Smartphones, Professional Behaviour and Workplace Socialisation in Kenyan Organisations: A Case of Capital FM

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ABSTRACT

The news media industry globally has experienced a great range of changes due to the entry of digital technologies in journalistic practice. Journalists are facing the challenge of evolving norms and practices in commercial companies which in turn are struggling to generate revenues, as well as keep and grow audiences. The internet-enabled smartphone is among those technologies whose increasing affordability has caused it to be ever-present in journalists' professional lives. This study's research objective was to interrogate the use of the smartphone among journalists at Kenya's pioneer commercial radio station, Capital FM, and the implications of that use on professional behaviour and socialisation. The study uses social learning theory and applies a qualitative case study research design. The data collection tools were observation and 23 purposively sampled interviews, the latter undertaken until saturation was reached. The data show smartphone use has facilitated the fast flow of multi-media content and changes to workplace routines. It has also redefined the nature of interactions among individuals in a working context, and transformed certain newsroom basics or rendered them obsolete. Overall, these changes suggest implications on the future vocational socialisation of journalists. The study recommends further long-term interrogation of the effect of smartphones and other digital tools on professional behaviour to better assess the effects of organisational norms, practices, and structures.

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Key words: Smartphones, Workplace Socialisation, Work Routines, Digital Technologies, Journalism

Introduction

During the last two decades, a wave of political reforms on the African continent was accompanied by a liberalisation of the news media

(Karikari, 2007; Mbeke, Ugangu & Okello-Orlale, 2010; Mwesige & Kalinaki, 2007; Ugangu, 2012). In the same time period, there was explosive growth globally in the use of Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) such as mobile phones and social media sites (Abbott, 2012; Berger, 2007; Boyd & Ellison, 2007; Fountain, 2013; Mare, 2013).

The liberalisation of the news media was instrumental in the rise of commercial broadcasting across much of the continent, and the entry of foreign television channels available on satellite. In Kenya, new radio stations were established, of which Capital FM was the first to be licensed in 1995 and to go on air in September 1996 (Kenya Yearbook Editorial Board, 2010; Mbeke et al, 2010; Obonyo, 2011; Walubengo, 2011; Willems & Mano, 2016).

The use of ICTs led to the entry of digital technologies in journalistic practice. This manifested itself across different parts of Africa in various practices such as: the establishment of websites, blogs and social media accounts by the news media; the use of the web as a news platform alongside print and broadcast; the push for journalists to be multi-skilled so as to produce content for the converged platforms; and the incorporation of user-generated content (UGC) into other news work (Bosch, 2014; Mabweazara, 2014; Mare, 2014; Mudhai, 2014; Paterson, 2013; Sambuli, 2015; World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers, 2011).

Capital FM, the focus of this study, launched a Digital Media Division to focus on producing news content for the web and mobile phone platforms (Mudhai, 2014). As a commercial radio station, Capital FM has extensively used the web through its website and social media accounts. This, combined with its longevity in radio and demonstrated journalistic practice, led to its selection as the case for this study.

The company provides journalists with various digital technologies such as professional audio recorders and video cameras. The journalists also own smartphones which they use for their personal and professional work purposes. The latter is described later in this paper.

Professional journalistic work is a homogenised process comprised of particular skills, routines, and norms enacted by particular roles (e.g. editor, reporter, photographer) within a structured time frame. The process is entrenched through different socialisation processes including the usage of content from global news agencies, journalism training locally and abroad, and workplace interactions (Bielsa, 2008; Blöbaum, 2014; Hermans, Vergeer & d'Haenens, 2009; Nyamnjoh, 2005).

Global news agencies have become the source of most of the news available on the web, and have contributed to the spread of shared news norms, values and formats across the world, thus extending the homogeneous and globalised nature of news production (Bielsa, 2008; Scott, 2005).

Blöbaum (2014) observes that journalists learn how to perform their roles through professional training which is reinforced during socialisation in the workplace. Nyamnjoh (2005) further observes that the training of African journalists in Western countries is a socialisation process that has led to the adoption of particular news values and practices that are not always applicable to the African context (Nyamnjoh, 2005).

Kenya has experienced a great rise in demand for internet services, which has been enabled by the reduced cost of devices such as the smartphone with most users accessing the internet through the mobile phone (Communications Authority of Kenya, 2015; Communications Authority of Kenya, 2016a). Sector statistics indicate that by the second quarter of the 2016/2017 financial year, Kenya had 26.6 million internet subscribers, of which approximately 99% accessed it through mobile phone (Communications Authority of Kenya, 2016b).

