

**Social media in the newspaper newsroom:
The professional use of Facebook and Twitter at
Rapport and the *Mail & Guardian***

by

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*Thesis presented in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree
MPhil (Journalism)*

at

Stellenbosch University

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Date: March 2012

Declaration

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this thesis is my own original work and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it at any university for a degree.

Signature:

Date: March 2012

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Acknowledgements

First and foremost a heartfelt thanks to my supervisor, whom I happily call *Doctor Gabriël Botma*. He was unwavering in his support and guidance – in a year that he was finishing his own doctoral thesis. I will always be grateful for the thorough and speedy responses to anything I submitted or asked. Gawie, this is yours as much as it is mine.

To all the editors and journalists at *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian* for sharing so generously of their time and coffee. A special thanks to **Nic Dawes** and **Liza Albrecht** for allowing me access to their newsrooms.

To everyone in Journalism Programme at the University of Pretoria: **Prof Pippa Green** – for all the encouragement and allowing me to disappear from the office; **Ms Lizette du Plessis** – for countless cups of coffee and just being you; and to **Rachel van der Westhuizen** and **Sam Moolman** for taking care of those rowdy first years.

Another thanks to **Sam Moolman** for editing my thesis – into the wee hours of the night. Also to **Dewald Terblanche** who swooped in to save me from shoddy floor plans.

To my friends for all their Facebook “likes” to my desperate posts, and especially to: **Rinette van Rensburg** – for being such a gracious hostess while I did my fieldwork; **Magriet en Hugo Pienaar** – for the room every time I visit Cape Town; **Kristien Andrianatos**, **Liesl Pretorius** and **Jacolette Kloppers** for making me believe this is possible; and to **Dr Nadia van der Merwe** for all the articles and collegial advice.

To my favourite bands and The Beat for keeping me sane. Music really does cure all things.

And lastly to my family who but who taught me what being social really means: **Dr Chris** and **Dr Annette Jordaan** – for the love, the snacks and listening to me; **Dr Annelet Kruger** – we did it!; **Christél Jordaan** – we will always have Stars’ Hollow; **Dr Lize Jordaan** – bring on the Kimberly road trip; and to **Jeanne Jordaan** – bring on the trashy movies.

I have a fan page for each of you in my heart.

Soli Deo Gloria

Abstract

In a time of uncertainty for newspapers due in part to dwindling circulation, loss of advertising revenue and declining readership, Internet-based technologies have continued to grow. The unprecedented rise of social media, of which Facebook and Twitter are well-known examples, has not gone unnoticed by the newspaper community. Despite their initial misgivings about the credibility of the information disseminated on these media, mainstream journalists worldwide have gradually started to adopt social media as professional tools. Social media serve as channels that help to funnel information towards journalists. Some newspaper journalists also use these media to broadcast news and promote their personal brands.

The continued use of social media on a professional level will arguably have an impact on the daily routines and cultures within a newsroom. Academic research in this area is limited, especially within the South African context. This study explores whether the professional use of social media, with specific reference to Facebook and Twitter, influences the processes and cultures of news selection and presentation at the South Africa newspapers *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian*. A newsroom study within a social constructionism paradigm employed a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methodologies, including self-administered questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and ethnography.

The main findings of this study were that the majority of journalists at *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian* used Facebook and Twitter actively on a professional level – mainly for trend tracking. The newsroom cultures were open and encouraging towards social media use. Journalists were also aware that social media create opportunities for their audiences to challenge the traditional roles of journalists and the realities constructed by the mainstream media. According to the journalists from *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian* the professional use of social media had not significantly altered their processes of news selection and presentation.

Opsomming

Terwyl koerante 'n onsekere tyd beleef, deels weens dalende sirkulasiesyfers, 'n verlies aan advertensie-inkomste en 'n afname in lesertalle, het Internetgebaseerde tegnologieë aanhou groei. Die ongekeerde groei van sosial media, waarvan Facebook en Twitter welbekende voorbeelde is, het nie ongesiens by die koerantgemeenskap verby gegaan nie. Ondanks hul aanvanklike bedenkinge oor die geloofwaardigheid van inligting wat op dié media versprei word, het hoofstroomjoernaliste wêreldwyd geleidelik begin om sosiale media as professionele hulpmiddels te aanvaar. Sosial media dien as kanale waardeur inligting na joernaliste vloei. Sommige koerantjoernaliste gebruik ook die media om nuus uit te saai en hul persoonlike handelsmerk te bemark.

Die volgehoue gebruik van sosial media op 'n professionele vlak sal bes moontlik 'n impak op die daaglikse roetine en kulture binne 'n nuuskantoor hê. Akademiese navorsing op die gebied is beperk, veral binne die Suid-Afrikaanse konteks. Hierdie navorsing ondersoek of die professionele gebruik van sosiale media, met spesifieke verwysing na Facebook en Twitter, 'n invloed het op die prosesse en kulture van nuusseleksie en -aanbieding by die Suid-Afrikaanse koerante *Rapport* en die *Mail & Guardian*. 'n Nuuskantoorstudie, binne 'n sosiale konstruktivisme paradigma, het 'n kombinasie van kwantitatiewe en kwalitatiewe navorsingsmetodologieë ingespan, insluitende: selfgeadministreerde vraelyste, halfgestruktureerde onderhoude en etnografie.

Die hoofbevindinge van die studie was dat die meerderheid van die joernaliste by *Rapport* en die *Mail & Guardian* Facebook en Twitter aktief op 'n professionele vlak gebruik het – hoofsaaklik om tendense dop te hou. Die nuuskantoor-kulture was oop en aanmoedigend teenoor die gebruik van sosiale media. Joernaliste was ook bewus daarvan dat sosiale media geleentheid skep vir hul gehore om die tradisionele rol van joernaliste, sowel as die realiteite wat deur die hoofstroommedia geskep word, te betwis. Volgens die joernaliste van *Rapport* en die *Mail & Guardian* het die professionele gebruik van sosiale media nie hul nuusinsamelings- en aanbiedingsprosesse noemenswaardig beïnvloed nie.

“It’s like asking whether being able to use a dictaphone instead of a shorthand notebook will help journalism or not. I think social media is such a basic part of what journalism should do now. Whether it helps you or not, is irrelevant. It’s part of what you do. If I had to answer the question [...]

social media is going to be the saving of journalism.”

Chris Roper, editor of the *Mail & Guardian Online* (14 July 2011)

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Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Motivation for study

This study results from my personal experiences as a practising journalist when I worked at the Afrikaans Sunday newspaper *Rapport* from 2005 to 2009, as well as interactions with fellow journalists at various publications during this period and soon thereafter.

Of relevance here is the founding of social networking on the Internet – specifically Facebook in February 2004 with Twitter following in March 2006. Social networks were, therefore, still quite a new phenomenon during my time at *Rapport*. At the time, it was difficult to gauge the impact of these new technologies on the inner workings of the newsroom and how it might change journalists' news routines in the future.

However, the following examples of engagement with Twitter or Facebook seemed to indicate a steady use of social media by journalists in *Rapport*'s newsroom since 2008:

- “Sosiale netwerke eerste met die nuus” (Social networks first with the news) (Jordaan, 2008): During the aftermath of the Mumbai terror attacks, I was tasked to write an overview article. While reading various reports on international news sites, I realised that most of them mentioned “tweets” from people on the ground at the affected sites. This was my first real professional experience of Twitter. I started monitoring Twitter and found that it served as an excellent source of information in this instance. Without social media as a resource it would have been very difficult to write articles about these events with the same kind of insight and background knowledge. I wrote this specific article about the virtues of social media and how it can be used to support traditional media. Matthew Buckland, then manager of publications and social media at 24.com, was quoted in the article as saying that social networks play an important part in “enriching” traditional journalism – “on the one side because information can be sent to them quicker and also because people can use them to give another side of events”.
- “Iranese verset hulle met ’n ge-Twitter” (Iranians resist a-Tweeting) (Van Wyk, 2009b): The journalist wrote about the social protests after the elections in Iran that were fuelled by social media. She not only referred to the postings and pictures that originated from that country, but also to the reaction of South African personalities on social media about the event.

- “800 m-ster heldin op internet” (800m star heroine on internet) (Van Wyk, 2009a): This journalist used social media to find examples of support for the embattled local athlete Caster Semenya when international athletic authorities were investigating whether she may compete as a female. The report referred specifically to Facebook and Twitter.
- “Bridges die ‘groenie’” (Bridges the ‘greenie’) (Van der Berg, 2010): The journalist here did a follow-up article on a controversial statement, with racist undertones, that the local singer Sunette Bridges made on her Facebook page. The journalist clearly monitored Facebook for comments and also directly quoted from the singer’s Facebook page.
- “Wêreld geniet Twitter-gespot met Malema” (World enjoys Twitter mocking of Malema) (Prince, 2010): This story resulted from threats by the ANC youth leader Julius Malema to shut down Twitter. The journalists used social media to compile responses to this “threat” and showed that discussions about it became an international trending topic on Twitter.
- “Pippa se boudjies, dit gaan oor haar boudjies” (Pippa’s bum, it’s all about her bum) (Groenewald, 2011): This article, about a topic related to the Royal Wedding of the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge, was based entirely on information from social media. The journalists clearly monitored social media, including Facebook and Twitter, for responses and comments about people’s appreciation of Ms Pippa Middleton’s bum.

These selected examples show that journalists from *Rapport* have used social media as a source of information, as a starting point for stories, and to keep abreast of current issues. In most cases it appears as that the journalists viewed social media as an opportunity to supplement their own research and writing and to gain valuable story ideas or to gather direct reader responses on issues already under discussion.

I must, however, add that not all journalists made use of social media during my time at *Rapport* and that some even viewed them as silly or distracting. Their hesitancy to welcome social media often stemmed from their experience of so-called “telephone journalism”¹ on its influence and the journalism profession and its product. The argument is that easy access to and the wide reach of social media might arguably pose a similar (if not greater) threat and could keep journalists in the office even more. However, while I was

¹ Due to time constraints reporters (especially the younger ones) often rely on telephonic conversations instead of face-to-face meetings with sources for their reporting.

working at *Rapport* I did not observe a dramatic shift to deskbound journalism brought on by social media specifically. What did happen, was that some journalists gradually started to use Facebook as their first port of call when looking for a source.

During my time at *Rapport* there was still a lot of division about whether the information on social media could be viewed as credible or not. No one was really sure when information was reliable and there was no clear policy on how to approach social media – either as a source or as a platform to distribute information.

However, by observing how some journalists use social media – specifically Facebook and Twitter – to aggregate news, keep up with news trends, generate story ideas and keep in touch with sources, I began to wonder if and how the advent of social media might influence how newspaper journalists approach their daily tasks and news routines. After I realised the value of Twitter as a news source, I started following trending topics and locating sources on both Twitter and Facebook. Since these social media are now both established with a huge following world-wide, I thought it would be valuable to see if and how local journalists have adapted to incorporate these media constructively, or whether they (still) see them as a threat.

1.2 Research problem

While print newspapers in most of the developed world² are suffering from a decline in readership and revenue (Santhanam & Rosenstiel, 2011), social media have been thriving. A recent study of more than 95 300 internet users across 59 countries estimates that there are around 1.5 billion visits to social networks per day worldwide (Universal McCann, 2011:10).

Although the outlook for newspapers in developing countries is slightly better³, social media are also having impacting on the media landscape in South Africa – possibly spurred on by an increase in the number of people browsing the Internet on their cellphones (World Wide Worx, 2011). As Wunsch-Vincent and Vickery (2010:6) state:

² This researcher is aware that the terms “developed” and “developing” countries may lead to an ideological debate. I use these terms to refer to the distinction as described by composite indices like the United Nations’ Human Development Index (“Human Development Index”, 2010) and the World Bank’s World Development Indicators (“World Development Indicators”, 2011). According to both, South Africa is a developing country.

³ Newspaper circulation across the African continent rose by 4.8% in 2009 compared to the previous year (Santhanam & Rosenstiel, 2011).

Paradoxically, while the print newspaper sector might be struggling, individuals are nonetheless confronted with an ever-increasing availability of diverse news.

The battle newspapers face is the result of a myriad of factors, ranging from economic pressure and lack of advertising to a decline in readership (Edmonds, Guskin, & Rosenstiel, 2011). The State of the News Media Report 2011 stresses that “the digital realm” will have a bigger influence on the future of journalism than a lack of audience or revenue will (Rosenstiel & Mitchell, 2011). News organisations depend, for instance, on news aggregators like Google and social networks like Facebook to bring them a substantial portion of their audience (Rosenstiel & Mitchell, 2011). While social media might not be the cause of the pressures some newspapers are experiencing, it is worth investigating their influence on traditional professional journalism – and whether social media are seen as a contributing factor to the precarious position in which a lot of newspapers worldwide are finding themselves in.

Social media have become an important “working tool” for journalists (Cision Media Research, 2010:1). A number of industry reports (Brunswick Research, 2011; Cision Media Research, 2010; Cision, 2009; McClure & Middleberg, 2009) have indicated a steady increase in the uptake of social media by journalists worldwide. Some of the findings conclude that three quarters of more than a 1 000 business journalists surveyed believe that social media’s influence of content and story angles is set to grow (Brunswick Research, 2011:5).

In a working paper for the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, Newman (2009) illustrates how journalists at prominent media institutions in the United States and the United Kingdom are already using social media to complement their reporting – both to gather and disseminate information. According to Newman (2009:50) early debates focused on the credibility and reliability of social media and whether they would destroy “old media”. Newman (2009:50) argues that the debate has recently become more constructive – finding a place for both the old and the new. According to Newman (2009:2), social media are threatening the role of traditional media as bearers of breaking news. Yet at the same time Newman (2009:50) says

... as the timeline of breaking news is compressed, it can be argued that there is an even greater need for traditional journalistic skills of sorting fact from fiction; selecting the key facts for a mass audience.

Social media use by newspaper journalists (as indicated by the above-mentioned studies) has, however, not been properly described in a South African context yet. As Wasserman (2010:10) argues in his study of tabloid journalism, theoretical debates on journalism and media studies too often ignore conditions in the “Global South” or what will in this study be referred to as “developing” countries. According to Wasserman (2010:10) the result is that

... theoretical frameworks and future predictions are often arrived at by extrapolating the experiences of a limited range of countries and regions to assume universal relevance.

Wasserman (2010:10) emphasises that journalism scholars must be aware that debates about the future of journalism should include different contexts and not just those of “media-saturated societies”. Keeping in mind that the Internet penetration rate in Africa is only 9.6% (International Telecommunication Union, 2010), one might for instance assume that the uptake of new and social media will not be happening at the same rate as in more developed societies. Therefore, although references might be made and comparisons drawn to international examples and theoretical frameworks, it is imperative to do empirical local studies.

This study aims to investigate the influence of social media on South African newspaper journalism, particularly with regard to changes in work routines and newsroom culture. Findings will arguably shed light on the central issue – whether social media can be regarded as a threat or opportunity for South African newspaper journalism.

1.3 Focus

As evidenced by a number of recent studies, newspaper journalists have not ignored the rise of social media (Brunswick Research, 2011; Cision Media Research, 2010; Cision, 2009; McClure & Middleberg, 2009). Journalists worldwide have started to use social media during news-gathering and sourcing as well as to promote themselves and their stories. Anecdotal evidence suggests that some journalists in South Africa have also started employing social media in this manner. TalkRadio702 reporter Mandy Wiener told the *Mail & Guardian* she

used Twitter during the Brett Kebble murder trial to make the story “accessible to many people” (Subramany, 2011). She included many of the tweets she sent from the courtroom while reporting on the trial in her critically acclaimed book, *Killing Kebble* (2011).

Although this might be an indication that social media have become part of newsrooms, the impact they have had on the inner workings and culture of newsrooms, especially in South African newspaper newsrooms, is not yet clear. This study aims to fill this research gap by exploring the use of social media by newspaper journalists and the change this usage has brought to their routines and newsroom culture.

In an earlier study of the impact of new technologies on the BBC newsroom, Cottle and Ashton (1999:40) found that journalists were slow in exploiting the benefits of these technologies. They (1999:26) stressed the need for focused newsroom studies to improve the understanding of the “complex interactions between changing news technologies and journalist practices, and their impact on news output”. This call is echoed by Saltzis and Dickinson (2008:217) who, in their study of media convergence within British media organisations, questioned whether traditional concepts and ideals of news production are being challenged and how the work of journalists are being affected

This newsroom study of two South African weekly newspapers, *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian*, will investigate the influence of social media usage on news routines and newsroom culture.

While tabloid newspapers in South Africa are bucking international trends mostly by maintaining high circulation (Audit Bureau of Circulations of South Africa, 2011d), apparently most of them have been slow to adapt to new technologies. For instance, the country’s biggest daily newspaper, the *Daily Sun* (a tabloid), did not even have a working website when this study was written, neither did the two Cape Town-based tabloids, *Son* and the *Daily Voice*. Only the Afrikaans Sunday tabloid, *Sondag*, had both a website and a presence on social media, including Facebook and Twitter.

However, Wasserman (2010:20) contends that the “quality” press in South Africa have been quick to adapt to international trends in convergence and interactivity “in an attempt to halt declining circulation figures”. This includes the incorporation of new platforms like Facebook and Twitter.

It follows that, although tabloids are important players within the South African newspaper market, they will not be ideal subjects for a study on social media usage, since they have not implemented (and are apparently not using) these technologies professionally

and on a noticeable scale. One might argue that these trends reflect the poorer working class target market, although it is difficult to generalise without further inquiry.

Rapport is South Africa's biggest Afrikaans commercial newspaper, but it has recently shown a noteworthy decline in circulation. Its total circulation dipped by 12% from 275 388 to 241 286 year-on-year in the second quarter of 2011 (Audit Bureau of Circulations, 2011b). Part of its editorial mission is to campaign for Afrikaans and a multiparty democracy ("*Rapport se redaksionele missie*", 2009). The *Mail & Guardian*, an independent weekly English newspaper, focuses on political analysis, investigative reporting and Southern Africa news ("*Mail & Guardian: About Us*", 2011). It has recently shown a steady increase in total circulation – growing by almost 5% from 45 745 to 48 016 year-on-year in the second quarter of 2011 (Audit Bureau of Circulations, 2011c).

Rapport is arguably a good representation of the mainstream newspaper market and the Afrikaans press. It is the widest-reaching Afrikaans newspaper, penetrating around 23% of the total first-language speaking Afrikaans market in South Africa (De Beer, personal communications, 1 July 2011) and has the second highest circulation of all weekend newspapers (Audit Bureau of Circulations, 2011b).

According to its website ("*Mail & Guardian: About Us*", 2011) the *Mail & Guardian* caters for an English "niche market" who are interested in a "critical approach" to news. Its readership predominantly comprises from "professionals, academics, diplomats, lobbyists and non-governmental groups" ("*Mail & Guardian: About Us*", 2011).

Rapport is owned by Media24, a subsidiary of Naspers, one of the four largest media companies in South Africa. The *Mail & Guardian*, however, is independently owned and run by M&G Media, whose proprietor is the Zimbabwean-born businessman, Trevor Ncube. By looking at newspapers that function within different ownership structures and target different demographics, this study should be able to provide a nuanced understanding of the professional use of social media in the newsroom.

Although these two newspapers differ in terms of target markets and ownership, they are both distributed weekly, and have similar deadlines and production routines, which is what this study is focusing on. It might contribute to an understanding of the local media landscape⁴ to describe how these two newspapers, with similar production schedules, are reacting to the introduction of a new variable: social media.

⁴ The researcher is aware that the size of the research population of this study – around 30 journalists and editors in total – will make it difficult to generalise the findings to the larger newspaper journalist population in South Africa. It should, however, serve as a solid case study and basis for future research.

It is important to note, however, that while both newspapers publish weekly print editions and have websites attached to their brands, the online editions of the newspapers are not comparable. *Rapport*'s website consists mainly of that week's hard copy articles and is maintained by a single web editor. The *Mail & Guardian Online*, however, is run by a team of dedicated reporters and editors and is updated regularly – often with original reports. Whether the presence of online journalists working amongst print journalists has changed traditional newspaper journalists' attitudes towards social media, might also become apparent from this study.

The social media under investigation will be limited to Facebook and Twitter as they are two of the most popular social networking platforms in South Africa, respectively rated as the 2nd and 6th most visited sites in the country (Alexa, 2011). Both *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian* – as brands – maintain a lively social media presence on both Facebook and Twitter.

The focus of this study will therefore be an exploration of the nature and extent of the changes that Facebook and Twitter usage by journalists of *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian* have brought to their newsroom routine and culture.

1.4 Literature study

1.4.1 Social media and newspaper journalism

According to the World Association of Newspapers (2010) new media platforms are gaining market share as technologies evolve and digital sectors advance, while traditional media see limited growth or decreasing shares overall. News is increasingly shaped by users' desire for constant "on-the-go" updates – matching their greater mobility – and their wish to participate in the creation of content and to witness and share news (Wunsch-Vincent & Vickery, 2010). News has turned into a "social experience" (Purcell, Rainie, Mitchell, Rosenstiel, & Olmstead, 2010). Users are no longer passive receivers of news content, but they increasingly use social networks and social networking technology to "filter, assess and react to news" (Purcell et al., 2010:2). One of the biggest recent world-wide studies on social media, namely *Wave.5: The socialisation of brands*, describes social media as more than "hype" (Universal McCann, 2010:10). According to the social media statistics website Socialbakers, Facebook had 665 million users by April 2011 ("Facebook gains 80 million news accounts", 2011). On its fifth birthday in March 2011 Twitter released a blog stating there are around 500 000 new

Twitter accounts created every day with more than 140 million tweets sent out daily (“Happy Birthday Twitter!”, 2011). According to Universal McCann (2011:10) social media is

... an explosively dynamic phenomenon that is changing the way we interact and that is having a fundamental effect on our thoughts, feelings, attitudes and behaviour.

A study by Newman (2009:2) on the influence of social media on mainstream journalism in the United Kingdom and America found that journalists are beginning to embrace social media tools like Twitter, blogs and Facebook. More than half of the journalists surveyed in an industry study, co-researched by the George Washington University in the United States, also stated the importance of social media for reporting and producing the stories they write (Cision, 2009). The study is based on the responses of 371 journalists of whom three quarters worked at print publications. Raymond and Lu (2011:8) also found that journalists use Facebook to assist them in their “story research and investigation”. In a May/April 2011 industry study of around 500 journalists worldwide⁵, almost 50% said they use Twitter to source new story angles; about a third use Facebook (Oriella PR Network, 2011). In a similar survey of 200 journalists by the Society for New Communications Research (2011), 75% said they use Facebook in their reporting, while 69% use Twitter. Almost half of these journalists agree that social media are an increasingly important part of journalism (Society for New Communications Research, 2011). At the same time, most of them (almost 70%) do not feel that social media technologies and citizen journalism will “ultimately lead to the demise of the journalism profession” (Society for New Communications Research, 2011).

Nobil Ahmad (2010:151) writes that Twitter is used as a collaborative research tool by editors and journalists and as a way of “collaborating” with users. This view is supported by Lenatti (2009:3) who emphasises that newspapers and editors could, as the popularity of social media grow, act as a filter for the information they consider to be most valuable. Lavrusik (2010) elaborates on the possibility of social media as a tool for investigative journalists. He (ibid.) believes social media are enabling “watchdog journalism” to prosper. Business journalists across the world are also finding more leads for their stories on social media (Brunswick Research, 2011).

Newman (2009) looks at various real world examples from (amongst others) the *Guardian*, the *Telegraph* and the *New York Times*, of how media organisations have

⁵ The study included journalists from Brazil, Eastern Europe, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Sweden, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and the United States.

incorporated social media into their news production cycles. In his study Newman (2009:6) found that mainstream media organisations are

... engaging hard to try and understand the ethical and social challenges raised by the rapid growth of personal and social media.

It is important to note that the use of social media started in most organisations as a series of “bottom-up experiments”, but has since expanded to include formal, coordinated activities (Newman, 2009:23). The *New York Times*, for instance, appointed its first social media editor in 2009 (Kirkpatrick, 2009). Publications like the *Guardian* (Confino, 2010) and news agencies like Reuters (“Reporting from the Internet”, 2011) also instituted ethical codes for online and social media use. Reuters encourages its journalists to use social media, but also warns them to be aware of the risks involved (“Reporting from the Internet”, 2011). These perceived risks include losing independence, not accurately citing sources originating from social media and not distinguishing between private and professional identities on social media. Journalists have increasingly been getting into trouble because of their engagement with social media. Recent South African examples include sport commentator and writer Tank Lanning being fired by SuperSport after sending a tweet from an SA Rugby workshop where the content was supposed to be confidential (Alfreds, 2011) as well as a *Mail & Guardian* intern, Ngoako Matsha, being suspended for making an anti-Semitic comment during a personal discussion on Facebook (“M&G intern suspended”, 2011).

In her discussion about the rise of new media, Usher (2010:913) talks about the “empowered audience” who contribute to the creation of content and change news into a conversation. She (2010:913) argues that new media offer “the potential to challenge traditional journalism’s practices, assumptions and power”. Usher gathered the thoughts and writings of journalists who left or were forced to leave newspapers because of economic or other pressures. Some of the journalists described to her their struggle to understand how to incorporate new technology into the work they do. According to Usher (2010:914)

... nothing is reliable anymore – the occupational routines that journalists engaged in have been replaced by ones that include ready and rapid response to incorporating the web, for instance.

Traditional newsrooms have had to adapt because of economic pressures and the resulting loss of personnel (Rosenstiel & Mitchell, 2011). Although “their aspirations have narrowed

and their journalists are stretched thinner”, they are younger, adapt easier and are more engaged with new media and user-created content (Rosenstiel & Mitchell, 2011). According to Rosenstiel and Mitchell (2011)

... in some ways, new media and old, slowly and sometimes grudgingly, are coming to resemble each other.

One might therefore argue that while traditional newsrooms are becoming smaller, they are also becoming better acquainted with multimedia and are starting to communicate on different platforms with their users. As such, the mainstream media can create content that not only incorporates both different media formats, but also different voices through user-generated content.

Newman, Dutton and Blank (2011:24) also argue that social media formats have begun to influence the nature of news itself. According to them (2011:24)

... Twitter hashtags⁶ and Facebook comments have become part of the daily currency of news output, the blog and micro-blog format has been widely adopted as a way of providing regular short updates on a story through the day and news journalists have begun to have more regular contact with audiences on a daily basis.

1.4.2 Challenges and opportunities for newspapers

The number of printed newspaper titles, their circulation and readership are in decline worldwide (Wunsch-Vincent & Vickery, 2010). According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)⁷ the growth of the global newspaper market slowed progressively from 2004 down to zero growth in 2007 and negative growth since 2008 (Wunsch-Vincent & Vickery, 2010:17).

As part of the State of the News Media 2011 Report, Santhanam and Rosenstiel (2011) discuss various factors that influence the health of a country’s newspaper industry. According to them (2011) these include the possibility of more readers due to rising literacy rates and an increase in available disposable income. At the same time a high online

⁶ The hashtag is used to add a subject keyword such as #SouthAfrica to a post, mostly on Twitter,

⁷ This study is mostly based on findings from countries that are part of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development of which South African is not a member. Other developing nations, like Mexico and Chile have, however, been included in this study.

penetration rate as well as an economic structure that depends a lot on income from advertisers, might put the newspaper industry at risk (Santhanam & Rosenstiel, 2011). According to this analysis, print newspapers have been hard hit in the developed world in terms of declining readership and revenue, while circulation in some developing countries is still on the rise. The United States saw a 10.6% decline in paid newspaper circulation from 2008 to 2009, while Africa saw a 4.8% rise in the same period (Santhanam & Rosenstiel, 2011) This growth of newspapers in developing countries may be temporary though, because these countries are also shifting to new technologies (Picard, quoted in Santhanam & Rosenstiel, 2011).

According to Wunsch-Vincent and Vickery (2010:12), besides competition from traditional sources like radio and television, newspapers also have the attraction of Internet-based news sources (especially for younger readers) to contend with. “It has never been easier, quicker and cheaper to access news,” argue Wunsch-Vincent and Vickery (2010:12). This OECD study (Wunsch-Vincent & Vickery, 2010:44) found that few readers are willing to pay for their news online and even if they are willing, the amounts discussed “will not fundamentally shift newspaper industry economics”.

Despite the challenges faced by newspapers, many of them have seized the opportunities offered by new technologies to engage with their audiences or enhance the quality of their journalism, state Wunsch-Vincent and Vickery (2010:58-59). Newman (2009:7) also stresses the ability of social networks to help journalists tell better stories, make better relationships and get new users in.

1.4.3 Overview of the South African press landscape

The democratisation of South Africa in 1994 has had a significant impact on the print media industry – both in terms of editorial and ownership shifts (Wasserman & De Beer, 2005:37). Before 1994 the South African media was mostly split along ideological lines that corresponded with language preference (Wasserman & De Beer, 2005:38). Some authors distinguish between the English, Afrikaans, Black and Alternative press strands during South Africa’s pre-democracy history (Kolbe, 2005). From 1948, during the apartheid era, various laws were instituted that restricted press freedom and put journalists in conflict with the authorities (Kolbe, 2005:68-72).

Democratisation resulted in a shift away from the largely white-owned mainstream media, with alternative newspapers disappearing or being taken up into the mainstream print

media (Wasserman & De Beer, 2005:38). The introduction of a new constitution (“Constitution of the Republic of South Africa”, 1996) also ensured freedom of expression. The suggestion of a Media Appeals Tribunal by the ANC has, however, posed a threat to this freedom as well as to the self-regulatory measures of the media (Berger, 2010). Efforts by the ANC to introduce a Protection of State Information Bill has also been seen as an attempt to hamper the efforts of those who “publish secrets to reveal wrongdoing” (“Editorial: The sound of victory”, 2011). Following a strong public outcry against the bill the parliamentary vote to pass this bill was indefinitely postponed in September 2011. While the debates around the so-called “Secrecy Bill” raged on, the Press Council of South Africa instituted a task team to evaluate the self-regulating measures of the press (“Press Council of South Africa endorses media self regulation”, 2011). Following this process, amendments to the South African press code, which include clauses on “privacy, dignity, public interest and the use of anonymous sources” came into effect on 15 October 2011 (“Amendments to press code”, 2011). After the internal process of the press council the South African National Editor’s Forum and Print Media South Africa also came together to form a Press Freedom Commission to take an “independent look at the regulation of print media in SA” (Press Freedom Commission, 2011).

At the moment there are four primary players in the print media market in South Africa: Media24, Independent Newspapers, Avusa and Caxton (Media Development & Diversity Agency, 2009:16). These four media corporations are responsible for the production of most of the commercial newspapers in South Africa – 66 titles at the end of 2010 (Audit Bureau of Circulations of South Africa, 2011d). Notable exceptions are the independently owned weekly newspaper the *Mail & Guardian* and the recently launched daily newspaper *The New Age*. The *Mail & Guardian* is published by M&G Media, of which the Zimbabwean businessman Trevor Ncube is the proprietor. *The New Age* is published by TNA Media which was established in June 2010 and of which the Indian business tycoon Atul Gupta is executive chairman.

Wasserman and De Beer (2005:39) argue that the increasingly competitive media market post-1994 has had a detrimental effect on the local media market. It has led to the “tabloidisation” of the media, a reduction of staff, the juniorisation of newsrooms, a preference for commercial imperatives in making editorial judgements and an erosion of specialised reporting (Wasserman & De Beer, 2005:39). According to Harber (2004) South Africa, after 1994, had “more media but a smaller range of opinion”. Wasserman and De Beer (2005:39) also contend that despite the introduction of new titles since democratisation

and attempts to deracialise the ownership and editorial composition, little has changed in terms of “[broadening] the public sphere to encourage a more participatory, democratic exchange of perspectives”. Wasserman (2010:30) later explains, however, that although most tabloids were introduced by media conglomerates to tap into a “lucrative” working class market segment, they still might have the ability to open up alternative discourses.

Wasserman and De Beer (2005:40) say the “broadening” of the range of channels, including the Internet, for information distribution should contribute to a more open society and a media sphere in a post-apartheid South Africa with the potential to strengthen democracy. Internet use, via broadband connections and cellphones, has steadily been on the increase amongst South Africans (World Wide Worx 2010 & 2011). An increase in Internet usage enables the convergence of services, like voice, video and text, which used to be offered separately by mainstream media (World Wide Worx, 2010). According to World Wide Worx (2010) “today’s consumers in South Africa have more options than ever before”.

i) ***Rapport***

Rapport was established by Nasionale Pers (now known as Naspers) in 1970, when Sunday papers *Die Beeld* and *Dagbreek* were amalgamated (“Naspers – Company History”). The majority of the newspaper’s readers (around 85%) fall in the LSM⁸ 7 to 10 categories (De Beer, personal communications, 1 July 2011). Most of the readers are either between 35 and 49 years old (31.4%) or older than 50 (34.4%) (ibid.). In 2010 *Rapport*’s readers were 70% white, 27% coloured and 3% black (ibid.) Herman Jansen⁹, deputy editor of *Rapport*, describes the newspaper’s readers as “somewhere between blue collar and white collar” and maintains that there are very few intellectuals who read the paper.

Rapport campaigns for press freedom and economic freedom, human rights, a multiparty democracy and a peaceful and prosperous South Africa (“Rapport se redaksionele missie, 2009). Its journalists often receive nominations and awards in local journalism competitions (“Mondi Shanduka Newspaper Awards”, 2010; “Finalists in 10th Mondi Shanduka Newspaper Awards”, 2011).

⁸ The Living Standard Measure (LSM) is a South African market research tool used to categorise people based on criteria such as degree of urbanisation and ownership of appliances.

⁹ Jansen said this to the researcher in an informal conversation during the period of ethnographic research discussed in Chapter 6.

The newspaper has a website¹⁰, with ample space for reader interaction, a Facebook page with, at the time of writing, around 2 500 fans and a Twitter-feed with around 1 200 followers. Various journalists at the newspaper also have their own Twitter accounts¹¹. This amount of social media interaction does, however, not match the reach of the print version of the newspaper, which is the Afrikaans newspaper with the furthest reach and is overall the second biggest weekend newspaper in the country (Audit Bureau of Circulations, 2011b).

ii) ***Mail & Guardian***

The *Mail & Guardian* originated as *The Weekly Mail* in 1985 (“Mail & Guardian – History”). Most of the original staff members came from the liberal newspapers *Rand Daily Mail* and the *Sunday Express*, both of which closed down (De Waal, 2010:10). The *Weekly Mail* was renamed the *Mail & Guardian* in 1995, largely due to its close relationship with and the investment of the *Guardian* newspaper in London (“Mail & Guardian – History”). Zimbabwean-born businessman Trevor Ncube, who won a German African Award in 2008 for his contribution to media freedom, has been the proprietor of the newspaper since 2002 (Ncube, 2010:7).

According to Nic Dawes (personal communications, 13 July 2011), editor-in-chief of the *Mail & Guardian*, its readership is well-educated, with the highest proportion of people having tertiary and post-graduate degrees. Dawes (ibid.) says most of the papers’ readers are concentrated in the LSM 8 to 10 categories and are “broadly speaking reflective of South Africa’s population”.

The paper is renowned for its investigative reporting and exposés on corruption, with many of its reporters being awarded for their work in this field on a regular basis (Print “Mondi Shanduka – 2006 awards; “Mondi Shanduka Newspaper Awards”, 2010; “Finalists in 10th Mondi Shanduka Newspaper Awards”, 2011).

The *Mail & Guardian Online* was the first internet-based news publication in Africa when it was launched in 1994 (“Mail & Guardian – About us”). Although the Internet publication works closely with the print version, it has its own dedicated staff and editor. The site has an active blogging community, known as Thoughtleader, and various Twitter-feeds. The personalised tweets from the *Mail & Guardian* team has more than 28 000 followers. Its

¹⁰ The links to the websites, Facebook pages and Twitter feeds of *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian* as consulted at the time of writing are included as part of the references

¹¹ This comment is based on a preliminary search on Twitter by the researcher according to the names of reporters as they appear in *Rapport*. This list is accessible at <http://twitter.com/#!/MarenetJordaan/rapport>

recently relaunched Facebook page has around 8 100 fans. Compared to *Rapport* and considering that the print version of the newspaper only sells around 50 000 copies per week (Ncube, 2010:7), this is quite a substantial social media presence. The newspaper has a strong mobile presence and also launched the first e-reader (Kindle) version of the newspaper in February 2011.

1.4.4 Changing times – changing practice

As Usher (2010) found in her discussions with journalists, the work routines of journalists are *inter alia* influenced by changes in the external environment, like the introduction of new technologies. Other researchers have also studied how journalists' decision-making processes and news routines change in times of crisis, disaster or change: like the introduction of new technologies at the British Broadcasting Corporation (Cottle & Ashton, 1999), the reform in China's journalism by the introduction of market forces (Pan, 2000) and the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centre in New York on 11 September 2001 (Olsson, 2009).

One can therefore reasonably conclude that changes in and pressures on a newsroom linked to the introduction of social media necessitate a renewed look at how journalists approach the way they gather and produce news.

Klinenberg (2005:49) argues strongly for a renewed interest in newsroom studies when he says

... if, indeed, there is consensus that media products are central to the operations of different fields of action, it is surprising that sociologists have stopped examining how organizations responsible for producing the news and information work.

According to Cottle and Ashton (1999), Saltzis and Dickinson (2008), and Hermans, Vergeer and D'Haenens (2009), newsroom studies are still relevant to explore and describe the impact of technology on newsrooms and news routines. Hermans et al. (2009:139) have found that the Internet, for instance, has brought shifts to news flows, daily journalistic routines and professional accountability. Cottle and Ashton (1999:22) used a newsroom study to make a case against technological determinism when they studied the influence of new technologies on news production at the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC).

As discussed in section 1.4.1, some newspaper journalists seem to have already started to incorporate social media into their news-gathering and production routines. This

study aims to explore the influence of newsroom culture – or *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1990) – as well as possible variations in the work routines within the newsrooms of *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian* as a result of the professional use of social media, like Facebook and Twitter.

This newsroom study will work within a critical, social constructionist paradigm to explore and describe newsroom *habitus* and work routines at *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian*.

The critical, or alternative, research paradigm of mass communication and media research advocates that one has to view meaning as constructed, and that one has to keep the social situation and the audience's interests in mind when decoding messages (McQuail, 2010:67). This research tradition also turns to more qualitative research and adopts an "interpretative and constructionist perspective" (McQuail, 2010:68). Social constructionism views the world as the "object of our actions and interactions" (Schutz, 1945:534). According to Gergen (2009:2) social constructionism holds the view that

... what we take to be the world importantly depends on how we approach it, and how we approach it depends on the social relationships of which we are a part.

