# Citizen journalism and alternative media in Zimbabwe: An ethnographic study of citizen participation, newsmaking practices and discourses at AMH Voices

by
Thulani Tshabangu

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Supervisor: Dr Gabriël Botma

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## Declaration

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## Abstract

Digital technologies such as the internet and mobile smartphones allow citizens to play an active role in the process of collecting, reporting, analysing and disseminating news, thereby challenging the dominance of conventional media and professionalised ways of journalistic practices. This production-based ethnographic study investigates the operations of citizen journalism and alternative media in a repressive environment in Zimbabwe. It focuses on citizen participation, newsmaking practices and discourses at the citizen journalism and alternative media outlet of AMH Voices. The study is located within a specific context and timeframe, which isfrom 2014 to 2018, during which Zimbabwe's multidimensional crisis elongated. Central to this study was an endeavour to demonstrate how the crisis supported the emergence of citizen journalism as well as how citizen journalists constructed and circulated alternative political narratives and counterhegemonic discourses of the crisis at AMH Voices. The theoretical point of departure in this study refers to the public sphere and critical political economy theories. The argument is that a counterpublic sphere emerged, in which AMH Voices was viewed as an oppositional public sphere that afforded marginalised citizens the opportunity to participate in journalistic processes. Participation in journalistic processes enabled ordinary citizens to express themselves and contest the hegemonic position by establishing counterhegemonic news frames, reframing news stories and setting new topics for discursive conflict and negotiation. The critical political economy theory (CPE) was applied to understand how ownership and control at AMH Voices impacted on editorial direction and output. The CPE theory was also applied to understand structural factors that constrained citizen journalism and alternative media in Zimbabwe. Data was collected through triangulated ethnographic methods of participant observation, interviews and critical discourse analysis. AMH Voices was under constant flux as citizen participation, newsmaking practices and discourses changed from the time of its inception in 2014 due to a change of context and organisational factors. The findings revealed that citizen participation occurred at three, namely levels of content production, decision making and public sphere deliberations. Content related participation enabled citizen journalists to contribute to news production processes in different ways and at different stages. Participation in decision making was through a reader representative who sat in the public editorial board to convey reader feedback and interests. Participation in public sphere deliberations was the most common form of citizen participation that occurred through user comments, where citizens engaged in peer to peer review of thoughts and ideas. The newsmaking practices at AMH Voices were structured, unstructured, hybrid and digital. The citizen news discourses were mostly framed in non-dominant perspectives using interpretive news writing styles to express alternative political narratives, challenge the status quo and advocate for radical political change. However, the study showed that citizen journalism and alternative media at AMH Voices were also influenced by contextual and structural pressures and influences, including conservative views on gender, which made it difficult to categorise it as an automatic or consistent counterpublic sphere.

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## Opsomming

Digitale tegnologie soos die internet en slimfone laat mense/burgers toe om 'n aktiewe rol te speel in die proses om nuus in te samel, dit te ontleed en te versprei en sodoende die oorheersing van konvensionele media en professionele joernalistiek-praktyk uit te daag. Hierdie produksie-gebaseerde etnografiese studie ondersoek die werking van burgerjoernalistiek en alternatiewe media in 'n onderdrukkende omgewing in Zimbabwe. Dit fokus op die insette van inwoners/burgers, nuwe praktyke om nuus te skep en diskoerse van AMH Voices. Die studie het tydens Zimbabwe se multidimensionele krisis van 2014-2018 plaasgevind. Die kern was om te demonstreer hoe 'n krisis die opkoms van burgerjoernalistiek moontlik maak en hoe burgerjoernaliste alternatiewe politieke uitbeeldings en teenhegemoniese diskoerse van die krisis by AMH Voices opgestel en versprei het. Teorieë van die openbare sfeer en kritiese politieke ekonomie is as vertrekpunte gebruik. 'n Verwante konsep wat toegepas is, is die opponerende openbare sfeer. AMH Voices het in dié sfeer gemarginaliseerde burgers die kans gegee om aan joernalistiek-prosesse deel te neem om hulself uit te druk deur teenhegemoniese nuusrame, die nuwe interpretasie van bestaande nuusrame, en die opstel van nuwe onderwerpe vir diskursiewe konflik en onderhandeling. Die teorie van kritiese politieke ekonomie is toegepas om te verstaan hoe eienaarskap en beheer by AMH Voices op redaksionele rigting en inhoud ingewerk het. Die teorie is ook toegepas om te verstaan watter strukturele faktore burgerjoernalistiek en alternatiewe media in Zimbabwe aan bande lê. Data is ingesamel deur die etnografiese metodes van waarneming en deelnemende waarneming, onderhoude, en kritiese diskoersanalise te trianguleer. AMH Voices was 'n dinamiese omgewing omdat die aard van burgers se betrokkenheid, die nuusproduksieprosse en -diskoerse tussen 2014-2018 deur konstante veranderinge in die konteks en organisatoriese faktore geraak is. Daar is bevind dat burgerbetrokkenheid op drie vlakke plaasgevind het, naamlik inhoudsproduksie, besluitneming en deelname aan die debate in die publieke sfeer. Burgers het in verskillende stadiums en op verskillende maniere aan die produksieproses deelgeneem. Deelname aan besluitneming was moontlik omdat 'n verteenwoordiger van lesers in die openbare redaksieraad gedien het en die terugvoer en belange van burgers daar kon opper. Deelname aan die debate in die openbare sfeer was die mees algemene vorm van burgerbetrokkenheid deurdat gebruikers kommentaar gelewer het op mekaar se bydraes en idees uitgeruil het. Die nuusproduksiepraktyke by AMH Voices was gestruktureerd, ongestruktureerd, hibried en digitaal. Die diskoerese van die burgerjoernaliste het van teen-hegemoniese rame en 'n interpratiewe nuusskryfstyl gebruik gemaak om meestal alternatiewe narratiewe te skep wat die status quo uitgedaag en vir radikale politieke verandering betoog het. Die studie het egter ook aangetoon dat burgerjoernalistiek en alternatiewe media in die geval vant AMH Voices ook beïnvloed is deur kontekstuele en strukturele druk en invloede, insluitend konserwatiewe sienings oor gender, wat 'n beskrywing as outomatiese of konstante teenpublieke sfeer bemoeilik.

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## Dedication

To my beautiful wife, Hazel, who had to endure three years of my absence from home. To my lovely kids, Thandeka Nicole and Thandolwethu Quinton, grow up and emulate the same.

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# Chapter One
# Introduction

## 1.1. Motivation

I was first drawn into the broad field of citizen and participatory media in 2012 when I was working as an Information Officer for a non-governmental organisation (NGO) in Zimbabwe. The organisation was using participatory video (PV) as a tool for social change in targeted rural communities. Roberts and Lunch (2015:2) define PV as a set of techniques using information and communication technologies (ICTs) to involve a group or community in creating their own film so as to communicate about issues affecting their lives. They observe that PV hands control of the film production process to inexpert users to enable them to express and represent themselves. PV can enhance participants' self-confidence and self-esteem, individual and collective agency, and serve as an effective mechanism to amplify the voices of marginalised groups to influence decision making processes (Roberts & Lunch, 2015). Viewed within the field of journalism and media studies, PV is a form of alternative media that enables the participation of marginalised communities in media production using available digital tools to express themselves about localised developmental issues, thereby becoming a form of community activism and empowerment. Jeppesen (2016:57) affirms that PV is a type of alternative media that operate at community level as an "informational, dialogical and community media space for the practice of citizenship", whose theoretical foundation is "Development Communication" or "Communication for Social Change". Although my study is not about PV, I found PV fitting into contemporary debates in journalism studies about citizen participation, digital media production practices and citizen news discourses.

In the two years that followed, I was directly involved in training 25 community facilitators who were representing 250 community groups in various aspects of digital media production including photography, videography, scripting and MP3 podcasting. Each month, the trained community facilitators convened review meetings attended by villagers and local authority representatives to showcase/screen the media productions that usually highlighted the community's development challenges and aspirations. These community review meetings were often characterised by heated exchanges as villagers confronted the authority representatives over poor service delivery, lack of development and errant political leadership. I saw the community review meetings as an exciting "indigenous public sphere", which was utilising citizen media to deliberate community development challenges that sometimes led to both consensus and dissensus. Meadows (2005:38) states that indigenous public spheres just like counterpublic spheres "provide opportunities for people who are regularly subordinated and ignored by mainstream public sphere processes", to participate and engage

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in activities of importance to them. Indigenous public spheres enable the local people to deliberate together, to develop their own counter discourses, and to interpret their own cultural identities and experiences. As I witnessed this crystallisation of local level indigenous public spheres in rural areas, I began to introspect broadly about marginalised citizens in Zimbabwe and the counterpublic spheres that enabled them to deliberate issues affecting them. I define counterpublic spheres as oppositional spaces or platforms that enable the participation of citizens marginalised from mainstream public spheres to articulate themselves and contest their identities. How did marginalised Zimbabweans express themselves regarding the socio, economic and political situation in the country? What counterpublic spheres were available to marginalised citizens considering that the mainstream public sphere was government owned and controlled? What was the nature of citizen participation in those counterpublic spheres? What were the main discourses expressed by marginalised citizens in counterpublic spheres?