The Kenyan news media have taken up the use of the internet and the mobile phone in various work practices (Mudhai, 2014; Nyabuga & Booker, 2013; Sambuli, 2015). The use of digital technologies in journalism routines and practice has attracted scrutiny, with research moving from general accounts of usage to include perspectives on social media and citizen journalism, as well as the daily practices and activities

of journalists in newsrooms (Banda, 2010; Jordaan, 2013; Mabweazara, 2010; Obijiofor, 2003; Paterson, 2013; Sambuli, 2015).

However, there is a scarcity of research concerning the interactions between the technologies and journalists, and resulting effects on workplace behaviour. In studying the use of the smartphone among journalists at a Kenyan radio station, this research seeks to address the implications of smartphone use on professional behaviour and socialisation among journalists.

Theory

This study uses social learning theory, developed by Bandura (1971) and which describes behaviour as learned through observation, imitation, and modelling. The observation of other people's experiences enables an individual to acquire behavior by imitating the example of those they have observed. The individual's cognitive abilities also enable him or her to assess how those experiences will guide their future actions .

Using this theoretical framework, this study used interviews and observation to interrogate the professional practices of journalists in using their phones to interact with peers and superiors in the newsroom, as well as develop and submit news stories.

Methodology

The study took a qualitative approach, by applying a case study research design using observation and 23 open-ended interviews undertaken over a three-month period in 2016.

Case study design is both a methodology and a focus of study which is useful for reflecting on lived experience, setting 'how' or 'why' questions, enabling in-depth inquiry and whose findings can inform theoretical development (Chadderton & Torrance, 2011; Creswell & Clark, 2011; Yin, 2014). Case study design involves the investigation of a bounded system over a period of time.

In the case of this study, the bounded system was the purposively selected Capital FM radio station, chosen for its longevity in radio, demonstrated journalistic practice, and extensive use of digital technologies. Case

study data collection is detailed and in-depth, involving various sources. This study applied the following data forms: observation of the physical location as well as the website and official social media accounts of the company; and interviewing select personnel.

The study began with a month-long period of observation and informal discussions. There were then 23 formal open-ended interviews held with personnel identified during the period of observation. The personnel were selected using criterion sampling with the limit determined when the data reached saturation (Mason, 2011).

Guest, Namey and Mitchell (2013) describe observation as a process linked to understanding why something happens and exposing the underlying intangible reasons behind what is seen, such as rules and norms. It is useful in explaining and contextualizing the phenomenon under study as well as providing causation and confirmation. It is also useful in exposing knowledge that cannot be articulated or recounted in an interview (Mason, 2010).

The Guest et al. (2013) framework of conducting observation was used where time was spent watching employees at work, shadowing their activities, and consuming radio and website content. Observations were recorded using an information gathering protocol.

The 23 interviewees were purposively sampled with the limit determined when the data reached saturation. Interviews were held with journalists and senior management. Additional interviews were held with two former Capital FM staffers who had insights into the early years of the incorporation of the web into journalistic practice. The interviews were unstructured enabling interviewees to begin responding to a general topic but to answer specific questions as the interview progressed. This approach also encouraged the interviewees to speak at length and in vivid detail.

Mason (2010) indicates that saturation is an important guiding principle in qualitative data sample size even though there is little scholarly agreement on what constitutes it. Bertaux (1981) cited in Mason (2010), posits that 15 should be the smallest sample size in any

qualitative study. Creswell (1998), and Green and Thorogood (2009), both cited in Mason (2010), say a range of 5 to 25 is acceptable. This study had 23 interviews, and found the range of 5 to 25, to be sufficient in establishing saturation.

The data underwent theoretical analysis, which occurs when the researcher has a particular theoretical or analytical focus and is interested in addressing an aspect of the data. Theoretical analysis is handled by research question rather than inductively (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis was drawn from a review of the observation notes and interview transcripts, and emerged during the process of data collection and well into the post-data collection phase.

Results

All Capital FM journalists own their smartphones while the company provides supporting infrastructure, such as internet access on wireless or a monthly allowance for each journalist to purchase mobile phone bundles.

The smartphone and the mobile phone application WhatsApp are important professional tools for the journalists, who use them to share textual, audio and visual information. WhatsApp also serves as a forum where reporters, writers and editors can exchange information, story ideas, and completed stories without having to meet face-to-face.