Reality is therefore a result of people's actions, instead of (as traditional or positivist researchers argue) something out there that people can just observe. Tuchman (1978:182) supports this argument when she talks about news as "constructed reality".

The next three sections briefly introduce the theoretical assumptions underlying this study.

i) Personal and newsroom *habitus*

The use of Bourdieu's field theory, and specifically the *habitus* concept, might serve to try and bridge the gap left by newsroom studies that focused mostly on structure and routine. A complete analysis of Bourdieu's field theory falls without the scope of this study, but it is important to take note of the field concept, described by Bourdieu (2005:30) as

... the site of actions and reactions performed by social agents endowed with permanent dispositions, partly acquired in their experiences of these social fields.

Schultz (2007:190) argues that the field perspective contributes a “promising analytical framework to re-invigorate the genre of news ethnography”. According to Bourdieu (2005:33), it is not enough to have knowledge of the world that surrounds the journalistic field since

... part of what is produced in the world of journalism cannot be understood unless one conceptualizes this microcosm as such and endeavours to understand the effects that the people engaged in this microcosm exert on one another.

To understand this microcosm, it was important to pay specific attention to the newsroom *habitus* at the newspapers under investigation. Benson and Neveu (2005b:3) argue that the concept of *habitus* expresses a “reasonable hypothesis”

... that individuals’ predispositions, assumptions, judgments, and behaviours are the result of a long-term process of socialization, most importantly in the family, and secondarily, via primary, secondary, and professional education.

Benson and Neveu (2005b:3) emphasise that *habitus* is not unchangeable, but rather constantly being modified. But Bourdieu (1990:61) argues that the *habitus* will defend itself against change by rejecting information – “if exposed to it accidentally or by force” – capable of calling into question the information that is already part of its history and make-up. Following Bourdieu’s reasoning, one might therefore assume that changes within the newsroom will be met with resistance from the journalists within. This view is supported by, for instance, Ryfe’s 18 month long ethnographic study of an American daily newspaper where a new editor was brought in to introduce new news-gathering and reporting practices (Ryfe, 2011). He found that the culture of professionalism in the newsrooms is “remarkably resilient and resistant to change” and that the resistance to change is “institutional and cultural” (Ryfe, 2011:166). According to Ryfe (2011:166):

... deviations from their basic routines and practices may threaten journalists’ ability to find and transform information into news, and may also trouble deep-seated conceptions of identity and value within the profession.

Social media may also be viewed as an agent of change within newspaper newsrooms. This study will investigate the influence of the newsroom *habitus* on the levels of acceptance and use of social media as a professional tool at *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian*.

The first theoretical assumption of this study is thus that newspaper journalists have an individual and collective *habitus* which influences the way they react and adapt to external influences, like the introduction of social media as a professional tool.

ii) Structuring of time and typification of news

The very nature of news “stresses the novelty of information as its defining principle” (Deuze, 2011:22). According to Deuze (ibid.)

... the work of journalists therefore involves notions of speed, fast decision-making, hastiness, and working in accelerated real-time.

In order to keep up with the demands of their fast-paced environment and the speed at which decisions have to be made, news workers usually develop certain routines and standard practices. Shoemaker and Reese (1996:108) emphasise that media routines do not develop “randomly”. According to Shoemaker and Reese (1996:108)

... given finite organizational resources and an infinite supply of potential raw material, routines are practical responses to the needs of media organizations and workers.

One of the pioneers of the study of news work, the American sociologist Gaye Tuchman, argues that the news media plan their days by assessing occurrences as news events – mostly as influenced by the structuring of time (Tuchman, 1978:41). She describes, for instance, how the working hours of journalists might influence the assessment of occurrences as potential news events, simply because there are fewer reporters available to cover stories early in the morning or late at night. There are so many things happening at the same time, that it is impossible to consider all of them as news events because each of them is “a potential drain upon the news organization’s temporal and staff resources” (Tuchman, 1978:45).

In an environment where the supply of raw material available as occurrences for news outweighs the traditional media products available to report on them, the routinisation of news work becomes a “crucial strategy” (Deuze, 2008:20). According to Deuze (2008:20),

the acceleration of news flow and the added pressure of citizens who are not only consuming but also producing news, makes it imperative for news workers to be able to standardise “existing ways of doing things”.

In their study of 51 000 global Internet consumers during 2010, GlobalWebIndex (2011) found that the majority of people’s involvement in social media now consists of “real-time” opinions, links or shared content through status updates. According to GlobalWebIndex

... this radically changes the impact of social media, by primarily creating an ongoing shared agenda and conversation, that steers consumer involvement towards reacting or interacting with live events and discourse, rather than creating their own agenda or content.

Keeping in mind that social media serve to provide a near constant flow of information, it becomes even more important for journalists, who want to incorporate social media into their news routines, to be able to structure their time and schedule events as news.

This study aims to describe how newspaper journalists at *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian* adapt their schedules and time management to accommodate social media.

Tuchman (1978:46) argues that news reporters try to anticipate the impact potential occurrences will have upon their resources by referring to a flexible list of story types – just like doctors differentiate among diseases depending on how much time and resources they will demand from the hospital and staff. According to Tuchman (1973:117)

... because typifications are embedded in practical tasks in everyday life, they provide a key to understanding how newsmen (sic.) decrease the variability of events as the raw material of news.

Tuchman (1978:50) found that journalists use different story types to describe the practical tasks involved in producing those stories and the synchronisation of their work with likely news occurrences. She (1978:51) distinguishes between hard news, soft news, spot news, continuing news and developing news. News workers’ main distinction seems to be between hard news and soft news (Tuchman, 1978:47). While hard news will be obsolete if it is not distributed in a timely fashion, soft news does not need to be timely (Tuchman, 1978:51).

The basic premise which is relevant to this study is that the distinction between news types influences the way journalists plan and execute the gathering and dissemination of information. An analysis of how journalists distinguish between news types, with specific

reference to “hard news” and “soft news” (Tuchman, 1978:47), in view of the advent of social media, might be useful as starting point for a description of possible changes in news production.

Boczkowski (2009:100) describes the distinction between hard news and soft news as partly one of temporality. While hard news has an urgency to it, soft news stories can be disseminated in various news cycles, “without detriment to their newsworthiness” (Boczkowski, 2009:100). In his ethnographic study of an online newsroom in Argentina, Boczkowski showed that, because of “a growing separation in the temporal patterns” of hard news and soft news production, there developed a clearer distinction between these two types of news (Boczkowski, 2009:98). This study will investigate whether the professional use of social media by journalists at *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian* influences the way these journalists perceive the distinction between hard news and soft news.

The second theoretical assumption of this study is that newspaper journalists follow certain routines and typologies during the manufacturing of news and that these routines and typologies will be influenced by environmental and technological changes and/or pressures, such as the introduction of social media as a professional tool.

iii) Beats and sources

In her discussion on news routines, Tuchman touches on the division of labour within the newsroom through the “beats” system (Tuchman, 1978:27). Journalists specialise, either geographically or according to certain topics, to ensure better overall news coverage (Tuchman, 1978:25-31). According to Becker (2001) the beat structures were developed in response to “a need for routines”. After doing her ethnographic newsroom studies Tuchman (1978:21) argued that news media

... place reporters at legitimated institutions where stories supposedly appealing to contemporary news consumers may be expected to be found.

Gans ([1979] 2004:116) describes the relationship between journalists and sources as a “dance”, with both parties seeking access to each other and taking turns to lead. According to Gans ([1979] 2004:117), “the ability to provide suitable information” is the most crucial factor for sources who want to successfully gain access to journalists. Gans argues that even sources who are not powerful might gain access to journalists because the latter have an

“insatiable appetite for story ideas and stories” ([1979] 2004:121) At the same time, sources who bombard journalists with so much information that “some of it cannot help but turn into news”, might also have the upper hand on sources who are less organised (Gans, [1979] 2004:117).

This study will describe if and how the beat structure at *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian* have been adjusted because of the influence of social media and how different beat journalists use social media.

According to Becker and Vlad (2009:65) one of the main reasons for the creation of beats was to enable the creation of story ideas. The concept of story ideation is also closely linked to journalists’ relationships with their sources, since the more sources journalists have, the better their chances of filing a story every day (Tuchman, 1978:68). It is important to clarify here that sources in this study refer to what Gans ([1979] 2004:117) calls

... people with a chance to provide information that promotes their interests, to publicize their ideas, or in some cases, just to get their names and faces into the news.

Since members of the public also serve as sources for journalists, it would give insight to investigate how journalists’ relationships with their sources have been influenced by the rise of new technologies like social media. The need of journalists to gather information from their sources, like government officials, experts or press conferences, also have an influence on the routines of a media organisation (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996:127).

Technology plays a role in these relationships between journalists and their sources, by (amongst other things) diminishing the face-to-face or voice-to-voice communication time (Berkowitz, 2009:112). With the advent of new technologies, news consumers have increasingly become producers of content themselves (Deuze, 2008:12). Journalists do not have the power they once had as traditional intermediaries between public institutions and news consumers (Deuze, 2008:12). People are also increasingly taking part in “real-time” conversations – “reacting and interacting with live events” instead of promoting their own agenda by writing blogs, for instance (GlobalWebIndex, 2011). Some journalists remain wary, however, of sources they find on the Internet because of their tendency to be untrustworthy, and thereby undermine the journalists’ credibility (Ruggiero, 2004:98).

This study will describe the way journalists at *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian* have adjusted their relationships with their sources because of the influence of social media.

The third theoretical assumption of the study is that the news routines and story ideation of newspaper journalists are influenced by the way beats are structured at these newspapers and that the introductions of new technologies like social media will influence this structure, the generation of story ideas and the journalists' relationships with their sources.

In summary, this study works from the theoretical assumption that:

- newspaper journalists have an individual and collective *habitus*
- newspaper journalists follow certain routines during the manufacturing of news
- news routines and story ideation of newspaper journalists are influenced by the way beats are structured, as well as by journalists' relationships with their sources

and that all of the above will in some way be influenced by the introduction of an external factor, like social media as a professional tool.

1.5 Gaps in the field of research

A preliminary search on academic databases, such as NRF-Nexus, Google Scholar and the catalogues of both the libraries at the University of Pretoria and the University of Stellenbosch indicates that there has not been in-depth scholarly work published about the relationship between social media and newspaper journalism in South Africa. Nor has there been any specific studies pertaining to *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian* within this research area.

The focus of the most recent local research seems to be on the influence of the Internet and media convergence. Van Noort (2007), for instance, looks at reporters' and editors' attitudes towards newsroom convergence at the *Mail & Guardian*. The study was done during the launch period of convergence at the newspaper and the researcher found that, although there was a general positive attitude towards convergence, there was still uncertainty about a proper definition of the term as well as a number of structural and organisational difficulties (Van Noort, 2007:73-74).

Research on "new" technologies and their impact on journalism still focus mainly on the Internet, email and mobile phones. Mabweazara (2010) describes the importance of ethnographic studies when looking at the use of these technologies by Zimbabwean journalists. He also emphasised the importance of looking at these technologies within, not

only the bigger journalistic context, but specifically in a local geographic context (Mabweazara, 2009).

This study is also informed by Tuchman's seminal work on the nature and routinisation of news work: *Making News: a study in the construction of reality* (1978). The application of newsroom studies to understand news production has a long-standing tradition in journalism research (see Dickinson, 2007; Becker & Vlad, 2009). Recent studies and discussions on media convergence and the influence of technology on news production have made renewed calls for the application of newsroom studies to journalism research (Klinenberg, 2005; Saltzis & Dickinson, 2008; Kumar, 2009). Klinenberg (2005:49), however, laments the fact that researchers, when describing how organisations responsible for producing the news and information work, often have to cite work that is several decades old and are no longer reliable enough to explain how newsrooms work today. According to Klinenberg (2005:49-50), scholars often rely on "anecdotal" evidence of how changes in the media industry have affected conditions of news production, but rarely follow up by going into newsrooms and asking reporters and editors how they constructed their stories.

This study will, however, employ direct interaction and observation to describe the reactions and perceptions that journalists at *Rapport* and the *Mail and Guardian* have of the influence of social media on their practices.

Although the field theory, including the *habitus* concept, of the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu have been applied to journalism, see for instance (Botma 2008a & b; Benson & Neveu, 2005a; Schultz, 2007), preliminary searches on academic databases and Google Scholar did not yield any research where the influence of individual or collective newsroom *habitus* on the introduction of new technologies, with specific reference to social media, is investigated.

Academic research on the relationship between social media and newspaper journalism is hard to come by. Industry reports (Cision, 2009; McClure & Middleberg, 2009; Cision Media Research, 2010; Brunswick Research, 2011) seem to be the most up-to-date resources, but care must obviously be taken from a neutral academic perspective because of the commercial and often commissioned nature of these projects.

Research on the South African social media landscape and its relationship to newspaper journalism is especially difficult to find and will have to be supplemented by semi-structured interviews with industry experts¹².

1.6 Problem statement

The background provided in the chapter thus far illustrates that newspapers worldwide, and in South Africa, are increasingly facing pressure to survive and remain relevant. Social media cannot be seen as the only, or even the main, contributing factor to the economic, technological and resource-related hardships newspapers have to endure. However, the literature study in this chapter shows that social media have not gone unnoticed by journalists. While there have not been many academic studies done to investigate the influence of social media on journalism, industry studies have shown that some journalists are embracing social media, such as Facebook and Twitter, as part of the news-gathering and production process. Other journalists seem to view these media as threatening or merely as an annoyance. The lack of local research on social media use, specifically as it pertains to newspapers, makes this study relevant. No studies on social media usage at *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian* could be found in the literature consulted.

The literature referenced has shown that newsroom studies are still being used to explore and describe the impact of external influences and changes on the news routines of journalists. This study does not only want to describe whether journalists use social media professionally, but also what this usage means for the processes of news-gathering and production within the newspaper newsroom. In other words: do social media make a difference to the way journalists plan their days, look for stories, interact with their sources and structure their beats? The culture within the newsroom, as influenced by social media, will also be explored.

By describing newspaper journalists' use of social media and the influence these media have on the culture and routines within the newsroom, this study hopes to contribute knowledge to the debate about the opportunities and/or threats posed by the professional use of social media in newspaper newsrooms.

¹² I envision these to include, among others, Chris Roper, editor of the *Mail & Guardian Online*, Johann van Tonder, Internet strategist at Naspers, and Matthew Buckland, CEO of Creative Spark.

1.7 Research questions

The general research question in this study is:

How does the professional use of social media at *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian* influence processes and cultures of news selection and presentation?

Flowing from that the following specific **research questions** can thus be formulated:

- a) How has the use of Facebook and Twitter changed the way journalists at *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian* schedule and typify news?
- b) How has the use of Facebook and Twitter influenced the beat system at *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian*?
- c) How has the use of Facebook and Twitter influenced the relationships reporters at *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian* have with their sources?
- d) What influence has the newsroom *habitus* at *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian* had on the introduction and acceptance of the professional use of Facebook and Twitter?

1.8 Methodology and approach

This study, within a critical social constructionist paradigm, employs a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methodologies. Where there has been some “friction” in the past between researchers who favoured quantitative research methods and those who favoured qualitative research methods, many researchers now realize that “both methods are important in understanding any phenomenon” (Wimmer & Dominick, 2011:49). Du Plooy (2009:40) also emphasises that communication studies in a “so-called information society”, which includes new media, requires a more pluralistic approach.

The process of combining data-collection methods is generally referred to as triangulation (Du Plooy, 2009:40). The main reason for applying triangulation is to test theoretical assumptions in more than one way, and to increase the reliability and validity of observations, analyses and findings (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005:99; Du Plooy, 2009:41).

This study relies on a combination of three different data-collection methods: self-administered questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and ethnographic data gathered at the

newsrooms of *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian*. The self-administered questionnaires were distributed to the total accessible population researched in the study, in other words all the news journalists at the Gauteng offices of *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian*, during June 2011. This was followed by a week of ethnography at each of the newspapers during the end of June and the beginning of July 2011. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected journalists, who were purposely selected, during these same weeks. The data was analysed using both qualitative and quantitative data analysis methods. The research methodology will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.

1.9 Structure of research

The research report will be presented in seven chapters:

Chapter 1: Introduction

In this chapter the background, theoretical assumptions, research questions, research goals and methodological approach, as well as the research field and newspaper landscape within which the study is set, was discussed.

Chapter 2: Literature review and theoretical framework

This chapter will explore the concepts and themes central to the study, including social media, Facebook, Twitter, newspaper journalism, the scheduling and typification of news, beats, sources, story ideation and newsroom *habitus*. A more detailed analysis of the routinisation of news work, as proposed by Tuchman, and *habitus* as formulated by Bourdieu, will be given.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter will discuss the approaches that will be employed to conduct the empirical research for this study. A combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods will be used to answer the four research questions.

Chapter 4: Findings from questionnaires

This chapter will present and discuss the findings from the questionnaires distributed to the journalists at *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian*.

Chapter 5: Findings from semi-structured interviews

This chapter will present and discuss the findings from the semi-structured interviews conducted with selected journalists at *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian*.

Chapter 6: Findings from ethnography

This chapter will present and discuss the findings from the ethnographic research conducted at *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian*.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

This chapter will provide a short summary of the preceding chapters and will also provide summarised answers to the four specific research question and the one general research question: How does the professional use of social media at *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian* influence processes and cultures of news selection and presentation?

1.10 Summary

This chapter provided the motivation for the study and the background to the research problem. The pressures faced by newspapers, such as a decline in circulation, dwindling readership and loss of advertising revenue, were discussed. At the same time the rise of social media, such as Facebook and Twitter, was highlighted. The literature reviewed showed that newspaper journalists are starting to engage with these social media professionally. The question this study seeks to answer is whether these engagements with social media influences the daily practices and cultures of newspaper journalists at *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian*.

To answer this question the study is guided by three basic theoretical assumptions with regard to newsroom *habitus*, time and the typification of news, as well as beats and sources. This study therefore assumes that newspaper journalists:

- have an individual and collective *habitus*
- follow certain routines during the manufacturing of news
- work within a beat structure in their organisation and
- have certain relationships with sources that influence story ideation and the way news routines are structured.

In the next chapter the theoretical framework of the study will be discussed in more detail, together with a review of literature on the topics under discussion.

Chapter Two: Theoretical framework and literature review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter gives an overview of the study field by discussing the theoretical framework for this study, as well as providing a review of literature available on the main topics under discussion, namely social media and newspaper journalism.

This study broadly positions itself in what has been referred to as the critical or alternative approach to media studies – as highlighted by McQuail (2010:68) and Halloran (1995:37) – for the following reasons:

- It adopts of an interpretative and constructionist perspective (see section 2.3)
- It uses qualitative research methodology (see Chapters 1 and 3)
- It deals with communication as a social process
- It takes a non-deterministic view of media technology and messages: According to McQuail (2010:103) the theory of media technological determinism proposes that the pace at which communication is developed, directly influences the direction and pace of social change. In this study, however, the view of Cottle and Ashton (1999:23) is accepted. They (ibid.) studied the introduction of new technology at the BBC, and argue that although new technology may help to facilitate a “revolution” in the organisation and practices within the newsroom,

... they remain for all that deeply *embedded within*, and powerfully *shaped by*, corporate contexts, managerial strategies, professional norms and an increasingly competitive news market-place [original emphasis].

Hermans, Vergeer and D’Haenens (2009:138) echo this call to take the role of “social context factors, such as working conditions, workplace organizations, and professional values” in to consideration when studying the influence of new technology within a newsroom. They make a specific call for the “integrated perspective” of social constructionism (Hermans, Vergeer & d’Haenens, 2009:138). For Deuze (2007:153), technology is not an independent factor influencing the work of journalists from the “outside”, but must rather be seen “in terms of its implementation, and therefore how it

extends and amplifies previous ways of doing things”. This study, therefore, works from the assumption that although social media might affect changes to the routines, practices and culture within the newspaper newsroom, the existing contexts, routines and culture will still play an important role in how these changes take shape.

2.2 Newsroom study

As discussed in section 1.4.4 newsroom studies remain valid to investigate and describe the influence of external factors, such as the introduction of new technologies, into the newsroom. However, modern newsroom studies are not as comprehensive nor do they appear at such regular intervals as when Tuchman’s (1978) did her ten year long research. This is why Schultz (2007:191) argues for a “re-invigoration” of the newsroom genre. According to Schultz (ibid.)

... news ethnography is a key method for studying the processes and norms guiding the producers and the production, but as most of the studies are Anglo-American and were conducted around the 1970’s, we need more research on the everyday processes of news work in different cultural settings in order to understand the diverse, globalised journalistic cultures of the 21st century. ...Naturally, a re-invigoration of the newsroom genre means complementing the previous findings as well as trying to improve the analytical frameworks used in the past.

According to Wright (1995:100), early newsroom studies adopted the functionalist approach to analyse mass media organisations and examine patterns within those organisations. Boyd-Barrett (1995:72) says functionalism has

... many sources and many forms but which share in common a focus on system-wide properties and on issues of system survival, adaptation and change – although in early manifestations functionalism was principally concerned with the maintenance of social stability.

According to Boyd-Barrett (1995:73) the system-focus of functionalism “tends towards a rather mechanical way of asking and addressing questions”. He (ibid.) argues that it lends itself better to the theoretical than the practical or empirical levels of inquiry and that it is not “well suited to the subtleties and ambivalences of social, cultural and economic processes”.

Cottle (2000:21) criticises early researchers such as Tuchman (1978) and Gans, ([1979] 2004) for their view of news as an “organizational and bureaucratic accomplishment of routine”, which he terms “organizational functionalism”.

While some of the fundamental principles of early researchers such as Tuchman and Gans can be appreciated and adopted in context, she agrees that their approach is too narrow for a study that incorporates the flexibility of new media technologies.

As such this thesis adopts an alternative approach to newsroom study. Berkowitz (1989) compares the methodological differences of what he refers to as the “naturalist paradigm” with the positivist (or dominant) paradigm when doing newsroom research. According to Berkowitz (1989:1), naturalism begins in a “less-structured manner”, with background about the problem to be studied. It moves to data collection within the context of the situation “as the study evolves”. Berkowitz (1989:4) emphasises that it is “unavoidable in an interactive situation” that the researcher working within a naturalist paradigm will interact with the people he or she studies. The research can therefore never be completely objective (Berkowitz, 1989:4). Guba and Lincoln (1982:238) also describe the aim of gathering knowledge during naturalistic inquiry as developing a series of “working hypotheses” that describe each individual case. According to them (ibid.) one can never generalise since phenomena are always studied within a certain context and time frame. Guba and Lincoln (1982:234) say that

... finding a paradigm that can tolerate real world conditions surely makes more sense than manipulating those conditions to meet the arbitrary design requirements of a paradigm.

The attributes of the naturalist paradigm, as described by Berkowitz (1989) and Guba and Lincoln (1982), are comparable with the critical, or alternative paradigm, as discussed in section 2.1. According to Berkowitz (1989:2)

... positivism suggests that there is one knowable reality [while] the naturalist approach suggests that many realities can be constructed from the same situation.

Flowing from this argument the adoption of a social constructionist approach for the newsroom study was the next logical step when working within the critical, or naturalist, paradigm. Similar studies have used the social constructionist approach when doing

newsroom studies. Paulussen and Ugille (2008:37), for instance, say social constructionist approaches

... provide an appropriate theoretical framework to reveal [...] contextual factors that help us understand more profoundly how mainstream news media are dealing with user generated content and citizen journalism.

2.3 Social constructionism

McQuail (2010:68) says critical or alternative research – as opposed to the dominant, positivist tradition – is based on a “more complete view of communication as sharing and ritual rather than as just ‘transmission’”. According to McQuail (2010:68), this research paradigm also adopts the interpretive and constructionist perspective.

This study adopted the social constructionist paradigm. It views reality as a social construct and sees the media as an entity which helps to create and construct various realities. In her seminal work, *Making news: a study in the construction of reality*, based on long-term newsroom studies, Tuchman (1978:184) argues that news is

... perpetually defining and redefining, constituting and reconstituting social phenomena.

Tuchman (1978:184) demonstrates that news workers – or people who transform “everyday occurrences into news events” – are actively constructing social meanings. More recent applications of the social constructionism paradigm to newsroom studies, such as Payne and Dozier (2007) and Paulussen and Ugille (2008), support this view.

Burr (2003:2) describes social constructionism as “a critical stance towards taken-for-granted knowledge”. Instead of assuming, like traditional or positivist scientists, that what exists is what we perceive to exist, Burr (2003:3) argues that social constructionism

... invites us to be critical of the idea that our observation of the world unproblematically yields its nature to us.

Berger and Luckmann (1967:23), two of the first proponents of social constructionism, say that one cannot exist in the world of the “everyday life” without constant interaction and communication with other people. Burr (2003:4) contends that our common knowledge of the world is not derived from the world as it is, but that it is rather

... through the daily interactions of people in the course of social life that our versions of knowledge become fabricated.

McQuail (2010:100) also describes social constructionism as a theory that views the “structures, forces and ideas” of society as being created by humans and that it is continually being updated and open to challenge. Schutz (1945:538), also one of the pioneers of social constructionism, made a case for multiple realities – dependent on a person’s state of consciousness or awareness and how time can be typified; for instance, whether you are busy with something or adopting a “reflective attitude”. For Schutz (1945:534) the world of the “everyday life” is the place where things happen and where we let things happen. According to Schutz (ibid.)

...we have to dominate [the world] and we have to change it in order to realize the purposes which we pursue within it among our fellow-men. Thus, we work and operate not only within but *upon* the world. [emphasis added]

It is important to note, however, that although Schutz makes it clear that the idea of reality can be challenged, interpreted and influenced, he does not question the existence of objects and phenomena as part of this reality (Tuchman, 1978:186). Schutz (1945:534) talks of the knowledge that

...the world we live in is a world of well circumscribed objects with definite qualities, objects among which we move, which resist us and upon which we may act.

Although criticised by Cottle (2000) for her overemphasis on routine and apparent lack of reflexivity about the nature of news production, Tuchman (1978) does indeed reflect on how news is constructed within a society. Her description of news as a construction of reality (1978), is largely based on the work and concepts of Schutz. Tuchman (1978:184) argues that, instead of being a mirror of society, news helps to constitute society as a “shared social phenomenon”. Cottle (2000:22) argues that the views of Tuchman and her contemporaries on news representation

... has the unfortunate result of theoretically positioning journalists as mere supports or bearers of the organizational system, rather than as active and

thinking agents who purposefully produce news through their professional practices.

It can be argued that while Tuchman (1978) is focused mainly on routine, scheduling and systems, she does not ignore the role news workers themselves play in the production of news and the construction of reality. In her seminal work based on long-term newsroom studies, Tuchman (1978:183) argues that news workers help to create social norms. According to her (1978:184)

... notions of newsworthiness receive their definitions from moment to moment, as, for instance, newspaper editors negotiate which items are to be carried on page one.

Becker and Vlad (2009:62) argue that one of the biggest contributions that Tuchman, as well her contemporaries Molotch and Lester (1974), brought was the distinction between “the constructed reality of news and what news workers refer to as ‘reality’”. Molotch and Lester (1974:11) also argue that the news media do not reflect a “world out there”, but rather “the practices of those having the power to determine the experience of others”.

Tuchman (1978:191) also emphasises that news work is “contextually embedded”. She (ibid.) concurs with Molotch and Lester that news can be viewed as reproduction of how news workers understand news and political process. According to Tuchman (ibid.), for instance,

... when a reporter or editor identifies an occurrence as hard news, the news worker is drawing on a personal understanding of the processing of hard news.

In his seminal work, *The reality of the mass media*, the German sociologist Niklas Luhmann (2000:3) talks about the reality of the mass media as “the communications which go on within and through mass media. According to Luhmann (2000:4), communication only really happens

... when someone watches, listens, reads – and understands to the extent that further communication could follow on. The mere act of uttering something, then, does not, in and of itself, constitute communication.

Luhmann (ibid.) also talks about media reality in another sense, that is

... in the sense of what *appears* to *them*, or *through them to others*, to be reality. ... According to this understanding, the activity of the mass media is regarded not simply as a sequence of *operations*, but rather as a sequence of *observations* or, to be more precise, of observing observations.

An application of the social constructionism paradigm to newspaper research can be found in the analysis that Payne and Dozier (2007) did on the relationship between newspaper coverage of police brutality and the way the public view law enforcement agencies in the United States. They (2007:10) found that the way certain newspapers described and covered instances of police abused and corruption not only influenced readers' current perceptions of law enforcement agencies. Also

... more importantly, the erosion [of trust] is projective. Not only does it apply to the present specific case, an inductive inference is made that imposes that current construction of reality upon future occurrences.

For Payne and Dozier (2007:3) the “active audience” remains key in the processing and reconfiguring of media content, people respond and react to media and, therefore, help to shape reality themselves.

Schmidt and Jespersen (2011:17) also work within a social constructionist paradigm for their “in depth analysis of the negotiated knowledge and the social interactions” that took place between Scandinavian Airlines (SAS) and their customers on its Facebook page during the ash cloud crisis¹³. Although Schmidt and Jespersen (2011:72) focused on crisis communication and company response, their findings on the role of social media in creating reality are still relevant here:

The social reality they [the customers] are creating together is a social forum online where more communications processes are taking place and relationships are built, it is a constantly moving process that keeps creating more communication and again more relationships.

By positioning itself within the social constructionist paradigm, this study views social media – as part of the interaction and communication between people – as an influence on the

¹³ Danish airspace was closed due the Icelandic volcanic ash cloud emanating from Eyjafjallajökull, in April 2010

creation of reality in a society. Furthermore, this study also maintains that newspapers create a certain reality in interaction with their audiences when they present events as news.

This study explores the processes and cultures of news production at *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian*. Its focus is, therefore, how the producers of the news, in other words the newspaper journalists, experience news as a constructed reality (rather than how the audience experience it). Journalists will be asked how they view the audience's influence on the construction of reality and news through the use of social media, but audience reaction will not be included. This study, therefore, aims to establish whether social media change and/or challenge the established processes and cultures of manufacturing reality in mainstream media, such as *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian*.

Schutz (1945:534) argues that a person's interpretation of the world is based upon your previous experiences of the world – a combination of one's own experiences and those handed down by the people from whom one learns. These experiences become a person's frame of reference for the future.

In their research about how television journalists handled breaking news coverage of the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks in America, Reynolds and Barnett (2003:692) also refer to social constructionism as an explanation of why journalists might rely on their "professional experience, personal values, attitudes, and ideologies" to interpret news in a breaking news context. According to Reynolds and Barnett (2003:692)

... within such a view journalists could quite naturally draw on professional and personal values to shape a news story, especially if the objectivity routine is no longer in place to limit this.

With this in mind, Bourdieu's (1990) notion of *habitus* as a cultural indicator of future behaviour might be viewed as part of social constructionist theory.

A discussion of the notion of objectivity within the journalistic context is also necessitated here. Tuchman (1972:660) argues that objectivity is what protects journalists from their critics. For Tuchman (1972:661) objectivity is imbedded in the way journalists treat the form and content of news stories and handle interorganisational relationships. Tuchman (1972:665-671) lists basic principles for aiming to achieve objectivity such as giving both sides of the story, providing supporting evidence for statements and "the judicious use of quotation marks". For Schudson (2001: 149-150), objectivity is

... at once a moral ideal, a set of reporting and editing practices, and an observable pattern of news writing.... The objectivity norm guides journalists to separate facts from values and to report only the facts.”

According to Schudson and Anderson (2009:92), there has always been a link between maintaining professionalism and striving for objectivity. One might therefore argue that journalists’ specific brand of professionalism, specifically as demonstrated by their objectivity rituals, is what sets them apart from the rest of society. It should also be seen as an important part of newsroom culture, or *habitus*. According to Tuchman (1972:672) journalists claim objectivity, but also depend on their news judgement, which, it would appear,

... is the sacred knowledge, the secret ability of the newsman (sic.) which differentiates him (sic.) from other people.

News judgement, or rather, a common understanding of news values as determinants of newsworthiness, is not discussed in detail in this study. The selection of events-as-news according to a predetermined set of news values forms part of newsroom routine. In my experience, however, few journalists, use the terminology¹⁴ employed by researchers such as Luhmann (2000) to describe a newsworthy article when discussing their news routines. Luhmann (2000:36) himself admits that

... even if one distinguishes different selectors in news and reporting, there is a danger of generating still much too simple an image of the way the mass media construct reality. It is true that the problem is in the selection, but the selection itself is a complex event – regardless of which criteria it follows.

2.4 Gatekeeping

The role of gatekeepers in the construction of reality is also relevant to this study. As Singer (2005) says

¹⁴ Luhmann (2000:27-35) talks about “selectors” which include: surprise, conflict, quantity, local relevance, norm violations, thematic reoccurrence, topical actuality, expression of opinion, and the available space and time an organisation has.

... recent considerations of gatekeeping have posited that it remains a viable role despite technological changes.

News organisations and journalists have traditionally been described as the gatekeepers of information when constructing reality for their audiences. Shoemaker (1997:57) defines gatekeeping as

... the process by which the billions of messages that are available in the world get cut down and transformed into the hundreds of messages that reach a given person on a given day.

According to Shoemaker (1997:57) some messages are rejected, while other are displayed more prominently. Where White's ([1950] 1997:63-71) seminal study on gatekeeping focused on the individual gatekeeper's role, researcher who came after him, such as Gans ([1979] 2004), place more emphasis on organisational and societal factors. White ([1950] 1997:71), who studied a wire editor's news selection processes, concluded that a gatekeeper's decisions are "highly selective... based on 'the gatekeeper's' own set of experiences, attitudes and expectations". But Shoemaker (1997:62) adds that the gatekeeper is not totally free to follow "a personal whim"; the gatekeeper must work within the constraints of his or her organisation and social environment. Cassidy (2006:8), who writes about gatekeeping in both print and online journalism, discusses the influence of routines, such as the typification of news, on the selection of events as news.

The rise of the Internet and its associated technologies and media not only influence the role of journalists as gatekeepers, but also have had a significant impact on role of the audience in the communication process. Singer (1998) argues that, instead of seeing their gatekeeping role as redundant because of an online environment, journalists see that function as "evolving and adapting". According to a study Singer did amongst online staff at three newspapers (1998) people inside the newsroom are

... modifying their definition of the gatekeeper to incorporate notions of both quality control and sense-making. In particular, they see their role as credible interpreters of an unprecedented volume of available information as fundamental to their value – even their survival – in a new media environment.

At the same time, according to Shoemaker, Johnson, Seo and Wang (2010:61)

... the interactive capacity of internet-based mass media gives the audience a far more significant role in the evaluation of news items presented to them than previously.

Shoemaker et al (ibid.) argue that audiences now influence the gatekeeping process, and subsequent decisions by journalists, by providing information to each other about their “favoured news items”.

This study aims to establish how journalists at *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian* view their gatekeeping role and the influence of their audiences on the gatekeeping process through the use of social media such as Twitter and Facebook. As such the study further investigates how journalists view the role of social media when it comes to the manufacturing of reality.

2.5 *Habitus*

Every person carries with them historical influences (or dispositions) that shape the way they act and the way they will act in the future. This is described by Bourdieu as the *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1990), or, the “embodied history, internalized as a second nature and so forgotten as history” (1990:56). According to Bourdieu (1990:54) the *habitus*

... ensures the active presence of past experiences, which, deposited in each organism in the form of schemes of perception, thought and action, tend to guarantee the ‘correctness’ of practices and their constancy over time, more reliably than all formal rules and explicit norms.

According to Benson and Neveu (2005b:3), the notion of *habitus* is fundamental to Bourdieu’s understanding of “the ways in which society shapes individual actions (and vice versa)”.

Therefore, by considering *habitus* as important in shaping current practices, this study will explore and describe the personal background of journalists at *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian* as it relates to computer, internet and social media experiences, knowledge and practices.

Lester (1980:987), who did ethnographic newsroom studies around the same time as Tuchman, criticised the “generic status” of Tuchman’s conceptualisation of news workers’ typification of news and the construction of news. She argues that, instead of just typifying

news as “hard” or “soft” news, news workers interact with each other to identify the newsworthiness of events-as-news (ibid.). Lester (1980:988) also states that organisational features and context make a crucial difference in the news process. According to her (ibid.) this understanding of the organisational context helps news workers to socially organise and give meaning to occurrences (as newsworthy or not). This study also broadens the scope of Tuchman’s view of newsroom routine, by introducing the concept of *habitus*, or newsroom culture.

According to Bantz (1997:125), an analysis of the organisational culture at the news organisations studied by Lester and others “may identify cultural factors that may systematically contribute to variations in the constitutions of newsworthiness”. A recent analysis by Olsson (2009) shows how the organisational cultures of three Swedish news organisations resulted in different responses and news scheduling decisions in the aftermath of the 11 September 2001 terror attacks on the United States. This is an example of a study that looks at both culture, newsworthiness and routine within news organisations. Olsson (2009:772), for instance, shows how Swedish Radio (SR)

... presents as an organization near obsessed with its former mistakes during prior extraordinary events. Decision making at SR needs to be understood in the context of a prevailing collective mindset of striving to not repeat previous mistakes.

This study, in working within a critical, social constructionist paradigm, will also acknowledge the role of cultural factors as contributors to how routines and practices function within a newsroom. Williams (2011:54) describes culture as “a whole way of life”. According to him (ibid.)

... a culture has two aspects: the known meanings and directions which its members are trained to [and] the new observations and meanings, which are offered and tested.

When talking about journalists specifically, Hanitzsch (2011:35) says culture “becomes manifest in the way journalists think and act”. According to him, journalism culture can be defined as

... a particular set of ideas and practices by which journalists, consciously and unconsciously, legitimate their role in society and render their work meaningful for themselves and others.

Bourdieu used the concept *habitus* to bridge the “explanatory gap” that may exist between the understanding that social practice is the result of individual decision-making, or, on the other hand, that it is determined by “supra-individual ‘structures’ (Jenkins, 1992:45).” Schultz (2007:193) also argues that

... *habitus* is a conceptual tool for analysing how social agents have different positions in the social space, and how these serve as different dispositions for social action.

Bourdieu (1990:57) explains that *habitus*, which is produced “by the work of inculcation and appropriation”, is not only constituted “in the course of an individual history”, but it is also needed for the very structures and institutions (from which it takes meaning) to be reproduced and adjusted. Bourdieu (in Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992:124) says

... human action is not an instantaneous reaction to immediate stimuli, and the slightest ‘reaction’ of an individual to another is pregnant with the whole history of these persons and of their relationship.

Habitus is therefore not only relevant on an individual level, but also within a wider, communal context. Schultz (2007:193) also argues that what is individual is always social.