In 2014, I came across an item on the *NewsDay* website calling on its readers to participate in citizen journalism. At that time, citizen journalism was still a new phenomenon in the country, driven by ubiquitous internet at 89.8 percent penetration rate and saturated mobile phone reach (POTRAZ, 2017). This was a first express call for citizens to participate in journalism by a Zimbabwean legacy news media organisation. In making the call, AMH Voices Content Producer Tinotenda Samukange (2014) said they welcomed contributions on community-based stories that impacted on people's daily lives, in text, pictures or video. I was naturally interested in participating in citizen journalism at AMH Voices because I believed that content from the PV project qualified as some form of citizen journalism. My excitement at the prospect of contributing content to AMH Voices was also due to the fact that the mainstream media was largely closed for citizen participation in content production processes. My initial contribution to AMH Voices in 2014 was not published because the platform prioritised publishing content produced by trained citizen journalists. Although I was disappointed, I engaged with the platform by keenly following the citizen news contributions and the peer to peer discussions that ensued on the platform.

When I decided to pursue doctoral studies in 2017, the subject of citizen journalism and alternative media came to mind. My study focused on AMH Voices because it was the first institutionalised experiment of citizen journalism in Zimbabwe. Drawing on my past experiences working on the PV project where citizen participation in media production was enabled by digital media tools and facilitated by organisation processes, I wanted to find out if and how technology and organisation enabled citizen participation in journalism at AMH Voices. I was also keen to establish if the citizen news was counterhegemonic and if it led to occurances of political disobedience as I had observed in the PV project. My overall research goal was to understand, through ethnographic methods and using

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the case of AMH Voices, how citizen journalism and alternative media operated in a restrictive environment in Zimbabwe. Specifically, my quest for knowledge was to find out how citizen participation in journalistic processes was enacted at AMH Voices; to understand the newsmaking practices of citizen journalists; and, the extent to which AMH Voices functioned as a counterpublic sphere for the articulation of alternative views and counterhegemonic discourses.

## 1.2. Research Problem

The recent diffusion of digital technologies has greatly altered the practice of traditional journalism and the formal organisation of media institutions. Digital technologies are electronic devices and applications such as the internet, personal computers (laptops and notepads), wireless telephone, cellular network, satellite, mobile smartphones, digital recorders, interactive websites, email and social media that enable the interactive real-time production and consumption of news content by journalists and their audiences. Ryfe (2012:11) asserts that "the challenge to journalism posed by the Internet" is ontological as "it goes to the heart of what journalism is, what journalists do and why they do it". Digital technologies challenge the culture of journalism as they galvanise public interest and participation in a digitised public sphere. Singer (2011:4) notes that digital technologies have "created a world in which everyone can be a publisher" and for that reason "a journalist can no longer be defined by access to the means of disseminating information [because] technology put that capability at everyone's fingertips". Specifically, digital technologies allow audiences to create and distribute via online platforms user-generated content (UGC) such as images, videos, text and audio, thereby challenging the monopoly of traditional journalism in providing news. UGC is interchangeably referred to as "participatory journalism," "citizen journalism" or "produsage" to denote the active role of citizens in the process of collecting, reporting, analysing and disseminating news and information (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2015:169).

The internet and the mobile smartphone are the key technological drivers of citizen journalism and alternative media as they open up the possibility of empowering marginalised communities to participate in journalism. Mabweazara (2010:15) observes that the mobile phone is being leveraged in varying degrees by citizens to contribute to newsmaking as "individuals with mobile phones are able to capture news in real or close - to - real time much – more immediately and rapidly than professional journalists". In Zimbabwe, the remarkable growth in the usage of mobile smartphones and the internet contributed to citizen journalism and alternative media, which eroded the monopolistic control of news and information by the mainstream. Moyo (2011:754) argues that digital technologies such as the internet are a "Fifth Estate" in contestation with the "Fourth Estate" of the mainstream media. He notes that in Zimbabwe, digital technologies occasioned "new

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counterhegemonic spaces and new forms of journalism that are deinstitutionalised and deprofessionalised, and whose radicalism is reflected in both form and content". This study came at a time when journalism in Zimbabwe was at a transformational moment; when the mainstream faced challenges from citizens claiming to be performing journalism by publishing news content on alternative media platforms. Furthermore, the study was carried at a significant time in the history of journalism when almost every aspect of the production, reporting and reception of news was changing (Franklin, 2014). Bowman and Willis (2003:7) note that "the venerable profession of journalism finds itself at a rare moment in history where, for the first time, its hegemony as gatekeeper of the news is threatened by not just new technology and competitors but, potentially, by the audience it serves". In this study, it is argued that citizen journalism and alternative media in Zimbabwe grew not only as a response to a "dissatisfaction with the mainstream" (Atton & Hamilton, 2008:1), but also due to a coalescence of socio-economic, political and technological factors that changed the nature of journalism practice and the media landscape in Zimbabwe. The concepts "citizen journalism" and "alternative media" are contested and are thus defined briefly in the section below. They are also discussed in more detail in Chapter 2.

## 1.3. Definition of key terms

### 1.3.1 Citizen journalism

Bowman and Willis (2003:9) define citizen journalism as "the work of ordinary citizens who collect, analyse, report and disseminate news and other information through various forms of mass media". In this study, citizen journalism is defined as the initiative by ordinary citizens to participate in journalism by reporting news or expressing views about news events using alternative media due to their dissatisfaction with mainstream media narratives and representations. Citizen journalism is considered part of alternative media that seek to challenge the dominance of the mainstream. The study focuses on AMH Voices; a citizen journalism and alternative media platform owned by Alpha Media Holdings (AMH), which positions itself as an alternative to the mainstream. Two types of citizen journalism are identified: non-institutional and institutional (Banda, 2010:28). Non-institutional forms of citizen journalism function outside the control of formal media institutions, placing the individual at the core of the practice such as self-publishing on blogs and social media. Institutional citizen journalism, on the other hand, refers to that type of citizen journalism that has a form of organisational control. This study deals mainly with institutionalised citizen journalism at AMH Voices.

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### 1.3.2 Mainstream media

Mainstream media are often regarded as bastions of traditional journalism. Kenix (2011b:3) observes that mainstream media "are situated completely within (and concomitantly co-creating) the ideological norms of society, enjoy a widespread scale of influence, rely on professionalised reporters and are heavily connected with other corporate and governmental entities". For the purposes of this research, state owned print and broadcast media were were treated as the legitimate mainstream due to their production practices, ownership and control, financial capital, ideological content of news and market reach. State owned and controlled print media were in the hands of the Zimbabwe Newspapers Group (Zimpapers) and broadcast media were run by the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation. These mainstream media are the oldest in the country. They also had the widest audience reach.. Production practices of mainstream media in Zimbabwe were still rooted in traditional journalism because the news production process was closed for citizen participation and journalism was seen as unidirectional reaching mass audiences. Domingo and Le Cam (2015:141) observe that in mainstream media, professional journalists are "the legitimate narrators of current events, and press releases and press conferences are [part] of news practices". Journalism in Zimbabwe's mainstream was practiced by professionals only, who were thought to have knowledge of the profession through formal training and accreditation for practice by government and through affiliation to professional bodies. Fenton (2007:147) adds that mainstream media "stick to a professional journalistic agenda", which relies on official or government sources of information. This contrasts with alternative media, which have open production practices that allow citizens to participate in journalistic processes, thereby deprofessionalising news work. In Zimbabwe, mainstream media were owned and controlled by the state on behalf of the public. They were financed through taxpayers' money and often got funding grants from the state. Because of their huge command of readership and viewership, mainstream media attracted significant advertising revenue from both the private sector and government. Fenton (2007:147) observes that mainstream media "are of very limited value in empowering marginalised, oppressed or exploited sectors of society". Although mandated to serve the public interest, one can argue that mainstream media in Zimbabwe served the narrow interests of the political and economic elites, and in the process disregarded marginalised views. Mainstream media are also defined by their uncritical and partisan content that supports the status quo and reflects dominant discourses, current thought or prevailing ideology of the government.

