculture) (Priest 1996). This requires an holistic and inductive approach, which provides the opportunity to develop a descriptive, rich understanding and insight into the individual's beliefs, concerns, motivations, aspirations, life styles, culture, behaviour and preferences (Priest 1996). The question of the appropriateness for the present study of the methods and techniques discussed later is therefore closely hinged on the epistemological foundations of qualitative research.

The philosophical underpinnings of qualitative methodology are typically attributed to phenomenology. The phenomenological position takes the actor's

perspective as the empirical point of departure. In this sense, qualitative studies start from the assumption that in studying humans, we are examining a creative process whereby people produce and maintain forms of life and society and systems of meaning and value. Given that humans live by interpretations, it is the attempt at recovering the ways people live by intentions, purposes, and values that qualitative studies are dedicated to (Christians & Carey 1989). It is chiefly in this sense that it differs radically with quantitative research.

Qualitative research is naturally much more fluid and based on ontological and epistemological assumptions that differ from quantitative research's emphasis on measurement, standardisation, replication and representativeness (Wolff et al. 1993). While qualitative research stresses the need to understand social behaviour in its social context (Denzin & Lincoln 1998), quantitative research exhibits a tendency for the researcher to view events from the outside and to impose empirical concerns upon social reality (Bryman 1984). The need to study social behaviour within social contexts as underlined in qualitative research is fundamental to the object of the present study. Lindlof further emphasises the need for qualitative researchers to explain observed behaviour or verbal utterances with reference to context. For him:

> The analytic task is to show the meaningful coherence of these expressions, as it is experienced by the people who are studied. These arguments are then used to construct theoretical propositions which, in the case of media studies, may address such domains as the interpersonal negotiation of media....(Lindlof 1991: 25; see also Jensen 1982)

In qualitative research, therefore, any attempt to understand social reality must proceed from people's understanding of their own reality (Bryman 1988). This entails that the social scientist must grasp the interpretive devices by which the individual makes sense of his/her reality as these provide the motivation for his/her actions. In short, people construct their realities or 'subjective meanings' through actions determined by their lived circumstances which structure or constrain the way they construct meanings in the course of everyday life. For the social scientist to understand the subjective meanings of actors it is imperative therefore to study the actors in their natural settings, through a multi-method approach that can capture the nuances of the lived experiences (Denzin & Lincoln 1998).

The focus of qualitative research is primarily on understanding particulars rather than generalising to universals (Maxwell 1992; Denzin & Lincoln 1998; Yin

2003). Maxwell (1992: 293) observes that qualitative studies are usually not designed to allow systematic generalisations to some wider population, but rather:

> [G]eneralisation in qualitative research usually takes place through the development of a theory that not only makes sense of particular persons or situations studied, but also shows how the same process in different situations, can lead to different results.

Thus, the criticisms of the lack of generalisability of qualitative research (by quantitative researchers) miss its central point, which is the cogency of theoretical reasoning: this should be judged by the generalisability of cases to theoretical propositions (Bryman 1988). Yin (2003: 32-33) further posits that '...the mode of generalisation is "analytic generalisation", in which a previously developed theory is used as a template with which to compare the empirical results of the...study'. In this sense, qualitative studies are 'generalisable to theoretical propositions and not to populations or universes' (Yin 2003: 10). As Lindlof (1995) notes, the difference between qualitative and quantitative methods is that qualitative methods do not base their evidence on the logic of mathematics, the principles of numbers, or the methods of statistical analysis. Rather, actual talk, gesture and other social actions are the raw materials of analysis, which lead to an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in question.

While qualitative researchers are expressly committed to contextual understanding and the insider's view, the qualitative researcher should always speak and write from a position while at the same time acknowledging that all descriptions are constitutive of the object being described (see Denzin & Lincoln 1998). Thus, qualitative reports are all about perspectives of lived experience, this involves the production of knowledge, not its discovery (Lindlof 1995). This constructivist approach to research has led to the questioning of the validity and reliability of qualitative research findings by quantitative researchers. However, as Maxwell observes, there is a place for the issue of validity in qualitative research if one applies the concept primarily to accounts, not to methods. He argues thus:

> The applicability of the concept of validity...does not depend on the existence of some absolute truth or reality to which an account can be compared, but only on the fact that there exist ways of assessing accounts that do not depend entirely on features of the account itself, but in some way relate to those things that the account claims to be about. (1992: 283; see also Priest 1996)

Maxwell points to two forms of validity in qualitative research: 'descriptive validity', which means that researchers should not make up or distort what they saw or heard and 'interpretive validity', which refers to the applicability of the concepts used by the researcher in relation to the perspective of the individuals included in the account. Validity in qualitative research is thus dependent on whether or not we are providing a valid description of what events, utterances, and behaviour 'mean' to the people engaged with them (Maxwell 1992). Against this background, it is important to point out that qualitative studies that follow the basic principles of social science are not unscientific just because they are more interpretive than positivistic in their approach.

As noted earlier, qualitative researchers 'deploy a wide range of interconnected methods, hoping always to get a better fix on the subject matter at hand' (Denzin & Lincoln 1998: 3). The epistemological imperatives of qualitative research entail the need for a flexible research design. Qualitative researchers often favour a relatively open and unstructured research strategy as opposed to one which has been decided in advance, which dictates what ought to be investigated or how it ought to be done (Bryman 1988; Denzin & Lincoln 1998). This flexible approach allows researchers to consider unforeseen issues that may emerge as important and worth pursuing during the course of conducting research.

Given that the present study is based on a case study approach, the next section discusses this strategy as a particularly suitable approach for the study. It gives a rationale for the selection of newspapers from Zimpapers and Alpha Media Holdings as my focal point.

4.3.2 The case study strategy

A case study constitutes 'an empirical inquiry that investigates phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident' (Yin 2003: 13). For Yin, one would use a case study method if the issues to be examined deliberately require a close interrogation of the contextual circumstances within which they are rooted. The patterns, features and context provided by a case study allow the researcher to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of 'real-life events' (Yin 2003: 2), thus providing insights into the complexities of social relations and practices (Hamel et al. 1993).

It is important to highlight that the case study as a strategy is situated between concrete data-gathering techniques and methodological paradigms; it is therefore not a

data gathering technique in itself, but a comprehensive research strategy (Hamel et al. 1993). In other words, the case study as a research strategy comprises an 'all-encompassing method covering the logic of design, data collection techniques, and specific approaches to data analysis' (Yin 2003: 14). The strategy's strengths are in its openness to multiple sources of evidence which enable the researcher to deal with a full variety of evidence emerging from 'direct observation of the events being studied and interviews of the persons involved in the events' (Yin 2003: 8; see also Hamel et al. 1993). This means the researcher has direct contact with the participants who constitute the primary source of the data. This way, the researcher gains a sharpened understanding of the phenomena under examination.

Although Yin (2003) points out that case studies should not be confused with qualitative research and that they can be based on any mix of quantitative and qualitative evidence, for the present study the case study approach is located within the qualitative research paradigm. As Hamel et al. (1993: 17) argue, issues investigated in case studies are 'more than mere facts or items [they are] an experience containing the meanings and symbols involved in the interactions of the social actors'. It is in this light that the case study approach was considered relevant for the present study, its attributes resonate with the goals of the study. The common concerns about the generalisability of case studies find answer in the study's roots in qualitative research as discussed in the preceding section.

It is important, however, to note that case study research can entail single or multiple case studies. Stake (2003) identifies three types of case studies as follows: the *intrinsic* case study which aims at understanding the particular case; the *instrumental* case study whose objective is to draw generalisations and build theory; and the *collective* case study which seeks better understanding and conceptualisation of a larger collection of studies. Stake (2003) argues that the lines between these types are blurred given that a case is always situational and influenced by happenings of many kinds. The present study's concern to build theory, as well as seek an in-depth understanding of multiple-cases (selected newsrooms in Zimbabwe), finds common ground in the overlapping aims of the *instrumental* and the *collective* case study.

The main reason for focusing on practices in the press (and not television or radio) in the present study, is that the print media have a significant presence and influence in Zimbabwean journalism practice as it constitutes a major employer of journalists in the country ahead of the broadcast sector (which continues to be monopolised by the state). As noted in Chapter 1, there has been very little academic

research that focuses on professional practices and routines in the print media in Africa and indeed the world over. This study is thus an attempt to contribute to scholarship in this area.

Zimpapers is a relevant case for the present study for a number of reasons. First, it has a major presence in the news industry in Zimbabwe as it constitutes the dominant print journalism organisation in all Zimbabwean metropolitan environs (Ronning & Kupe 2000). Its newspapers command an overwhelming presence in metropolitan cities – the epicentres of technological innovation, adoption and appropriation in Zimbabwe. Moreover, being the oldest and largest employer of journalists in Zimbabwe, Zimpapers provides a good 'testing ground' of Zimbabwean journalists' use of new technologies.

Secondly, as noted in Chapter 1, following the increased use of the new technologies as journalistic tools throughout, particularly, the developed world (Garrison 1998), in the late 1990s, Zimpapers took the lead among Zimbabwean newspapers in harnessing the perceived power of new technologies in its operations. It is this investment in the promise of new technologies as newsmaking tools that presents Zimpapers as a critical and strategic case study for closely examining how Zimbabwean mainstream journalists use new technologies. However, rather than spreading my focus thinly across all Zimpapers newspapers, I decided to limit my focus to its four leading newspapers in Bulawayo and Harare: the *Chronicle*; the *Sunday News*; *The Herald* and the *Sunday Mail*. Narrowing focus to these newspapers thus led to in-depth analysis and the generation of rich, detailed descriptions in keeping with the underlying imperatives of qualitative research.

The Zimbabwe Independent and *The Standard* were also selected for their significance as leading independent newspapers in Zimbabwe. Although the sister weeklies are considerably smaller than the state-controlled newspapers particularly in terms of the sizes of their newsrooms and employment capacity, they constitute important rivals to the state-controlled press in controlling public discourse. More significantly, the two newspapers have been receptive to change and innovation in the use of new technologies in their newsrooms. They have in particular, stretched the boundaries of how Zimbabwean newspapers have traditionally interacted with readers and sources especially through their interactive websites and the use of the mobile phone.

It is important to point out that the choice of my case studies was also influenced by anticipated ease of access to the newsrooms as a result of my prior

professional roles as I discuss shortly in section 4.4.1.1. According to Bryman and Burgess (1999), gaining access to many settings is fraught with difficulty; hence access is a legitimate criterion for choice of a case to study.

The next sections discuss the ethnographic techniques and sampling procedures employed in the data gathering processes.

4.4 Research techniques and sampling procedures

In keeping with the epistemological imperatives of the qualitative research tradition, the study employed a research design that enabled inferences and leads drawn from one data source to be corroborated or strengthened by another. Thus, the case study drew on a combination of ethnographic techniques that followed a four-part approach as follows:

i. Participant observation
ii. Focus group interviews
iii. Individual in-depth interviews
iv. Document analysis

With respect to the first three techniques, the research procedure finds support in Fielding and Fielding's (1986) instructive view that the technique of observation is an important preparatory tool that should precede the framing of interview questions. For them: '[a]part from establishing the interviewer's bona fides, such preparations are necessary if the interviewer is to manage the course of the interview' (Fielding & Fielding 1986: 50). It has to be stated, however, that in practice, these techniques overlapped and did not necessarily follow a linear order. I will now discuss each of these research techniques including the sampling procedures employed in each technique.

4.4.1 Participant observation

Participant observation is one of the primary methods of qualitative research. It is, in particular, a key technique for ethnography. Goffman (1989: 125) defines it as a technique:

> Of getting data...by subjecting yourself, your own body and your own personality, and your own social situation, to the set of contingencies that play upon a set of individuals, so that you can physically and ecologically penetrate

> their circle of response to their social situation, or their work situation...So that you are close to them while they are responding to what life does to them.

Correspondingly, Hansen et al. (1998: 34) view participant observation as a method that:

> [P]romises to provide, what remains, a rare look into the inner sanctum of media production, that privileged domain in which media professionals ply their trade, make their decisions and fashion their collective outpourings for consumption...

From these definitions one notes that participant observation allows the researcher to access the normally invisible realm of media production by 'revealing the complex of forces, constraints and conversations that inform the shape, selections and silences of media out output' (Hansen et al. 1998: 44; see also Cottle 2007). There is therefore a cogent reason for employing the method in attempting to understand the discursive encounters in news production processes in Zimbabwean newsrooms. The method, as Cottle (2007) argues, allows the researcher to go beyond taken-for-granted assumptions and established professional norms of journalists. It enables the researcher to establish:

> Much more about processes of "technological embedding" and the "social (and professional) shaping" of news technologies by journalists in their work practices as well as the impact of new technologies on the involvement of sources and news output. (Cottle 2007: 12)

In keeping with the theoretical and conceptual framework guiding the present study, which emphasises the constructivist nature of technologies and journalism (see Chapter 3) and consequently the multidimensionality of forces that variously facilitate, condition and constrain journalists' deployment of new technologies:

> [P]articipant observation reminds us that processes of cultural production are less clean, less tidy, and more happenstance, and more leaky than theorists sometimes acknowledge and it points us to the complexities and contingencies involved in the "mediations" of cultural processes. (Cottle: 2007: 6)

In this sense, the method practically embodies the fact that 'media production is not hermetically sealed from the rest of society' (ibid.) or wider dynamics of everyday life

rather it responds to these wider forces of change – whether political, commercial, technological or cultural (Cottle 2007). It simultaneously draws attention to 'internal' as well as 'external' forces (values, conventions, newsroom policies and cultures, proprietary demands, politics, economic pressures etc.) that constrain news production processes. For the present study, participant observation facilitated the examination of how journalists negotiate these impinging realities and the consequences thereof for the deployment of new technologies.

One of the 'major strengths of participant observation is that it is not really a single method, but can embrace different ways of gathering data and styles of observation' (Bryman 1988: 48; see also Lindlof 1995). The flexibility of the method allows for the incorporation of other methods such as unstructured interviews and informal talk which provide a solid basis on which evidence and findings can be triangulated by allowing inferences drawn from one data source to be contrasted, corroborated or followed up by another (I discuss this later). This is particularly important given that it may be practically challenging for a single researcher to observe all relevant situations and processes. Cottle avers that participant observation is 'destined to be reflexive, open to the contingencies of the field experiences and therefore less than strictly linear in its execution or predictable...' (Cottle 2007: 5; see also Hansen et al. 1998). The 'commitment' to reflexivity embedded in participant observation is fundamental to the qualitative research tradition's openness to the contingencies of field experiences.

Although the technique of participant observation is flexible and not strictly linear in its execution (Hansen et al. 1998), it still depends upon sequenced research stages each of which forms an indispensable part of the ethnographic research process. Thus, despite arguments that 'there are no set times for conducting participant observation, nor guidelines on what or how many media should be studied' (Hansen et al. 1998: 50), for the present study I spent a total of seven months in the field between June and December 2008. The design and course of action of my observations was thus structured and organised within this time frame. Given that four of the newsrooms I studied (*The Herald*, *The Sunday Mail*, *The Zimbabwe Independent*, *The Standard*) are located in Harare, I decided to spend four months in Harare between mid-June and the end of September and two months in Bulawayo, at the *Chronicle* and the *Sunday News*, between the end of September and early December as shown in Table 1 below.

Harare: June – September 2008	
The Herald	16 June – 18 July
The Sunday Mail	22 July – 11 August
The Zimbabwe Independent	13 August – 1 September
The Standard	2 September – 19 September
Bulawayo: September – December 2008	
The Chronicle	22 September – 27 October
The Sunday News	7 November – 5 December

Table 1. **Period of fieldwork**

4.4.1.1 The gains of my insider-status

The strength and success of my participant observations (including interviews and personal conversations) was heavily predicated on my prior connections with the research context. Not only was I conducting the research in my native country, but I was also researching among a social group I was intimately attached to through my professional life as a journalism educator at two key tertiary institutions: the National University of Science and Technology (NUST) and at the Zimbabwe Open University (ZOU). These roles entailed regular interactions and contact with journalists on various platforms and levels, all linked to journalism training and wide-ranging journalistic activities outside newsrooms.

As a Journalism Lecturer and Internship coordinator at NUST, I paid regular visits to most newsrooms to assess students on internship; some senior journalists in the newsrooms were either former classmates of mine at the University of Zimbabwe or taught part-time on our undergraduate programme; most of my students at ZOU (which is a distance learning university) were practising journalists and, indeed, some of my former students were employed in various capacities across the newsrooms.

More significantly, my activities in civic and social organisations such as the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA, Zimbabwe) and the Bulawayo Press Club (where I was on the executive committee until my move to the UK) ensured regular contact with the journalists. I was no stranger to the research context; I was treading on familiar ground.

This 'insider-status' not only helped me to gain some rapport with the journalists but to also avoid mistakes in the highly polarised and sensitive political context of the research. Gaining some connection with informants in this particular context was very important. It reinforced the point that ethnography is not just about interviews and observation but is also very much about informant cultivation which, as some researchers argue, is probably the most important part of ethnographic fieldwork (Metcalf 1998).

My connection to the research context was reflected to a large extent in the unfettered conditions of access to the newsrooms and the level of openness from my informants. Although this 'insider-status' brought to the fore questions on the impact of my biography to the unfolding research process, it earned my study unique value, especially given the political problems that obtained in the country during the time of my fieldwork, which might have posed problems in negotiating entry into the newsrooms.

Even though I had to use my early days in Zimbabwe to establish contact and explain the object of my research in person, I negotiated access to the newsrooms from my base in the UK without facing any hurdles (see appendices 1 and 2). As Bryman and Burgess (1999) rightly note, gaining access to research settings is always fraught with difficulty – it can be a very stressful process. Similarly, Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) point out that however skilful a researcher is in negotiating entry into the research context, some information will not be available at first hand.

The following empirical analysis of an encounter on my first research trip to Harare illuminates how the prior knowledge of my informants and encounters with familiar individuals in the research context became a key assert in the unfolding research process:

> The day I travelled from Bulawayo (my home town) to the capital city, Harare, to begin my research at *The Herald*, I boarded the same bus with a long time acquaintance and former student of mine at NUST – the News Editor of *The Standard*, formerly the Bureau Chief of the same paper in Bulawayo but now based in Harare. This serendipitous meeting was to prove critical for my research in Harare for two reasons: first, because most of my professional and social interactions with journalists was in Bulawayo, I had a somewhat blurred picture of journalistic activities in Harare, at least in terms of journalists' social interactions outside newsrooms. Second, because I had been away from the country for more than a year – a period during which my contact with the

research context was mediated through often 'contradictory' avenues: the press and personal communication with family and close associates via email and phone calls. The press primarily emphasised the social and political challenges facing Zimbabwe, while communication with friends and family focused on the 'everyday' as I knew it. In this sense, I was (re)entering the field, to use Chawla's (2006) words, 'ensconced in degrees of outsiderness' created by temporal, geographic, intellectual, or emotional distance from the field.

Thus, in this five hour journey I was 'put into the picture' in terms of the places where Harare journalists interact, meet for lunch and for social activities after work. I was made aware of who exactly frequented the Harare Press Club and who did not. It occurred to me, as I talked to the journalist, that the Club was frequented more by journalists from the privately owned press; freelance journalists (who worked mainly for the foreign press) and staff from human rights organisations and media freedom campaigners like the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA, Zimbabwe).

Journalists from the state-controlled press (mainly political reporters) only occasionally patronised the club. From my conversation with the journalist, it also emerged that the Harare Press Club was generally perceived as a haven for opposition politics and so the journalists from the state-controlled press tended to keep a distance. Of note, was the fact that from time-to-time the Press Club executive invited key political figures to speak at the club on hard-hitting political issues bedevilling the country.

Although I generally knew from my experiences with journalists that their leisure time was important, this timely meeting with an old acquaintance added a leaf to my methodological approach – I knew that the Harare Press Club was going to be the place to catch up on the unfolding political situation in the country having been away for some time.

So, from the onset of my research in Harare, I frequented the Harare press club for lunch and drinks after 'work'. I took the opportunity to discuss issues that spoke to my research with journalists at the club. The club also provided space for unfettered follow-up interviews and informal conversations on issues not raised in the newsrooms, or on which journalists were evasive about in the newsrooms because of the constraints of the circumstances. In a

sense, the social events at the club became extensions of my newsroom observations and interviews. (Field notes, Journey to Harare, June 9, 2008)

Related to the above field experience was my first day at *The Herald* newsroom. It revealed the profitability of my field identity and inevitably enhanced my understanding of the practices of a population that may not have been accessible to a 'non-native' researcher as shown in the empirical narrative below:

> On my first day at *The Herald* newsroom, I met two close individuals: a former classmate of mine at the University of Zimbabwe who was now a Senior News Reporter, and my former student at NUST, who was now employed as a Cadet Reporter.
>
> These figures played a critical role in introducing me to the finer details of the 'politics' of the newsroom. They confided in me on a number of issues central to my research undertaking in the newsroom: how to log in to the newsroom network system, getting to know who sits where, whose computer not to touch, and introducing me to other journalists whose faces were new to me. In short, they nuanced the brief and hastened induction session I had gone through with the Senior Assistant Editor of the Newspaper. This facilitated a seamless build up of relations with journalists in the newsroom; in particular as it gradually emerged that my face was familiar to a number of journalists in the newsroom. (Field notes, first day at *The Herald*, June 16, 2008)

These encounters also highlight the fact that ethnography is not just about observations and interviews, but that it also involves 'informant cultivation' and the exploitation of personal relationships forged prior to the research. As Metcalf (1998: 327-328) rightly argues: 'these relationships often provide much-needed emotional support to the insecure researcher and create a genuine bond with his or her host or informants'.

Beyond the encounters highlighted above, my 'insider-status' informed my understanding and awareness of the nuances of the political context, that is, the political dispositions of the research subjects and the ideological persuasions of the newsrooms studied. This understanding facilitated careful navigation of the research context: knowing what to say and what not to say in given contexts, whom to

associate with in which contexts, and more importantly, the demeanour to adopt when approaching specific individuals. As Owens (2003: 122) points out,

> ...like all human beings meaningfully engaged with others, practicing [researchers] are politically positioned within the local contexts in which they live and work. But the consequences of such positioning, whether intentional or not, can be most keenly experienced in the context of polarising political situations.

Admittedly, although my personal background and prior associations with the newsrooms was important in shaping the nature of my participant observations, and indeed the entire research process, it was devoid of firsthand experience of the practicalities of doing journalism in the selected newsrooms. This necessitated two key aspects in the design and execution of my participant observations. First, I had to invest time (at the initial stages of my fieldwork) in understanding the work routines, practices and newsmaking cultures of the newsrooms before the actual data gathering process. Second, given the strategic importance of the first phase of the research, the data collection process itself gathered momentum with the shift from one newsroom to another. This constituted an on-going process of reflection that allowed the comparison of data and experiences from one newsroom with data and experiences from another. This approach also enabled me to concentrate time strategically by following up on and zeroing in on aspects not fully documented in previous observations, and thus concretising as well as providing multiple-data for triangulation.

4.4.1.2 My role as an observer

Even though my conditions of access to the newsrooms enabled unfettered participant observation, establishing useful working relations with the journalists in the selected newsrooms helped me to secure an intimate vantage on news production processes. Thus, although I was known in the newsrooms and had interacted with most journalists, the identity I assumed defined the course of my observations. I sought to establish what Walsh (1998: 226) describes as 'a large degree of ordinary sociability and normal social intercourse' that 'demystified' my lengthy presence in the newsrooms. In this regard, at the start on my newsroom observations I introduced myself to all interested parties and reassured them about my intentions. I also

familiarised myself with the basic organisation of the newsrooms, that is, who sits where, and their respective responsibilities.

In the early stages of the research, I deliberately assumed the role of a stranger who watches and asks questions in order to make sense of different scenarios and activities within the newsrooms. I gradually established myself as a 'naïve participant' retaining, as Walsh (1998: 226) advises, a 'self-conscious position in which "incompetence" [was] progressively substituted by an awareness of what has been learnt, how it has been learned and the social transactions that inform[ed] the production of knowledge'.

I also developed a 'contextual sensitivity' that enabled me to fit within varied and complex news production processes by nurturing ongoing contextual relations. This entailed remaining 'relatively open to *in situ* developments and impromptu lines of inquiry' (Hansen et al. 1998: 37, emphasis original). Following Walsh (1998) and Hansen et al.'s (1998) advice that changes in observer role over the course of fieldwork may be vital in producing new information and creating new lines of inquiry that extend the scope of the research, I continuously reflected on and adapted my role to ensure sustained acceptance in the newsrooms. I also negotiated and renegotiated an acceptable 'front' that warranted the willingness of journalists to 'volunteer' information. As Goffman (1989) puts it, as an observer, I had to open myself up in ways that I do not in ordinary life.

To avoid the pitfalls of 'going native', that is, abandoning the position of analyst for identification with the journalists leading to restrictions on the character of the data collected (Walsh 1998), I adopted a degree of 'marginality' in the research situation, avoiding too much rapport and yet maintaining a familiarity that grasped the perspectives of the journalists.

4.4.1.3 Data collection and recording

The challenge with participant observation, as Hansen et al. (1998: 55) note, is 'knowing exactly what to record and what not to'. The method's openness to contingencies and lack of predictable linearity in its execution, as intimated above, makes it difficult for the researcher to enter the field with a set of prior categories on what to record and what not to. This is particularly the case in attempts to capture the fluid and diffuse processes of ICT use in the 'real-world' of journalism practice with the high ethnographic standard of first-hand experience. For instance, how to observe a journalist browsing the Internet; writing a text message on his/her mobile phone or

engaging in a mobile phone conversation, without being deemed too intrusive, and relating discrete ICT practices to the object of one's study.

Hansen et al. (1998: 36) are, however, quick to note that whereas other research methods typically involve the design and deployment of a research instrument such as an interview schedule, the participant observer 'becomes his or her own research instrument'. To this extent, in my study, the issue of relevant categories to observe in the journalists' use of ICTs fell back on my sensitivity to the research's objectives which limited my attention to relevant 'analytical categories in the field' (Jensen 1982: 242). This approach finds root in the flexibility of ethnography which, as noted earlier, enables the researcher to persistently exercise discretion, deciding always what is interesting and worth documenting in the field notes. It is this flexibility and alertness to contexts where my ethnographic immersion would yield thick descriptions that assisted me in overcoming the practical obstacles of using a qualitative approach to study the use of new ICTs in journalism practice.

Thus, to capture the complex imbrications of new technologies, the journalists and the wider society, I purposively identified loose categories that focused my attention to different aspects of news production and journalistic routines and attempted to 'shut off' categories that competed for my attention. To this end, I deployed a loosely categorised checklist for my observations which I constantly referred to ensure coverage of all key issues (see appendix 3). As Peshkin (2001: 240) notes, 'the selection of a category is a form of sampling that focuses the researcher's attention, interest, time, and energy in a particular way'. To this end, since the core of newsgathering processes occurs mainly at the level of reporters (Fishman 1980), I decided to observe the daily activities of reporters, focusing my attention on different news desks or beats at a time. I also regularly decided between staying in the newsroom all day and going out on newsgathering assignments. This process entailed attending early morning editorial conferences as well as following individual reporters on assignments but also leaving space for the contingent and unexpected. The early morning conferences were particularly important as they provided 'insightful professional exchanges, revealing journalistic values and judgements in action' (Hansen et al. 1998: 56). They provided a rich source of 'dense journalistic comment' and verbalised decision-making (Cottle 2007: 6). In addition, given that news is primarily a product of transactions between journalists and their sources (Tuchman 1991), attention was also given to the interactions between reporters and their sources, taking a closer look at how the interactions were mediated by the Internet, emails, and

mobile phones. Thus, although ethnography is generally flexible, being systematic and orderly is not antithetical to its epistemological goals. As Peshkin (2001: 241) argues: '[t]here may well be times when what we want to learn is best learned by rigorously structured perceptual means; in this way, we obtain frequencies to undergird our speculations and interpretations'.

In many ways, however, these strategies were developed on my intuitive tendency to make 'numerous sampling decisions about what to include and what to place at the centre and periphery' (Pheshkin 2001: 250), in keeping with my research goals. Janesick (2001) has written on the centrality of intuitive and creative inclinations in navigating complex dialectical interactions between the researcher, the researched and the context of research. She defines intuition as the immediate apprehension or cognition of issues that speak to one's research in the research field, and creativity as having the creative sense to ingeniously mediate methodological challenges rather than simply imitating existing methods. The extract below from one of my newsroom observations at *The Herald* shows how a conscious decision to stay in the newsroom and focus attention on senior journalists' ICT activities proved useful. In particular, it shows how my intuitive predisposition enabled me to simultaneously observe and directly witness the fluid processes characteristic of everyday interactions and routines in the newsroom. Thus, although, I could not set down the finer details of the specific ICT activities, at least at the surface (without capturing nuance), I could observe the trends in their use in the newsroom setting:

> The Assistant News Editor walks in for his late shift at about 10:00 am and from a distance, I notice that the first thing he does upon logging onto his computer is to browse through his email, it is also within close range enough for me to discern that he immediately responds to a selection of emails.
>
> As he does so, he shifts to a social networking site, *Facebook*, and spends a couple of minutes on the site before returning to his mail box once again, but only for a few minutes. He then shifts his attention to online newspapers and, in particular, spends quite a while on *Newzimbabwe*, a news website that mostly focuses on Zimbabwean issues. Eventually he stands up and takes a stroll around the newsroom, chatting with colleagues and clearly catching up on 'news'.
>
> At that point, the News Editor shouts from his cubicle, telling one news reporter that a journalist in Mutawatawa has just sent him an SMS to say

he is ready to file his story – he instructs the reporter to phone the journalist on his mobile phone without delay to get the story.

As he issues the instructions, he remembers (and vocalises) that one senior reporter out on an assignment in a rural district has not yet contacted him on his progress, and he tells the reporter in the newsroom to phone him as well after getting the story from Mutawatawa.

To get in touch with the second reporter the journalist in the newsroom tries his mobile phone and fails to go through and alerts the news editor of this hitch and he is told to try the accompanying driver's mobile number as he uses a different mobile network. He does so and talks to the reporter who, as it turned out, was still working on his story. (*Field notes, The Herald newsroom, July 14, 2008*)

Thus, my 'ethnographic immersion' enabled me to explore and 'excavate' fluid and diffuse activities, often obscured from view, but which required my active involvement in order to discern them (Schatzberg 2008). My immersion in the newsrooms and sustained alertness to selected journalistic activities – in particular, those that spoke to my research goals – unlocked the possibilities to discover and explore more.

Following Goffman's (1989: 125) advice, I also listened to what the journalists spoke about and picked up 'on their minor grunts and groans as they respond[ed] to their situation'. In the same manner, unstructured informal conversations generated important data that constituted a key element of data triangulation (see Hansen et al. 1998). I intuitively responded to opportune moments which presented themselves for informal conversations in the field. These conversations took place in various contexts: in the newsrooms; on newsgathering assignments; in staff canteens; at the press clubs; in pubs, and in editorial reference libraries. On many occasions, the informal conversations went on for hours and often proved valuable for deepening insights on issues elusive to observation or as 'follow-ups' to issues glossed over in formal interviews (discussed shortly) after an interviewee's discomfort over a particular line of questioning. To capture insights from these unstructured moments, I kept a small pocket notebook in which I immediately wrote notes after the conversations.

In terms of the actual recording of my field notes, I wrote notes and memory prompts in shorthand on a daily basis in order to avoid 'memory drop-out' (see

Goffman 1989; Hammersley & Atkinson 1995; Hansen et al. 1998). I occasionally retreated to 'quiet corners' to reflect, write up brief notes and plan my next period of observation by taking note of issues that required follow up, reflection, ordering or analysis. Bearing in mind that 'one can never record everything' as social scenes are inexhaustible (Hammersley & Atkinson 1995: 179-180), I had to make numerous sampling decisions, choosing only to record particular observations because they 'stood out' in relation to my research goals.

There has been considerable scholarly interest on what conventions to follow when recording and writing ethnographic data (Wolfinger 2002; Hammersley & Atkinson 1995; Tjora 2006). Mason (2006b) argues that the researcher needs to pay attention to how they wish to handle the distinction between *literal*, *interpretive* and *reflexive* 'readings' of their field notes. Thus, in writing my field accounts I took the *interpretive* approach by 'constructing' my accounts rather than the 'accounts simply mirroring reality' (Hammersley & Atkinson 1995: 239). Accordingly, in expanding on my notes, I used various figures of speech to narrate 'recognisable and plausible reconstructions' (Hammersley & Atkinson 1995: 245) of journalists' actions in particular settings as they related to the focus of my study. In doing so, I followed Hammersley and Atkinson's (1995: 246) advice that 'the graphic use of metaphorical descriptions must always be part of the ethnographer's repertoire' (see also Tjora 2006). It needs to be stated, however, that the writing of my field notes was closely related to the formal data analysis process discussed in section 4.6, as the field notes were encoded with my 'understandings and interpretations' (Tjora 2006: 433).

Although my participant observations were conducted within specific time frames in each newsroom as shown earlier, when data began to replicate itself by duplicating what I had already got, I took the decision to stop taking notes and move on to the next newsroom. Further to this, because the three technologies I was focusing on did not allow for a full range of 'human expression' that I wanted to experience, it became even more important for me to see participant observation as an alternative source of data for enhancing triangulation against information gathered through other means, in particular, in-depth interviews (group and individual) as discussed below.

4.4.2 Focus group interviews

Focus groups are typically defined as bringing together a small group of people or, more often, a series of groups, to participate in a carefully planned discussion on a

defined topic. The aim of the technique is to make use of group interaction to produce data and insights in the presence of a moderator (Lunt and Livingstone 1996; Macun & Posel 1998). 'It is precisely the group dynamics and interaction found where several people are brought together to discuss a subject' (Hansen et al. 1998: 262), that is seen as the strength of this mode of data-collection over other methods. The technique aims 'at achieving proximity to the terms in use in the cultures in which interviewees experience the world and construct meaning' (Fielding & Fielding 1986: 50).

For the present study, the interactions between participants in focus group interviews created an opportunity for the energy and momentum of group interaction to open up a wider range of responses than was possible in individual interviews and personal conversations (discussed shortly). The group interactions stimulated and aided recall among journalists, providing me with an opportunity to access socially expressed and contested opinions on the use of ICTs in the newsrooms (see Morgan 1988; Fontana & Frey 1994; Lunt & Livingstone 1996; Hansen et al. 1998). The discussions captured the way journalists '"naturally" talk about, make sense of, reason about, and generate meaning' (Hansen et al. 1998: 281) in relation to new technologies. In summary, the method provided journalists with an opportunity to verbalise various ways in which their operations are mediated by ICTs, among other factors.

It is important, however, to note that focus groups are not without disadvantages as individuals may dominate the discussion resulting in other members being silenced. Furthermore, to the extent that group discussions tend to work towards consensus, dissenting views may be marginalised (Morgan 1988; Hansen et al. 1998).

4.4.2.1 Sampling and recruitment of groups

Because group interviews must define a narrow audience for study, the sampling and recruitment of the participants was critical. As noted earlier guidelines for sampling within qualitative research are more flexible and situational, the choice of participants is determined by criteria that are appropriate for a specific study and the number of participants chosen is also situational. As Deacon et al. (1999) observe qualitative sampling strategies are rarely straightforward matters involving well-established sampling protocols; instead they depend upon the creativity and resourcefulness of the researcher. Consequently, there is no consistency in sampling procedures used in

focus-group research. The sampling methods commonly used are often hybrids of existing sampling strategies (Deacon et al. 1999).

It is, however, essential that the sampling of the participants in the groups takes into consideration particular dimensions of the participants. For this study, journalists were purposively selected using theoretical sampling. This sampling strategy is concerned with 'constructing a sample...which is meaningful theoretically and empirically, because it builds in certain characteristics or criteria which help to develop and test [one's] theory or argument' (Mason 2006b: 124). This means selecting participants on the basis of their relevance to one's research questions, theoretical approach, as well as the argument or explanation that one is developing (Mason 2006b). According to Maxwell (1992: 293), the goal of this type of sampling is 'to make sure that one has adequately understood the variations in the phenomenon of interest in the setting, and to test developing ideas about the setting by selecting phenomena that are crucial to the validity of those ideas'. Thus, in selecting participants I considered their possession of common characteristics as professionals working in the same newspaper, rather than bringing together participants from different newsrooms. Of considerable importance was the need to cover key 'beats' as well as a diversity of positions and roles in the newsrooms. This also meant that the journalists invited to participate in the interviews had to be representative of the population of interest as well as able and willing to provide the desired information (see Hansen 1998). I particularly considered the need to ensure that participants felt comfortable and uninhibited with each other as much as possible through ensuring homogeneity in the groups.

Although Hansen et al. (1998) argue that one should have a minimum of six focus groups, until comments begin to repeat themselves and little new material is generated, in my study, the number of journalists available to participate in the sessions was shaped by the demanding nature of their routines. Thus, most of the discussions were held after hours in the newsrooms or at press clubs when journalists were free. Overall, a total of twelve focus groups that lasted between thirty minutes and one hour were conducted across the newsrooms, with participants ranging between three and five. The groups were spread across the newsrooms as follows: *The Herald* - 3; *The Chronicle* - 3; *The Sunday Mail* - 2; *The Sunday News* – 2; *The Zimbabwe Independent* – 1; and *The Standard* -1.

4.4.2.2 My role as moderator

As moderator, my task was to make the participants feel at ease with the situation before starting on the thematic agenda of the interview, the intention being to encourage them speak freely from the discursive resources available to them in the area under study. I made it clear to the participants that the study specifically sought their personal experience of new technologies in news production routines. The participants were encouraged to speak freely about their day-to-day experiences of new technologies in their professional routines, connecting their experiences with the broader socio-cultural, political and economic circumstances in which they operate. As moderator, my role was to ensure that the conversations in the groups did not stray from the main focus of the study although I allowed for much of the energy in the discussions to emerge from the participants themselves. In casting the group interview as a simulation of a natural conversation, I began the interviews by asking general questions, before moving on to more specific ones rooted in the study's objectives (see Jensen 1982).