Bourdieu (1990:60) argues that people of the same “class” or group, though they do not have exactly the same experiences in the same order, are more likely to have been confronted with the situations most frequent for people in their own group than members of another group. Following this argument, one might assume, for instance, that a person who was brought up in a community without access to computers, would still not have access to a computer. Deuze and Fortunati (2011:116) also refer to the “general homogeneity” discovered in international studies done on journalists in “different but equivalent countries”¹⁵. According to Deuze and Fortunati (ibid.), these similarities include: sharing a middle-class background, being college-educated and holding similar views on what is important in their work.

¹⁵ The researchers refer to studies done in The Netherlands, Germany, Great Britain, Australia and the United States.

Bourdieu (1990:60) also says, however, that while *habitus* is constantly structuring new experiences “in accordance with the structures produced by past experiences”, the structures are also being modified by new experiences. According to Bourdieu (1990:60), this brings about a “unique integration”, dominated by the earliest experiences.

Schultz (2007:193) adapts Bourdieu’s metaphor of “having a feel for a game” by describing journalistic *habitus* as having an understanding of the “journalistic game, and being able to master the rules of that same game”.

Compton and Benedetti (2010) also employ Bourdieu’s field theory and the concept of *habitus* to discuss the conditions in which journalists, paid and unpaid, work. In their study (2010:488) they look at the entry of bloggers and new media into the field of journalism during a period they describe as “unquestionably a chaotic moment in journalism”. Compton and Benedetti (2010:489) also describe *habitus* as having a “feel for the game”, which in journalism’s case would involve forms of storytelling and news-gathering. While they (2010:493&496) concede that the work of traditional newsrooms deserve to be “challenged and questioned”, they argue that citizen journalism is “no substitute for the day-to-day grind of reporting and fact checking”.

In her application of *habitus* to journalism, Schultz (2007:194) emphasises that

... an important assumption in Bourdieu’s sociology is the fact that social practice is never completely ‘free’ but will always and at the same time be structured. What journalists experience as ‘freedom’ and ‘unpredictability’ in news work must be conceptualised as freedom within certain frames and structures.

According to Breed (1997:109,[1954]) new recruits in the newsroom are never told what the policy of that newsroom is. Reporters he spoke to during his research, told him that they learn it “by osmosis” (Breed, 1997:109,[1954]). Breed (1997:109,[1954]) equates this to the way any “neophyte” in any subculture becomes socialised. Deuze (2008:19) supports this notion when he talks about newcomers who are expected to “adapt themselves”.

Deuze (2008:11) believes technology is not a “neutral” agent in the way news workers and organisations function do their work. Rather, it tends to amplify the way things have been done in the past, instead of radically changing it. Deuze (ibid.) also believes it takes a long time to filter into the culture of a news organisation. Sivek (2010:150) argues that social media are likely to be a “significant” factor in the way especially new and future

journalists will be socialised. According to Sivek (2010:149) multimedia reporting will seem “simply natural” to young journalists – an assumption supported by their education and life experiences. Deuze (2008:9) agrees, saying journalists who are among the “earliest adopters” or who lead innovation in their organisation tend to be excited about changes in the way they do their work. According to Deuze (2008:13)

... the success or failure of journalists to deal with the role of technology in their work must therefore also be set against the history of their professional identity, the changes in the institutional structure of the industry, and the fragmentation and even disappearance of their audiences.

It is noteworthy that Bourdieu (in Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992:133), who helped establish *habitus* as a sociological concept, describes it as “durable, but not eternal”. Bourdieu (ibid.) argues that

... *habitus* is not the fate that some people read into it. Being the product of history, it is an *open system of dispositions* that is constantly subjected to experiences, and therefore constantly affected by them in a way that either reinforces or modifies its structures.

This study presupposes that journalists have a personal *habitus*, that they come from different backgrounds where they were exposed to computers, the internet and social media to varying degrees. It also views newsrooms as entities with a specific *habitus*. This study aims to explore and describe the newsroom *habitus* of *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian*, whilst also referring to the personal *habitus* of their reporters, in order to establish its influence on the professional use of social media.

2.6 Social media

2.6.1 Defining social media

A definition of the term “social media” necessitates a look at concepts to which it is closely linked, like Web 2.0, user-generated media and social networks – on the one hand to provide context and on the other hand to help eliminate confusion about what this study refers to.

- **Web 2.0** is used to describe the shift from the creation and publication of content for the Internet by individuals to a new environment where all users now continuously create,

modify and publish content online in a “participatory and collaborative fashion” (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010:61). Facebook and Twitter can be considered as part of Web 2.0, but this definition is not specific enough when it comes to the extent of these media’s communication capabilities (as will be discussed in this study).

- **User-generated content (UGC)** refers to all the media content that end-users create and publish via the Internet (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010:61). Although most of the content that is published via Facebook and Twitter can be user-generated content, it is not enough to categorise these media strictly under UGC. Fairweather (personal communications, 12 July 2011) explains that while social media can be seen as “any medium where the vast majority of the content is contributed by the readers, the users themselves”, it more importantly deals with the capturing of physical relationships in a digital way.
- **Social networks** might be the term closest related to social media as described by this study. McQuail (2010:570), for instance, uses the term “social network sites” interchangeably with “social media” when he describes them as

... a number of Internet websites that have been set up to enable and encourage users to create networks of acquaintances and also to share messages and audio-visual material, often available to a wider public.

Boyd and Ellison (2008:211) describe social networks as web-based services where people create profiles, build connections within a system and “view and traverse” their list of connections. The focus in the definition as set out by Boyd and Ellison seems to lean more towards the actual connections than on the trading of information through this network of connections, as is the case with the way social media are described in this study. Most industry studies, such as a recent comprehensive¹⁶ one by Universal McCann (2010), also gravitate towards social connections and communities, rather than information-sharing, when talking about social networks. According to Universal McCann (2010:28), a social network is

... a site designed to allow users to meet, communicate, share content and build communities.

¹⁶ This study included the opinions of 37 600 Internet users in 54 countries, including South Africa.

Van Tonder (personal communications, 5 May 2011) argues that being “media” is not necessarily the main function of social networks. As example he (ibid.) mentions people who are Facebook-active only to play Farmville¹⁷ without being interested in any activity on their newsfeeds. According to Van Tonder, social media can be seen as the “use of social networks to ‘commit’ media”.

For Roper (personal communications, 14 July 2011), social media are “new ways to create information and content and pass information and content”. Roper (ibid.) sees social media as not just the creation of information, but also as the description of new ways of understanding already existing bits of content, information or data.

According to the author of *The Social Media Bible*, Lon Safko¹⁸ (2010:3), social media is “the media we use to be social”. Although the author himself agrees that this is an oversimplification, it might be a good place from which to start an analysis. For Safko (2010:4), “social” refers to the “instinctual needs we humans have to connect with other humans”, whereas “media” refers to the technologies we use “to make those connections. For Blossom (2009:29), these connections become a way to influence people. He defines social media as

... any highly scalable and accessible communications technology or technique that enables any individual to influence groups of other individuals easily.

It is important to note that social media are mostly driven by active Internet users (people who use the Internet on a daily or every-other-day basis) since people are unlikely to set up a social network profile or start microblogging if they don’t use the Internet regularly (Universal McCann, 2010:16). But not all people who join social networks and use social media are equally active on them. Nielsen (2006) talks about what is still often referred to, as the 90-9-1 rule to describe the activity of users in online communities. As illustrated in figure 2.1, this refers to the 90% of users who are “lurkers” and may read but do not contribute to the medium, the 9% who sporadically contribute to the medium and the 1% who actively contribute to the medium.

¹⁷ Farmville is a simulation game available as an application on Facebook.

¹⁸ It is important to note that, Safko, as is the case with most authors of books currently available on social media, is focused on marketing and business strategies using these media, rather than on their inherent nature or their influence on journalism.

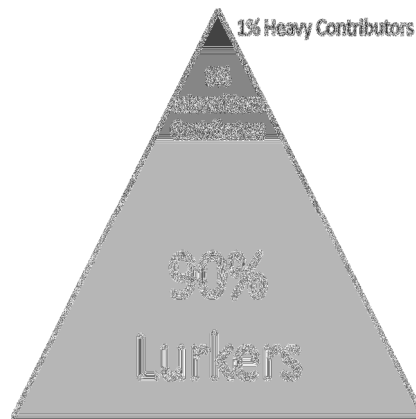


Figure 2.1 Illustration of the participation inequality on online networks

Source: Nielsen, J. (2006)

Heil and Piskorski (2009) studied a random sample of 300 000 Twitter accounts and also found that “the top 10% of prolific Twitter users [accounted] for over 90% of tweets”. Newman (2009:42) argues that these findings suggests that

... many people are using Twitter more as a one-way publishing service than a two-way, peer-to-peer communication network.

Social media enable second-to-second information-sharing between individuals and groups on a massive scale. It is important, however, to take note of the fact that research has shown that

... the motivations for blogging, joining a social network, uploading a video or a photo are not only very different at a global level but that individual countries and regions also have a different take on the value, appeal and utility of each platform.

(Universal McCann, 2010)

Raymond and Lu (2011:3) also emphasise that people get involved in social network sites for different reasons that may change as these sites evolve.

Qualman (2009:2) explains that the attraction of social media lies in their ability to make people feel that they “belong to and are accepted by a much larger social set”. People want to know what other people are doing (Qualman, 2009:3). Pillay (2011) also says that the attraction of social media is that

... the technology mimics our natural propensity for forming links and relationships around shared interests. As technology gets more and more sophisticated we get closer and closer to just enhancing what comes natural [sic.] to us.

One can possibly find a common denominator for all the afore-mentioned terms in the words of Castells (2007:248) when he talks about

... a new form of socialized communication: *mass self-communication*. It is mass communication because it reaches potentially a global audience through the [peer-to-peer] networks and Internet connection. It is multimodal, as the digitization of content and advanced social software, often based on open sources that can be downloaded free, allows the reformatting of almost any content in almost any form, increasingly distributed via wireless networks. And it is self-generated in content, self-directed in emission, and self-selected in reception by many that communicate with many. [emphasis added]

As a working definition, this study will draw on the afore-mentioned definitions and descriptions by Blossom (2009) and Qualman (2009), when it defines social media as

... communication technologies that enable connections between individuals and groups where these connections lead to information-sharing and mutual influence.

Within the scope of this definition, Facebook and Twitter can be identified as social media.

2.6.2 Facebook

According to Facebook's company profile ("Facebook: About info"), Facebook was established on 4 February 2004 by Harvard student Mark Zuckerberg to give "people the power to share and make the world more open and connected". Its basic functionality enables individuals to keep in touch with friends by sharing information, pictures, videos and links to other content. It is also utilised by companies, news outlets and celebrities to promote themselves and keep customers, audiences and fans up to date with developments and news. On 24 October 2007 the company announced in a press release ("Facebook: Announcement") that it is launching a cellphone application, allowing users to keep up to date with Facebook

on their phones. On 5 April 2011 Facebook launched a page called “Journalists on Facebook” with the aim to, according to Osofsky (2011)

... serve as an ongoing resource for the growing number of reporters using Facebook to find sources, interact with readers, and advance stories.

According to the social media statistics website, Socialbakers¹⁹, as of October 2011 there were more than 757 million users on Facebook. South Africa with its more than 4.4 million Facebook users ranks 28th in the world in terms of the number of Facebook users – only 2nd in Africa to Egypt (“South Africa Facebook Statistics”). Some experts estimate that around 80% of Internet users in South Africa use Facebook and that they spend around 50 minutes per day using it (Bell, 2011).

2.6.3 Twitter

The first tweet (message sent via Twitter) was sent on 21 March 2006 by co-founder Jack Dorsey (Digital Trends, 2011). This social media site, also known as a “microblogging” site, allows users to post messages of up to 140 characters, either via the Internet or their cellphones. In August 2011 Twitter announced on its blog that it generates around 200 million tweets per day (“Your world, more connected”, 2011). A month later it announced that it has 100 million active users around the globe – more than half of which log into Twitter every day (“One hundred million voices”, 2011). While 30% of tweets concern people’s current status (in other words, what they are up to) 10% of tweets are links to news or blog articles (Digital Trends, 2011). According to a tweet²⁰ sent out on 18 August 2011 by Arthur Goldstuck, media analyst and managing director of World Wide Worx, there are

... about 1 m SA Twitter users. Half are active tweeters (but non-tweeters are also active users).

This concurs with other experts who estimate that the number of local accounts has risen to around a million (Bell, 2011). Goldstuck’s comment also supports Nielsen’s typology of users in an online community, as discussed in section 2.6.1.

¹⁹ www.socialbakers.com provides comprehensive statistics on social media usage for sites such as Facebook, Twitter and linkedin and is regularly updated.

²⁰ This tweet is included here since it is from the verified account of a reputable source.

2.7 Newsroom routines in a new context: social media and newspaper journalism

2.7.1 Newspapers: old news?

According to Wunsch-Vincent and Vickery (2010:12) the news-gathering and distribution processes at newspapers are undergoing fundamental changes. Besides competition from more traditional sources like television and radio, younger consumers are also increasingly becoming attracted to the Internet as a source of information and news (Wunsch-Vincent & Vickery, 2010:12). The majority of editors and senior newsroom personnel said in a 2010 survey by the World Association of Newspapers that declining readership amongst the youth, as well as the Internet and digital media are the biggest threats facing their newspapers (World Association of Newspapers, 2010). It is important to note, however, that nearly nine out of ten respondents described social media as an opportunity as opposed to a threat. This number rises to 95% when one only looks at the editors under 35 years old who were surveyed (World Association of Newspapers, 2010).

According to this “newsroom barometer”, cost and staff reductions are the norm in all but developing markets (World Association of Newspapers, 2010). Wunsch-Vincent and Vickery (2010:12) emphasise that the global economic downturn and the resulting loss of advertising revenue have “accentuated the downward spiral of many forms of printed news”. High paper prices also placed a strain on the funds available for maintaining editorial quality, with “predictably... a notable increase in typos and fact errors in many papers” (Edmonds, Guskin, & Rosenstiel, 2011).

But not all newspapers are suffering the same fate. Wasserman’s (2010:10) sentiment²¹ about the fallacy of the universal application of theory and data is echoed by Wunsch-Vincent and Vickery (2010:22), who say

... there are large country-by-country and title-by-title differences and only a few generalisations can be made about the state of the news industry. Certainly the data does not currently lend itself to making the case for the death of the newspaper.

²¹ For a more detailed discussion, see Chapter 1 (section 1.2).

In South Africa, the picture of the newspaper industry differs depending on the vantage point. Daily newspapers are steadily losing circulation with a year-on-year decline of 5.4% in the 2nd quarter of 2011 (Audit Bureau of Circulations of South Africa, 2011a). However, some daily titles, such as Independent Newspapers' Zulu language newspaper, *Isolezwe*, is still growing: in the 2nd quarter of 2011 *Isolezwe*'s total circulation increased by more than 9% (Audit Bureau of Circulations of South Africa, 2011a). The 31 weekend newspapers, which include *Rapport*, suffered a loss of almost 4% in terms of total circulation year-on-year in the 2nd quarter of 2011 (Audit Bureau of Circulations of South Africa, 2011b). However, the weekly newspapers, including the *Mail & Guardian*, showed growth of 10.5% in the corresponding period (Audit Bureau of Circulations of South Africa, 2011c). In an advertorial²² on 20 May 2011, the *Mail & Guardian* ascribed its success (in terms of circulation growth, continued support of their online edition and awards received at the annual Mondi Shanduka Awards for Journalism) to “focused investment in great journalism” (“Mail & Guardian: Africa's best read”, 2011).

Dawes (personal communications, 13 July 2011) explains that the staff at the *Mail & Guardian* have realised that “there is commercial value in good journalism”. According to Dawes (ibid.)

... many people lay the blame for declining journalism in rich countries at the doorstep of the Internet. And I think that's a factor, but it's certainly not the whole story. The declining circulation of many South African titles is a direct consequence of their slashing newsroom budgets and their inability to produce journalism that feels relevant to their readers. So 'quality' you can describe in many different ways. You may get a quality tabloid, which means that its reporting is accurate and that it is relevant to its community. But relevance really is the issue. I think the fact that we have tried really hard to remain relevant, tried hard to remain credible, and that we offer a product that takes quality seriously in a market where almost no one else does – that has been critical to our commercial success.

Bosch (2010:266) also argues that traditional print media in South Africa, like their counterparts in the more developed world, have faced

²² This advertorial appeared as a full page advertisement on page 24 of the *Mail & Guardian* with the strapline: “Mail & Guardian: Africa's best read”.

... the challenges of the increasing juniorisation of newsrooms, and over-reliance on press releases and stories from the news wires, as a result of economic imperatives.

According to Bosch, although these might not be the primary motivations for print newspapers to move online, the rise of digital journalism, which includes the use of social media by journalists, is tied to the global trend of moving newspapers online (Bosch, 2010:266). It is important to note that Bosch considers both the so-called “new” and “old” media as necessary to “facilitate [...] communities to represent themselves, and to participate in local and global public spaces and democracies” (Bosch, 2010:273). And according to research conducted by PricewaterhouseCoopers (2010:109), newspapers have a “long-term future and will co-exist with other media”. According to PricewaterhouseCoopers (2010:109)

... consumers place high value on the deep insight and analysis provided by journalists over and above general or breaking news stories... Newspapers have been able to earn their readers’ trust and loyalty, giving them the opportunity to both lead and follow audiences as they migrate online and into the use of portable electronic media. Indeed, with the core principles of deep analysis and trusted editorial, the medium is secondary to the brand.

2.7.2 Social media: threat or opportunity?

According to Alistair Fairweather (personal communications, 12 July 2011), digital platforms manager at the *Mail & Guardian*, what attracts journalists to social media is the way it captures social connections, because

... what does a journalist do? They place themselves at the centre of a physical social network [...] What social media can do is it can let them reach out to people they might never otherwise have access to.

Fairweather (ibid.) adds that social media affords journalists the opportunity to “broadcast” their thoughts, thereby widening the reach of their messages.

According to Van Tonder (personal communications, 5 May 2011), Facebook and Twitter are busy redefining the concept of news. He believes

... the big success, the big secret [of social media] is something that newspapers and other media have for years been trying to do and have never been able to do: hyperlocalisation.

The annual report on American Journalism (Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2011) has also identified local news as “the vast untapped territory” of newspapers. Qualman supports this argument with an illustration of a part-time political blogger who lives in the same town as a politician who drives drunk. The blogger will probably be able to provide a better report of the story than a journalist from a well-known newspaper who has to come in from “headquarters” (Qualman, 2009:14-17). According to Qualman (2009:16), the journalist might even reference the blogger’s work to do his or her story.

This ability to be at the scene as the story unfolds, might arguably be one of the reasons for journalists’ attraction to social media. Simultaneously, however, it poses a threat to newspaper journalism. Sambrook (quoted in Newman, Dutton, & Blank, 2011:14) talks about news coverage becoming a “partnership”, because the public can offer just as much new information about important, breaking news events as traditional news outlets are able to publish or broadcast. The editor of *The Guardian*, Alan Rusbridger (quoted in Newman, Dutton, & Blank, 2011:15), says that journalists have to rid themselves of their “arrogance”, and thoughts that they are the only “figures of authority” in the world. In a similar vein of social constructionism, Roper (personal communications, 14 July 2011) says journalists can

... never ever again hide behind any kind of objectivity, because now you know you are just competing amongst multiple points of view.

According to Messner, Linke and Eford (2011:5), Twitter and other social networking sites, with their ability to spread the news quickly,

... have posed a challenge to traditional news media in their efforts for quick and reliable reporting on disasters and [have] led them [the journalists] to adopt social media platforms themselves.

Journalists have, for instance, followed their audiences’ cue in adopting Twitter in an effort to find sources, monitor conversations and build an online following through social bookmarking and tweeting (Messner, Linke, & Eford, 2011:5). Newman (2009:2), who did extensive research about the adoption of social media at media institutions says that journalists are embracing Facebook and Twitter

... very much on their own terms. 'Same values, new tools' sums up the approach in most mainstream organisations as they marry the culture of the web with their own organisational norms. Guidelines are being rewritten; social media editors and Twitter correspondents are being appointed; training and awareness programmes are underway.

Newman, Dutton and Blank (2011:17) are of the opinion that, overall, attitudes within journalism towards social media have been transformed in the period between 2009 and 2011²³. According to them (2011:17)

... news organisations have gradually worked through the dilemmas associated with social media, and have published guidelines and undertaken training programmes on how to embrace these new formats whilst protecting their principles and brands.

Van Tonder (personal communications, 5 May 2011), however, paints a gloomy picture about South African newspaper journalists' current use of social media:

Journalists in South Africa [...] are currently still a little clueless when it comes to social media. When I try to follow people [journalists who write] on Twitter for instance [...] they are either not there, or they are not active [...] My impression is that there is a handful of people who really use and integrate [social media]...

Pillay (personal communications, 14 July 2011) believes that social media is a powerful tool, but journalists aren't using it well in South Africa yet. According to her (ibid.) for those that are using it, it comes naturally – they do not think about how they use it and do not know how to transfer their knowledge about this use.

A preliminary survey²⁴ of news journalists at *Rapport*, for instance, shows around ten with Twitter accounts, with only a couple of these account holders sending out regular tweets (a lot being of a personal nature). The *Mail & Guardian* held an editorial workshop on social

²³ Once again, however, I must hasten to add that these authors write from a British perspective, with some reference to other European and American examples. As I mentioned before, one cannot draw a direct inference from such conclusions when it comes to the South African situation. A study of local newsrooms, as is undertaken with this study, might help to clarify whether attitudes towards social media have also been transformed within South African newsrooms.

²⁴ This comment is based on a preliminary search on Twitter by the researcher according to the names of reporters as they appear in *Rapport*. This list is accessible at <http://twitter.com/#!/MarenetJordaan/rapport>

media in early 2011. According to Kruger (2011), the suggestion that journalists should be paying attention to what is being discussed on Twitter, was apparently met with some resistance from “old-timers” in *Mail & Guardian*’s newsroom. However, the *Mail & Guardian* is developing a set of guidelines on social media and related issues and, according to Kruger (2011), “you can expect them to encourage the use of social media”.

At the time that this study was being written, both the *Mail & Guardian* and *Rapport* were developing social media policies on the use of social media by journalists as well as in their newsrooms.

2.7.3 Newsroom routines: renewed?

For Shoemaker and Reese (1996:118), the only way the news media, as “rational, complex organizations with regular deadlines”, can cope with this unpredictable influx of events that may lead to news, is to have some kind of system. As Gans ([1979] 2004:109) says, deadlines are ultimately what determines not only the division of labour and power, but also how stories are selected and how production processes are routinised. According to Gans ([1979] 2004:109), these processes have remained “virtually unchanged over the years – which is one reason why journalists describe their organizations as assembly lines.”

According to Gans ([1979] 2004:83), the application of news judgement necessitates consensus among journalists “to prevent chaos”. Gans ([1979] 2004:82) describes the selection of stories for news broadcasts and publishing as a hurried process of making decisions. He (2004:82,[1979]) argues that journalists act on the basis of virtually “intuitive judgements”, i.e. considerations that are easily applicable to enable choices “without too much deliberation”. However, these considerations must also be adaptable to the “endless variety of available news” (Gans, [1979] 2004:83).

The rise of Web 2.0 and with it user-generated content and social media, has arguably increased the accessibility of newsworthy events – for journalists as well as their audiences. According to Quinn and Quinn-Allan (2006:61), news has become a 24-hour “continuous process” where audiences have more sources to choose more news from. Klinenberg (2005:54) talks about the “news cyclone”, “the erratic and unending pattern” into which the regular news cycle has spun. According to Klinenberg (ibid.)

... the advent of twenty-four-hour television news and the rapid emergence of instant Internet news sites²⁵ have eliminated the temporal borders in the news day, creating an informational environment in which there is always breaking news to produce, consume, and – for reporters and their subjects – react against.

It is natural that journalists would find a way to adapt their regular time schedules and routines to accommodate new technologies, such as social media, in order to survive. According to Deuze (2007:155), technology is not a “neutral agent” when it comes to how news organisations and news workers do their work. He (ibid.) argues that new technologies

... amplify existing ways of doing things, are used to supplement rather than radically change whatever people were already doing, and take a long time to sediment into the working culture of a news organization.

Following this reasoning, it is understandable that the introduction of social media, as a new technology, may amplify and supplement the existing routines of the journalists, but may take some time to affect fundamental changes. Deuze (2011:27) argues that the impact of a growing multimedia and multicultural environment can have two opposing effects on journalism: it can either ignore diverse voices because of the sense of urgency and speed in a 24/7 deadline environment, or it can offer “depth, inclusiveness and more than two, polarized perspectives”.

This study aims to establish how newspaper journalists have reacted to social media, specifically in terms of adapting their time schedules and routines.

The role of time as a structuring factor is highlighted throughout Tuchman’s findings (Tuchman, 1978:40). She suggests (1978:41) that news conferences, for instance, are held so that the editor can keep track of

... what’s happening or is expected to happen [...] so that he can revise plans for the daily news product should an important occurrence arise unexpectedly.²⁶

²⁵ Here I would add social media.

²⁶ Tuchman (1978) did research at daily newspapers and television stations. This study will focus on weekly and weekend newspapers and, therefore, the time frame will be adapted to accommodate a weekly news cycle.

Social media were at the forefront of recent hard news events, such as a plane landing in the Hudson river in New York (Deards, 2009), the revolution in Egypt (Varma, 2011) and the killing of Osama bin Laden (Stelter & Preston, 2011). Deards (2009) argues that there is a basis for an “ideal partnership” between social media such as Twitter and traditional media, such as television and newspapers, since Twitter is “quick off the mark with ‘breaking news’” and traditional media can provide “in-depth and unbiased coverage”. According to Stelter and Preston (2011), the way news about Bin Laden’s death first circulated on social media, before it was announced by traditional media

.... was another example of how social media and traditional media deal with the same news in different ways and at different speeds [...] Twitter and Facebook have become early warning systems for breaking news – albeit not always reliable ones.

One might therefore assume that in relation to official relevance in newsrooms social media are mostly concerned with the dissemination of hard-news. However, much of what is generally presented on social media platforms can be described as soft news. This study will therefore attempt to clarify whether newspaper journalists view social media as more of a conduit for hard news or for soft news and whether social media have influenced journalists’ distinction between hard news and soft news.

A newspaper’s journalists do not cover all possible events that might be newsworthy – simply because they cannot be everywhere at the same time (Tuchman, 1978:24). Tuchman (1978:23) uses the analogy of a “news net” to explain how editors and journalists go about gathering news. According to Tuchman (1978:25), the news net is “flung through space, focuses upon specific organizations, and highlights topics”. Simply put: journalist specialise either in terms of the geographical setting they are assigned to work from, the institution or organisation that might regularly produce newsworthy events, or lastly, on a specific topic of specialisation, such as sport, finance or politics. These beats help news organisations organise themselves to observe events and gather the raw materials used to produce news (Becker & Vlad, 2009:64). According to Becker and Vlad (2009:64)

... beats have a history in the news organization that outlives the histories of the individuals who work the beats [...] the reporter does not own that beat.

This study works from the assumption that journalists at *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian* work on the beat system as described here. The study aims to establish whether the beat systems within these newsrooms are affected by the introduction of social media as a professional tool.

Becker and Vlad (2009:64) also argue that journalists become part of the social relations that is the beat; talking about their beats as “places to go and people to see”. Gans ([1979] 2004:137) observes that beat reporters develop close relationships with some regular sources. According to Gans ([1979] 2004:137) these reporters become “ambassadors to the lay world for the specialities they cover”. Scanlan (2011) also emphasises that beat reporters are judged by their success in communicating stories about things happening on their beat and by the “breadth of their knowledge”. According to Scanlan (*ibid.*) beat reporters’ relationship with their sources are essential to their success. Scanlan (*ibid.*) describes how difficult it is for beat reporters to “stay on top of things” and to return to sources, even if the sources are unhappy with their stories.

Knowing enough sources also enables journalists to file stories at regular intervals, helping them to demonstrate their competence (Tuchman, 1978:68). According to Tuchman (1978:68) knowing enough sources also gives reporters “professional status” and enables them to do their work “adequately”. Tuchman (1978:69) observes that

... the higher the status of sources and the greater the scope of their positions,
the higher the status of the reporters.

Berkowitz (2009:102) raises the question about who exerts the greater influence in “shaping the news”: journalists or their sources. According to Berkowitz (2009:102) this relationship does not only have a short-term influence on the public, but also a long-term effect on society – “the ability to shape ongoing meanings in a culture”. From a social constructionist perspective one might also argue that the relationships and interaction between journalists and their sources and their interaction are indeed helping to create reality. With the advent of social media and the subsequent increase in interaction between the public, as sources, and journalists, as well as with each other, the possibility exists that realities will be created that are different from those that the mainstream media upholds. As Benkler (2006:32) explains when talking about the “networked information economy”,

... any person who has information can connect with any other person who wants it, and anyone who wants to make it mean something in some context, can do so.

According to Benkler (2006:33) the production of meaning is now far more collaborative – “radically decentralized and based on emergent patterns of cooperation and sharing”. Qualman (2009:89) argues the novelty surrounding social networks is the way they enable quick and easy information sharing and that “the success of social media proves, people like disseminating information”. According to Gans ([1979] 2004:117), although journalists still will decide whether a source is suitable or not, “the news is weighted toward sources which are eager to provide information.” One might therefore argue that journalists would use social media to expand their network of sources, since, as Qualman puts it, people use these media because they enjoy sharing information.

A study (MarketWire, 2008) of 450 American reporters from different beats²⁷ found that the reporters have divergent views on how social media has impacted on their reporting. While over half of the reporters said social media and blogs have a positive influence on the editorial direction and diversity of reporting, “the views on tone, quality and accuracy varied by beat” (MarketWire, 2008). Political and lifestyle reporters, for instance, mainly believed that social media had a negative impact on the “tone” of reporting in their area of expertise, while health care, technology and travel journalists were more positive about the impact of social media (MarketWire, 2008).

This study aims to describe different beat reporters’ use of social media and the impact social media have had on reporters’ relationships with their sources.

2.8 Summary

This chapter served as a summary of the overall theoretical paradigm, critical, social constructionism, in which this study positions itself. It also gave an analysis of the concept *habitus* as the basis for a discussion on how the culture within a newsroom might influence the adoption of social media as a professional tool. As part of the literature review, special attention was given to clarifying the study’s definition for social media and how it differs from related terminology. Social media’s influence on the routines within newspaper newsrooms was further investigated by reviewing literature on the current newspaper

²⁷ The study looked at journalists from five different beats: politics, lifestyle, technology, healthcare and travel.

landscape, social media and newspaper journalism, the structuring and typification of news, and beats and sources.

In the next chapter the research methodology will be discussed.

Chapter Three: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces the methodology for the exploration and description of the use of social media in the newsrooms of *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian*, as well as the possible influence social media might have on the routines and culture within these newsrooms.

Working with social constructionism as a theoretical framework, it will be necessary to, according to Burr (2003:3), be “ever suspicious of our assumptions about how the world appears to be”. Burr (2003:4) says that instead of deriving our knowledge of the world from the natural world as it is, we should understand that knowledge is constructed when people interact with each other. According to Gergen (2009:58), empirical scientific researchers believe it is their task to illuminate the nature of phenomena as they exist and that they should develop “rigorous methods of research”. Gergen (2009:58) argues that constructionists give voice to the cultural traditions of which they are a part when they select phenomena to study. It is therefore important to note that the researcher of this study is part of a society in which social media usage is currently a cultural by-product, i.e. of a specific period in time.

According to Burr (2003:149), social constructionist research usually shows a preference for qualitative methods of inquiry, partly because they are viewed as “less likely to decontextualize the experience and accounts of respondents”. Burr (2003:152) emphasises that researchers who work within a social constructionist framework will view objectivity as impossible, since everyone approaches the world from some perspective and that the assumptions embedded in this perspective will inform the questions he or she asks about the world. Burr (2003:152) argues that a researcher has to acknowledge his or her own “intrinsic involvement” in the research process and the part it plays in the results that are produced. The researcher of this study has taken all of the above into account.

Although this study is mostly qualitative in nature, a quantitative data collection and analysis method will also be employed. In order to fully understand the research problem, both qualitative and quantitative research methods can be employed (Wimmer & Dominick, 2011:48). Leedy and Ormrod (2005:95) explain that qualitative and quantitative research designs are appropriate for answering different kinds of questions – even though the questions are about the same phenomenon. According to Leedy and Ormrod (2005:95) we therefore

... learn more about the world when we have both quantitative and qualitative methodologies at our disposal than when we are limited to only one approach or the other.

Thomas (2003) also argues for the combination of qualitative and quantitative research methodologies. According to Thomas (2003:44), in survey research, for instance, variables are better described in numerical form, such as frequencies and percentages, rather “imprecise verbal expressions” such as *many*, *majority* or *a few*. Burr (2003:150) also says that researchers working within a social constructionist paradigm may validly use quantitative methods in their research. Gergen (2009:61) also maintains that constructionists should not “cast away” the value of empirical research, like surveys and laboratory experiments. According to Gergen (2009:61-62), empirical findings can provide powerful illustrations and generate useful information and predictions.

The quantitative data-collection method used in this study consists of self-administered questionnaires, while the qualitative methods are semi-structured interviews and ethnography in the form of direct observation, informal conversations and the researcher’s personal field notes.

According to Babbie (2010:92), three of the most common and useful purposes of social research are exploration, description, and explanation.

This study is not explanatory in nature. Its main aim is not to try and answer *why* social media might have an influence on the routines and culture within newsrooms (adapted from Babbie, 2010:94). Although reasons for any possible changes might become apparent from interviews and observations for the study, it is designed to first establish whether social media do indeed have any significant impact on the routines and culture within these newsrooms before it tries to establish the motivations behind any changes.

The study will therefore focus on:

- **Exploration:** Babbie (2010:92) argues that exploratory studies look at interests or subjects that are relatively new. According to Babbie (2010:92), they are well served, not only to satisfy the researcher’s own curiosity, but also to test the feasibility for further study and develop methods for subsequent studies. As discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, Facebook and Twitter usage among journalists, especially in South Africa, has not yet been broadly researched on an academic level. This study aims to explore this field of research and look at the possible need for further investigation.

- **Description:** According to Babbie (2010:93), the primary purpose of social research is to observe and then describe situations and events. Babbie (2010:93) emphasises that these empirical observations are “careful and deliberate” and therefore far more accurate than “casual” observations. This study will use various empirical methods and techniques to observe the use of Facebook and Twitter by journalists at *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian* in order to be able to describe how these South African newspaper journalists use social media.

3.2 Qualitative research approach

A qualitative research approach is often chosen to explore an area where “limited or no prior information exists” (Du Plooy, 2009:88). As discussed in Chapters 1 and 2 and in section 3.1, academic studies on the professional use of social media within newspaper newsrooms are limited and are non-existent with regard to *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian*. According to Leedy and Ormrod (2005:94), qualitative research is also

... typically used to answer questions about the complex nature of phenomena, often with the purpose of describing and understanding the phenomena from the participants’ point of view.

In this study, social media (as a relatively new factor) in newspaper newsrooms will be described from the point of view from the journalists who work in the newsrooms of *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian*.

It is important to note that qualitative research is usually inductive (Du Plooy, 2009:88). In other words: based on certain assumptions, one would start with observations and/or asking questions and end up with descriptions (“summaries and interpretations”) of what was observed or of the responses received (Du Plooy, 2009:88). Babbie (2010:56) argues that social scientists often construct a theory after observation and by then “seeking to discover patterns that may point to relatively universal principles”. Du Plooy (2009:88) emphasises that the assumptions that guide the observations and questions have to be “well established in literature” to ensure that the researcher’s approach is not based on “subjective or faulty reasoning”. Although the motivation for this study was initiated the researcher’s own experiences as a journalist at *Rapport*, the assumption that social media have been introduced as a new factor in newsrooms such as *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian* is based

on an extensive literature review²⁸ and preliminary study of journalists' presence on social media networks²⁹. The goal of the questions asked of the participants in the study and of the observations is therefore to establish and describe to what extent this introduction of social media has influenced the daily running and culture of the newsroom.

3.3 Quantitative research methods

Berger and Luckmann (1967:188) end their treatise on the social construction of reality with a plea that their work must not be understood to ignore the need for “empirical research” . According to Berger and Luckmann (ibid.)

... empirical research in the relation of institutions to legitimating symbolic universes will greatly enhance the sociological understanding of contemporary society.

While the qualitative research methods, ethnography and semi-structured interviews, also yield empirical data, it is necessary to support these qualitative observations with more directly measurable data – i.e. data that can be counted. This study, working from a social constructionist viewpoint, will employ quantitative empirical research methods to enhance the qualitative research approach. Self-administered questionnaires, as well as quantitative data analysis techniques, such as summary and descriptive statistics, will be used.

Du Plooy (2009:86) notes that a quantitative research design can be used when you want to count and/or measure variables. According to Du Plooy (2009:87), its objectives are usually

... to describe, predict and explain quantities, degrees and relationships, and to generalise from a sample to the target or accessible populations by collecting numerical data.

In this study, the self-administered questionnaire will be used to count and measure variables, such as how journalists at *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian* view social media as a

²⁸ See Chapter 2.

²⁹ This comment is based on a preliminary search, before the commencement of the research, on Facebook and Twitter according to the names of reporters as they appear in *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian*. On Facebook the researcher could find profiles for 11 journalists from *Rapport*, while about 8 *Mail & Guardian* journalists seemed to have profiles. Around 9 *Rapport* journalists and around 9 *Mail & Guardian* journalists had accounts on Twitter. The lists of the journalists with Twitter accounts can be accessed at: <http://twitter.com/#!/MarenetJordaan/rapport> and <http://twitter.com/#!/MarenetJordaan/mail-guardian>.

professional tool differently, how journalists view social media as a tool for hard news and soft news differently and how journalists see the influence of social media on their relationships with their sources differently.

Because every effort will be made to survey all the news journalists in the Gauteng offices of *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian* in order to get a comprehensive picture of these two newsrooms, the questionnaires will also help to serve as a sample to generalise for the target population.

The survey data will be analysed using descriptive statistics, described by Babbie (2010:467) as “statistical computations describing either the characteristics of a sample or the relationship among variables in a sample”.

3.4 Triangulation of methods

The use of multiple methods in a single study is generally referred to as triangulation (Priest, 2010:8; Leedy & Ormrod, 2005:99; Wimmer & Dominick, 2011:48; Du Plooy, 2009:40). Leedy and Ormrod (2005:99) also explain that the validity of the study can be improved by gathering data from multiple sources in the hope that they will converge to support a particular hypothesis or theory. As was stated above, this study employs qualitative methods (semi-structured interviews and ethnography) and quantitative methods (surveys, specifically self-administered questionnaires). Sections 3.6 to 3.8 will discuss each of these methods in more detail.