### 1.3.3 Alternative Media

Alternative media cannot be explained or understood without placing them in relation to mainstream media (Kenix, 2009). In this research, alternative media are defined by their antagonistic relationship to the mainstream, thereby following Bailey, Cammaerts and Carpentier's (2008:15) notion of

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alternative media as a "as a counterhegemonic critique of the mainstream". Atton and Hamilton, (2008:1) define alternative media as that which "emphasizes[1] alternatives to, inter alia, conventions of news sources and representation; the inverted pyramid of news texts; the hierarchical and capitalized economy of commercial journalism; the professional, elite basis of journalism as a practice; the professional norm of objectivity; and the subordinate role of audience as receiver". Ruhanya (2014) argues that any media that confronts authoritarianism in repressive environments such as Zimbabwe can be referred to as alternative. He reasons that independent media in Zimbabwe are rightly categorised as alternative because they provide "more accessible platforms for robust debate that challenge the status quo in the troubled state" (Ruhanya, 2014:2). For the purposes of this research, alternative media are defined as any media in Zimbabwe that were in explicit opposition to the dominance of the mainstream by offering marginalised groups opportunities for self-expression and participation in production processes. Alternative media are characterised by citizen participation, small market share, critical news content or counterhegemonic discourses, deprofessionalisation and radical approaches that push for socio-political change.

### 1.3.4 Public Sphere

The public sphere theory advanced by German sociologist Jürgen Habermas in 1962 and publicised in 1964 provides a basis for understanding the role of the media in a democracy. Although Zimbabwe had characteristics of a repressive regime, it was a republican democracy. For this reason, democratic theories and concepts are used in this research as a basis for understanding the media in Zimbabwe. Curran (2002:223) defines a public sphere as a "space" where access to information affecting the public good is widely available, where discussion is free of domination and where all those participating in public debate do so on an equal basis. In the public sphere, people collectively determine, through rational argument, the way in which they wish to see society develop. This in turn shapes government policy. The media facilitate this process by providing an arena of public debate. As the public sphere, the media must be free from state and corporate control. Fuchs (2010:174) argues that the public sphere theory is a basis for understanding alternative media. He notes that the Habermasian vision of the public sphere failed to expand and accommodate more inclusive debate due to the commercialisation of the mass media leading to alternative public spheres. Fuchs (2010:176) sees alternative media as a result of a "manipulated public sphere" and the "colonization of the public sphere by market imperatives". The Habermasian public sphere theory is applied to understand participation in citizen journalism and alternative media. Related to the public sphere

[1] This thesis is written according to Zimbabwean/South African English spellings. However, quotations used will be in the English of the source. As a result, there will be variations in the spelling of some words, e.g. 'organisation/organization,' 'emphasise / emphasize', 'capitalise /capitalise'.

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theory are concepts of counterpublic spheres and counterhegemonic discourses that are linked to alternative media.

### 1.3.5 Counterpublic spheres

The public sphere theory, although useful in providing a basis for understanding the role of the media in democratic societies, has come under criticism from scholars such as Fraser (1990:67) who argues that it excluded "members of subordinated social groups - women, workers, peoples of colour, and gays and lesbians". Fraser (1990:67) is of the view that such subordinated groups can form alternative public spheres called subaltern counterpublics, "where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counter discourses". She defines counterpublic spheres as "parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counter discourses, which in turn permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs". In this research, AMH Voices is theorised as a counterpublic sphere that operated in opposition to the mainstream public spheres and provided opportunities for self-expression to subordinated and repressed citizens.

### 1.3.6 Counterhegemonic discourses

Alternative media are often carriers of counterhegemonic discourses. The theory of hegemony was first propounded by neo-Marxist scholar Antonio Gramsci in his published work *The prison note book* in 1937. Hegemony typically refers to power or domination of one type or the other. It is the attainment, maintenance and consolidation of the status quo. Simon (1982:24) argues that the starting point for Gramsci's concept of hegemony is that a class and its representatives exercise power over subordinate classes by a combination of coercion and persuasion. Any group asserts its hegemony over others through a process of contestation. This process of contestation depends significantly on the news media. As hegemonic powers try to dominate the media by excluding alternative views, counterhegemonic elements engage in practices of "disorganizing consent and organizing dissent" (Simon, 1982:24). Counterhegemonic refers to attempts to critique or dismantle hegemonic power. In other words, it is a confrontation or opposition to the existing status quo and its legitimacy. Warf and Grimes (1997:260) submit that counterhegemonic discourses challenge established systems of domination by legitimating and publicising causes of the powerless and marginalised that are often stifled and overlooked by mainstream media. They note counterhegemonic discourses comprise "messages from groups and individuals who refuse to take existing politics as normal, natural, or necessary, typically swimming against the tide of public opinion". In this study, counterhegemonic news discourses are defined as news media texts that represented and articulated the interests of marginalised citizens. The concept of counterhegemonic discourses is applied to investigate the extent

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to which citizen news content at AMH Voices challenged the dominant and everyday representations of the mainstream.

## 1.4. About AMH Voices

AMH Voices is an online citizen journalism news site and alternative media platform in Zimbabwe launched in 2014 by Alpha Media Holdings (AMH). It was the first experiment of institutionalised citizen journalism in Zimbabwe by a formal media institution in 2014, (Chiyadzwa and Maunganidze, 2014). As implied in the name, AMH Voices harnesses citizen voices from the four AMH newspaper titles of the *NewsDay*, *Southern Eye, The Zimbabwe Independent* and *The Standard*. The AMH group positions itself as an alternative to the mainstream specifically by challenging the market and ideological dominance of Zimpapers. Mabweazara (2014:65) affirms this view when he notes that the AMH group is "small but powerful" and competes with the "dominant state-controlled Zimbabwe Newspapers Group". Although the AMH group, which owns AMH Voices, labels itself as independent media, it is regarded as alternative in this study because independent media are synonymous with alternative media (Forde, 2009; Kenix, 2011a), especially in a repressive environment such as Zimbabwe. Forde (2009:4) insists on using the terms alternative and independent media interchangeably to refer to media organisations outside the mainstream because some editors and journalists from non-mainstream often object to the term 'alternative' because it seems to place them at the margins and suggests that they do not have the potential to influence society. Thus, the term alternative may denote a secondary status and place too much legitimacy on the mainstream media (Kenix, 2011b:17). As the discussion below will show, AMH Voices is characterised as alternative becauseof its open production practices that allowed for citizen participation in content production and decision making, its rejection of the objectivity norm of journalism by use of interpretive news genres and writing styles and its explicit opposition to the market and ideological dominance of the mainstream.

## 1.5. Research Context

Zimbabwe has an eventful media history, which carries dual contradictions of democratic and authoritarian media systems. Rønning and Kupe (2000:138) state that at independence in 1980, Zimbabwe had a semblance of a democratic media system characterised by a pluralist press, which was born out of the liberation movement's demands for majority rule. However, in the years after independence the democratic media system was gradually replaced "by an authoritarian ideology which often comprised a mixture of Soviet-type Marxist ideology and Africanist one-party statism" (Rønning & Kupe, 2000:138). The authoritarian stance was in partial fulfilment of the country's desire to maintain a one-party state that centralised all spheres of life including the economy, politics

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and media. Zimbabwean lawyer and academic at the University of Kent, Alex Magaisa (2017), writing online notes:

> While Zimbabwe is not a classic totalitarian state, it nevertheless has some elements that might be found in such a state. Tight and rigid control of information by the state, a key feature of a classic totalitarian system, is one of the pillars of the Zimbabwean regime. As far as information is concerned, Zimbabwe runs a tight ship. It still has a communist-style state media which controls radio, television and newspapers. Thirty-seven years after independence, Zimbabwe still has just one national television station, which is heavily-controlled by the state. The so-called private radio stations are run by associates and cronies of ZANU PF[2], who were awarded licences a few years ago. ZANU PF politicians have also acquired key shareholdings in some of the private newspapers.

Since independence, Zimbabwe has maintained a monolithic and repressive media system where the mainstream is owned and controlled by government through the Ministry of Media, Information and Broadcasting Services. The monolithic media system was achieved through concentration and monopoly strategies of the mainstream. Media concentration is a process whereby progressively fewer individuals or organisations control increasing shares of the mass media. Mendel, Castillejo and Gómez (2017:10) define concentration of media ownership as "referring to the idea that one individual, or a corporate body, exercises control over an important part of an overall media market". The government has ownership and control of the biggest diversified media company, Zimpapers, which publishes 11 newspapers and three magazines, and also has interests in commercial printing, radio and television broadcasting. Zimpapers is the "oldest and largest publisher of newspapers having dominated the industry for over 120 years" (*The Herald*, 2017). Zimpapers has regional offices and bureau offices across the country that facilitate reportage of news events as they happen in different locations of the country.

Zimpapers owns two leading dailies, *The Herald* (founded in 1891) and the *Chronicle* (1894), which are published alongside three weeklies, *Sunday News* (1930), *The Sunday Mail* (1935) and *Business Weekly* (2017). *The Herald* and *The Sunday Mail* are published in the capital city Harare, while the *Sunday News* and *Chronicle* are published in the second biggest city of Bulawayo. Zimpapers also owns another daily newspaper, *Manica Post* (1893), and a Southern Africa regional weekly, *Southern Times* (2004). The company owns three magazine titles, *New Farmer* (2002), *Trends* (2003), and the

[2] ZANU PF is an abbreviation for the Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front. ZANU PF is the political organisation that was established in 1963 as part of a liberation movement against British colonial rule and has been the ruling party in Zimbabwe since independence in 1980. ZANU PF was led by former president Robert Mugabe until November 2017, when he was expelled from the party and deposed in a military assisted coup.