In order to ensure that the discussions remained focused, I worked from a list of broad questions (interview guide, see appendix 4) which ensured that similar issues were discussed in the different groups thus enabling a cross-comparison of data between groups later. The broad questions on the interview guide were, in part, shaped by issues emerging from participant observations. Thus, I isolated key themes and issues emerging from participant observations that required further exploration. However, in keeping with the flexibility of the qualitative research tradition, I did not follow the interview guide in too rigid a fashion (Morgan 1988); this flexibility allowed me to probe more deeply and follow up on new topics that arose in the interviews.

To record the data in the focus-group proceedings, I used a digital voice recorder. I asked for permission to do so from the participants at the outset of each discussion. Having obtained this, I asked each participant to introduce themselves for voice-identification at the transcribing stage.

As with most social science research, focus group data should as far as possible be combined and juxtaposed with a range of data gathered from different sources using various research techniques in the interest of as complete and reliable an answer to the research question as possible (Macun & Posel 1998; Morgan 1988). In my study, focus group discussions suggested 'new' research questions that necessitated further interrogation through individual in-depth interviews. Thus, the

main purpose of using individual in-depth interviews as a follow-up to focus group interviews was to corroborate findings and further explore in greater depth issues that emerged from other techniques.

4.4.3 Individual in-depth interviews

Individual in-depth interviews are a variant of the one-to-one interview approach. A commonsensical justification for their wide usage in journalism and media studies is that 'the best way to find out what the people think about something is to ask them' (Jensen 1982: 240). The technique has affinities to conversation and is well suited to tap social agents' perspectives on diverse issues 'since spoken language remains the primary and familiar mode of social interaction, and one that people habitually relate to the technological media' (ibid.).

In the present study, the technique was particularly strategic as a follow-up to group interviews as it counterbalanced the 'spiral of silence' (Noelle-Neumann 1993) that affected some reporters in the group interview context. In similar vein, the technique also helped to illuminate sensitive issues beyond the discursive range of acceptable practices in the use of new technologies by journalists. For instance, issues that bordered around ethics and in-house policies and were too sensitive to talk about in a group scenario were explored at length in individual interviews where reporters felt more secure than in an open group set-up. In this sense, the technique equipped me with an understanding of the journalists' inner perspectives and descriptions of experiences that were not easily amenable to observation. It also assisted in digging deeper into why and how individual journalists do certain things as well as interrogate the extent to which they draw on personal initiatives in deploying new technologies.

Individual interviews were also deployed to probe chief editors, Information Technology (IT) managers (in the newsrooms) and other strategic personnel in the Zimbabwean ICT industry for background information and further perspectives that contributed to my understanding of how journalists deploy new technologies. Individual interviews were particularly useful for enlisting data from chief editors whose work routines were not amenable to observation and yet provided insights into corporate and editorial lines of command that constrain or structure journalists' deployment of new technologies. Data from individual interviews thus constituted a further form of triangulation.

4.4.3.1 Sampling and interview procedure

Wimmer and Dominick (2000) argue that in one-on-one interviews respondents are selected based on a pre-determined set of screening requirements. Consequently, in my study candidates for individual interviews were purposively selected from participant observation as well as from focus group interviews. I gave particular attention to participants whose daily routines and practices spoke directly to the study's objectives and those most articulate in focus group interviews.

My decision to interview reporters in situ, at their desks in the newsrooms enabled a direct and clear access to their experience of new ICTs. The setting facilitated a direct interactive engagement with the reporters and the technologies under study, in particular, the Internet and email. Journalists illustrated their responses to particular questions by making reference to specific websites and emails. They made relevant connections of their everyday use of the technologies and aspects of news production, including linking the technologies to the generation of specific stories. More fascinatingly, the journalists illustrated how the Internet is often abused in the newsrooms through 'copying and pasting' stories from news websites and reediting them to suit their newspapers' editorial thrusts (I discuss this at length in Chapter 6 section 6.42). Thus, the setting enabled me to directly witness as well as probe further on how the Internet and email are used by journalists. In the same way, interviewing the reporters in situ made it possible for me to make reference to specific websites that I had seen them browsing from a distance (but without capturing nuance) in my newsroom observations (see section 4.4.1.3).

In conducting the interviews, an open, dialogic relationship with the interviewee was established at the introductory stage, so as to make the interviewee feel comfortable with the speech event of the interview, thus facilitating access to relatively unfiltered and spontaneous data and meanings relating to the journalist's use of new technologies in news production. Given that the individual interviews were mainly conducted as a follow-up to participant observations and focus group interviews, I prepared myself for each interview by identifying pertinent issues that needed further probing in order to ensure that the interview interactions generated relevant data (Mason 2006b). In this sense, I did not use a predesigned standard set of questions for the interviews as in the case with focus group interviews. Rather, my preparations and questions for each interview were focused on enhancing my understanding of pertinent issues that emerged in participant observations and focus group interviews. As a result, the interview questions differed from individual to

individual. However, my questioning did not, preclude 'simultaneously orchestrating the intellectual and social dynamics of the situation' (Mason 2006b: 67) by probing on other relevant issues that emerged as the interviews unfolded.

Overall, a minimum of 96 journalists were involved in the study, either through observations, interviews or a combination of all the methods. As already mentioned in Chapter 1, the figure nonetheless represents the minimum number of journalists involved in the study since it was highly probable that some reporters were involved in observations or other interactions but were not counted due to their limited presence or lack of striking contribution to the focus of the study. However, in keeping with the qualitative thrust of the research, I was not concerned with the generalisability of cases to populations or universes in selecting my participants. Rather, as noted earlier, I was 'concerned with *explanation* in a wider sense than measurement or causation' (Mason 2006a: 16, emphasis original), given that the primary focus of qualitative research is to understand particulars rather than generalising to universals (Maxwell 1992; Bryman 1988; Denzin & Lincoln 1998; Yin 2003) (see section 4.3.1).

Given that in individual interviews, 'people do not always say what they think, or mean what they say' (Jensen 1982: 240), it was essential that interviews be combined with other data gathering techniques.

4.4.4 Documentary sources

My fieldwork also included documentary research. I accessed and used different kinds of documents ranging from a few restricted internal records in the form of minutes, memos and policy statements at *The Herald* to a variety of mass media reports accessed in the newspapers' editorial reference libraries and from on the Internet. Some of the internal documents consulted at *The Herald* included minutes of weekly ICT planning meetings held during Zimpapers's computerisation programme in the 1990s on the following dates: 14 May 1999; 5 June 1999; 11 June 1999; 10 September 1999; 17 September 1999; 12 October 1999; and 20 October 1999. I also consulted the Zimpapers Harare branch computer hardware replacement policy, as well as a memo from operations manager to the acting managing director titled: *Benefits and Costs of Computerising Zimpapers' operations*, dated 10 October 1997.

Although the senior assistant editor who provided these internal records at *The Herald* insisted on confidentiality and was very selective in the records he gave me, the limited data provided enabled me to situate the contemporary ICT situation in

Zimpapers' newsrooms within a historical context. As Walsh (1998) contends, official documents such as minutes, internal memos and policy statements are valuable resources for ethnographic study. They can add useful analytic insights to issues that emerge from participant observations and interviews. At *The Zimbabwe Independent* and *The Standard* management was not forthcoming in providing internal records.

As a result of the restricted nature of accessing more detailed internal reports and records, much of my documentary research was based on mass media reports. Despite the criticisms levelled against mass media reports for their gaps and biases, Deacon et al. (1999: 21) argue that they are 'convenient place[s] to begin a search for information and commentary'. Hammersley and Atkinson (1995: 159) similarly, aver that mass media reports provide '"lay" accounts of everyday life that the enterprising and imaginative researcher can draw on' for particular purposes. The material from newspapers, although sometimes partial and opinionated, can thus be a source of 'sensitising concepts' by suggesting 'distinctive ways in which their authors, or the people reported in them, organise their experiences and through providing the 'situated vocabularies' they employ in everyday encounters (Hammersley & Atkinson 1995: 159).

Despite the rich insights gleaned from newspaper archival data and in-house documents I had to be cautious in my interpretations. May (2001) points out that documents must not be read and interpreted outside the process and context of their production. However, those who criticise documentary research tend to be concerned with the way documents are used rather than being opposed to their use. Thus, in my case, documentary research generally provided important background information that supplemented and backed up data produced through my participant observations and interviews. I used the data mainly as 'secondary material to flesh out, cross-check or question the picture that emerge[d] from the research materials [I produced myself]' (Deacon et al. 1999: 38).

4.5 The rationale for triangulation

The quest for accuracy and alternative explanations in qualitative research has roots in the concept of triangulation. As a concept mainly inclined to quantitative research, it is important to briefly discuss the rationale for its adoption and implementation in the present research, which adopts a qualitative approach. Creswell and Miller (2000: 126) define triangulation as 'a validity procedure where researchers search for convergence among multiple and different sources of information to form themes or

categories in a study'. For Stake (2003: 148), it is a 'process of using multiple perceptions to clarify meaning, verifying the repeatability of an observation or interpretation'. An attempt at triangulation is, therefore, not an effort to capture an 'objective reality' – it is simply an endeavour to secure an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in question through relating different sorts of data in such a way as to counteract various possible threats to the validity of the analysis (Fielding & Fielding 1986; Denzin & Lincoln 1998).

Triangulation is, however, complex in qualitative research because of its roots in 'constructivism' which incline its epistemology to the belief that all knowledge is constructed rather than discovered. In fact, 'the stronger one's belief in constructed reality, the more difficult it is to believe that any complex observation or interpretation can be triangulated' (Stake 1995: 114). 'Most qualitative researchers not only believe that there are multiple perspectives or views of a case that need to be represented, but that there is no way to establish, beyond contention, the best view' (Stake 1995: 108). Stake further argues that despite the complexities posed by the constructivist thrust of qualitative research, it remains imperative to:

> ...minimise misrepresentation and misunderstanding [through] certain triangulation protocols or procedures which researchers and readers alike come to expect, efforts that go beyond simple repetition of data gathering to [a] deliberate effort to find the validity of data observed. (Stake 1995: 109)

Golafashani (2003) concurs, submitting that triangulation has a place in the qualitative research tradition as a way of providing multiple ways to test or maximise the validity and reliability of one's findings.

Following these views, one can argue that constructivism values the multiplicity of human experiences, hence to acquire valid and reliable perspectives to a research problem, multiple methods of data gathering are appropriate (Golafashani 2003). Given qualitative research's acknowledgement of the fact that 'no observations or interpretations are perfectly repeatable, triangulation serves also to clarify meaning by identifying different ways' phenomena can be seen (Stake 2003: 148). 'The idea is that the more sources you consult the more likely it is that omissions will show up and that discrepancies in dates, times, places and the people involved can be resolved' (Deacon et al. 1999: 30).

The open-ended constructivist path adopted in the present study allowed for the implementation of forms of triangulation in order to increase the credibility of

interpretations. Thus, three triangulation protocols were deployed, viz: informant triangulation; case triangulation; and multiple data collection procedures.

Informant triangulation or validation entails the 'checking of inferences drawn from one set of data sources by collecting data from others' (Hammersley & Atkinson 1995: 230). Accordingly, in my case I gathered data from a range of respondents whose positions varied from junior reporters, desk editors, editors-in-chief, and newsroom Information Technology (IT) managers. The reporters observed and interviewed were varied in their age range, experience, seniority as well as their 'beat' specialities in each of the newsrooms studied. Sensitivity to the diversity of informants was particularly important for accessing a number of variables that impacted on individual journalists' use of new technologies.

Sourcing data from six newsrooms enabled case triangulation. This involved the comparison of data derived from one newsroom with data relating to the same phenomenon from another newsroom. The reasoning behind my comparison of data from a cross-section of newsrooms was primarily rooted in the logic of qualitative research. As Mason (2006a: 16) aptly explains:

> Instead of seeking to compare by using standardized measures or comparators applied to all the cases, a qualitative comparative logic works by seeking to understand the distinctive dynamics, mechanics and particularity of each case *holistically*, and then to make comparisons at the level of analysis...(emphasis original)

As a consequence, my research was not fixated on standardising units of measurement for cross-sectional analysis, particularly in the context of the fluid and dispersed nature of new ICT use by journalists, which occurred on a range of dimensions that could not be compared in the sense of 'like with like'. Thus, multiple cases enabled 'cross-contextual and contextual explanations' (Mason 2006a: 17) at the analysis stage. The comparative logic of moving across different contexts or settings also enhanced the scope and generalisability of the explanations (Hammersley & Atkinson 1995).

A third form of my triangulation protocols was the use of multiple data collection procedures or techniques: participant observation and in-depth interviews (group and individual), including informal conversations and documentary analysis (see section 4.4 above). Stake (1995: 114) argues that the use of multiple approaches of this nature within a single study is 'likely to illuminate or nullify some extraneous

influences' as data relating to the same phenomenon are compared but derived from a diversity of techniques. Given the fluid and diffuse nature of processes around ICT use by journalists, deploying a single methodological procedure would have limited my attempt to capture the complex processes. Mixing methods, therefore, offered enormous potential in exploring the multiple dimensions of journalists' use of new technologies in their daily practices. As Mason (2006a: 13) argues, the deployment of a set of qualitative methods enabled me to 'see differently, or to think "outside the box"'. Thus, applying a multi-pronged triangulated approach as shown in figure 3 below enhanced my capacity for in-depth explanation as well as contributed to the robustness of my results than if I had used a single method or approach.

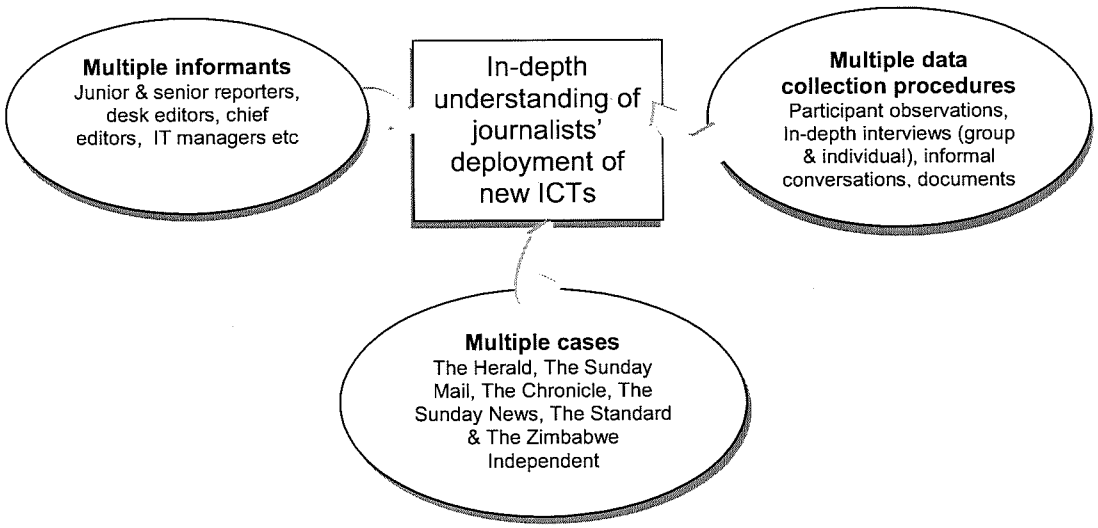

Figure 3. **Multi-method triangulated approach**

It important, however, to note that although triangulation can be a good thing, it is not inevitably so: '[e]ven if the results tally, this provides no guarantee that the inferences involved are correct' (Hammersley & Atkinson 1995: 231). Its value must therefore be judged in relation to the study's 'theoretical logic' (Mason 2006a: 10) and the kinds of questions one seeks to answer.

4.6 Data processing and analysis

It is important to highlight that in qualitative research, ethnography in particular, the processing and analysis of data is not so much 'a distinct stage of the research' (Hammersley & Atkinson 1995: 204). It is a process embodied in the researcher's ideas and hunches as the fieldwork unfolds. Thus, my data processing and analysis

took shape in the field with the writing of my field notes, recording interviews and informal conversations which at that stage conveyed a number of analytic themes as noted in section 4.4.1.3.

Given that participant observations produced data in form of field notes and the interview produced verbatim transcripts, my task at the formal data analysis stage was therefore to categorise the data, interpreting its meanings and presenting the most salient features in critical and coherent form. Thematic coding was thus used as the mode of analysis. My task was to report those sections of participant observations and interview data that illuminated more light on the study's research questions. Thus, in reporting the data, I maintained balance between 'letting the data speak for themselves', summarising and analysing the material. In giving verbatim quotes, I limited these to representative illustrations. Following Jensen (1982: 247), the approach is a 'loosely inductive categorisation of [data] with reference to various concepts, headings or themes. The process comprises the comparing, contrasting, and abstracting of the constitutive elements of meaning'. In this sense, my analysis is broadly interpretive, involving 'the creative construction of possible meaning' (Thompson 1990: 22) in keeping with the constructivist thrust of qualitative research which, according to Denzin and Lincoln (1998: 29), 'is endlessly creative and interpretive'.

4.7 Ethical considerations

The nature of new technologies may present ethical issues for the research process (Rice & Rogers 1984). Observing the use of the Internet, emails and mobile phones within the newsrooms, for instance, can be seen as intrusive and therefore untenable in certain circumstances. There were significant ethical considerations to contend with due to questions of privacy involved in new technology use. These constraints and ethical dilemmas necessitated persistent self-reflexivity and sustained sensitivity to the interviewees. This entailed being very flexible and adaptive to specific research contexts by always being on guard and alert to points of interaction where I appeared a bit too intrusive and ensuring 'informed consent' by being as explicit as possible of my intentions to the journalists.

Throughout my interactions with journalists, my intuitive and creative inclinations (Janesick 2001) guided me in deciding how intrusive my observations were; deciding between simply being a bystander on the margins of action, not intruding at all, and occasionally interrupting and questioning the journalists about

their actions. This also entailed constantly negotiating 'entry' to various contexts and activities that spoke to my research goals, for example: visiting reporters' web browsers on their computers to identify websites they regularly visited; sitting next to a journalist as he/she browsed the Internet; or shadowing a journalist on a newsgathering assignment.

Apart from being self-reflexive and sensitive to the interviewees, I also followed a set of ethical standards during interviews, for example I avoided 'doggedly pursuing a particular issue' (Mason 2006b: 79) if my respondent showed signs of discomfort with a particular line of questioning. Also, where they divulged sensitive personal data or confidential information about their newsroom, I honoured the promise not to repeat it outside the research context. In the same manner, I sought the interviewees' permission each time I used my digital voice recorder and where the permission was not granted I resorted to my note book.

More importantly, due to the political unpredictability of the research context and the sensitivity of some of the responses provided by journalists, I decided to use pseudonyms in place of actual names especially where I felt that the responses might land them into trouble or put their jobs at risk (and where the journalists themselves specifically requested confidentiality and anonymity). As Mason (2006b: 80) notes granting confidentiality and anonymity to respondents 'can be quite difficult given the personal nature of data generated from qualitative interviews. Such data can be recognised by the interviewee...and so may be recognisable to other people'. Similarly, Fontana and Frey (1994) advise that when the objects of inquiry are human beings, extreme care must be taken to avoid any harm to them. For Fontana and Frey, traditional ethical concerns revolve around issues of '*informed consent* (consent received from the subject after he or she has been carefully and truthfully informed about the research) [and the] *right to privacy* (protecting the identity of the subject)' (Fontana & Frey 1994: 372, emphasis added). However, where direct reference is made to journalists' real names (as in the case of the interview extract and screenshot abstracted from the *Facebook* home page profile of Lenin Ndebele – an entertainment reporter at the *Chronicle* – in Chapter 6), 'informed consent' was sought and granted. In all instances, however, I made judgements about which material to explicitly attribute to respondents and which material to remove or alter, for example, by replacing more definite identifiers with more general non-traceable descriptions in order to grant the respondents confidentiality and anonymity.

4.8 Conclusion

This chapter has sought to map out the research design and procedure employed in generating empirical data for the present study. The methodological approach discussed is qualitative in nature as qualitative approaches provide a deeper and possibly more humanistic understanding of the complexities and contingencies involved in news production (Cottle 2003; 2007). The chapter has outlined a four-part research process revolving around: participant observation, two variants of the in-depth interview (including the sampling procedures employed), and documentary analysis. Some methodological issues relating to debates about researching new technologies; the philosophical underpinnings of qualitative research; the 'case study' strategy; ethnography in news production studies; the rationale for triangulation and ethical considerations have also been discussed.

The next three chapters use the empirical data derived from this methodological approach and the theoretical and conceptual framework presented in Chapter 2 and 3 to critically examine newsmaking practices and professional cultures in the newsrooms studied with respect to how journalists deploy and appropriate the Internet, email and mobile phone in the day-to-day practices.

CHAPTER 5

News production practices, cultures and the centrality of new technologies

5.0 Introduction

This chapter closely examines the newsmaking practices and cultures that underpin mainstream print journalism practice in Zimbabwe. Particular focus is given to the notions of structure and agency, that is, the extent to which the journalists make their own choices in the context of the constraining impact of organisational, occupational and wider contextual demands that shape and promote specific professional practices and cultures. The discussion includes newsroom practices and the impact of wider contextual pressures on the practices. This provides the backdrop for discussing the deployment and appropriation of new technologies in the newsrooms as the practices and routines provide a context in which the use of the technologies is manifest. Thus, a discussion of everyday news production practices and cultures provides a backdrop against which we can begin to critically unpack the mediatory function of new technologies in the journalists' professional practices. As Schatzberg (2008) rightly avers, 'if we are to understand behaviour and activity in any society, we need an appreciation of what makes the people we choose to study tick'. We therefore need to understand the banalities of everyday journalistic practices (Sonwalker 2005), the bureaucratic and organisational expediency of routines which help account for the relatively subconscious and standardised role played by journalist in news manufacture across news outlets (Cottle 2000b). It is equally important to put into perspective the journalists' self-understanding of their newsroom practices – how they conceptualise and define their daily practices in order to begin to critically answer questions around their deployment of the technologies that concern the present study (the Internet, email and the mobile phone) in their newsmaking practices.

Although the sites of my immersion and exposure to the journalists' daily professional routines comprised multiple contexts of journalistic activities, the bulk of my discussion focuses on practices in newsrooms, as it is the newsrooms which constitute the 'epicentre' of mainstream journalism practice. I draw on ethnographic material from my observation of editorial processes in the six newsrooms studied and in-depth interviews with journalists. The ethnographic material provides insights into two critical issues: first, how the journalists experience and conceive of their daily

practices and second, the professional interactions and organisational cultures that underpin new technology use. The findings are corroborated with sociological perspectives to the study of journalism discussed in Chapter 3.

Generally, the study establishes that newsmaking practices in the newsrooms studied essentially follow well-known traditions ingrained in occupational and organisational demands. Thus, the day-to-day routines and practices in the newsrooms are comparatively similar in terms of: journalists' daily search for stories and updates on local/global issues; the pressure of deadlines; and the need to constantly pay careful attention to proprietary demands and editorial policies. The latter marks the differences in the editorial content of the state-controlled and the private press. It accounts for the newsmaking practices that are imposed by 'internal' newsroom cultures *vis-à-vis* those that emerge from the wider socio-political and economic context in which the journalists operate.

5.1 Everyday practices and routines

I begin this discussion by giving an overview of the newsroom practices. To this end, I draw firstly on empirical data from the observation of two separate early morning newsroom activities (drawn from the very early days of my fieldwork at *The Herald* and later on at the *Chronicle*). Secondly, I draw on journalists' personal views of their daily practices. The empirical data provides context and broadly summarises the daily work routines in the newsrooms.

> Early morning 07.30 am – As I walked around the newsroom, I noticed that most journalists were glued to computer monitors – either browsing through online news websites or scrolling through their emails. (Quite clear at this time was the shortage of computers in the newsroom as the journalists literally took turns to use the computers.) Also noticeable among the journalists' activities were the substantial number of conversations on fixed phones and mobile phones.
>
> As the clock struck 08: 30 am, journalists began to submit their story ideas (referred to as 'diary items' in newsroom parlance) to their desk editors. At that point, I turned my attention to the News Editor's desk and noticed that as the news reporters presented their story ideas, the news editor took time to engage them on their story ideas. He spoke with frightening authority at the top of his voice, in particular as he discarded some story ideas, much to the

misery of the unlucky reporters. He also frequently assigned the unlucky journalists to specific stories in his own diary.[12]

By and large, this time seemed to be the most challenging moment for most journalists, particularly junior reporters who had difficulties in finding 'diary items'. The scenario was even more worrying when reporters discovered just before the 'diary meeting' that their primary story ideas had been published by some online publication or were presented earlier to the news editor by another reporter. (*Field notes, The Herald newsroom, July 02, 2008*)

Later on after my stint in Harare newsrooms, I witnessed a more or less similar scenario at the *Chronicle* in Bulawayo, but this time the encounter was focused on a junior health reporter:

Early morning 08.00am – as per custom, I took a stroll around the newsroom looking for a work station where I could 'join the queue' to surf the Internet. I decided to sit next to a junior health reporter who was deeply engrossed in browsing the Internet. I registered my presence by greeting her but from her demeanour I realised that she was in no mood to entertain disturbances. So I played it safe by keeping my distance as I leafed through a copy of the day's edition.

I was curious, however, to get a glimpse of what exactly she was doing, and so I occasionally threw my eyes to the computer screen (in the manner of someone anxiously awaiting his turn on the computer, this was not uncommon at this time of the day in the newsroom), in the process noticing that she was repeatedly switching between an assortment of news websites (*Newzimbabwe.com*, *Zimdaily.com* etc.); *Wikipedia*; the *Google* search engine; and her *Yahoo* email. After a few minutes she stood up (making way for me on the computer) as she scribbled a few lines in her notebook and lackadaisically walked towards the News Editor's desk. At that point it dawned on me that she had been working on her story ideas ('diary items') for the day and that she was actually going to present the ideas to the News Editor. She spent some time at the News Editor's desk – a little longer than usual – and from a

[12] Often the news editor had a selection of stories ideas that he assigned to reporters, some came directly from the chief editor's desk while others were ideas derived from newswires and personal contacts.

distance, I could see that she was getting a dressing-down and colleagues situated near the News Editor's cubicle were laughing hysterically. (Again, this was not an unusual scene at this time of the day in the newsroom.)

On her return to her desk, she joked about how 'blank' she was for story ideas. Upon probing her on whether she managed to submit something, she laughingly revealed that the News Editor had, as she expected, cynically trashed her story ideas and assigned her to different stories instead. (*Field notes, the Chronicle newsroom, September 24, 2008*)

The foregoing narratives exemplify how a typical day in the daily newsrooms followed a firm pattern revolving around searching for (and confirming) story ideas through various channels that included browsing the Internet and phoning around. These informal practices marked the onset of business for the journalists and preceded the more formal and institutionalised practices marked by the submission of story ideas to desk editors. These early morning practices were not necessarily exclusive or clearly defined. However, it was clear as shown in the narratives that technologies, both 'old' and 'new', were at the core of the practices.

The early morning routines also appeared nerve-racking for reporters, in particular for those new to the profession and still trying to master the daily challenges and pressures of coming up with 'acceptable' story ideas. For the junior reporters these challenges were worsened by the dominant newsroom cultures. In particular, the nature of relations between reporters and the unyielding desk editors who occupied the first level of the newsroom 'gate-keeping' hierarchy and often 'shot down' story ideas with contempt that drew laughter and apprehension among reporters. On the whole, the mood, pulse and the atmosphere in the newsrooms at the onset of business may perhaps best be described as 'alive' and pulsating with scope for laughter, tears and anger. Journalists, however, seemed socialised into accepting the 'newsroom bureaucracy, hierarchical pecking-orders and the particular style of office politics operative in their newsroom' (Louw 2001: 165).

The empirical narratives above found confirmation in the journalists' personal views about their daily practices. They perceived their daily work as patterned and routinised in ways that affirm the early newsroom studies discussed in Chapter 3. For the journalists, daily news production fell within the realm of the taken-for-granted. They saw newsmaking practices as 'common sense' routines, simply not worthy of comment and explanation. This was largely manifest in the journalists' description of

their daily practices as 'calculated', 'boring', 'ritualised', and 'following a particular trend'. The extracts below from two senior journalists, a political reporter at *The Standard* and a news reporter at the *Chronicle* respectively offer insights into how the journalists generally conceived of their daily practices. The extracts particularly emphasise the 'patterned' nature of the practices. There were also perceptions among the journalists that newsmaking practices are more or less the same across newsrooms:

> Busani: I don't know how many times you have heard or observed this really, but I will tell you that it's just *the same*. It's just a *ritual*! Basically, the routine of a newsman (sic) is to get up in the morning and get story ideas that you want to develop for your paper. You also want to get updates on what other people in the world have been writing, whether it's related to your areas of concern. Like in my case here, I will be interested in stories that mention Zimbabwe in one way or the other.
>
> This essentially entails that most of the morning I will be *browsing the Internet*, checking what has been published elsewhere. I will also be *checking my emails* repeatedly throughout the day to see if there is anything new coming in or anything I can pick up a story from. I also look at local newspapers to see if there are likely to be any interesting stories with potential for follow-ups.
>
> I also do some interviews, most of them *telephonically* using either the *fixed phone* or *my mobile phone*. I look at what has come through the *fax*; mobile phone *SMS alerts* from organisations like the *Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition* on what is happening locally. Basically that's it (emphasis added).

> Stanley: I would basically say that my day is very much sort of *calculated*, whereby I get in the newsroom in the morning, *peruse my emails*, *peruse the daily papers*, *peruse through the Internet news sites* to get to see the latest on what is happening in Zimbabwe and what is emerging from the outside world about Zimbabwe and try to formulate some ideas or devise my own stories for my newspaper (emphasis added).

The need to keep abreast of local and global issues and the general 'craving' for what other media have covered for background information and story ideas formed part of the motivation behind the early morning individual routines. While there was an

element of individual agency in these taken-for-granted everyday professional practices, the structuring impact of professional imperatives was equally obvious.

It is important to note that the day-to-day newsmaking practices are also 'mediated by the routine factors of everyday [life]' (Jacobs 1996: 375). To this extent, journalistic practices are enmeshed in the journalists' leisure hours which include the time at home before going to work. Most journalists pointed out that they spend their leisure time at home following news from traditional news channels that include radio and television (local and international channels). These domestic practices marked the beginning of the day before the bureaucratic and formalised processes in the newsroom. Two senior political reporters from *The Herald* and the *Zimbabwe Independent* clearly articulated this point:

> Viola: When I wake up in the morning, usually by 05.00 am, I listen to my short wave radio which allows me to get to almost every part of the world...By the time I get to work, before I have even read the newspaper I would have listened to all the major international channels. Within that period, I would have listened to the *BBC*, *Voice of America*, *Radio France International*, *Radio Canada*, *Channel Africa* in South Africa and also our own *ZTV* news. As a political writer, in most cases I pick up an issue that I have to analyse and needs research. So this is why, for example, I have to listen to four or five channels and want to hear what they say about an issue, especially within the Zimbabwe context, in the African context and globally. By the time I get out of the house I would be aware of what is going on around us, what is being said about Zimbabwe, and what Zimbabweans are saying about themselves.
>
> So this is when I start orienting myself, I start thinking about my stories for the day and even consider some initial ideas on the basis of what I would have listened to on radio or television. I actually 'talk to myself' as I process the information on my way to work. When I get to the newsroom I read the day's edition of our paper just to get a feel of what my colleagues wrote about and then I browse the *Internet for various news websites that I think are authoritative* enough to give me news and story ideas such as *Newzimbabwe.com*. Then I compare and contrast with what I already have, what is in our newspaper and what the news websites have. Thus, I am already processing more and more, and solid ideas are formulating. It might be things that I want to write about or it might also be the things that I am interested in. So, this is how my day begins (emphasis added).

> Tonderai: My working day usually begins with watching news on different satellite television channels, usually its *France24* and *SABC Africa*. I also listen to the news on the radio before I leave home. When I get to work, part of my morning is spent going through newspapers and *browsing through Internet editions* just to acquaint myself with what stories are there on Zimbabwe so that I can have follow-ups or drop some of the stories that may have been carried by the daily publications. So, I rely on listening to the local main news on radio and access to online newspapers writing on both local and international news (emphasis added).

From the above, it is apparent that journalists rely on multiple sources of information that include both the 'old' and 'new' media (radio, television, online/hard copy newspapers, fax, emails, fixed/mobile telephone and SMS alerts) in order to accomplish their daily duties. These technologies, however, complemented 'traditional' newsmaking practices such as face-to-face interactions with sources (as shall be shown later). Journalists thus relied on multiple sources of news and story ideas. Significantly, the use of some of the sources of news and story ideas highlighted above was not detached from the journalists' private lives. As Grint (1998: 2) argues:

> The spheres of work, employment and home are all necessarily intertwined and to separate them as if they could exist independently is to misconceive the complex reality of work and misunderstand the significance of the relationships which it embodies.

Although the interview extracts above draw attention to the obvious and indispensable daily practices of journalism, it is important to reiterate that the journalists' conception of their daily practices as 'ritualised', 'self-evident' and 'self-explaining' patterns of practice corroborates the findings of the pioneering news production studies discussed in Chapter 3. Precisely, that newsrooms have a high degree of routinisation and their methods of gathering and selecting news are standardised across media houses (Tuchman 1991; Schudson 2003). The journalists' responses highlight the fulfilment of institutional and professional demands that are ingrained in the need to come up with 'fresh' news ideas tailored around institutional 'interests' and constantly shifting news values. When asked to explain the motivation

behind the routine practices described above, one political reporter at *The Zimbabwe Independent* explained thus:

> Luthando: ...it's a journalistic culture that whatever you write on has to be *new*. You need to believe in the concept of the *newness* of a story and adapt to changing news values on a daily basis. That desire to find new stories, your sense of finding out something new on a day-to-day basis, I'm sure, is the major drive that pushes any newsman to explore and find out *new angles* for stories that have been reported or are yet to be reported...
>
> It's actually also a combination of factors or habits that you develop as you grow in the profession. Basically the journey in journalism makes you try to adapt to day-to-day changes in news...What makes my job easier now is that I can use a combination of technologies: the *fixed phone*, the *mobile phone*, the *fax*, the *Internet* and *email* to get to know issues of basic interest...But as I say, there is a combination of factors behind the daily practices I described earlier. In a sense, it also includes personal intuitions on the stories one covers regularly (emphasis added).

While there were obvious differences between the private and state-controlled newspapers' newsmaking cultures (as explained by the newspapers' editorial policies and proprietary influences), some practices extended across the newsrooms and these were shaped by a combination of factors that coalesced around professional, occupational and organisational demands. In particular, journalists across the newsrooms shared basic values of what constitutes news. As it emerged in both focus group and individual interviews, these included, among others: localness, proximity, importance, impact, interest and timeliness. These values constituted the basic shared values for identifying news and were the most important criteria in pursuing or rejecting stories (see Shoemaker & Reese 1991).

However, there was evidence of significant differences between dailies and weeklies in terms of the news selection, gathering and packaging processes, all predicated on differences in the constraining impact of time and deadlines in the newspapers' work cycles before going to print. As Louw (2001: 158) points out, it is not only newsroom practices that impact on meanings made: 'deadlines necessarily influence journalistic work routines' as well. Thus, while daily newspapers focused primarily on 'hard' and breaking news, the weeklies occasionally fed-off the daily papers' stories and went a step further to include more analysis and 'featurised' stories

that explored human interest angles, context and implications because they had more time at their disposal. This scenario finds support in Fishman's (1980: 162) assertion that '[t]he hardness and softness of news is not inherent in events themselves but rather in the decisions of newsworkers about how to cover and formulate occurrences'. The differences in the dailies and weeklies' approaches to newsmaking were acknowledged by news editors of two weeklies, the *Sunday Mail* and the *Zimbabwe Independent* respectively:

> Garikai: As a weekly newspaper it's quite a challenge to come up with something entirely new, so our approach is to find maybe two hard news stories that we think will capture the attention of the reader. Otherwise, we rely entirely on analysis since we have more time to go through issues and even stories that appear in the dailies, *The Herald* and the *Chronicle*, since they don't have time really to go deeper into the stories. As an example, a story in *The Herald* might report the death of an entire family in a car accident – as hard news – that so many people died, but in our case we can attend the funerals and try to get deeper into issues, how the families are coping and so forth.
>
> Costa: Weekly newspapers are not there to break news, they are there to make analysis and inform people further on any subject which would have been tackled in daily newspapers. Ours is *interpretative* journalism, we mix analysis with facts, which is the essence of a weekly newspaper. Our practices revolve around this basic understanding and conception. We are not driven by the need to break news like daily newspapers, and neither do we seek to focus on events. We are not an event driven newspaper.
>
> Unfortunately, however, nowadays in this country weekly newspapers are behaving more like daily newspapers basically because the dailies that we have are so biased, they deliberately omit very important issues, and so, as a private newspaper with a different editorial policy, we take advantage (emphasis added).

These extracts show that the basic news values for weeklies (across the ownership divide) are generally distinct from those of their counterparts in the dailies. The differences have an influence on journalists' everyday newsmaking practices, including how they routinely deploy new technologies. However, as implied in

Costa's response, the newspapers' dichotomous editorial policies also foster divergent newsmaking cultures between the private and state-controlled weeklies whose editorial thrust he considers to be 'so biased [and] deliberately [omitting] very important issues'.