3.5 Unit of analysis and sampling

Unit of analysis refers to the individual item being described by the data collected (Priest, 2010:41). This study is, for the most part, focused on the characteristics of and routines within a single newsroom. The unit of analysis is therefore a newspaper newsroom. There will be instances, however, where the newsroom will be divided into subgroups for descriptive purposes, such as journalists with or without social media profiles.

Before drawing a sample to study, it is important to make a clear distinction between the target population and the accessible population (Du Plooy, 2009:109). According to Du Plooy (2009:109), this distinction has serious implications for research, because if you have a narrow selection in terms of your accessibility, the generalisability of your findings will be more limited. For this study, the target population comprises the journalists who write on a full-time basis for *Rapport* newspaper and journalists who write on a full-time basis for the

print edition³⁰ of the *Mail & Guardian*. Admittedly, the application of this study's findings to a larger population, such as *all* newspaper journalists in South Africa, will be limited. It will, however, add knowledge to an under-researched field and prepare the way for future research.

The accessible population comprises all the journalists who write regularly for the print editions of *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian* in Gauteng. Although there are journalists in other parts of the country, such as Cape Town, who work for these publications, the researcher did not have easy access to them – especially to conduct the semi-structured interviews and to do ethnographic research. However, the Gauteng offices of *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian* are their head offices, and therefore the sites where most of the journalists work.

The self-administered questionnaires will be distributed to all the journalists from the accessible population. Although all of them might not return the questionnaires, the researcher expects a relatively high response rate. This assumption is made on the basis of the small size of the population³¹ which will make follow-ups, especially with help from support staff at the newspapers, easier.

For the semi-structured interviews purposive sampling will be used. As Babbie (2010:193) argues, it is sometimes appropriate to select a sample “on the basis of knowledge of a population, its elements, and the purpose of the study”. In order to draw this sample the researcher conducted preliminary surveys of the Twitter and Facebook usage of the journalists at *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian* in Gauteng. This enabled the researcher to identify journalists who are either very active on social media, or who are not active at all and might not even have Twitter or Facebook accounts. Leedy and Ormrod (2005:206) summarise this as choosing people who are either “typical” of a group or those who represent “diverse perspectives on an issue”. A preliminary survey of journalists from both *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian* has shown that the majority of the journalists have a presence on Facebook and/or Twitter – albeit not necessarily an active one. It can therefore be inferred that that what is typical of this group is to have some kind of social media presence. The researcher will therefore choose to do interviews with a selection of journalists who, on the one hand, seem to have active Twitter and Facebook profiles and, on the other hand,

³⁰ It is important to distinguish here between the print edition and the *Mail & Guardian Online* which, at the time of writing, functioned as a separate newsroom, although the online journalists share an office with the print journalists.

³¹ *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian* each have around sixteen journalists and editors who work full-time for the print edition of their respective newspapers in their Gauteng offices.

journalists who do not seem to have any social media presence at all. The population at both newspapers consists of around 16 journalists and editors at each publication. The researcher will aim to interview at least 5 journalists and editors at each publication.

The ethnography leg of the research will involve observing of each newspaper's newsroom for a whole production week: at *Rapport* from Tuesday to Saturday and at the *Mail & Guardian* from Friday to Thursday. Although observations will be made and a diary kept of what happens in the whole newsroom, purposive sampling will once again be employed to choose specific journalists whose actions and use of social media will be monitored in detail during this week. Due to the time constraints, the focus will fall on not more than two to three journalists at each publication.

3.6 Questionnaires

Surveys are used to collect large amounts of data about different variables from individuals who are representatives of a larger group (Du Plooy, 2009:189). Wimmer and Dominick (2011:185) distinguishes between descriptive and analytical surveys. A descriptive survey – used in this study – attempts to describe or document current conditions or attitudes, whereas an analytical survey attempts to describe *why* situations exist (Wimmer & Dominick, 2011:185).

Surveys have various advantages as research methods, as discussed by Babbie (2010:287) and Wimmer and Dominick (2011:185-186): They can help to collect data and characteristics from a large group of people from different places; the cost of surveys is reasonable; surveys can be used to investigate problems in realistic settings as opposed to in laboratories under artificial conditions; and surveys are flexible because many questions can be asked on a given topic at once.

At the same time, there are several disadvantages of using surveys as a research method (Babbie, 2010:287; Wimmer & Dominick, 2011:186): Because of the requirements of standardisation, a survey often does not take into account what questions would be most appropriate for many respondents since it focuses on what will be at least minimally appropriate to all respondents; causality cannot be established through surveys because independent variables cannot be manipulated as in a laboratory setting; inappropriate wording or placing of questions can bias results; and the choice of respondents or the response rates may influence the results.

Because this study is inherently qualitative in nature, causality is not an issue. The selection of respondents and the focus of inquiry are also not problematic because of the self-evident nature of the research population and project (professional journalists and journalism at *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian*). However, care will be taken with the wording of the questions to avoid suggestion and minimise bias.

A self-administered questionnaire is a survey tool that uses a questionnaire filled in by respondents without assistance from anyone else (Du Plooy, 2009:152). For this study, a comprehensive self-administered questionnaire will be designed to gather self-reported data from journalists at *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian* about their news routines, beat structure, sourcing and newsroom *habitus*, with specific reference to the role Facebook and Twitter plays in them.

All the news journalists in the Gauteng offices of *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian* will be approached to complete the surveys from June 2011 onwards. Since the study's aim is to sketch as complete a picture as possible about the news routines and news *habitus* as influenced by the professional use of social media, every effort will be made to include the responses of all the journalists and editors working at these newspapers. In an attempt to increase the response rate the researcher will follow up with the journalists regarding the completion of the questionnaires while conducting interviews and ethnographic research in these newsrooms.

Quantitative data analysis methods will be used to assess the data collected by means of the questionnaires. This will involve descriptive statistics, or taking random data and organising them into some type of order as was suggested by Wimmer and Dominick (2011:267). The answers given to the questionnaires will generally be presented and discussed as a frequency distribution – “a description of the number of times that the various attributes of a variable are observed in a sample” (Babbie, 2010:428). The results will also be presented as graphs to make it more understandable.

The questionnaire is designed to elicit responses that will help to provide an overview of social media usage at *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian*, and to answer the four specific research questions:

- a) Has the use of Facebook and Twitter changed the way journalists at *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian* schedule and typify news?

- b) How has the use of Facebook and Twitter influenced the beat system at *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian*?
- c) How has the use of Facebook and Twitter influenced the relationships reporters at *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian* have with their sources?
- d) What influence has the newsroom *habitus* at *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian* had on the introduction and acceptance of the professional use of Facebook and Twitter?

3.7 Semi-structured interviews

The qualitative, semi-structured interview is based on a “set of topics” for discussion, rather than the use of standardised questions (Babbie, 2010:318). The interview is an “interaction” between interviewer and respondent where the interviewer has a general plan of inquiry, but no formal questions in any specific order (Babbie, 2010:318). These kinds of interviews provide detailed background about the reasons for respondents’ answers and ample time to observe their non-verbal responses (Wimmer & Dominick, 2011:139). They can also be customised to adapt to the individual respondent and the interview climate (Wimmer & Dominick, 2011:139).

The main advantage of these types of interviews is the amount of information they provide (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005:146; Wimmer & Dominick, 2011:139). However, it is difficult to get generalised answers from semi-structured interviews, since all the respondents may not answer the same questions (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005:146; Wimmer & Dominick, 2011:139). Longer interviews also create the opportunity for interviewer bias, since the respondent also gets a chance to observe the interviewer and gauge his/her attitude (Wimmer & Dominick, 2011:139). According to Babbie (2010:321)

... since field research interviewing is so much like normal conversation, researchers must keep reminding themselves that they are not having a normal conversation.

The focus for the semi-structured interviews for this study will be on news journalists and selected editors, who will be approached for their interviews after completing the self-administered questionnaires. As discussed in section 3.4, purposive selection will be used to choose the interviewees on the basis of their social media usage.

The editor of *Rapport*, Ms Liza Albrecht³² (Lombard, personal communications, 4 May, 2011), and the managing editor of the *Mail & Guardian*, Ms Charmeela Bhagowat (personal communications, 28 April, 2011), granted the researcher access to the newsrooms. It was supplemented by signed informed consent from the journalists. The researcher also sought and received ethical clearance for the study from Stellenbosch University's Research Ethics Committee. The interviews are planned for July 2011.

The data from the semi-structured interviews will be qualitatively analysed, in other words: by looking for general thematic patterns and then organising data accordingly (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005:150).

The themes set out for discussion in the interviews centre around all specific four research questions. These themes include:

- personal background and group culture (*habitus*)
- general social media use
- news routines as influenced by social media
- relationship with sources as influenced by social media
- beats as influenced by social media
- newsroom culture
- personal perception of social media

3.8 Ethnography

Wimmer and Dominick (2011:145) characterise ethnographic research as follows:

- It puts the researcher in the middle of the topic under study
- It emphasises studying an issue or topic from the participants' frame of reference
- It involves spending a considerable amount of time in the field
- It uses a variety of research techniques, like observation, interviewing, diary keeping, analysis of existing documents, photography and videotaping

³² In the week before research was to be conducted, an announcement was made that Liza Albrecht will be leaving *Rapport* to take up a new position as head of digital platforms for Afrikaans newspapers at Media24. At the time a new editor had not yet been appointed. She has since been replaced by Mr Bokkie Gerber.

This study will focus on the direct observation of journalists at *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian* to describe their professional use of Facebook and Twitter, as well as their news routines. This observation will be supplemented with informal interviews and discussions, as well as a diary kept by the researcher during the observation period. A period of at least a week, i.e. a full production cycle, at each of the newspapers under investigation, will be set aside for the ethnographic observation.

Mabweazara (2010:665) discusses the challenges of using ethnography to research the use of new technologies by journalists, 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 these practices to the object of one’s study”. This researcher foresees the same problems when focusing mainly on ethnography as research design for establishing the use of Facebook and Twitter by journalists from *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian*. However, some of the solutions Mabweazara offers for this dilemma might prove to be of use. This includes focused attention to certain news beats at a time, observation of journalists away from their desks and occasionally interrupting journalists during their news routines to question them about their actions (Mabweazara, 2010:667). It is also of utmost importance that journalists are aware of the researcher’s intentions and goals and give informed consent for their participation in the study (Mabweazara, 2010:667).

In doing ethnographic research within newspaper newsrooms, especially where one has worked previously, it will be important for the researcher to acknowledge the possible influence of his/her own perspective and/or assumptions about the results of the study. It might therefore be especially important to develop what Burr (2003:154) describes as a democratised research relationship. According to Burr (2003:155)

... the subject’s own account of their experiences can no longer be given an alternative interpretation by the researcher who then offers their reading as truth [...] the validity of the participants’ accounts must be acknowledged.

When looking at how journalists experience the introduction of social media within the newsroom, care would therefore have to be taken to not mould the answers given in questionnaires or interviews to fit the researcher’s assumptions. The study should only aim to describe the journalists’ own experiences of social media and their influences on the newsroom.

Since I used to be a reporter at *Rapport* it will be easier to negotiate access into this newsroom. I am aware that this might also lead to bias, but will take this into account in my approach and interaction with journalists. As discussed above, consent for the study has been granted by the editors of *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian* and ethical clearance has also been received from the ethics committee of Stellenbosch University.

As with the semi-structured interviews, the data and observations gathered during the ethnography will be qualitatively analysed, catalogued and discussed using similar themes. The ethnographic research will help to answer the general research question: How does the professional use of social media at *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian* influence processes and cultures of news selection and presentation?

3.9 Summary

This chapter discussed the research methodology. While the design of this study is mainly qualitative, a quantitative element was introduced in the form of self-administered questionnaires and descriptive statistics. The influence of social media on newsroom practices and culture will be described. All the news journalists and editors in the Gauteng offices of *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian* will be considered as the accessible population for the self-administered questionnaires. For the semi-structured interviews and ethnography purposive sampling will be done to choose certain journalists and editors that either represent a typical example of the group or diverse views.

In the next chapter, the results from the self-administered questionnaires will be presented.

Chapter Four: Findings from self-administered questionnaires

4.1. Introduction

This chapter discusses the findings from the self-administered questionnaires that were distributed to news journalists and editors at *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian*. The questionnaire for this study was designed to address the four specific research questions:

- a) Has the use of Facebook and Twitter changed the way journalists at *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian* schedule and typify news?
- b) How has the use of Facebook and Twitter influenced the beat system at *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian*?
- c) How has the use of Facebook and Twitter influenced the relationships reporters at *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian* have with their sources?
- d) What influence has the newsroom *habitus* at *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian* had on the introduction and acceptance of the professional use of Facebook and Twitter?

The findings of the questionnaires brought various issues and/or topics for discussion to light. These issues are presented in this chapter in the form of a summary of the journalists' responses to the research questions above.

4.2. Review of methodology

This study made use of a self-administered questionnaire designed by the researcher according to guidelines set out by Babbie (2010:254-272), Bourque and Fielder (1995), Du Plooy (2009:192-195), Leedy and Ormrod (2005:190-197) and Wimmer and Dominick (2011:185-202). These guidelines include:

- According to Du Plooy (2009:192), the first page of the questionnaire must include an introduction, identify the person who is undertaking the research and explain the purpose of the research. Bourque and Fielder (1995:121) also say that it is important to give a “realistic estimate” of the time it might take a respondent to complete the questionnaire.

- Du Plooy (2009:193) emphasises that since it is “virtually impossible” to obtain informed consent from respondents due to the absence of direct contact between the respondents and the researcher, the introduction should include information about “voluntary participation”. According to Du Plooy (2009:193) “if a respondent returns a completed questionnaire, this will be taken as an indication of informed consent”. With this study, extra precautions were taken to ensure informed consent by explicitly informing respondents about the rights as research subjects and asking them to indicate if they agreed to take part in the study. Confidentiality, as emphasised by Bourque and Fielder (1995:122), was also achieved since the questionnaires were completed anonymously.
- Although there are different opinions on the matter, most sources³³ consulted by the researcher agree that the demographic questions should be included at the end of the questionnaire. According to Du Plooy (2009:194), this helps to stop the respondent from seeing the questionnaire as “yet another routine survey”. Du Plooy (2009:194) also argues that a respondent may become tired towards the end of a survey and not complete the last page.
- All the sources consulted agree that the questionnaire should be kept as short as possible.
- According to the sources consulted, each question should be accompanied with clear instructions on how to answer that question.
- The sources agree that simple, clear, unambiguous language should be used.
- Most sources emphasise that double-barrelled and leading questions should be avoided.
- According to most of the sources consulted, it is important to keep the goal of the research in mind when structuring the questionnaire.

The questionnaire was completed in consultation with the researcher’s supervisor, who also provided input. Some questions can be answered with a simple “yes” or “no”, but for others a variety of Likert scales were used to gauge the respondents’ attitudes and perceptions towards several issues. According to Wimmer and Dominick (2011:55), Likert scales are arguable the most commonly used scale in mass media research. Du Plooy (2009:144) explains that a Likert scale assesses the

³³ See: Babbie (2010: 254-272), Bourque and Fielder (1995), Du Plooy (2009:192-195), Leedy and Ormrod (2005:190-197) and Wimmer and Dominick (2011:185-202).

... degree to which respondents agree or disagree with statements about a specific topic or issue.

Only close-ended questions were used in these instances. The responses were coded in such a way that a higher score meant a stronger agreement with the statement in question.

The final questionnaire³⁴ consists of seven pages and contains four sections. Each section deals with a specific aspect of social media use and/or newsroom routine or culture and how they might possibly be influenced by social media. This structure follows the advice of Babbie (2010:265) who warns against randomising questions in a questionnaire since it forces the respondents to “continually switch their attention from one topic to another”. As advised by Wimmer and Dominick (2011:197), the questionnaire starts with a few “warm up questions” about social media to accustom the respondents with the topic and to “serve as motivation to create interest in the questionnaire”. Section A therefore deals with the respondents’ general use of social media. In Section B the respondents are asked about their news production routines, sources, the beat structure in their news office and the culture in their newsroom. In each instance questions about the respondents’ perception of social media are included. Section C asks the respondents more explicitly to rate their experience of social media in the newsroom. As mentioned above, the demographic characteristics are included at the end (section D).

The questionnaires were distributed at *Rapport*, via the news editor, and at the *Mail & Guardian*, via the news secretary, during the second week of June. Journalists could hand them back to their news secretaries at any time. The researcher collected the completed questionnaires about two weeks later. In total, 21 journalists and editors – 11 at *Rapport* and 10 at the *Mail & Guardian* – completed the questionnaire. This amounts to a response rate³⁵ of around 67%

The responses of the questionnaires were captured by the researcher in a Microsoft Excel database and analysed using the statistical tools of this software package. To validate the findings, descriptive analyses of the results were also conducted by the Centre for Statistical Consultation at Stellenbosch University.

³⁴ Attached here as Appendix A

³⁵ For consistency and analysis purposes the researcher estimated how many journalists and editors would have been in the office if *all* the staff were present, since the number of journalists present varies every week.

4.3. Limitations of methodology

As discussed in Chapter 1, the researcher could not locate any significant academic studies on social media usage amongst journalists – especially not in South Africa. Finding an existing questionnaire on which to model this study's questionnaire proved to be a challenge. The researcher therefore created her own questionnaire with guidance from literature on the structuring of questionnaires, as well as industry studies that looked at social media usage in general and social media usage amongst journalists.

While every effort was made to involve as many journalists in the study as possible, the researcher could not account for journalists who were on extended leave or ignored repeated attempts to involve them in the study. Although all of the journalists were made aware of the aim of the study there was no reward nor incentive for them to take part therein and the researcher therefore had to depend on their good will. Despite this apparent hurdle, this study did manage to gather questionnaires from a fair representation of journalists from the newsrooms of both *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian*.

4.4. Findings

The findings of the survey will generally be presented according to the main topics discussed in the literature review and investigated in the questionnaire.

4.4.1 Personal and newsroom *habitus*

This survey's results indicate that the majority of the journalists at *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian* who responded to the questionnaire are male (almost 62%). The male respondents proportionally have more experience than their female counterparts, with 53.8% of the males having more than 10 years' experience at newspapers, with only 37.5% of the females with the same level of experience. Overall, both the male and female respondents are highly qualified, with almost half of all the journalists in the study (10 out of 21) having completed a second tertiary degree. There is no significant difference between the qualification level of men and women in this study.

While they are clearly well educated and experienced, most of these journalists (71%) did not grow up with Internet access. Only 42% indicated that they used social media before starting to work as journalists. These findings were corroborated by the responses from the semi-structured interviews which are discussed in Chapter 5. It also correlates with the

finding that almost half of the respondents have been working as journalists for more than 10 years, since social media such as Facebook and Twitter have been in use for less than 10 years³⁶.

The majority of journalists who responded to the questionnaire personally came to embrace both the Internet and social media. Almost 86% of them also say they are dependent on the Internet as journalists. During the semi-structured interviews even some of the journalists who do not use social media agreed that the Internet is essential to their job. The ethnographic research also showed that journalists spent significant amounts of their work day behind their computers, mostly with social media and Internet search engine websites such as Google open all day on their computer desktops. While quite a few of the respondents did not have Internet access at home (9 out of 21), most of them (86%) accessed the Internet on their cellphones.

According to the literature reviewed in Chapter 2, a person's *habitus* (or historical dispositions) will influence the way they act in the present. Following this reasoning, one might expect that journalists who did not grow up with the Internet will use it less today and that they might also be more wary of social media. However, journalists in this study who did not grow up with the Internet did not seem less inclined to use it than those who were exposed to the Internet from an early age *and* were encouraged by their parents to use it. Table 4.1 summarises the personal use of social media amongst journalists who grew up with the Internet and compares it with those who grew up without the Internet. While the journalists who did not grow up with the Internet seemed to favour Facebook above Twitter, they did not seem to be markedly less active on social media than journalists who grew up with these media. Also see chart (i) in Appendix B.

	Grew up with Internet access (n= 6)	Grew up without Internet access (n= 15)
Personal Facebook account	100%	93.3%
No personal Facebook account	0	6.7%
Personal Twitter account	83.3%	73.3%
No personal Twitter account	16.7%	26.7%

Table 4.1 – Comparison of social media profiles of journalists who grew up with Internet access with those of journalists who did not grow up with Internet access (see chart (i) in Appendix B)

³⁶ See Chapter 2 (section 2.4)

Most of the journalists with personal Facebook accounts indicated that they use them for personal interaction. Only one journalist indicated that he/she did not have a personal Facebook account at the time. Of the 16 journalists with personal Twitter accounts, most of them used this medium for professional interactions and contact building and/or to promote themselves and their work.

Most of the journalists (85.7%) said that they started using social media at work using their own initiative. This concurs with findings by Newman (2009:23) after studies at institutions such as the *New York Times* showed that social media in most organisations start as “bottom up experiments”. Most of the journalists surveyed (76.2%) agreed that they enjoyed using social media, with only 9.5% disagreeing with the statement, “I enjoy social media” and 14.3% saying they “neither agree nor disagree”.

The survey’s findings indicate newsrooms that welcome and encourage the professional use of social media. As discussed in the literature review, a person’s actions are not only determined by his or her personal *habitus*, but are also shaped by socialisation and new experiences. Respondents might therefore have had a certain attitude or understanding of the Internet and/or social media before entering the newsroom (because of their personal background), but their views and actions were probably influenced by the culture of the newsroom. In the survey section designed to probe the culture and atmosphere in the newsroom, most journalists were in strong agreement with statements describing their newsrooms as places where social media are used and encouraged. Of all the respondents from *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian* more than 95.2% agreed that they were “encouraged to use social media” as part of their jobs. Story ideas from social media seemed to be encouraged, with 85.7% of journalists agreeing with this statement.

The journalists were also aware of the fact that their colleagues were active on social media, with 95.2% agreeing with the statement: “The other journalists in my office use social media.” One might therefore make the assumption that journalists are not only using social media for their own benefit, but because they want to fit in with the rest of the newsroom. This assumption is also based on the observations Breed (1997:109,[1954]) makes about the way staff members learn policy in the newsroom. Breed (1997:109,[1954]) says

...the learning of policy is a process by which the recruit discovers and internalizes the rights and obligations of his status and its norms and values.

The majority of respondents (75%) believed and/or knew for sure that their managers were using social media regularly. This finding was confirmed by the semi-structured interviews discussed in Chapter 5.

Although there was no formal, written-down policy on the use of social media in either of these newsrooms when this research was being conducted, social media usage appeared to be a widely accepted practice. During the semi-structured interviews it emerged that both *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian* were in the process of formulating social media guidelines. It seems clear from the interviews discussed in Chapter 5 that the gist of these guidelines had already been communicated to staff at the *Mail & Guardian*. *Rapport* journalists, however, were less clear about what their newspaper's stance on social media usage were.

4.4.2 General view of social media

It is clear from these the results of the questionnaires that journalists consider it to be very important that they use social media such as Facebook and Twitter as part of their professional lives. While a couple of journalists indicated that they thought social media is only “somewhat important”, none of the journalists surveyed thought it *not* important for journalists to use social media professionally. These findings generally correspond with results from industry studies, such as those by Cision (2009) and Cision Media Research (2010), the latter of which found that 74% of 549 journalists in the United Kingdom, Germany and France believed social media are either “important” or “somewhat important” in their work.

It is important to note though, that while most of the journalists considered social media important and had clearly embraced them, they still seemed wary of the information distributed via these media. Most of the journalists (more than 80%) surveyed considered the information they gathered on these social media to be “somewhat reliable” – as opposed to “very reliable” – with some (10%) indicating that they thought such information is “not reliable at all”. This seems to be in line with international trends – with the 3rd *Annual Middleberg/SNCR Survey of Media in the Wired World* (Society for New Communications Research, 2011) reporting that 68% of the journalists³⁷ surveyed said that social media is “sometimes” a reliable tool for sourcing stories. Raymond and Lu (2011:22), however, found that 71.4% of the journalists they surveyed on Facebook believed that information provided

³⁷ The study surveyed 200 journalists – mostly from the United States.

there might be inaccurate. In the most recent study by Cision (2010:5) 66% of journalists indicated that they believed social media is “much less” or “slightly less” reliable than traditional offline channels when it comes to delivering information.

In light of the previous finding, it is understandable that most of the journalists surveyed in this study said that they don’t often use social media – Facebook or Twitter – to get story ideas or further developments on current stories. This seems to be in line with international trends, with a worldwide study amongst business journalists by Brunswick Research (2011:8) reporting that around one in seven of the stories journalists write may have originated from social media. This study, however, indicated that social media – especially Facebook – was being used quite often by journalists at *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian* to locate sources, more so than to find ideas for stories.

Table 4.2 compares journalists’ use of Facebook and Twitter with regard to story ideation and sourcing. Also see charts (ii) to (v) in Appendix B.

	Story ideas or follow-ups		Sources	
	Facebook	Twitter	Facebook	Twitter
<i>Often (daily/weekly)</i>	19%	19%	42.9%	23.8%
<i>Sometimes (every few months)</i>	42.9%	52.4%	33.3%	28.6%
<i>Seldom (once/twice a year)</i>	23.8%	14.3%	19%	14.3%
<i>Never</i>	14.3%	14.3%	4.8%	23.8%
<i>I don’t know</i>	n/a	n/a	n/a	9.5%

Table 4.2 – Journalists’ use of Facebook and Twitter for story ideation and sources (also see charts (ii) to (v) in Appendix B)

The above findings were mostly corroborated when respondents were explicitly asked what influence they thought social media have on “finding stories”: most journalists indicated that it has an “average influence” (43%), with less than 20% believing social media have a “big influence”, and around a third indicating social media have a “small influence”.

Journalists from *Rapport* considered Facebook to be more important than their counterparts at the *Mail & Guardian*. Only one of the *Rapport* journalists did not belong to any Facebook groups or did not “like” any Facebook pages to gather information for stories. With the *Mail & Guardian*, half of the journalists did not engage with Facebook pages and groups for story ideation. The picture changes only slightly with Twitter, with 8 out of 11

Rapport journalists using the medium at the time to gather information, while 6 out of 10 *Mail & Guardian* journalists were doing the same.

It emerged from the semi-structured interviews that one of the main uses of social media for the journalists was to keep up with trends, which is important to note. This is further discussed in Chapter 5, but (as an example) Dawes (personal communications, 13 July 2011) explained that he uses it

... to see what's going on around me, to take the temperature, to see what different people's attitudes to different news stories are, to look for hard news, to see where we might be missing something that is building up, a kind of social currency that we haven't recognised.

During the ethnographic research in informal conversations, journalists also mentioned browsing social media out of pure curiosity. The researcher was also witness to this.

When explicitly asked to rate the influence they have felt from social media had on the practices and routines in their newsroom, most journalists described social media as “very” (48%) or “somewhat” (29%) helpful – rather than hindering – when it comes to their professional practices and routines. They still seemed a bit divided about whether social media such as Facebook and Twitter, were easy to use and save time, with almost half indicating that they find social media neither “complex” nor “simple” and neither “time-saving” nor “time-consuming”. See Table 4.3 for a summary of the journalists' responses on how they perceive the direct influence of social media on their newsrooms.

	Somewhat to very much	Neither	Somewhat to very much	
Helpful	76%	19%	5%	Hindering
Complex	29%	47%	24%	Simple
Time-saving	29%	52%	19%	Time consuming

Table 4.3 – Journalists' perceptions of how social media directly influence newsroom practices and routines

4.4.3 Time and typification of news

The self-administered questionnaire was designed to first establish the journalists' general understanding and perception of a field or activity – such as the scheduling and typification of news – within the newsroom. These views serve as context for a discussion on how social

media might have influenced these fields and/or activities. The theoretical assumption relevant here is that journalists follow certain routines during the manufacturing of news, and that changes and/or pressures such as the introduction of social media will influence these routines. The respondents' general views on time and the typification of news are briefly discussed at the end of this section.

As discussed in the literature review, social media have the potential to break news as soon as it happens, often giving journalists insight into what is happening on the ground. In an analysis of the role social media played in the coverage of the Iranian election protests in June 2009, Newman (2009:31) notes that

... in the future, news organisations are going to need to get used to the fact that they will always be running behind the social networks.

Most of the journalists in this study (62%) agreed that journalists “follow social media for hard news leads”. This is, however, no indication that journalists typify the news that their newspapers are doing differently because of the role social media play in the media landscape. When asked whether “newspapers cover more soft news because social media cover hard news” almost all the journalists (86%) disagreed. Their reaction on the typification of news was further interrogated during the semi-structured interviews and will be discussed at length in Chapter 5.

To continue with the example of social media's coverage of the Iranian election, Internet commentator Andrew Keen's comments to Sky Online (Barnett, 2009) at the time are noteworthy in this instance:

Twitter is a great real-time tool for distributing opinion, but it is no replacement for curated media coverage of the crisis [...] Twitter makes us more passionate and engaged in the immediacy of events – but it doesn't make us any wiser.

When explicitly asked whether they think social media influence the choice between hard news and soft news (as part of the routines within the news room), most of the journalists (43%) agreed that social media have a “small influence”. Furthermore, the journalists did not think that social media played a big or even average influence on the way news was scheduled (placed on the news diary) – with 43% saying that social media have a “small influence” on news scheduling and 33% indicating that social media have “no influence”.

When discussing the influence of social media on the scheduling of news, a slight majority of journalists (52%) agreed that social media are “unpredictable”, making it “difficult to plan ahead”. Considering the way Tuchman (1978:52) typifies hard news as mostly “unscheduled”, not giving the news workers a choice on when to “gather ‘facts’ and [when] to disseminate accounts and explanations”, the aforementioned finding supports the findings of section 4.4.3: that most journalists viewed social media as a distributor of mostly hard news. Almost half of the journalists approached in this study agreed that social media help “to plan around and predict developments in news”. According to Tuchman (1978:54), developing news concerns “emergent situations”. Tuchman (1978:55) explained that although “emergent situations” are an “unexpected events”, and can therefore be typified as hard news, new facts will become available in time, or “the story develops”. The findings in this study indicate that a fair amount of journalists realised the value of social media in delivering updates on developments in the news. One might argue that this confirms that the journalists were using social media to keep abreast of news as-it-happens or, alternatively, news trends.

This finding was corroborated when journalists were explicitly asked to rate the influence of social media on “story follow-ups”³⁸; 48% of the journalists indicated that social media have either an average or big influence in this regard. Table 4.4 summarises the journalists’ views of the influence of social media on the scheduling and typification of news. As advised by Babbie (2010:434), the two end ranges of variations – in this case “strongly agree”/“agree” and “disagree”/“strongly disagree” – are collapsed. This will ensure that a positive or negative response – even though there might be a slight degree of difference – is not ignored in the final analysis. Also see charts (vi) to (ix) in Appendix B.

	<i>Agree or strongly agree</i>	<i>Neither agree nor disagree</i>	<i>Disagree or strongly disagree</i>
Journalists follow social media for hard news leads.	62%	14%	24%
Newspapers cover more soft news because social media covers hard news.	-	14%	86%
Social media are unpredictable and makes it difficult to plan ahead.	52%	38%	10%
Social media help to plan around and predict developments in news.	48%	52%	-

Table 4.4 – Journalists’ view of social media’s influence on the scheduling and typification of news (also see charts (vi) – (ix) in Appendix B)

³⁸ This is a generally accepted way amongst journalists of referring to developing news

In order to gauge the journalists' general understanding of how news is scheduled and typified within the newsroom, the journalists were also presented with various statements on news production. These statements were formulated within the framework of the theoretical assumptions and literature review of the study as discussed in Chapter 2.

When talking about the typification of news, Tuchman (1978:48) notices that journalists often find it difficult to formulate how they distinguish between "hard" and "soft" news. Tuchman (1978:48) says that the distinctions often overlap and that

... frequently it is difficult, if not impossible, to decide whether an event is interesting or important or is both interesting and important. Indeed, the same event may be treated as either a hard- or a soft-news story.

Tuchman's observation (1978:48) was supported by the findings of this study. Just 52% of the journalists agreed with the following statement: "There is a clear distinction between hard news and soft news". Of those 52% only 14% indicated that they strongly agreed. Some 43% were neutral about the statement, while 5% said they disagreed.

One might argue that the respondents' seeming inability to make a clear distinction between hard news and soft news were already been influenced to some extent by the advent of social media. This is clear from their responses, discussed above, establishing social media as conduits for hard news leads, while at the same time still stating that newspapers are not going "soft" as a result.

When probed about the nature of hard and soft news, journalists seemed to agree with Tuchman (1978:51), who argues that the "date of dissemination as news" of soft news can be determined by the news workers. More than 90% of journalists surveyed in this study either strongly agreed or agreed that: "Journalists can plan ahead for the reporting on and production of soft news stories". Despite the opportunity to plan for soft news stories, the journalists did not consider this type of story easier to do. Almost three quarters of the journalists (72%) disagreed with the statement: "Soft news stories are easier to do than hard news stories." But they seemed more divided about whether, "[e]vents that lead to hard news stories happen too quickly for the journalists to plan ahead." While the majority (43%) agreed with this statement, a substantial number (29%) indicated that they neither agreed nor disagreed with it and quite a few (29%) did not agree that one cannot plan for hard news stories.

Table 4.5 summarises the findings on the scheduling and typification of news discussed above. As with Table 4.4 the response categories have been collapsed.

	<i>Agree or strongly agree</i>	<i>Neither agree nor disagree</i>	<i>Disagree or strongly disagree</i>
There is a clear distinction between hard news and soft news.	52%	43%	5%
Soft news stories are easier to do than hard news stories.	15%	14%	73%
Journalists can plan ahead for the reporting on and production of soft news stories.	90%	5%	5%
Events that lead to hard news stories happen too quickly for the journalist to plan ahead.	43%	29%	19%

Table 4.5- Journalists' view of the scheduling and typification of news

4.4.4 Sources

In most of the industry studies consulted for the literature review, journalists indicate that although they find social media increasingly helpful to network with and locate sources, they are still dependent, and often prefer personal interaction with sources, as well as more established technologies such as company websites. In the semi-structured interviews, discussed in Chapter 5, the journalists from *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian* also spoke about their preference for one-one-one meetings with sources to gather information – even though they might have initial contact with these sources on social media.

When rating the importance of sources according to the responses of the journalists in this study, documents proved to be the most important source used during the news-gathering process, closely followed by first person encounters. Facebook and Twitter – in that order – are the least important sources of information for journalists at *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian*.

It is important to note, though, that when explicitly asked, 66% of the journalists in this study indicated that social media had an average or big influence on their contact with sources. It would therefore seem that while they still did not consider social media to be as important as other sources, they still felt that social media had a significant impact on their daily interaction with sources.

This might explain the findings of the ethnographic research, discussed in Chapter 6, which indicated that a lot of journalists are deskbound for long periods during the day. One cannot, however, assume that this means journalists interact with sources only on social media. It would seem to indicate, however, that a lot of them spend less time in the physical presence of their sources

Table 4.6 summarises the value attached to various sources by journalists from *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian*. Also see chart (x) in Appendix B.

	Important to Indispensable	Useful	Unimportant to negligible
Documents	95%	5%	-
First person encounters	90%	10%	-
Electronic research	62%	38%	-
Public events	57%	43%	-
Public relation officers	33%	62%	5%
Facebook	19%	71%	10%
Twitter	14.3%	71.4%	14.3%

Table 4.6 – Journalists view of sources used during the newsgathering process (also see chart (x) in Appendix B)

4.4.5 Beats

As with section 4.4.3, the respondents' perceptions and opinions of the beat structure at *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian* were questioned to contextualise their views of social media within the newsroom. In this instance, it is necessary to discuss the journalists' responses to questions about the beat system in general since these views have a direct bearing on how journalists perceive the role of social media on the beat system.

As discussed in the literature review, newspapers often use the beat system to enable better coverage of events-as-news. The findings of the questionnaire indicate that while most journalists at both *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian* agreed that beats are necessary within a newspaper newsroom, they also indicated that within *their* newsrooms the beat system is flexible. While more journalists at the *Mail & Guardian* than at *Rapport* indicated that they “prefer to stick to [their] own beat”, most journalists overall said that they did stories on other people's beats as well.

Table 4.7 summarises the journalists' general views on the beat system.

	<i>Agree or strongly agree</i>	<i>Neither agree nor disagree</i>	<i>Disagree or strongly disagree</i>
Beats are necessary within a newspaper newsroom	81%	19%	-
The beats at my newspaper are flexible.	90%	10%	-
I do stories on other people's beats.	86%	9%	5%
I prefer to stick to my own beat.	33%	24%	43%

Table 4.7 – Journalists' general view of the beat system

These findings seem to indicate that while journalists at *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian* believed in the beat system in principle (some even preferred it), their newsrooms did not follow a strict beat system in practice. This was clearly corroborated when journalists were asked to indicate what beats they were working on: of the 21 journalists and editors, only four – all at the *Mail & Guardian* – said that that they work on only one beat. While some (four) indicated they work on two beats, the majority were working on four or more beats at the time. In the semi-structured interviews, discussed in Chapter 5, journalists also explained how they worked across various beats when reporting and writing.

The findings on the perceived influence of social media on beat reporting from this questionnaire are noteworthy, but must be read in conjunction with the above-mentioned findings on the apparent lack of clearly defined beat structure – at least at *Rapport*. The blurring of lines between beats seemed to be encouraged by the advent of social media. Most of the journalists (57%) agreed that social media were leading them to stories on other beats. More of the journalists (67%) indicated that social media also helped them to “find stories on [their] beat”.

Almost as many journalists (43%) were neutral about whether social media threaten beat reporting as those journalists (47%) who thought social media hold no threat to beats. Once again, it must be emphasised that this finding must be read with the accompanying findings in mind which indicate that the beat system is “flexible” in these newsrooms. With this in mind, it can be inferred that journalists who work in a newsroom where beats are not strictly adhered to, would either not have an opinion on social media's influence on beats, or would not view social media as a threat to the beat system. The same applies to the response journalists in this study gave in response to the statement: “[m]y beat is threatened by social media” – with 33% of journalists having indicated that they neither agreed nor disagreed and 67% saying they disagreed.

When explicitly asked what they thought the influence of social media on the beat structure in the newsroom was, most of the journalists said that social media had a small influence (43%) on the beat structure, with 24% believing it had “no influence”.

Table 4.8 summarises the views of journalists at *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian* about the influence of social media on beat reporting. Also see charts (x) to (xiii) in Appendix B.

	<i>Agree or strongly agree</i>	<i>Neither agree nor disagree</i>	<i>Disagree or strongly disagree</i>
Social media help met to find stories on my beat.	67%	28%	5%
Social media lead me to stories on other beats.	57%	29%	14%
Social media threaten beat reporting.	10%	43%	47%
My beat is threatened by social media.	-	33%	67%

Table 4.8 – Journalists’ view of the influence of social media on the beat system. Also see charts xi to xiv in Appendix B.