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*Zimbabwean Travel* (2003); two tabloids *H-Metro* (2009) and *B-Metro* (2010); two indigenous language newspapers, *Kwayedza* (1986), published in ChiShona and *uMthunywa* (2004), published in iSiNdebele; two broadcasting stations, *Star FM* (2011) and *Diamond FM* (2015), and one television station, *Zimpapers Television Network* (2017).

In view of the above Zimpapers business profile, it is apparent that it dwarfs the alternative media sector that has very few publications and a small market niche. The alternative media sector is led by AMH group, which is owned by former journalist and entrepreneur, Trevor Ncube. AMH are publishers of two weeklies, *The Zimbabwe Independent* (1996) which is financial weekly, and *The Standard* (1997), and two dailies, *NewsDay* (2010) and the *SouthernEye.* (2010). Due to the ever-mounting economic challenges, *SouthernEye* stopped printing in 2015 and was subsumed into the *NewsDay*. The Associated Newspapers of Zimbabwe (ANZ) is the second biggest alternative media organisation. ANZ are the publishers of *The Daily News* and its sister weekly, *The Daily News on Sunday* as well as the business weekly called *The Financial Gazette*. Alternative media therefore occupy a very small market niche with six notable newspaper titles compared to 11 mainstream titles owned and controlled by the state through Zimpapers.

Apart from Zimpapers, the government has had control and ownership of the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC), the public broadcaster, which "has served essentially as a propaganda mouthpiece for the government of the day since colonialism" (Moyo, 2005:112). ZBC has four radio stations, Spot FM, National FM, Power FM and Radio Zimbabwe as well as one television station, ZBCTV. MISA Zimbabwe (2016:14) stated that ZBC's lack of credibility was evidenced by the fact that a "majority of Zimbabweans preferred to watch foreign television broadcasts via satellite and/or rely on social media or alternative broadcasts for news and current affairs". Until 2012, ZBC had a monopoly of broadcasting when in that year, government, through the Broadcasting Authority of Zimbabwe (BAZ), granted commercial broadcasting licences to 10 companies owned and affiliated to the state ignoring pleas from activists to licence about 28 community radio initiatives. This seeming end to ZBC's monopoly of broadcasting and the illusion of media pluralism was rejected by Amnesty International (2015:6) who noted that there was "biased issuance of broadcasting licences to companies that are state owned or controlled and to companies which are either owned or run by individuals who are closely associated with the ruling party".

The net effect of concentration and monopoly of the media market by the mainstream has been the undermining of democratic principles of freedom of expression and freedom of the media. Von Dohnanyi and Moller (2003:30) argue that "concentration is a clear and present danger to media pluralism and diversity". It is apparent that the dominant public voice in Zimbabwe is that of the state through the mainstream media. Independent media activist and blogger Takura Zhangazha (2017)

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observed that concentration and monopoly threatened the ability of the mainstream media system to reflect the variety of ideas, viewpoints and opinions that exist in Zimbabwe society and to represent all political, cultural and social groups because mainstream media "have uniform editorial policies that disable media diversity and […] they determine what is 'news' in favour of their own political or economic interests". Media concentration can reduce professionalism and the quality of journalism (Von Dohnanyi & Moller, 2003). MISA Zimbabwe (2016:12) reported that mainstream journalists' editorial independence was compromised, and they were often under pressure to be "politically correct" when reporting news dealing with top politicians — a euphemistic description of self-censorship. Citizen journalism and alternative media in Zimbabwe emerged in opposition to mainstream media concentration and monopoly of news and information.

The concentration and monopoly of the mainstream arguably led to media "capture" by the state and the dearth of the mainstream public sphere. Ndlovu (2017) notes that media capture results from a "hijacked media primarily serving vested interests be they governments, corporates or other special interests rather than public interest". In this argument, the mainstream media in Zimbabwe was captured by the state because it was biased and served political interests of the ruling ZANU PF government (Africa Media Barometer Zimbabwe, 2015:7). Zimpapers and ZBC continuously showed unwavering support for the ZANU PF politicians in government and were preoccupied with preserving the status quo through deliberate misinformation and propaganda. The consequence of media capture was the dearth of the mainstream public sphere and an impoverishment of democracy as the mainstream media abdicated on its duty to truthfully inform the public and act as a market place for the exchange of ideas. This failure by the mainstream to deliver on its public sphere mandate led to a decline in its credibility. Willems (2011:50) observes that in Africa, "formal media continue to be associated with the state, and for this reason, they enjoy minimal legitimacy among citizenries". Moyo (2009:142) argues that due to the capture of the mainstream public sphere, the internet has emerged as an alternative public sphere, which "approximate the dialogic, deliberative, communicative and democratic ideals of the Habermasian public sphere". Mpofu (2015:29) coined the term "internet public spheres" to "denote the growing range of online platforms that are used for public communication and interaction and which, in some instances, augment or challenge traditional platforms". This study focused on AMH Voices as an online counterpublic sphere that emerged in opposition to a captured mainstream public sphere.

Alternative media in Zimbabwe operated under a repressive environment, which made it difficult for it to execute its public sphere and watchdog roles. Tettey (2001:11) argues that alternative media in Africa not only suffers from "the maintenance of anachronistic and debilitating media laws", but also suffers the physical harassment of journalists, the violation of their premises and equipment as well

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as lack of access to inputs and audiences. Media violations that include arrests, threats and harassment of journalists were common in Zimbabwe and were orchestrated by state security agents against alternative media. In 1999, alternative media journalists from *The Standard* newspaper, Mark Chavunduka and Ray Choto, were arrested and severely tortured following the publication of a story in which they alleged that some senior army officers had been arrested regarding a coup attempt (Saunders, 1999). Moyo (2005:118) attests that the alternative title *Daily News* was the target of two bombing attacks, which had a crippling effect on its operation, before it subsequently shut down in 2003 due to failing to meet registration requirements stipulated by the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA) passed into law in 2002. The state also employed wide ranging tactics such as blocking news content from alternative media websites and jamming radio frequencies of pirate radio stations such as *Voice of America Studio 7* and *SW Radio Africa*. This repression was aimed at suppressing alternative media's criticism of government and promoting uncritical reportage from the mainstream. The monolithic and repressive media environment in Zimbabwe necessitated the growth of citizen journalism and alternative media as marginalised citizens sought to share news and information that challenged the hegemonic constructs of the mainstream on safer and neutral media spaces such as AMH Voices. Citizen journalism and alternative media had the attraction of being a third communicative space, free from government and market control. Another advantage of citizen journalism and alternative media was that they provided underrepresented and underprivileged segments of society with a voice and in the process, adding to media diversity and plurality of voices in the public sphere.

## 1.6 Research questions

The goal of the research was to contribute to the theoretical and practical understanding of citizen journalism and alternative media in a repressive environment in Zimbabwe. The study concentrated on the contribution of citizen journalism and alternative media to democratic ideals of citizen participation in the public sphere and in the contestation of news discourses about Zimbabwe during the period 2014-18.

### 1.6.1 General research question

i. How did citizen journalism and alternative media of AMH Voices operate in a repressive and monolithic media environment in Zimbabwe?

### 1.6.2 Specific research questions

i. How did ordinary citizens participate in journalistic processes at AMH Voices?
ii. What were the newsmaking practices of citizen journalists at AMH Voices?

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iii. What discourses were contested by citizen journalists at AMH Voices and to what extent were they counterhegemonic?
iv. How did AMH Voices function as a counterpublic sphere that prioritised and strengthened the voice of marginalised groups?
v. What were the structural factors that constrained citizen journalism and alternative media at AMH Voices?
vi. How did ownership and control affect content production and editorial direction at AMH Voices?

## 1.7 Gaps in the field of research

Fuchs (2010:189) observes that alternative media are the neglected spot in journalism and media studies, which are also "under-resourced, under-represented, and under researched". For this reason, this study on citizen journalism and alternative media in Zimbabwe was a worthy pursuit that sought to contribute to the knowledge gap on citizen participation, news production practices and news discourses of citizen journalism and alternative media. Mutsvairo and Columbus (2012:133) observe that there are few studies of citizen journalism in Africa that are ethnographically grounded. This research made a methodological and empirical contribution by using ethnographic methods to investigate the practice of citizen journalism and alternative media in Zimbabwe. The call for this study was also amplified by Goode (2009:1301) who noted that "exploring the discourses, news values and ideological patterns of citizen journalism and social news content remains a critical enterprise". This study contributed to the understanding of citizen news discourses over a prolonged period (2014-18) and accounted for the changes that occurred in the citizen news discourses in relation to changes in the organisation and context. This study also departed from the norm observed in previous studies were the analysis of citizen news discourses was limited to particular news events. By focusing on citizen news discourses over a lengthy period, the study contributed to a more nuanced understanding of the discourses of citizen journalism and their impact in society. Atton (2002) observes that the academic study of alternative media is dominated by an approach that focuses on progressive political values of alternative media to "empower" citizens, neglecting how alternative media are produced. This study responded to this research gap by focusing on the everyday newsmaking practices of citizen journalists and alternative media in Zimbabwe. Wall (2015:804) calls for de-Westernised studies of citizen journalism to avoid a distorted view of citizen journalism since "most media research, generalities are consistently based on the US and European experiences, which make up a small portion of the world's media systems". This research was inherently de-Westernised as it made contributions to the understanding of citizen journalism and alternative media in an African context.