What is generally clear from the foregoing discussion is that journalists' work routines are structured around the news outcomes of other news media – both 'traditional' and 'new'. Journalists feed off each other's news products, often following up on stories covered by other media to develop their own stories. One economic reporter for the *Sunday News*, Mbuso, stated:

> We keep track of topical stories covered in other publications, in particular, the local dailies which mostly scratch issues on the surface. Our task is simple, as a weekly paper with the advantage of the time on our side, we try to get deeper into issues and pursue different angles to the stories.

The discussion above has given a broad overview of the primary phases of everyday newsroom activities and practices. The next section focuses on the institutionalised bureaucratic routines through which 'gate-keeping' decisions are rendered in the newsmaking processes through 'diary' and 'conference' meetings.

5.2 The gate-keeping processes

As noted in Chapter 3, the 'gatekeeper' concept has provided a useful metaphor for the relation of news organisations to news products through its emphasis on biases in news selection decisions (Manning 2001). Louw (2001: 160) argues that:

> Gatekeeping has been institutionalised in...newsrooms, where the process of selection, emphasis and de-emphasis has been turned into a set of systematised routines. Significantly, it is the very routinisation of the process that has tended to render it opaque to journalists themselves.

As already implied in the preceding section, in the newsrooms studied the formal institutional gatekeeping processes began with diary meetings between reporters and desk editors. For weekly newspapers, these meetings were held at the start of the respective newspaper's working week. The meetings were very brief (often lasting between five and ten minutes) and informal in structure. They also varied between one-on-one meetings and group meetings. In these meetings, reporters submitted story ideas (diary items) to their desk editors and explained the newsworthiness of their

ideas including the sources to be contacted. The desk editors meticulously considered the story ideas, frequently posing a series of questions to ascertain their newsworthiness and feasibility. They also suggested possible sources and the angles to take. As noted in the preceding section, in instances where the reporter's story ideas failed to 'meet the mark', desk editors assigned them to different stories.

The essence of the brief discussions in the 'diary' meetings was to serve not only the functional ends for the news organisations but those of the readership as well. The meetings constituted one of the platforms in which audience considerations were built into the newsmaking processes. As the sports editor of the *Chronicle* put it, each of his reporters was supposed to come up with three diary items 'drawn from a mixed bag of sporting disciplines that accommodate the diverse sporting interests of the paper's readership'.

The diary meetings were followed by more organised and coherent editorial conferences in which proprietary affairs took centre stage in shaping the editorial content through direct input from chief editors who chaired all the conferences. The conferences were held in the mornings and afternoons in daily newspapers, and at the start of the working week and just before going to print in weekly newspapers. Despite some similarities, the meetings varied in nuance from newspaper to newspaper. Their style, structure and organisation differed sharply in particular between dailies and weeklies. Whereas at the weeklies all the journalists attended the conference and contributed to the shaping of story outcomes, at the dailies attendance was mainly the preserve of desk and chief editors. The differences depended more on the 'constraints of assembly-time' (Fishman 1980: 37) in terms of the 'pace at which stories were assembled into a finished newspaper' (ibid.), than on the newsroom cultures or proprietary influences.

In the conferences several copies of local newspapers and copies of diary items prepared by desk editors were spread across the table. The meetings unfolded by way of examining the current edition page-by-page, with the staffers in attendance critiquing each other's work by raising editorial and reportorial issues on particular stories. One news reporter at *The Sunday Mail*, Vongai, likened the conference meetings to a 'peer-review gathering' where one will be discussing with peers, sharing ideas on her stories in the current edition as well as what she intends to write about in that particular week. This process went further to include exploring various possible angles to specific stories in relation to angles taken by other publications. Reference was thus made to comparable stories published by other Zimbabwean

media including radio, television and more regularly the popular online newspapers that focus mainly on Zimbabwean issues, such as *Newzimbabwe.com*; *Zimonline.co.za*; *Zimbabwesituation.com*; *Zwnews.com* and *Zimdaily.com.* The practice of closely following the news of competitors is not unique to the newsrooms studied. According to Fishman (1980: 7-8) '[a]ll journalists depend on other news organisations for their sense of "what's news today".' Because most of the news organisations followed (as shown in the examples given above) were located in different cities and regions, this meant that 'news judgements...spread throughout an indefinite expanse of territory' (Fishman 1980: 8).

Also at the heart of the conferences were presentations by desk editors of story ideas generated earlier in diary meetings. Each story idea was subsequently evaluated with possible story angles being suggested in comparison to angles taken by other publications. At the end of the meeting, all the stories on the 'diary' would have been discussed, new story ideas generated, story angles and sources suggested, and the first selection of news stories done. In the dailies, desk editors returned to the newsroom with suggestions for their reporters and for weeklies reporters returned to their desks with more concrete ideas of the stories they will be working on during the week.

Following these routines, the newsgathering and writing processes took place within set deadlines. This meant that journalists were supposed to have their stories ready in time for the pre-publication conference in which completed stories were discussed. The pre-publication conferences also focused on breaking news from news wires and stories that had slipped off the attention of the journalists earlier on. In summary, the conference provided a platform for incorporating stories that emerged during the course of the day or week. The reasoning behind this conference was aptly stated by the sports editor of the *Chronicle* as follows:

> Samuel: ...at times you realise that the 'diaries' that are submitted by the journalists are just speculative diaries...submitted just to get over with it. Eventually during the course of the day, we might come up with totally different stories, because, until the time we knock off, we will still be looking around for newsworthy issues that may come up. So, when I go to the afternoon conference, I must be having definite stories and be in a position to suggest the lead stories for my pages.

In this sense, the afternoon conference ensured that the newspapers did not miss out on important issues which could give their rivals competitive advantage.

Generally, these editorial meetings made it clear that 'news is a practical organisational accomplishment and that newsworkers heavily rely on the bureaucratic definition of the phenomena they report' (Fishman 1980: 140). From a researcher's point of view these processes revealed how the desk editors and their chief editors shaped and controlled the editorial identities of their newspapers. The meetings constituted key 'gate-keeping' processes that ensured conformity to editorial policies and proprietary demands. They also kept journalists 'in check'. As one senior business reporter at the *Sunday Mail* explained in a focus group interview:

> Prince: Questions will always emerge if you don't toe the expected editorial line and guidelines because we get feedback from colleagues and chief editors on how they view our stories...If they continue to say your stories are 'not good' then you know you better pull up your stockings or else...

It was also in these meetings that editors assigned reporters to their 'beats', and because of the political situation in Zimbabwe at the time of doing fieldwork for the present study, the dominant 'beats' were politics, police news, and court reporting.

It has to be noted, however, that newsmaking in the newsrooms is far more complex than is implied by the gatekeeping practices discussed earlier. Indeed, we cannot fix the complexity of Zimbabwean mainstream newsmaking to 'one point' along a circuit of interactions by attributing newsmaking solely to these institutionalised 'gate-keeping' processes. This would be to overlook other important processes and practices at play in the practice of mainstream journalism in Zimbabwe.

Although newswork is clearly accomplished through the institutionalised routine practices discussed above, some occurrences are far from being routine. A closer and deeper examination of the journalists' everyday practices shows a somewhat complex newsmaking culture shaped by many unplanned or unpredictable factors. These factors are not amenable to the journalists' generalised conceptions of their daily practices as entirely linear and routinised. There is therefore need to explore other factors at play in the practice of journalism – factors beyond the in-house 'gatekeeping' processes – which relate to the impact of the economic context, and the dynamics of the wider body politic on professional and institutional practices. As noted in Chapter 3, there are other external pressures that shape journalistic practice (MaGregor 1997; Ettema et al. 1997). This line of thought necessitates a conceptual shift from *routines* to *practices* which, according to Cottle (2000b: 22), 'accommodates both the determinacy of bureaucratic needs and journalist agency'.

Consequently, we consider the constraints imposed by both 'internal' newsroom cultures and the wider 'external' socio-political and economic conditions in which the journalists operate. As McNair (1998: 125) rightly notes, '[m]any of these conditions are reflected in the day-to-day organisation of the newsroom, but also have relevance on the grander sociological scale, shaping the social role and function of journalism'.

As discussed in Chapter 1, newsmaking in Zimbabwe is governed by a host of constraints built into the polarised political environment and the cultural and socio-economic context in which the journalists operate. These factors manifest themselves in editorial policies and proprietary demands; source cultivation, selection and deployment; the deployment of the 'beat' system; and practices emerging with the journalists' quest for economic 'survival', precisely 'moonlighting'. These factors have significant implications on the deployment and appropriation of new technologies by the journalists as discussed in Chapter 6. I discuss these in turn below.

5.2.1 Editorial policies and proprietary demands

Mainstream news production practices in Zimbabwe are characteristically shaped by the polarised terrain of Zimbabwean politics (Mano 2005; Moyo, D 2007). While the mainstream private press assumes an anti-government editorial perspective, the state-controlled public press is manifestly partisan and politicised in its support for government policy (see Chapter 1). This is a defining characteristic of Zimbabwean news production and has a significant impact on how journalists conduct their day-to-day activities. This includes processes around the journalists' news selection habits and the appropriation of new technologies in sourcing stories and connecting with the wider society wherein news is sourced. It is interesting, however, to note that the journalists are consciously and knowingly involved in this polarised newsmaking culture. As one senior political reporter, at *The Herald*, Tamuka commented in a focus group interview: 'When you work for a government paper you know what is expected of you, you naturally internalise the house policy'. This finds support in Cottle's (2000b: 23) observation that:

> ...journalists quickly develop a professional competency in (knowingly) reproducing news according to the specific expectations and requirements of the particular outlet for which they work. This professional flexibility cannot convincingly be accounted for with reference to general news routines, but

rather in respect of the professional enactment of different organisational policies and differentiated cultural forms of news.

The journalists' internalisation and understanding of their newspaper's editorial policies found articulation in their conceptions of their newspapers' objectives and editorial policies. A senior political reporter at the *Sunday News* noted thus:

> John: Every newspaper has its own objectives, in our case as a state-owned paper; our primary goal is to inform the public on what the state is doing. We provide interaction between the public and the government. Our interest is to uphold the state and to provide an interface between the state and the public – that is the paper's policy position. Other newspapers have their objectives as well.

Similarly, journalists at the private weeklies also showed a deep-rooted understanding of their house policies which contrast sharply with the state-controlled newspapers' approaches. They saw their newsmaking cultures as rooted in different editorial policies as captured in the following interview extract with a business reporter at *The Zimbabwe Independent*:

> Paulus: *The Zimbabwe Independent* is more like a watchdog; we tend to look at all the people who are in power and decision making structures, how they are coming up with policies and whether they are following those policies. That's how we conceive ourselves...We also know that people have got this perception that anything that comes from the state media is propaganda – it is lies – so our task is to chase up topical stories published in the state media and give the readership a different version of the same stories. So you read something in *The Herald* or the *Chronicle* then you talk to people who are quoted in the stories and those from the opposing side and you come up with a different story.
>
> In short, our editorial policy is to be the 'watchdog' of government and the major political players, including the opposition. That's how it is, but of late we have been more of a watchdog of government. People tend to think that we have to write negatively about the government all the time because at times when we write negatively about the major opposition political party, the MDC, we get a lot of phone calls people saying now you are sounding like

> *The Herald* but our editorial policy is being the watchdog of both opposition and the government.

The newsmaking culture described above is closely related to the impact of proprietary demands, which also have a 'shaping' impact on news production practices and account for the differences in newsroom cultures, in particular as they relate to the dichotomy between the state-controlled and the private press. Referring to the newsmaking practices in his newsroom, the news editor of the state-owned *Sunday News*, Gilbert, highlighted the centrality of the proprietor in shaping the paper's news production culture: 'my core activity is to generate story ideas that... will not conflict with the shareholder or the owner of the paper who happen to be the government and private companies'.

As noted above, these editorial policies have deep-rooted implications for the routine cycles of news production in the newsrooms studied. They tend to constrain journalists' individual agency as they willingly adapt even when the policies impinge on the professional journalistic culture (Fishman 1980). The polarised political environment in which the journalists operate also legitimises and naturalises partisan work routines (Nyamnjoh 2005a). This scenario counters the argument that journalistic professional values are key factors in determining the news outcome. The imperatives of objectivity, impartiality, accuracy and credibility rooted in the codes of journalistic practice are eclipsed and dispersed by the polarised political environment (see Tuchman 1978; Soloski 1997; Heinonen 1999; Schudson 2000).

As Cottle (2000b: 25) argues '[i]deas of objectivity and its closest correlates: balance, impartiality, fairness, truthfulness, factual accuracy do not exhaust the epistemological claims of journalism', rather they simplify what in reality may be a far more variegated set of journalistic epistemological positions. Similarly, McNair (1998: 64) writes:

> [J]ournalism, like any other form of cultural production, always reflects and embodies the historical processes within which it has developed and the contemporary social conditions within which it is made. Concepts such as objectivity and balance – have complex socio-historical roots which reflect the values and ideas of the societies in which they emerged.

I shall discuss the specific impact of proprietary and editorial policy influence on new technology use by the journalists later on, but the general observations made so far

about the impact of proprietary and editorial policy force attention to the newsmaking cultures manifest in the polarised news production environment in which the journalists operate (see Mano 2005). In this sense, it is important to note that news outcomes in Zimbabwe are not necessarily determined by increased access to new technologies and related resources but are also an outcome of the editorial policy regimes that prevail in the newsrooms. The policies are ingrained in 'the informing political ethos of the news organisation and its managers' (Cottle 2000b: 27). Thus, the structures of ownership and control and the broader ideological climate shape the thinking of reporters, editors, and news sources alike (MacGregor 1997).

Although the journalists' routines and news production practices are characterised by a high degree of institutionalisation, as noted in the discussion above, other factors in the wider context of practice (such as the political and economic environment) also impact on journalistic practices in Zimbabwe. Their influence gravitates to other aspects of news production that are worth noting, if only for their implications on new technology deployment in the newsrooms.

5.2.2 Source cultivation, selection and deployment

The cultivation, selection and deployment of sources have a defining impact on the character of Zimbabwean mainstream journalism practice. The sourcing routines are also entangled in the country's polarised political situation. The processes of sourcing stories do not only entail routinely phoning regular and specific sources to maintain a relationship that ensures a steady flow of story ideas, tips and comments, but also entail carefully selecting and cultivating new sources whose political orientation buttress the newspapers' political orientations (as discussed in the preceding section). Source relations are thus clearly at the heart of journalists' daily practices. I return to this point shortly, but I shall take a brief detour to highlight the importance of sources in the journalists' everyday practices, as highlighted in the interview extract below with a news reporter at the *Chronicle*:

> Ngirandi: One of the first things I do when I get to the newsroom (in the event that I failed to source a diary the previous day) is to go to phones and *start calling my sources* so that they give me stories...We interact with sources from time to time...and for me, this is a relationship I have developed over time to the extent that when I SMS or 'beep'[13] some of them using my mobile phone,

[13] Dialling a number and hanging up before the call is answered, in hope that the other person will call back.

they instantly phone back. Sometimes they just phone me to tell me there is this and that happening. But I also routinely call them just to keep the relationship going (sic)....

From the response above one notes an element of journalistic agency in terms of the journalists' source cultivation and the regularity with which they maintain contact with them to 'sustain the relationship'. As one senior business reporter at the *Chronicle*, Mbonisi, put it: 'there is no specific rule of doing things in terms of sources; it's something that you actually design (sic) on your own – you cultivate and deal with your sources on your own'. This point found reinforcement in my observations. It was clear that much of the contact with sources was through the mobile phone, this included the use of SMS text messages and the 'beeping' function of mobile phones, as noted in Ngirandi's response above. A political reporter at *The Herald*, Simon, also confirmed this point in a focus group interview: 'usually the mobile phone is better as opposed to fixed phones, most sources are very uncomfortable discussing certain issues on fixed phones in their offices, they prefer mobile phones which immediately reveal the caller's identity to them'. This pointed to the degree of trust and confidence between the journalists and their sources. It is also worth noting that the contact numbers of sources were jealously guarded by the journalists who often refused to share the numbers with colleagues. In extreme cases, some sources refused to divulge information to journalists they did not have a 'working' relationship with even if they knew them as bona fide journalists. This scenario mirrored the heavily politicised context in which the journalists practiced.

Sourcing routines were thus equally entwined in the polarised political terrain in which journalists and their sources subsist, to the extent that when a journalist moves from one media house to another, they are bound to lose the trust and confidence of their sources. As Mano (2005: 63) explains: '[e]xcept for "openly accessible news sources"...a number of news sources in Zimbabwe restrict their interviews to publications of their liking and in most cases along political lines'. So deeply naturalised are these divisions in the sourcing routines that professionalism is often at stake as highlighted in the interview extract below with a senior political reporter at *The Herald*:

Tamuka: ...It's the environment in which we operate in, for instance every time I phone my sources in the police force, I know for sure that when they

give me reports of politically related arrests – they will only focus on supporters from one political party, the main opposition MDC. They won't say much about the involvement of ZANU-PF supporters.

So glaring are the divisions in our sources that, at times when I call Nelson Chamisa, [the national spokesperson of the MDC], because I am a political reporter for *The Herald*, he is always scathing in his responses. He would say "you have already started doing ZANU-PF things, when we get into power you will see what we will do to you". He says this almost daily when I call him. On a bad day, he simply says "I don't talk to a Zanu-PF political commissar!" and hangs up.

This is the environment we operate in; it therefore naturally has an impact on our source selection...you think twice before phoning some potential sources. So this is the reason why you will see in some of our stories on local politics we simply write "so and so was not immediately available for comment" because trying to contact them is a waste of time...

Chamisa is also in the habit of sending press statements through email. So when I come in the morning I see the press statements flooding my mail box, usually they will be alleging that an MDC supporter has been killed by ZANU PF supporters. The language he uses is the typical MDC mantra. I just read the emails for fun; I can't even present them to the news editor, I know I will be told off.

This is a clear example of how the everyday political atmosphere in Zimbabwe generates 'predictable hierarchies of sourcing and representational practices' (Atton & Wickenden 2005: 351). The sourcing routines are clearly linked to the journalist's internalisation of their editorial policies and proprietary expectations as noted in the preceding section. Louw (2001: 163) argues thus:

> Learning who news editors and editors consider to be "appropriate" contacts constitutes an important part of the staff-cloning process in any newsroom. This will be learned by having contacts "passed-on" and by encountering disapproval when "inappropriate" contacts are used.

In this sense, Tamuka's submission in the interview extract above that he only reads emails from the opposition political party sources for fun, and cannot even present their contents to his news editor as story ideas, reinforces the fact that Zimbabwean

mainstream journalists 'internalise...the values of their employers. They cooperate...rather than risk a fall out with the proprietor' (Mano 2005: 68). To this extent, it is not just the newsroom routines that determine journalists' news coverage or the range of news sources gaining access to news but, as noted earlier, 'the informing political ethos of the news organisations' (Cottle 2000b: 27) and the wider political context in which news is sourced. As Louw (2001: 163) further avers:

> The pool of contacts used by any newsroom constitutes a very small minority of the overall population. Ultimately, the choice of contacts reflects how that newsroom sees the community it reports on, the choice of contacts being fundamental to defining the shape and position of the...news-frame.

Fishman (1980: 36) also reminds us that '[t]he availability of each source of information is predictable for the reporter because availability is itself a product of systematically organised work within various beat settings'. The context of practice therefore has an impact on the interpretive framework through which the journalists construct news. More fundamentally, as relates to the present study, the polarised sourcing culture in Zimbabwean newsrooms has implications for professionalism. According to Mano (2005: 68) professionalism in Zimbabwean journalism 'operate[s] at various levels and [is] influenced by several factors that [include] news sources, proprietors and the broader environment'.

The sourcing routines in the newsrooms studied corroborate the trends established by the early newsroom studies, that journalists tend to privilege institutional sources with 'social hegemony' (Schudson 2000: 184) and appropriate infrastructure to guarantee a reliable and steady supply of news (Schlesinger 1990). As one political reporter at the *Chronicle*, Tafadzwa pointed out:

> Because of the deadlines some people tend to fall out of my pool of sources, which is quite unfortunate...But I have to deal with reliable people for me to meet my deadlines...I know for instance that when I'm writing a particular story I have got a specific reliable source, whom I can get in touch with even at odd hours and get some information without any hassles at all. Those are the sources I keep close contact with...

In his discussion of the routine practices adopted by journalists in order to meet their deadlines, Louw (2001: 164) submits that a key feature of the routine practices of journalists is the importance time plays in imposing certain practices 'because news-

making takes place within the parameters of deadlines'. Fishman (1980: 142) correspondingly argues that: '[t]he news organisation needs reliable, predictable, scheduled quantities of raw materials because it is set up to process these in reliable, predictable, scheduled ways in order to turn out on a standard product (the newspaper) at the same time every day'. My participant observation in the newsrooms also established that journalists always preferred the 'easier way out' in terms of contacting sources, particularly when under pressure to meet deadlines. The trend was even more significant when it came to deploying new technologies to communicate with sources. As the news editor of the *Sunday News* pointed out:

> Gilbert:...it is much easier to deal with sophisticated sources...sources that have access to the Internet, email and in particular the mobile phone. These are the kind of sources that we deal with. As you may know Zimbabwean journalism emphasises much on officialdom...getting the voices of officials, fortunately, these are the same people that have got the facilities and means...to stay in touch with us.

In discussing the complexities around the sourcing routines of journalists, Louw (2001: 163) proffers an explanation that substantiates the interview extract above. He writes:

> When constructing a story, journalists will work through their contact list, starting with the person who is considered the most 'appropriate' contact. Consequently, news construction has come to favour (and hence promote) certain kinds of people – *those with resources to maintain publicity machines* or who are able to deliver "quote" and an "image" concurrent with media requirements (emphasis added).

It is important to highlight that the journalists' everyday news sourcing routines are also built into the technologies they use. I return to this point in greater depth later in my discussion of the deployment of the Internet, email and mobile phones in Chapters 6 and 7. In the next section I focus on the 'beat' system and the contextual factors that influence its deployment in the newsrooms studied.

5.2.3 The 'beat' system and its entrenchment in politics

The 'beat' system, which disperses reporters to where news is most likely to occur (Tuchman 1978; Ettema et al. 1997), has a central function in Zimbabwean

newsrooms. Its wider deployment in the newsrooms typifies the '"generic" Anglo pattern of news-making practices and newsroom structures, a pattern that has been carried across the globe during the periods of British and American domination' (Louw 2001: 159; see also Nyamnjoh 2005a). The common beats in the newsrooms studied included: political reporting; sport reporting; entertainment reporting; health reporting; municipality reporting; business reporting; and court reporting. Each of these beats has its own news coverage routines with reporters adapting their work routines to varying opportunities to news access which they were presented with. This observation supports Fishman's (1980: 36) view that 'each beat requires very different coverage routines, different work rounds individually tailored to the particular activities within the beat's territory'. As Fishman further avers that:

> It is a fundamental fact of beat work that the reporter must deal with a plurality of worlds of information (news sources in the broadest sense). Such sources differ as to where they can be located; at what time they are available; by what means they may be tapped (by telephone, through personal inspection, by appointment with a spokesman, or through a clandestine informant)...(1980: 36)

Although beat reporters in the newsrooms studied generally followed established procedures, routines and practices in their reporting, some beats were however highly politicised. They assumed a political stance and identity that mirrored the country's polarised political environment: in particular, the protracted political stalemate that prevailed in the country at the time of conducting fieldwork for the present study (see Chapter 1). The most prominent among these politicised beats, across all the newsrooms, were political reporting and court/crime reporting. The practices of political reporters, however, clearly stood out in this regard. As one political editor at the *Sunday News*, Tanaka, put it: 'If you talk about the impact of political pressure, I will be surprised if anybody else in this newsroom told you they feel it the way I do, particularly as it comes from politicians. I am the person who directly deals with it'. A more graphic picture of the politicisation of the political 'beat' emerged in an interview with another senior political reporter from the *Sunday Mail*:

> Mukucha: I will tell you something that will give you a broader idea of the principles that underlie my operations in this newsroom, and I'm sure I share the same spirit with my fellow political reporters within Zimpapers....

When the *Daily News* was set up in 1999; I was one of the first journalists to be offered a job as a senior political reporter. I was offered a good remuneration package because they knew I had what they wanted. I simply said "thank you very much for your offer, but I'm not taking it". I told them I didn't believe in their editorial driving force (sic). Believe you me, at that time I didn't have a personal car, I just had my mobile phone with a sim card provided by the company, but I simply said "no thanks" to the lucrative offer.

And just recently, the *Sunday Times* in South Africa offered me a good job; they said I will be heading their operations in Zimbabwe, but I still turned it down. All my bosses know, I showed them the offer letters but I told them not to worry about me going.

So, the long and short of what I'm saying is that, I know what I want as a political journalist...To be more specific, I will tell you that I believe in ZANU PF's political ideology – it appeals to me. I always tell people that "if there is one thing that ZANU-PF is very good at, it is making you realise that you are in a struggle"....

Interviewer: So as a political journalist you operate on the basis of individual principle?

Mukucha: Of course! There is something that has gone wrong with journalists in this country. When you read what they write you tend to think that they were journalists first before they were Zimbabwean... but it should not be like that! You are a Zimbabwean first then you become a journalist by qualifications. So you defend who you are, you defend what is your own!

This is a clear example of how deeply politicised the political beat is in Zimbabwean newsrooms. The ostensibly partisan sentiments expressed in the interview extract above manifest themselves in newsmaking practices and have marked implications on how the journalists frame and mediate political issues.

The politicisation of political reporting was also manifest among reporters in the private weeklies. So deeply entrenched is this politicisation that journalistic values (notions of balance, impartiality and objectivity) are at threat as shown in the interview extract below with a political reporter at the *Zimbabwe Independent*.

Interviewer: Are political reporters ever objective?

Tonderai: Well, we are taught at school to be objective, but as you might know the environment in which we work pushes us to depart from notions of objectivity. Working in Zimbabwe where you have a government that cracks down on opposition supporters and colleagues whom you sympathise with makes it difficult to uphold objectivity. It is definitely compromised, but not without good cause of course...

Interviewer: So I take it you are naturally biased in your political reporting?

Tonderai: I tend to sympathise with the victims, whether I'm writing on politics or not...I sympathise with them because I live with them and so I always see how they are being violated. You look at human rights defenders you see they are being cracked down for the same views that you also uphold...At the end of the day as much I try to be objective, I still end up giving coverage to one part at the expense of the other. So it's because of the environment in which we are operating...

This character of political reporting also has a telling impact on the mediatory function of new technologies in the journalists' everyday news construction and sourcing routines. The Internet in particular constitutes a reservoir of story ideas, story angles and insights into topical Zimbabwean political issues hence its centrality in the day-to-day newsmaking routines of the political reporters. This observation finds support in Tuchman's (1997: 210-229) view that beat reporters systematically and exclusively expose themselves through their rounds of formally organised settings that present them with bureaucratically packaged activities.[14]

5.2.4 Politics, economy and the journalists' quest for economic survival

The political and economic environment in Zimbabwe has also nurtured an environment in which journalists incorporate extra paid work (commonly referred to

[14] It is important to state, however, that although my observations generally established that journalists were assigned to particular beat by the chief editors, there were degrees of flexibility among journalists, with some journalists considering themselves 'all-rounders' because of staff shortages in the newsrooms.

as 'moonlighting' in newsroom parlance) into their daily work routines as an economic survival strategy. New technologies play a central role in cultivating and sustaining this widespread practice. This is particularly so because the news organisations that the journalists moonlight for mainly consist of foreign media houses and online newspapers with an interest on Zimbabwean issues. As shown in Chapter 1, the latter are predominantly run by exiled Zimbabwean journalists who have maintained contact with their former colleagues in Zimbabwean mainstream newsrooms. The interview extract below with a senior news reporter at *The Standard* is telling in terms of the economic drive towards adopting extra work outside one's regular employment in the mainstream newsrooms.

> Stanley: Knowing as you do that here in Zimbabwe working as a journalist is tough....particularly in terms of the salaries we earn, this means that within my main daily business, I have to look for more ideas in order to be able to formulate stories to sell to some outside news websites and get a few extra bucks...Thus, I would give my newspaper its own piece of the flesh (sic) first, and then I would do my other work. Basically I think we are helping out the company...
>
> So, I would say that my work routines revolve around that kind of culture in which I have to browse the Internet in the morning, look at daily newspapers and try and set an agenda that caters for my company's interests as well as mine.

This response typifies the taken-for-granted and almost naturalised explanation of the 'conflicting' professional practice that characterises newswork in the Zimbabwean mainstream press. The surge in moonlighting is directly related to the political and economic environment following the post-2000 developments. According to Mano (2005: 62) this era 'presented the media with new political, economic and legislative challenges' which increasingly saw the tightening of the media's legislative environment and the prohibition of foreign media houses from practising in Zimbabwe following accusations by government 'of writing falsehoods to tarnish its image at home and abroad' (Mano 2005: 62). This scenario provided space for '[s]ome public and private journalists [to act] as foreign correspondents for Western media, some of which are traditionally hostile in their coverage of Africa' (Mano 2005: 62).

This state of affairs promoted the development of 'underground' relationships between foreign media houses (with restricted access to Zimbabwe) and local mainstream journalists who were forced to look elsewhere to supplement their poor salaries.[15] Nyamnjoh (2005a: 73-74) observes that poor salaries and working conditions in African newsrooms have 'inevitably led to "prostitution" by journalists or what one may term a hand-to-mouth journalism, if not a journalism of misery. Any bit of money can lure a journalist to write anything'.

In the newsrooms studied journalists chose to retain their contractual obligations with their regular employers for a number of reasons that include: financial security in case their part-time jobs fail them; to maintain cover from surveillance forces; to safeguard their legitimacy and maintain visibility to prospective foreign media houses; and more importantly as regards the present study to ensure guaranteed and regular access to the technologies that sustain their part-time work; particularly, the Internet. As Nyamnjoh (2005a: 70) explains, this predicament forces many of the practitioners to opt for a 'Jekyll-and-Hyde personality' that allows them to accommodate the interests of their regular as well as their 'underground' employers.

5.3 Conclusion

The findings discussed thus far point to the fact that news production cultures in Zimbabwean mainstream newsrooms are relative and contingent upon the country's socio-political and economic context. This observation reinforces the notion of the social contingency of journalism practice. It also suggests that: 'the claim that professional journalists subscribe to prevalent, *perhaps universal*, ideology of objectivity generalises what in fact may be a *far more variegated* and often *journalistically circumspect* set of epistemological positions' (Cottle 2000b: 25, emphasis added). Thus, while at the surface the journalistic practices in the newsrooms studied 'typify the generic Anglo pattern of news-making' (Louw 2001: 159), a deeper analysis shows discrepancies that counter epistemological claims about the universality of journalism as a social practice. The discrepancies are predicated on the constraints imposed by the impact of 'an encompassing social and cultural context

[15] On average, in January 2009 when the Zimbabwean economy was dollarized the least paid journalist across all the newsrooms was earning US$160 and the highest paid was taking home US$300 per month.

that...informs [journalits'] attempts to make sense of the world' (Ettema et al. 1997: 44). As Nyamnjoh (2005a: 39) argues, although African

> [j]ournalistic styles reflect exposure to Anglo-Saxon and Latin press cultures...on the other hand [they] show how these colonial influences have been married with African values to produce a melting pot of media culture. One finds on the continent people in tune with *online newspapers* and *facilitated by multimedia connectivity*, just as one finds stradlers of indigenous and modern media, creatively drawing on both to negotiate themselves through the communicative hurdles and hierarchies of the continent...(emphasis added)

Journalistic routines, (which include: the daily need to come up with story ideas (diary items); keeping abreast with what is happening locally and across the globe; the need to contact sources and meet deadlines; the compulsion to contribute to 'diary' and 'conference' meetings): all point to the fact that journalists do not necessarily recreate methods of gathering and reporting news, rather they draw on established routines to gather and report news (Fishman 1980). New technologies are inextricably built into these daily routines which set the standards by which journalists collect, produce, and report news. The technologies facilitate the communicative processes at the heart of the newsmaking practices and play a significant role in helping journalists to move beyond the confines of traditional news gathering methods. For example, the practice of following news stories about Zimbabwe on online newspapers and the use of mobile phones, including SMS and 'beeping' functions, are all significant in complementing established forms of practising journalism. As Seelig (2002) puts it, the technologies make it easier for the journalists to produce 'news quickly and efficiently'. McNair (1998: 125) similarly, notes that 'the form and content of journalism is crucially determined by the available technology of newsgathering, production and dissemination. News content is (at least in part) the outcome of the technical conditions of journalistic production'. However, as has emerged in the discussion above, new technologies complement and reinforce the traditional tools of journalism. They are ingrained in the competing and complex web of news production processes internal and external to the newsroom contexts.

Although I have so far highlighted, at least at a general level, that the Internet, email and mobile phones are considered mundane and part of the banalities of everyday journalistic practice in the newsrooms studied, it is important to take a

closer look at how these technologies are specifically deployed in order to go beyond the general indications so far presented. In this regard, the next two chapters critically examine how the technologies are deployed and appropriated in everyday news production processes.

CHAPTER 6

Everyday uses of the Internet and email: patterns, trends and implications for the profession

6.0 Introduction

One morning after the 'diary meeting' at *The Herald*, I decided to 'shadow' a senior health reporter who had been assigned to work on a story about the alleged decrease in HIV/AIDS prevalence in Zimbabwe. As a starting point, the reporter decided to use the Internet for background information and a general feel of the circumstances behind the alleged decline in HIV/AIDS prevalence...As we were chatting, I noticed that he constantly switched from one website to another and back to the page in which he was typing his story. In fact, he constantly copied material from some of the sites and pasted it to his story.

After a while, clearly satisfied with his progress for that moment, he reached for his mobile phone, scrolled through, and scribbled a number in his note book and walked towards the news editor's desk to make a phone call.[16] After a few minutes, he returned to his desk complaining that the number he had been trying was incessantly on voicemail (it turned out that he had been calling the Minister of Heath and Child Welfare for comment).

As though unfazed by the unsuccessful call, he skimmed through a box on his desk and flushed out a business card belonging to Tim Hallet, a Research Associate at Imperial College in London (who, as I was to learn, had at some point partnered with the Zimbabwean government on HIV/AIDS research and the reporter under observation had met him on one of his visits to Zimbabwe). He immediately set out to write Tim an email, but before he could type anything, his mobile phone rang and he scurried for his pen and notebook and started posing a series of questions relating to the story he was working on. It immediately dawned on me that he was talking to the Minister of Heath and Child Welfare who was apparently returning his call. After the call, the

[16] As an attempt to curb abuse as well as cut costs, most telephone extensions at reporters' workstations in this newsroom were restricted only to receiving and calling local landlines. So, to make long-distance calls, including calling mobile phones, reporters had to use a supervised telephone situated next to the news editor's desk.

reporter immediately revisited his story, making reference to his note book. He also remembered to send Tim Hallet an email. By this time it was almost 12.00 noon, lunch hour in this newsroom, so we set off for the staff canteen...

Immediately after lunch, we returned to the reporter's desk and, intuitively, he opened his email and noticed with excitement that Tim Hallet had responded to his email. Unfortunately, it turned out to be an automatic 'out-of-office response'. Without wasting time, as the deadline was drawing closer, he immediately went back to his story, added a few lines and forwarded it to the news editor – exclaiming "that's done!" (*Field notes, The Herald newsroom, July 11, 2008*)

The narrative above (re)establishes a point made in Chapter 5 about the centrality of the Internet, email and mobile phone in Zimbabwe's mainstream print journalism practice. Although the narrative does not sum up all aspects of the technologies' functions in the newsrooms studied, it is telling in terms of the technologies' interconnected roles in newsmaking routines. While in practice (as the narrative shows) the three technologies are inextricably connected and constitute part of the everyday 'blend' of the journalists' professional activities, in this chapter I closely examine the deployment and appropriation of the *Internet* and *email* separately for analytical reasons.

Thus, while Chapter 5 discussed the newsmaking practices and cultures that underpin mainstream print journalism practice in Zimbabwe and established (at a general level) the centrality of new technologies in the newsroom routines, this chapter critically examines the specific uses of the Internet and email in the journalists' day-to-day newsmaking routines. It gives a detailed exploration of the patterns and trends of the deployment and appropriation of the technologies and their impact on practices and professionalism.

6.1 The appropriation of the Internet in newsroom practices

This section discusses the salient uses of the Internet across the newsrooms studied. These range from basic and general uses that transcend the confines of the newsrooms to the more intricate uses resulting from the internal as well as external factors that characterise the context in which the journalists operate.

As a journalistic tool, the Internet has assumed a taken-for-granted function in newsroom routines. Its intricate functions have been enmeshed with the fluid and

continually shifting processes of journalism practice. In this section I isolate and discuss the core functions of the Internet as they relate to specific newsmaking operations in the newsrooms studied.

The World Wide Web particularly constitutes a large portion of the Internet that has offered journalists unprecedented online opportunities which include: the sourcing of news and story ideas; research (for background information; verification of facts on specialised topics; training opportunities, including learning new writing styles and skills); social networking and source cultivation; interacting with readers; the mobilisation of user-generated content; and the use of web-based emails to communicate with sources. I discuss these in turn below.

6.1.1 The Internet as an alternative source of news and story ideas

The use of the Internet as an alternative source of local and foreign news was one of its key functions across all the newsrooms studied. Most journalists acknowledged that the Internet had widened their news sourcing horizons in unprecedented ways. As one senior news reporter at the *Chronicle*, Nathan, put it:

> The Internet has widened our horizon; our sources of news now include online newspapers that we previously had no access to. Some of the news websites are interactive and you get more than just news...as you get to read other readers' opinions and comments on particular stories. Basically, I can say that the Internet has come in very handy to complement our traditional ways of sourcing news...

