

# Chapter 34

## Mobile Journalism, Cellphilms, and the Use of the StoryMaker Multimedia Software at a Zimbabwean Media Training University

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### ABSTRACT

*This chapter deals with the teaching of students in the use of a smartphone application for cellphone filming and mobile journalism at the Media and Society Studies Department Midlands State University (MSU) in Zimbabwe. The smartphone and Storymaker multimedia software application used for training was provided by a Zimbabwean non-governmental organisation – Her Zimbabwe – which is affiliated to the Netherlands-based media civil society group Free Press Unlimited. MSU is a state university. Its administrative culture is intricately linked to the ZANU PF led government of President Robert Mugabe. The training offered to media students is conducted with caution. Students make cellphone films (cellphilms) and practice mobile journalism (mojo) to produce media content. The chapter critiques students' media content, especially why it appears apolitical. Self-censorship arising from socialization and interpellation is implicated in the restrained nature of students' productions, and lecturers and the civil society organisation involved are also cited as oblique gatekeepers in the production chain.*

### INTRODUCTION

This chapter explores and critiques how the Department of Media and Society Studies at the Midlands State University (MSU) in Zimbabwe, with the assistance of some local and international partners, has started using mobile devices in the form of smartphones for cellphone filming (cellphilming) and mobile

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journalism (mojo) as part of their extra-curriculum, but with the future possibility of full incorporation into formal curriculum. The use and application of smartphones in media and journalism training curricula in Zimbabwean tertiary institutions is a fairly recent phenomenon. The inclusion of mobile devices in mainstream formal curricula offers new changes, challenges and opportunities. The smartphone and *Storymaker* multimedia software application used for training was provided by a Zimbabwean non-governmental organisation – Her Zimbabwe – which is affiliated to the Netherlands-based media civil society group Free Press Unlimited. MSU is a state university. Its administrative culture is intricately linked to the ZANU PF led government of President Robert Mugabe. Since its controversial land reform program starting around 1999 the country has been under sanctions and in constant diplomatic conflict with ‘Western’ countries such as the USA, European Union and Australia. The Zimbabwean state has traditionally been suspicious of civil society and donor agencies that have western links. The ‘citizen journalism’ training offered to media students at a state university is, therefore, conducted with caution. Students make cellphone film (cellphilms) and practice mobile journalism (mojo) producing media content. The chapter critiques students’ media content, especially why it appears apolitical. Self-censorship arising from socialization and interpellation is implicated in the restrained nature of students’ productions, and lecturers and the civil society organisation involved are also cited as oblique gatekeepers in the production chain. The latter approve or discourage openly subversive content’. On the surface students’ cellphilms and mojo productions seem largely embedded in human interest stories and depoliticized, notwithstanding Zimbabwe’s recent political history. Much as new media is expected to democratize communication and representation, it can also rearticulate and reproduce dominant hegemonies. Interestingly the same innocuous content has a way of critiquing both the local status quo and larger global political dynamics. The chapter observes that an epistemological vigilance is required if mojo and cellphilming are to be incorporated into the Zimbabwean media curriculum. The double bind of resisting an overbearing local regime and not playing into the hands of self-interested international capitalism cannot be ignored. The dilemma is striking but cannot be preoccupied with condemnation of ZANU PF or totally embracing the liberal human rights discourse. Much as social media is potentially a force for democracy and emancipation, it can also be used for destabilisation and the suspicions of the ZANU PF regime cannot be easily dismissed as merely self-interested given the outcomes in some countries after the Arab Spring.

The chapter’s structure begins with a background of the partnerships that have led to the introduction of the devices into a department that struggles to acquire all forms of communication, media and journalism teaching and training ICT devices. Zimbabwean state universities are generally undercapitalized due to weak government investment and the flight of international donors after the controversies of the post-2000 national politics. After presenting the background of the partnerships and purpose of the research, the chapter explains the methodology, defines key concepts of cellphilming, mojo, and problematises student-producers as ‘community’ members involved in community media. Zimbabwean media professionals have often complained of heavy-handedness of the state machinery in media-state interactions, in short, citing the ‘criminalization’ of media profession, therefore it becomes pertinent to ascertain what chances students have of adopting and applying mobile devices in their training. The researchers as active trainers hence find it necessary to be reflexive so that they reveal the dynamics behind training students where government and university can be suspicious after government received a barrage of criticism about its policies and human rights records from local and international critics. After this broad contextual background with accompanying reviewing of literature, the MSU students’ cellphilms and mojo productions are presented and critiqued. The organisational roles of the Zimbabwean

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