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## 1.8 Theoretical points of departure

The study was anchored on public sphere and critical political economy (CPE) theories. Central to the study was an endeavour to theorise citizen journalism and alternative media in relation to both the deliberative public sphere theory propounded by Habermas (1964) and that of the counterpublic sphere envisaged by Fraser (1990). The focus was on how AMH Voices was accessible for participation by citizens in the articulation of consensus as foreseen by Habermas (1964) and how it equally fuelled agonism and dissensus, in line with the concepts of radical pluralism that Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (1985) expressed in their book *Hegemony and socialist strategy*. Habermas (1964:49) describes the public sphere as "a realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed" and in which "access is guaranteed to all citizens". He had envisioned a bourgeois public sphere were there was rational debate of social issues affecting the community. However, Mouffe (2007:3) rejects the Habermasian concept of the public sphere where there is "deliberation aiming at a rational consensus taking place", noting that it is "improbable, given the limitations of social life, that such a consensus could effectively be reached". To counteract Habermas' concept of the public sphere, Fraser (1990) coined the concept of counterpublic spheres to describe spaces for marginalised citizens to express themselves, often in opposition to the mainstream through discursive conflict and negotiation. The concept of the counterpublic sphere was employed to investigate how AMH Voices functioned as an oppositional platform that provided marginalised citizens opportunities for self-expression. Natalie (2007:26) defines CPE as an approach seeking to "reveal how forms of financing and organizing cultural production has consequences for public discourses and representations and the public's access to them within a broad context of social and economic structures". Research themes in critical political economy in the media include ownership patterns, market concentration, competition for audiences, access to different types of media, and the link between media performance and democracy (Graham, 2006:494). This study engaged in an empirical analysis of ownership and managerial control at AMH Voices and how this affected news content and editorial decisions. Ownership and control involved an analysis of "internal factors such as professional ideologies, ownership and management structures, editorial polices, and technical and financial constraints" (Gallagher, 1982:149) that impacted on AMH Voices news output and editorial direction. CPE was also applied to analyse the structural factors that constrained or enabled citizen journalism and alternative media in Zimbabwe.

## 1.9 Research design and methods

This study adopted a qualitative design to empirically examine how citizen journalism and alternative media functioned in everyday real-life situations through an ethnographic study of AMH Voices in

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Zimbabwe. Atton (2009:273) observes that qualitative approaches are suitable when studying alternative media because they "emphasize the experience of media producers", help understand the "culture of participants" and "the meaningfulness of production as a process". Van den Bulck (2002:74) argues that ethnography is used to study the working of media institutions "when little is known about the phenomenon under study" and to "generate theoretical interpretations". In this ethnographic study, research data was collected using observation, participation and semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews were used to "foster learning about individual experiences and perspectives" (Bloom & Crabtree, 2006:314) on citizen journalism and alternative media. Interviews were conducted with AMH Voices management team and citizen journalists focusing on citizen participation and the everyday newsmaking practices. Selection of the respondents was done using a mixture of snowball and purposive sampling that sought to maximise the depth and richness of the data by using respondents knowledgeable on the subject matter. Participation and observation were used to triangulate research data from interviews and to fully understand the complexities of citizen journalism and alternative media in Zimbabwe.

### 1.9.1 Data analysis

The aim of qualitative data analysis is to discover patterns, concepts, themes and meanings (Taylor, 2001). The methodological approach to data analysis was critical discourse analysis (CDA). CDA was used as a data analysis method to investigate meanings and the ideological underpinnings of interview data, field notes and news articles. In this case, the citizen-produced news content on AMH Voices, so as to gain an understanding of the significance of citizen journalism and alternative media in shaping public discourses. The model of CDA adopted here is one propounded by Van Dijk (1988a, 1988b) with subsequent variations in Van Dijk (1991, 1995, 2000, 2015). Van Dijk (1988a:25) asserts that discourses are analysed at two dimensions; the textual and the contextual. The textual dimension focuses on "structures of discourse at various levels of description" such as the grammatical, phonological, morphological and semantics. Contextual dimensions relate "to structural descriptions to various properties of the context, such as cognitive processes and representations or sociocultural factors". The citizen news discourses were analysed at both textual and contextual dimensions with greater emphasis placed on thematic issues that were emerging from the citizen news content and their relationship with the context. CDA was used as a method of data analysis because it offered critical insights to language use in relation to the context and the relations of power and domination in society.

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## 1.10 Chapter outline and structure of the thesis

This thesis comprises seven interlinked chapters. The first four chapters are theoretical in nature as they seek to establish the background, literature review, theoretical and methodological foundations of the research. The last three chapters are informed by the fieldwork and present key findings of the research in line with the stated objectives, themes and they summarise the research by proffering conclusions and recommendations. Chapter 1 is the foregoing chapter that introduced the whole research. The chapter described the background to the study, outlined the research goal, research questions and gaps in the field of study. Chapter 2 focuses on the literature review. The objective of the chapter is to gain a thorough understanding of citizen journalism and alternative media. It also discusses the related concepts of citizen participation and newsmaking practices that are central to this study. Chapter 3 centres on the theoretical framework. The chapter presents an outline of the two theories of choice used in the study, that is, the public sphere theory and the critical political economy theory. A justification of the suitability and application of the theories to the study is made. Chapter 4 is the research methodology chapter. It outlines the qualitative research design adopted in the study, in particular the ethnographic research method. The data collection methods of semi-structured interviews, participant observation and the data analysis method of CDA are discussed at length. Chapter 5 is a presentation of the research findings obtained through field observations and interviews. The chapter presents and discusses the findings based on the analysis of structural factors that impacted on citizen journalism and alternative media in Zimbabwe, and research themes of citizen participation and newsmaking practices. Chapter 6 is a continuation of the research findings focusing on citizen news discourses at AMH Voices. Chapter 7 is a summary of the research project. It draws conclusions and recommendations for future research.

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# Chapter Two
# Literature Review

## 2.1. Introduction

This chapter discusses the central concepts of citizen journalism and alternative media that underpin the study. The related thematic concerns of citizen participation and newsmaking practices are also discussed. The objective of the chapter is to gain an adequate understanding of the subject matter by unravelling the body of knowledge on the above with a view of distinguishing what has been done by different scholars and what still needs to be done in new research such as this project. The chapter also provides an insight into the different theoretical and methodological approaches that have been utilised in studies of citizen journalism and alternative media to lay a foundation for the subsequent chapters on theoretical framework and research methodology.

## 2.2. Traditional journalism and its normative functions

Journalism is a diverse and dynamic practice which is constantly under transformation due to socio-cultural, economic, legal, political and technological factors. The face of journalism today is not the same as it was a few years ago. Nip (2006) describes the evolutionary nature of journalism and has identified five categories in the genealogy of journalism these being (1) traditional journalism, (2) public journalism, (3) interactive journalism, (4) participatory journalism, and (5) citizen journalism. However, these forms of journalism do not always occur chronologically as they have overlapping characteristics and can sometimes run concurrently as was observed at the AMH group, where the citizen journalism platform of AMH Voices was on the same website as the more traditional journalism publication of the *NewsDay*. An endeavour is made in this research to distinguish traditional journalism, which according to Nip's (2006) genealogy outlined above is the earliest type, from citizen journalism, which is the most recent type. Traditional journalism can be defined as the process of gathering, assessing, creating, and presenting news information to the public by professionally trained journalists working for mainstream print and electronic media. McQuail (2013:2) defines traditional journalism as the "activities and outcomes of those professionally engaged in collecting, analysing and publishing news", often within established news media organisations. Nip (2006:216) asserts that traditional journalism is when "professional journalists are the gatekeepers who filter through the happenings of the world, select the significant events, and report them for their audience". In traditional journalism, ordinary people participate to a limited extent in the news production process as sources of news from which journalists gather information and opinion. This view is elaborated by Nip (2006:216) who notes that traditional journalists "perform

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the entire news process, from story idea generation, news gathering, writing, editing, to publishing, exercising their professional news values at every stage". Thus, the model of traditional journalism is not participatory in the main as it is the professional journalists who determine what news is and disseminate it to the audience members. However, there are opportunities for ordinary people to participate in traditional journalism by providing feedback in the form of letters to the editor, through phone in radio programmes and as audience members in television talk shows. Furthermore, advertisers and shareholders can influence the news production processes in traditional journalism by exerting pressure on editors and management that may lead to self-censorship. They can also influence the coverage of certain issues, politicians and public personalities. The above definitions of traditional journalism foreground its professionalisation, institutionalisation and largely non-participatory nature, which contrasts with the deprofessionalised, deinstitutionalised and participatory nature of citizen journalism, as will be discussed later.