This function of the Internet was closely tied to the general challenges faced by the media in Zimbabwe with respect to news sourcing as a result of the polarised political context in which they operate (see Chapter 5 section 5.2.2). While journalists in the state-controlled press generally find it easy to source information from government departments, sourcing information from opposition political parties has over the years been a challenge. Similarly, for the private press, sourcing news and information from government-related sections of society is a challenge. This scenario means that newspapers undergo 'unique newsroom processes and routines, both in order to survive, and in order to produce quality news products' (Mukundu 2006: 28). It is in this context that the Internet has become a key alternative source of news and story ideas. One senior journalists at the state-controlled *Sunday News* explained this scenario thus:

Gilbert: There is one thing that I want to make very clear...because of our continued lambasting of the MDC and supporting ZANU-PF's policies we have lost sources among opposition politicians...You can phone someone and they will tell you "we know you are not going to write this" and then they phone these online newspapers and even maintain contact with our fellow reporters who clandestinely write for the online newspapers. So these online newspapers have a better Zimbabwe story than us.

If you look at it closely, there is an interesting irony there, as reporters now we have to rely more on the Internet to get an understanding of what is happening in our country. Yes, we have other sources who give us news but they do not tell us everything, they leave out other details which end up in the hands of our colleagues who write for online publications...

If you have noticed we have in some cases made some follow-ups on stories that we have seen on the Internet and surprisingly our government officials confirm some of the stories we see online and yet they don't tell us here...So we have to rely on the Internet.

These circumstances have resulted in the foreign-based online newspapers run by exiled Zimbabwean journalists always being the first to break news on many topical issues in the country ahead of the traditional mainstream press on the ground. Moyo, D (2007: 91) observes that often the online newspapers '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' (see also Chapter 5 section 5.1).

This scenario further finds explanation in the fact that 'online publications...enjoy "unfettered liberty" to publish what they want' (Chari 2009: 23) hence the pervasiveness of online newspapers that focus on Zimbabwe, as highlighted in Chapter 1. The Internet, therefore, offers mainstream journalists an alternative space for exploring and accessing local news from diverse sources and perspectives, including stories they cannot pursue because of the constrained nature of the context in which they operate. The latter point finds support in Pavlik's (2001: 33) observation in the American context that '[t]he Internet...provides access to news and information otherwise often censored by governments and others in control of traditional media'.

A senior political reporter at *The Zimbabwe Independent*, Luthando, highlighted that the pervasiveness of Zimbabwean news on the Internet spurs mainstream journalists to keep track of online news. Particular focus is given to news websites run by exiled Zimbabwean journalists, not only as a way of keeping abreast of general news and current affairs, but also as a way to avoid publishing 'stale' news.

> ...there are lots of things that are said and written about Zimbabwe, and the best way to know what's been said is to go to the Internet...we have a lot of news websites run by Zimbabweans and so it's wise to scheme through the major ones such as *Newzimbabwe.com*, *Zimonline.co.za*, *Zimbabwesituation.com* and so on, regularly so as to avoid giving readers – the majority of whom read news on these websites – stale news…

Expressing similar sentiments, an assistant editor at the *Chronicle*, Pepukai, highlighted thus: '…as you know most of these online newspapers carry the Zimbabwean story which is not told by most newspapers like us. So, our interest is in examining how they tell the Zimbabwean story on a regular basis...'. From the foregoing, one can surmise that the Internet has exerted profound influence on news coverage in Zimbabwe's mainstream press (see Chari 2009; Moyo, D 2009).

Beyond accessing local news, the Internet is also central as a source of foreign news. Unlike in the past where the newsrooms accessed international stories mainly through the Zimbabwe Inter-Africa News Agency (ZIANA), a government owned news agency that supplied stories to the newsrooms via telex, the Internet provides newsrooms with a wide selection of international stories. This entails that international news is now published more timeously than previously. A senior business reporter at *The Herald* emphasised this point:

> Wiseman: In the past we were getting our foreign stories from various news agencies through the Zimbabwe Inter Africa News Agency (ZIANA) via the telex…it was such a burden having to go through heaps of paper with about fifty stories and be expected to select one or two. Whereas now with the Internet you can just flash out the headlines and select the stories that you want to use in no time at all...
>
> On rare occasions, we also relied on hard copies of foreign newspapers for our international news, but the hard copy was hard to come by...

From observations and interviews, it emerged that the selection of news websites was patterned and shaped by a broad variety of factors as discussed in the next section.

6.1.1.2 The selection criteria of news websites and content

Most of the criteria used to select news sites and content were rooted in established professional imperatives that included: news values; readership considerations; and personal journalistic judgements. Following these criteria, a number of news websites were branded as 'lacking credibility' or completely 'untrustworthy' by most journalists. As a result, journalists tended to be cautious and selective in their use of stories from online newspapers by deploying a number of criteria and ratings to assess the credibility of online news sources.

These criteria and ratings were variously alluded to in focus group and individual interviews in terms and concepts central to journalistic norms and values such as accuracy, balance, bias, fairness, factuality, believability, honesty, objectivity, sourcing, reliability, sensationalism, currency and trustworthiness. Thus, in testing for credibility (or lack of it) in online news sources journalists tended to lean on traditional journalistic culture and normative values. As the news editor of *The Zimbabwe Independent* explained:

> Costa: ...the problem with Internet news, especially on websites that focus on Zimbabwe, is that you have to be *very selective*; you have to *test most stories for credibility*. But, we basically rely on *traditional news websites* such as *BBC*, *SABC* and *Reuters*. On rare occasions, we use columns from sites with a reputation of professionalism such as *Newzimbabwe.com* or *Zimonline.co.za*, but really, we don't look at stories from websites such as *Zimdaily.com* and *Zimbabwetimes.com* because we know they've a tendency to overstate issues...(emphasis added)

The extract above makes it clear that journalists do not take online news at face value, rather they are selective. From my newsroom observations, it was also evident that senior journalists and news editors constantly warned junior reporters not to rely on specific news websites. Often, they emphasised the need to crosscheck and verify the stories before using some of the material.

News values such as proximity, impact, relevance, interest and prominence were also central to journalists' selection of online news. Most journalists highlighted that when they visit online news websites their main objective is to locate the

'Zimbabwean story'. To this end, they frequently visited online sites that give prominence to Zimbabwean news such as *Zimonline.co.za*; *Newzimbabwe.com*; *Zimdaily.com*; and other global news media such as the *BBC* and *CNN*. This was clearly articulated in separate focus group interviews with reporters from *The Herald* and *The Zimbabwe Independent* respectively:

> Freedom: I am inclined to visit sites that cover more Zimbabwean issues and are bound to give me news ideas of relevance to the Zimbabwean readership. As you would realise, because of time constrains associated with working in a daily newspaper, we tend to prioritise news websites that cover more Zimbabwean issues ahead of any other news site.

> Stanley: I would say first and foremost, I look at sites that will give me an insight into issues that are much more closer to home. This is why, for example, I would go to *The Herald*, the *Chronicle*, and *Zimonline.co.za*. I also choose *News24.com* of South Africa because they have a dedicated section on Zimbabwe and it is updated almost every minute as long as something is happening in the country. So, by going to those news websites I wouldn't miss anything on Zimbabwe.

News values were also critical in the newsrooms' selection of international stories from online newspapers for their foreign news pages. In selecting international stories, journalists imposed news values such as timeliness, proximity, impact, conflict, unusualness, relevance, interest and prominence. One political reporter at the *Chronicle* attested to this point:

> Dumisani: When we go online for foreign news, we always look for the *most topical* regional and global issues. We also consider the relevance of the news to our readers.
>
> It wouldn't make sense for us to take a story on elections in Cyprus unless there is something particularly interesting about that election. But it does make sense to consider a story about American presidential elections because of the strained relations between America and Zimbabwe. People are always looking forward to developments in America and their potential implications on Zimbabwe. (emphasis added)

However, the appropriation of the content sourced from online sources was shaped by the newsroom's editorial policies. These set the parameters, not only in terms of how the journalists navigated the Internet in search for news, but also in terms of how they made use of the content in their news construction. The news editor of *The Zimbabwe Independent*, Costa, gave an insightful explanation of how his newsroom makes use of online news content:

> ...once we take a story from the Internet we don't simply put it in the newspaper as it is. It has to comply with our editorial policy. So it has to be edited to suit the way we write or the position of our newspaper...but we always acknowledge that we got the story from a particular online source...

Although the Internet occupies a central place as a source of news and story ideas in the newsrooms studied, it has not completely replaced traditional ways of sourcing stories; rather it complements and reinforces them.

6.1.2 The Internet as a research tool

The use of the Internet as a research tool emerged as one of its key functions in all the newsrooms studied. For most journalists, the Internet provided access to a new frontier and tool for research and data collection. It helped them to overcome some of the barriers imposed by traditional research approaches. Newsroom observations revealed that online research was widely used for background information as well as to seek clarifications on various subject areas. The following extracts from focus group interviews with senior reporters at the *Chronicle* and *The Standard* further explain the importance of the Internet as a research tool:

> Nathan: As reporters we do a lot of Internet research. Instead of going to the library to browse through stacks of files for background information on a particular subject, it is much easier to use *Google*...

> Kholiwe: For us, the Internet is like the lifeline of our daily practice. We need it primarily for research...it's more like our bigger library.
>
> When you do stories, you need to research and get to know the issues at stake in depth. Like in my case, I write a lot about trade issues which require a lot of research in order to keep abreast of the latest developments in international trade...Basically, we can't do without the Internet!

From the interview extracts above it is clear that the Internet occupies a central part of the journalists' day-to-day newsmaking research activities. Emphasising the importance of the Internet as a research tool for journalists, Machill and Beiler (2009: 201) highlight that with the Internet 'even editorial offices with poor research capacities now have at their disposal a relatively good means of conducting research'. This observation found articulation in wide-ranging uses of the Internet as a research tool in the newsrooms studied. A number of journalists highlighted that the Internet provided them with a platform to conduct research on how to tackle specific assignments as well as learn from other journalists.

> Mehluli: When I want to "featurise" a certain subject, I usually *Google* my proposed headline...like: "woman scalds daughter with hot water" and see how various international reporters have tackled that headline... I then borrow one or two writing styles…

> Garikai:...English is not our first language, so when you read the UK *Guardian* or the *Telegraph* online, for example, you look at the way they report particular stories, say, murder or general court cases, there is that tendency to try and copy their writing styles. So, I think there is positive impact…our writing skills and styles have improved, they have been changing to match those in the developed World although there is still room for some improvement...

Of significance in the extracts above is the journalists' reliance on Western journalistic forms as a standard measure of their own practices. This emphasises a point noted earlier (Chapter 5 section 5.2.3) that newsmaking practices in Zimbabwean newsrooms continue to be influenced, at least at a general level, by Western patterns of newsmaking (Louw 2001; Nyamnjoh 2005a).

In addition to using the Internet for assignment-related research, journalists also used it to search for regional and international training opportunities (short courses, conferences and exchange programmes) to enhance and sharpen their skills. In support of these findings, Pavlik (2001: 77) notes that '[t]he Internet is a useful resource for professional development and continuing education for journalists'.

The deployment of the Internet as a research tool was, however, not without practical and ethical challenges for most journalists. From observations and interviews it emerged that a number of journalists had difficulties or limited skills in exploiting

various online search options which included using: topic-specific search engines; evaluating the quality of online content; and properly attributing material abstracted from the Internet.

These challenges also related to individual levels of Internet use proficiency. Journalists routinely deployed the same search engines and search criteria. *Google*, in particular, was regarded as the most important research tool. This scenario, to use Machill and Beiler's (2009: 201) words, pointed 'to only a moderate level of search-engine competence on the part of journalists'. As one senior political reporter at *The Zimbabwe Independent*, Luthando, explained:

> Most of us in this newsroom have serious problems in effectively deploying the Internet. I am talking here about using different search methods on the Internet. I am sure there are several other search options other than the popular *Google* which everyone in this newsroom relies on...

These challenges were, nonetheless, intricate, as some journalists gave indications of competences and an awareness of problems that arise from a total reliance on Internet research. Even more, the journalists were not consistent in their responses to questions on the nature of their Internet searches and behaviour, but it appeared that the dominant attitude towards Internet research was one of 'pragmatism' (Machill & Beiler 2009: 201), in particular, in relation to the constraints associated with news production pressures, which limit the time available for leisurely Internet research.

It is important, however, to highlight that non-Internet based research approaches are still central and far from being supplanted by the Internet. Although the Internet often constituted the first port-of-call for journalists when they embarked on new assignments, traditional research and newsgathering approaches often took over once reporters became familiar and confident enough with the subject at hand to approach other sources of information. As Mchakulu (2007) observes in his assessment of Malawian journalists' use of new technologies: 'physical space and face-to-face meetings remain essential and under-gird journalists' professional practice'. In the following section I examine how the deployment of the Internet by journalists is influenced by the 'beat' system.

6.2 Beat influences on the use of the Internet

Although the preceding discussion points to a general trend in the use of the Internet that appeared to cut across different news desks, the beat system also shaped and

influenced how journalists deployed the Internet in the newsrooms. Observations revealed that journalists were less inclined to stray to Internet functions outside the sphere of their beats. Each beat required 'very different coverage routines, different work rounds individually tailored to the particular activities within the beat's territory' (Fishman 1980: 36). Time constraints and the pressures of deadlines also restrained journalists from exhaustively exploring aspects of the Internet outside the sphere of their beats.

Consequently, a close examination of the journalists' Internet browsing history through their web browsers revealed a particular pattern in terms of websites frequently visited by specific beat reporters, as well as across beats as illustrated in Figure 4 below.

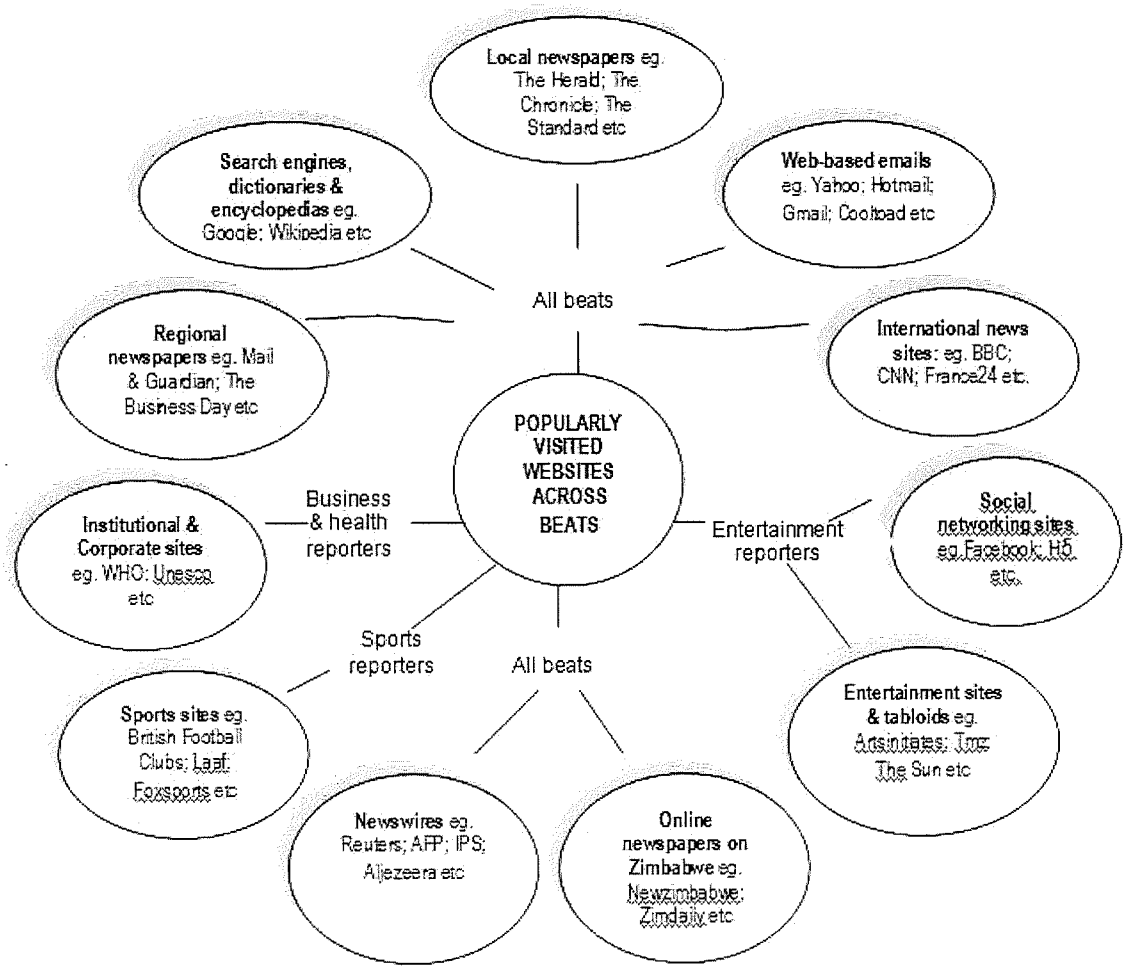

Figure 4. **Popularly visited websites across newsrooms**

This illustration indicates a deliberate and conscious attempt by journalists to select particular websites based on their day-to-day beat routines. The actual appropriations

of content from the websites were, however, far more complex and characterised by many instances of interconnections across beats than the illustration suggests. In the sections that follow I closely discuss the influence of specific beats on the deployment of the Internet among generic beats in the newsrooms.

6.2.1 Political reporting

The polarised political environment in Zimbabwe had marked implications on how political reporters deployed the Internet in their daily news construction and sourcing routines. The interview extract below sums up how the political editor of the state-controlled *Sunday Mail* conceived of the role of the Internet in his beat:

> Mutepfa: I can't imagine my job without the Internet because as a political editor I am responsible for monitoring the political environment within and outside the country. I do that through contacting the political players themselves, but I also get useful tips from the Internet. I read stories from online publications on Zimbabwe. I also read news from outside Zimbabwe, looking at how other media houses are reporting on Zimbabwe. In brief, I would say the Internet is playing a very big role because it keeps me informed on the latest political developments...locally and globally.
>
> Interviewer: Are there specific news websites that you visit?
>
> Mutepfa: Because of our strained relationship with Britain, it is a must to read what the *BBC* is saying about Zimbabwe...I take the *BBC* to be the purveyor of British foreign policy. Once you get what the *BBC* is saying you understand what the British government is thinking at any particular moment.[17] So, I make it a point that I visit the *BBC* website everyday... I also follow the *CNN* website.
>
> In terms of online publications that focus on Zimbabwe, I rely more on *Newzimbabwe* as I find it to be more credible, but I also visit other websites like *Zimdaily* just to get a feel of what the "political rumour mongers" are saying...As you may know most of these websites run by exiled Zimbabwean

[17] This understanding was clearly based on the journalists' imprecise understanding of the role of the BBC as a public broadcaster whose editorial content is influenced by government as is the case with Zimbabwe's public media.

> journalists rely on hearsay and they don't verify issues, in fact, they publish anything!

This extract highlights how online news sources play a key role in shaping the political content of Zimbabwean mainstream newspapers. It also points to the centrality of the Internet as a platform for crosschecking or verifying political rumours that pervade Zimbabwe's political arena. The latter point was expounded by one political reporter at the *Sunday Mail*, Tafadzwa, who pointed to the use of the Internet as a platform for confirming or disapproving political rumours that frequently circulate in Zimbabwe:

> When there is speculation on a particular political topic, I usually visit a number of online newspapers that focus on Zimbabwe such as *Newzimbabwe*, just to get a rough idea of what is happening on the ground, at least as a starting point...

This trend in the use of the Internet was, in part, a result of the stifling media regulatory environment which limits the free circulation of information thus forcing people to depend on alternative sources of information, including rumours circulated through street talk, mobile phone SMS or viral emails (Nyamnjoh 2005, Moyo, D 2009). At the time of doing fieldwork for the present study, political rumour was rife about the negotiations that led to the formation of a coalition government at the end of 2008.

For political reporters in the private press, however, the Internet provided unfettered space to access and explore issues that were not easily accessible because of the government's tight control on access to information. The Internet provided access to stories that counter the perceived 'propaganda' churned out in the state-controlled press. According to Chari (2009: 23):

> The new technology has rendered stringent media laws such as the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (2001) and the Broadcasting Services Act (2001) null and void resulting in journalists having free reign. Online publications now enjoy "unfettered liberty" to publish what they want and how they want.

Chari's observation was also articulated by a senior political reporter at *The Standard*, Busani, who saw the Internet as an alternative source of information on issues censored by the government.

> ...we also rely on the Internet for most of the information that we cannot access freely because of the political situation, but we always try and localize the material so that it becomes relevant to our readers and editorial policy.

In the next section I briefly discuss how the Internet has prompted a journalistic ethic that can best be characterised as 'vendetta journalism' (Kasoma 1996; Chari 2009) in political reporting.

6.2.1.1 The proliferation of 'vendetta journalism' in political reporting

The Internet has also facilitated the growth of a 'journalism of hatred, revenge, and dislike' (Kasoma 1996: 99) among political reporters, especially in the state-controlled press. This journalistic culture – in which political reporters browse an assortment of news websites with a view to respond to stories that attack government policy – can best be described as 'activist journalism' (Chari 2009: 29) or 'vendetta journalism' (Kasoma 1996: 99). The practice assumed the character of a qualitatively different 'patriotic journalism' (Ranger 2005: 8) concerned, as the former Minister of Information and Publicity in the President's office, Jonathan Moyo, put it: 'to protect, preserve and project...regime values' (Moyo, J 2004). This practice was a direct result of political developments in the country and the general feeling by government that the nation was facing unwarranted vilification from foreign media.

One assistant editor at the *Chronicle*, Pepukai, explained the Internet's role in promoting 'vendetta journalism' as follows:

> ...you realise that most stories which are published on websites which we call 'anti-government' have become some kind of a source of news or story ideas for us in the state media. I am sure you would have realised that in some of our stories, we prefix official comment with statements like "contrary to reports in online editions"...In such cases, we will be *reacting* or *responding* to news published in those websites...(emphasis added)

The political editor of the *Sunday Mail*, Mutepfa, similarly explained:

> I will tell you with certainty that if I see a news item on the Internet that wantonly attacks the national interests of Zimbabwe, I will have no choice but

to write an article that defends my nation. But by defending it I don't mean that I don't contact the relevant people, I will contact them but...when I write that story I will give it an angle or slant that defends Zimbabwe...[18]

My friend, if you read some stories on the Internet you will think Zimbabwe is on the brink of collapse...especially *Zimonline.co.za*. When you read some of it's stories you will think Zimbabwe is about to be "shut down". As for *Studio 7* (*voanews.com*), they publish total lies! When they report about the government of Zimbabwe they don't bother contacting anyone in government, they always give one side – their stories are not balanced...

Just last week, there was a story of this British journalist who died here and the international media *BBC*, *CNN* and all these other websites implicated the government of Zimbabwe in his death, but it later turned out that he had committed suicide. When I see such stories, because I know what is happening most of the time, I use the stories to discredit the media houses that publish the stories. So I am always watchful for such kind of stories...

From the extracts above it is clear, as Chari (2009: 23) argues that 'vendetta journalism violates...the core tenets of [journalism] such as objectivity, balance, fairness and impartiality'. Journalists 'cast caution to the wind in order to *settle scores with perceived or real enemies*' (Chari 2009: 26, emphasis added) and moral and ethical standards are sacrificed in pursuit of 'self defence' and political expediency.

6.2.2 Entertainment reporting

Entertainment reporters followed local, regional and international entertainment and celebrity gossip websites such as *Artsinitiates.co.zw*; *Zimvibes.com*; *Tmz.com* and tabloid newspapers such as the *The Sun* and the *Newsoftheworld*. The issues pursued in the beat and the nature of the sources used tended to differentiate the reporters from their counterparts in other beats (see figure 4 above). Highlighting the centrality of the Internet in her day-to-day work, one entertainment reporter at *The Standard*, Sandra, stated:

> Basically, you have no choice but to use the Internet...in this beat. If you don't, you will be stuck on your desk, go for shows, or phone people and come out

[18] His response mirrors the prevailing scenario among journalists in the state-controlled press where the state is often confused or deliberately conflated with government.

> with nothing interesting because you will not be fully connected. So, it's a matter of being connected to the outside world. There are so many websites out there, even artists' blogs, which always provide scoops. If you don't do that you will always be amazed where other entertainment reporters are getting their juicy (sic) stories from...

Another entertainment reporter at the *Sunday Mail*, Mthabisi, similarly found that it was difficult to imagine himself operating without the Internet:

> I will tell you that the moment I sit on my desk I just find myself visiting those websites that relate to my beat – *Artsinitiates.co.zw*; *Itsbho.com*; *Zimvibes.com*; *Tmz.com*, you name them – it's instinctive, I don't even need to think about that because I have to update myself on what is happening in the arts and entertainment arena, otherwise there will be nothing to write about!

This response reinforces the fact that new technologies have become part of entertainment reporters' taken-for-granted daily newswork. As with Sandra and Mthabisi, the entertainment editor of the *Sunday News*, Patson, referred to the Internet as the 'backbone' of his day-to-day routines. He explained that his selection of sites and stories from the Internet was influenced by a consideration of what is popular among readers:

> It's more to do with what is popular locally and we are just searching for that...We follow news on celebrities, the scandals and so forth, and everything that might be of interest to the masses and readable when they are at leisure...This is the sort of stuff that you will find in South African tabloids like the *Sowetan.co.za*, the *Sundayworld.co.za* and other well-known entertainment websites like *Bet.com* and *Tmz.com*.

6.2.2.1 Entertainment reporting and social networking sites

A regular observation of web browsers in the newsrooms indicated that entertainment reporters invested more time on social networking sites such as *Hi5* and *Facebook* much more than their colleagues in other beats. Facebook in particular, was seen as a valuable platform for connecting with potential sources scattered across the globe and has been integrated into some reporters' newsmaking routines. The social networks' integration of email and 'instant messaging' allowed the reporters to connect with their sources in 'real-time'.

Users of Facebook also highlighted that they got updates on diverse issues of interest to their beat and argued that the social platform was an invaluable reporting tool that instantly connected them to stories that otherwise would have taken days or weeks to surface. One entertainment reporter at the *Chronicle* spoke passionately about the importance of Facebook as shown in the interview extract below:

> Lenin: I do some of my stories on Facebook. As you know artists and entertainers are scattered across the globe, so I created a "network" of artists and when I do stories I interview them using Facebook...
>
> Interviewer: Any examples of stories you have done through Facebook?
>
> Lenin: Yes, I have just done one with Arthur Mafokate, a South African musician. He is a friend of mine on Facebook.
>
> Interviewer: But have you ever met him in person?
>
> Lenin: No, but the good thing is I have pictures on my profile, so he has an idea of how I look like... [Digresses as he directs me to his computer monitor], look this is the story I'm talking about...
>
> Interviewer: So all these direct quotes in this story were sent to you through Facebook?
>
> Lenin: Yes, they are from our chat on Facebook word-for-word. Arthur actually sent me pictures of his child through the same platform. What made it easy for me to link up with him is that I am a friend to some of his friends on *Facebook* and I have interviewed some of them for stories...
>
> ...I have also done a story with Makhosi, the Zimbabwean nurse who starred in *Big Brother* in the UK through Facebook, and now she regularly sends me story ideas. As we speak I am expecting something about Kevin Ncube.[19] She gets information in the UK about many Zimbabwean celebrities and socialites and lets me know through Facebook...

[19] Kevin Ncube is Zimbabwean radio and television personality who fled the country for the United Kingdom in fear of 'homophobic' attacks after his sexuality was exposed by the media.

> Sometimes you can actually pick stories from Facebook...like if you get an artist writing on his or her profile: "I had a boring show", that is a scoop on its own! You quickly initiate communication with them and ask how big the show was and what went wrong and so on. In fact, a couple of weeks ago, a South African musician was publicly 'dumped' by his girlfriend on Facebook and the *Sowetan* tabloid made a big story out of it...

From the above it is clear that social networking sites are not without journalistic value for entertainment reporters. The example shows that the functions of social networking sites are not 'fixed' as technological determinists would suggest (see Chapter 3), rather they are a site of interpretive work that is entrenched in the intricacies of social interactions (see Flew 2002; Lieuvrouw 2002; Livingstone 2002). This reinforces Bijker's (1995: 6) view that:

> [O]ne should never take the meaning of a technical artefact or technological system as residing in the technology itself instead one must study how technologies are shaped and acquire their meaning in the heterogeneity of social interactions.

As Hine (2001: 33) also argues, '[t]echnologies possess interpretive flexibility, such that not only do relevant social groups view the technology differently, but the technology could be said actually to be a different thing for each'.

Figure 5 below, a screenshot from the Facebook home page profile of Lenin Ndebele[20], further highlights the nature of Facebook as a social setting in which journalists interact with friends and potential sources and in the process paving, way for more tips and story ideas. As the extract illustrates, Lenin playfully cajoles his friends about stories coming up on the entertainment pages of the next edition of the *Chronicle* and in response one of his friends hints that he has a more scandalous story.

Of significance is the fact that the social networking platform connects the reporter to society and fosters trust and norms of reciprocity that constitute key antecedents to effective entertainment reporting. The short messages left by friends on the reporter's 'wall' (the space on each user's profile page that allows friends to post messages for the user and is visible to anyone among the user's network of friends on

[20]See Chapter 4 section 4.7 for my discussion of the ethical considerations around the research subject's right to privacy and protecting the identity of the subject.

the site) call attention to what is happening on the social scene, hence offering a conduit for maintaining relationships and engaging with readers.

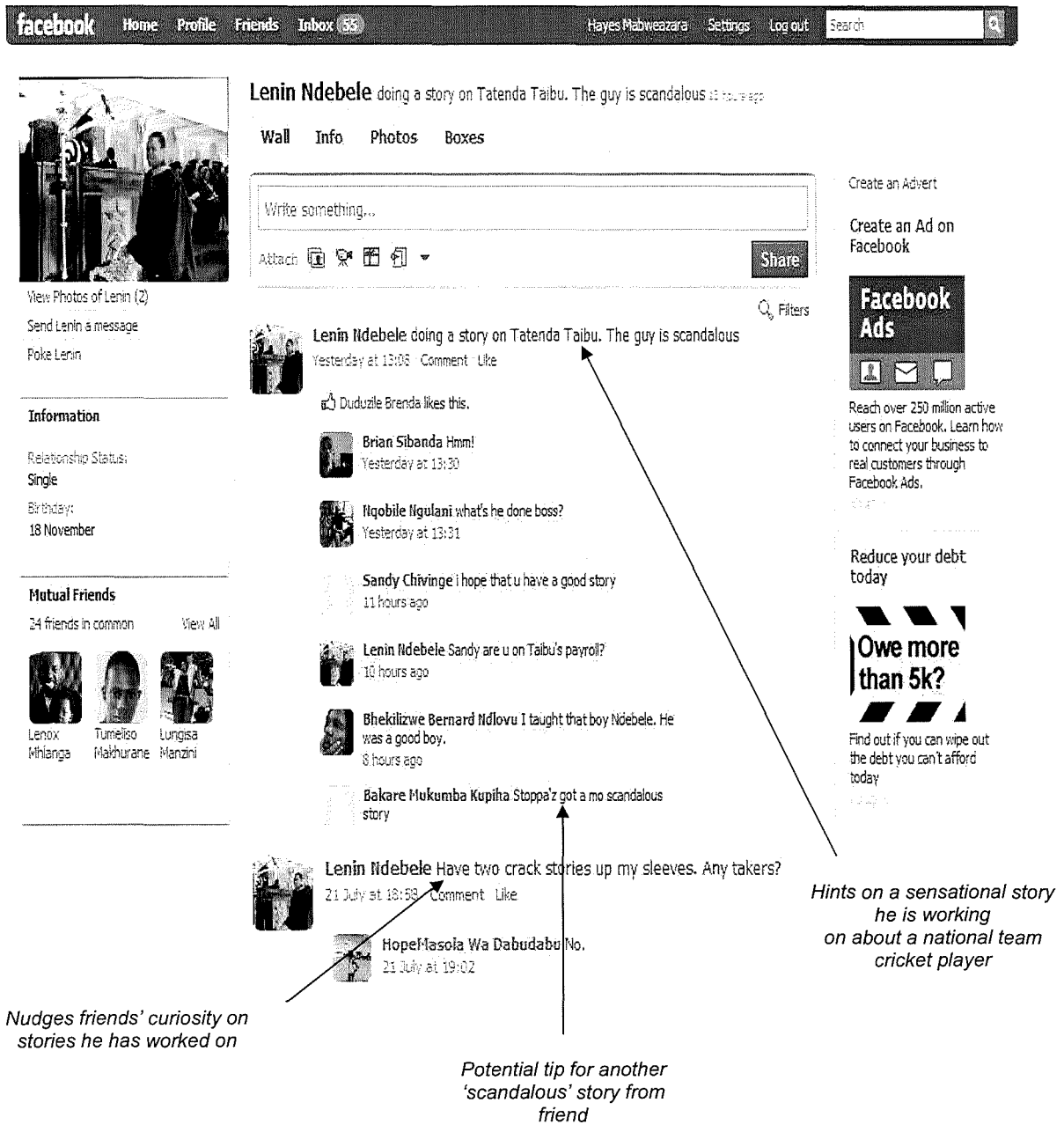

Figure 5. **Abstracted from the Facebook home page profile of Lenin Ndebele, an entertainment reporter at the *Chronicle*** [21]

[21] The screenshot was obtained (with permission) following in situ interviews and observations in which the journalist concerned allowed me to observe his activities on Facebook, eventually leading me to log onto my Facebook account to conduct forms of 'participant content observation' of the journalists' activities on Facebook. This approach was in keeping with the study's ethnographic goal to bring a variety of techniques of inquiry into play: to observe things that happen, listen to what people say and question people in the setting under investigation in order to gain in-depth understanding of the cultural issues at stake (Hammersley & Atkinson 1995: 16; Walsh 1998: 220, see Chapter 4 section 4.2).

Thus, while it may be tempting to see social networks as social platforms with no other function beyond the social capital they cultivate, for entertainment reporters – whose beat thrives more on social networking with entertainers and socialites – the sites are not without significant journalistic relevance. A point needs to be made, however, that age and levels of education were clearly influential in shaping the appropriations of social networks by entertainment reporters across the newsrooms studied. Younger reporters with university degrees used social networks as journalistic tools more innovatively than their 'conservative' senior colleagues who hardly took part in electronic networking.

The utility of social networking sites as journalistic tools was, however, not without challenges. In reflecting on the effectiveness of online social networking as a journalistic tool, some entertainment reporters underlined the challenge of balancing between the 'personal' and the 'professional'. They emphasised that social networking sites forced them to exercise restraint in terms of revealing their own biases and political preferences on their profiles. Referring to the activities on Facebook and their link with journalistic practice, reporters spoke about how they exercised restraint and professed the need for caution in terms of expressing their personal interests, emotions and opinions about issues raised by their network of friends on the platform. Doing so, in their opinion, would put them on the spotlight and subject them to criticism given the general understanding that journalists should maintain a public deportment that does not put into question their journalistic 'independence' in the eyes of the public. One entertainment reporter at *The Zimbabwe Independent* highlighted thus:

> Sandada: ...I try to avoid being intimately involved in most of the issues raised on Facebook. Although, like anybody else, I am tickled and provoked by some of the issues raised by my friends, I avoid commenting on those issues that put me on a tight spot, in case, I am seen to be lacking objectivity in my work...I try not to expose personal convictions...I can only pose more questions and provoke further comments from friends. If personal or interesting issues arise, I follow them up behind the scenes by sending particular individuals private messages...thank God Facebook allows for that!

This critical approach to the use of Facebook echoes Berger's (2005: 1) observation that Southern African journalists are far from 'lacking when it comes to critical

perspectives with ICTs and global information networks'. Similarly, journalists also pointed to challenges embedded in independently verifying information sourced from Facebook by highlighting that some people tend make things up or exaggerate issues, especially given the very nature of social networks as social settings.

From the discussion above, one can surmise that although social networking sites present unprecedented challenges to the professional imperatives of journalism in African contexts (where the technologies are only just penetrating journalism) they, however, mark the high point of the interface between new technologies and mainstream journalism practice. In particular, the sites highlight the social shaping nature of the Internet as a journalistic tool through their blurring of the boundary between journalists' private (social) and professional life.

6.2.3 Sports reporting

The wide presence of sports news on the Internet also offered new opportunities for sports reporting in the newsrooms studied. Like entertainment reporters, sports reporters across all the newsrooms have adapted their work routines to the varying opportunities offered by the Internet. Acknowledging the sport beat's influence on the deployment of the Internet, one sports reporter at *The Zimbabwe Independent*, Mthulusi, noted: 'I rarely open sites that don't have anything to do with sport during the course of the day, especially football. So, my beat really does influence the way I surf the Internet...'.

For sports reporters, the Internet was particularly strategic as a source of information and updates on Zimbabwean athletes based in foreign countries like South Africa, Belgium, the UK and the US. As the sports editor of *The Chronicle*, Samuel, explained, sports reporters follow the athletes through an assortment of sports websites:

> We have top athletes in America and in Europe, most of the time these websites carry stories about them and it is possible to pick up a story on an event that has happened that particular evening and be in a position to publish it in the next edition...
>
> So, until the time we knock off we will be "clicking the button", checking on various sports websites such as the International Association of Athletics Federations website (*Iaaf.org*), *Foxsports.com*, *Kickoff.com* and newswires such as AFP and Reuters to see what our foreign-based athletes are doing.

As with general news reporting, sports reporters' selection of sports news sites and content was heavily predicated on traditional news values. Journalists mainly look for sporting events and personalities that are contextually relevant and closer to their target readership. One sports reporter at the *Sunday Mail* clearly articulated this point in a focus group interview:

> Zvikomborero: You put yourself in the shoes of the reader and ask yourself 'what would they want to read?'...they would rather read about Wayne Rooney than Carlton Cole, they would rather read about Rio Ferdinand than his brother... You can have a story about *West Ham* and then another story about *Manchester United*, your journalistic sense will tell you that the story about *Manchester United* is the "story" because it would be rare to find a *West Ham* supporter in this country
>
> So, the taste of our readers has a bearing on the sites that we regularly visit on the sports desk...Obviously, the English premiership football club websites are quite central, it is a must to look through them daily and in that group, you also have specific teams and personalities.