4.5 Discussion

The journalists surveyed in this study had varying degrees of experience – both in terms of education, journalistic background and exposure to the Internet and social media. Despite these apparent differences, they, to a large extent, adapted to and embraced social media in equal measure. This might be ascribed to the fact that they are clearly working in newsrooms where the use of social media is encouraged by superiors and fellow journalists. Considering the strength of the journalists’ responses in this questionnaire one can deduce that the collective *habitus*, or newsroom *habitus*, at both *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian* has had a significant influence on the adoption and acceptance of social media within the newsroom. While this does not negate the influence of the historical dispositions of individual journalists, it would seem that even journalists with no previous exposure to social media started using social media while working at *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian*.

Most of the journalists surveyed saw social media as a tool to deliver hard news leads to them and some believed that social media helped them to keep abreast with developments in the news. Most of the journalists, however, still did not see social media as influencing the way they typified and scheduled news.

With a flexible beat system (especially at *Rapport*) it is not surprising that journalists seemed divided about whether social media threatened beat reporting in general or “their

beat” specifically. In light of the general findings regarding the beat structures at these newspapers, as well as the way the journalists identified themselves as working across various beats, it would be prudent to further qualify these results in future studies.

While journalists indicated that they interacted with both Facebook and Twitter on a personal and professional level, they still seemed wary of trusting the information gathered there. Although they felt that social media might have influenced the way they engaged with their sources, most journalists said that they still preferred personal contact with sources – or even documents – over Facebook and Twitter for sourcing.

It can therefore be preliminarily be concluded, from the findings of this survey, that social media were seen as a natural and accepted part of the professional lives of journalists at *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian*. However, while some of these journalists may even have used social media on a daily basis, the use of social have not become so pervasive that these journalists radically adapted their professional work routine.

4.6 Summary

This chapter presented the findings of the self-administered questionnaires, as suggested by the four specific research questions listed in section 4.1. The responses indicated that social media are accepted as part of the newsrooms of *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian*. Respondents of the questionnaires, however, seemed uncertain and in some cases quite divided on exactly what the place of social media is in the newspaper newsroom.

In terms of news scheduling and typification, respondents saw social media mostly as a trigger and/or conduit for hard news and developments around current events. Yet they were nevertheless adamant about the fact that the place of hard news in newspapers is not threatened as a result of social media.

Questions about the beat system at *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian* revealed a flexible beat structure in these newsrooms. The majority of respondents indicated that they cover at least two areas of specialisation and that they do stories on other people’s beats. More than half of the respondents indicated that social media help them to find stories on other beats. One might conclude that social media helps to blur the lines between beats and encourages the flexibility of the beat structure at these newspapers. I would argue that while social media might contribute to the lack of distinction between beats, it is just one of many variables that may include pre-existing issues such as time pressure and shrinking newsrooms.

Respondents considered physical contact with sources far more important than interactions on Facebook and Twitter. Yet at the same time, two thirds of the journalists indicated that Facebook and Twitter had either an “average” or “big” influence on the way they interacted with their sources. The discussions of the results of the semi-structured interviews (Chapter 5) and ethnography (Chapter 6) will also question journalists’ perceptions that they are still doing most of their reporting through first person encounters.

It emerged from the questionnaires that previous knowledge of and exposure to computers and the Internet were not indicative of respondents’ current dependence on social media. Far more relevant were their socialisation as journalists and the culture of the newsrooms they were part of – i.e. the newsroom *habitus*. Nearly all the journalists indicated that they experienced their newsrooms as an environment that encouraged the use of social media.

In the next chapter the findings from the semi-structured interviews will be discussed.

Chapter Five: Findings of semi-structured interviews

5.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the results of the semi-structured interviews that were conducted with a selection of news journalists and editors at *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian*. The idea behind these interviews was to gather more in-depth information about the influence of social media on the routines and culture within these newsrooms. Like the questionnaires, the interviews addressed all four specific research questions (see section 4.1).

5.2 Review of methodology

In Chapter 3 the semi-structured interview was described as a methodology used to gather substantial information about a set of topics related to the research problem. The topics discussed in the interviews conducted for this study agree for the most part with the questions covered in its questionnaires. However, in correspondence with Babbie (2010:210), the interviewer had a

... general plan of inquiry... but not a set of questions that must be asked with particular words and in a particular order.

Wimmer and Dominick (2011:139) also distinguish between the questions asked in a survey, such as a questionnaire, and what they term an “intensive” or “in-depth” interview. The semi-structured interviews for this study followed to a great extent the pattern of an intensive interview described by Wimmer and Dominick (2011:139) in the following ways:

- The population sampled was smaller than for the questionnaires.
- The interviews provided elaborate data on the respondents’ opinions and experiences.
- The interviews were usually quite long.
- The interviews were customised to individual respondents.

Since the researcher conducted all the interviews personally, all the questions were familiar to the researcher and could be adapted if necessary during the interview. According to Babbie (2010:320), this type of familiarity “allows the interview to proceed smoothly and naturally”.

Drawing on the research questions and literature review, a basic structure for the interviews was designed. The following general topics for discussion were introduced:

- Introduction and informed consent
- Personal background
- General use of social media
- News routines – influenced by social media
- Relationship with sources – as influenced by social media
- Beat structure – as influenced by social media
- News typification – as influenced by social media
- Newsroom culture – as influenced by social media
- Personal perception of social media and newspaper journalism

I planned for the interviews to happen during the week I spent doing ethnographic research at each of the newspapers. As such I could familiarise myself with the environment and identify some key informants before scheduling interviews. This approach also served to put journalists more at ease before interviews took place.

The respondents were, for the most part, selected using purposive sampling. Wimmer and Dominick (2011:94) explain that a purposive sample includes respondents “selected for specific characteristics and qualities”. In this case, the news editors and editors of *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian* were chosen using purposive sampling because their positions in the newsroom necessitates the inclusion of their opinions on social media’s influence on the news routines and culture of their newsrooms. The rest of the respondents were chosen not only because they are representatives (and form part) of their newsrooms, but also because they were available and willing to talk. Each interview was usually scheduled a day or two before it took place. However, some interviews were either scheduled a few hours beforehand or rescheduled at short notice since some journalists were sent out on an assignment unexpectedly.

The following interviews³⁹ were conducted:

Rapport:

Liza Albrecht, outgoing editor⁴⁰
 Jacob Rooi, deputy editor
 Deon Lamprecht, content editor
 Johannes de Villiers, senior reporter
 Gavin Prins, senior reporter
 Réne-Jean van der Berg, reporter
 Hanri Wondergem, reporter
 Celinda Groenewald, junior reporter

Mail & Guardian:

Nic Dawes, editor-in-chief
 Drew Forrest, national news editor
 Lloyd Gedye, senior reporter
 Yolandi Groenewald, senior reporter
 Kwanele Sosibo, reporter
 Siphon McDermott, trainee reporter
 Aphiwe Deklerk, trainee reporter

The interviews were transcribed into Microsoft Word and provisionally analysed to identify themes. Thereafter the qualitative data analysis tool, Weft QDA, was employed to assist with thematic analysis. Boyatzis (1998: Introduction in *Transforming Qualitative Information*) describes a theme in qualitative information as

... a pattern found in the information that at the minimum describes and organizes possible observations or at the maximum interprets aspects of the phenomenon.

Weft QDA made it possible to categorise and analyse the interview transcripts according to a set of themes. The main reason for choosing this specific tool was because it is free and easy to use. Thirteen main categories or themes were identified, that collate the feedback journalists gave during the interviews. These categories correspond with the theoretical framework and literature of the study as described in Chapter 2. What Boyatzis (1998:51) describes as a “hybrid approach” to thematic analysis was implemented. Instead of developing a code that is based on prior theory, prior research or just the data itself, the data for this study was coded using, as Boyatzis (1998:52) describes it, “theories or prior research as a guide for articulation of meaningful themes”.

³⁹ The web and production editors of *Rapport* and various members of the online staff at the *Mail & Guardian* were also interviewed during the weeks specified. While some of their opinions are included in the study and were used as background knowledge, they are not news staff and, therefore, the content of these interviews are not part of the analysis here.

⁴⁰ It must be noted that when the ethnographic research and interviews were conducted at *Rapport*, an announcement had just been made that Liza Albrecht would be leaving the newspaper to take up a new position as head of digital platforms for Afrikaans newspapers at Media24. At that stage a new editor had not yet been appointed. The researcher was only able to interview Albrecht after she had left the newspaper.

Using these themes as a framework, WeftQDA was employed to read through the transcripts and highlight passages that might be relevant to or representative of a particular theme. WeftQDA makes it possible to then group all quotes from the various interview transcripts according to the set of themes identified. Table 5.1 summarises and explains the categories that will be used as the basis for the discussion of the findings from the semi-structured interviews.

Category	Explanation
Personal <i>habitus</i>	The background of the journalists, with specific reference to education, journalistic experience, as well as their introduction to computers, the Internet and social media
Newsroom culture	The statements the journalists made on the extent to which they are encouraged to use social media in their newsroom
Social media and the construction of reality	The perceptions of the journalists on the way the media shapes reality for their audience and the influence social media have on the role of gatekeeping
Credibility of social media	The perceptions of the journalists about the validity and credibility of the information and sources gathered from social media
Use of social media (general)	The statements the journalists made on the ways social media are used or can be used by journalists professionally and/or personally
Use of Facebook	The statements the journalists made on how they use Facebook specifically, mainly on a professional level
Use of Twitter	The statements made by the journalists on how they use Twitter specifically, mainly on a professional level
Newsroom schedule	The statements the journalists made about what influences their weekly schedule and news routines and if and how social media play a role
News typification	The statements the journalists made about the typification of news – with specific reference to hard news and soft news – and if and how social media play a role in their approach to the presentation of these types of news in their newspapers
Beats	The statements the journalists made about the beat structure at their newspapers and their perceptions about how social media might influence this
Relationships with sources	The statements made by the journalists about their relationships with their sources
Social media policy	The perceptions of the journalists on the guidelines that exist in their newsrooms for the use of social media and the need for formal social media policies
Social media: threat or opportunity?	The perceptions of journalists on whether social media can be seen as a threat to the future of newspapers or whether these media holds opportunities for newspaper journalists

Table 5.1 – Thematic categories that emerged during the analysis of interview data

5.3 Limitations of the methodology

Since the interviews took place during the journalists' normal working hours, they were usually under pressure and could not offer too much time. The journalists were more open to being interviewed when they were told that the interview would not last longer than half an hour to forty minutes. Despite shortening the length of the interview time there were still a number of journalists who declined the invitation to sit for an interview, mainly stating time pressure as the reason.

5.4 Findings

The findings from the interviews conducted at *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian* will be presented together since the newsroom is the unit of analysis in this study. While the aim is not to compare the routines and cultures within these two newsrooms, observations and findings about correspondences and differences between *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian* will be noted. The respondents' statements and perceptions will be discussed according to the various themes that emerged during the analysis.

5.4.1 Personal *habitus*

The journalists interviewed for this study were in their mid-twenties to early-thirties, while most of the editors were in their forties or fifties. They all had tertiary qualifications, most of them specifically in journalism-related fields. While three of them were either trainee or junior reporters, the majority of the rest had between five and ten years journalism experience. The journalists with the most experience, such as Johannes de Villiers (12 years), Gavin Prins (12 years) and Yolandi Groenewald (9 years), have only worked at newspapers. Although these journalists were still relatively young, not all of them grew up with computers or the Internet everyday life. Most remembered their introduction to the Internet as something that happened during their tertiary education. Réne-Jean van der Berg, a reporter at *Rapport* said:

... I sat in front of a computer for the first time in standard three in my father's office. It was [one of] those with the black and orange. That was the first and last time. And thereafter only at university.⁴¹

However, when all of these journalists started working, the Internet was pervasive and is now seen as an indispensable tool by journalists. Even the news editor of the *Mail & Guardian*, Drew Forrest, who openly did not support the professional use of social media by journalists, valued the Internet as an important tool. Forrest said he used Internet search engines

... all the time – to check out information, to amplify stories, to check out dates, to check the spelling of names. All the stuff that you used to use newspaper libraries for – now I use Google for.

All the journalists were introduced to social media in different ways and to varying degrees. For most of them, it started out of curiosity and on a personal level. They mentioned chat rooms, MXit, personal blogs and MySpace as some of the first forms of social media they used. All of them either figured out how to use Facebook themselves or were shown by friends how it works and had already been using it for some time. Siphon McDermott, a trainee reporter from the *Mail & Guardian*, said, for instance, that he was introduced to Facebook while at Rhodes University by a visiting American exchange student. Prins also talked about how *Rapport's* editor, Liza Albrecht, showed him to use Twitter, saying

... she [Albrecht] said Twitter is this exciting thing and it is this new form of Facebook [...] and I was totally lost. If you bring technology to me it feels like you bring me up against a mountain [...] So she said she would show me.

However, there were still a few of the journalists who were not yet comfortable with Twitter. Although he had a Twitter account at the time he was interviewed, Johannes de Villiers, senior reporter at *Rapport* said

... someone still has to show me how to use Twitter. I can't figure out the damn thing. I don't understand it. Facebook satisfies all my needs, but I read that more stuff comes out of Twitter these days, so one should actually [be on] Twitter.

⁴¹ All quotes from journalists at *Rapport* were translated directly from Afrikaans by the researcher.

While it is clear that journalists were wholly dependent on the Internet, they appeared split on whether social media are necessary for their functioning as journalists. Some journalists seemed to consider social media usage as essential, while others felt that it to at least be useful. Hanri Wondergem, reporter at *Rapport*, said she would “die” without social media and De Villiers said he would “cry like a child” if Facebook was switched off at work. Alternatively, Lloyd Gedye, senior reporter at the *Mail & Guardian*, said

... if we lost Google, it would fundamentally change how I do my job. If we lost Twitter, it wouldn't [...] Twitter is not nearly as useful as a telephone line and an Internet connection and a Google search [...] As it stands now, I don't see [social media] as a game changer. It is a useful aggregation tool.

From these findings one can deduce that while the journalists interviewed might be more or less the same age, have similar journalistic training and have all been using the Internet throughout their journalism careers, they have not necessarily adapted to social media to the same extent and at the same pace. The extent to which they consider social media as an important professional tool does not seem to be related to either their journalistic training or experience, but rather to their personal affinity to and use of these media.

5.4.2 Newsroom culture (*habitus*)

All the journalists and the editors who were interviewed are unanimous about the fact that the use of social media is encouraged within their newsrooms. Both Nic Dawes, editor-in-chief of the *Mail & Guardian*, and Liza Albrecht, editor of *Rapport*, were described by their journalists to be regular users of social media. This seemed to be a motivating factor for the journalists. Wondergem said in her first week at *Rapport* that the news editor, Liezel de Lange, told her to go to YouTube to see if she can find story ideas and that

... even Liza [Albrecht], the editor, when you see her, she is on that phone looking at Twitter feeds.

Dawes and Albrecht both said that while they encourage their journalists to use social media, they would never force them to use it. Dawes emphasised that he thinks “it is fine for some people not to get into this stuff”. Albrecht said that for more than half of the journalists at *Rapport* the adoption of social media was a natural process and that she encouraged the rest

to do it too. According to De Lange, everybody at the paper tries to use it – some more effectively than others. De Lange said

... it is not as if one of the reporters are not interested at all. Everyone is getting used to the idea, is starting to use the stuff and is starting to teach themselves how to apply it.

In contrast to De Lange's support for social media use, Forrest was outspoken about his lack of trust in seeing these media as professional tools. Forrest said he is "not interested" in social media and added,

... I have made it clear in discussions we've had in the newsroom [...] I don't know of any stories we picked up on Twitter that we wouldn't have picked up as quickly on the telephone or on Sapa⁴². I don't think it offers any major advantages in terms of access to news developments.

The journalists at the *Mail & Guardian* were aware of Forrest's apparent resistance to social media usage. Although he was the news editor at the time this study was conducted, he still held a minority view and his attitude did not seem to have had a significant influence on the rest of the newsroom.

The journalists were generally aware whether other journalists in their newsrooms were using social media or not. Dawes believed that some journalists were just more self-conscious about their social media use than others. He said

... some journalists are on Facebook and are having all kinds of serious discussions with all kinds of, for example, political office bearers and business people and colleagues in other newsrooms.

According to Dawes these journalists do not think they have adapted to or are using social media as a professional tool. He said

... they just think they're on Facebook [...] They don't think they are using it as a tool. They're immersed in it.

When probed about the use of social media within their newsrooms, journalists at both *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian* often started their answer with a list of their colleagues

⁴² Forrest here refers to the news wire service of the South African Press Association.

who use Facebook and/or Twitter and whether they do so actively or not. Most journalists were also very aware of which journalists in their newsrooms were not using social media. Some referred to those not using social media as “technology Luddites”, while a fair number of others equated resistance to social media with age. Wondergem, for instance said that while “the old guard” use social media they are “more cautious than the younger journalists”. She believed that if older journalists learned about social media in their twenties “they would also be comfortable with it after a year or two”. Gedye also said that the *Mail & Guardian* understands

... there are multiple generations of journalists working at the *Mail & Guardian*. Not all of them are going to embrace social media. They just don't understand it. They don't see the point. I think if they actually spend some time [with it], they may see the point, by they are a bit Luddite.

These journalists' perceptions about age and social media use cannot be fully validated since the oldest journalists sampled here are just over thirty. It must be noted, however, that most of the editors sampled, such as Dawes and Deon Lamprecht and Jacob Rooi of *Rapport*, are older than forty and they use social media often and with ease. At first glance, the journalists' perceptions about the influence of age on social media usage do therefore appear a bit prejudicial.

5.4.3 Social media and the construction of reality

As discussed in the literature review, this study works within the social constructionist paradigm. In discussing the application of social constructionism to media studies, McQuail (2010:101) says that, with regard to news,

... there is now more or less a consensus among media scholars that the picture of ‘reality’ that news claims to provide cannot help but be a selective construct made up of fragments of factual information and observation that are bound together and given meaning by a particular, frame, angle of vision or perspective.

News workers, with their different backgrounds, worldviews and sense of newsworthiness, act as gatekeepers when constructing reality for their audiences. The literature reviewed also describes how journalists have traditionally been viewed as the gatekeepers of information,

but that this role has evolved with the growth of Internet-based technologies. As such, one might argue that journalists' traditional authority as gatekeepers who are constructing reality is being challenged by social media.

Working within this theoretical framework, the respondents of this study were probed about their perceptions on how the role of journalists in the construction of reality has evolved due to the advent of social media (and if this is indeed so). More specifically, they were asked whether they thought the role of journalists, as gatekeepers of information, are threatened by social media.

The journalists generally agreed that social media can be described as interactive platforms that create opportunities, not only for individual expression, but also for interaction and feedback to journalists. Albrecht said people that, through access to social networks, people are "...part of what happens every minute of the day...". For Yolandi Groenewald, social media

... opens up the debate. It makes things more democratic. I think in the past it was a little [like] one way traffic. With the coming of social media there is a lot more interaction.

Journalists also agreed that social media affords the audience the opportunity to challenge the reality created by mass media. Dawes said that while he is not sure that it is as "epochal" as people sometimes construe it to be, there is a lot of "visible contestation" of the reality created by mass media. According to Lamprecht, reality is now actually driven "from the other side,"

... not by the media, but by the larger community out there, who realised that with Facebook and Twitter the mainstream media don't have an exclusive monopoly on information. We [the community] don't need to go to them [the media] anymore for information. We can create our own information. We can give our own input.

The journalists' references to the explicit use of social media *as part of* news articles is also noteworthy. Both journalists at *Rapport* and those at the *Mail & Guardian* mentioned instances where Facebook or Twitter were not only used for research, to find sources or for story ideation, but were quoted in a story or, through referencing, became part of the stories. One might argue that social media as such are also employed to construct a certain reality –

especially since it represents the views and or perceptions of those who have access to it and use it regularly. Gedye, for instance, talked about the “self-referential” nature of Twitter when he said social media is

... only as good as the amount of people that are on it and the types of people that are on it... I feel that sometimes South African journalists take it a little bit too seriously and are losing touch with reality on the ground, and the people on the ground who aren't on Twitter. Twitter can explode with a story...but you actually feel this is a very small segment of a population. Not everybody feels this way, so while it feels like a huge event to you, it is a small ripple in a huge pond.

Despite their acknowledgement of the empowerment of their audiences through social media, most of the journalists in this study did not feel that their roles as gatekeepers are diminished or threatened. Most of them still believed that the mass media (and newspapers specifically) are needed to curate information for their audiences and to provide expert opinions in certain fields. Their statements supported the findings of Singer (1998) that journalists view themselves as interpreters of information in a new media environment. *Mail & Guardian* journalist Kwanele Sosibo said the role of a journalist

... has probably changed in that the journalist still has to distil all these things and make sense of them and help people make sense of them [...] You probably have to be more media savvy now as a journalist and be able to be on that many platforms, but what you still have to be able to provide is a role of something more considered or slightly more authoritative.

De Lange was also adamant that while social media “explodes with a bang” and provides a lot of information, “somewhere along the road people will have the need again to have weighted news”.

McQuail (2010:312) argues that

... the eventual news content of the media arrives by several different routes and in different forms. It may have to be sought out or ordered in advance, or its ‘discovery’ may have to be systematically planned. At times it also has to be internally manufactured and constructed. Such a process of construction, like the selection of news, is not random and subjective.

In general, these findings seemed to show that journalists were aware of their audiences' use of and participation in social media. Notwithstanding, they did not see these changes in the communication process as a threat to their roles as gatekeepers, but rather a renewed call for them to act as curators of information for their audiences.

The journalists' responses discussed above echoed the view of Singer (2005) who argues that the participatory nature of content created on the Internet does not necessarily pose a threat to the traditional gatekeeping role of journalists, but that journalists rather

... continue to provide information that is distinguished from other online content precisely by the vetting process. In that sense, they continue to act as gatekeepers, arguably a role that is more vital than ever in today's rowdy, unbounded information environment.

5.4.4 Credibility of social media

The findings from the self-administered questionnaires of this study, discussed in Chapter 4, clearly show that the majority of journalists were still wary at the time about the credibility of information distributed via social media. Since the credibility of social media was not the main focus of the study, this issue was not interrogated more intently during the semi-structured interviews. Nonetheless certain of the journalists had strong opinions about the matter. Both the editors and the journalists, especially at *Rapport*, made it clear that while they viewed social media as a useful tool, all the information and sources found there have to be independently verified. De Lange said that when using social media

... the same rules apply [as with traditional media]. You still have to check the *bona fides* of that source [...] I think a lot of media, when they started using social media, made that mistake: they forgot those old rules for a while. But they are coming back. People are realising it.

A number of journalists also raised the issue of the exhibitionist nature of personal information available on social media. These journalists believed that people, especially public figures, put information on Facebook or Twitter that they might not necessarily discuss with a journalist during a one-on-one conversation. Considering that these types of statements on social media are often included in newspaper articles, some journalists wondered about the ethics and integrity of using such social media statements in their articles. Aphiwe Deklerk, a

trainee reporter at the *Mail & Guardian*, said that the opinion that a lot of people put on Twitter are

... mostly just random small thoughts. It doesn't have much more of a context that you would understand [...] so you would kind of misrepresent that person in a story [...] I am uneasy about that.

Lamprecht said people's "tongues are looser than they should be" when they say something on Facebook or Twitter. He believes journalists should always verify information to sometimes "protect people against themselves".

5.4.5 Use of social media

All the journalists and editors interviewed, barring one⁴³, used social media professionally, albeit to varying degrees. Dawes said social media

...are a kind of natural environment for journalists. We are all gossipy people. We all love data – there are masses of data out there. We are all a bit egotistical [...] [Social media usage] says I'm not only a broadcaster, this is not just a one way process, you don't have to just listen to what I have to say, I am responsive, I am an engaged part of the community, I will respond if you are someone who's been talking to me for a while and has something interesting to say.

When the journalists talked about social media in general, four main uses of social media emerged: story ideation, trend tracking, research and self-promotion.

The majority of the journalists said they sometimes find story ideas on social media. This corresponds with the findings from the self-administered questionnaires as discussed in Chapter 4 (section 4.4.2). Prins said he purposefully warned *Rapport's* former editor, Tim du Plessis, about not blocking Facebook at work when he realised how many story ideas he received via social media. Some journalists, such as Gedye, said that they do use social media to find story ideas, but not frequently. Journalists also used social media for research – some even explicitly posing questions to their audience when busy with articles in the hope that the responses they get may further guide them in their reporting. Said De Villiers:

⁴³ As mentioned in section 5.1, Drew Forrest, news editor of the *Mail & Guardian*, says he has "no interest" in social media

You play around. Ninety-five percent of the stuff is fluff and five percent are stories. But that's the way research has always been.

While journalists considered social media relevant to story ideation and research, they also seemed much more concerned with using social media to keep abreast of news trends and – as Sosibo put it – “to find out what a lot of people are doing...”. Even McDermott, who said he does not get any story ideas from Twitter, said he uses social media for “general awareness”. Lamprecht described social media as a “modern letter page”. Dawes said as a manager of the newsroom it is important for him to stay in touch with what is going on outside his newsroom,

... so that I can get a sense of where people are addressing the right things and where they are addressing the wrong things.

Another use of social media that featured in the feedback from the journalists who were interviewed, is the use of social media as a tool for self-promotion and branding. Even Forrest, who did not use social media, said about social media that

... the one thing that I think it does do, that it can do, that it is useful for (professionally useful for the newspaper) is that you can promote [...] for example Lloyd [Gedye] over there: Whenever he does a story he puts out tweets about the fact, that: ‘Look out for my story tomorrow, it's about this and that and the next thing’, and I think that can be valuable.

It is important to note, however, that while journalists deemed this to be possibly the most valuable asset of social media, few of them were already utilising social media themselves in this manner. Most just aspired to do so. When probed about this aspect of their use of social media, they mostly spoke either about other journalists' social media presence or their own newspaper's formal social media channels.

The next two sub sections will discuss the journalists' references to the use of Facebook and Twitter specifically.

i) Use of Facebook

There were a number of similarities between journalists' description of their use of social media in general and how they used Facebook. They used Facebook to do research and, to a

lesser extent, to track trends. The journalists did not explicitly mention Facebook when discussing story ideation, but rather talked about the access it grants them to sources. Wondergem said, especially when it comes to finding people,

... Facebook is fabulous, because you [can] send (potential sources) a message: 'Sorry, I am invading your privacy a little, but I need to talk to you about this and that, send me your contact details.' Nine out of ten times they answer you that same day.

With Facebook the emphasis seemed to be more on the sense of community created by the medium. Albrecht said Facebook is more personal than Twitter,

... it is more of a camp fire than Twitter. It is a forum where people can chat.

The majority of the journalists used Facebook either for private interaction only or to combine private and professional interactions.

ii) Use of Twitter

Twitter was definitely seen by the journalists as more of a professional tool. They used it especially to track trends – even those who did not have personal Twitter accounts. Yolandi Groenewald explained that she uses Twitter as a news feed, since

... it is so immediate and relevant. You can immediately see when something happens.

The journalists also saw social media, especially Twitter, as a wonderful tool for self-promotion. However, only a few journalists interviewed are already doing this actively. Gedye, Yolandi Groenewald and Prins used Twitter to build their personal brands as journalists on the beat. Dawes, who has a substantial number of followers on Twitter, said that he unashamedly uses the medium

... to promote what we do in the paper. And I use it to campaign around media freedom issues in particular and to help generate support for us when we are under legal or political pressure [...] I use it a little bit to show that the *Mail & Guardian* is not only about high politics and investigations [...]

While these journalists did tweet their own opinions around current events and events they had attended, most of them were adamant about the fact that they will not tweet about their personal lives and loved ones.

5.4.6 Newsroom schedule

In the literature reviewed, the need for journalists to control their work through routines and schedules was highlighted. Each newsroom, as a unit, followed definite news-gathering and production routines⁴⁴. However, the individual journalists all had their own ways of coping with what Tuchman (1978:41) describes as “the assessment of occurrences as news events”. No one dominating factor emerged when journalists were asked to describe the driving forces behind their daily and/or weekly schedules. Answers fluctuated between resources, in terms of time and sources, to the continuing news agenda. Social media did not feature here at all. For Sosibo, his weekly planning was usually just influenced by

...stuff that follow logically from each other. So it would be some sort of a follow-up or something that was branching off from the story that I was doing. Or if I meet someone interesting and I tell them what I do and they provide, like, leads for me [...] [It is] not usually what’s happening on Twitter, I can tell you that much. For me, at least, no. It’s usually the mood in the country. The *zeitgeist*.

Most of the journalists interviewed agreed with Sosibo that social media did not have a big impact on the news agenda at their newspapers. Gedy thought:

It is giving social media too much importance to say that it has changed the news agenda. It has probably had an influence, but a very minimal influence [...] It’s a communication tool. It’s all it is. Like a telephone or an Internet account or an RSS⁴⁵ feeder.

Rooi also did not feel that social media were setting the agenda at *Rapport*. In his opinion it is just “an additional resource”. He believed the scheduling of news depends to a large extent on

⁴⁴ For a detail description of these routines, see Chapter 6.

⁴⁵ RSS refers to “Really Simple Syndication” – a web format that is used to aggregate and publish various types of information that are regularly updated, such as blogs and news postings.

the quality of journalists, because “if they come with stories they dug out [...] then naturally you have a better paper”.

Only one of the responses indicated that social media play some part in routine processes at their newspaper. Lamprecht said that while news-gathering in the past depended on speaking to contacts or listening to the radio and reading newspapers, now

... you are more likely to first look at the electronic media or Facebook or social media or the television. You often don't spend so much time on making calls, personal calls [...] I think you are just running after news the whole time [...] The breaking of news is not limited to office hours.

The bulk of the respondents, as weekly journalists, seemed more concerned with finding fresh angles for developing stories than with mining social media for breaking news. Wondergem (2011), for instance, explained that when she comes in to the office on a Tuesday

... I source stories like a crazy thing [...] I literary search [...] putting feelers out. It's crappy if you sit in the news meeting and have to say you don't have anything yet.

Journalists control their work routine as well as what Tuchman (1978:44) describes as the “glut of occurrences” by planning across days and weeks. Rooi captured the pressures of this scheduling process when talking about the need to find a unique front page lead for the paper:

Often things happen on a Saturday and then we have to adapt. We know that story is coming and we are going to cover it; it is a fresh story. But say, for instance, nothing happens on a Saturday, you have to plan ahead for the week.... You have to have a back-up idea [...] So it is about planning the whole time, to think news, to look at what the dailies had and how we can adapt it, how we can get a new angle.

Rooi's statement supported Tuchman's (1978:41) generalisation that

... the news media carefully impose a structure upon time and space to enable themselves to accomplish the work of any one day and to plan across days.

These findings indicate that the journalists interviewed did not really look at social media as a help or a hindrance when planning their schedules across days or weeks. It appears as though they did not consider social media useful for helping them to develop new angles on breaking news, especially as weekly and weekend newspaper journalists. As discussed in section 5.4.5, it must be noted that the journalists did, however, follow social media to keep up with trends and developments in news.

5.4.7 Typification of news

The journalists at *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian* did not seem overly concerned with typifying news as either hard news or soft news. They seemed more interested in discussing newspapers' roles as conduits of analysis, interpretation and investigation. According to the literature reviewed, the main distinctions between hard news and soft news were, traditionally based on whether journalists could schedule these events as news beforehand and whether the dissemination of the information needed to be timely to remain relevant. According to Albrecht people make a mistake when they think that

... something that is not breaking news is soft news [...] I think South African newspapers must go and learn a little bit from big international newspapers like *The Guardian* and *The New York Times* that hard news can also be interpretative news.

De Villiers also did not seem to make a clear distinction between hard news and soft news when he said

...nobody is going to get breaking news from the newspapers anymore [...] They [newspapers] will have to switch to analysis and in-depth and more lifestyle stuff. This does not mean fluffy, pink-around-the-edges stuff. It basically means stuff that is approached more narratively [sic] and with a bit more analysis.

The majority of these journalists' statements corresponded with Tuchman's (1978:51) description of developing⁴⁶ or continuing⁴⁷ news – both still subcategories of hard news.

⁴⁶ Tuchman (1978:54) says developing news concerns "emergent situations", where new facts become available as time passes. It cannot be scheduled.

While the journalists were cognisant of the immediacy of social media, they were not concerned that social media will leave no room for newspapers to present current affairs as news. Gedye was very sceptical about social media as a breaking news source, since it does not offer expert analysis or explanation. Forrest also said that

... as long as the *Mail & Guardian* continues to offer readers more than just factual information – it offers them perspective on events and understanding of events – then I don't think we are threatened.

De Lange admitted that the newspaper industry is getting more difficult because traditional media are not breaking news anymore. According to her, newspapers have to find new ways to look at and package information – not only by providing in-depth analysis and background. She believed, however, that

... hard news still sells the best. If you run [a story] that happens on a Saturday that is new to people, that they haven't heard about yet, you sell better than if you go with even a fantastic follow-up of something that happened during the week. People are still looking for new things that they haven't heard about before.

5.4.8 Beats

It is apparent from the interviews with journalists at both *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian* that a traditional beat structure, as described in Chapter 1 (section 1.4.4) and Chapter 2 (section 2.10), is not in operation at these newspapers. While some of the journalists might have specific areas of expertise they focus their reporting on, all of them do not view themselves as beat reporters. The majority of those who responded to the self-administered questionnaires, discussed in Chapter 4, listed at least two, but generally four or more areas of specialisation they focus on.

Rapport journalist Johannes de Villiers was observed during the ethnographic research, discussed in Chapter 6. De Villiers had religion as one of his focus areas, but reported on issues that ranged from farm murders to historical artefacts. Van der Berg, who

⁴⁷ Tuchman (1978:56) says continuing news is prescheduled and concerns a series of stories on the same topic over a period of time

focused on health, said journalists at *Rapport* had an understanding amongst each other that they could do stories on each other's beats.

Albrecht said that, as editor, she

... did not want to force people in that context to keep themselves blind for something that happens outside their so-called beat.

Yolandi Groenewald said that although she had a beat to some extent at the *Mail & Guardian*, it was nevertheless very "very *laissez-faire*". Groenewald ascribed this partly to the fact that there is so few journalists in the newsroom that the journalists do not really have the luxury of focusing on only one beat. Gedye said

... I am a senior business journalists and I am the music editor. Although my business card does not say that, I do the work. They just get away with not paying me for that [...] the arts stuff.

In light of these findings, the role of social media in beat reporting could not be fully explored by this study. None of the journalists interviewed mentioned social media as a threat to their individual beats or focus areas. One might argue, however, that the journalists in question had not fully realised the influence of social media on their beats yet.

Becker and Vlad (2009:66) argue that the main function of beats is story ideation, with the reporter becoming part of a network of social relations that supplies these ideas. The immediacy of social media and the opportunity it affords users to voice their own opinions (as described in Chapters 1 and 2), might limit this function of beats as a means of story ideation. Journalists do not need to go out and form a network of social relations within a specific beat. Through social media, a much wider social network – and by implication a wider range of story ideas – are open to them.

One might conclude that social media help to blur the lines between beats and encourages the flexibility of the beat structure at these newspapers. It is important to note, however, that while social media might very well contribute to this state of affairs, it is just one of many variables that may include pre-existing issues such as time pressures and the downsizing of newsrooms.

5.4.9 Relationship with sources

In the literature reviewed for this study, the relationship between journalists and their sources are portrayed as one of the most important avenues for story ideation. This was supported by feedback from the journalists in this study. It came to light that while the journalists might have used social media to initiate contact with a source or to find someone speedily, it seemed that conversations via social media did not replace personal contact. Lamprecht said that social media

... can never completely take the place of personal contact between people when it comes to building a contact base. It can definitely contribute, especially where you cannot ever meet someone on the other side of the world on a personal basis. I don't think it can supplant everything as a single source.

Yolandi Groenewald said that social media

...create the space to have a one-on-one [conversation] with someone you might not have known beforehand and who you met through Facebook or Twitter and said: 'Let's go have coffee'. [...] It's no substitution for a one-on-one.

Wondergem also said she might

... find someone on Facebook, but I will still make an appointment to see him. It [Facebook] just makes that initial contact easier.

Journalists considered personal conversations with their sources and contacts as a key ingredient to a good story. They have developed more relationships and nurtured relationships with sources on social media. Yet most journalists do not believe that social media have dramatically altered the way they interact with their sources and contacts. Gedye captures the general consensus amongst journalists very well when he says

... you have to get out of the office and meet people and develop contacts so they know you and they know your voice and your face. [...] It's all about that and it is all about developing contacts [...] Yes, journalists are more deskbound now than they ever were, but that is just because they can speak to people using the Internet, email, Twitter, Facebook [...] So yes, the tools make

it easier to do your job and [this] means you spend more time in the office than out the office but it is all about developing relationships with people. And the minute you stop doing that, journalism will die, basically. And Twitter can't replace that. It gives you access to more people, but it doesn't allow you to develop those relationships any easier. It's just another tool.

The ethnographic research, discussed in Chapter 6, raises questions about the statements made by the journalists about their interaction with sources. While they were being observed for this study, the majority of the journalists at *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian* the majority of journalists (but especially at *Rapport*) were office-bound for long periods of time. This is by no means an indication that they were only spending time on social media. The above observation, however, may thus indicate how the journalists *wish* to be interacting with sources, instead of how they interact with sources in reality.

5.4.10 Social media policy

There was one theme that emerged during the interviews which was not discussed in the literature review or theoretical framework, and that is the ethical aspects of social media usage, and specifically the need for a formal social media policy or guidelines at the newspaper.

As discussed in section 5.4.2, the newsroom cultures of both *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian* were highly supportive of social media use. The findings of section 5.4.5 also showed that the majority of the journalists in the study were using social media professionally, to some extent. This did not, however, indicate that social media have a significant influence on their daily routines. Notwithstanding, journalists still had quite strong opinions about how social media use should be managed by their newspapers, and what guidelines should be in place.

Some journalists preferred to keep Facebook personal and to use Twitter for work purposes. Sosibo, for instance, did not consider Facebook to be an “appropriate” platform for professional use, but considered Twitter to be “more in line” for it. The majority of journalists believed it is impossible to maintain a personal identity on social media that is not connected to your professional identity. Prins said that Facebook should not be a personal medium since it is “open for the world”. Dawes agreed that journalists cannot separate the personal and the professional and that

... you need to manage your personal presence online in a way that is consistent with your professional responsibilities and the parameters within which your organisation is able to roam.

When journalists were probed about a formal social media policy at their newspapers, there was a marked difference in the responses between journalists from the *Mail & Guardian* and those from *Rapport*. The *Mail & Guardian* journalists, most of whom spoke about a social media workshop they attended, referred to their newsroom's "rule of thumb" or "general guideline". Deklerk, for instance, said

... Nic (Dawes) sort of clarified it that what you say on Facebook or Twitter or on a social network or blog should be something you should be prepared to have on the front page with your name on it.