It is imperative to understand the normative functions of journalism in society so that we are able to refer back to them as we evaluate citizen journalism and alternative media. Providing news and information on contemporary events and affairs is the primary mandate of journalism in society. McNair (1994:21) notes that "at the simplest level, journalism presents us with an ongoing narrative about the world beyond our immediate experience". The news stories and the information provided by journalists must be truthful, factual and balanced. A second function of journalism is the watchdog role or fourth estate. The watchdog role implies that journalists must monitor and hold actors in power accountable by exposing acts of abuse of power and corruption. Schultz (1998:2) states that the idea of the fourth estate is grounded on the notion that journalism exercises checks and balances on the executive, legislature, and judiciary to ensure that the powerful are held accountable. Journalism plays a key role in representing the public interests. Deuze (2005:447) notes that journalists work in the name of the people hence they have a sense of "doing it for the public". The role of journalism in representing the public is elaborated by Carey (2007: 19) when he notes:

> The value of journalism was predicated on the existence of the public and not the reverse. For that reason, the "public" is the god term of journalism, the final term, the term without which nothing counts, and journalists justify their actions, defend the craft, plead their case in terms of the public's right to know, their role as the representative of the public, and their capacity to speak both to and for the public.

The public interests refer to matters of "general interest or good of the majority that are carried out well and according to principles of efficiency, justice, fairness and respect for current social and cultural values" (McQuail, 2013:30). Public interest matters include increasing transparency, exposing wrong doing, holding political and economic power to account, expressing public opinion

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and protecting the interests of citizens. Agenda setting is another normative function of journalism in society. The agenda setting hypothesis states that journalistic news values act as cues for the audience, alerting them to the importance of an issue, and encouraging them to place it on their personal agendas of important issues (McNair, 1994:21). The other function of journalism is that of establishing and taking part in a public sphere. Curran (2000:134) conceives of the public sphere "as a neutral space within society, free of both state or corporate control in which the media should make available information affecting the public good and facilitate a free, open and reasoned public dialogue that guides the public direction of society". Journalists have a mandate to manage a space for public debate, circulating opinions and ideas, extending freedom and diversity for the public. In carrying out its normative roles, journalism is expected to uphold professional ethics of objectivity, accuracy, truthfulness, verifiability and credibility. Central to this study was an endeavour to distinguish citizen journalism from traditional journalism, particularly how citizen participation, newsmaking practices and discourses of citizen journalism and alternative media were different from those of mainstream journalism.

## 2.3. The conceptualisation of citizen journalism

Digital technologies are a major force that have impacted on journalism in recent times. Pavlik (2000:229) established that digital technology influenced journalism in four broad areas of (1) how journalists do their work; (2) the content of news; (3) the structure or organisation of the newsroom; and (4) the relationships between or among news organisations, journalists and their many publics. In Zimbabwe, the appropriation of digital technologies contributed to the rise of citizen journalism and alternative media (Mutsvairo & Columbus, 2012). Xu (2015) argues that traditional journalism can be distinguished from citizen journalism from a technological perspective. He states that unlike traditional journalism, from which the public is often largely excluded, citizen journalism came into the core of journalism studies because of digital technologies that enable ordinary citizens to participate in journalism. Noor (2017:58) argues that "it is certain that the term citizen journalism did not exist before the advent of the internet". This view is affirmed by Banda (2010) who established that much of citizen journalism in Africa was driven by digital technologies. Today citizen journalism is considered an integral part of the news ecosystem that works to complement and/or challenge legacy media. Moyo (2011:757) observes that "the advent of citizen journalism means that the epistemes of mainstream journalism are being challenged", meaning that news and information produced by mainstream journalism together with the knowledge forms about traditional journalism practices, norms and values are being challenged by citizen journalism.

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Allan (2015:455) asserts that citizen journalism gained universal currency in the aftermath of the South Asian tsunami of 26 December 2004. He states that the "citizen journalism movement" consolidated into a distinct journalistic genre in 2005 when citizen journalists augmented BBC and CNN news coverage of the bombings of London Underground train stations and Hurricane Katrina along the Gulf Coast in the United States (Allan, 2009:28). When the term citizen journalism first appeared in 2004, it was used to describe a new genre of reportage whereby ordinary people have capacity to bear witness to news events using internet technology (Allan, 2015:455). Ross and Cormier (2010:66) define citizen journalism "as a rapidly evolving form of journalism where common citizens take the initiative to report news or express views about happenings within their community". Defining a citizen journalist is a complex process as journalism students, community and political activists can all be referred to as citizen journalists at one point depending on their various motivations for creating news content, and the varying levels of their previous experience, if any, in news production (Wall 2017:139). For example, during field work, I encountered a journalism and media studies graduate who had not been employed for a number of years but worked as a citizen journalist who volunteered regular news content for an alternative media organisation just to gain experience and grow her profile. A citizen journalist is hereby defined as an average, non-professional – in most cases unpaid person voluntarily participating in the process of gathering and sharing news. Unlike professional journalists whose work is organised into daily routines and who have journalism as their main source of income, citizen journalists, on the other hand, do not regard journalism as their main occupation and are not part of a defined professional collective (Darbo & Skjerdal, 2019:113). In this research, various definitions of trained citizen journalists, spontaneous citizen journalists and activist citizen journalists are explored to describe the type and level of participation by citizen journalists in news production processes as observed at AMH Voices.

Mutsvairo (2013) and Bentley, Hamman, Littau, Meyer, Watson and Welsh (2005) challenge Allan's (2015) assertion that citizen journalism is a recent phenomenon that emerged in 2004. They argue that citizen journalism is an old practice that can be traced back to the early 17th and 18th century pamphleteering in Europe. Mutsvairo (2013:45) argues that "participatory journalism was already in existence in Zimbabwe long before the arrival of the British colonialists in the 1880s, in the form of "traditional one-to-one or one-to-many exchange of information among Africans as news". To support this view, Bentley *et al* (2005) argue that if the University of Missouri opened doors to the world's first journalism school in 1908, it then means that anyone engaged in journalism work before that period could be considered a "citizen journalist" on the basisthat they did not have professional training. Hughes (2010) notes that it is a misconception to say that citizen journalism is a new phenomenon that emerged with digital technological innovations of the late 20th and early 21st

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centuries. Hughes (2010:6) observes that the "first newspaper in America, *Publick Occurrences Both Forreign and Domestick*, printed in September 25, 1690 was published by what today's standards would classify as a citizen journalist". It can therefore be argued that citizen journalism defined as the activities by ordinary, untrained people in news production has been around longer than widely assumed. In Zimbabwe, citizen journalism became popular in the past five years due to widespread internet connectivity and appropriation of digital technologies. AMH Voices, the first institutionalised citizen journalism platform, was only established in 2014, a confirmation that in Zimbabwe and perhaps throughout Africa, the practice of citizen journalism is still new.

Earlier conceptualisations of citizen journalism tended to confuse it with citizen eyewitnessing, which entailed random acts of capturing newsworthy events or eyewitness accounts and sharing them online via personal blogs and social media. Hajek, Stefanikova and Allan (2014), Allan (2015) take the initiative to distinguish citizen journalism from citizen witnessing. Allan (2015:456) describes the citizen eyewitnesses as "members of the public who, unintentionally find themselves in the wrong place at the right time, retaining the presence of mind to bear witness". Hajek *et al* (2014:176) emphasise that "the citizen witness comes to the fore on a spontaneous, spur-of-the-moment basis" and "in all likelihood, they didn't plan or anticipate such a role in advance but find themselves suddenly performing it under unexpected circumstances". Ross and Cormier (2010:58) describe citizen witnessing as accidental journalism were "people are unexpectedly caught in the middle of an event and take photos or videos and upload them to either social networking websites such as Facebook, MySpace or Twitter, or news websites such as CNN's iReport or Fox News' uReport". The distinction is that citizen journalists are "people who do think of themselves as citizen journalists, who consciously and purposely perform a journalistic role" (Hajek *et al*, 2014:176). Citizen journalists do identify themselves as such and have a conscious resolve to perform journalism in a sustained manner unlike the citizen eyewitnesses who document news events in serendipitous coincidence. Berger (2011:710) elaborates:

> Not every act of journalism, however, defines a person as being a 'journalist' in terms of ongoing or significant identity. The point is that the notion of 'citizen journalism', if it is to be taken as a meaningful concept, should refer to something much more than once-off or even thrice-off volunteering of journalistic content. Citizen journalism, thus, should be defined as journalism done by persons whose status is not that of hired hands in a media enterprise, but who are outsiders that are nevertheless engaged in the sustained generation of journalism.