In general, sports reporters searched for the best selling stories with a potential for popularity among readers. To this end, they made an attempt to follow and understand the sporting interests of their readers as well as keep abreast with developments in different sporting disciplines.

The notion of 'proximity' in the selection of sports websites and specific stories was also evident in terms of the regional locations of the newspapers in the country. In the case of the *Chronicle*, based in Bulawayo, the second largest city, the sports desk relied on the Internet to keep track of sporting personalities from the region based outside the country. As the sports editor, Samuel, explained:

> We have many Bulawayo boys playing in premiership football clubs in South Africa. These are big sellers for us, the billboards that we post in the streets when we have stories about local players based in South Africa, always have a positive impact on our sales.

For sports reporters, the Internet has thus been adapted to fit into local news interests. Most senior sports reporters also believed that they are now widely read on

international sports and better able to cover a wide base of sporting events and disciplines than was possible before the Internet age.

6.2.4 Business, health and court/crime reporting

Although Internet-based research was common across all beats, some beats like business, health, court and crime reporting used the Internet more intensively for research than their counterparts in other beats. These beats constantly required specialised knowledge and understanding of technical issues that reporters had to routinely interpret in their assignments. With respect to business reporting, one business editor at *The Herald*, Prince, commented thus:

> The sites we visit usually pertain to research sites, for more information on technical issues. For instance, I just had an interview with an economist from the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe. He made reference to a number of economic terms and concepts that I need to clarify. So I have to *Google* to check what they mean in order to write a story that readers can comprehend. I would say on the business desk, the Internet is really important otherwise, it will be difficult do most of our stories.

In doing their research, business reporters also regularly visited corporate and institutional websites in pursuit of specialised information (see figure 4 above). However, the key impediment to using the Internet to research for local stories was that most Zimbabwean corporate organisations do not update their websites on a regular basis. Consequently, a number of business reporters highlighted that the Internet was less helpful when it comes to local news assignments. They pointed out that when doing local stories, they resort to the traditional 'shoe leather' reporting.[22] As one business reporter at *The Herald* explained:

> Martin: I don't normally use the Internet for local stories, if I do, it's only to a limited extent when I need to understand some technical terms...but as I say it's to a very limited extent. It is, in fact, very difficult to find relevant and up to date information on the websites of most local companies and business institutions.

[22] 'Shoe leather' reporting refers to 'news-gathering when the journalist is on the scene...out in the field observing directly the events and processes on which they report' (Pavlik 2000: 229) .

You will find that critical institutions in our economy like the Confederation of Zimbabwe Industries (CZI) and the Zimbabwe Chamber of Commerce (ZCC) don't usually update their sites regularly. So, most of the information is outdated and it's quite challenging when it comes to using it when writing stories. You will also be surprised to learn that even the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe (RBZ), hardly updates its website…

But, I would say the Internet becomes effective when I do stories that need a regional flavour because most regional business and economic institutions update their websites quite frequently…

As with business reporters, health and crime/court reporters also used the Internet to search for clarifications on technical issues that they routinely encountered in their beats. The narrative from my observation of a health reporter, given at the beginning of this chapter, is illustrative of the centrality of the Internet as a research tool among this group. As one health reporter at *The Sunday Mail*, Paida, further explained in a focus group interview: 'As a health reporter, some of the issues I have to write about are too technical for my understanding and medical practitioners may not always be available to explain…So, I always resort to the Internet for clarifications…'.

In the same way, court and crime reporters also extensively used the Internet to search for clarifications on complex legal issues. A senior court reporter at the *Chronicle* explained thus:

Felicity: …at times we fail to find lawyers to explain difficult legal issues that we come across. In such instances, the Internet becomes our fallback. We also use the Internet to draw comparisons with cases from elsewhere. For example, right now I am working on a case involving the extradition of a South African serial rapist to the Equatorial Guinea and I am using the Internet for definitions and interpretations of international extradition law…

Although the Internet is an important research tool for these specialised beats whose assignments often demand knowledge of technical concepts and terms it, however, complemented traditional forms of research, such as directly seeking expert comments and using the editorial reference libraries.

The discussion above shows that the beat system has a defining impact on the deployment and appropriations of the Internet in the newsrooms studied. This is

mainly because each beat has its own news coverage routines hence reporters adapt their work routines to aspects of the Internet that are closer to their 'beat's territory (Fishman 1980). Similarly, because of time constraints and the pressures of deadlines journalists across beats spend less time on aspects of the Internet that do not relate to their beat interests.

In the section that follows I discuss the adoption of interactivity and user-generated content in the private weeklies and the reasons for the state-controlled press's ambivalence towards opening up their newsmaking process to users.

6.3 The adoption of interactivity and user generated content

Although all the newspapers studied have websites whose content duplicates their print editions, the private weeklies (*The Standard* and *The Zimbabwe Independent*) have gone a step further to embrace interactivity and user-generated content. The newspapers' websites provide space for readers to comment and to contribute content, as well as access comments made by other readers. Figure 6 below, a screenshot of a story on *The Standard* newspaper's online edition, illustrates the interactivity of the newspaper's web version and how the newspaper has embraced user-generated content through providing readers with space to comment on stories.

Although *The Standard* and *The Zimbabwe Independent*'s websites still largely duplicate their print versions in terms of content, the interactivity of the websites is a major shift from dominant trends in Zimbabwe where newspaper websites simply replicate their print editions. The weeklies have taken the lead in innovatively blending traditional mainstream journalism with online journalism. As Mudhai (2004: 328) contends, although '[o]ne may argue that the duplication of print content on the online editions does not add much value to the news [it, however,] is an important step' in the direction of maximising the use of new technologies. As figure 6 shows, readers exploit the interactive features of the websites by commenting on stories. Some readers even write longer and more in-depth comments that suggest different angles and slants to the original stories.

Journalists in the two private weeklies saw the interactivity of their newspapers' websites and the content from readers as contributing positively to their newsmaking processes. As the news editor of *The Zimbabwe Independent* explained:

> Costa: The interactivity of our websites is a fairly new development, it has added value to the newspaper as it provides us with hints on what our readers think. The readers' contributions and responses to stories are wide-ranging –

they cover all sorts of issues – politics, business, sports, entertainment, and health and so on. But obviously, political issues are more popular. You might get up to fifty comments on one political story…

We take the comments seriously as some readers are better informed than us. Some are even experts in some of the issues we write about…

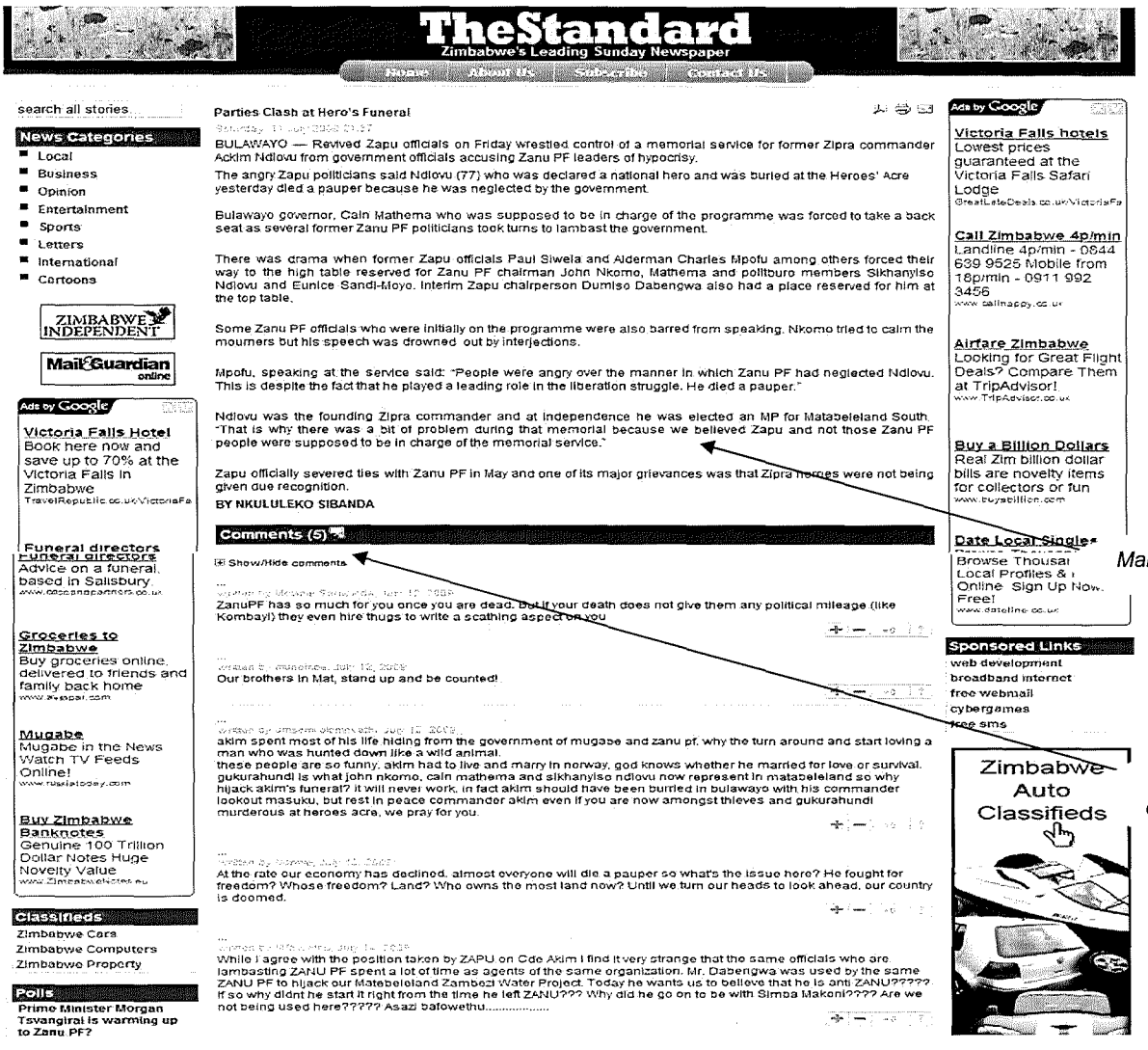

Figure 6. **The interactivity of *The Standard*'s online edition**

The critical role of content posted by the readers on the newspaper's websites also emerged in editorial conferences, where it often contributed to the agenda of the meetings. In this sense, readers inadvertently contributed to the issues covered in the newspapers. In some cases, the interactive features enabled readers to correct misnomers and factual inaccuracies. As one business reporter at *The Zimbabwe Independent* explained:

Paulus: Some readers will tell you: "you omitted something in your story about corruption in this company, it's even worse in this other company...you can phone so and so, he will give you more detail" or someone might comment "you got it all wrong in this story, you wrote about 20% of what didn't happen, the real story is like this...".

These comments are very helpful because there are a lot of people out there who know far much more than we do as journalists...From the comments we carry out our own investigations and come up with richer stories…

I remember a few weeks ago, someone commented on my story about the corruption at the NMB Bank, he wrote: "do you know that the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe has fined them for not giving financial results". I wasn't aware of that and so I made a follow up …

From the extracts above one can surmise that the interactivity of *The Standard* and *The Zimbabwe Independent*'s online editions is redefining journalism by decentralising the sourcing processes in terms of who produces news (see Kupe 2003; Mudhai 2004). Thus, we are seeing the emergence of a 'two-way symmetric model of communication' in which 'the flow of communication is…much more a dialog between both or all parties to communication' (Pavlik 2000: 235-236). The ability to engage with news and with other news consumers is giving readers greater influence over the material covered in the newspapers while at the same time providing journalist with an opportunity to access ideas and leads from the readers (Moyo, D 2009).

It is important to examine the adoption of interactivity and user-generated content by *The Standard* and *The Zimbabwe Independent* in light of the socio-political context in which they were introduced – a period during which Zimbabwe went through political turmoil following disputed presidential elections – a context in which journalists generally faced challenges in accessing information as a result of the polarised political environment governed by stringent media laws (see Chapter 1). In this crisis period as Moyo, D (2009: 561) observes 'news websites, including those that belong to mainstream newspapers such as *The Zimbabwe Independent*…sought to get leads and insights from their readers to help them cover this complex political impasse'. In this light, the adoption of interactivity and user generated content by *The Standard* and *The Zimbabwe Independent* is not merely a shift towards global

journalistic trends, but also an innovative attempt to access information in a context where the free flow of information is tightly controlled.

However, there are challenges related to gatekeeping and the traditional media's ambivalence about fully embracing the voices of readers. The comments posted on the newspapers' websites are subjected to the traditional gatekeeping processes in which the editors select comments along the newspapers' editorial policy positions. From my observation, sometimes it took a couple of days before readers' comments were posted on the websites as they awaited approval by senior gatekeepers. Referring to the gatekeeping of readers' comments, one senior journalist at *The Standard*, Kholiwe, commented:

> ...all comments posted on the website are moderated for abusive language or false claims before publication. Also as a newspaper, we have an identity to maintain and protect and so comments that conflict with our editorial policy are not published on our website...

One can thus surmise, as Hermida and Thurman (2007) observe in the British context, that '[w]hile there has been a change of attitude towards user-generated content, there remains a reluctance to relinquish the traditional gatekeeping role of journalists'. For them, '[e]ditors tend to view moderation in terms of the traditional role of journalists, gathering and filtering information for the public'. They conclude that 'this approach may perhaps offer a model for the integration of user-generated content in professional news structures' (Hermida & Thurman 2007).

On the other hand, the state-controlled newspapers are reluctant to adopt interactivity and user-generated content. Their web editions do not provide readers with space to comment or contribute content on stories as illustrated in Figure 7 below which shows how *The Herald*'s online edition duplicates the print edition and provides no space for interactivity and user-generated content. The restrictive newsmaking cultures in the state-controlled newspapers made it difficult for the newspapers to embrace the voices of readers. As a result, the newspapers' interactions with the readers are mainly limited to the traditional letters to the editor and the landline phone.

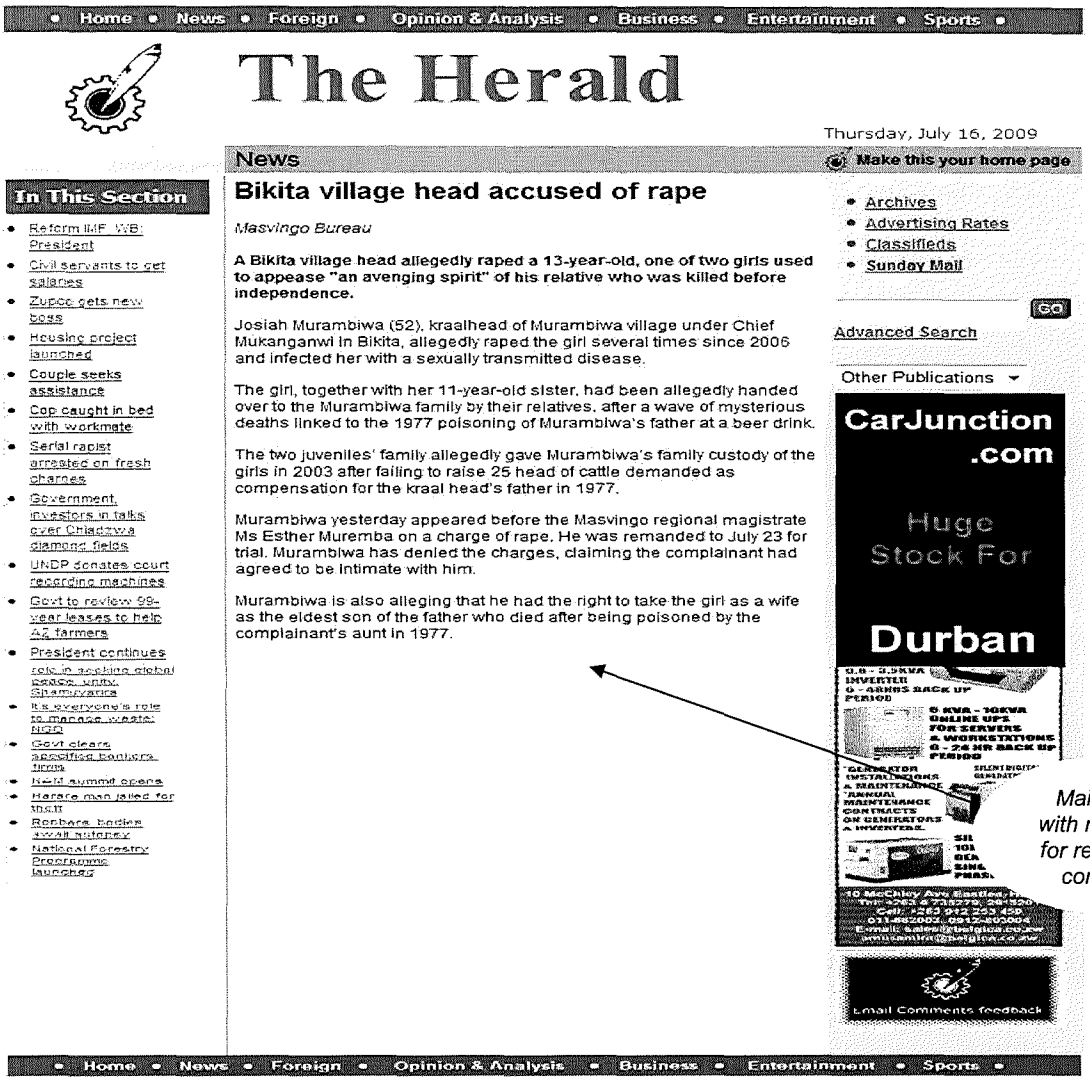

Figure 7. **Story from *The Herald*'s online edition**

The reluctance by the newspapers to embrace interactivity and user-generated content found explanation in two reasons. First, the editors were clearly uneasy with the prospect of abusive comments from readers because of the newspapers' partisan reportage. Second, the newspapers' 'innate conservatism' (Hermida & Thurman 2007), associated with their aim to maintain a unidirectional flow of information, also made it difficult for them to embrace readers' voices. The response from one senior journalist at the *Sunday News* was particularly informative.

> Gilbert: Let us be frank about this, there is nothing wrong with opening up to readers' input as has been done by *The Standard* and *The Zimbabwe Independent*, but sometimes readers can be abusive. The experience that we had in this newsroom after the March 29 [2008] general elections was

shattering to say the least...People would phone the newsroom just to shout at you or they would send very abusive emails...

So, we deliberately did not include interactive features on our website because we know that from the way we cover our news, we were going to be insulted everyday...

From this excerpt one notes that the state-controlled newspapers are resistant to the idea of opening themselves up to readers' scrutiny as a deliberate way to avoid abusive contributions from a readership frustrated by the newspapers' partisan editorial content. This scenario echoes Deuze's (2003) view that news organisations tend to expand their operations to the Internet based on their existing journalistic culture, including the way they relate to the public. Similarly, Pavlik (2001: 17) contends that '...newsroom traditions...ultimately determine whether journalists fully utilize online capabilities'. Thus, the ambivalence towards the adoption of user-generated content in the state-controlled press is not just a matter of professional conservatism, but should also be seen in the broader context of the newspapers' work practices, 'organisational structures and wider politics' (Paulusse & Ugille 2008: 25). In this sense, as the present study broadly argues, technologies should be seen as social and cultural forms instead of autonomous forces that act for good or ill of society (Williams & Edge 1996; Lievrouw 2002). Thus, 'the adoption of innovation in the newsrooms 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' (Paulussen & Ugille 2008: 27).

Although there is no doubt that the Internet offers a number of advantages to journalism practice in the Zimbabwean mainstream press, it has however magnified traditional professional and ethical challenges. As Pavlik (2005: 245) puts it: 'new ethical problems are arising' and old ethical concerns have taken on 'new meaning'. Similarly, Chari (2009: 15) points out that 'belying the numerous opportunities brought about by the Internet is a plethora of ethical minefields associated with the medium'. In the sections that follow I discuss the challenges posed by the Internet to journalism practice and professionalism.

6.4 The impact of the Internet on practice and professionalism

6.4.1 The Internet and 'armchair' journalism

The impact of the Internet on journalism practice was apparent in the generational tensions between senior journalists and junior reporters. The former lamented the dearth of traditional 'shoe leather' journalism as a result of overreliance on the Internet by younger journalists – they saw the Internet as promoting a culture of laziness. As one long serving senior journalist at *The Zimbabwe Independent*, Paulus, put it: 'Journalism is now devoid of the "organic feel of things". Journalists are now reduced to "armchair" practitioners who shun going out there to get the story...as a result their stories are dry'. Another long serving sports editor at the *Chronicle* expressed similar sentiments:

> Samuel: The Internet has 'killed' some journalists, they sit there and become 'arm chair journalists', and they don't interview anyone, all they do is visit websites like the Zimbabwe Olympic Committee (Z.O.C) website, check what athletes are doing and then write stories...
>
> In this very newsroom, we have had cases where sports reporters tasked to write a match report simply goes to the Internet and searches for a story written ages ago and edits it in line with the match at hand...this is a culture that has emerged with the Internet.

These findings echo Pavlik's (2000: 229) observations in the American context that with the development of the Internet 'more and more journalists spend increasingly less of their time out in the field'. In the light of these developments, more conservative senior journalists argued that the Internet was taking away the 'human face' of journalism in terms of face-to-face interaction with sources. As one senior news reporter at *The Standard*, Valerie, explained:

> As a journalist, I think there is need for one to go out there and meet the people. There is always need to get the 'colour'...people don't want to read a flat story that is detailed in everything else but provides no context.
>
> ...there are some stories in which you need to describe, the context, how that person looks like, how he was breathing and so forth, but you will realise that these technologies take away that 'human touch'...that important feel that you need to share with the readers...

So, stories packaged by a journalist who has gone out to the field will always be different from stories written by a journalist who chooses to spend time in the newsroom and relies on these technologies…

The interview extracts above sum up the general feelings among 'conservative [journalists] who hardly take part in electronic networking' (Mudhai 2004: 327). They argued that journalists are now spending too much time in the newsrooms wedged on their armchairs surfing the Internet for story ideas instead of being 'out in the field observing directly the events and processes on which they report' (Pavlik 2000: 229). For the senior journalists, therefore, the Internet is stifling creativity and promoting laziness among young journalists.

Junior reporters, on the other hand, articulated contrasting views in support of Internet-based journalism as shown in the following interview excerpt with a junior news reporter at *The Herald*:

Freedom: With the Internet, sometimes you don't really have to go out for your research, you can just browse the Internet and download stuff. That saves time and gives you the required information right at your desk. You don't have to go anywhere!

You see, like right now I am working on a story centred around the Durban International Film festival which is taking place in South Africa...I am getting all the information that I want through *Google* and online newspapers. I am not wasting time at all!

Most junior reporters across the newsrooms saw senior reporters' emphasis on 'shoe leather' reporting as counterproductive. One junior reporter at *The Standard*, Nqaba, vividly expressed his frustration with his seniors' refusal to 'move with the times' by suggesting the need to 'digitise their minds' in a focus group interview. Some reporters argued that the Internet was 'saving the situation' as newsrooms, like most institutions in the country, were operating under constrained budgets due to economic challenges facing the country. These journalists saw the Internet as enabling newsrooms to cut costs while at the same time continuing to cover a wide range of stories. As one senior sports journalist at the *Chronicle* explained:

Samson:...whereas in the past you could send someone to particular international sporting events for a 'first hand' feel of things, nowadays our

bosses don't send us to important assignments that require travel across the borders, because they know we will get the story on the Internet...

The bosses will tell you: "Zimbabwe is playing Zambia in Lusaka next week, no problem, we'll carry the story in the *Chronicle*, just be on the look out for what the Zambian newspapers write on the Internet". The misfortune with this is that stories on the Internet tend to have a slant towards who has written them...Zambian journalists will naturally, give a slant that has Zambian fans in mind whereas, a story by a Zimbabwean journalist with fist hand experience of the match will certainly read differently...

The tension between senior and junior journalists was reflective of the impact of age differences and academic backgrounds in shaping attitudes towards the use of the Internet as a journalistic tool. However, the inclination towards 'armchair journalism' in newsrooms was also as a result of the economic circumstances in which the newsrooms operated which limited their operational budgets.

6.4.2 Plagiarism and the challenge of verifying Internet content

Related to the challenge of 'armchair journalism' were ethical challenges of plagiarism and the failure to verify Internet content. These problems raised questions of 'news accuracy and credibility' (Mudhai & Nyabuga 2001) that newsrooms had to contend with. Although plagiarism has always been an ethical problem in Zimbabwean newsrooms (Chari 2009), newsroom observations confirmed that the Internet made plagiarism 'increasingly simple and tempting' (Pavlik 2001: 47).

One of the main challenges the newsrooms faced was the difficulty for gatekeepers to monitor reporters' activities on the Internet. Writing on the impact of plagiarism in the context of the Internet in Zimbabwe, Chari (2009: 22) observes that 'in some cases, plagiarism becomes more sophisticated so that even the most alert editor would not know who was plagiarising what'. The narrative presented at the beginning of this chapter of my observation of a health reporter writing a story on the decline of HIV/AIDS prevalence in Zimbabwe provides compelling evidence of how plagiarism has become taken-for-granted. The reporter's oblivious copying and pasting of material from various web pages to his story is indicative of how naturalised and deep-rooted this ethical problem has become.

Noteworthy is the fact that senior journalists in the newsrooms studied were aware of the prevalence of plagiarism from the Internet in their newsrooms as the news editor of the *Sunday News* explained.

> Gilbert:...there are particular people in this newsrooms that we have nicknamed 'online reporters'. The first thing the person does is to ask himself: "what is on the news websites today, and what can I extract and develop into my own story?". They then copy stories and...because most of these websites are hostile towards the government of Zimbabwe, they simply change a few words, for instance, where there is 'dictator' in reference to President Mugabe they put 'comrade'...so that the story is in line with our editorial policy. These things are happening in this very newsroom...

Observations uncovered striking similarities between some political stories covered in the private weeklies and those carried by some websites that focus on Zimbabwe such as *Newzimbabwe.com*. As Chari (2009: 21) also observes:

> A close analysis of the newspapers reveals a striking identity of stories in different publications which might suggest the prevalence of plagiarism. Similarity in headlines, phrases, introductions and conclusions of stories are common.

Although there was awareness among editors of the increase in plagiarism from the Internet, as the interview excerpt above shows, it is important to highlight that the anonymity of the technology made it difficult to gauge the magnitude of the problem because of the wide use of pseudonyms on the Internet particularly on news websites that focus on Zimbabwe.

The problem of plagiarism was closely related to the challenge of verifying or judging the reliability of information sourced from the Internet. Although there were attempts at being selective in using Internet content, with journalists deploying a number of criteria to ascertain the credibility of content from news websites (see section 6.1.1.2), the low barriers of access which characterise the Internet made it susceptible to manipulation and therefore problematic in terms of 'credibility and reliability' (Machill & Beiler 2009: 201). It is in this light that Adamolekun (1996: 34-35) warns that:

> If we must know...[the information superhighway] is full of several booby traps for unwary and unprepared information wayfarers. The sheer great

> immediacy and drama we now experience and the speed at which we can view what is happening world wide...makes it extremely difficult to easily process the data we have on our hands at any given time.

Journalists were resigned to these challenges. The entertainment editor of the *Sunday News*, Patson, for instance, argued:

> There is not much that we can do really; I think we are limited in terms of verifying Internet content. There are times when you cannot really know what is credible and what is not. In my case, I can't verify or do anything about the Hollywood stuff I find on *Bet.com* or *Tmz.com*, for example. Even with local stories carried on the Internet, at times it's very difficult to verify them because we are under resourced...and always under pressure to deliver.

As the interview extract above shows, other countervailing factors such as limited budgets and the pressure to deliver stories within a limited time frame were also key limiting factors in terms of verifying Internet content. With respect to deadline pressures, Pavlik (2001: 94) writes: '[f]requently, deadline pressures have serious negative consequences for the truthfulness of the news. Journalists under intense deadline pressure...have little time for fact checking'.

Although no excuse can be made for plagiarism and the use of the Internet without verifying content, from my newsroom observations the problem was partly rooted in the absence of formal policy frameworks and the training of journalists to use the Internet effectively as a journalistic tool. Commenting on training in the newsrooms, the news editor of *The Zimbabwe Independent*, Costa, stated: 'I have been in this game for the past 14 years, I don't remember receiving any training on Internet as a journalistic tool, you learn as you go'. These findings support Berger's (2005: 9-10) observations that Southern African newsrooms have no formal policies on the training of staff in the use of the Internet, thus resulting in a large proportion of 'peer-to-peer learning and self-teaching in the newsrooms'. Another reporter at *The Herald*, Daniel, also confirmed the absence of in-house supportive structures in terms of training on the use of the Internet: '...there is no training on the use of the Internet in this newsroom. The assumption is that when you walk into the newsroom you are already fully equipped and raring to go...So people just experiment as they go although here and there colleagues chip-in to assist'.

6.4.3 The impact of the Internet on news access and sourcing routines

The increase in the reliance on the Internet as a source of news and story ideas by journalists (as discussed in section 6.1.1) has had implications on news access and sourcing patterns. From observations and interviews (both group and individual) it seemed clear that the Internet (and other ICTs) promoted the sourcing of stories from elite sections of society with access and the means to contribute content to the Internet. This scenario – coupled with the growing impact of online newspapers in 'setting the agenda' of news coverage – promotes an elite news culture, particularly in terms of political news.

Although as noted earlier, the Internet is opening up alternative sources of political news often censored by government, overreliance on the technology also seems to cement established relations between elite forces and newsmakers which partly influence who gets on the news. As the Glasgow University Media Group (1980: 114) argues '[a]ccess is structured and hierarchical to the extent that powerful groups and individuals have privileged and routine entry into news itself and to the manner and means of its production'.

The appropriation of social networking sites by entertainment reporters (as discussed in section 6.2.2.1) provides a good example of the impact of the Internet on news access and sourcing. As some journalists highlighted, the tendency to rely on social networking sites such as Facebook for story ideas and communication with sources, limits the scope of the stories covered to the interests and agenda set by those with regular access and knowledge of how the social networking sites function. As the entertainment editor of the *Sunday News*, Patson, put it:

> ...the problem with sourcing stories from social networking sites is that it slants your stories towards the more affluent and educated...In fact, the whole process of interviewing people 'digitally' leads to journalists missing a lot of good ideas outside these networks...Remember there are many entertainers in this very country who are semi-literate and can't tell the difference between the mouse and the keyboard of a computer, let alone, these social networking sites [chuckles]...

The response above highlights that reliance on the Internet for story ideas and connecting with sources tends to marginalise potential story ideas from many other sources who are not digitally connected. This reinforces the social impact of the digital divide discussed in Chapter 2, in particular the question of access to

technology which also includes '(digital) skills or competencies and media or technology use and applications' (van Dijk 2006: 224). It also mirrors extant problems of widespread illiteracy, poverty, infrastructure, management, policy regimes and other socio-economic and political issues (Adam & Wood 1990; Roos & Jordaan 2006). Thus, those who actively participate on social networking sites become the 'primary definers' (Hall et al.1978: 61) of entertainment news. They command the discursive field and set the agenda for issues covered by entertainment reporters much to the annihilation of the voices of those without the means or the knowledge to effectively deploy the Internet.

The reliance on online research, particularly if traditional 'shoe leather' approaches are dispensed with, also presents 'risks of a distorted reality' (Machill & Beiler 2009:179) in terms of news coverage. For Machill and Beiler (2009: 201), '[t]his situation requires careful reflection since the danger of a *distortion of reality* or of *one-sided* reporting exists if trust is placed unhesitatingly in the logic of a single search engine' (emphasis added).

Journalists also highlighted the practical pressures of constantly working against the clock and the need to meet required story quotas. These combined to structure 'over-accessing to the media' (Hall et al.1978: 58) for those in positions of privilege with sustained online presence and visibility. Consequently, as noted earlier, those with limited access to communication technologies as a result of inequalities of access in the country are somewhat marginalised in the news especially as journalists contend with the pressure to meet deadlines among other professional pressures. In the words of Sonwalker (2005: 262):

> Caught up in the web of events, tight deadlines and the inherent disposability of their daily output, journalists are rarely able to realise that they routinely ignore large parts of human existence or that willy nilly their exertions end up catering to the elite sections of society.

From newsroom observations it was clear that when under pressure to meet deadlines and requisite story quotas, particularly in after-hours situations, the Internet constituted a key fallback. As the political editor of *The Herald* explained:

> Mataka: You have to get news as quickly as possible...so obviously inaccessible areas will have very little news access...it's even worse if they are not connected to new technologies like the Internet. I might drive to the

areas but the problem is that other newspapers will be moving on with the latest stories.

Fine! When I come back I will write a very good story on what is happening out there, but it's about getting the news quickly and beating competitors. If your competitors pick the information that you drive out there to fetch on the Internet, they will beat you to the game...

Thus, '[a]s the practice of journalism gets into "supersonic mode" the eye of the reporter is fixed on "scooping"' (Chari 2009: 15) , rather than ensuring that the story is balanced. This scenario results in 'sociologically' bereft stories that are detached from issues on the ground and devoid of comment by ordinary citizens.

While it is indeed reductionist to attribute elite news accessing to ICTs alone, it seems clear from the discussion above that the Internet is promoting routine elite access to the news. It places the elite at a vantage point in terms of defining and pontificating on newsworthy events. In the same way, the sociology of journalism has also proved that reporters tend to privilege sources who wield 'social hegemony' (Schudson 2000: 184) mainly because they have the appropriate infrastructure to guarantee a reliable and steady supply of raw materials of news production.

6.4.4 The Internet and 'moonlighting': some professional implications

As discussed in Chapter 5, the Internet has also facilitated the bourgeoning of 'underground' extra paid work for journalists in the mainstream press. Most journalists clandestinely correspond for foreign news organisations as a way of supplementing their poor salaries as well as surviving the economic challenges facing the country. Although moonlighting has always been part of mainstream journalism practice in Zimbabwe, journalists' exposure to international news organisations through the Internet – coupled with the prohibition of foreign media houses from practising in Zimbabwe[23] – has cultivated a mercenary approach to journalism. For some journalists, making money has taken precedence over professional and ethical standards. This development was clearly articulated by the political editor of *The Zimbabwe Independent* in a lengthy interview at the Harare Press Club:

Jabulani: The Internet has economically empowered a lot of journalists in Zimbabwe where the majority of top journalists were forced to flee the

[23] At the time of doing fieldwork for the present study, many foreign news organisations deemed hostile to government policies had been banned from practising journalism in Zimbabwe.

country. Those that have remained have managed to use the opportunities offered by the Internet to break into global media organisations that were traditionally very difficult to break into...

There are people right here in this very club who are doing jobs for *Reuters*; *BBC*; *The Washington Post*; and *The New York Times*: some of the biggest news organisations in the world. It has all been made possible by the Internet. I can say 90% of the journalists operating in Zimbabwe survive through the Internet because these are the guys that feed the outside world with stories. For instance, almost everyday we have a story on *BBC* from Harare and Bulawayo yet the *BBC* is banned from practising in this country. It's a similar story with the *CNN* and numerous other media organisations that are banned from practising here; they are being serviced by local journalists...we are talking here of journalists in Zimbabwean newsrooms. These are journalists that can now be classified as some of the richest guys in Zimbabwe...some of these guys drink here [in the press club] everyday and drive very good cars...and all these are benefits accrued through the Internet...

Interviewer: But doesn't that whole scenario have negative professional implications?

Jabulani: It does to a certain extent, because we have had instances where we discuss rumours in this press club and ten minutes later you find the rumour on the Internet as a story. A case in point was during the March 29 [2008] parliamentary and presidential elections, rumours were circulated here in the press club that Mugabe was losing and that his sister, Sabina, had collapsed and died in shock. In no time at all, there was a story on the Internet that Mugabe's sister had died. Someone had picked it up and written a story under a pseudonym and the editor of that particular news website published it without crosschecking. Embarrassingly, two hours down the line the government was denying it!

From this interview, it is clear that the Internet has provided Zimbabwean mainstream journalists with opportunities for economic survival. However, these opportunities are fraught with negative professional and ethical implications. Commenting on the impact of the Internet on African journalism practice, Kasoma (1996: 95) writes:

> In a world in which the information superhighway has made journalists practise their profession in a hurry as they strive to satisfy the world's craving for more and quicker news and other information, the humaneness of journalism has increasingly been giving way to the expediencies of cut-throat financial...competition.

Journalists' use of pseudonyms as a way of disguising their identities from their regular employers and protecting themselves from a perceived threat to personal security by the authorities further compromises ethical standards as accountability is buried in anonymity (Moyo, D 2007; Chari 2009). Moreover, the speed with which the Internet allows for the publication of stories also fuels the publication of 'unsubstantiated and often highly opinionated stories' (Moyo, D 2007: 91) as seen in the publication of press club rumours about the alleged death of Mugabe's sister referred to in the interview extract above.