Although not all of them agreed with it, the *Mail & Guardian* journalists were certainly aware of their newsroom's stance on the general use of social media by its journalists. This awareness was apparently intensified after the suspension of a trainee reporter from the *Mail & Guardian* for anti-Semitic comments he made on Facebook ("M&G intern suspended", 2011). This incident occurred shortly before the research was conducted in this newsroom and was mentioned by most of the journalists and editors during interviews.

But the journalists at *Rapport* had varying opinions about how social media should be managed within the newsroom. While neither of the newspapers had a formal social media policy when this study was being conducted, journalists at the *Mail & Guardian* were aware that one was forthcoming. Forrest supported this policy when he said:

You can't kind of assume what people say on Facebook or what they say on Twitter is entirely their own business. You can't. It reflects on the newspaper. And it's a new problem. [...] In the pre-social media days there weren't opportunities for people to kind of stray, to overstep the bounds in that way. There are plenty of opportunities now with people constantly sending out stuff into cyberspace. There are real risks that they can say things that damage the publication. You need a policy that governs what people say and how they say it.

At *Rapport*, journalists seemed divided about whether the newspaper needed a social media policy or not. The general feeling was that a formal policy would be too constricting.

Albrecht believed that “social media will not allow itself to be policed”. De Villiers also did not support a formal policy, but said that one should apply common sense – as one would in any “normal” situation. According to De Villiers:

The general rules of [social media] use are quite well established. People know you must not go and bad mouth your employer and such things – then you are stupid. [...] It is silly for me with too many rules to try and mould the Internet into how things must work. The whole medium innovates itself, recreates itself the whole time. [...] Your rules are going to become redundant immediately. [...] At the moment the wonder of it is that it is this free-for-all where anything goes. And I think it is cool, stick to it.

Although the journalists of *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian* had diverging views on the institution of formalised social media policies or guidelines, they mostly agreed that any use of social should happen within an established ethical framework. Dawes said that their social media policy will be an addendum to their overarching ethical code. Albrecht said it is necessary to give journalists a “best practices” guide on social media – so that they are “not told how to use it, but that they understand it better.” Wondergem believed that it is

... part of your job description as a journalist to know that you can’t only rely on what is on Facebook. I think it must be understood at university already: How do you use social media? How reliable is social media? Can you only depend on social media? I think it should be part of your ethos as journalists from the beginning, to know how to do it.

5.4.11 Social media: threat or opportunity?

The majority of journalists interviewed did not view social media as a direct threat to the continued existence of journalism and newspaper journalism specifically. McDermott believed social media did not yet determine the shape of the South African media landscape because it was not accessible to everybody. Rooi also believed that the cost of Internet access in South Africa limits the reach of social media.

The respondents agreed that if journalists do not adapt to these new technologies and new media, then newspaper journalism does indeed run the risk of becoming irrelevant in the future. Gedye said he did not think that social media

... necessarily threatens newspaper journalism. I think it threatens newspaper journalism if newspaper journalists aren't prepared to get onto Twitter, yes.

As a whole, the journalists who took part in this study saw the advent of social media as an opportunity, rather than a threat to their profession. Van der Berg said she likes to “embrace things” to see how they can help. De Villiers, who was a bit more sceptical about the future of newspapers within a new media environment, felt challenged to “see the opportunities that happens around you as it changes, and to try and catch them”.

Both the editors at *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian* believed that social media should be a naturally accepted part of a journalist's professional life. Albrecht said

...all kinds of clever analysts and media consultants are busy doing presentations about the worth of social media and the usefulness thereof. But actually, it is [...] almost like an organism with a life of its own and rules of its own and it is busy changing every day.

Dawes believed that any journalists who believe social media is a threat “is going to be out of business in ten years' time”. He agreed with Albrecht that social media is part of the world: “it's where we live,” he said, adding that social media

... [when] used properly, understood properly, engaged with appropriately, has the potential to save us – if we get it right. You've got to be there and you can't fear it.

5.5 Discussion

The journalists interviewed at *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian* are a fair representation of each newspaper's entire news staff. The two newspapers' editors and news editors were included in the discussions. At *Rapport* two additional editors, who are also practising journalists, were also interviewed.

The findings showed that the journalists' personal history, such as education, journalism training and history with computers have little to no bearing on the way they

currently use social media professionally, and to what extent. Two journalists of the same age, with the same training and the same history with computers might have completely different social media profiles. Case in point is Siphon McDermott of the *Mail & Guardian* and Hanri Wondergem of *Rapport*. Both of these journalists are 24 years old, have degrees in journalism and/or communications studies and only started using the Internet at university. McDermott seemed to be a little suspicious of social media, especially when it came to the lack of privacy that comes with it. Wondergem, on the other hand, spoke excitedly about social media, using various examples of instances where she used social media as a tool to help her with stories.

Despite the journalists' varying personal experiences with computers and the Internet, they all entered newsrooms that were open to the use of social media, and encouraged their journalists to use it. They have therefore been similarly socialised when it comes to the professional use of social media. All the journalists interviewed, even one who personally had a disparaging view of social media, acknowledged that their editors supported the use of social media and that they were personally active on these media. One can therefore conclude that newsroom culture (*habitus*) played a part in the respondents' acceptance and use of social media.

The journalists were aware that social media enabled their audience to create and distribute information quicker and easier. However, journalists did not feel that their role as gatekeepers of information was threatened. In fact, they believed that readers and audiences would always need experts to make sense of the information for them.

Social media served different purposes for the different journalists within the newsroom. The most commonly cited use of social media was to keep abreast of developments in the news. Some journalists also mentioned that they found story ideas on Facebook and Twitter or used these media to find sources. The other important role social media played in the journalists' professional lives was to broadcast what they were working on – as individuals and within the broader newsroom. While only a few journalists were doing this with a measure of success, most of them still aspired to do the same.

The journalists generally agreed with the literature reviewed, that scheduling and routines are necessary to control work and events of news. They mentioned various factors that determined how they schedule their time and routinise their work – varying from the availability of resources to the dominating news agenda. It is evident from the journalists' responses that social media was not a contributing factor to the way they scheduled news. The same can be said about the way the journalists typified news. They knew that social

media are capable of delivering news soon after an event occurred, leaving little room for newspapers to “break” news. However, they felt confident that there would always be a need for the analysis and interpretation that they, especially as weekly newspaper journalists, helped to provide.

The beat system at these newspapers did not conform to a traditional beat structure, as described in Chapter 1 (section 1.4.4) and Chapter 2 (section 2.10). While some journalists worked in specific focus areas, others worked across beats and did not feel threatened if another journalist pursued a lead on their beat. Since the beat structure was so flexible this study could not sufficiently describe the influence of social media on the beat structure at a newspaper. As discussed in section 5.4.8, one might argue that the journalists had just not reflected yet on the role social media played on the increasing flexibility of the beat system at their newspapers.

Social media facilitated easier access to sources for the journalists. Prior to the advent of social media the journalists might have had difficulty getting into contact with certain sources, but Facebook and Twitter granted immediate access to most sources. Nevertheless, journalists still preferred personal contact with their sources to nurture relationships and gather information. As discussed in section 5.4.9, the respondents perceptions in this regard might be problematic and are further examined in Chapter 7.

The findings suggested that a social media policy, or even just a general guideline on the professional use of social media, cleared up confusion and helped to shape the newsroom culture with regard to these media.

Most of the journalists did not view social media as a threat to their professional role, but rather as a handy tool that could enhance the work they were already doing.

5.6 Summary

This chapter presented the findings from the semi-structured interviews according to a set of themes that were identified, in combination with the theoretical framework and literature review. All four specific research questions were addressed.

When asked what determined the way they scheduled their work for the week, the respondents provided a variety of answers, none of which included the use of social media. While they understood that social media are changing the nature and immediacy of breaking news, the respondents did not see this as a reason for newspapers to change the way they typified news.

The findings from the semi-structured interviews support the findings from the self-administered questionnaires, discussed in Chapter 4, which indicated a flexible beat structure at *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian*. One might argue that social media, together with other problems inherent to modern newspaper newsrooms (such as increasing time pressure and lack of staff) contributes to this flexibility when it comes to beats. Since the journalists at *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian* were hardly reflexive about this issue it would presume too much to consider that social media influenced the apparent lack of a formal beat structure in these newsrooms.

The majority of the journalists interviewed were adamant that they preferred and still relied on personal interaction with sources to report and produce news. They said that they might use social media, especially Facebook, to get hold of sources, but that these media only serve to facilitate initial contact. These findings are further interrogated in Chapter 7.

Journalists at both *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian* agreed that they felt encouraged by their editors to use social media within their newsrooms. Whether they had previous knowledge of social media and/or the Internet while growing up had little bearing on their current acceptance of social media. It can therefore be concluded that the newsroom culture (*habitus*) and the socialisation of the journalists within these newsrooms have had a favourable influence on their introduction to and acceptance of the professional use of Facebook and Twitter.

In the next chapter the findings from the ethnographic research will be presented.

Chapter Six: Findings from ethnography

6.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the findings of the ethnographic research that was conducted in the newsrooms of *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian*. The research is presented in the form of a chronological first person narrative of the time spent in each newsroom. It aims to address the general research question: **How does the professional use of social media at *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian* influence processes and cultures of news selection and presentation?**

6.2 Review of methodology

As discussed in Chapter 3, the aim of ethnographic research is to observe the researched subjects within their natural environment. According to Fetterman (1998:31) this allows the researcher to see people and their behaviour “given all the real-world incentives and constraints”. Scott Jones (2010:26) also says that ethnography as a methodology involves a commitment to seek ways to understand a social world by immersion (long or short term) in that environment. The natural environments studied here were the news offices of *Rapport* at Media Park in Auckland Park, Johannesburg, and the *Mail & Guardian* in Rosebank, Johannesburg. I (the researcher) gained access to these newsrooms by making appointments with the editors beforehand to explain the purpose and nature of the study. The self-administered questionnaires were distributed to the journalists before the ethnographic research commenced so that most of the journalists were already familiar with the aim and nature of the research when the researcher entered the newsroom. On the day the ethnographic leg of the research started, I was introduced to all the journalists and editors during an editorial meeting where I explained my presence and the research process. This was done, not only to initiate contact with the journalists, but also to ensure their informed consent for the study. All the journalists were made aware of the fact that they would be talking to a researcher for an academic study and that they may choose not to speak to the researcher or to remain anonymous during conversations if they so wished.

Fetterman (1998:1) compares the work of an ethnographer to that of an investigative reporter, with one key difference: journalists look for the unusual, while the ethnographer writes about the “routine, daily lives of people”.

It must be noted, as described by Schultz (2007:192), that journalists themselves generally believe the “news game” begins afresh every day. According to Schultz (ibid.), journalists see journalistic practice as a “daily challenge with very little routine embedded” in it. Schultz (ibid.) does, however, add that who says for ethnographers who observe news work, “this is not so”. For Schultz (ibid.)

... news work is highly routinized and follows recognisable patterns from day to day. Even though the news stories that are processed are about different events, and even though events and themes will change over time, the daily structuring of journalistic practice is very much the same from day to day.

In the weeks spent at each of the newspapers, I attempted to establish what the cultures and the general news routines of the journalists in the newsrooms were, as well as what roles social media played in this regard.

Fetterman (1998:33) argues that ethnographers usually start their research “wherever they can slip a foot in the door”, which is followed by judgmental sampling of members of a population who will most appropriately provide an answer to the research question. It was established, upon entering the newsrooms of *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian*, that certain reporters would be easier to communicate with and observe, and that some reporters were more forthcoming about their routines and social media usage than others. According to Fetterman (1998:33), “natural opportunities, convenience and luck” also play a part in the process.

Although a variety of methods and techniques are employed during ethnography to ensure the integrity of data, Fetterman (1998:32) argues that the ethnographer must adapt each of them to the local environment. According to Fetterman (1998:9), the most important element of fieldwork is being there

... to observe, to ask seemingly stupid but insightful questions, and to write down what is seen and heard.

In order to achieve this objective, I spent a full production week at both *Rapport*⁴⁸ and the *Mail & Guardian*⁴⁹, recording handwritten notes (which I organised electronically shortly

⁴⁸ From Saturday 28 June 2011 to Saturday 2 July 2011.

⁴⁹ From Friday 8 July 2011 to Thursday 14 July 2011.

afterwards. The three different types of notes recorded during this time can be summarised as follows:

- **Field notes:** the researcher's personal impressions and observations of events. Light (2010:174) emphasises that during ethnographic research writing is embedded throughout the research process. According to Light, it is a good idea to keep a record of additional ideas, observations and interpretations generated during the collection of field data.
- **Observations:** direct descriptive statements, with as little interpretation as possible of journalists' actions and events in the newsroom
- **Informal conversations:** *ad hoc* conversations, mostly initiated by the researcher. These differ from the semi-structured interviews in that they are not scheduled and either flow from an observation or start naturally. Fetterman (1998:38) says informal interviews are the most common in ethnographic work and that they are useful in discovering "what people think and how one person's perceptions compare with another's".

Light (2010:176) suggests various ways of presenting ethnographic research, including structuring it around themes, around categories or chronologically. According to Light (2010:181), writing an ethnography involves producing a narrative where "presentation, interpretation, discussion and contextualization are seamlessly interwoven". Hammersley and Atkinson (1995:249) also highlight the importance of the narrative in the organisation of ethnography. According to them (1995:249), the ethnographer

...draws on and elicits narratives as 'data' and recasts them in the sociological or anthropological narratives of scholarly writing.

In this study, the notes recorded will be combined and presented (in section 6.4) as a chronological narrative to indicate my experiences within the newsrooms of *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian*.

6.3 Limitations of methodology

Due to time constraints, observation was only possible for a period of one production week at each newspaper. While this was ample time to gather information about regular routines, such as editorial conferences, this might not have been sufficient time for the journalists to get comfortable enough with me, the researcher, to see me as part of their natural

environment. However, relationships were easier to establish at *Rapport* than at the *Mail & Guardian* because I worked there (at *Rapport*) as a journalist until 2009 and knew a fair number of the journalists and editors. But at the *Mail & Guardian* there were a few instances where people purposefully moved conversations away when they spotted me, the researcher, nearby. I aimed to overcome this hurdle by stationing myself next to the secretary's desk – with a view of the whole open-plan office, but without being a direct disturbance to the journalists. Unfortunately, this led to a far less comprehensive observation and report than at *Rapport*.

However, the layout of the news office⁵⁰ at *Rapport* was a drawback. The journalists sit in separate offices and they often close their doors. This made observing their routines and their use of social media quite intrusive since I had to knock on their door to gain access before any informal conversation could start. This hurdle was overcome in part by sitting in a few different journalists' offices on different days – to observe their schedules and social media use – whilst still occasionally moving around the office for informal conversation and to attend conferences.

6.4 Findings and discussion

6.4.1 *Rapport*

What struck me when I arrived at the offices of *Rapport* was how quiet it was. At first I thought it was because it was still early (I arrived at around 08:30) but later I realised it was because there were so few reporters on staff. At the time of writing there were seven journalists and six editors in various positions on the news staff in the Johannesburg office⁵¹. This supports findings by studies such as the study by OECD on *The evolution of news and the Internet* (Wunsch-Vincent & Vickery, 2010) and the North American *State of the News Media Report 2011* which reports a decline in fulltime newsroom employment (Edmonds, Guskin, & Rosenstiel, 2011). According to Edmonds, Guskin and Rosenstiel (2011)

... rising costs, especially of newsprint, will work against restoration of space and staffing on the print side. Nor is there abundant start-up cash and spare-time capacity for the legacy newsroom to learn new tricks.

⁵⁰ See Appendix C for the basic layout of the newsrooms of *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian*.

⁵¹ Two news journalists in Pretoria also completed questionnaires for this study and are, therefore, considered part of the population.

When I worked at *Rapport* from 2005 to 2009, the news journalists sat in an open office, with only a few senior journalists with their own offices. Now even the junior reporters have their own offices – and most of the journalists keep their doors closed during the day. They mostly communicate with the news editor via telephone or email and spend most of their time behind their computers.

On entering the news office I met senior journalist Johannes de Villiers who was always in the office early in the morning. He had Facebook open when I entered his office and told me that he keeps it open all day, every day. De Villiers, who I have known since we worked together at *Die Burger* in Cape Town around 2002, was helpful and forthcoming throughout my research visit to *Rapport*, letting me spend a lot of time working out of his office.

I observed De Villiers most of that Wednesday and found that he does make use of various forms of social media on a regular basis. While he said that he still finds most of his stories through personal interactions with people, social media seemed to be a very natural part of his daily routine. There also seemed to be very little distinction between his personal and professional use of social media. On Wednesday morning, for instance, he watched a YouTube video. When I asked him later what was the purpose of this, he explained that it was a story he was tracking that was not “ripe” yet and added that when using social media

...I don't always know where the line is between when I am working and when I am just looking at trash.⁵²

For De Villiers, his use of social media started with a personal blog; he still believed he gathered more information and made more contacts from that medium than through some of the newer forms of social media. Although he had a Twitter account, he rarely used it, saying:

I don't like Twitter. It is pointless.

However, he talked easily about his fascination with and use of Facebook on a personal and professional level. Since he has gained some recognition through his writing both in the newspaper world and through a book he has written

⁵² All quotes from *Rapport* journalists were translated from the original Afrikaans by the researcher.

... a lot of people I don't know want to friend me on Facebook [...] But I don't do that anymore because some of them are crazy.

As an example of some of the unusual people that have befriended him on Facebook, he showed me the profile of one of his Facebook friends who he described as having “right-wing tendencies” – which made De Villiers quite uncomfortable. De Villiers, who (amongst other things) wrote about religion for *Rapport*, was fascinated by the discussion the seemingly conservative man had on his Facebook page with about pagan beliefs. De Villiers decided not to unfriend⁵³ this “stranger” since he found him too interesting.

The way he used Facebook here, seem to concur with the view of Raymond and Lu (2011:8) that

... the social network that is the core of Facebook creates an intriguing allure for the journalist as well. Often when researching a story, connections supplied by others lead the reporter to an important source. Since Facebook is all about creating and maintaining connections, the likelihood that someone within a journalist's group of cyber friends may be able to connect a reporter to a source, would seem to be great.

While De Villiers planned for the rest of that week (doing things such as calling to make an appointment and organising a photographer) he regularly referred back to Facebook. At around 10:30 he decided to place a tip on Facebook telling everyone about the good service he received from a courier company. Later, he created an event to invite people to a reading of and discussion on his book, *Agter die somber gordyn* (Behind the sombre curtain), at an upcoming festival.

While he used social media throughout the day while at the office, De Villiers was also one of the journalists who spent the most time out on assignment during the week I spent at *Rapport*.

In the first weekly news conference for the journalists which took place at around 09:30 on Tuesday, five news journalists gathered in the office of news editor Liezel de Lange to pitch their initial story ideas. One journalist was on leave and another was covering a labour

⁵³ This refers to the severing of ties or a relationship one had with someone on Facebook.

conference for most of the week. The conversation veered towards a discussion about shift schedules. This was clearly a sensitive subject, with journalists defending themselves for switching shifts or not being able to work a specific shift. The current system of letting one reporter work from Monday to Friday (instead of Tuesday to Saturday) seemed to be an area of contestation and/or confusion. De Lange explained that they have this two-shift system to try to file copy earlier, but with the newspaper not being big in size at that moment they did not have space for “softer, investigative news”. This was the first of many discussions during the course of the week (especially amongst the chief editorial staff) that centred around the size of the newspaper and how it affected the presentation of news and the distribution between what De Lange called “heavy and light”.

In this news conference⁵⁴ I heard the first mention of Marius Visser, a sub-editor at the newspaper, whom I later found out started to manage the Facebook and Twitter accounts of *Rapport* of his own accord. De Lange told the journalists about Visser’s involvement in managing the social media for the newspaper and encouraged them to start contributing content for the newspaper’s social media feeds. According to her

... at the moment it [*Rapport*’s Facebook and Twitter] is not that great.

De Lange’s announcement received a mixed reaction from the journalists – a buzz of conversation started amongst them. Van der Berg immediately wanted to know if the journalists are going to get new phones with which to tweet while on assignment – a question that was met with a definite “no” from the news editor. De Villiers urged his colleagues to try and emulate the example of the *New York Times* which sends out regular updates on Facebook and Twitter. Gavin Prins, entertainment reporter and the only reporter at that stage who had access to the official *Rapport* Twitter account, told everyone of a costly mistake he made himself using Twitter that previous weekend when he quoted a tweet (from a local celebrity) that contained a profanity. This in turn reflected on the official *Rapport* Twitter stream. Before the news conference Prins also told me that

⁵⁴ During this news conference I experienced what I would like to refer to as ‘playing for the camera’ for the first time. Although I tried to remain as unobtrusive as possible – especially during larger meetings – it became clear to me that journalists and editors – mostly at *Rapport* – brought up social media as soon as they became aware of my presence, even when I did not initiate a conversation about the subject. This is, however, not an indication that what they told me was untrue; it is merely an observation worth noting.

... what has to come through in your [research] report is that mistakes are made. You have to show the big *faux pas* of the past six months... You have to warn people.

Despite the lively conversation, no initial, clear agreement was reached on how journalists at *Rapport* should be tweeting – or using Facebook – professionally.

The main editorial meeting of the week, attended by all the journalists, editors, website editor and, via Skype, the Cape Town editors, took place at around 10:00 on Tuesday. The conference, which lasted just over an hour, had an informal feel, with editors and journalists sharing jokes and some of the junior journalists discretely busy on their cellphones at times. Herman Jansen, the assistant editor, stood in for Liza Albrecht, the outgoing editor who was not present that week.

De Lange opened the discussion⁵⁵ by referring to Facebook and Twitter and what Visser was doing to get the newsfeeds going. In this meeting she gave her opinion on how journalists should engage with the *Rapport* Twitter feed:

They are news tweets. Not value judgements. You are tweeting on behalf of the newspaper, not personally.

There were clearly some misgivings from some of the other senior staff members about the introduction of social media into the news routines and schedules of the journalists. Jansen said the (printed) newspaper is “90% of the job if you go out on a job”. De Lange and Prins countered this argument by stressing the “marketing” potential of Twitter; Prins called it an “electronic form of a poster”. De Lange emphasised to the reporters present that while they may tweet while on assignment, especially being a Sunday newspaper,

... if you give away your story angle, we will wring your neck.

When the staff started discussing the previous week’s edition of the newspaper, Jansen referred to various articles where one of the journalists dug out more than the obvious news:

With Michelle Obama he [Gavin Prins] had to do something different. He couldn’t just do the same thing; he couldn’t just sit and write what he saw...⁵⁶

⁵⁵ See footnote 4 above

⁵⁶ The American first lady Mrs Michelle Obama delivered a speech at the Regina Mundi church in Soweto in June 2011.

The need to write something unique, news-behind-the-news or a “scoop” was a recurring theme during discussions between journalists and editors during that week. When a story a journalist was working on appeared somewhere else before deadline on Saturday, their stories was either dropped from the paper immediately, or they had to find a new, stronger angle or another source. Scheduling and timing was also foremost in everyone’s mind – especially with regard to events that happened close to deadline. Tuchman (1978:44) emphasises that journalists plan across days to try and control work.

During the week I was observing the routines at *Rapport*, the royal wedding of princess Charlene and prince Albert of Monaco was going to take place at around the same time as the Super Rugby semi-final between the Stormers and the Crusaders in Cape Town: late that Saturday afternoon, and therefore close to the newspaper’s deadline.

According to a recent demographic analysis of *Rapport* (De Beer, personal communications, 1 July, 2011), more than 55% of its readers prefer rugby to any other sport and of its almost 1,4 million readers almost 1 million read the sport section every week. The editors therefore had discussions all week long about what would be the best lead for the paper: the rugby or the story of a South African princess’s wedding. The paper decided to lead with the royal wedding because there had been a lot of build-up towards it. But the final decision was only made on the Friday, and could still have changed at a moment’s notice.

After the news conference I had various informal conversations with some of the journalists who attended the news conference to establish connections and to gauge their initial feelings about social media. In Van der Berg’s office (which she was sharing with senior journalist Johan Eybers, who was on leave at the time), I saw that she had various links open on her computer screen. She told me:

I open Facebook, Twitter and Google as soon as I get to work [...] I am friends with spokespeople on Facebook. The bad thing is you can’t write personal stuff anymore, because you represent *Rapport*. [...] The good thing is that sometimes when you call them they don’t answer, but then they are on Facebook and will reply.

Van der Berg used social media – especially Facebook – often and with ease. With her, as with De Villiers, there seemed to be little distinction between personal and professional use

of these media. When I found Van der Berg in her office again after lunch on Tuesday, she echoed De Villiers's sentiments about sometimes looking at people's profiles just because he finds them interesting or unusual. She told me she is "fascinated" by right-wing groups on Facebook. Although she mostly just looked at the pages and people involved out of curiosity there is one person that she mentioned she might try to do a story about. She believed that pages such as these show that

... if you give people a soapbox, they will jump on it. That is what Facebook and Twitter are.

I also had a chat with senior journalist Gavin Prins, reporter Hanri Wondergem and junior reporter Celinda Groenewald, in Prins's office on Tuesday. When I entered the office before lunch, Prins said he was "just talking about social media". According to him he was not afraid to take part in discussions on social media about news events – even when his editor was commenting as well. After conversing for about fifteen minutes (mostly about things of a personal nature), I excused myself and walked across the hall to the editors' offices where I met an old acquaintance from my days at *Die Burger*, Anastasia de Vries, now assistant editor and book editor at *Rapport*. She was confident that – even though she does not work for the news staff directly anymore, she was still

... probably the journalist who brings the most stories to [other] journalists from Facebook and Twitter. Facebook is not your life. It is a tool – use it.

Later in the afternoon I purposefully went back to find Groenewald and Wondergem (who were sharing an office) since I did not really get a chance to talk to them in Prins's office. Here I found out that Groenewald was planning on leaving *Rapport* within the next month because she got a job at *Beeld*, to work on the lifestyle section of. According to her she was specifically asked if she was interested in broadening the social media presence for the supplement. She told me she was convinced that "newspapers can't be one dimensional anymore".

Groenewald was indeed one of the journalists at *Rapport* who seemed to most use social media to her advantage. On that Thursday afternoon I found her posting messages on Facebook. She explained that she was trying to locate some of the participants in the *Rapport* modelling competition since their contact details seemed to have gotten lost and said:

Thank heavens for Facebook.

Most journalists left the office at around 17:00 daily. During my time at *Rapport*, around half the journalists each spent the better part of their time in their office, doing most of their work via telephone and the Internet.

The editors held editorial conferences every day at around midday for the rest of the week, except for Saturday when the meeting was held at 09h00. During these meetings the main topic of discussion was about the size of the newspaper and how the scheduling of events was going to influence the presentation of the news. That Thursday, the editors were concerned about how they, as De Lange put it, were going to “fit everything in”. Again De Lange emphasised the need for balanced news representation when she said:

If we have a soft news or ‘frivolous’ lead, we have to have a hard news plug
[on the front page].

It was also important to the decision-makers at the paper what their readers would want, since the readers determine the news agenda to a large extent. That Thursday, when discussing their presentation of the royal wedding, Jansen (for instance) said they could go with the South African angle if they have “the grandmother crying.”⁵⁷

It was clear to me that the editors of the paper considered it important to establish a “character” for the newspaper in accordance to who they, as editors, thought their ideal reader was, and thus catering to what readers wanted.

Not one of the meetings I attended, besides the first main editorial meeting, mentioned social media. Social media did not seem to have any influence on the newspaper’s editorial decisions, or on the news agenda.

On Thursday morning just before 09:00 I met Marius Visser, who I was told was then handling *Rapport*’s Facebook and Twitter feeds, for the first time. Van der Berg told me on that Friday afternoon that she – as a regular Facebook and Twitter user and a follower of

⁵⁷ *Rapport* had an exclusive interview with Charlene Wittstock’s grandmother.

Rapport's feeds on social media, could pick up immediately that someone new had taken over these accounts.

Visser told me he had put together a conceptual social media policy⁵⁸ for the newspaper the previous evening. Visser believed that

... Afrikaans newspapers are not doing it [social media] right yet.

He explained that there are two ways of handling Twitter feeds at a newspaper: one where the journalists tweet under the brand's name, or one where the personal feeds are kept separate from the brand. He believed that *Rapport* should follow the latter route.

Visser was clearly excited about taking on this new challenge and was not afraid to speak his mind (with regard to social media usage) about what he saw as the paper's shortcomings and what he thought needed improvement. On the Friday he approached me to say that he downloaded the statistics from the newspaper's Facebook page to analyse the statistics and demographics of its readers. He said it was going to keep him busy the whole weekend. According to him

... it should be a fulltime job [handling social media for the paper].

Also on that Friday senior reporter Johan Eybers was back from leave and I had a chat to him in the office he was sharing with Van der Berg. When I started talking about my research, he showed me an article that he read about how the Internet makes people more narcissistic. At first he was quite reluctant to talk about his own experiences, but later we had quite a fruitful discussion, spurred on by his own apparent interest in technology – although this interest was not specifically in social media. He was, however, very knowledgeable about other new technologies, such as iPad newspaper applications.

Eybers told me that he and Van der Berg attended a social media course⁵⁹ earlier in the year which helped him to understand and use Twitter better. Yet he still did not tweet and admitted to using Facebook, but very rarely at the time that he and I spoke. He said that he did not

⁵⁸ Since it was not part of Visser's official duties to handle social media at the *Rapport*, and since the newspaper was in the process of changing leadership while this study was being completed, this policy was not yet formally adapted or approved and, therefore, cannot be included as a formal document here.

⁵⁹ The course Eybers and Van der Berg attended was presented by the Institute for the Advancement of Journalism. But not all *Rapport* journalists attended, and the course did not focus on newspaper-specific policies or guidelines.

... use social media to find sources. I prefer personal contact. I also don't like sending long emails [...] I rarely find story ideas on Facebook.

Our conversation did, however, seem to peak his interests because when we spoke again later in the afternoon he asked me various questions about Twitter such as what "trending topics" were and who I followed on the medium.

Senior reporter Llewellyn Prince was back at the office that Friday after having covered a Cosatu conference since that Monday. I spent some time sitting in his office and tried to strike up a conversation with him, but he was very keen to finish his series of articles and go home after a busy few days. During the time I spent in his office he did not engage with social media at all. I did notice, however, that he made a few Facebook comments while attending the conference.

Just after midday on Friday I had a very brief conversation with Jansen, who was standing in as editor for the week. He was friendly, but clearly under pressure, and only had a few available minutes to talk. Jansen did not use any social media himself. He believed social media takes

... telephone journalism one step further. How you have to write your story, is by going out and looking someone in the eyes [...]. I have seen too many mistakes from [using] things that have been on Facebook.

It is for this reason that although he did not think that social media threatens newspapers as such, he feared they might have a negative impact on journalism. Despite his misgivings, though, he still thought Facebook was a good place to find pictures if one was under time pressure.

On Saturday the newsroom turned into a production hub. The senior editors moved into the open-plan office with the layout artists and sub-editors to put the paper to print, while the news editor kept up to date with the most recent news developments on the news wires, on television and by talking to the various journalists.

While events, like a farm murder, that led to new news stories that broke during the day, none of them were received or influenced by social media. It was only late in the afternoon (around 16:00) that De Lange told the senior editors that it helps to “dig around Twitter”, since she found pictures and comments there that some of the local celebrity guests posted of themselves at the royal wedding.

The first edition of the newspaper went to print at around 19:00 on Saturday with the royal wedding as its lead.

6.4.2 *Mail & Guardian*

As with *Rapport*, the news office at the *Mail & Guardian* was very quiet when I arrived there on the Friday (approximately one week after my week of research at *Rapport*). Wendy Mosetlhi, news secretary, told me that that was because most journalists only come in for the news conference and spend little time in the office. While the open-plan office appeared busy at first glance, I later realised that a lot of the people in this office were either online, photographic or production staff – and not news journalists. The first person I saw in the office was the paper’s online day news editor, Matthew Burbidge, who started working at 06:00. The first person I really spoke to was Amanda Strydom, an online junior sub-editor who also handled the social media feeds for the *Mail & Guardian Online* website. Strydom told me that there were few journalists who tweet regularly at the newspaper, but was quick to point out that the editor-in-chief, Nic Dawes, was an avid social media user:

Nic [...] we should start a little fan page for him on Facebook. He has a big following.⁶⁰

For most of the week I spent at the *Mail & Guardian*, there were seven⁶¹ reporters in the office – three of which were interns. The editor, except for the news editors and section chiefs (such as the education editor), have their own offices. The journalists (especially the more senior ones) spent a fair amount of time out of the office. When they were at their desks they were difficult to approach as they wanted to set times for structured interviews, rather than engage in informal conversation.

⁶⁰ At the time of writing Dawes had more than 9 500 followers on Twitter.

⁶¹ It must be noted that two reporters were on leave and one was on maternity leave during the time I spent at the *Mail & Guardian*

One exception was arts editor, Matthew Krouse, who I had a quick conversation with when he came to the secretary's desk shortly after my arrival in the news office. When he found out who I was, he first told me that I don't have to talk to him because he does not use social media at all. Then he asked me if

... you are talking about using it [social media] for work or to get laid on a Saturday night?

I took this to be meant mostly in jest, because he continued to describe to me why he believes social media are not necessary in his line of work:

Artists *want* to talk about their work. I don't need to get in with them. I just need to pick up the phone [...] Ballet dancers don't talk off the record [...] It is investigative reporters that need to make contact with people they meet at conferences.

His view supported findings in an industry study by Brodeur and Marketwire (MarketWire, 2008) which found that

... journalists' perceptions and engagement with social media differ based on their beat.

This study (MarketWire, 2008), which included politics, lifestyle, technology, healthcare and travel reporters, found that while most journalists that feel social media have a positive influence on reporting and editorial directions, "views on tone, quality and accuracy varied by beat."

One must remember, however, that, as discussed in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5, beats are not strictly adhered to at the *Mail & Guardian*. Krouse who works as arts editor and therefore has a specific beat, appeared to be an exception.

The first full news conference of the week (and the only one attended by all the staff) took place on Friday at 11:00. It is important to note here, that while the previous week's edition was mentioned in passing and journalists had the opportunity to present their story ideas for the following week, the bulk of the time was spent on discussing journalism as a craft and profession. Although it is doubtful that this is the case every week, the conversation did

appear to be a natural part of the conference proceedings. Editor-in-chief Nic Dawes later confirmed to me that he liked to keep current journalism debates in the forefront of his staff's minds.

Dawes for instance, initiated a discussion on the phone hacking scandal that led to the demise of the British tabloid the *News of the World*⁶². Dawes discussed the implications thereof for journalism ethics and self-regulation across the world and reminded the staff that locally the newly established Press Freedom Commission will be investigating international best practice. He warned that it is easy to start down a "slippery slope" of unethical behaviour. According to Dawes the *News of the World* debacle is

... a powerful reminder to pay attention to the big things *and* the little things.

As with *Rapport*, timing and scheduling was a dominant part of discussion from early on in the week. When features editor Tanya Pampalone presented an article by one of the journalists during this first conference she said it is not time-bound and can run "if not this week, next week". This is a clear example of what Tuchman (1978:51) describes as "soft news", because, amongst other things the need for dissemination is not urgent.

After the news conference most of the journalists left for the weekend. During the rest of the week, journalists were usually in the office at around 09:00 and left at around 17:00, depending on what their deadlines were. On Wednesday evening most of the staff worked late, finishing large parts of the newspaper, with the final deadline being 18:00 on Thursday.

On Monday morning I had a quick conversation with Drew Forrest, news editor. He was quite adamant that he does not use social media at all, and told me

... we haven't found a single thing we can use for a story [on social media].

Later in the week Forrest purposefully approached me to tell me that everything he said to me about social media (including the semi-structured interview I conducted with him⁶³) must be taken with the consideration that he is *news editor* and, with that, of a *weekly* publication.

⁶² Comprehensive coverage of how journalists and editors at News International, parent company of *News of the World*, apparently hacked into various people's cellphones and voicemail accounts can be found at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/phone-hacking>

⁶³ See findings discussed in Chapter 5.

This gave me the impression that he was trying to convince me that he was right in having, for lack of a better word, a “negative” attitude towards social media.

Forrest also referred me to online day news editor Matthew Burbidge, who shared the “super desk”⁶⁴ with Forrest to support his statement. At that stage, Burbidge mainly just responded by saying that he only uses Twitter, not Facebook. When I spoke to Burbidge later on that Monday he told me that social media is an “invaluable tool”. According to him

... social media has shown great growth [...] Twitter is the place where things happen first. It happens there before it hits the wires.

Burbidge was also one of the first journalists who told me about the social media strategy or policy at the *Mail & Guardian*, which he summarised as

... you are first a representative of the company and then a private citizen.

Before the Monday news conference (which was only attended by editors and section editors) the newsroom started to get quite busy. Although there were still very few print journalists in the office, there were a number of conversations taking place all over the office between editors, journalists, sub-editors and layout staff. The atmosphere was very relaxed. Some of the early pages, like the *Friday* (arts) section, were already being prepared for press. Forrest was reading various newspapers and walking around the office making notes in preparation for the conference. Forrest also engaged in conversation with Verashni Pillay, deputy online editor, about a breaking news story that one of the online reporters picked up, and how it might be presented for both the online and print editions of the newspaper.

The *Mail & Guardian Online* staff were clearly very engaged with social media, seemingly on a personal and professional level. They had a lot of discussions amongst themselves about both Facebook and Twitter. Dashnee Subramany, online junior sub-editor, described to me on Monday morning how they use social media to promote the newspaper’s headlines as well as when new stories break.

⁶⁴ Burbidge explained that the “super desk” is a combination of print and online news editors at the *Mail & Guardian*.

When the news conference started at 14:00⁶⁵, Pillay was the first person to present her team's news offering – discussing what was available for the *Mail & Guardian Online* and which stories might also be adapted for the print edition. For instance: One of her reporters, Nickolaus Bauer, stumbled upon the story of “bodies piling up” at the mortuary of Chris Hani Baragwanath hospital in Soweto while he was covering a strike there. While he had the first story available for the online edition, he could adapt it for the print edition.

Later in the week I found out that this specific story – after it was posted online and on Facebook and Twitter – elicited a lot of reaction from readers. It led to people offering to fund burials for the unclaimed bodies at the mortuary.

I found it noteworthy that the print and online editions of the newspaper seemed to work so well together. When I mentioned this to various people during the week, such as Burbidge, they seemed to be hesitant to view this process as successful yet. According to Burbidge: “We try.” However, having conducted this research, I believe that huge strides have been made since the study Van Noort completed in 2007 on convergence at the *Mail & Guardian* which found, amongst other things, that the print and online editions had separate office spaces, which led to communication problems at the time.