Considering the above clarification, citizen journalism in this study was considered a sustained activity of producing news content by ordinary citizens. Serban (2019:99) adds that citizen journalism

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must "be understood as intentional acts committed by a public who aims to participate in the broader journalistic conversations". These acts can range from personal investigations to comments regarding journalistic work posted on media websites or on social media networks.

There are three types of definitions of citizen journalism: those that underscore its technological foundation; those that emphasise the participation of people in journalism; and, those that conceive citizen journalism as part of alternative media opposed to the mainstream. Technology-focused definitions highlight the centrality of digital technologies in enabling citizen journalism. For instance, Ross and Cormier (2010:66) observe that citizen journalists "utilise a variety of internet technologies to gather, process, research, report, analyse and publish news and information". Similarly, Radsch (2013:159) defines citizen journalism using a technology-centred perspective as "a practice that refers to non-professionals who engage in acts of journalism, such as reporting, fact checking, documenting, verifying, quoting, typically using ICTs such as mobile phones, the Internet and social media or blogging platforms to self-publish the resulting user-generated content". Goode (2009:1288) also underscores technology when he defines citizen journalism "as a range of web-based practices whereby 'ordinary' users engage in journalistic practices". These definitions presume that citizen journalism is technologically driven and confined to online activities such as blogging, photo and video sharing, eyewitness accounts and commentary on current affairs.

Citizen journalism has been defined using people-centred perspectives that emphasise the participation of ordinary citizens in newsmaking processes that leads to the democratisation, deinstitutionalisation and deprofessionalisation of journalism. This is because citizen journalism aims to empower communities by transferring the power and responsibility of reporting away from mainstream journalists and media institutions. This is confirmed by Kperogi (2011:318) who submits that citizen journalism "eliminates the authority of the professional and is free from the encumbrances of professional news judgment and gate-keeping". Rosen (2006) describes citizen journalism as an act when "the people formerly known as the audience" employ the press tools they have in their possession to inform one another. Nip (2006:218) defines citizen journalism as a model "where the people are responsible for gathering content, visioning, producing and publishing the news product". Citizen journalism is therefore participatory in nature. By encouraging participation of ordinary citizens in all stages of news production, citizen journalism can amplify subaltern voices in the public sphere.

Citizen journalism has also been defined in relation to mainstream media as its opposite and challenger of its dominance. Such definitions work from the premise that ordinary people engage in citizen journalism because they are disenfranchised and dissatisfied with mainstream media. This is

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to propose that citizen journalism is part of alternative media practices. Radsch (2013:159) defines citizen journalism as:

> An alternative and activist form of newsgathering and reporting that leverages networked social media and functions outside but in relation to mainstream media institutions, often as a response to shortcomings in the professional journalistic field, and which tends to be driven by different objectives and ideals and rely on alternative sources of legitimacy than mainstream journalism.

Goode (2009:1289) notes that citizen journalism must be conceived of as a "movement with intrinsically oppositional characteristics" to mainstream journalism. This view of citizen journalism as having oppositional traits is important because in monolithic media environments and repressive regimes such as Zimbabwe, citizen journalism, "represents a potent form of political contestation" and "creates spheres of dissidence where critiques of the dominant, mainstream media version of reality is articulated and alternative political and social orders proposed" (Radsch, 2013:155). In this study, citizen journalism is defined as the initiative by ordinary citizens to report news or express views about events in Zimbabwe using alternative media due to a dissatisfaction with the mainstream media.

Some scholars have proffered different approaches to the understanding of citizen journalism based on their experiences and contextual realities. Australian academic Axel Bruns (2009:127) proposes that citizen journalism must be understood as "produsage" to describe blurred collaborative content creation whereby "it is becoming difficult if not impossible to tell mere users from producers". Zimbabwean academic Last Moyo (2014: 4) proposes that citizen journalism must be understood as an alternative or subaltern space ideologically counterpoised to mainstream media "epitomised by free speech, debate, direct participation, resistance to power and domination". He adds that "subalternism implies resistance and fighting power from below through forms of communication that seek to mobilise and advocate ideologies of emancipation and freedom for the oppressed" (Moyo, 2014:7). Consistent with the above, AMH Voices was regarded as a counterpublic sphere opposed to the mainstream.

Ever since 2004, when citizen journalism gained universal currency, newer perspectives around it that reflect its evolution, reportorial forms, practices and epistemologies have been emerging (Zeng, Jain, Nguyen & Allan, 2019). Whereas conventional studies of citizen journalism have tended to focus on the notion of participation as a common thread, newer perspectives by scholars such as Serban (2019) focus on citizen participation as a threat to journalistic fields, following Pierre Bourdieu's field theory which enables researchers to understand how agents are organising

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themselves in a field. Another theoretical approach in recent citizen journalism studies is boundary work, which is concerned with the way in which social divisions in the field of knowledge are delimited, attacked and reinforced (Serban, 2019). Darbo and Skjerdal (2019) employ the concept of boundary work to study the relationships between conventional (professional) and citizen journalists in Hong Kong. They argue that boundaries between conventional journalism and citizen journalism are blurred because it is difficult to differentiate the two, giving rise to hybrid journalism that sometimes balances itself, as both conventional and citizen journalism supplement each other in providing news and information. Boundary work is later discussed in detail in Chapter 6 to delineate citizen-produced news content characterised by interpretive news writing styles from professional journalistic output, which is punctuated more by the notion of journalistic objectivity.

Other recent researches on citizen journalism focus on newsroom transformation caused by citizen participation and the newsmaking practices of citizen journalists, as this study attempts to do so. Within studies that focus on newsmaking practices of citizen journalists, there are some that focus on specific practices within the news production process, such as verification and fact checking. For example, a study by Zeng, Burgess and Bruns (2019) centres on how citizen journalists in China participated to verify and fact check rumours during the 2015 Tianjin blasts. They define rumours as unverified information that arises from and is publicly circulated under conditions of uncertainty. Their study is ground-breaking because it focuses, for the first time, on citizen journalists not as producers of news content but as verifiers of news and information. Zeng, Burgess and Bruns (2019:14) conclude that citizen journalists in China were able to debunk official rumours and disinformation deliberately placed by government agencies into official media, in an attempt to cover up facts they deemed to be harmful to their interests.

Despite the new perspectives to the study of citizen journalism mentioned above, this study remains committed to an understanding of the everyday operations of citizen journalism and alternative media practices in a repressive environment in Zimbabwe, focusing on citizen participation, newsmaking practices and discourses, while at the same time integrating some of the new perspectives into the analysis of the data.

## 2.4. Research themes in citizen journalism

Academic studies on citizen journalism tend to focus on its interplay with six major themes: (1) crises; (2) ethics; (3) collaboration with mainstream media; (4) political activism and radical democracy; (5) citizenship; and (6) hyperlocal news.

Most studies have highlighted the role of citizen journalism in times of crisis such as humanitarian disasters and politically engineered crises. This is so because citizen journalism came to international

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prominence during times of crisis (Allan 2015). Wall (2015:799) asserts that "crisis coverage is citizen journalism's key area of contribution". The 2008 post-election violence in Kenya demonstrated the role of citizen journalism in reporting news and coordinating responses to a political crisis. Kenya was one of the early adopters of citizen journalism in sub-Sahara Africa alongside Zimbabwe and South Africa due to the high level of internet penetration (Zuckerman, 2009). In January 2008, Kenya was engulfed by ethnic violence, fuelled by the irregularities of the December 2007 election. During the ensuring violence, an information gap arose as the government banned mainstream media coverage of the election. Banda (2010:43) notes that during the violence "some television stations chose to air soap operas and football shows", ignoring the crisis at hand. This deliberate news and information void led to the creation of a citizen journalism platform called Ushahidi, which means testimony in Swahili. Ushahidi was used to get citizens' testimonies via text messages, Twitter, Facebook and blogs (Banda, 2010). Blogs challenged mainstream media narratives of the crisis while online campaigns were rolled out to promote awareness of the human rights violations (Goldstein & Rotich, 2008). The success of Ushahidi as a collaborative citizen journalism site rested on its ability to expand the democratic space and allow people to share their opinions. Ushahidi managed to draw local and global attention to the violence taking place in Kenya. Goldstein and Rotich (2008:3) observe that "within weeks Ushahidi had documented in detail hundreds of incidents of violence that would have otherwise gone unreported and received hundreds of thousands of site visits from around the world, sparking increased global media attention". Despite the success of Ushahidi's citizen journalism in highlighting the political crisis to the world and coordinating the response efforts, Zuckerman (2009:194) has castigated it "for rumour mongering and incitement to violence". This study focused on citizen journalism at AMH Voices and how it was shaped by the multidimensional crisis that elongated in Zimbabwe as from 2014-18.