The pressure to maintain efficiency in the face of a demanding workload divided between one's regular employer and the 'underground' employer also led to unprofessional behaviour in the newsrooms as journalists resorted to 'stealing' stories from colleagues in order to sell them to their underground employers. The entertainment editor of the *Sunday News*, Patson, described this scenario thus: 'moonlighting has resulted in several problems in this newsroom, people steal stories from each other and sell them to online publications...there are also growing incidents of fabrications'. Reinforcing this response, one assistant news editor at *The Herald* gave an insightful illustration of how journalists 'stole' stories from each other in a newsroom interview:

> Interviewer: In your experience in this newsroom, have you witnessed any forms of abuse of these technologies?
>
> John: A lot, because of the editorial system that we use...I will show you something [looks around], you see that reporter, look at his monitor – he is going through other people's raw copies, he is on 'read only', come closer, come and see what I am talking about [we both move towards the journalist]. Look, now he is in his own 'basket', but [seizes the mouse to illustrate his point] if he moves up here he can see all the stories that have been filed for tomorrow's paper, but he can only read, he can't edit them. So, what he does is, he secretly copies these stories, spices them up (sic) a bit and sends them to

an online publication that he works for clandestinely, no one can tell he has done it...

The professional and ethical challenges posed by the increase in moonlighting among mainstream journalists were also a result of competition for breaking news among foreign news agencies and online newspapers with an interest in Zimbabwe's unfolding socio-political crisis. As one reporter at *The Standard*, Busani, explained in a focus group interview, the competition among journalists to be the first to break a story exposed the profession to ethical challenges:

> ...because of the competition among news agencies and online publications for the Zimbabwean story...each journalist wants to be the first to break the story and make more money. This has damaged the profession as people don't even wait to adhere to the cardinal rules of journalism of verifying and crosschecking issues.

Although journalists were wary of the pitfalls of the Internet, they broadly agreed that it is an important and indispensable resource in their day-to-day newswork.

The next section discusses the deployment and appropriation of email as a journalistic tool. It focuses on patterns of use and the challenges journalists face in effectively deploying the technology. I closely examine how the technology has been integrated into newsmaking routines as well as the contextual factors that impinge on the effective use of the technology by journalists. As indicated at the beginning of this chapter, although the Internet and email are closely connected, I examine them separately for analytical purposes.

6.5 Email as a journalistic tool: trends and patterns of use

Electronic mail was one of the most widely used features of the Internet in the newsrooms studied. Its deployment as a journalistic tool was, in many ways, heavily shaped by the beat system. This meant that some beats were more inclined to deploy the email in their newsmaking practices than others, precisely because 'sources differ as to where they can be located; at what time they are available [and] *by what means they may be tapped...*' (Fishman 1980: 36, emphasis added). Fishman (1980: 36) further points out that 'each beat requires very different coverage routines, different work rounds individually tailored to the particular activities within the beat' territory' (see Chapter 5 section 5.2.3). I expand on this point shortly.

In general, the centrality of email as a newsmaking tool was rooted in its wide-ranging appropriations and merits over traditional modes of communication used by journalists in their day-to-day routines such as the fax machine and the fixed phone. Evidence from newsroom observations and interviews revealed that the email technology was predominantly used for: interviewing sources; receiving news alerts and press releases; subscribing to different interest group listservs; and interacting with readers. I discuss these in turn below.

6.5.1 Email as a tool for interviewing sources

There was consensus among reporters on the effectiveness of email in interviewing sources in the private sector such as non-governmental organisations; embassies and corporate organisations. As the assistant business editor of *The Herald*, Geoff, explained:

> Email is quite convenient when dealing with top guys in the private sector than people in public sector and government offices who seem to have problems with emails...For some reason people in the corporate sector are very efficient and quick to respond to emails...

The disparate diffusion of email technology into various institutions – intimated in the observation that most people in government offices 'seem to have a problems with emails' – renders the technology more strategic as a newsmaking tool for beats whose news coverage routines revolve mostly around the private and corporate sectors (such as business reporting). It is no wonder then that business reporters in all the newsrooms studied found email to be an invaluable tool in their day-to-day interactions with sources as compared to reporters in other beats. This scenario suggests that email technology has not supplanted other traditional forms of communication used by journalists, rather it complements them. As some scholars argue, because of the socio-economic conditions prevailing in Africa ICTs such as email, have not yet permeated all sectors of society. Many people and institutions go about their daily chores the way they know best, using the well-known and established traditional methods such as face-to-face communication (see Okigbo 1995; Adamolekun 1996; Nyamnjoh 2005). This scenario finds articulation in the notion of the digital divide which explains the inequalities of access to technologies 'indicative of larger, structural inequalities between Africa and the developed world' (Wasserman 2005: 174).

In general, journalists pointed out that email was critical for sourcing information from foreign-based sources (particularly Zimbabweans based abroad), where phone call charges are prohibitive for the newsrooms because of constrained operational budgets. This finding is affirmed by Pavlik (2000: 69) in his observation that: 'using email to interview [news sources] is an increasingly viable option, especially for international sources'.

It should be noted, however, that using email as an interviewing tool was largely predicated on prior relationships cultivated over time between the reporters and sources. As Reddick and King (1995) note, this prior relationship not only served to build the trust necessary for the effectiveness of email as a newsgathering and processing tool, but also makes evaluating information sent through email easier.

6.5.2 Email news alerts, listservs and press releases

A number of journalists studied also used email to receive daily news alerts from various Internet news sources such as *Google News* which provides the latest news via email. *Google News* aggregates news items which fall within a broad theme selected by the user and sends them as email alerts. As some journalists explained, *Google Alerts* allowed them to decide the frequency with which they wanted to receive the news alerts, with three main options available: once a day, once a week, or right away, as the news breaks. Mataka, the political editor of *The Herald*, explained thus:

> I receive email alerts from *Google News* about the topics that I deal with on a daily basis...When you go to *Google News* it offers to send you alerts on whatever you are interested in. For instance, if you go to *Google News* and type President Mugabe, it will give you the latest news on President Mugabe and then it will offer to send you news alerts on a regular basis. It's up to you, whether you want to receive the alerts: once a day; once a week or as the news breaks. I prefer to get my alerts as the news breaks and I clear my email of news alerts about 5 or 6 times a day because they come in batches...

Closely related to news alerts, journalists also subscribed to listservs administered by various media and human rights organisations in the country, such as the Media Institute of Southern Africa and the *Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition*. These organisations regularly send email alerts to journalists, which sometimes provide story ideas and leads. Explaining the importance of online material, Reddick and King (1995: 189) note that sifting through material churned out on online platforms such as

listservs, is like listening to conversations 'among people who are deeply interested in a specific subject…'.

Institutions that have embraced email technology as an everyday communication technology regularly send press releases to journalists via email. From newsroom observations and interviews it emerged that this practice was promoting forms of 'press release journalism' as illustrated in the interview excerpt below with one assistant news editor at *The Herald.*

> John:…look, [beckons me to move closer to his computer] you see this? This [email] is from the Zimbabwe Tourism Authority. They sent this yesterday, as you can see, they were saying Zimbabwe's Victoria Falls is amongst the top five African tourist attractions. If you look at today's paper [he picks up a copy of the day's edition on his desk and leafs through it to show me the story he had written based on the press release he received via email].
>
> Interviewer: So you did this story on the basis of the email you have just shown me?
>
> John: Yes, as you see, they sent me this, it's about four paragraphs and I blew it up (sic) into the story you see in that newspaper. I simply added context and 'life' to the email. For instance, I added some detail to the activities they say tourists can indulge themselves in while at the Victoria Falls.
>
> These are my sources, they are informing me about the latest developments at the Victoria Falls, in terms of the activities that visitors can occupy themselves with…then I write a story out of that…we get many of these emails telling us bout various events and developments across sectors, so you can't run away from the email in this business.

This form of 'press release journalism' was, however, criticised by some senior journalists as counterproductive and against the key tenets of journalism practice (see section 6.5.5 below).

6.5.3 Email as a tool for interacting with readers

In all the newsrooms studied email was also used to facilitate what can be referred to as 'dialogical journalism' between journalists and readers. The all-purpose email addresses provided on the print editions of all the newspapers (such as *editor@chronicle.co.zw*; *newsdesk@standard.co.zw*; *newsdesk@zimind.co.zw*; *sundaymail@zimpapers.co.zw*) allowed readers to communicate directly with the newspapers for various reasons that included: responding to stories; voicing concerns on the coverage of specific issues; and providing tip-offs. In addition to the general newsroom emails pointed to above, some columnists provide their personal email addresses below their columns, thus enabling readers to respond directly to the issues raised in the columns. For *The Standard* and *The Zimbabwe Independent*, email interactions with readers added to the interaction facilitated by the newspaper's websites as discussed in section 6.3 above. Email thus provides readers with an alternative avenue to engage with journalists hence contributing to a dialogical form of journalism that inverts the traditional top-down journalistic practice. The interview extract below with an assistant news editor at *The Herald* illustrates how email is facilitating dialogic journalism.

> Interviewer: Are there instances where readers respond to some of your stories through email?
>
> John: Yes, especially through my column. Let me show you something [scrolls through his mailbox and opens an email] like this one, he wrote an email saying he wanted to introduce himself to me after reading an article that I had written. I will show you another example of somebody who wrote insulting me. In fact, they are many, I had written a story about Chief Polokwane which triggered many responses from readers and relatives who were incensed by its content.
>
> Interviewer: So did some of these readers directly communicate with you?
>
> John: Yes, this email came first [directing me to his mail box] and it opened a Pandora's Box. Emails started raining (sic) as people responded to the story.
>
> Interviewer: Other than the insults, did some of the emails give you any leads or ideas for follow-up?

John: They did, one of the emails actually forced me to go back to Polokwane for a follow-up story.

From the extract above, it is clear that email has become an empowering technology providing readers with an opportunity to engage directly with journalists on issues they write about. Thus, while email enables the journalists to gather and process news as shown above, it also empowers readers to interact with the journalists on social, political, and economic issues carried by the newspapers (Pavlik 2000). In this sense, '[e]mail has become a vital and instantaneous link between readers and reporters, often shaping reporters' knowledge and attitudes as much as an initial report may have influenced the public' (Pavlik 2000: 235).

A point needs to be made, however, that the use of email to interact with readers in the newsrooms studied was somewhat limited, as only a few senior journalists had access to the emails sent by readers through the newsrooms' general email addresses. Further, only reporters with columns published their email addresses in the newspapers.

6.5.4 The significance of email as a newsmaking technology

The centrality of email as a newsmaking technology in the newsrooms studied was reflected in a number of uses and appropriations gleaned through observations and interviews as discussed below:

For many journalists, email interviews were strategic as they provided a written record of information exchange between reporters and their sources hence leaving very little room for accusations of misquoting a source. As one health reporter at *The Herald* put it in a focus group interview.

Paida: One good thing about email is that it constitutes a record which you can easily retrieve in the event your source or interviewee later alleges that you misquoted them or fabricated issues. I once had an incident in which the chief executive officer of CIMAS Medical Aid disputed some issues I had written about his organisation...Fortunately, I still had the email in which the CEO had personally written the issues he was disputing in my mailbox, so I simply retrieved it and forwarded it to my editor and the issue was diffused...

So, an email is like an interview transcript, they can't really say you got the quotation wrong...It gives us a virtually indelible electronic record as

you can hold people to what they would have written themselves in the event of any allegations of misquoting.

A number of reporters argued that email interviews could make for more precise reporting as emailed responses reduce the likelihood of a source being misquoted: journalists simply copy and paste relevant sections of an email directly into a story – and this facilitates accuracy (Berger 2006).

Journalists also argued that email gives sources a chance to provide well-thought-out answers rather than top-of-the-head responses that may miss out on critical nuances or even misrepresent issues. The assistant news editor of the *Chronicle*, Thabisani, clearly articulated this point:

> In some instances, I imagine email can make sources more comfortable as they don't feel grilled. This of course, can lead to overly calculated responses, but it certainly makes sources more relaxed than if they were questioned face-to-face. It also depends on the nature of the issues being discussed...

Email was also seen as facilitating direct access to public officials and top-level management who are always overscheduled and difficult to get hold of. As Reddick and King (1995) observe sometimes people who refuse to accept a telephone call or a meeting with journalists may be willing to respond to an email message as they do so at their own convenience. This is particularly the case with authoritative sources who are difficult to access because of bureaucratic hurdles. One senior business reporter at *The Herald* explained thus:

> Wiseman: Many officials particularly in the corporate world actually prefer to be contacted via e-mail than through a phone call because they find it more convenient – they don't have to wait for their secretary to clear an hour or two hour long backlog...

Writing about the deployment of email by Southern African journalists Berger (2005: 9) similarly observes that one advantage of email is its potential for direct communication, which breaks 'the dependence of journalists on gatekeepers and secretaries to get access to key sources'.

The study also established that email breaks down the barriers created by distance through its capacity to bridge time and space differences between senders and receivers of messages. All the newsrooms studied relied on email to connect with

their local bureaus, correspondents and columnists. Journalists on international assignments also filed their stories through email. In the same way, it emerged that email made it easy for the newsrooms to connect with international news sources thus reducing the time it takes to cover international news. Sports reporters, for instance, used email to keep in touch with foreign-based Zimbabwean athletes.

In this sense, the global reach of email has enabled Zimbabwean newsrooms to widen the scope of their information gathering from sources in different time zones across continents. As Chari (2009: 1) puts it: 'where it used to take months to [source] news, now it is only a matter of clicking a button'. Similarly, Reddick and King (1995: 189) posit that 'as the use and availability of online information grows, the constraints time and space imposes on reporters is diminishing'.

6.5.5 Ambivalences and fears in the use of email as a newsmaking tool

It should be mentioned that while many journalists glorified the speed, flexibility and efficiency of email, others (mostly the 'old school' journalists), were wary of using email as a journalistic tool. They saw it not only as less transparent and lacking credibility than the traditional tools of reporting such as the fax and the fixed phone, but as promoting laziness among journalists as well.

The tendency for email to promote 'press-release-journalism' and the risk of using unreliable sources were also among the biggest concerns raised by senior and more 'conservative' journalists. As the news editor of the *Chronicle* put it:

> Mkhahlamezi: Yes, email has its advantages but journalists are becoming lazy. We have journalists in this very newsroom who will tell you that they haven't gone out of the newsroom in a week. They come to work everyday and sit in front of the computer, waiting for press statements to come through so they can write their stories, but as you would know, journalism is all about going out there to interact physically with your sources.

Similarly, Berger (1996) stresses that online access should not displace the need to find out entirely new information. For him, a large part of newsgathering is not about collecting existing information, but eliciting and discovering new data. (The foregoing criticism of email as promoting laziness also relates to the criticism of 'armchair journalism' discussed in section 6.4.1.)

Some veteran journalists further argued that interviewing sources through email eliminates the candour, spontaneity and natural dialogue that characterise face-

to-face conversations. The journalists warned that email can hardly be a substitute for real-time conversation but rather is a recipe for 'sterile' journalism. As in the case of social networking sites (discussed in section 6.2.2.1), there seemed be a conflict between the new generation of reporters (trained under changed technological circumstances) and the newsroom 'traditionalists' who maintained that live conversations, either face-to-face or by phone were by far superior to cyberspace communication. As one senior news writer at *The Herald*, Viola, pointed out: 'email is *lifeless*, devoid of *intimacy*, *pauses*, *chuckles* and *spontaneous reactions*, all of which add the essential context to a story' (emphasis added). Likewise, the news editor of *The Zimbabwe Independent*, Costa, highlighted that email is devoid of the interactivity that characterises oral conversations with sources, and it can take very long before the journalists gets the right answers to all the key questions.

> The problem with email is that it's not as interactive as communicating orally; face-to-face or by phone. If you send questions to your source that's that...they just answer you the way they want to and if you want to follow up on some of the responses, you have to write another email and wait maybe another day for the response. Whereas if you are talking one-on-one, as soon as something interesting is brought up you pursue it...

The different conceptions of the value of email as a journalistic tool between senior and junior journalists are perhaps a reflection of the 'generational digital divide' widely perceived in terms of the 'usage gap' between age groups with different social classes and educational backgrounds (van Dijk 2005; 2006).

Journalists' fears and ambivalences in deploying emails for journalistic purposes (across the divide of the state-controlled and the private press) were also defined by censorship and security fears associated with newsroom management's use of spyware – computer software that obtains information from a user's computer without the user's knowledge or consent – to monitor and track email traffic in the newsrooms. These fears also related to the general telecommunications regulation and censorship environment in the country.[24] At the time of doing fieldwork for the

[24] In 2007 the government promulgated the Interception of Communication Act which 'provides for the setting up of an interception centre to listen into telephone conversations, open mail and intercept emails and faxes. [The Act also] compels Internet service providers to install equipment to facilitate interception "at all times or when so required" and ensure that its equipment allows full-time monitoring of communications'. See 'Zimbabwe passes eavesdrop law', reported in the *Mail & Guardian Online*, August 03, 2007. Retrieved December 5, 2008 from: http://www.mg.co.za/article/2007-08-03-zimbabwe-passe-eavesdrop-law

present study, a Zimpapers editor was suspended and subsequently dismissed on allegations of 'moonlighting' after his emails were intercepted and used as evidence against him in a disciplinary hearing.[25] In the light of these circumstances, journalists were extremely cautious in their use of email communication within the newsrooms, especially company emails that they saw as easily susceptible to interception. As one senior editor at the *Chronicle*, Thabisani, explained:

> ...you see, at the moment there are a lot of suspicions on company email. People suspect that if you use the company email the IT department can intercept and read your private mails, but if you have a web-based email the belief is that it's more secure. For that reason, I have a company email and a personal web-based email. I prefer to use the web-based...I don't really feel comfortable with the company email.

The Information Technology manager at *The Herald* confirmed the presence of a system that monitors journalists' email traffic and a general commitment towards censoring journalists' online activities within Zimpapers.

> Gilbert: We have a system in place that enables us to see who has generated what email and its content. So, we regularly do random checks for abuse from our main server...Sometimes if we are not sure with the nature of the content we simply intercept and quarantine the email...
>
> Our major challenge, however, is in monitoring the web-based emails. It continues to be a big challenge as journalists smuggle (sic) stories from our newsrooms to foreign media houses on a regular basis.
>
> We could be more drastic actually by using stricter ways of controlling and monitoring email traffic, but we want people to be responsible...

Journalists in the private press were equally cautious in their use of email because of fears and suspicions of snooping. One senior reporter at *The Zimbabwe Independent*, Colin, explained:

> I have got two private web-based emails, one of them is completely anonymous even if I write to you, you will not recognise the email is from me because I use a secret username. It is strictly for private business. You see for

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[25] 'Zimpapers Managers Spy on Suspended Editor', reported in *The Standard*, September 27. 2008. Retrieved December 3, 2008 from: http://www.thestandard.co.zw/local/18997-zimpapers-managersspy-on-suspended-editor.html

most of us to feed our families, we have to freelance, which is against our company policy...you cannot freelance using the company email...

We are also aware that management has surreptitiously installed malicious spyware on our computers to monitor who is sending stories where because they suspect that most of the content on these Zimbabwean news websites is originating from our newsroom...

So, we use private emails like *Yahoo* to wire stories abroad and the company email for business related to the newspaper. Essentially, the private email is for business which you don't want to be detected by management...

Although these circumstances render the deployment of email in newsmaking difficult, journalists are 'are far from being mired in "backwardness" or passively awaiting external salvation' (Berger 2005: 1) in regard to using email for journalistic purposes. Thus, where the use of company email is risky, journalists resort to web-based emails such as *Yahoo*, *Hotmail* and *Gmail*, which they see as more secure and difficult to monitor. As the interview extract above shows, confidence in using web-based emails was drawn from the fact that journalists controlled the passwords and chose their own secret usernames.

6.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed wide-ranging uses of the Internet and email in Zimbabwe's mainstream press. I have highlighted a number of opportunities and advantages which the technologies have brought to the newsrooms. The centrality of the Internet is particularly shown in its shaping of the mainstream press' news agenda and in its availing of information often censored by government among other functions. Similarly, email has become a vital and instantaneous link between reporters and readers. It also facilitates direct communication with key sources.

Although all the newspapers' online editions predominantly duplicate their print versions' content, the private weeklies have taken significant strides towards creatively deploying interactivity and user-generated content to enrich their newsmaking practices. This development is, however, perceived with ambivalence and resistance by the state-controlled newspapers. As the study has revealed, the resistance is not just a matter of professional conservatism, but should be understood in the broader context of the state-controlled newspapers' newsmaking culture.

While the Internet and email have undoubtedly added value to the newsrooms' newsmaking practices, they have also magnified the traditional ethical and professional challenges surrounding news production (Pavlik 2001) and the very nature of journalism itself. Myriad professional and ethical problems associated with the use of the technologies in the newsrooms emerged in this study. Plagiarism has increasingly become simple and tempting, and journalists do not adhere to the ethical canons of the profession. In the same way, the technologies are contributing to the development of 'new' forms of journalistic practices such as 'armchair journalism', where journalists are increasingly spending more time in the newsrooms than in the field. The Internet is also driving 'activist journalism' or 'vendetta journalism' among political reporters in the state-controlled newsrooms.

The technologies have also seen a surge in a 'mercenary' approach to journalism as journalists strive to augment their poor salaries through moonlighting. Reliance on the technologies is also promoting a shrinking diversity of voices in terms of who contributes to news content given significant inequalities in the distribution of the technologies in the country. These ethical and professional challenges are exacerbated by the absence of formal ICT policy frameworks in the newsrooms supporting the training of journalists in the use of the technologies for newsmaking purposes hence most journalists are either self-trained or assisted by their peers.

The internal conditions of practice, professional ideologies of timeliness and the demands of specific beats also foster particular patterns of Internet and email use. In the same way, the wider socio-political and economic conditions in which the journalists operate also heavily shape and constrain the deployment of the technologies. These observations counter 'technological determinism' and make a stronger case for a constructivist approach that looks at new technologies as deeply embedded in the social context in which they are deployed. As Ettema et al. (1997: 44) put it, 'journalists live and work within an encompassing social and cultural context that powerfully and implicitly informs their attempts to make sense of the world'. Their deployment of technologies should thus be seen as relative and contingent upon the socio-political and economic circumstances in which they operate.

CHAPTER 7

The mobile phone in the dynamics of everyday newswork: appropriations and impact

7.0 Introduction

This chapter critically examines the appropriations of the mobile phone in the dynamics of the newsmaking processes of Zimbabwean mainstream journalists. It highlights how the technology has assumed a taken-for-granted role in the routine operations of journalists and, in particular, how it is redefining newsmaking practices. In keeping with the broader theoretical foundations of the present study, as articulated in Chapter 3, the mobile phone is seen as ingrained in the social relations and interpretive processes that sustain its appropriations. It is seen as deeply enmeshed in the heterogeneity and dynamics of the socio-cultural, political and economic context in which the journalists operate. The chapter highlights contextual challenges that journalists face in their attempt to effectively deploy the mobile phone and the 'localised' approaches they employ in negotiating these challenges, all of which illuminate the 'shaping impact' of the journalists' immediate and wider context of practice and the extent to which the technology has been 'tamed' and 'domesticated'. The findings further suggest that the technology has acquired 'new meanings' in the social context of its appropriation by the journalists. In the same way, the technology' pervasiveness and permeation into everyday life (among both 'elite' and 'mass') has rendered it central in (re)organising and (re)shaping mainstream newsmaking practices, including the blurring of the boundaries between 'work' and 'private life'.

7.1 The entrenchment of the mobile phone in journalists' everyday life

Journalists across the newsrooms collectively highlighted the extent to which the mobile phone has freed them from the necessity of physical proximity and the constraining demands of spatial immobility rooted in traditional modes of communication such as the fixed phone. For the journalists this – among other communicative potentialities inherent in the mobile phone – has rendered the technology an indispensable part of their day-to-day work. As the managing editor of the *Chronicle*, Thabisani, put it: '...we find it strange that you are a journalist and you don't have a mobile phone, that's one thing we expect every journalist to have...'. With hindsight, some journalists spoke of the mobile phone in terms of its general transformative impact on the practice of journalism. Thus, the political editor of the

Sunday Mail, Mutepfa, explained: 'At times when I look at the mobile phone and the way I have become so dependent on it, I always ask myself *"how did we ever manage without it?"...I really can't imagine myself in this job without a mobile phone'* (emphasis added). Echoing similar sentiments, the news editor of *The Zimbabwe Independent*, Costa, recounted: '...sometimes I sit in the newsroom and watch these youngsters use their cell phones and wonder how we survived during our days as cub reporters without this gadget...It is such a phenomenal technological advancement that has completely changed the way we gather news'. Relating the extent to which journalists have become dependent on the mobile phone in the newsrooms, the political editor of *The Herald*, Mataka, stated: '...if you lose your mobile phone, you will find yourself *completely crippled* almost immediately' (emphasis added).

The interview responses above not only highlight the extent to which the mobile phone has become part of the everyday professional life of mainstream journalists in Zimbabwe but also the extent to which they have become patently dependent on it. Many encounters in my field observations corroborated the responses cited above. One newsroom encounter at *The Herald* was particularly illuminating. It dramatised the extent to which the mobile phone has become an integral and indispensable part of the journalists' operations even in the face of the deprived circumstances in which the journalists operate. The encounter further highlighted how the mobile phone has come to embody key professional and social relations in the journalists' daily life (de Bruijn et al. 2009).

> One early morning around 07.45am, I walked into *The Herald* newsroom and saw a junior female reporter looking quite dejected and depressed, on her desk was a broken mobile phone which she was fiddling with in an apparent attempt to fix it. From a closer look, it appeared the makeshift rubber band she had used to keep the phone intact had snapped and the 'pieces' had fallen apart. Upon setting her eyes on me, she asked if I could help or, at least, if knew someone who could quickly fix the phone for her. Unfortunately, I could not give a hand, either way.
>
> She continued with her futile attempts to fix the phone until one male reporter walked in, and looked at the phone in response to her plea. He took it to his desk, quipping "I think we need a new phone, my sister!"...In no time, the cell phone was ringing again, but not without a reinforcement of rubber bands around it. The female reporter couldn't resist showing her excitement

and expression of relief at the sight of her phone 'back to life' again. Clearly, her mobile phone, in its old and crumbling state, meant a lot to her.

I joked about how miserable she had looked before her 'dead' phone and she hit back, explaining that she felt like she was '*losing a vital part of her person*' and that she did not even want to contemplate the challenges of carrying out her duties without her mobile phone. She spoke at length about the difficulties she would have faced in getting in touch with her contacts, most of whose contact numbers were only in her mobile phone and that at the time when the phone broke down she was anticipating calls from two of her key sources.

What made her situation particularly poignant, as she further explained, was that she could not afford to replace her old phone, not even with a used one, as her salary was just not enough. (*Field notes, The Herald newsroom, July 15, 2008, emphasis added*)

The narrative reflects the extent to which the mobile phone has become entrenched in the daily lives of the journalists in the newsrooms studied. That the reporter felt incomplete and as though stripped of '*a vital part of her person*' in the form of important associations and relationships embodied in her mobile phone is suggestive of the extent to which the mobile phone 'has become a necessary tool for the expression of identity and for keeping track of social relations in daily life' (de Bruijn et al. 2009: 12). The technology has become an everyday technology, thoroughly embedded and routinised in the 'processes of relating' (ibid.) on which journalism practice is dependent.

More poignantly, the narrative foregrounds how the reality of the deprived circumstances in which the journalists operate defines the nature and form of the technologies they rely on in their quest to stay connected (see Chapter 2). That one of the staffers in the newsroom was quick to fix the phone is a further reinforcement of the extent to which the mobile phone has not only become ingrained in the journalists' daily existence but also the extent to which it has been 'tamed' and 'domesticated' (Nyamnjoh 2005a: 208). It equally dramatises the resilience with which journalists confront their deprived circumstances in their efforts to stay connected through the mobile phone. In Nyamnjoh's (2005a: 209) words, the mobile phone 'has been eagerly grasped by [Africans] exploring ways of denying exclusion its smile of triumph'. Similarly, Berger (2005) contends that Southern African journalists are far

from passively awaiting external salvation in regard to attempts to deploy ICTs. He argues that: 'when seen in comparison with the First World, there are indeed shortcomings and a dire need for catch-up...But there is also another dimension visible which reflects *internal creativity*, *strengths* and *adaptations*' (Berger 2005: 1, emphasis added).

Against this backdrop, the sections that follow discuss the appropriations of the mobile phone by journalists focusing mainly on the technology's communicative value in empowering journalists to overcome the temporal and spatial limitations of established modes of communication such as the fixed phone. The discussion delves into interconnected factors rooted in the inherent communicative functions of the mobile phone as a portable and mobile gadget which broadly underpin its deployment in the newsrooms studied, precisely: mobility, convenience, and immediacy among others. These factors intersect and influence the appropriation of the mobile phone in the dynamics of everyday newswork in terms of work organisation; arrangement; contact with sources and colleagues, among other functions.

7.2 The expediency of the mobile phone in everyday newswork

7.2.1 Mobility and flexibility

With hindsight, a number of senior journalists saw the flexibility and mobility engendered by the mobile phone as constituting a positive shift from inflexible newsmaking practices. From field observations and interviews it also emerged that the mobile phone's capacity to 'compress time and space' (Pelckamans 2009: 47) imbued reporters with relative flexibility and mobility in carrying out their newsgathering routines. The technology has 'liberated' journalists from the constraints of physical proximity and spatial immobility as regards their newsmaking communicative needs.

From field observations it was indeed clear that journalists have adapted their communicative needs to the inherent flexibility and portability of the mobile phone. It has to be stated, however, that although the broader theoretical concerns of the present study reject technological determinism (see Chapter 3), 'this does not mean that the properties of the technology concerned are irrelevant' (van Dijk 2005: 22). This perhaps points to the relevance of what some critics refer to as 'soft determinism' (Lawson 2007). This emphasises the centrality of the properties of technology while at the same time questioning the plausibility of imputing agency to technology by locating it 'in a far more various and complex social, economic, political, and cultural matrix' (Smith & Marx 1994: xiii). Accordingly, the flexibility and mobility

engendered by the mobile phone can be seen as empowering journalists in terms of their professional communicative needs, which are no longer necessarily limited or bound to the fixed phone. With the mobile phone communication can be initiated from any point that has network connectivity.

In general, the expediency and flexibility engendered by the mobile phone was manifest in the technology's impact on newsmaking practices and in particular on three interrelated issues, viz: the changing news flows and values; the flexible management of the newsmaking processes by senior journalists; and evolving reporter/source relations.

The direct 'oral' and 'textual' contact with people facilitated by the mobile phone was seen as enabling a flexible work regime in which journalists are available to their sources and colleagues while on the move – on work-related assignments or engaging in personal business. Nkwi (2009: 51) posits that '[i]t is this direct or instant voice [or text] exchange [while on the move] that make the mobile phone so attractive'. As one senior news reporter at *The Herald*, Simon, aptly summed it:

> The mobile phone is very important because, as you know, journalism involves a lot of travelling and *when you travel you don't travel with your landline*. This means that with the mobile phone you are easily contactable when you are in those remote areas where there are no landlines. You can also easily liaise with the newsroom and even file stories from there.
>
> In the same way, when a source phones you at work and fails to locate you, he or she can reach you on your mobile phone because you carry it with you wherever you are...(emphasis added)

Some senior journalists, who strongly believed in 'shoe leather' reporting, emphasised the fact that the permeation of the mobile phone into the practice of journalism and, in particular, the flexibility and mobility it facilitates, should be seen by young reporters as an opportunity for the 'resurgence' of 'shoe leather' reporting. One senior and long-serving journalist at *The Zimbabwe Independent*, Paulus, gave a lucid and insightful reasoning:

> ...serious journalists are hardly ever at one place, they are always up and about, and on many occasions they are out of town searching for news. So, I think, in truth, the centrality of the mobile phone should be located in the possibilities it allows for reporters to spend more time in the field chasing

stories...This, at least, should be the way these young reporters – who have been initiated into a growing culture of laziness – see the mobile phones...

The ability to traverse spatial and time constraints through the mobile phone has not only altered the time spent gathering news but also the newsrooms' notions of 'immediacy' in newsmaking. The mobile phone has thus 'generated relative emancipation from local settings in place and time' (Pelckamans 2009: 47).

It is significant to note that all the newsrooms studied have adapted their newsmaking culture to the expediency and flexibility of the mobile phone through deploying it as a strategic tool for filing stories from the field. All the newsrooms have thus made it policy for reporters on out-of-town assignments to always file their stories from there and avoid travelling long distances with stories. This was seen not only as a way of saving time but also as a means of averting possible delays in the transmission of stories that could result from traffic delays or a vehicle breakdown. This was articulated in the following interview extract with one senior reporter at *The Herald*:

Simon: What you want is to beat the time factor, especially the afternoon deadline. So, you get in touch with the newsroom early so that someone can either get the full story or just the key notes which he or she can use to write the story.

So, when you are in an area without network coverage you drive to the next point where there is network and you phone or text the newsroom to ask someone to phone back...

The advantage of doing this is that you don't have to travel a long distance 'carrying the story'. This is what we are trying to avoid. Instead of me travelling from, Mt Darwin, about 2 hours from Harare, and rushing to the newsroom to type the story, which may take another 1 hour...I simply give it to a colleague in the newsroom via the phone...This is particularly convenient when covering accidents or news that breaks fairly late which the editor may want published in the next edition...

The convenience of the mobile phone as a tool for filing stories from the field and in particular its impact on the news organisations' notions of immediacy in newsgathering was especially felt during national elections when reporters were assigned to cover news in dispersed and outlying areas with poor roads and 'often-

paralysed...fixed telecommunications networks' (Moyo, D 2009: 556; see also Etta & Parvyn-Wamahiu 2003; Mutula 2005). Explaining the mediatory function of the mobile phone in the March, 2008 presidential and parliamentary elections, the news editor of *The Herald*, Itai, stated: 'I kept in touch with my reporters stationed at various polling stations across the country, constantly giving them instructions and directives to shift to particular areas...where I had been informed that violence had broken out or something of interest had occurred'. Highlighting the mobile phone's significance during the same elections, a news reporter at the *Chronicle*, Mthulisi, noted: 'As information criss-crossed between the newsroom and polling stations through our cell phones, we found ourselves recharging our phone batteries many times, in just one day'. Moyo, D (2009: 556) makes a similar observation, highlighting that during the March, 2008 elections 'the mobile phone network was literally clogged, as people jostled to exchange information via text messages and voice calls'.

It is worth noting that the process of filing stories from the field through the mobile phone necessarily had an impact on the news writing processes and generally pointed to subtle but noteworthy shifting ideas about news values. The formerly separate processes of newsgathering and news writing appeared to be somewhat merging and overlapping with the increase in writing and filing stories from the field instead of waiting until one got back to the newsroom. In this sense, the deployment of the mobile phone by mainstream journalists has led to new dimensions of speed and immediacy in newsmaking. However, as has been noted in the preceding chapter, with respect to the deployment of the Internet and email, the mobile phone complements and reinforces the traditional tools of journalism (such as the fixed phone).

The responses above also point to the importance of the mobile phone as a tool for managing newsmaking processes, principally in terms of coordinating and consulting with reporters in the field. This function was especially important for novice reporters who frequently sought advice from the newsroom when they found themselves in difficult situations in the field. Similarly, desk editors tracked reporters in the field through their mobile phones. In fact, some editors referred to their mobile phones as 'mobile offices' whose expediency facilitated flexible planning, organisation and the co-ordination of newsmaking processes without being constrained by the need for physical proximity. Reinforcing this point, the managing

editor of the *Chronicle*, Thabisani, described the mobile phone as a 'handy gadget that has improved efficiency in terms of running and managing his newsroom'.

The flexibility and mobility inherent in the mobile phone was also seen as significantly (re)defining the journalists' relations and connections with sources. A number of reporters highlighted that the mobile phone enabled them to work around the habits and routines of their sources through facilitating direct contact, especially with sources who are always busy and are difficult to get hold of on their office landlines or in person, such as business executives and politicians. As the news editor of the *Sunday Mail*, Garikai, explained:

> You will realise that company executives and government ministers are always in meetings, so the easiest way to get hold of them is through their mobile phones. If they can't take the call, you send a text message or leave a message on their voicemail.

In the same vein, some journalists emphasised the centrality of the mobile phone in navigating bureaucratic hurdles associated with contacting high profile sources like government ministers. As one senior news reporter at *The Standard*, Busani, explained: '...[the mobile phone] breaks the channel of going through the main reception or through personal assistants, you talk to the person you want straight away...'. Another senior business reporter at *The Herald*, echoed similar sentiments:

> Wiseman:...You will realise that getting hold of some of our sources like government ministers is a nightmare as their secretaries will always tell you they are busy...even when they are not. So, to bypass that challenge, you just phone the minister directly on his mobile phone. If he is busy, he will give you a specific time to call at which point he will readily give you a comment...That is how convenient the mobile phone is...

As with email, the advantages of using 'cell phones were seen to be their direct communications potential, breaking the dependence of journalists on gatekeepers and secretaries to get access to key sources' (Berger 2005: 9).

More significantly, however, with respect to reporter/source relations, the advantage of using the mobile phone was that it allowed sources to recognise the identity of the reporter beforehand (through the number or name displayed on the phone's screen) and thus immediately figure out any prior associations before answering. That tacit familiarity, rooted on a prior building of rapport with sources,

rendered the mobile phone a highly convenient communicative tool for journalists. As one senior business reporter at the *Sunday Mail*, Prince, explained in a focus group interview:

> ...the mobile phone makes it easy to communicate with high profile sources like ministers because there is that prior familiarity associated with the name or number he sees on his phone. He immediately knows who it is...In most cases, if he doesn't recognise who you are, the response is not all that hospitable...