Various journalists described the ways in which they use their smartphones. When away from her workstation, one editor uses her phone to update the website, to communicate with writers and contributors via WhatsApp, and to update company and personal social media accounts. A reporter said that while in the field, he uses his phone to submit stories to his editors on WhatsApp or on his personal email account. Reporters develop at least two versions of each story, one for the radio bulletins, and the other to be published on the company website.

The reporter sends pictures via WhatsApp and video via gmail. He has found this approach to be a more efficient way of using up his mobile phone bundles, where the heavier content is sent on his email

account and lighter content on WhatsApp (Another reporter said that the smartphone and its applications enabled him to multi-task, work fast and stay ahead of the competition while out in the field.

> *"Without a phone you cannot do this [work]. It's next to impossible… You want to be the first person to break the story."*

The smartphone has also become an organisational communication tool. The staffers based in the physical newsroom all belong to a news WhatsApp group where they interchange personal/social messages, news content in text, audio or video form, as well as source contacts, among other information. WhatsApp is a mobile phone application, though a web-based version is now available on other devices such as laptops and tablets.

Figure 1 below shows the different ways in which the smartphone is used by journalists in the Kenyan newsroom under study.

Fig 1: The various ways in which the smartphone is used in the Kenyan newsroom.

The use of WhatsApp as a forum to create a virtual meeting space for journalists in the newsroom exposed two disruptions to professional practices. One was the loss of the docket book as a newsroom artefact, and the other was a change in the morning meeting. The docket book or diary was a large red book placed in the centre of the newsroom that served as a record of stories being worked on by different reporters in the course of the news day. During the period of observation, one long-

serving newsreader mentioned that the docket book was no longer in use. Everything was shared on WhatsApp.

The newsroom meeting at Capital FM is a scheduled short meeting held at the beginning of the day and is convened by the news editor. Members present review the previous day's stories as well as go over what they are working on for that day. Any questions or requirements are raised during the meeting after which members disperse to attend to their various duties.

During the period of observation, newsroom staff did not meet regularly face-to-face to go over the previous day's stories (post-mortem) or discuss the day's diary, as is the norm during the face-to-face newsroom meeting. Instead, editors would assign stories, while reporters and camera personnel would send in stories as well as still or video images via WhatsApp, all without having to be physically present in the newsroom. WhatsApp would also be used as a forum to search for information from news sources or from fellow journalists.

On one occasion, one intern was sitting alone at her workstation as other reporters had left on assignment. She had presented and worked on a story that would eventually not run. The editor walked her through the story and the reasons for it not running but told her to look for other story ideas. She had her smartphone in her hand, and when she was not writing stories, would constantly be scrolling on it. She said she used her phone to visit news and gossip websites, and to share story ideas via WhatsApp with a fellow student on internship at a different media house. She also looked up audience feedback on her stories which she also shared on social media. While she received guidance from her editors and other reporters, she also relied heavily on the web for information, story ideas, and validation of work done based on audience metrics (Observation notes, August 2016).

Discussion

The data revealed three aspects of professional practice at the radio station under observation. The pervasive use of the smartphone has led to particular ways in which the journalists work. There is a mediated

socialisation taking place through the use of the smartphone and its applications. There are newsroom artefacts and practices that have been rendered obsolete by the use of the smartphone and its applications.

The smartphone has contributed to changes in how journalists work. By owning a smartphone which can share different kinds of content - video, audio, or text – and has internet access, journalists are able to work outside the newsroom and for longer hours, generate multiple forms of content over the course of the working day, and promote stories on social media.

This has meant that journalists are increasingly multi-skilled and able to multi-task, which has been experienced in other parts of the world as well (Anderson, 2009; Robinson, 2011; Scott, 2005; Witschge & Nygren, 2009). The editorial director said this ability to do multiple stories and to multi-task with speed was challenging at first but has now become routine and even new hires are expected to conform.

> *You can even do three, four stories from one news event but within an hour, you should have produced all of them… People really struggled initially when we started. But slowly, people caught on, and you see when you have new people coming in, they know this is how we do it. You come, you deliver a story for radio, you have to sit down and deliver a story for the website. And slowly, everything is falling into place*

Journalists have also acquired new roles with the use of various digital technologies, including the smartphone. Various scholars have described the journalism of the past as a three-stage process which involves the following: gathering of information, development of the information into news stories; and packaging the stories which involves editing and preparation for distribution to audiences (Erjavec, 2004; Mabweazara, 2010; Witschge & Nygren 2009). Today, journalists are able through their smartphones to also promote their stories on social media, which is a new task within their practice.