What also struck me was how social media, especially Twitter, was used, not only by the staff who were responsible for the newspaper's formal feeds, but also by the journalists themselves to promote stories⁶⁶. Social media was, however, not a feature of discussion at any of the news conferences I attended during the week I spent at the *Mail & Guardian*. It was mentioned once in passing by managing editor Charmeela Bhagowat when talking about the fierce reaction she saw on Facebook about all the accidents during the Tour de France. It did not seem that she meant this to influence news selection and/or routine in any way though.

At the first news conference, the available resources, in terms of time and staff, were an important topic. With a number of journalists on leave and the interns attending a course most of the week, Forrest described the situation as “dire”⁶⁷.

The editors discussed what stories they already “have in the bag”, ready to publish. Most of these stories can be described as soft news, as described by Tuchman (1978:51). At both the *Mail & Guardian* and *Rapport*, these types of stories were the first to be prepared for

⁶⁵ The news conferences usually happens earlier (around 12:00), but the editors had to wait for the carpets that were being upholstered in the conference room.

⁶⁶ It must, however, be noted that although there *are* journalists at the print edition of the *Mail & Guardian*, especially editor-in-chief Nic Dawes, who is prolific on Twitter, the online staff of the newspaper take the lead in this instance.

⁶⁷ This corresponds with the staff situation at *Rapport* as discussed in section 6.4.1.

press, and usually presented deeper within the paper – leaving the front pages open for “hard” or “developing” news. At both newspapers the layout of these early pages were ready a day – or even two – before deadline and put up against the wall for all the journalists to see and comment on.

The editors, as with those of *Rapport*, seemed keen to focus certain articles with their readers in mind. For instance, deputy editor-in-chief, Rapule Tabane, compared the *Mail & Guardian*'s political coverage to that of other newspapers. Forrest said they must look at “what is bubbling up with the strikes”. A possible lead for the paper – the latest news about the public protector Thuli Madonsela – was also discussed.

From Tuesday morning the pace in the newsroom seemed to pick up. The journalists came into the office earlier, but then mostly went out on assignment. While discussions about the progress of the news flow took place regularly around the newsroom, I could not gather any overt mention of social media at all.

I had a quick discussion with Nickolaus Bauer⁶⁸, who at the time had only worked at the *Mail & Guardian Online* for a week, and hardly spent more than a couple of hours in the office in the week I spent at the newspaper. He started his journalism career in 2008 in an online environment and regularly used Twitter to

“find ideas that I investigate and to report.”

I found this to be true when later in the week I saw an article he wrote on the website about the nation-wide fuel shortage, in which he included comments from Twitter users.

During the news conference on Wednesday the space left available for stories was a prominent topic of discussion. As with *Rapport*, there seemed to be more stories than available space. This conference therefore included a long discussion on what pages would be best for which stories. Dawes suggested that for some articles, such as one about the British phone hacking scandal, they must “put a package together” which they can link to, from the paper, to the online edition. Dawes also emphasised the need to make stories relevant to the

⁶⁸ Bauer was appointed as an online journalists, but he filed for the print edition of the paper as well.

paper's readers when he urged the business editor to "bring home" an article about the Greek debt crises.

By Thursday morning most of the layout of the back and inner pages of the newspaper had been completed. The focus shifted to the "hard news", with specific reference to the lead.

Tabane told me what important role time plays in their planning. According to him

... we might miss something because of our early deadline if it breaks on Thursday. Thursday is a crucial day for us. We decide what goes where, what we drop and what we keep.

At no stage did Tabane mention social media as playing a role in these decision-making processes. At the editorial conference the discussion centred on finding a new angle on a story that had already been in the news: the apparent attack on the image of the public protector, Thuli Madonsela. Later that afternoon, Dawes spent time with the layout artists choosing an image that would tell the story, but differed from previous images – and specifically the previous editions of the paper.

By 18:00 the paper went to press, leading with an article about the public protector's report on alleged tender corruption with the leasing of police buildings.

6.5 Discussion

From the time I spent in the *Rapport* newsroom, I gathered that the use of social media, especially Facebook, was a natural part of the journalists' daily routines. Social media usage seemed to be an established and accepted part of the newsroom culture. Yet there did not seem to be any clear policy on how to use social media professionally, or any strategy on how to employ it as a tool within the newsroom. While there were instances where journalists presented story ideas and used Facebook during their reporting, social media did not seem to have any influence on the overall processes of news selection and presentation in the newsroom. I would therefore argue that journalists at *Rapport* personally view social media as valuable and useful as professional tools. However, the importance they attach to social media does not seem to be matched by the explicit influence of social media on newsroom routines and the final news product.

At the *Mail & Guardian*, some of the print journalists were more cautious to talk about their use of social media use⁶⁹. They were very aware of the newspaper's policy regarding social media usage – although at that stage it had not been formalised yet. The print journalists at the *Mail & Guardian* preferred structured interviews to informal conversations. The online journalists, however, were far more forthcoming, and also seemed to be more comfortable with social media. It seemed to me that although the use of social media was encouraged and that the newsroom culture was accepting of it, social media usage was not expected of the journalists. While the journalists might have been using it in their personal capacities, it was not such a part of their daily routines as with the journalists at *Rapport*. In other words, they did not seem to spend as much time as *Rapport* journalists did on social media, either looking for stories or simply out of curiosity. Social media did not seem to play any part in editorial decisions and/or the overall newsroom routines of the newspaper.

6.6 Summary

In this chapter, the findings of the ethnographic leg of the research were presented in the form of a chronological narrative – as experienced at each of the newspapers.

The ethnographic research provided a comprehensive understanding of the overall management (such as the scheduling of events-as-news) of the newsrooms of *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian*. It also showed that the newsrooms encouraged debate and discussions around news and related issues. Informal conversations and observations showed clear signs of social media usage by the majority of the journalists at both newspapers, with the scale tipped slightly towards the side of *Rapport's* journalists. Despite most of the journalists' insistence that social media were integrated as part of their professional lives, few signs of this integration could be found during the overall production and presentation processes at *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian*. Social media were rarely mentioned, if at all, during editorial conferences. There were no observed instances where social media were responsible for changes in the production schedule, news routines or overall presentation at these newspapers.

It is important to note, however, that all journalists, even those who did not personally embrace social media, acknowledged (during informal conversations) that the culture and atmosphere in their newsrooms supported and encouraged the use of social media. At no

⁶⁹ Their caution might have resulted from the recent suspension of an intern at the newspaper over apparent anti-Semitic remarks on Facebook.

point did I observe any attempt by managerial staff and/or editors to curb the social media use of their journalists.

In the final chapter of this study, all the chapters and findings will be summarised and contextualised in light of the research questions. Suggestions for possible further research will also be provided.

Chapter Seven: Conclusion

7.1 Introduction

In conclusion this chapter provides an overview of the study and addresses the research questions introduced in Chapter 1 (section 1.7).

This researcher echoes the sentiment of Berkowitz (1989:19) who used a naturalistic approach⁷⁰ to reach the following conclusion after a newsroom study of two months:

“I’ll never be sure that I saw everything I should have seen, heard everything I should have heard, or even if I understood anything correctly.”

Despite these misgivings, the triangulation of research methods not only increased the validity of the findings, but also my understanding of the research problem. In this newsroom study, information was gained directly from the journalists, through questionnaires, interviews, informal conversations and observations. While the research design was mainly qualitative, the findings from the self-administered questionnaires were first analysed using quantitative methods, specifically descriptive statistics. The combination of statistical analysis with the qualitative, thematic analysis and ethnography will arguably supply a more rounded picture of the topic under investigation.

As discussed in Chapter 2, a newsroom study is a valuable method for studying the producers of news. This newsroom study was informed by classical newsroom studies such as those by Tuchman (1978) and Gans ([1979] 2004). Working within the critical research tradition and applying the social constructionist paradigm to this newsroom study, this approach allowed for the inclusion of social and cultural factors during the analysis of the news routines of the journalists at *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian*.

In the next sections the background to the study and research problem will be summarised. Thereafter the four specific and one general research questions will be answered against the backdrop of the research findings discussed in Chapters 4,5 and 6.

⁷⁰ See discussion in Chapter 2 (section 2.2)

7.2 Summary of literature review and theoretical framework

7.2.1 The media landscape

In Chapter 1 and Chapter 2 the current newspaper landscape, worldwide and locally, was described as an introduction to the description of social media's role in newspaper journalism. According to recent reports, the general trend in print newspaper circulation and readership is spiralling downwards, with a few exceptions. These include newspapers in developing nations such as India and specific publications such as the *Mail & Guardian*. Nic Dawes, editor-in-chief of the *Mail & Guardian*, ascribed the success of this newspaper to "quality journalism and staying relevant to their market" (Dawes, 2011).

Social media cannot be seen as the only contributing factor to this somewhat dire position some newspapers find themselves in. A harsh economic climate, lack of advertising revenue and rising Internet penetration rates are some of the other elements that also add to the general downward trend in newspaper circulation. The incredible growth and popularity of social media amongst audiences and media users can, however, not be ignored. A study (GlobalWebIndex, 2011) of 51 000 Internet users in 16 countries describes overall social engagement as having reached "massive levels in all markets". According to GlobalWebIndex (2011) social media engagement "has, in the last 5 years, redefined all Internet markets".

The South African newspaper market, although not as badly hit as newspapers in the United States, have not been left unscathed by the drop in circulation and decline in readership – as was described by various recent reports on newspaper circulation by the Audit Bureau of Circulations (2011a,b,c & d).

Chapter 1 introduced *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian* as the newspapers which would be included in this study. While they differ in terms of target audience, presentation, language and ownership structure, their production schedules, which are relevant for the purposes of this study, are similar.

7.2.2 Social media and newspaper journalism

Chapter 2 provided background to social media and a definition of it and its related terminology. For the purposes of this study, social media was defined as

... communication technologies that enable connections between individuals and groups where these connections lead to information-sharing and mutual influence.

The history and nature of Facebook and Twitter as examples of social media were discussed in Chapter 2. Both mediums rank amongst the most popular sites in South Africa. When talking to the journalists at *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian*, it was also evident that Facebook and Twitter are the main forms of social media that journalists are engaged in.

Various industry studies referenced have shown that journalists have adopted social media, such as Facebook and Twitter, professionally, albeit to varying degrees. This section of the study was, to a large extent, informed by Newman's (2009) working paper for the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism on the rise of social media and its impact on mainstream journalism. Newman (2009) came to a series of conclusions after studying newspapers and television stations in the United States and the United Kingdom. According to Newman (2009:2), these include: the acknowledgement of the "explosion" of social media; the fundamental change social media brings to the nature of breaking news and the manner in which journalists are beginning to embrace social media, such as Facebook and Twitter.

The literature reviewed shows that social media are a so-called double-edged sword for journalists. On the one hand, it affords opportunities to gather and disseminate information quickly, and via media that increasingly reaches a wider audience. Yet it is this same immediacy of and ability to reach a diverse audience that may pose an arguable threat to the traditional position of authority that journalists hold. Anyone who has access to Facebook and Twitter and has something newsworthy to share can use these media to broadcast it. According to the literature reviewed in this study, journalists have started to realise they have to work in partnership with their audiences – especially in view of the power given to the public by social media.

This study revealed, however, that industry experts are doubtful about whether South African journalists are using social media successfully yet. The findings of this study indicate that journalists, at least at *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian*, are actively using social media professionally. The use of these media has, however, not significantly altered their newsroom routines – yet.

7.2.3 Social constructionist paradigm

In contrast to the dominant, positivist research tradition, this study implemented a critical approach. More specifically, it worked within the social constructionist paradigm. As such, this study viewed reality as constructed by the actions of and interactions between the members of a society. This researcher would argue that one should therefore talk about reality in the plural sense, since reality will always be influenced by multiple viewpoints and will also be interpreted from different vantage points. The realities people experience are therefore not just something out there, these realities are, to varying degrees, also creations of the people who experience them.

In Chapter 2, the application of this research tradition to the production and study of news was investigated. The literature reviewed showed that the argument for news as a “constructed reality” has a long history in newsroom research. Early proponents of this view, such as Tuchman (1978), have been criticised for their overemphasis of the role of routine in newsrooms. Yet Tuchman (1978) argued that news workers construct news within the context of their personal understanding of societal factors and how news is typified.

This study focused on news workers’ perceptions of the construction of news, specifically within the context of the rise of social media, rather than on their audiences’ experiences of news and realities. The role of a news worker’s personal perceptions and preferences in the construction of news also necessitated a look at the gatekeeping theory. While personal attitudes may influence the gatekeepers’ selection of events-as-news (and thus the construction of realities for audiences), they are not immune to organisational and societal factors. The newsroom culture, or *habitus*, as discussed in Chapter 2 and summarised in section 7.2.4 (i), can therefore be considered a contributing factor to the construction of news and realities for audiences.

The rise of the Internet and, more recently, social media, has not only changed the power balance between producers and consumers of news, but it can be argued that it has also influenced the way news and (by implication) realities are constructed. Where news workers were traditionally the gatekeepers guarding the information and selectively distributing it to their audiences, the Internet and social media have opened the proverbial floodgates, giving news consumers direct access to vast amounts of information. News workers themselves might not be aware of, and are rarely reflective about, the influence of their daily routines and cultures on the construction of news, and subsequently, realities for their audiences. This study has shown, however, that some journalists *did* seem to know that their traditional roles

as gatekeepers (who influence the construction of realities) are being challenged. However, the literature reviewed showed that the gatekeeping role of news workers, especially to construct meaningful realities for their audiences, may not be disappearing as yet, despite the increased access people have to information.

7.2.4 Theoretical framework and assumptions

Chapters 1 and 2 introduced the three theoretical assumptions on which this study are based. They are briefly summarised here.

i) *Habitus*

A person's current and future actions are influenced by their past experiences and perceptions, or what Bourdieu (1990) refers to as *habitus*. This notion of *habitus* not only refers to individual's reactions to situations and events, but also to the way society shapes its members. In other words, *habitus* functions on both an individual and a collective level. It assumes that the way a person is socialised (into a work environment as well) will influence the way he or she acts in the future. The culture of a newsroom will, for instance, influence how news workers react to outside influences and how they determine the potential newsworthiness of an event.

While *habitus* is a product of history and, as such, generally has a durable effect on individuals, Bourdieu (in Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992:133) makes it clear that new experiences may affect changes to the *habitus* of a person. This study seeks to substantiate the notion that the introduction of social media can be seen as a new experience, on both the individual and the collective level.

With this in mind, the first theoretical assumption of this study is that newspaper journalists have an individual and collective *habitus* which influences the way they react and adapt to external influences, like the introduction of social media as a professional tool.

ii) Structuring of time and typification of news

The literature reviewed for this study discussed the need for routines during the manufacturing of news to help journalists cope with the influx of possible events as news. While news decisions are made quickly and routines must be adaptable (because of the

spontaneous nature of events), it is clear that some kind of set routine is needed to, in the words of Gans ([1979]2004:83), “prevent chaos”.

It has also been argued that the advent of new technologies and the rise of social media might impact the way journalists structure their time and routines. Klinenberg (2005:54), for instance, talks about the never-ending news cycle in which there is always news to produce and consume.

In her seminal work about the construction of news, based on ten years of newsroom study, Gaye Tuchman (1978) uses a typology of news to further describe how journalists make sense of the events that can possibly lead to news. Tuchman’s (ibid.) main distinction is between various categories of hard news and soft news. This distinction is based on whether the events that lead to news can be scheduled and to what extent it urgently needs to be disseminated.

In the literature review examples of social media as source of breaking hard news was presented. The argument for a partnership between social media and mainstream media was also made.

The second theoretical assumption of this study is therefore that newspaper journalists follow certain routines and typologies during the manufacturing of news and that these routines and typologies will be influenced by environmental and technological changes and/or pressures, such as the introduction of social media as a professional tool.

iii) Beats and sources

Tuchman’s (1978:23) analogy of a “news net” was employed to explain how journalists are dispersed geographically and across topical specialisations to enable a news organisation to have better possible coverage of newsworthy events. According to Becker and Vlad (2009:64) these so-called beats help news organisations organise themselves to observe events and gather the raw materials used to produce news.

The literature reviewed also discussed how journalists on the beat develop a network of sources who assist them with story ideation. This is a reciprocal relationship: journalists prove their worth and ability to produce stories through their access to sources, while sources get to publicise their news and events. It is argued throughout the study that the production of news is increasingly becoming a more collaborative effort: traditional sources are also becoming producers of news themselves. According to Berkowitz (2009:112), technology

also influences the relationships between journalists and their sources, by (amongst other things) diminishing the face-to-face or voice-to-voice communication time.

The third theoretical assumption of this study is that the news routines and story ideation of newspaper journalists are influenced by the way beats are structured at these newspapers and that the introductions of new technologies like social media will influence this structure, the generation of story ideas and journalists' relationships with their sources.

7.3 Response to research questions

In this section the research questions are answered in light of the findings from Chapter 4 (self-administered questionnaires), Chapter 5 (semi-structured interviews) and Chapter 6 (ethnography).

The first specific research question answered by this study was:

Has the use of Facebook and Twitter changed the way journalists at *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian* schedule and typify news?

From the semi-structured interviews, it emerged that the journalists at *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian* did not consider social media to be one of the driving forces with regard to managing their personal schedules in the newsroom. For the journalists interviewed, a variety of other factors, such as finding new angles on developing events-as-news, influence the way journalists plan for the next few days and/or weeks. The ethnographic research also did not find any overt signs of Twitter and Facebook being used to influence overall scheduling of events-as-news within these newsrooms. Social media were hardly ever mentioned during any of the daily editorial news conferences the researcher attended. This validated the findings of the self-administered questionnaires where the majority of journalists, when asked explicitly, indicated that they believed that social media had little to no influence on the way news was placed on the news diary.

Despite the apparent lack of influence that social media has on scheduling and planning within these newsrooms, it must be noted that these media were by no means absent from the daily routines of the journalists at *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian*. Journalists actively used social media for various purposes, mainly to keep abreast of general trends in the news and in society. The use of social media for what this researcher referred to as “trend tracking”, was confirmed during the semi-structured interviews. Through informal

conversations and observations during the ethnographic research, the researcher also established that many of the journalists, especially at *Rapport*, opened Facebook and Twitter as soon as they got to the office and often kept it open throughout the day. The researcher observed journalists at *Rapport* often looking at social media content purely out of a sense of curiosity or fascination. One might argue that the use of social media in this fashion constitutes a waste of time and resources because the majority of the journalists did not develop the information they accessed via social media into news articles.

Working within the social constructionist paradigm, however, one has to keep in mind that news and realities are constructed through interaction and the sharing of information between people. It can, therefore, be assumed that the information transmitted via social media helps to create multiple realities, with the audience as co-creators. It can, therefore, be argued that one reason why journalists kept up with trends on social media was to keep in touch with the realities created by their audiences⁷¹. This enabled them to better understand audience expectations and what their readers were interested in. This researcher makes no claim that the journalists in question were conscious or self-reflexive about their use of social media for this purpose. It did, however, emerge from interviews and informal conversations during the ethnographic research that certain journalists kept up to date with what was being said on social media regarding the topics and issues they were busy reporting about.

According to the results of the self-administered questionnaires most journalists said that they followed social media to gather hard news leads. In both the questionnaires and the semi-structured interviews journalists made it clear that despite this ability of social media to break hard news, they did not see the role of newspapers as conduits of hard news as becoming redundant, or diminishing altogether. In other words, they did not see themselves suddenly only reporting and writing soft news.

It is necessary to point out at this stage that the journalists, in the self-administered questionnaires as well as in the semi-structured interviews, did not all agree about a clear-cut distinction between hard and soft news. As discussed in Chapter 2, Tuchman (1978:51) argues that one of the main distinctions between hard news and soft news is the fact that hard news is unscheduled and needs to be disseminated urgently, otherwise it loses its newsworthiness. Following this reasoning, newspapers would be hard-pressed to present hard news in light of the immediacy of social media and other Internet-based technologies. From the semi-structured interviews it was also apparent that when the journalists said newspapers

⁷¹ As discussed in section 5.4.3 not everyone – especially in South Africa – has access to social media. However, this researcher would argue that this limitation does not nullify the basic principle at work here.

are still covering hard news, they usually started emphasizing analysis and interpretation of current events, rather than traditional hard or breaking news. In fact, most journalists emphasised the need for journalists as interpreters and aggregators of news, especially in light of an abundance of information as presented by the Internet and social media. This researcher would argue that in the current newspaper climate, Tuchman's classification of "developing news" is more applicable than "hard news" – especially when it is contrasted with "soft news". As discussed in Chapter 4 (section 4.4.3), Tuchman (1978:54) says developing news concerns "emergent situations". The self-administered questionnaires indicated that almost half of the journalists believed social media helped them to keep abreast of developments in the news.

The ethnographic research showed that *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian* would still prefer to have developing news rather than soft news as their front page leads⁷². In the case of *Rapport* the two events-as-news that were considered as front page leads (the Monaco royal wedding and the Super Rugby semi-final) both occurred the day before the paper was published. While the "hard news" about these events had already been distributed on various platforms, including social media, before *Rapport* hit the streets, the newspaper still considered this "developing news" as being "hard" enough to lead with.

Within the social constructionist paradigm, it can be argued that the journalists at these newspapers were, therefore, creating news, and, by extension, new realities, through interaction with existing knowledge and realities created and communicated not only by their sources, but also by other traditional media, Internet-based technologies and social media.

The research methodologies used here have shown that social media have become a natural part of the professional lives of most journalists at *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian*. They seemed to have organised their days to accommodate the time they spent browsing these media – often out of curiosity, but also to keep up with trends. It can, therefore, also be argued that the immediacy of social media contributes more and more to "hard news" in these newspapers, consisting of "developing news" rather than breaking news.

The second specific research question answered by this study was:

How has the use of Facebook and Twitter influenced the beat system at *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian*?

⁷² All newspapers would generally prefer a "scoop" or an exclusive story, but this researcher is referring to the real-world examples of articles that were published and considered as front page leads during the period of ethnographic research at *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian*.

As discussed in chapters Chapters 4 and 5, the beat structures at *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian* were very flexible. Journalists had certain areas of specialisation they focused on, but very few considered themselves “beat” reporters. These focus areas might be seen as the development of a new type of beat structure – more adaptable to the needs of newsrooms constantly under pressure because of a lack of staff. As described in Chapter 6, both newsrooms functioned with only a handful of journalists during the production week that was observed during this study. These newsrooms did not have the capacity to provide journalists to cover beats as topical specialisations to the extent that Tuchman (1978:29) and Becker and Vlad (2009:66) describes beats. It was clear from the findings of the self-administered questionnaires that the majority of news journalists at *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian* did stories on other people’s beats. When asked in the questionnaires which beat they work on, most journalists indicated at least two, and some indicated more than four areas of specialisation. These findings were validated with responses given during the semi-structured interviews, and observations made during the ethnographic research.

The findings of this study regarding the influence of social media on the beat systems at *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian* must, therefore, be read within the context of the flexible nature of their beat structures.

In the self-administered questionnaires the majority of journalists indicated that social media are helpful when it comes to finding story ideas on their own and on other beats. It can, therefore, be argued that social media has contributed to the blurring of lines between beats. As discussed above and in Chapter 5 (section 5.4.8) other factors, such as the shrinking of newsrooms and increasing time pressure, contributed to the development of this flexible beat structure.

According to the findings of the self-administered questionnaires, almost none of the journalists at *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian* feel that beat reporting in general, or their own beats specifically, are threatened by social media. Since very few journalists really considered themselves to be beat reporters, these findings are not surprising. During the semi-structured interviews, it did emerge that some journalists with specific focus areas, such as health and entertainment, saw social media as supplementary and helpful to their work, rather than detrimental.

The third specific research question answered by this study was:

How has the use of Facebook and Twitter influenced the relationships reporters at *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian* have with their sources?

In the self-administered questionnaires, two thirds of the respondents indicated that social media have a “big” or “average” influence on their relationship with their sources. This would seem to indicate a significant shift in the reporter-source relationship. However, Facebook and Twitter are still rated last in terms of importance when compared to other sources such as documents, first person encounters and public events. When interrogated about this during the semi-structured interviews, the journalists, without exception, were adamant about the fact that they only used social media to initiate contact with sources. They believed that they spent most of their time talking “one-on-one” with sources.

However, the evidence gathered during the ethnographic phase of this study, substantiates the argument that the journalists might have had an unrealistic perception of their own actions in this regard – especially at *Rapport*. Where the journalists told the researcher that they gathered news by talking to people in person, the majority of them spent most of the week in their offices behind closed doors. This researcher makes no claim that they spent all this time interacting with sources on social media, but this observation does seem to indicate that the journalists’ relationships with their sources have changed, in ways that the journalists themselves perhaps had not yet fully comprehended. It must be noted that all the journalists indicated in both the self-administered questionnaires and the semi-structured interviews that they used social media as a professional tool. One can, therefore, stand to argue that social media had an influence on the relationship journalists at *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian* have with their sources.

In drawing this conclusion the researcher remains cognisant of the fact that journalists at these newspapers were still wary about the credibility of information disseminated through social media. A distinction must be made, however, between *information* found on social media and *sources* found on social media. In the first instance, the information is not necessarily connected to a specific, recognisable person or institution and can, therefore, not always be verified. When referring to sources, however, many of the journalists admitted to using social media especially to contact a specific person or institution and/or to develop a relationship with that person or institution. The information supplied by such a source is arguably easier to verify and considered more credible by journalists.

As discussed in Chapter 2, a journalist’s relationship with his or her sources is one of the most important avenues for story ideation. Since it is argued here that social media has

brought a shift to these relationships, it is logical to state that social media also contributed to story ideation at *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian*. This argument is supported to some extent by the findings in the self-administered questionnaires. Around half of the journalists who responded indicated that they sometimes (every few months) find story ideas or follow-ups for stories on Twitter and Facebook. Around 20% said they often (daily/weekly) find ideas on these social media.

From a social constructionist perspective, it can be argued that the influence of social media on the journalist-source relationship also influences the way news is structured and realities are created for audiences. It would follow that journalists experience and, therefore, create a different impression of a source they interact with only through social media. The portrayal of a source who a journalist contacted only on social media might arguably be more one-dimensional than a source met in person. However, during the semi-structured interviews, various journalists mentioned that people are generally less inhibited when using social media. As such, sources might be more open to divulge information, or just be more informal, when communicating with journalists via social media. Some of the journalists considered this to be detrimental to their sources in terms of privacy while others saw this as a wonderful opportunity and a new avenue for story ideation. With this in mind, it can be argued, rather, that the use of social media by journalists to interact with sources actually helps to construct personality-driven news in a way newspapers would not have been able to do before the rise of social media.

The final specific research question answered by this study was:

What influence has the newsroom *habitus* at *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian* had on the introduction and acceptance of the professional use of Facebook and Twitter?

As discussed in Chapter 2, Bourdieu (1990) argues that people of the same class or group (in this case journalists) are more likely to have been confronted with similar situations or events than people from different groupings. This argument was supported by the findings from this study. For example, journalists from *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian* are generally well-educated, with the majority having obtained tertiary degrees. The findings from the self-administered questionnaires also showed that the majority of journalists did not grow up with Internet access and that less than half of them used social media before they started working as journalists. During the semi-structured interviews it emerged that the journalists were usually introduced to Twitter and Facebook out of personal curiosity or socialisation in

friendship circles. The results of the self-administered questionnaires and semi-structured interviews showed that almost all of the journalists had already established profiles on Facebook or Twitter, or both/. While these journalists might all bring their individual personal histories and experiences with them into the newsroom, it would, therefore, seem that with regards to knowledge of computers and social media, their backgrounds are quite similar.

This researcher would, therefore, substantiate the argument that the role of newsroom culture, or collective *habitus*, played a significant role in journalists' acceptance of social media as a professional tool. This conclusion is based on the journalists' responses in both the self-administered questionnaires and the semi-structured interviews. Journalists at *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian* experienced their newsrooms as open and encouraging towards the use of social media. Specific emphasis was placed on the influence of the two newspapers' editors and the way they personally adopted and employed social media. The lack of support for social media usage from some editors, specifically the news editor at the *Mail & Guardian*, did not seem to deter the journalists from using these media. The journalists who took part in the study were very aware of the extent to which their colleagues used, or did not use, social media. Even journalists whose attitude to social media could be described as somewhat negative acknowledged the possible benefits other journalists were reaping from these media. As these types of journalists were clearly a minority, the presence of such social media nay-sayers did not seem to deter from the overall acceptance of social media within these newsrooms. Journalists said they felt encouraged to present ideas originating from social media. They also never felt any restriction when it came to the time they spent on social media at work.

In the semi-structured interviews the journalists at the *Mail & Guardian* indicated that they were knowledgeable about their institution's expectations of them with regard to social media use. While there was no formal social media policy at the *Mail & Guardian* at the time that this study was being conducted, the journalists knew that one was being developed for the newspaper, and had taken part in a workshop to discuss it. The journalists at *Rapport* were far more divided about the need for a social media policy and/or formal guidelines for professional social media use at their newspaper. Efforts to establish a social media policy at *Rapport* also seemed disjointed.

Despite the lack of formal social media policies, the newsroom cultures, or *habitus*, indicated an environment where the professional use of social media would flourish without fail. It is also important to add that the ethnographic research showed that social media rarely

featured in the editorial news conferences during the weeks of ethnographic observation. While the journalists said that ideas originating from social media were encouraged, this researcher did not observe or was told of any significant news-related conversations that involved social media during the weeks spent at *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian*.

It was, however, observed, that the newsroom cultures at *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian* openly encourage the use of social media such as Facebook and Twitter. Most of the journalists felt comfortable using these media and, especially at the *Mail & Guardian*, they knew what their institutions expected of them when interacting via these media.

In order to draw a final conclusion the four specific research questions were summarised into one general research question:

How does the professional use of social media at *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian* influence processes and cultures of news selection and presentation?

The majority of the journalists at *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian* who took part in this study indicated that they did not feel they had adapted their schedules, news typologies, beat structure or relationships with sources according to their professional use of Facebook and Twitter. This researcher had to critically examine and question some of these responses – especially after the week of ethnographic research at each publication. The journalists, for instance, believed that they were gathering most of their information for news articles from personal contact with sources. It was, however, observed that the majority of the journalists (especially at *Rapport*) spent most of the week in the office, and sometimes finished articles without meeting a source in person at all. While social media cannot be seen as the only factor contributing to office-bound journalism, observations such as this led the researcher to question the journalists' perceptions regarding their own actions more critically. Journalists also did not factor in social media when talking about what determined the way they planned their days and weeks. It was, however, observed that some of the time the journalists spent at the office was spent on social media. Even journalists who believed social media did not apply to story ideation and sourcing, admitted that they spent some of their time at the office using social media.

Much of what the journalists used Facebook and Twitter for can be summarised as “trend tracking”. As was argued in response to the specific research questions above, browsing social media in this manner might appear like a waste of time. But, according to the

research conducted for this study, trend tracking appeared to aid some of the journalists when it came to staying informed (in general and about specific topics they were reporting on).

Social media also afforded them the opportunity to engage with their audiences in a more personal manner and to promote themselves and their work. Whilst the topic of self-promotion and branding was not investigated in depth in this study, it was apparent from the semi-structured interviews that journalists considered this to be an important aspect of using social media as a professional tool.

With regard to news typification (and in the opinion of the researcher of this study), the findings of this study indicate the necessity for the bulk of the news constructed by newspapers today⁷³ to be reclassified as “developing news” rather than “hard news” because of the advent of social media.

In response to the specific research questions, it has already been discussed that journalists do not see themselves writing “soft news”. Yet they refer to what they do as analysis and interpretation of emerging events-as-news, rather than breaking news. It was also clear from the ethnographic research at both the *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian* that “hard news” take precedence over “soft news” when it comes to their front page leads. In both instances (during the production weeks observed), the “hard news” that made it onto the front pages of these newspapers at that time could be described as “developing news”. While the newspapers presented analysis, interpretation and even new facts, the events-as-news they reported on were already reported on in other media – social media amongst them.

Overall, the journalists at *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian* viewed social media as a supplement to their work, rather than as a threat. That being said, they were aware that the immediacy and reach of social media such as Facebook and Twitter challenges the traditional role of journalists. They believed that their role as gatekeepers was still valid, more importantly to curate and interpret the massive influx of information that their audiences had to deal with. This researcher, therefore, concludes that the news and realities created by journalists of *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian* were influenced both directly and indirectly by their professional use of social media.

Facebook and Twitter had become a natural part of the lives (on a personal as well as professional level) of the majority of the journalists at *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian*. The journalists might have viewed these media as separate from their usual activities, routines and cultures within the newsroom, but from a social constructionist point of view, this researcher

⁷³ This is especially true in the case of weekly and weekend newspapers, which now not only compete with other traditional media, such as daily newspapers, to break news, but now also with social media.

would argue that being immersed in social media forced the journalists to alter the way they approached news selection and presentation, even if they did not reflect internally about it.

7.4 Directions for further research

Some of the journalists spoken to during this study mentioned that *daily* newspapers might be feeling the influence of social media on their routines more strongly. An exploration of the influence of social media on the routines and cultures of daily newspapers in South Africa might be, therefore, very well be worthwhile.

As discussed in Chapter 5, the journalists mentioned that social media are useful tools for self-promotion, branding or broadcasting to their audiences. This research finding was not discussed in detail because it falls outside of the scope of the theoretical framework of this study. However, it provides fertile ground for further research especially in the context of a culture of journalism that is described by Deuze (2007:170) as becoming “more diverse, open, and dynamic all the time”. According to Deuze (*ibid.*) there is

... an ongoing fragmentation of titles, channels, outlets (and thus jobs), the emergence of new work practices in convergent journalism, the proliferation of all kinds of citizen’s, alternative and community media both online and offline, and the growing importance of freelance and part-time work in the field.

Journalists working in such an environment, therefore, have to make a name for themselves in order to be distinguished from the crowd. Social media can help to do this. Local examples of journalists who are already carving a niche for themselves via social media, include the *Mail & Guardian*’s editor-in-chief, Nic Dawes, and political journalist Stephen Grootes from TalkRadio702 who each had close to 10 000 Twitter followers at the time that this study was being conducted. A study looking at how and why journalists use social media for self-promotion and how their audiences respond to it, could provide valuable insight.

Lastly, the need for a study on the ethics of professional social media use, as well as guidelines and policies, is also indicated. A lot of the journalists interviewed for this study seemed unsure about where they stood with regard to the intersection of their personal and professional personas on social media. Since the newspapers under investigation were both still finalising formal social media policies, it might be worth revisiting both publications to discuss the nature of these policies and the reaction and adoption of them in the newsroom.

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<https://www.facebook.com/#!/RapportWeb>

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<https://www.facebook.com/#!/RapportWeb>

Appendixes

Appendix A: self-administered questionnaire

Appendix B: charts based on findings from self-administered questionnaires

Appendix C: layout of newsrooms of *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian*

Appendix A: Self-administered questionnaire

Stellenbosch University Department of Journalism: MPhil(Journalism) Research Project:

SOCIAL MEDIA IN THE NEWSPAPER NEWSROOM

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this study.

This questionnaire looks at how journalists use social media and how social media influence the way things work in the newsroom.

The questionnaire contains four sections (A to D). Please complete all of them.

It should not take more than 15 minutes of your time

You may remain anonymous and your specific answers will not/ cannot be traced back to you. By taking part, you agree that the information gathered may be used and published for research purposes.

If you feel comfortable to continue, please confirm your consent by placing a ✓ in box below.

Informed consent

SECTION A

In this section the respondents will be asked to describe their use of social media during newsgathering.

Please circle the appropriate number next to your choice.

Question A1

How important to you think it is for journalists to use social media like Facebook and Twitter professionally?

- 1 Very important
- 2 Somewhat important
- 3 Not important at all
- 4 I don't know

Question A2

How would you rate the credibility of the information available on social media like Facebook and Twitter?

- 1 Very reliable
- 2 Somewhat reliable
- 3 Not reliable at all
- 4 I don't know

Question A3

How often do you get story ideas or follow-up's for stories from Twitter?

- 1 Often (daily/weekly)
- 2 Sometimes (every few months)
- 3 Seldom (once/twice a year)
- 4 Never
- 5 I don't know

Question A4

How often do you get story ideas or follow-up's for stories from Facebook?

- 1 Often (daily/weekly)
- 2 Sometimes (every few months)
- 3 Seldom (once/twice a year)
- 4 Never
- 5 I don't know

Question A5

How often do you find sources for stories on Twitter?

- 1 Often (daily/weekly)
- 2 Sometimes (every few months)
- 3 Seldom (once/twice a year)
- 4 Never
- 5 I don't know

Question A6

How often do you find sources for stories on Facebook?

- 1 Often (daily/weekly)
- 2 Sometimes (every few months)
- 3 Seldom (once/twice a year)
- 4 Never
- 5 I don't know

Question A7

Do you belong to any Facebook groups or "like" any Facebook pages to gather information for stories?

- 1 Yes
- 2 No

If yes, approximately how many groups/pages

- 1 Less than five
- 2 Five to ten
- 3 More than ten

Question A8

Do you follow anyone/any organisation on Twitter to gather information for stories?

- 1 Yes
- 2 No

If yes, approximately how many people/organisations

- 1 Less than five
- 2 Five to ten
- 3 More than ten

SECTION B

In this section the respondents will be asked to describe their news routines and the way things are done in their newsroom.

Please circle the appropriate number next to your choice.

Question B1

Listed below are various statements about news production and social media. Please circle one number for each statement to indicate whether you agree with it or not. Please use the scale below.

- 1 = Strongly agree with it
 2 = Agree with it
 3 = Neither agree nor disagree
 4 = Disagree
 5 = Strongly disagree

- | | | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| a. Journalists follow social media for hard news leads | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| b. Newspapers cover more soft news because social media covers hard news | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| c. There is a clear distinction between hard news and soft news | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| d. Journalists can plan ahead for the reporting on and production of soft news stories | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| e. Events that lead to hard news stories happen too quickly for the journalist to plan ahead | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| f. Soft news stories are easier to do than hard news stories | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| g. Social media are unpredictable and makes it difficult to plan ahead | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| h. Social media help to plan around and predict developments in news | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Question B2

Listed below are some sources used during the newsgathering process. Please circle one number for each source to indicate its importance to you. Please use the scale below.

- 1 = Indispensable
 2 = Important
 3 = Useful
 4 = Unimportant
 5 = Negligible

- | | | | | | |
|-----------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|
| a. First person encounters | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| b. Public relation officers | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| c. Public events | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| d. Documents | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| e. Electronic research | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| f. Facebook | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| g. Twitter | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Question B3

Listed below are various statements about the “beats” system and social media. Please circle one number for each statement to indicate whether you agree with it or not. Please use the scale below.