7.2.2 The mobile phone as a 'source' of news and story ideas

A central finding of this study was that the mobile phone has increased the options and possibilities of sourcing news and story ideas, mainly through subscription-based SMS alerts from civic organisations and unsolicited calls/SMS messages from the public. Subscriber-based SMS alerts were generally managed by civic organisations concerned with human rights issues such as the *Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition* and *Kubatana.net*. It is not surprising therefore that the alerts were an important source of news and story ideas for journalists in the private press than those in the state-controlled press. The centrality of the SMS alerts as a source of news was highlighted by one political reporter at *The Zimbabwe Independent*, Jabulani:

> I have found the mobile phone to be a great source of news. For instance, I subscribe to a number of the so called pro-democracy organisations in Zimbabwe, such as the *Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition* and *Kubatana.net*. These are organisations that are concerned with human rights and governance issues in the country.
>
> Every time they send SMS alerts of breaking news – as it happens – on anything to do with human rights and governance abuses. For instance, the recent arrest of Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) legislators in Parliament. The moment they were taken by the police, the *Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition* sent out SMS alerts and I did my own follow-ups – phoned the police, the MDC and other authoritative sources – and wrote my story...If it wasn't for the alerts; I would have missed that story...

Given that the SMS alerts distributed by civic organisations usually preceded official sources and in many ways frustrated government censorship and news blackouts, the mobile phone can be seen as challenging repression and official sources of

information, in particular as it related to information closely guarded by the government. As Bivens (2008: 119) observes, in Zimbabwe '...information sent from mobile phones makes up some of the only news coverage mainstream media organisations can acquire'. Similarly, Esipisu and Khaguli (2009: 66) argue that:

> It is hard to see how SMS could easily be brought within the regulatory ambit without resorting to heavy-handed censorship...[I]n the Zimbabwe elections in 2008, *SMS was about the only tool available* to the opposition parties, as the country's mass media – owned by government – offered limited or no coverage of opposition messages (emphasis added).

SMS alerts therefore constituted an unfettered source of news for the mainstream press in Zimbabwe (in particular the private press). In many instances journalists received SMS alerts while socialising in pubs and immediately made notes or put reminders in their mobile phones for follow-ups:

> One evening while socialising with reporters from *The Standard* at the Harare Press Club, one reporter's mobile phone buzzed, briefly interrupting the conversation at our table. After a brief glance at his phone, he handed it over to me as he recapitulated what we had talked about in an interview a couple of days back – "look this is what I was talking about the other day, this is an SMS alert from the *Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition*. It's about a journalist who has just been arrested for taking photographs of soldiers jostling for basic commodities in Gweru, I'll do a story based on this...watch the space". *(Field notes, at the Harare Press Club, August 21, 2008)*

Stories about the incident captured in the SMS alert were written by the reporter and many others who wrote under pseudonyms for online newspapers.[26]

The encounter in the narrative above also illustrates that the mobile phone has provided journalists with continuity of the work environment as regards the crafting and processing of stories even outside the newsrooms (I discuss this point in greater depth in section 7.3). Thus, receiving an SMS alert from the *Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition* while socialising with colleagues provided a basis for crafting and

[26] See for example, 'Police Arrest, Quiz Standard Journalist For Taking Pictures', reported in *The Standard*, August 24, 2008. Retrieved September 4, 2008 from: http://www.thestandard.co.zw/local/18780-police-arrest-quiz-standardjournalist-for-takingpictures.html.

developing stories. There is, therefore, a sense in which one can argue that mainstream Zimbabwean journalists have truly become 'mobile' professionals who have taken full advantage of the mobile phone as a source of news and story ideas, among its other uses.

In addition to the subscription-based SMS news alerts from civic organisations, unsolicited SMS news tip-offs and voice calls were not uncommon. This was despite the fact that receiving anonymous calls or SMS texts in Zimbabwe is fraught with security fears, as journalists (especially those in the private press) are commonly believed to be under threat from secret intelligence services (Mukundu 2006). As one sports reporter at the *Sunday Mail* explained:

> Zvikomborero: People will always get hold of your mobile number, they ask around or even call the newsroom to say "I want to give so and so a story, may I have his mobile number"...Some people are friendly, they know us and when they meet you in the streets, they will ask for your mobile number... and once you give your number to one, you have given to many. It just spreads, there is nothing you can do about that...
>
> So, it's not surprising that someone can just phone you out of the blue saying "I was given your number by so and so...I have this story...".

The ready availability of the journalists' mobile numbers to the public and the anonymity enabled by mobile phones has made it easy for eyewitness sources or insiders who want to divulge information to directly contact reporters without exposing their identity. This has widened the scope of news coverage as well as reduced the time taken to cover 'issues and events that may otherwise go unreported' (Moyo, D 2009: 555; see also Verclas & Mechael 2008) or that would otherwise have required lengthy investigation. The narrative extract below from field observations is illustrative of this scenario.

> On one occasion, as we left *The Herald* newsroom for the Harare Central Police Station with a court/crime reporter, the reporter's mobile phone rang, but the caller's identity did not show nor did he recognise the voice...
>
> The caller hastily told the reporter to dash to the magistrates' courts (across town) where a popular Harare businessman had just collapsed during court proceedings, and hung up. We immediately changed course and rushed across town to the magistrates' courts, arriving in time to get comments from

eye witnesses and relatives and the story made headlines the following morning. *(Field notes, The Herald, July 16, 2008)*

This almost instantaneous response to a news tip-off relayed from an unsolicited phone call shows that the mobile phone is providing a platform for the quick and timeous coverage of news 'as it happens', hence cementing Pavlik's (1996) view that new ICTs have the potential to increase journalists' work efficiency and speed.

From observations throughout my fieldwork, the strength of the mobile phone as a journalistic tool seemed to be largely entrenched in the creative deployment of the SMS technology by both journalists and the wider public. The convenience and instantaneity of text messaging enabled reporters to get in touch with their sources and colleagues without necessarily interfering or disturbing their business. It particularly enabled reporters to plan and navigate their work routines and schedule interviews around the routine preferences and availability of their sources. The popularity of SMS technology was in many ways influenced by its affordability in comparison to mobile voice calls (see section 7.5.3 below).[27]

Thus, while it was observed in Chapter 6 that the Internet and email are (to an extent) promoting an over-accessing of the media by those with access and the ability to effectively use the technologies, the SMS appears to be providing a counter-hegemonic-news sourcing platform that is reversing the long-standing critique of the news media. The ubiquity of the technology, partly explained by the penetration of Zimbabwe's three mobile networks into rural areas[28], has widened the scope of news coverage to include the remote and previously inaccessible areas where most ordinary people reside (see Chapter 1 section 1.1.2).

SMS technology seems to have enabled journalists to lessen their dependence on official sources 'through the expansion of personal networks and means of communication' (Bivens 2008: 119-120). Moyo, D (2009: 556) observes that SMS text messaging is 'the most potent tool for alternative communication in the developing world today [providing a] panacea for the endless challenge of providing

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[27] 'Over the last few years, *Telecel Zimbabwe* has seen a phenomenal rise in the use of texttalk, its Short Message Service (SMS). [The] over-riding consideration has been the relative cost of the service as it comes at a discount to the normal voice service', reported in *The Sunday Mail*, May 13, 2008. (see also Moyo, D 2009: 556)

[28] 'Since *NetOne* ushered in the new era of mobile communications...many rural areas hitherto without telecommunications have been opened up...' reported in *The Zimbabwe Independent*, September 8-14, 2006.

universal access to landline telephony'. Similarly, Lesame (2005b: 8) avers that mobile phones are 'bridging the digital-divide in African countries...beyond the expectations of the mobile users'.

7.2.3 The private press's embrace of the SMS technology

The private press has been quick to take advantage of the SMS technology. Capitalising on the pervasiveness of the technology and the general ubiquity of the mobile phone, *The Standard* and *The Zimbabwe Independent* have creatively blended the technology with the interactivity of their websites. This development is clearly an attempt to widen the scope of their 'user-generated content' traditionally elicited through the conventional 'letters to the editor' and the newspapers' websites (as discussed in Chapter 6). The newspapers also 'sought to get leads and insights from their readers to help them cover [Zimbabwe's] complex political impasse' (Moyo, D 2009: 561).

The SMS facility, aptly entitled: *SMS The Standard* and *SMS The Zimbabwe Independent*, enables readers to text their views to a dedicated mobile number specifically set aside for readers' SMS messages. In both newsrooms, editors and subeditors take turns to manage the phones. This facility not only provides readers with an affordable channel to air their views on various socio-political issues in the country but also provides an alternative avenue for readers and newsrooms to interact, thus complementing and extending the functions of the traditional 'letters to the editor' and the newspapers' interactive websites. Explaining the function and rationale behind the introduction of the SMS service in his paper, the news editor of *The Zimbabwe Independent*, Costa, stated:

> The SMS service was created to increase the paper's interaction with the readership. Readers are normally expressing their thoughts on what they would have read in the latest edition, but some will be responding to other readers' SMS messages. In some instances, the text messages provide leads and story ideas which the chief editor instructs us to follow up on.

The creative integration of readers' SMS text messages with the newspapers' interactive websites, as shown in figure 8 below, provides readers with an opportunity to comment on other readers' SMS text messages posted on the websites thus, creating a virtual deliberative space of sorts.

Figure 8. **Reader's SMS messages on *The Zimbabwe Independent*'s interactive website**

By integrating the SMS technology into the newspapers' websites, the newsrooms are clearly taking advantage of the pervasiveness of the technology as an alternative platform of communication for citizens in a context where the mainstream communicative space has been suppressed by the government (see Chapter 1).

Although it can be argued that the ability to fully exploit the SMS facility provided by *The Zimbabwe Independent* and *The Standard* is dependent on the level of the readers' knowledge and technical competencies, there is reason to surmise that the technology has empowered citizens and partially challenged the over-accessing of the news media by the privileged elite. Through enabling ordinary people's interaction with the mainstream press, the SMS facility has rendered the mobile phone an agent of citizen inclusion and 'visibility' in the media. It has facilitated a shift from the centralisation of journalism practice to its pluralisation, leading to 'an intersection between top-down and bottom-up communication' (Moyo, D 2009: 561). As the news editor of *The Standard*, Kholiwe, explained:

> ...the text messages posted on the newspaper's websites are wide-ranging both in terms of the issues they raise and the geographical locations of the people who send them...Although it is difficult to tell off-hand, from the content, there is reason to think that contributors are from all sections of society – the well-to-do and the poor...

Like the general contributions from readers posted on the newspapers' websites, readers' SMS messages are subjected to the traditional gate-keeping processes (Manning 2001; Louw 2001; Reese & Ballinger 2001; Zelizer 2004, see Chapter 6 section 6.3). In selecting text messages for publication, the editors (and subeditors) consider clarity, length, relevance, language use and the messages' general conformity to the newspapers' editorial policies. As one subeditor at *The Zimbabwe Independent*, Teldah, pointed out: 'messages should obviously be aligned to our editorial policy, but in general messages that aren't clear or that use abusive language are not published'.

It is worth noting that unlike the private press, the state-controlled newspapers have not embraced the mobile phone as a tool for interacting with readers at institutional level, although some columnists occasionally post their mobile numbers below their columns to elicit readers' comments. The lack of commitment by the newsrooms to embrace the mobile phone as a tool for interacting with readers and enlisting user generated content, reinforces the state-controlled press's antagonistic attitude towards opening up to the readers' input (as discussed in Chapter 6). This attitude is ingrained in the newspapers' editorial policies, which favour a unidirectional (top-down) flow of information that only seeks to serve the interests of government. The reason for this ambivalence was explained by one senior journalist at the *Sunday News*:

> Gilbert: ...people have at some point suggested that we have a company mobile phone dedicated to readers' in puts, but we argued vehemently against it. We knew that with the way we cover our news, people would definitely have a 'field day'! We were going to be insulted everyday...

The political editor of the *Sunday Mail* gave a lucid and insightful account of the reasons behind the state-controlled newspapers' fears and ambivalences towards engaging readers through the mobile phone.

> Mutepfa: ...I don't know how, but many people tend to have my mobile phone numbers. As the political editor, I can tell you that I receive very direct calls and texts messages on my mobile phones. Someone will send you a message saying "thank you for the news" and the other person will just call or send you a message saying "you are very stupid!". I have even received death threats because of some of the stories I have written. In fact, at one point the company had to give me security at home for about seven months...

The 'selective' use of the mobile phone by the state-controlled newspapers further highlights a point that underpins the present study, that the deployment and appropriation of new technologies should be seen as enmeshed in the social context in which they are deployed. The mobile phone should thus be seen as a social product whose deployment and appropriation are embroiled in existing political, ideological and institutional processes – and not only in its intrinsic potential, as technological determinism would suggest (see Chapter 3). The uptake of the mobile phone in the newsrooms should also be seen as continuous with the existing journalistic culture and the ways the newspapers generally relate to the public (see Chapter 6).

One of the greatest impacts of the mobile phone on mainstream journalism practice in Zimbabwe is in its blurring of the temporal and spatial boundaries between journalists' professional and personal lives. The versatility of the technology has enabled journalists to juggle between private and professional life in unprecedented ways. Against this backdrop, the next section discusses the mobile phone's blurring of the temporal and spatial boundaries between journalists' work and personal life, and examines how journalists have adapted to the seemingly intrusive impact of the mobile phone.

7.3 Stretching the boundaries of social time and space

Throughout the study, there were many occasions in which the mobile phone mediated a seamless and subconscious diversion from personal to work-related business and vice versa, prompting one to deduce, as Brinkman et al. (2009: 83) put it, that 'boundaries of public and private space are being redesigned'. From observations and interviews, it emerged that work-related mobile phone use often intruded into aspects of the journalists' private life leading to a blurring of the distinction between private and professional life. One after-hours encounter with a senior news reporter from the *Chronicle* at a city pub in Bulawayo was particularly insightful:

Around 05: 30 pm after work, just as we set to order our second glasses of drinks, a mobile phone buzzed loudly, interfering with our conversation. We simultaneously reached for our pockets and it turned out to be the reporter's phone. He took a brief glance, at the phone's screen and immediately excused himself as he quickly walked towards the exit. After a short while, he came back and told me that it was the news editor alerting him of an incident of alleged political arson in Tsholotsho (a rural district about 98 kilometres North West of Bulawayo) in which an entire homestead had been razed down by fire and the editor-in-chief wanted the story covered in the next edition.

Transport was arranged to pick us up from the pub and in a short while we drove to Tsholotsho. By 07.00pm we were at Tsholotsho business centre, where we got directions to the homestead concerned. After observing the scene, and interviewing the victims and witnesses, we drove back to the business centre where the reporter immediately scribbled the story in his notebook. When he finished, he sent an SMS text message to the news editor who instantly phoned back and the reporter filed his story, reading from his notebook word-for-word. We then drove back heading straight to the newsroom to proof-read the story before the paper went to print.

At the newsrooms we learnt that the story was actually an eye witness tip-off through an SMS text message sent to the news editor's mobile phone. (*Field notes, the Chronicle, September 26, 2008*)

The sudden transformation of what was clearly a private after-hours social excursion into a work-related assignment following a call from the news editor is illustrative of the mobile phone's intrusion into aspects of the journalists' private lives and, indeed, a collision of temporal and spatial boundaries between work and personal life.

This encounter sheds further light on two key issues concerning the use of the mobile phone in Zimbabwean mainstream newsrooms. First, its role in connecting reporters in the field (on assignments) with the newsroom hence facilitating the timeous transmission of stories and second, its centrality as a source of news from outlying areas, generally out-of-reach from mainstream media's news coverage hence challenging the conventional sourcing or primary definitions of news (see Hall et al.1978).

Given that all the newsrooms studied support mobile phone use by their journalists (mainly through assistance in the purchase of SIM cards and a modicum of

airtime allowances), there is reason to surmise that the intrusion of work into the private sphere as mediated by the mobile phone has become a taken-for-granted arrangement in which the news organisations are informally mandating journalists to be accessible around the clock. Although the fixed phone also served this end as well, the mobile phone ensures journalists' continued availability outside working hours irrespective of where they are, hence potentially binding them to employers' requirements and expectations at all times. This effectively facilitates work intensification, with most journalists regarding themselves as operating on a 24 hour basis. As the news editor of *The Zimbabwe Independent*, Costa, put it: 'as a journalist I operate 24 hours, if my sources call me in the middle of the night, I will answer them. If I happen to miss the call, I will definitely be calling them first thing in the morning'. Similar sentiments were expressed by other reporters at *The Herald*, as shown in the following extracts from focus group interviews:

> Mapfumo: Years back leaving the newsroom after filing your stories meant the end of business for that day, but now, with the mobile phone, the scenario is different...We operate 24/7. The mobile phone has changed the way we operate...If my sources can't get me on my *Econet Wireless* number, they will definitely find me on my *NetOne* number...

> Freeman: I don't mind receiving work-related calls after hours...my cell phone is always on 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, except of course when the battery is flat because there is no electricity at home...Actually, there are many instances when I have received work-related calls on my mobile phone when I am at home watching television with family.
>
> I suppose if I don't want to entertain work-related calls after-hours I will have to go on leave or perhaps quit my job completely...

From the responses above, one can argue that to some degree mainstream journalism has become seamlessly blended with the daily lives of journalists. The blurring of the line between private life and work is, however, to the advantage of news organisations as it has led to the timeous coverage of news events that occur outside normal working hours.

From the above, it also seems apparent that journalists' have naturally accepted the mobile phone's mediation of the intrusion of work into their private time and space. This perhaps also illustrates what Duff (2008) refers to as 'the normative

crisis of the information society' which has seen the right to personal privacy and space coming under unprecedented threat in the 'new media age'.

One can further contend that with the permeation of the mobile phone into Zimbabwean mainstream journalism, the close association between news production and the broader routines of every day life (Jacobs 1996) have become even more obvious. This observation advances a general point made by theorists rooted in the sociology of work who argue that:

> The spheres of work, employment and home are all necessarily intertwined and to separate them as if they could exist independently is to misconceive the complex reality of work and misunderstand the significance of the relationships which it embodies. (Grint 1998: 2; see also Lowrey 2006)

It must also be noted that the journalists' tendency to take for granted the mobile phone's 'invasion' of their private space and time can also be seen as anchored in their undeclared attempts to keep their jobs given the shrinkage of the mainstream press owing to the closure of private press in recent years (Mabweazara 2005b). This resulted in a constricted and highly competitive job market (see Chapter 1). The compulsion to tolerate the intrusion of work into their private space and time is therefore solidly anchored in prevailing local circumstances.

It is noteworthy, however, that the deployment of the mobile phone by Zimbabwean mainstream journalists, is not without contextual challenges and obstacles. These range from poor network connectivity; censorship fears; and the high costs of handsets and airtime. I discuss these in turn below.

7.4 Challenges and obstacles to the effective use of the mobile phone

7.4.1 Connectivity and censorship concerns

Although Zimbabwe has 'a relatively good telecommunications infrastructure' (Moyo, L 2009: 58-59), political instability, falling income and hyperinflation since the turn of the century have severely impacted on the telecommunications industry.[29] This has meant that the mobile network system is occasionally unreliable; in some instances the three network service providers (*NetOne*; *Econet Wireless* and *Telecel*

[29] 'The industry [has] endured a decade of underinvestment as the economic crisis took a toll on the sector', reported in *The Standard*, October 17, 2009. Retrieved October 19, 2009 from: http://www.thestandard.co.zw/business/21791-hype-war-as-mobile-operators-jostle-for-market-supremacy.html

Zimbabwe) hardly work at the same time as the breadth their network coverage is not uniform across the country.

Persistent power cuts have also worsened the situation by affecting the mobile network service providers' base-stations. This situation resulted in some of the mobile network service providers resorting to the use of diesel-powered electricity generators to keep their base-stations running.[30] This scenario has an impact on the effective deployment of the mobile phone by journalists and the wider public. The news editors of the *Sunday Mail* and *The Zimbabwe Independent* gave illustrative insights on the challenges wrought by mobile network connectivity problems:

> Garikai: When you go out of Harare, you face connectivity problems with some of our mobile networks, especially *Telecel*...Even in some residential areas here in Harare, there are areas where particular networks have no connections. This is particularly the case now with these regular power cuts, some base-stations are sometimes switched off and that affects network coverage...
>
> Costa: I would say there are times when using the cell phone is quite a hustle because of the network...we don't have the best of mobile networks in Zimbabwe, so at times you find yourself trying to phone somebody many times before going through...

The connectivity challenges described above point to the significance of the notion of the digital divide, especially, the popular and much criticised technicist approach to the digital divide. As van Dijk (2005: 49) aptly puts it, 'physical and conditional access, among them access conditions...and services available for particular users make a tremendous difference to the potential applications'.[31]

The polarised political environment obtaining in Zimbabwe – and in particular the government's determination to censor telecommunications in the country – has gradually instilled concern in the extent to which journalists and the wider public (who constitute sources of news) use the mobile phone. These fears were particularly

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[30] 'Econet...acquired 98 diesel generators from China to provide stand-by power to its base stations, bringing to almost 210 the number of base stations with generators out of the more than 320 that the company has country wide', reported in *The Herald*, July 17, 2008.

[31] 'The network congestion has been particularly felt in the media fraternity where journalists have to keep in touch with sources and have to contend with the congested network while having to beat their deadlines', reported in *The Sunday Mail*, January 27, 2007.

heightened by the promulgation of the Interception of Communications Act, which as noted in Chapter 6 (section 6.5.5) empowers the state-security agents to intercept all forms of telecommunications as and when they deem fit. This has created 'a world where the citizen is constantly being watched, or, at least, cannot ever be sure that she is *not* being watched' (Duff, forthcoming 2011, emphasis original). As a result, some journalists noted that they use the mobile phone with a great sense of trepidation and caution, particularly when working on investigative stories that involve highly sensitive and classified information. Journalists pointed out that when working on investigative stories, the mobile phone (and the landline phone) is reduced to an administrative gadget used mainly for setting up appointments for one-on-one meetings with the sources. One senior political reporter at *The Standard*, explained thus:

> Busani: In general, I tend to be careful on the issues I discuss with my sources over the phone because of the government's tight control of telecommunications in Zimbabwe. As a journalist, you're not sure who else is listening to your conversations...
>
> So, you will notice that the use of the mobile phone is heavily predicated on the nature of the story one will be working on. In investigative stories, sources will always prefer face-to-face interaction because of the fears I am talking about...

Journalists further emphasised that some sources tend to shy away from the government-owned network service provider (*NetOne*) when communicating with them, preferring instead to use the privately-owned service providers such as *Econet Wireless*, which they consider more secure. As the news editor of *The Zimbabwe Independent* explained:

> Costa: Some of my sources will specify the kind of mobile phone network they want me to use when communicating with them. In most cases, they demand that I use *Econet Wireless*, for some reason, they believe it's more secure...
>
> If you happen to have sources within government itself, you can't use *NetOne* because they will easily be sniffed-out. After all, the network is owned by government. In fact, the sources themselves will tell you that 'if you want to discuss politics please use *Econet Wireless*'.

These localised appropriations and preferences in using the mobile phone were a direct result of the atmosphere of misgivings and distrust that pervades the highly politicised context in which Zimbabwean mainstream journalists operate.

7.4.2 Prohibitive costs and limited company support

Although all the newsrooms are generally committed to promoting mobile phone use by journalists, as seen mainly in the assistance they extend to reporters in acquiring mobile phone SIM cards[32] and a modicum of allowances, the cost of running a mobile phone is a key disincentive with strong implications for its deployment.

The lack of consistent and sustained company support in terms of the day-to-day running of the mobile phone was seen by most journalists as a key inhibiting factor to the effective use of the mobile phone for professional purposes. Journalists saw the allowances they are given by their organisations for airtime as inconsistent with the actual costs they incur in using their mobile phones for work-related business. This observation finds support in Berger's (2005: 9) general view that the disincentive for Sothern African journalists using their mobile phones for professional purposes is that they are not 'subsidised by their workplaces for doing so' (see also Mabweazara 2005a).

There were, however, disparities between the newsrooms, particularly between the state-controlled and the private press in terms of company support. *The Zimbabwe Independent* and *The Standard* offered relatively better allowances compared to the all the state-controlled newsrooms. Reporters on prepaid mobile phones were given weekly allowances and those with contract lines received monthly allowances adjusted in keeping with inflation. The scenario was different in the state-controlled press, where mobile phone allowances were seen as virtually insignificant. As one news reporter at *The Herald*, Fannie, put it: 'at times the cell phone is just an administrative gadget because we don't get sufficient allowances to cover the costs. We get very ridiculous figures...'. Similarly, the news editor of the *Chronicle*, Mkhahlamezi, highlighted:

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[32] At the time of doing fieldwork for the present study, it was very difficult to buy a SIM card on the official market for all the three mobile phone network providers. The SIM cards were mainly sold on the parallel 'black market' at very exorbitant prices. Depending on the network, one could buy a SIM card for up to US$150. Journalists, however, bought SIM cards at reasonable prices directly from the three mobile network operators through company Initiatives. As *The Herald* put it: 'Before the dollarization of the economy...SIM cards used to cost as much as US$150', reported in *The Herald*, July 07, 2009 from: http://www.herald.co.zw/inside.aspx?sectid=3174&cat=8.

> ...the company gives us an allowance, but it's not enough, you can make one or two calls from the allowance, and that's it, then you have to use your own money. So, we end up subsidising the company...

The motivation behind using personal funds for work-related business was clearly rooted in the flexibility and convenience offered by the mobile phone. As one court reporter at *The Herald*, Felicity, put it: 'If you want to get stories then you have no choice but to use your own money for airtime otherwise you might end up failing to submit your 'diaries' and even to talk to your sources'.

In some state-controlled newsrooms there were significant disparities in the mobile phone allowances given to journalists. Desk editors were given significantly more support than other staffers, a policy arrangement seen by most reporters as miscalculated as it overlooked the fact that reporters are the ones who do most of the 'ground work' in terms of newsgathering. As one reporter at the *Sunday News*, Nqaba, explained: 'in this newsroom only editors, are given meaningful cell phone allowances, and I think this is a wrong policy because we are the ones who extensively use these mobile phones for newsgathering'. This scenario reinforces Dutton's (1996) observation that in most organisations the new media tend to be implemented in ways that follow and reinforce prevailing structures of power and influence (see also Obijiofor 1996).

The costs of mobile phone handsets also has implications on the quality, form and properties of the handsets used by the journalists including the very nature of mobile phone appropriation for journalistic purposes. In all the newsrooms studied, only a few journalists had sophisticated handsets with multiple functions such as the capacity to record voice, video and still-pictures. These sophisticated phones were all individually acquired. Most journalists therefore used the basic mobile phone applications of voice communication and SMS text messaging. This scenario was discussed by the news and entertainment editors of the *Sunday News*:

> Gilbert: To be honest with you, most of us still use old mobile phone handsets that we bought many years back. Yes, we can text and phone, but I believe, resources permitting, we should have more up-to-date mobile phones. Phones that can record interviews or take video and still pictures; phones that can be hooked onto the Internet and even allow one to type a story and file it from the field...

> Look, (reaches out for his mobile phone in his pocket) this is my latest phone. I bought it recently, it's very basic and doesn't record voice or take pictures, but it's my latest phone. So, just imagine what kind of phone I was using before this one...We still have got a long way to go my brother!
>
> Patson: We are kind of limited by working in an environment where we can't really afford the best phones. We know the importance of a good phone, but we are really limited. If we could afford the latest mobile phones we could be checking our emails every minute, taking pictures and even recording interviews rather than writing in shorthand as we do...

These responses substantiate personal observations in the newsrooms both in terms of the nature of mobile phones used by reporters and the popular forms of uses. The narrative of a female journalist struggling to fix her mobile phone presented at the beginning of this chapter (section 7.1) is a poignant case in point.

These circumstances point to the persistence of technological inequalities (van Dijk 2005; 2006) between the poor and elite in the country and more specifically within the wider economically developed countries of the North where, sophisticated 'third generation (3G) mobile phones [that] include broadband Internet connection, multimedia messaging, text messaging, mobile pictures and...location awareness' (de Souza e Silva 2006: 109) have long been widely used. As Hamelink (1997: 19) avers:

> It may well be an illusion to think that ICT-poor countries can...keep pace with advances in the most technologically advanced societies. In the North the rate of technological development is very high and is supported by enormous resources...The situation may improve but the disparity between the North and South is not likely to go away.

Therefore, to capture the nuances of mobile phone use by Zimbabwean mainstream journalists, there is need to closely interrogate the notion of 'access' and the conception of 'use' against the backdrop of the socio-economic factors characteristic of the context in which the journalists practice.

Although the challenges discussed above heavily modify and shape the deployment of the mobile phone by Zimbabwean mainstream journalists, they ultimately do not limit its value and potential. As Wasserman (2005: 174) rightly warns, '[j]ust as we should avoid a crude technological determinism in exploring the

positive potential of new media [we] should also not overstate the negative aspects relating to connectivity and lose sight of the innovative use of these technologies...'. Adam and Wood (1990) similarly aver that people always adapt and learn, and that constraints are not set aside as problems and difficulties but are faced as challenges. Zimbabwean journalists are thus not deterred nor are they discouraged, rather they have developed pragmatic and localised approaches to resist and negotiate the contextual challenges and obstacles discussed above. The pragmatic approaches deployed by the journalists project aspects of individual and collective agency in navigating the challenges. These approaches have resulted in localised appropriations that emphasise the social contingency or 'local context-shaping' (Pelckmans 2009: 28) of mobile phone use as discussed in the sections that follow.

7.5 Meeting the challenges, overcoming the obstacles

7.5.1 The 'single-owner-multiple-user'[33] phenomenon

The ubiquitous culture of mobile phone sharing (borrowing and lending each other's phones to make calls or send an SMS text message) across the newsrooms studied was driven by airtime costs and network connectivity challenges. This practice was sustained by an existing culture of sharing: most journalists pointed out that their first mobile phone experience was a shared one with colleagues in the newsrooms. Highlighting the centrality of mobile phone sharing, one court reporter at *The Herald*, Felicity, stated:

> I use *NetOne*, but when I have problems with my network or I have insufficient airtime, and need to make an urgent call to a source, it's not unusual to seek assistance from a colleague who uses *Econet* or *Telecel* and has airtime in his or her phone.

This culture of mobile phone sharing closely relates to the 'single-owner-multiple-user' phenomenon observed by Nyamnjoh (2004: 54) in West Africa. He notes that most cell phone owners serve as a 'point of presence' in their communities, enabling those who cannot afford cell phones to benefit from mobile phone services (Nyamnjoh 2005a: 205). In many situations, it suffices for an individual to be connected in order for groups and communities to benefit, 'thanks to the sociality and

[33] The term 'single-owner-multiple-user' is borrowed from Nyamnjoh's (2004: 54) discussion of mobile phone sharing culture in West Africa, a practice he sees as rooted in local cultural values of solidarity, interconnectedness and interdependence (see Chapter 2, sections 2.4 and 2.4.1).

solidarity of the local cultures' (Nyamnjoh 2005a: 209) which allows for interconnectedness and interdependence (see also Scott et al. 2004; Gray 2006).

Against this backdrop, the appropriation of the mobile phone by Zimbabwean mainstream journalists is no exception to the axiom that 'cultural characteristics play an important role in how people make sense of their social reality' (Campbell 2007: 346). We therefore should not overlook the social realities of African citizens' multiple identities and their cultural orientation to communal values. We should also acknowledge the uniqueness of Africa's journalistic culture by which social relationships and world views are maintained and defined (Nyamnjoh 2005a). In this sense, '[t]he way in which the [mobile] phone has been integrated into society cannot be separated from the specific culture' (Nkwi 2009: 51). As Flew (2002) advises about ICTs in general, we should see the mobile phone as a social and cultural form instead of an independent force that acts for good or ill in society. This way of thinking affirms the fact that technology use takes place in socially structured contexts and as Thompson (1988: 368) rightly directs us, the first phase of cultural analysis should 'reconstruct [the] context and examine the social relations...by virtue of which this context forms a social field' (see Chapter 3 section 3.5).

It has to be stressed, however, that although sharing mobile phones was a common practice in the newsrooms studied, the trend is not completely homogeneous as some journalists are wary about the practice of mobile phone sharing with colleagues because of security concerns and lack of trust. As the news editor of *The Zimbabwe Independent*, Costa, pointed out: '...personally I wouldn't agree to pass on my phone to somebody to use it because a lot of journalists are becoming state spies...you just can't trust anyone!'

7.5.2 The multiple-ownership of mobile phones

In the effort to navigate connectivity challenges, a number of journalists in the newsrooms studied also resorted to multiple-ownership of mobile phones connected to different network providers. This practice was tied to the functional needs related to network connectivity challenges generally faced in the country (as highlighted earlier). Journalists saw this as a contingent strategy for navigating connectivity challenges associated with the three mobile phone network providers in the country. As shown in Chapter 1, the three network service providers have disparate network coverages across the country and in some locations they are hardly working at the

same time. The following interview extract with the *Sunday Mail*'s political editor, highlights importance of mobile phone sharing:

> Interviewer: Okay, but why do have two mobile phones?
>
> Mutepfa: Well, you know the problem in this country is the network congestion. Calling a person can be a hassle. So, I decided to have two mobile phones connected to different network providers, *TelOne* and *Econet Wireless*. I really want to be in touch with my sources and associates all the time, so I gave them the option of two contact numbers instead of one...
>
> As the political editor of the newspaper, I realised that many a times I would talk to my sources and they would tell me they have been trying to contact me on my mobile without success. So, I quickly decided to purchase another mobile line...so as to make life easier for myself...

It is also worth noting that the multiple-ownership of mobile phones is not a phenomenon confined to journalists, as others have also resorted to this strategy. As one senior business reporter at *The Herald*, Wiseman, explained: 'Most of the people, especially business leaders, have two mobile phones subscribed to different network providers, if you fail to get him on his *Econet Wireless* number you try him on his *NetOne* number, chances of getting him are very high'.

7.5.3 The use of SMS text messaging and 'beeping'

In further attempts to mitigate the cost of running a mobile phone and network connectivity challenges, journalists studied also depended heavily on SMS text messaging and the practice of 'beeping' (dialling a number and hanging up before it is answered, in the hope that the other person will call back) (see Mudhai 2003a). The person beeped is usually considered to have money at his disposal and is therefore put in the position of a 'credit caretaker' (Pelckamans 2009: 29).[34] As one reporter at *The Herald*, Freedom, explained:

> ...most sources are 'big' people, they can afford to phone you back and so if I don't have airtime I can just *text* or *beep* as a way of prompting the source to

[34] One writer in *The Zimbabwe Independent* referred to the practice of 'beeping' as 'one of the fastest-growing phenomena in the continent's booming mobile telephone markets – and it's a headache for mobile operators who are trying to figure out how to make some money out of it. It is a tactic born out of ingenuity and necessity...by cash-strapped cell-phone users...*its roots are in the strategy to save money*' (emphasis original), reported in *The Zimbabwe Independent*, September 28, 2007.

call back, as long as it is a close source. Obviously, they understand that as journalists we are poorly paid...(emphasis added)

The practice of 'beeping' has particularly assumed context-specific meanings amongst journalists, their regular sources, and colleagues. As one court reporter at *The Herald* explained.

> Daniel: Precisely, when you beep someone you are saying 'please phone me, I don't have enough airtime'. So, you will find that we usually beep those close sources who understand that 'when this guy beeps its business, I have to phone him without fail'.
>
> It's the same understanding with the news editor, when I beep him when I'm on an assignment he immediately phones back because he will know that I have got limited airtime and I need to talk to him about something important...

The practice of 'beeping' signifies a familiarity and intimacy between reporters and their close associates. It is clearly embedded in the context of limited economic resources 'tied up with ideas about reciprocity, such as who takes care or is in charge of whom' (Pelckamans 2009: 29), deeply entrenched in the context in which the journalists operate. These 'localised' appropriations of the mobile phone further suggest, as de Bruijn et al. (2009: 12) argues, 'that technologies acquire different meanings in different social contexts'.

Writing on the impact of the mobile phone in Khartoum, Sudan Brinkman et al. (2009: 88) also argue that, in the process of appropriation, technologies are 'transformed under the influence of local creative usages and the process of becoming embedded in a historical, cultural context'. This observation necessitates the need to see the mobile phone as a text whose 'interpretive flexibility' and character are nothing but attributes given to it by its users within a specific socio-cultural context (Woolgar 1996: 93) (see Chapter 3 section 3.1). This metaphoric understanding of the sociality of the mobile phone illuminates the complex range of interpretations and social dimensions involved in its use by journalists. The central idea of the metaphor is that technologies are socially constructed; this foregrounds questions of the extent to which the character of this socially constructed technology influences its use in contexts other than, and broadly separate from, its production. Confronted with texts the user will draw upon any available resources to make comprehensible the task of

making sense of it (Woolgar 1996). Viewing technologies as texts therefore highlights the social contingency of the processes involved in the deployment of the mobile phone by Zimbabwean mainstream journalists.

In many instances, text messaging and 'beeping' were deemed more effective than voice calls in areas where mobile network connectivity is normally poor because their use of a low bandwidth relative to voice calls. This meant that in places where the network is normally a problem or in times of network congestion, text messaging or 'beeps' easily went through. Text messaging and 'beeping' were also useful in areas where landline communication is generally out of service.

Thus the ability of these functions to traverse the constraining impact of poor reception and connectivity made the mobile phone a useful tool to enable journalists and their sources to communicate even in circumstances where direct voice communication was not possible.

7.5.4 Navigating censorship and snooping concerns

For some journalists, the multiple-ownership of mobile phones discussed above was also an attempt to navigate censorship fears that pervade the context in which they operate. As noted earlier, the common belief among journalists and sources alike is that *NetOne* – as a state-owned network service provider – is susceptible to bugging and snooping than the privately owned *Econet Wireless* and *Telecel Zimbabwe*. In this regard, the multiple-ownership of mobile phones not only enables journalists to juggle between network service providers when the network fails but also to navigate censorship concerns. As noted in section 7.4.1 some sources even demand that journalists use specific network providers when contacting them to discuss sensitive issues.

