

# Chapter 16

## Citizen Journalism on Facebook and the Challenges of Media Regulation in Zimbabwe: Baba Jukwa

**Collen Sabao**

*Stellenbosch University, South Africa & Midlands State University, Zimbabwe*

**Vimbai Rejoice Chingwaramusee**

*Midlands State University, Zimbabwe*

### ABSTRACT

*The chapter discusses the rise of citizen journalism, examining the manners in which such form of journalistic practice impacts media regulatory frameworks and journalistic ethics in Zimbabwe, specifically looking at the Baba Jukwa Facebook wall. It discusses the nature of reporting in citizen journalism and the challenges these pose on media regulating laws and journalistic ethics. Over the last decade, social networking websites and other social forums have exploded in popularity in the whole world, Zimbabwe included. These social networking sites have become quite central as alternative news media, breaking stories before the mainstream official media does. The impact that such social networks have on contemporary society as public spheres - platforms for group social interactions and news outlets should not be undermined because of how they allow people to interact freely and to (re)construct their desired realities in the face of the gag of stringent media laws.*

### THE DIGITAL AGE AND THE RISE OF CITIZEN JOURNALISM

The chapter examines the manners in which citizen journalism impacts media regulatory frameworks in Zimbabwe, specifically looking at the Baba Jukwa wall as a case study. Through the analysis of the news 'breaking' and news 'reporting' culture on Facebook among Zimbabwean users, the chapter examines the language as well as images used in citizen journalism and the challenges these pose on media regulating laws and journalistic ethics. Over the last decade, social networking websites such as

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-8359-2.ch016

Facebook, Twitter, MySpace, Belbo and other social forums such as the mobile phone based chat services like Whatsapp have exploded in popularity in the whole world, Zimbabwe included. The phenomenon of citizen journalism is not restricted to the internet alone as well as to the independent 'broadcast' of news via the internet. As Goode (2009) explains, 'citizen journalism is generally associated with the internet and yet does not begin and end online or even with digital-interactive media. Broadcast news, for example, sometimes feeds off and incorporates elements of citizen journalism: examples include eyewitness footage from cell phones, reporting of stories originally broken by citizen journalism initiatives on the web, or even guest reporter slots in which citizens front and participate in packaging an item for a television or radio newscast.' These social networking sites have also become quite central as alternative news media, breaking stories before the mainstream official media does. The impact that such social networks have on contemporary society as platforms for group social interactions and news outlets should not be undermined.

Social networking sites have become widespread and grown in popularity because they allow people to interact freely and to (re)construct and reveal their desired realities by providing an alternative space for the dissemination of 'news' in the face of the gag of stringent media laws and regulatory frameworks. For example, Subrahmanyam et al (2008) estimate that sites such as MySpace and Facebook have over 100 million users between them, many of them adolescents and emerging adults. The proposed study seeks to examine the constructions of alternative media on the social networking websites using a case study of Zimbabwe. The advent of web based networking sites however has meant that the questions of professional and ethical journalistic practices have to be (re)confronted and (re)interrogated. Of particular interest in proposed chapter is how this alternative digital public sphere has offered Zimbabweans 'an avenue to discuss a taboo subject in Zimbabwe without fear or being reprimanded by the secretive and authoritarian state. The 'taboo' in this context refers to issues that the state does not want discussed in public like the president's health, genocide, ZANU-PF factionalism or succession debate and state sponsored corruption just to mention but a few. The state has tabooed the genocide debates within Zimbabwe for national cohesion and ZANU-PF's political expediency. Most precisely, the article explores how the internet has challenged the elitist dominated domestic public sphere into a sphere where ordinary citizens interact among themselves and those in power' (Mpofu, nd). Such are the issues the Baba Jukwa wall largely reported on. Whereas the Baba Jukwa wall offered an alternative source of news, in many instances offering narratives parallel to official government controlled reports and making it possible for the proliferation of counter-hegemonic voices, the chapter seeks to explore how such uncontrolled and 'free' news outlets represent media regulatory challenges in Zimbabwe.

Observing that citizen journalists are people that are not trained professional newsmen, and usually present 'news' as they see them through the use of gadgets such as mobile phones and the internet with complete disregard of journalistic ethics and laws, the study here examines how the proliferation of such 'newsmen' present challenges for media regulation in Zimbabwe. Ruellan (2007: 2) for instance, observes in this regard that, '[s]ince 2005, the Internet has given rise to several novel initiatives concerning journalism designated by the generic term "citizen journalism". Underlying a set of heterogeneous systems, a unique principle can be observed: web users, who are not professional journalists, contribute directly to the production of the daily news. These practices raise a series of questions, one of which is the link, in the media and journalism, between professional and amateur practices.' For example there have been instances of nude pictures being posted on the internet as part of 'breaking news' by citizen journalists, who clearly lack a code and journalistic ethics. With regards to the ethical problems of citizen

12 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage:

[www.igi-global.com/chapter/citizen-journalism-on-facebook-and-the-challenges-of-media-regulation-in-zimbabwe/226679](http://www.igi-global.com/chapter/citizen-journalism-on-facebook-and-the-challenges-of-media-regulation-in-zimbabwe/226679)

## Related Content

---

### Poverty Reduction, Wealth Creation, and Tourism in Ethnic Minority Communities in Mainland Southeast Asia

Scott Hipsher (2017). *International Journal of Sustainable Entrepreneurship and Corporate Social Responsibility* (pp. 39-53).

[www.irma-international.org/article/poverty-reduction-wealth-creation-and-tourism-in-ethnic-minority-communities-in-mainland-southeast-asia/203608](http://www.irma-international.org/article/poverty-reduction-wealth-creation-and-tourism-in-ethnic-minority-communities-in-mainland-southeast-asia/203608)

### Metaverse: The Ethical Dilemma

Susan Shepherd Ferebee (2022). *Exploring Ethical Problems in Today's Technological World* (pp. 315-330).

[www.irma-international.org/chapter/metaverse/312488](http://www.irma-international.org/chapter/metaverse/312488)

### Ensuring Research Integrity: An Overview

Ebikaboere Ovia (2018). *Ensuring Research Integrity and the Ethical Management of Data* (pp. 46-58).

[www.irma-international.org/chapter/ensuring-research-integrity/196874](http://www.irma-international.org/chapter/ensuring-research-integrity/196874)

### Ethical Issues of 'Morality Mining': Moral Identity as a Focus of Data Mining

Markus Christen, Mark Alfano, Endre Bangerter and Daniel Lapsley (2015). *Human Rights and Ethics: Concepts, Methodologies, Tools, and Applications* (pp. 1146-1166).

[www.irma-international.org/chapter/ethical-issues-of-morality-mining/117082](http://www.irma-international.org/chapter/ethical-issues-of-morality-mining/117082)

### Travel and Tourism Sector in India: Potential, Opportunities, and Framework for Sustainable Growth

Mukesh Chauhan (2016). *Corporate Social Responsibility in the Hospitality and Tourism Industry* (pp. 119-137).

[www.irma-international.org/chapter/travel-and-tourism-sector-in-india/147195](http://www.irma-international.org/chapter/travel-and-tourism-sector-in-india/147195)