- 1 = Strongly agree with it
 2 = Agree with it
 3 = Neither agree nor disagree
 4 = Disagree
 5 = Strongly disagree

- | | | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| a. Beats are necessary within a newspaper newsroom | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| b. The beats at my newspaper are flexible | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| c. I do stories on other people beats | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| d. Social media leads me to stories on other beats | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| e. I prefer to stick to my own beat | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| f. Social media threaten beat reporting | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| g. My beat is threatened by social media | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| h. Social media help me to find stories on my beat | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Question C2

Please give an indication of whether you think social media influence the day-to-day operations in your newsroom. Please rate the extent of the influence on each of the practices or processes mentioned by using the scale below.

Please circle the appropriate number.

- 1 = Big influence
 2 = Average influence
 3 = Small influence
 4 = No influence
 5 = I don't know

a. Finding stories	1	2	3	4	5
b. Research	1	2	3	4	5
c. Contact with sources	1	2	3	4	5
d. Story follow-ups	1	2	3	4	5
e. Choice between hard news and soft news story types	1	2	3	4	5
f. How news is scheduled (placed on the news diary)	1	2	3	4	5
g. Beat structure	1	2	3	4	5

SECTION D

This section records some demographic details of the respondent.

Please circle the appropriate number(s) next to your choice.

Question D1

Are you...?

- 1 Male
 2 Female

Question D2

What is your highest qualification?

- 1 High school
 2 In-service training
 3 Technikon
 4 First university degree
 5 Second university degree

Question D3

Did you grow up having regular access to a computer with Internet access ...?

- 1 Yes
- 2 No

Question D4

Did your parents encourage you to learn how to access the Internet...?

- 1 Yes
- 2 No

Question D5

Do you currently have a computer with Internet access at home...?

- 1 Yes
- 2 No

Vraag D6

Do you use the Internet on your cellphone...?

- 1 Yes
- 2 No

Question D7

Did you use social media before you started working as a newspaper journalist?

- 1 Yes
- 2 No

Question D8

How long have you been working as a newspaper journalist?

- 1 Less than five years
- 2 Five to ten years
- 3 More than ten years

Question D9

Please indicate which "beat" you report on. If there are more than one, please indicate all of them.

- | | | | |
|----|-----------------------------|----|-------------------|
| 1 | Politics | 6 | Education |
| 2 | Crime | 7 | Religion |
| 3 | Court | 8 | Art/Entertainment |
| 4 | Health | 9 | Sport |
| 5 | Environment | 10 | Business |
| 11 | Other (please specify)..... | | |

Question D10

Do you have a personal Facebook profile?

- 1 Yes
- 2 No

If **yes**, what is the purpose of this profile?

- 1 Personal contacts and interaction
- 2 Professional contacts and interaction

If **yes**, do you use this profile to promote yourself and your work?

- 1 Yes
- 2 No

Question D11

Do you have a personal Twitter account?

- 1 Yes
- 2 No

If **yes**, what is the purpose of this account?

- 1 Personal contacts and interaction
- 2 Professional contacts and interaction

If **yes**, do you use this account to promote yourself and your work?

- 1 Yes
- 2 No

Thank you for your time and effort!

If you have any questions regarding this research, please do not hesitate to contact the researcher:
Marenet Jordaan marenet.jordaan@gmail.com Tel: 083 3177528

Appendix B: Charts

Chart (i)

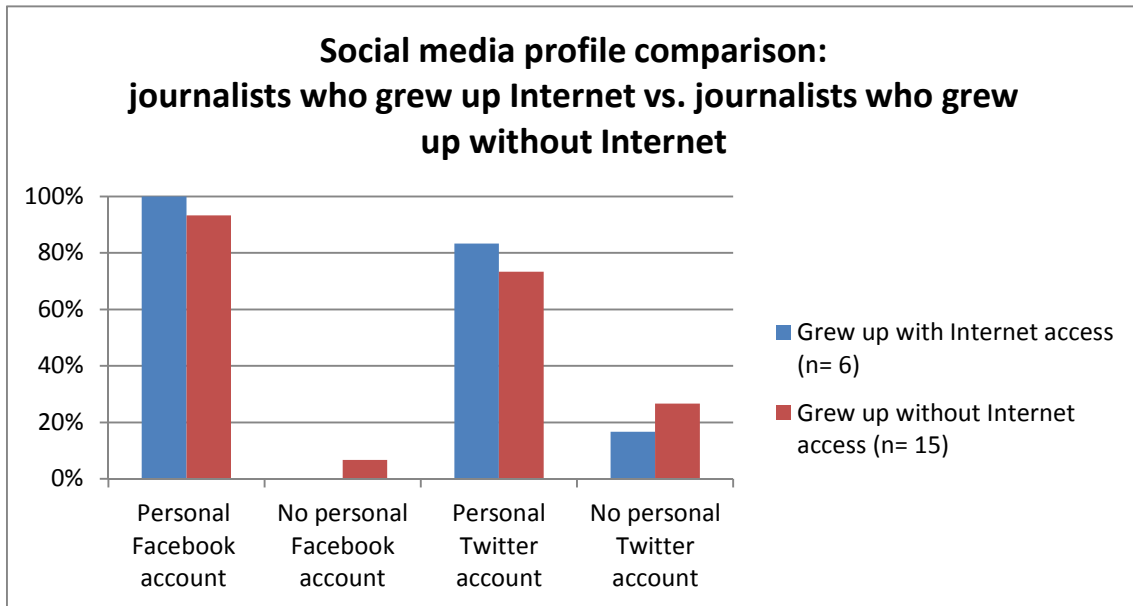


Chart (ii)

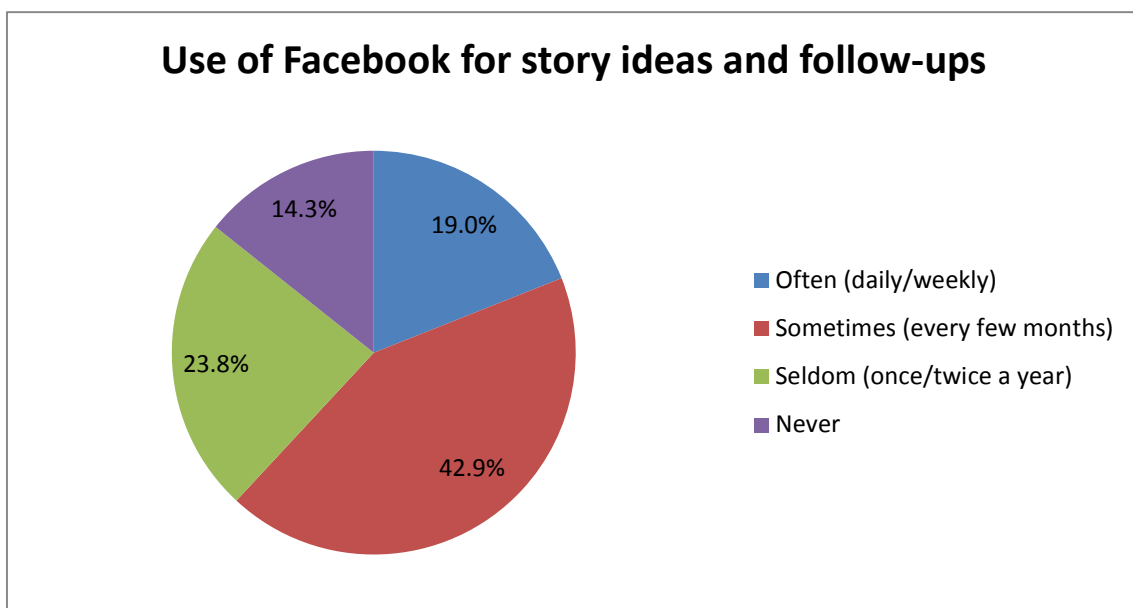


Chart (iii)

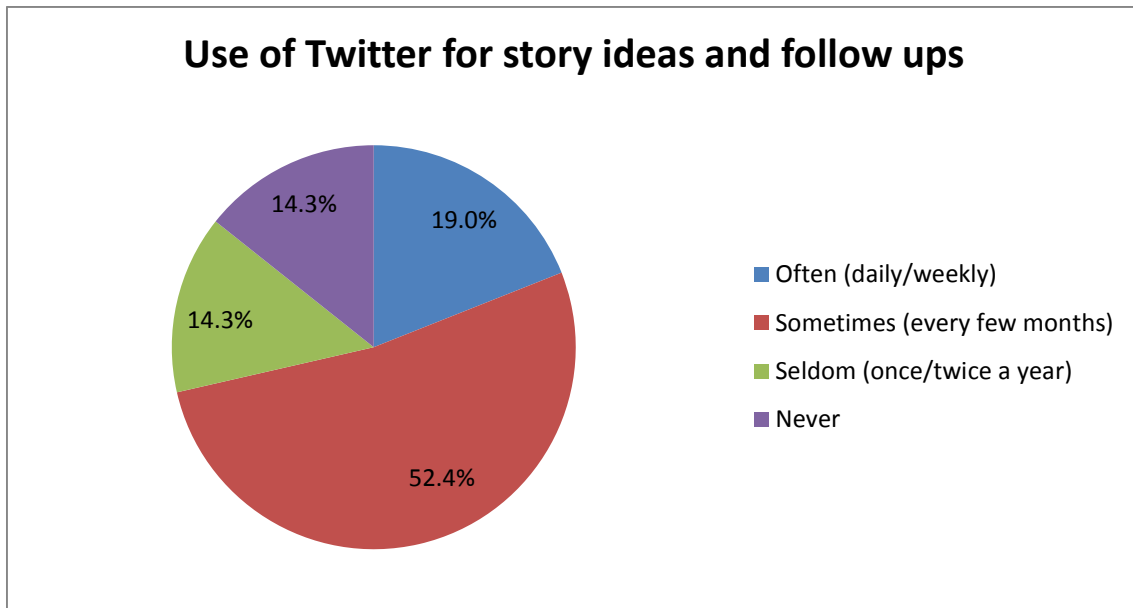


Chart (iv)

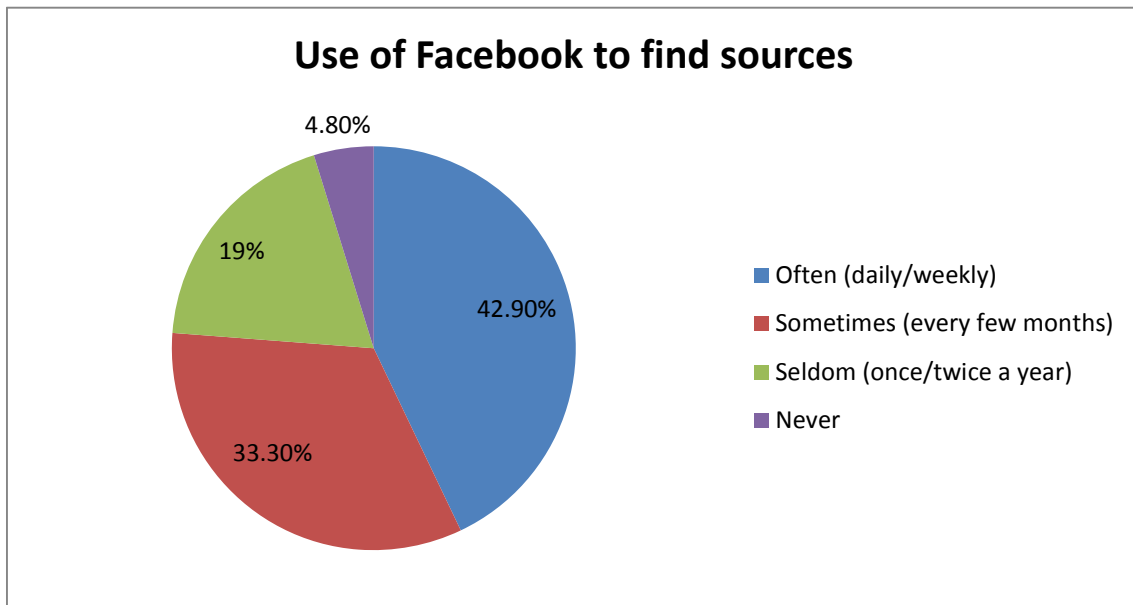


Chart (v)

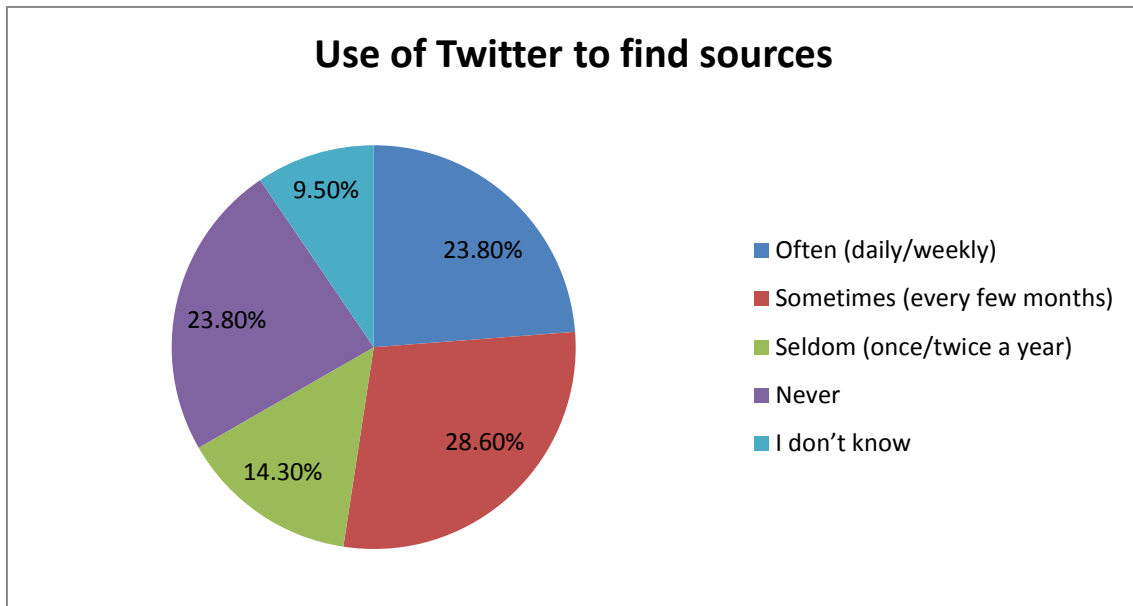


Chart (vi)

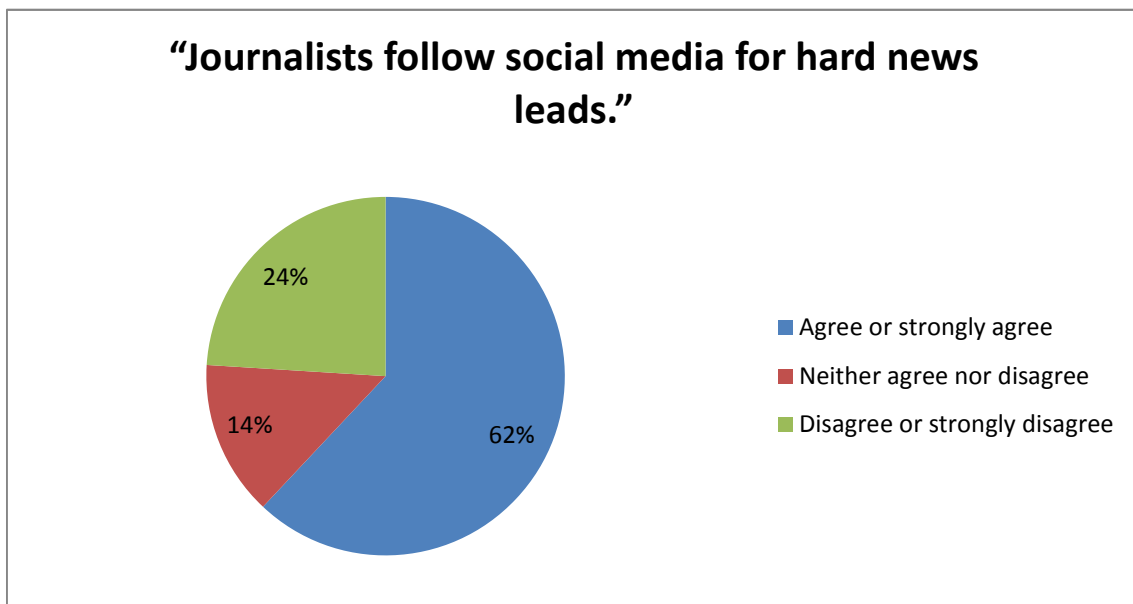


Chart (vii)

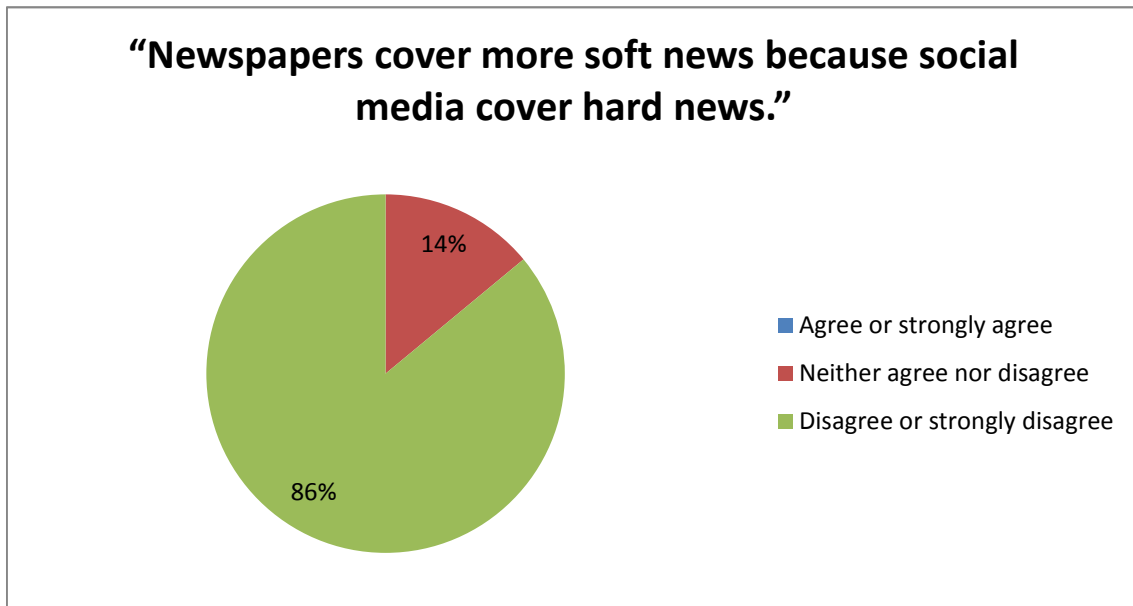


Chart (viii)

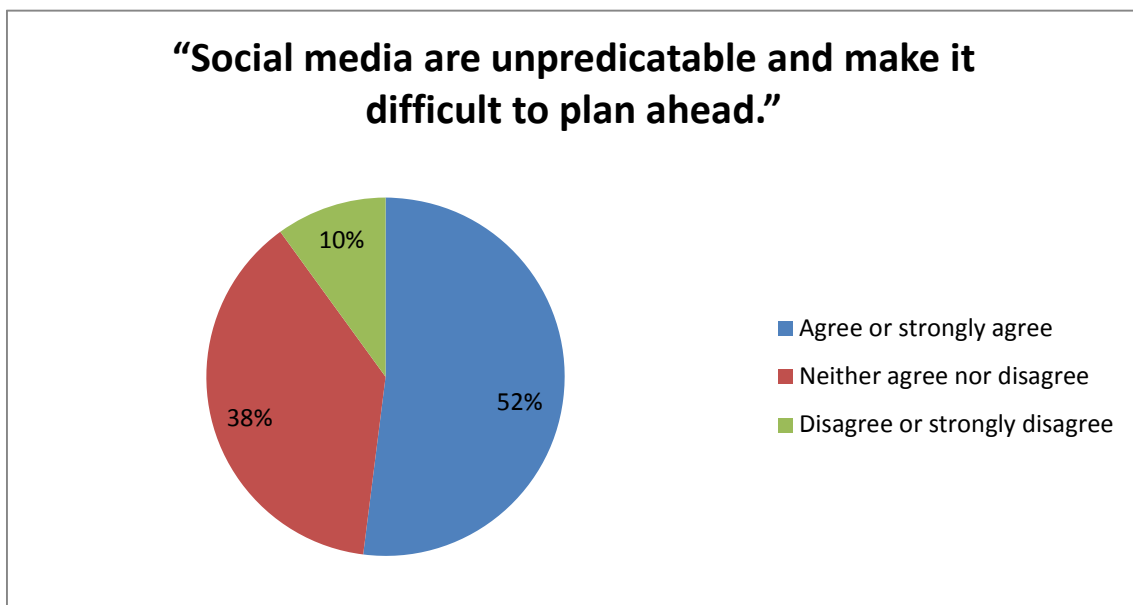


Chart (ix)

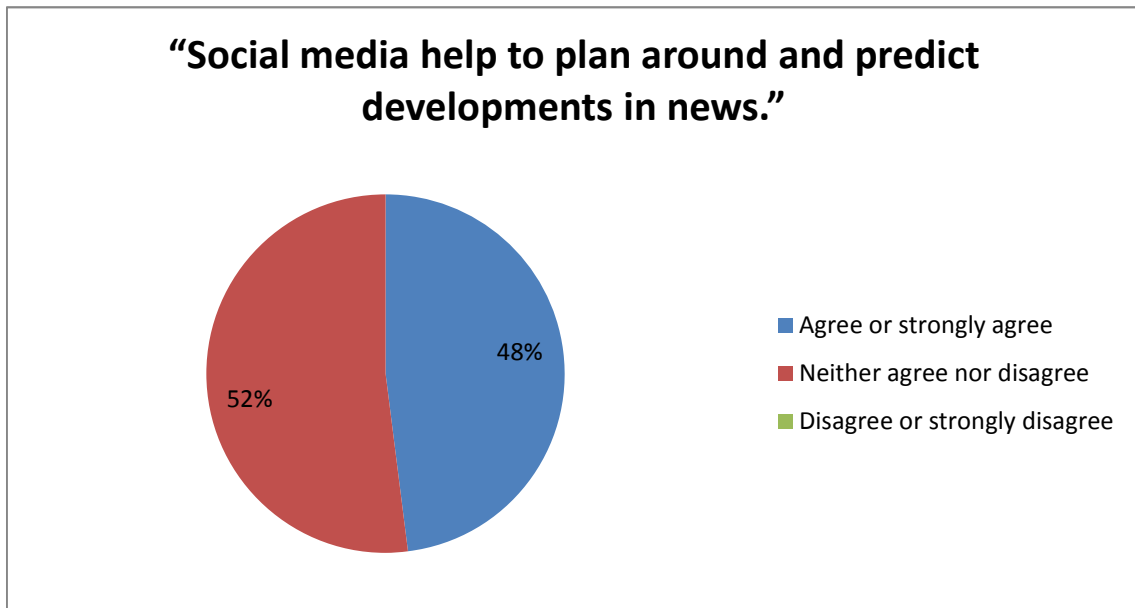


Chart (x)

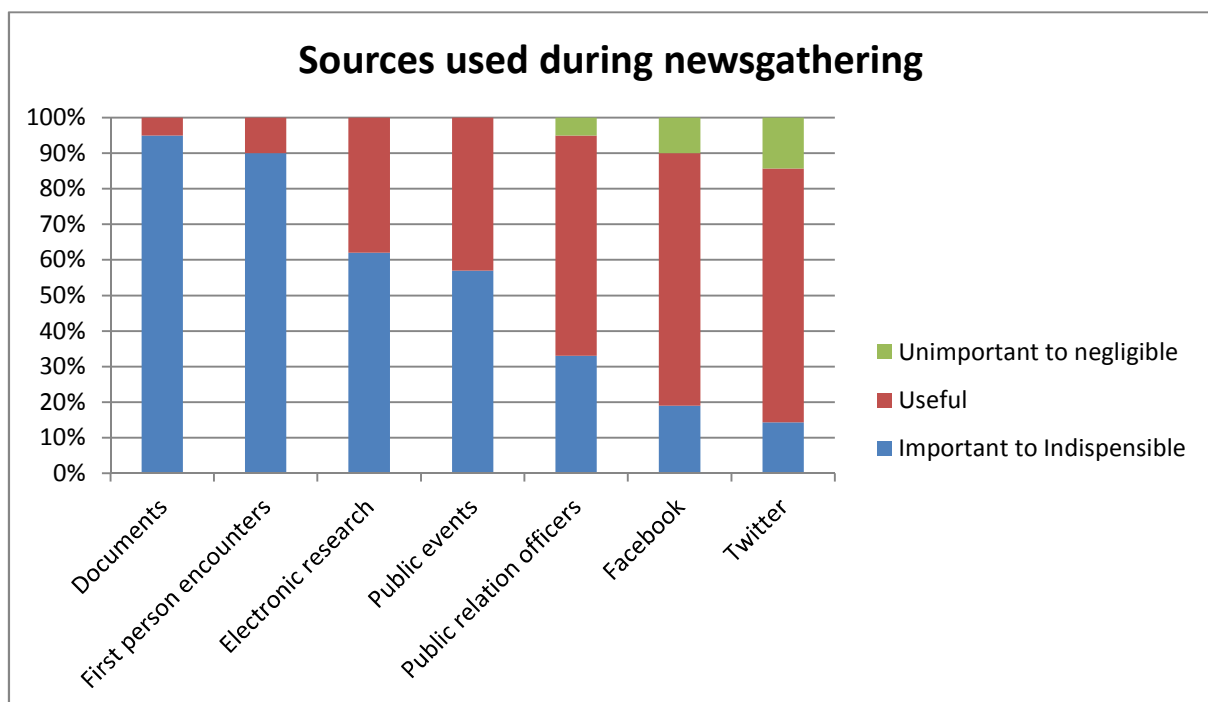


Chart (xi)

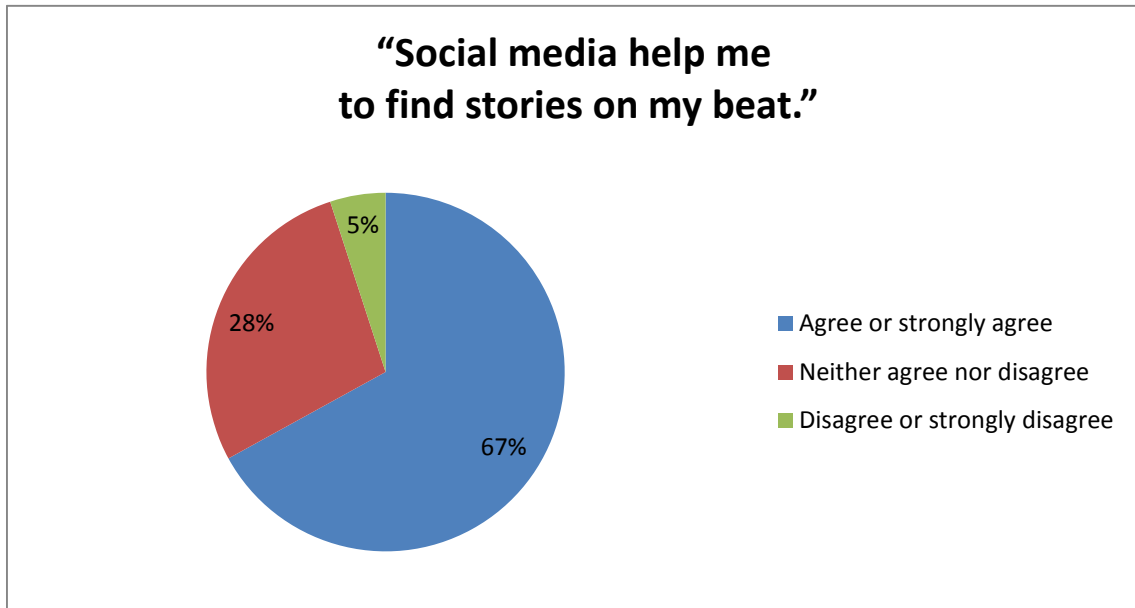


Chart (xii)

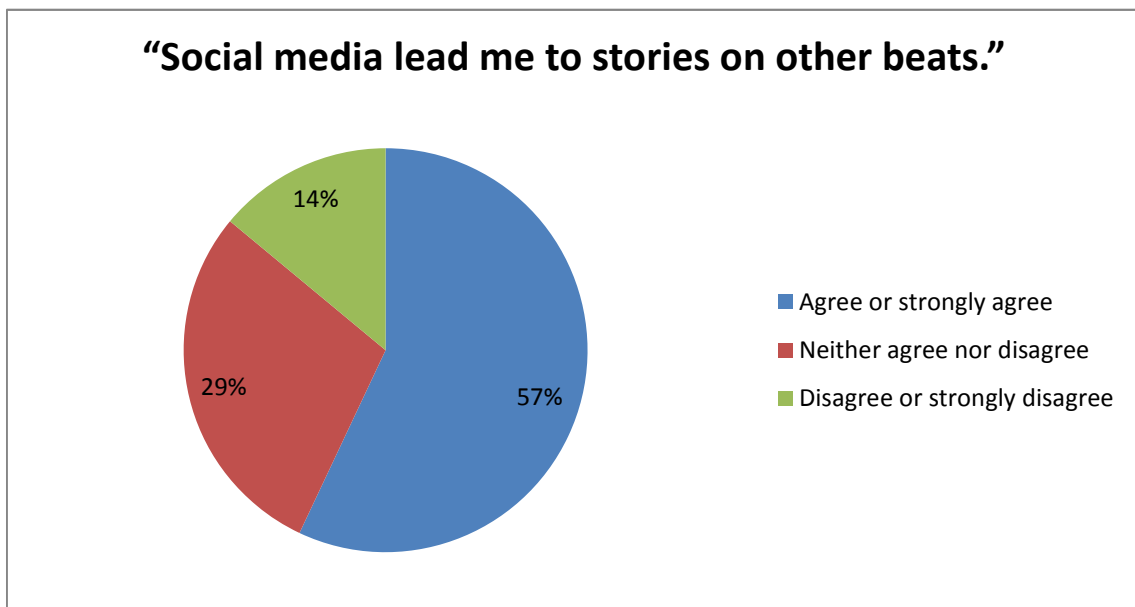


Chart (xiii)

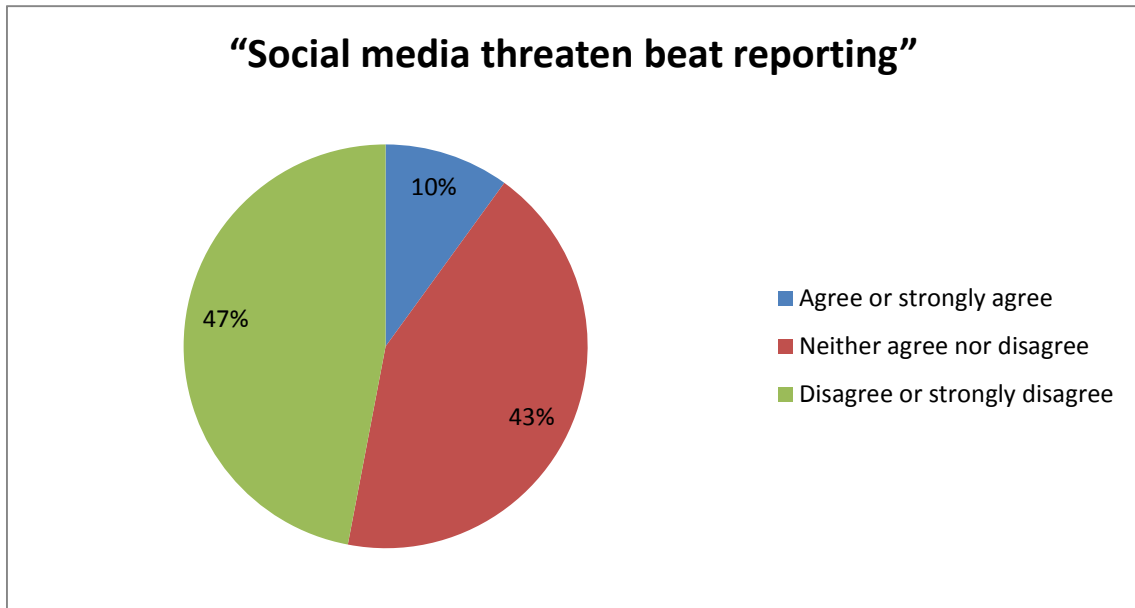
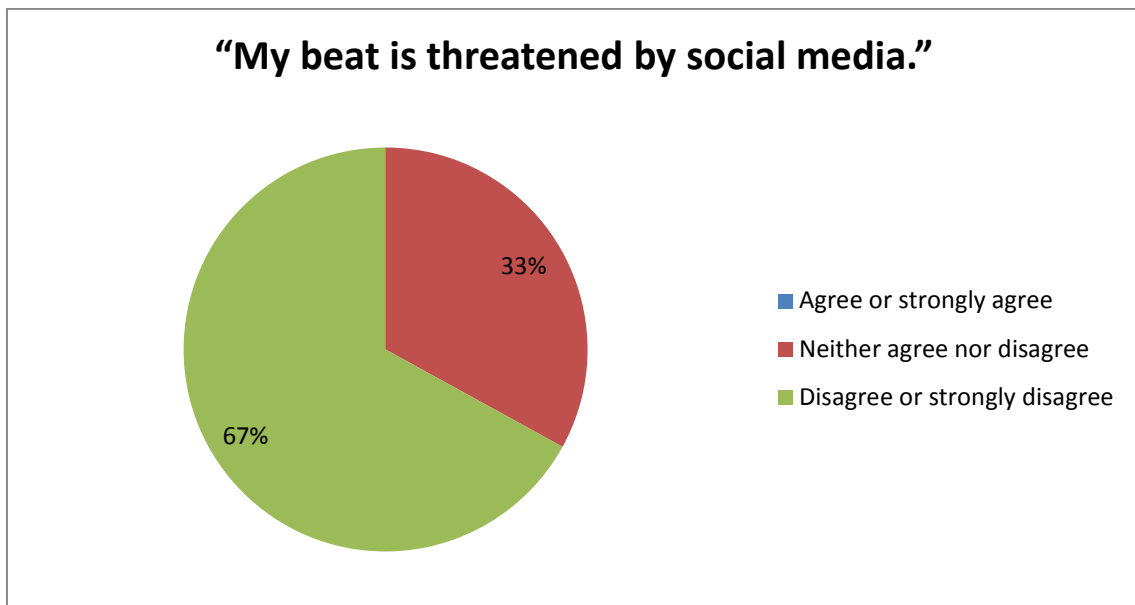
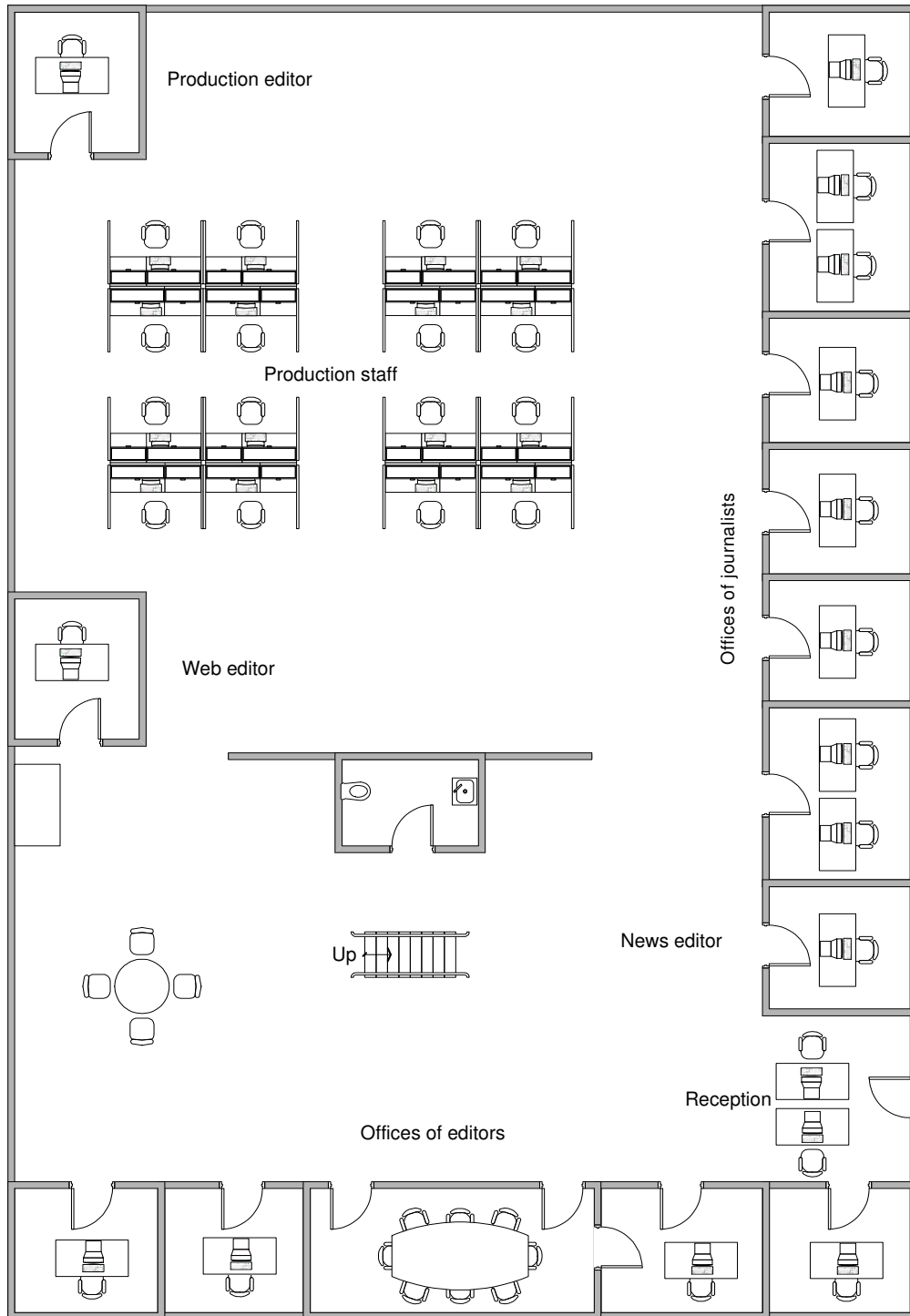


Chart (xiv)



Appendix C

Basic layout of *Rapport* newsroom



Basic layout of *Mail & Guardian* newsroom