The study also established that journalists navigate the deep-rooted censorship and security fears through exploiting the 'caller-identity'[35] function of their mobile phones which they switched on and off depending on the sources they were dealing with. This inherent function of the mobile phone was exploited as a security strategy that allowed journalists to directly communicate with sources while at the same time maintaining 'a safe distance' through hiding their mobile phone's identity. In this regard, the selective appropriation of the 'caller-identity' function enabled journalists

[35] 'The call-identity facility...allows cell phone users who receive calls to be able to identify the importance of the call before responding to it by knowing who is calling them' (*The Connection* 2001: 2). In the same way, one may choose hide his/her identity when making calls.

to exercise caution in their communication with sources they do not trust and would not want to know their mobile numbers. As one senior political reporter at the *Zimbabwe Independent* explained:

> Stanley: The mobile phone enables me to hide my identity, because at times I don't trust some of the sources I deal with. For instance, when I attempt to get comments from the Central Intelligence Organisation or someone I suspect to be part of that organisation, I hide my cell phone identity because there is a risk of being bugged...

Although there is reason to believe that this practice is not foolproof given the government's commitment to censorship, the careful control of the mobile phone's caller-identity function enables journalists to use the technology as a 'social filter'. In the same way, the caller-identity function enables journalists to maintain control over their own availability by accepting or avoiding incoming calls depending on the 'identities' displayed on their mobile phone screens. This creative use of the mobile phone points to the extent to which its appropriations are shaped and controlled by the circumstances in which the journalists operate.

Collectively, the initiatives and strategies discussed above point to the journalists' resilience and 'refusal' to be let down by contextual challenges in their deployment of the mobile phone for professional purposes. The strategies further point to the unsustainability of 'technicist' approaches to technology, and affirm the relevance of the 'social-shaping' approach to technology which underpins the present study.

It is important to point out that attitudes towards mobile phone use and its appropriations in the newsrooms studied were not homogenous. Senior journalists, in particular, saw the mobile phone (like other new technologies) as 'deskilling' younger journalists and generally leading to the 'dumbing down' of journalism practice and professionalism.

7.6 Generational tensions and the impact of the mobile phone

The impact of the mobile phone on traditional journalistic practice in the newsrooms studied was articulated in the tensions between senior 'old-school' journalists and junior reporters. As shown in Chapter 6 (section 6.4.1), senior journalists generally felt that the over-reliance on new technologies by junior reporters was dumbing-down journalism practice. Although the senior staffers appreciated the functional relevance

of mobile phones in newsmaking, they were disturbed by the increase in 'mobile phone culture' among junior reporters which they saw as substituting face-to-face contact with sources – the mainstay of traditional newsgathering. One senior assistant editor at *The Herald*, Isaac, succinctly vocalised his concerns over junior reporters' growing dependence on the mobile phone:

> The mobile phone is destroying these youngsters...if someone fails to get through to a source's mobile phone, they simply write 'efforts to contact so-and-so were not successful', when in actual fact the concerned person's office is just across the street and they could have easily arranged to meet the source in person...or even wait for him at his doorstep and ambush him with questions...like we used to do.
>
> So, you will find that because of these gadgets, journalists no longer explore other options of getting in touch with the source, in particular, the importance of face-to-face contact....At times I have nostalgic memories of the beauty of going out there to get the story...but all you get from these youngsters is 'I can't get him on his mobile phone, sir' and you just wonder...To be honest with you, real journalism is gone!

The professional conservatism underlying this response was further articulated by one senior news reporter at the *Chronicle*, Nathan, who highlighted the pitfalls of what he branded as 'cell phone journalism' (overreliance on the mobile phone in carrying out one's duties, including interviewing sources, thus effectively limiting time for 'shoe-leather' journalism and face-to-face interviews).

> [The mobile phone] is creating so many lazy journalists. There is so much 'cell phone journalism', reporters just sit in the newsroom and wait for stories to come their way via their phones.
>
> It's very difficult to have a balanced story when you interview people over the phone...you just write whatever you are told and chances of being misinformed are high. Whereas, if you are on the ground you can see things for yourself and talk to other people who might have a different opinion on the subject matter. That way, you have a well balanced story and you also avert chances of being misinformed.

One assistant news editor at *The Herald*, Wonder, concurred with the foregoing response, arguing that:

> ...the process of verifying and telling news in its proper context and without bias, belongs to journalists. Even if eye witnesses may attempt to accurately narrate issues over the phone, their point of view should never be allowed to take precedence over enduring journalistic processes of verifying and telling the news from first-hand encounters...

Affirming these concerns Moyo, D (2009: 563) argues that over relying on the mobile phone has the 'potential to erode some of the vital values of the profession, such as truth-telling, fairness and balance'. Expressing similar sentiments Pelckmans (2009: 35) argues that: 'Online communication mediated by phone necessarily reduces information to purely oral statements, which inevitably entails a loss of social cues' such as the location and social status of the caller that assist in making judgements about the interlocutor.

It is important to reiterate that the senior journalists' frustration with the changes associated with the overreliance on the mobile phone were closely related to their general feelings about new technologies: precisely that they were facilitating a growing culture of laziness and the dearth of 'shoe leather' journalism (see Chapter 6 section 6.4.1). Conversely, junior reporters saw mobile phone as a necessity in their day-to-day newsmaking routines and the senior journalists' emphasis and inflexibility on 'shoe leather' reporting as counterproductive.

The misgivings by senior journalists are, however, in themselves an indication of the continued relevance and necessity of the traditional news gathering methods including face-to-face contact with sources. Thus, while the mobile phone has an unquestionable functional relevance in the newsrooms, traditional approaches to journalism still retain their relevance. As the political editor of *The Herald*, Mataka, succinctly put it: 'newspapers were invented before the advent of mobile phones; you can't say the newspaper won't come out tomorrow because cell phones are not working'.

7.7 Conclusion

This chapter has critically discussed the intricate forms of mobile phone use by Zimbabwean mainstream journalists. It has highlighted the extent to which the technology's inherent properties have spawned unprecedented flexibility in the day-to-day communicative practices of journalists. The properties of the technology have engendered particular forms of use, while at the same time emphasising the 'shaping

impact' of the socio-political and economic context in which it is deployed. Thus, the study's findings suggest that the inherent functions of the mobile phone – voice calls, SMS text messaging and 'beeping' – have been creatively blended with local circumstances resulting in appropriations that are deeply anchored in 'local' conditions while at the same time responding to the nature of the technology itself. The deployment of the technology by journalists is thus largely shaped the socio-cultural environment in which the journalists operate, including the 'sociality and solidarity of the local cultures' (Nyamnjoh 2005a: 209), which allow for interdependence in mobile phone use. We need not narrowly see the mobile phone only in terms of its inherent properties and functions, but more holistically in terms of its dialectical interchange with the immediate and wider context its deployment. Although journalists face a number of contextual challenges in their attempts to effectively deploy the mobile phone, the creative exploitation of the technology demonstrates the extent to which it has been 'tamed' or 'domesticated'. In this sense, the technology has acquired new meanings in the social context of its appropriation.

The study further shows a widening exposure of journalists to news and inevitably, a widening participation of citizens in the processes of newsmaking. This points to the gradual dispersion of the newsrooms' monopoly in defining what constitutes news. The technology's pervasiveness and permeation into everyday life has particularly rendered it central in (re)organising and (re)shaping mainstream newsmaking practices, including its blurring of the boundaries between work and private life. News values and the newsrooms' conception of immediacy in newsmaking processes have also assumed new meanings. However, as seen through the eyes of conservative senior journalists concerned with the traditional forms of journalism practice, over relying on the mobile phone has the potential to erode some of the vital values of the profession – in particular, the centrality of face-to-face communication in newsgathering.

The chapter has also shown that journalists, like other citizens, face a number of contextual challenges in effectively deploying the mobile phone, such as connectivity and censorship concerns, prohibitive costs and limited company support. They have, however, devised localised approaches to meet the challenges and overcome the obstacles as seen in the pervasiveness of the 'single-owner-multiple-user' phenomenon; the multiple-ownership of mobile phones; and reliance on SMS (text messaging) and 'beeping'.

CHAPTER 8

Conclusions

8.0 Introduction

This chapter concludes the thesis by giving a critical assessment of the study's findings in relation to the questions it sought to investigate. It recapitulates and evaluates the significance of the study's findings and attempts to show its wider implications through pointing to areas of possible further investigations suggested by the study.

The study set out to examine how Zimbabwean mainstream print journalists in selected state-controlled and private newspapers deploy new technologies in their everyday professional practices. It examined how the journalists' immediate conditions of practice and broader social circumstances set conditions for distinctive forms of new technology use, as well as the degree of agency available to them in deploying the technologies. The research further sought to understand how the technologies are impacting on traditional journalistic practices in terms of whether or not they are redefining established journalistic standards, values, and practices. To address these objectives, the study set itself three interrelated questions, as follows:

i. How are new ICTs deployed by Zimbabwean mainstream print journalists in their day-to-day newsmaking practices?
ii. How do the immediate context of everyday practice and the wider lived circumstances in which the journalists operate influence the nature, form and extent of their deployment of the technologies?
iii. How is the deployment of the technologies impacting on or challenging traditional journalistic standards, values and practices?

In searching for answers to these questions, the study deployed a qualitative ethnographic case study approach that employed participant observation in conjunction with in-depth (group and individual) interviews to offer 'thick' descriptions and 'insider' perspectives of practices and cultures of new ICT use in news production. The ethnographic approach was crucial to the study of how journalists perceive and adapt to change in the way they make news.

The study challenged the technological determinism underlying much thinking about ICTs and journalism in Africa by questioning the assumption that there is a

straightforward causal connection between technology and society. It argued that the 'extremes of utopian and dystopian thinking about technology do not stand up to scrutiny' (Henwood et al. 2000: 2). To this end, it sought a critical analytical approach that questions the immediate and wider social context in which Zimbabwean journalists deploy new technologies through reinvigorating traditional sociological approaches to both journalism and technology. This approach found root in the collective strengths of the sociology of journalism and social constructivist approaches to technology. These theoretical bodies collectively provided a basis for conceptualising the interplay between the journalists, their everyday practice and the wider social factors that coalesce to structure and constrain the deployment of new technologies.

While the sociology of journalism engages directly with the question of what constitutes news, the factors that shape it and broadly argues that news is a social product shaped by the interactions among media professionals, media organisations and society (Manning 2001), social constructivist approaches to technology emphasise the 'social shaping' and 'interpretive flexibility' of technology and offer a key guiding frame in which technologies are understood as continuous with and embedded in existing social realities and dynamics (Bijker 1995; Miller & Slater 2000). The data analysis presented in chapters 5, 6 and 7 were structured to provide answers to the research's three interrelated questions.

8.1 News production practices and the place of new technologies

Chapter 5 focused on the newsmaking practices and professional cultures that underpin the deployment of new technologies in Zimbabwean newsrooms. It generally establishes that the newsmaking practices essentially follow well-known traditions anchored in occupational and organisational demands. Day-to-day routines and practices which include: the pressure to meet deadlines; the daily need to come up with story ideas as well as contribute to 'conference' meetings; keeping abreast with local and global issues; maintaining sustained contact with sources; and the compulsion to adhere to proprietary demands and editorial policies – all point to the fact that the journalists do not necessarily recreate methods of gathering and reporting news, rather they draw on established practices. Proprietary demands and editorial policies account for the newsmaking practices imposed by internal newsroom cultures *vis-à-vis* those that emerge from the wider socio-political and economic context in which the journalists operate and thus explain the differences between the editorial

content of the state-controlled and private press. While the newsroom cultures and practices are generic and broadly resonate with the findings of early newsroom studies (as discussed in Chapter 3), they not only point to routine practices in which new technologies are deployed but also to the embedding of new technologies into the journalists' daily routines.

Chapter 5 also points to the contingent nature of news production practices and cultures in Zimbabwean newsrooms through directing attention to the 'hidden' internal newsmaking cultures and practices nurtured by the wider socio-political and economic factors. This supports the notion of the social contingency of cultural practices and resonates with Cottle's (2000b) view that claims to the 'universality' of journalism as a social practice generalise 'what in fact may be a far more variegated' state of affairs. Thus, while at the surface the journalistic practices in the newsrooms 'typify the generic Anglo pattern of news-making' (Louw 2001: 159), a deeper analysis shows discrepancies that counter epistemological claims about the universality of journalism practice. The discrepancies are predicated on the constraints imposed by the impact of 'an encompassing social and cultural context that...informs [journalits'] attempts to make sense of the world' (Ettema et al. 1997: 44). This further finds support in Nyamnjoh's (2005a: 39) argument that while African '[j]ournalistic styles reflect exposure to Anglo-Saxon and Latin press cultures...on the other hand [they] show how these colonial influences have been married with African values to produce a melting pot of media culture'.

More fundamentally, Chapter 5 shows that new technologies are inextricably built into the daily routines in which journalists collect, produce and report news. The technologies are at the heart of the communicative processes that encompass newsmaking and play a significant role in helping journalists to move beyond the confines of traditional news gathering methods. For example, the practice of following news stories about Zimbabwe on an assortment of online newspapers and the use of mobile phones (including the SMS and 'beeping' functions), complement and enhance traditional tools of newsgathering. As Seelig (2002) puts it, new technologies make it easier for the journalists to produce 'news quickly and efficiently'. This also finds support in McNair's (1998) view that the available technology of newsgathering and production strongly shape the content of journalism. Indeed, in keeping with McNair's (1998: 125) observation one can argue that the news content of Zimbabwe's mainstream newspapers is in part 'the outcome of the technical conditions of journalistic production'. However, as has generally emerged in

the study, the new technical conditions complement and reinforce the traditional tools of journalism and are enmeshed in the competing and complex web of processes internal and external to the newsroom.

8.2 New technologies in the dynamics of everyday production routines

Chapters 6 and 7 provide a detailed exploration of the uses of the Internet, email and the mobile phone in everyday news production. The chapters affirm findings from previous studies, precisely that new technologies offer journalists a wide range of resources and technological possibilities to work with (see for example, Pavlik 2000; Seelig 2002; Singer 2003). In general, the findings discussed in these chapters point to the fact that the impact of new technologies on journalism in economically developing non-Western contexts should not be underestimated. Together the chapters show that new technologies have an impact on how Zimbabwean mainstream journalists do their work; the content they produce; the structure of their work environment; and their relationships with sources and readers. However, a number of contextual factors have a strong bearing on the uses of the technologies resulting in 'local context appropriations' that move beyond a simple substantiation of early studies.

As well as contributing to the news agendas of the newsrooms and functioning as a research tool, the Internet provides information often censored by government. It provides access to email, which has become a vital and instantaneous link between reporters, readers and key news sources. Email is also central for receiving alerts and press releases from various organisations and institutions in addition to news tips and feedback from readers. The internal conditions of practice, professional ideologies of timeliness and the demands of specific news beats foster particular patterns of both Internet and email use. For example, entertainment reporters across newsrooms are more inclined to use social networking sites such as Facebook as journalistic tools ahead of their counterparts in other beats. Similarly, business reporters use email as a strategic tool for communicating with their busy sources more than their colleagues in other beats. The wider socio-political and economic conditions in which the journalists operate also shape and constrain the deployment of the technologies in the newsrooms. This counters technological determinism and makes a stronger case for constructivist approaches that look at new technologies as deeply embedded in the social context in which they are deployed.

Although all the newspapers have an online presence, they mainly duplicate their print editions and have not fundamentally altered their patterns of news

production in keeping with general trends in online journalism, such as regular updates and emphasising the immediacy of news coverage and focusing on breaking news (Allan 2005). However, the privately owned weeklies (*The Standard* and *The Zimbabwe Independent*) have incorporated interactive features into their websites, thus taking significant strides towards using content and ideas from readers to enrich their newsmaking practices. The interactivity of these newspapers' websites has enabled them to embrace a spectrum of user-contributions that include direct comments on stories; SMS comments and responses to stories; as well as news tips which can generically be referred to as 'citizen journalism' (Hermida & Thurman 2007; Atton 2007; Moyo, D 2009). The state-controlled newspapers are, however, leery about embracing interactivity. Their resistance is not just a matter of professional conservatism but is also fundamentally anchored in the newspapers' paternalistic editorial thrusts which favour a vertical unidirectional flow of information aimed at upholding the government which is the majority shareholder. There are also fears of facing up to public scrutiny because of the newspapers' ostensibly partisan reportage. This scenario finds support in Deuze's (2003) view that news organisations tend to expand their operations to the Internet based on their existing journalistic culture, including the way they relate to the public.

Chapter 7 examines the appropriations of the mobile phone and highlights how the technology has assumed a taken-for-granted role in the routine operations of journalists across the newsrooms studied. The findings suggest that the mobile phone has acquired new meanings in the social context of its appropriations by journalists. Its pervasiveness (among both elite and mass) has placed it at the centre of reorganising and reshaping newsmaking practices, including the blurring of the boundaries between work and private life.

The technology's inherent properties – voice calls; SMS text messaging; and 'beeping' – have particularly spawned unprecedented flexibility in journalists' day-to-day professional communication practices. These properties engender particular forms of use by journalists while also *responding* to the shaping impact of the socio-political and economic context in which it is deployed. The 'mobility' and flexibility of the mobile phone has driven its use as a tool for filing stories from remote and outlying parts of the country with poor infrastructure and unmet demand for fixed telecommunication networks especially during election time. This flexibility is contributing to timeous news coverage as well as improvements in meeting deadlines. In this sense, newsrooms' conceptions of immediacy in news coverage have assumed

new meanings which point to subtle but significant changes to news values. Further, the mobile phone has facilitated the flexible management of newsmaking processes by editors as well as the navigation of bureaucratic hurdles when dealing with busy sources.

However, the inherent functions of mobile phone have been creatively blended with local circumstances resulting in appropriations that are anchored in local conditions while at the same time responding to the nature of the technology itself. The 'sociality and solidarity of...local cultures' (Nyamnjoh 2005a: 209), for example, allow for interdependence in mobile phone use. In this sense, the mobile phone is embedded in the social relations and interpretive processes that sustain its appropriations. Its journalistic utility is enmeshed in the heterogeneity and dynamics of the context in which the journalists operate. We, therefore, need not narrowly see the mobile phone only in terms of its inherent properties and functions but more holistically in terms of its dialectical interchange with the immediate and wider context of its deployment.

8.3 Challenges and obstacles to the effective use of new technologies

Despite progress in the use of new technologies in Zimbabwean newsrooms, Chapters 6 and 7 highlight a number of contextual factors that hamper journalists' effective deployment of the technologies. These challenges are mainly a result of economic, social and political problems that confront the country. Chapter 6 shows that while there is general access to the Internet in the newsrooms, its effective use is hindered by lack of training and in-house supporting policies. In addition, problems relating to poor ICT infrastructure (including access to electricity) often result in poor Internet and mobile phone connectivity, low bandwidth and the exorbitant costs of accessing and using the technologies.

These problems mirror the wider challenges faced by the economically developing countries of the South as encapsulated in the notion of the 'digital divide' discussed in Chapter 2. The scenario has overall implications on the use of new technologies as journalistic tools given that journalism as a social practice does not operate in a social vacuum, but is closely tied to its wider context of practice.

Other obstacles pertain to the government's inclination towards Internet and mobile phone communication censorship as codified through such statutory instruments as the Interception of Communication Act of 2007 which (as noted in Chapter 6) empowers the state-security agents to intercept all forms of

telecommunications as and when they deem fit. This has created an environment that curtails the effective use of the technologies as journalists are forced to exercise extreme caution in order to protect their sources as they are never sure whether or not they are being watched. This is particularly the case when journalists are working on investigative stories that involve highly sensitive and classified information.

However, as has generally emerged in the study, localised initiatives have emerged as attempts to mitigate these challenges and obstacles. In many cases, for example, journalists queue to access the Internet rather than have personal workstations; they also borrow and lend each other's mobile phones to make calls or send an SMS text message, as well as resort to the multiple-ownership of phones as a way of navigating connectivity, congestion and censorship problems. In the same way, in attempts to lessen the running costs of mobile phones, they rely heavily on SMS texts and the practice of 'beeping'. Collectively, these initiatives and strategies point to the journalists' resilience and 'refusal' to be let down by contextual challenges in their use of new technologies for professional purposes. Thus, as Nyamnjoh (2005a: 209) puts it, the journalists, like other Africans have explored 'ways of denying exclusion its smile of triumph'. Similarly, to repeat Berger's (2005: 1) observations cited in Chapter 2, Southern African journalists:

> ...are far from being mired in 'backwardness' or passively awaiting external salvation in regard to attempts to use ICTs...In short, when seen in comparison with the First World, there are indeed shortcomings and a dire need for catch-up...But there is also another dimension visible which reflects *internal creativity*, *strengths* and *adaptations*. (emphasis added)

These strategies point to the unsustainability of technicist approaches to technology, and affirm the relevance of the social-shaping approach to technology that underpins the present study.

8.4 Ethical and professional implications

While the technologies have undoubtedly added value to news production practices in the newsrooms studied, they are nonetheless not without negative implications on traditional journalistic values and the general practice of the profession. As highlighted in Chapters 6 and 7, the excessive dependence on new technologies, especially by junior reporters has promoted a new 'breed' of journalistic culture and work ethic that has magnified traditional ethical and professional challenges

surrounding news production. The ethical and professional challenges are manifest in generational tensions between the more professionally conservative older journalists and younger reporters. Whereas senior journalists see the excessive reliance on new technologies in a bad light, young journalists associate the use of new technologies with the notion of 'moving with the times'.

Myriad ethical and professional problems associated with the use of the technologies abound. For instance, with the increasing use of the Internet in the newsrooms, plagiarism has become easier and more difficult to monitor. Journalists appear to allow the seductiveness of the Internet to impinge on the ethical tenets of the profession as they take advantage of the difficulties the Internet presents to gatekeepers in terms of monitoring reporters' activities. As Chari (2009: 22) observes 'in some cases, plagiarism becomes more sophisticated so that even the most alert editor would not know who was plagiarising what'. Although there was awareness among editors of the increase in plagiarism from the Internet, the extensive use of pseudonyms (particularly on news websites that focus on Zimbabwean issues such as *Newzimbabwe.com* and *Zimdaily.com*) has made it difficult for them gauge the magnitude of the problem.

The professional implications have also extended to other practices such as 'armchair journalism', where journalists are increasingly spending more time in the newsrooms than in the field 'observing directly the events and processes on which they report' (Pavlik 2000: 229). Senior journalists associated this growing culture of ICT-based journalism with the dearth of journalistic creativity and the so called traditional 'shoe leather' reporting. In the same vein, 'moonlighting' has taken on new dimensions as journalists strive to augment their poor salaries. With the increased exposure of journalists to international news organisations through the Internet and the prohibition of foreign media houses from practising in Zimbabwe, moonlighting has taken on 'new' meanings with critical professional and ethical implications. The pressure to maintain efficiency in the face of a demanding workload divided between one's regular employer and the 'underground' employer has compromised professionalism in the newsrooms as journalists resort to unethical practices such as 'stealing' stories from one another and plagiarism in order to meet their targets. On the political front, the Internet is also driving 'activist journalism' or 'vendetta journalism' among political reporters in the state-controlled newsrooms.

The study has also shown that the over-reliance on new technologies, coupled with the daily pressures of meeting deadlines, also promotes a shrinking diversity of

voices in terms of who contributes to news content given the significant inequalities of access to new technologies in the country. The disproportionate distribution of the new technologies has implications on news sourcing trends, in particular in terms of news access and the barring of potential sources from the 'sphere of visibility'. Thus, the increasing use of Facebook by entertainment reporters to conduct interviews as well as source stories has the potential to exclude other possible sources of news without the means and or abilities to navigate the social networking site. Similarly, only readers with access to the Internet (and the ability to effectively use it) can add their comments to stories and thus be part of the discursive realm afforded by the interactivity of *The Standard* and *The Zimbabwe Independent*'s websites. In this sense, the technologies serve to 'access the voices of the socially powerful, and marginalise or even silence those of the institutionally non-aligned and powerless' (Cottle 2000b: 26).

As the study has established, these ethical and professional challenges are exacerbated by the absence of formal ICT policy frameworks that support the training of journalists on the use of new technologies for journalistic purposes in the newsrooms, hence most journalists are either self-trained or assisted by their peers. Nevertheless, the ethical and professional challenges posed by new technologies demand greater accountability as well as a sense of responsibility from the journalists. The insights gleaned from this study are instructive insofar as they 'exhort the journalistic fraternity to think critically and reflect on the substance of their work in the context of a technological revolution that has its own contradictions' (Chari 2009: 29). The study thus provides a foundation for reflecting critically on the impact of new technologies on the practice of mainstream journalism in Zimbabwe and the wider economically developing world. There is a need for newsrooms to re-examine their news production practices in order to safeguard the traditional values of journalism such as 'objectivity and its closest correlates; balance, impartiality, fairness, truthfulness, factual accuracy' (Cottle 2000b: 25) and a 'general respect for others' (Chari 2009: 5).

8.5 Summary of the main findings

The value of the new technologies in the Zimbabwean mainstream print journalism, and perhaps in Africa at large, 'lies in the extent to which they enmesh with old media to provide multimedia platforms' (Banda et al. 2009: 2) that have reconfigured the structure of journalists' work environment in terms of how they do their work and

their relationships with sources and readers. Although technology by itself does not explain the changes taking place in Zimbabwean print newsrooms, it nonetheless constitutes an integral part of intertwined multi-dimensional factors that shape newsmaking practices and cultures. Collectively, the technologies have spawned subtle but significant regimes of flexible work routines. They have enhanced the journalists' control over the production of news, while also leading to reduced time for background research, contributing to timeous news coverage as well as an improvement in meeting deadlines. Similarly, journalists are now more in touch with the outside world. In this sense, news values and the newsrooms' conception of immediacy in newsmaking processes have also assumed new meanings.

The study further shows a widening exposure of journalists to news and inevitably a widening participation of citizens in newsmaking even if only those citizens with access and the means to deploy the technologies are involved. This again points to a subtle but significant gradual dispersion of the newsrooms' monopoly in defining what constitutes news. In other terms journalists no longer speak *ex cathedra* as they used to do before the 'new media age'. The permeation of the mobile phone into everyday life has particularly rendered it central to the newsmaking business. The affordability of its inherent features such as the SMS technology and 'beeping' has made it a technology of inclusion in the newsmaking processes.

It is worth noting that technological innovation in the newsrooms is mediated by a host of factors that include internal institutional factors as well as external socio-political factors. In this regard, the study's findings reinforce the need to qualify substantially any suggestions of technological determinism. Technology by itself is not a relevant explanatory variable of practices in the newsroom studied rather, as Paterson (2008: 1) puts it, it is embedded in an adoption process where the journalists 'make conscious or unconscious decisions' on how they deploy the technologies. As Banda et al. (2009: 2) argue: 'perhaps the value of new media in Africa lies in the fact that they have supplemented, but by no means supplanted, old media forms'. There is a need, therefore, to acknowledge both the rapidly changing set of formal and technological aspects as well as the complex set of interactions between new technological possibilities and established media forms (Lister et al. 2003). As Wasserman (2005: 165) observes, ICTs only serve to 'enlarge and accelerate processes already in place in societies and organisations rather than create entirely new forces' that radically break from old ways. Thus, notwithstanding the attraction new technologies hold for Zimbabwean journalists (and indeed the wider African

journalists), traditional modes of communication remain in force (Nyamnjoh 2005a; Adamolekun 1996).

The increase in the use of new technologies has, however, also opened up a plethora of 'old' ethical and professional challenges, which have the potential to erode some of the vital and valued practices of the profession, such as face-to-face communication in newsgathering.

8.6 Study weaknesses, strengths and scope for further research

The predominantly 'newsroom-centric' approach taken up in this study could be seen as one of the weaknesses of the study given the possibility of many informing social experiences in which journalists deploy new technologies outside the spaces and indeed the 'physicality' of the newsroom. The latter is perhaps one of the reasons that some researchers emphasise a closer experience of the research population's cyber activities through the deployment of 'digital ethnography' or 'virtual ethnography' (see Murthy 2008; Hine 2000; Howard 2002). However, I maintain that the physical space of the newsroom is the ideal focal point for the observation of routines in news production. It constitutes the actual space for decision making in mainstream print journalism practice and therefore strategic for examining the complex routines, professional values, rules, roles and processes that inform the deployment and appropriation of new technologies by journalists in general newsmaking. Further, in keeping with the qualitative nature of my study, the aim was, as Hammersley and Atkinson (1995: 6) put it, 'to describe what happens in the setting, how the people involved see their own actions and those of others, and the contexts in which the action takes place'. I further argue that even though my main focus was the newsroom this did not preclude me from observing journalistic interactions outside the newsrooms, for example, reporters on newsgathering assignments and at press clubs. I have also made attempts to examine the findings against the backdrop of experiences elsewhere through deploying research on the new media and journalism practice in Africa as well as suggesting how the findings corroborate and potentially enrich similar debates in the economically developed countries of the North.

I also remain ambivalent about social research that uses the new technologies themselves as the sole data gathering instruments as most proponents of digital or virtual ethnography suggest. I argue that using the technologies as research tools has the potential to obscure independent observations in the physical spaces of the research (such as the newsroom). This leaves the researcher confined to analysing

only content availed by the research subjects. Perhaps a more robust compromise, which other studies might pursue, lies in combining digital ethnography and physical ethnography in a single study.

The study may face challenges for being too narrowly focused on a selection of newsrooms that are not necessarily representative of the Zimbabwean mainstream press in terms of numbers. I reiterate a point made in Chapter 4 that the study's main concern was to understand particulars rather than to generalise to universals, in keeping with the assumptions of qualitative research (see Maxwell 1992; Bryman 1988; Denzin & Lincoln 1998; Yin 2003; Mason 2006a). This resulted in 'thick' descriptions (interview data and observation narratives) of the journalists' everyday experiences of new technologies. The narrow focus of the study also has important implications for understanding journalism practice in nation states in the context of threats by forces of internationalisation and globalisation, which include the new technologies themselves. The context-specific nature of the study offers one dimension for widening the frame of understanding the interface between new technologies and mainstream journalism practice in Africa.

The study also points to a number of areas that require further investigation. Given the qualitative nature of data generated by the research, there is a need to test them in other countries. Indeed, there is a case for cross-cultural comparative studies that assess the impact of new technologies on mainstream journalism, especially between economically developing African countries like Zimbabwe and the economically developed countries of the North, which offer markedly different socio-economic, cultural and political conditions of practice for journalists to those in the global South. The value of cross-cultural comparative studies is not that universal truths about mainstream journalism in the age of the new media will emerge but to seek wide-ranging empirical evidence that might enable us to critically assess a number of utopian predictions that have been made about the impact of new technologies on journalism practice. For example, are the epistemological, ontological and ideological imperatives of journalism necessarily standardising in the face of the diffusion and permeation of globalising new technologies across various aspects of news production? Research from wider and varied contexts would provide a backdrop for testing and supplementing the predominantly Western examples and theoretical frameworks on which African researchers continue to rely.

The notion of the digital divide (discussed in Chapter 2) may also help to further frame this debate by taking into account 'the multiple overlapping spaces and

flows in the era of globalization [and] global power imbalances and material inequalities' (Wasserman 2009: 282). The critical tension between the local and the global might form the focus of attempts to widen as well as deepen understandings of the position of African journalism in the 'new media age'. This also necessitates a rethinking of what journalism is (and what it is not) in terms of its normative identity across cultures. This is particularly important given that African journalism continues to be informed by Western (Anglo-American) notions of the profession's identity (see Louw 2001; Nyamnjoh 2005a).

Although the present study has generally shown that journalists are not passive users of new technologies (particularly of the Internet), many worries were expressed about the credibility and relevance of some of the content to the African situation and experiences. For example, in Chapter 6 some business reporters highlighted the absence of relevant data on the Internet. A useful question to ask, therefore, is whether there has been an 'information revolution' in Zimbabwean (and indeed in African newsrooms in general), given the information gaps on the Internet and the 'severe inequalities [that] endure, especially between elite and mass in developing countries' (Duff forthcoming 2011).

It is hoped that this study will contribute to a knowledge base that other journalism researchers can draw on in attempting to understand the continuously evolving interface between new technologies and mainstream journalism practice in non-Western societies. It is also my hope that insights gleaned from the study will assist journalism practitioners and educators in Africa to critically examine their work practices and empower themselves with a better understanding of the challenges and constraints that African mainstream journalism faces in the 'new media age'.

APPENDICES:

Appendix 1: Personal introductory letter to newsrooms

School of Arts and Creative Industries
Edinburgh Napier University
Craighouse Campus
Edinburgh
EH10 5LG

28 March 2008

Dear Sir,

Accessing your newsroom for research purposes

I am writing to you to discuss the possibility of conducting an important study in your newsroom as part of my PhD research in journalism studies at Edinburgh Napier University. The main focus of my study is to examine how Zimbabwean print journalists deploy new technologies (the Internet; email; and the mobile phone) in their everyday professional practices. I am looking at spending a minimum of a month in your newsroom learning, observing, as well as interviewing your staffers on their use of the technologies for journalistic purposes.

Participation of individuals would be entirely voluntary and confidential. The study will therefore not refer to the actual names of individuals unless where permission to do so is sought and granted. Further, the data collected will strictly be used for academic purposes only and I would be happy to produce a summary report of my findings following my fieldwork should this be required.

Throughout the study I will endeavour to have as little impact on daily working practices as possible.

I would very much appreciate it if we could talk over this proposal in more detail. I will phone in the second week of April to try to arrange an appointment for a detailed discussion of the study and the possibility of your organisation taking part. In the mean time, should you require immediate further details please do not hesitate to contact me on the following email address: h.mabweazara@napier.ac.uk.

Accompanying this letter please find an introductory letter from my director of studies at Edinburgh Napier University, Dr. Chris Atton.

In advance, I thank you for your kind consideration.

Sincerely,

Hayes Mawindi Mabweazara

Appendix 2: Introductory letter to newsrooms (by my director of studies)

School of Arts and Creative Industries
Edinburgh Napier University
Craighouse Campus
Edinburgh
EH10 5LG

28 March 2008

To the Editor,

Request to access your newsroom for research purposes

I am writing to request your assistance in a research project being undertaken as part of a PhD degree in journalism by Hayes Mabweazara, a research student of mine at Edinburgh Napier University. In particular, I would appreciate your assistance for him to collect a limited amount of information on how some of your staffers use the Internet, email and mobile phones as tools for journalism. I would be grateful, therefore, if you could permit him access to learn, interview and observe a number of your staffers (with their permission) over a period of a maximum of two months.

I must stress that the data collected will not identify the individuals personally excerpt where permission is sought. Further, the findings will be used strictly for academic purposes only. We would be very happy to share the general results with you.

If you would like to discuss this further, please do not hesitate to email or call me. My email address is c.atton@napier.ac.uk and my phone number is 0044 0131 455 6127.

Your assistance will be greatly appreciated.

Yours faithfully,

Dr. Chris Atton

Appendix 3: Observation checklist

1. Structure and organisation of the newsrooms
2. Organisation of news processing in relation to newsroom divisions of labour
3. Editorial conferences (influences on newsmaking processes and news content)
4. News production routines – beat influences
5. Use of the new technologies in place of traditional reporting tools
6. How new technologies structure and influence news production processes at different stages (within and outside the newsrooms)
7. Popularly visited websites (visit web-browsers) and influences of the beat system
8. Use of the technologies in interacting with:
    a) News sources
    b) Readers
    c) Colleagues
9. Use of traditional reader-feedback functions *vis-à-vis* ICT-related feedback functions (email, mobile phones, newspaper websites etc.)
10. Use and selection of online sources of news
11. Work versus personal use of new technologies
12. Newsroom support in new technology use
13. Professional and ethical issues associated with the use of the technologies
14. Challenges to effective use of technologies

Appendix 4: Guide for focus group interviews

1. Professional routines and day-to-day newsroom practices

- How would you describe your day-to-day practices and routines?
- Would you say you have been socialised into these practices?
- Are these practices the same for every journalists or they vary between individuals and with each day?
- Do your beats influence routines and practices?
- Do your newsroom policies (formal and informal) have any implications on your daily routines and practices?

2. ICTs in news production

- What are your general experiences in the use of new technologies (Internet, email and mobile phones)?
- How important are the technologies in news production?
- How exactly do you use each of these technologies in your professional practice?
- Do they have any implications on the efficacy of news production?
- Any comparisons with past experiences?

3. Newsroom culture, professional ideologies and ICT use

- How does your newsroom culture and shared professional ideology impact on your use of these technologies?
- Do the institutional contexts and managerial approaches facilitate or constrain your deployment of the technologies?
- Would you say your newsroom supports the use of these technologies?
- Do editorial policies influence how you use the technologies as news making tools?
- Would you say your newsroom is well placed in terms of ICTs, any comparisons with other newsrooms?

4. Personal creativity and peer support

- Do individual abilities and efforts play a significant role in the use of these technologies in news production?

- Any shared experiences – failures and successes – in using the technologies for professional purposes?

5. Impact of the economic and socio-political environment

- Does the economy have any implications of your deployment of the new technologies?
- Do you think the political context has any role in shaping or constraining your use of these technologies in news production?

6. Interactions with sources, colleagues and readers

- Does each of the three technologies (Internet, email and mobile phone) have any influence or shaping impact on your news sourcing routines?
- Do they play any role in your professional interactions with fellow reporters within and outside the newsroom?
- What role does each of the three technologies play in your interaction with readers?
- Are there any comparisons that you can draw with traditional technologies (eg. Phone, fax, mail) in terms of interactions with sources, colleagues and readers?

7. New technologies and the organisation of news production

- Do the technologies have any implications or impact on news values (eg. timeliness)?
- Are these implications a welcome development in newsmaking?
- Are there any implications on the quality of your news output?
- Have professional standards and the quality of news been impacted upon at all?

8. New technologies: challenges and ethical concerns in news production

- What challenges (if any) do you generally face in using these technologies for professional purposes?
- How do you navigate the challenges?
- Any ethical concerns emerging with the use of these technologies?

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