Blöbaum (2014) observes that journalists learn how to perform their roles through professional training which is reinforced during socialisation in the workplace. The editorial director's comments provide evidence of

this when he expressed the expectation the organisation places on new workers to acquire expected professional behaviour such as generating two versions of each story by observing and imitating their peers in the newsroom.

Additionally, the observations of the intern indicate that she was learning about the vocation of journalism by working on stories and receiving guidance from reporters and editors. But in her case, there was also a mediated socialisation taking place via smartphone or the web. While some of it came from established news sources, part of it occurred through the interaction with sources – such as the friend on WhatsApp – or gossip sites.

The last two sources would be of concern because they raise questions as to what the intern ends up learning from a fellow intern and a gossip site. In the case of the former, the intern would be observing and imitating the behaviour of someone who is also not yet fully socialised into professional working requirements for journalists. This leaves room for the acquisition and adoption of incorrect professional practices. The gossip site subscribes to a more sensational form of journalism than that undertaken at the radio station where she was on internship. This would again potentially cause the intern to observe, imitate and model choices in story development that would not reflect those required by the radio station.

Korte (2007) and Korte (2013) note the importance of social interactions in the learning process, and provide a workplace socialisation model for new employees.
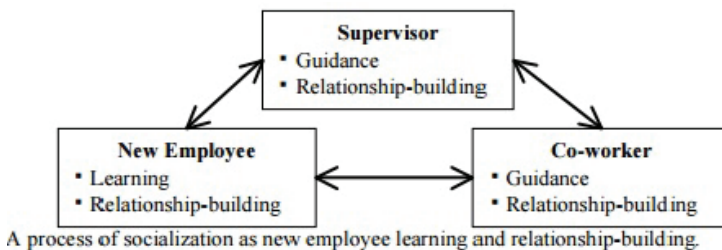

A process of socialization as new employee learning and relationship-building.

Fig 2: Korte's (2007) model of workplace socialisation among new employees.

The model presumes human interaction that is based on aspects of learning, guidance and relationship-building. The new employee, or intern in this case, is a learner, and the sources from which the intern is learning will contribute to how they are socialised in the workplace. The effect of the use of peers and gossip sites as sources of socialisation is speculative in this study. Therefore how mediated socialisation affects the process of learning, guidance and relationship-building would warrant further research.

Separately, WhatsApp has rendered the docket book obsolete and transformed the newsroom meeting from a face-to-face discussion forum to a virtual space. This virtual space enables a mediated flow of information which facilitates speed in the development of news stories. However, the change from face-to-face interactions facilitated by the newsroom meeting to mediated interaction facilitated by WhatsApp has come at a cost. One reporter said that WhatsApp does not allow a discussion of nuances to a story and the sharing of institutional memory related to a news event or personality, yet these are easily available during the face-to-face meeting (Interview, Aug. 8, 2016).

Mediated communication, such as that availed by WhatsApp is useful in enabling the fast flow of information, be it news stories or direction on how stories should be covered. However, it has led to the loss of practices and interactions that inform the professional work of journalists. The long-term effect of the loss of face-to-face interaction on workplace socialisation would also call for further study.

Conclusion

The findings of this study are that the use of the smartphone by journalists has led to new professional practices and changing socialisation. The smartphone and provision of mobile bundles have enabled journalists to work virtually and constantly, which is useful in terms of work efficiency and speed. However, the smartphone use has also meant the reduction of face-to-face interaction among journalists, as well as the loss of newsroom artefacts such as the docket book.

The loss of face-to-face interaction with newsroom peers has meant that the socialisation of new journalists, institutional memory and nuance in a story that came from face-to-face discussion are no longer available to journalists as they work on stories. The loss of the newsroom diary has transferred the availability of institutional memory from a centralised fixed record to a virtual, dynamic space. An individual's access to that virtual space depends on when they are invited by the WhatsApp administrator into it, but with no access to what was there before they entered the space.

This situation also affects the socialisation of the journalists, particularly those young in the profession. But this paper posits that the mediated interaction that the smartphone avails is changing the socialisation of young journalists, even as it improves efficiency and speed in work production. These changes and their long-term effects would require further study.

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BIO

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