Studies that focus on citizen journalism and ethics are important because citizen journalists are considered a constant threat to the integrity of journalism due to the long-established image of them as "amateurish, accidental reporter[s] whose personal naivety and technological obsession override his/her respect for the integrity and privacy of others" (Moyo, 2015:129). Research has established that citizen journalism does not fully adhere to ethical norms of objectivity, balance, truthfulness and accuracy. Citizen journalists are bound to violate ethical standards and sensationalize stories as they do not have the prerequisite journalistic background and skills in editing and quality control. To date, there is no known ratified code of ethics for citizen journalism. Mutsvairo, Columbus and Leijendekker (2014) observe that due to lack of codified ethics, citizen journalists borrow ethical behaviour and guidelines from traditional journalism that align them with the ethics of social responsibility. However, Moyo (2015) argues to the contrary when he applies Bauman's (2005)

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theory of liquid modernity to conclude that digital technologies and citizen journalism give rise to liquid ethics because they are fast paced and too fluid to be regulated by traditional sources of moral authority. Moyo (2015:142) concludes that "citizen journalism does not herald the end of journalism ethics, but ushers in transformations associated with liquid modernity and networked journalism" where there is a "rise of personalised ethics due to the deinstitutionalisation, deterritorialisation and deprofessionalisation of journalism". Radsch (2013:166) notes that "objectivity is a value that enjoys a far less prominent place among the normative rules of citizen journalism than professional journalism". Mpofu and Barnabas (2016:132) established that citizen journalists violated journalistic ethics and contributed to moral panics when they used WhatsApp for the "dissemination of manipulated, false and decontextualised images, messages and videos" of the xenophobic attacks on foreign nationals in South Africa in April 2015. Although the use of WhatsApp by ordinary citizens to disseminate news and information may raise fundamental questions about whether it qualifies as some form of journalism, the argument is that the WhatsApp application is being increasingly used by alternative media start-ups in Zimbabwe to disseminate news and information to ordinary citizens (see Thomas, 2019). It is now common for ordinary citizens to engage in acts of citizen journalism by sharing news and information via WhatsApp groups although they sometimes do so without verifying the authenticity of such, thereby contributing to the rise of fake news and moral panics. The use of WhatsApp to disseminate news and information by some alternative media institutions in Zimbabwe can be seen as "creative" journalism practice (Witschge, Deuze & Willemsen, 2019), which is a technologically innovative way of story telling that breaks away from traditional journalism. Since this study was not primarily concerned with citizen journalism ethics, I however, observed some aspects of citizen journalists' ethical behaviour during newsmaking processes.

Citizen journalism and mainstream journalism have a dialectical relationship where sometimes they complement, compete, or even challenge one another. There is a growing number of studies that examine the ways in which citizen journalism has interacted with mainstream news media. At the first level, citizen journalism can complement mainstream journalism by providing story ideas and sometimes full stories. Noor (2017) highlights that citizen journalism can add value to the mainstream news coverage by bringing to light issues at the grassroots level that are otherwise overlooked by big media outlets. Bruns (2010:138) notes that citizen journalism can complement mainstream news media coverage in three key dimensions of breath, depth and time. Citizen journalism can extend the breadth of journalistic coverage by reporting first-hand from areas in which mainstream journalism is under-resourced and inflexible to cover. It can improve the depth of journalistic coverage by offering more detailed evaluation of current affairs, incorporating a greater variety of critical voices and thereby achieving a more multi-perspectival coverage of the news. It can extend the ongoing

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journalistic coverage of issues over time, by being able to exist outside the 24-hour news cycle (Bruns, 2010:138). Moyo (2009:553) argues that citizen journalism in Zimbabwe constituted a "parallel market" for information during the 2008 post-election crisis replete with a "mix of information and disinformation" that challenged mainstream media coverage of the crisis and fulfilled the informational needs of citizens. This research was concerned with the extent to which citizen journalism at AMH Voices was an alternative to the mainstream.

Studies that focus on the interplay of citizen journalism with political activism and radical democracy are important because citizen journalism has potential to mobilise citizens into action and can be utilised as a form of activism and a site for democratic struggle. To achieve this role, citizen journalism must assume an oppositional and radical stance. The view that citizen journalism is activist in nature is enunciated by Wall (2015:803) who notes that "citizen journalism operates in well-defined resistance to the existing political and social systems within which it is embedded [by] bringing together activists opposed to existing power structures". Citizen journalism provides ways to participate in the public sphere so as to influence political change. Radsch (2013:156) observes that in Egypt, "citizen journalism was the embodiment of a micropolitics of power in that it presented alternatives to metapolitical narratives" of the state. She adds that citizen journalists covered topics like torture, human rights, and presidential succession that were largely absent from the mainstream Egyptian media. Radsch (2013:222) notes:

> Citizen journalism has become the distinguishing form of political activism in authoritarian and undemocratic societies in the post-millennial era. In these regimes citizen journalism, in the form of blogging and social networking, has become central to contemporary contentious politics and represents a most potent form of political contestation.

Contentious politics is a form of political participation and contestation against concentrated state power through collective action and disruptive techniques by groups or individuals with limited political voice (Wampler, 2014:199). It puts on the political agenda the ideas and interests of the marginalised. Forms of contentious politics include protests, demonstrations, strikes, riots, petitions, civil strife, violence, revolutions and civil disobedience. The ultimate goal of contentious politics is political change or transformation and it is often linked with alternative media, civil society activists and social movements. Alternative media gives voice to contentious politics because both are counter positioned to state power or hegemony. Citizen journalism and alternative media are central to contentious politics because they can be used for the expression of dissident ideas, organisation, mobilisation and advocacy (Radsch, 2013:169). Baris and Bora (2017) have linked citizen journalism to the international Occupy Movement which was inspired by the Arab Spring revolutions of 2009 against socio-political inequality and need for democratic forms of governance. My interest in this

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study was to establish if citizen journalism at AMH Voices was part of a movement of political activism and radical democracy by challenging status quo Mugabeism during the years 2014-18. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2009:1139) coined the term Mugabeism to describe "a summation of a constellation of political controversies, political behaviour, political ideas, utterances, rhetoric and actions that have crystallised around [former president Robert] Mugabe's political life". The main characteristics of Mugabeism are that it was violent, racist, tribalistic, heavily militarised, corrupt and founded on sexism and patriarchy (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015:2).

Campbell (2015) asserts that there are two groups of theories regarding citizenship in citizen journalism: those that consider journalism for citizenship and those that consider journalism as citizenship. The journalism for citizenship theories "constructs the primary function of citizens as being informed, with the emphasis of this theory on the role of journalists rather than citizens" (Campbell, 2015:709). The journalism as citizenship theories view citizen journalism as directly constituting citizenship (p.712). In terms of the journalism as citizenship theories, citizen journalism actualises citizenship through "the mere expression of alternative voices, perspectives and identities" and the production of oppositional content (Campbell, 2015:715). South African academic Guy Berger (2011) pioneered research that focuses on citizen journalism as an active part of citizenship in the continent. His research on Iindaba Ziyafika, an "experimental citizen journalism project" conceptualized by the Rhodes University School of Journalism and Media Studies, demonstrated the use of citizen journalism to assert citizenship rights by the people of Grahamstown in South Africa. Berger (2011:716) observes that Iindaba Ziyafika was conceived in 2008 amidst poverty and unemployment; crime and violence; that created a need for citizens to assert their socio-economic rights to property and personal safety; and, the need to reconcile and reconstruct a damaged and divided social fabric. Iindaba Ziyafika succeeded to forge a common public sphere of citizenship in action across the divides of race, residential area, class, language and especially age, particularly by exploiting new media technologies to enable a flow of information and conversation across the barriers (Berger, 2011). My interest in this study was to investigate the ways in which citizen journalism at AMH Voices contributed to active citizenship.

Citizen journalism can also be linked to the coverage of local events and community activities in a process commonly referred to as hyperlocal journalism (D'heer & Paulussen, 2013:152). Hess and Waller (2017:194) describe hyperlocal journalism as "news produced and circulated at the very local level". Hyperlocal journalism is community-oriented, usually shared online and intended to fill perceived gaps in coverage of an issue or region. Stur, Jangdal and Nilsson (2018:87) observe that hyperlocal journalism is driven by entrepreneurial journalists, reporters deeply rooted in a community, community activists, concerned citizens or people with no journalistic background

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(citizen journalists) covering community activities such as local councils and the services they provide. Hyperlocal journalism seeks to promote civic engagement, increase citizen empowerment and social interaction that transform lives and communities. This study investigated the extent to which citizen journalism at AMH Voices focused on hyperlocal news.

## 2.5. Opportunities and threats of citizen journalism

Citizen journalism has been received with mixed feelings by traditional journalists and scholars alike. Some see citizen journalism in a positive light as contributing to the betterment of journalism and democracy while others are against the practice, arguing that it has brought many turbulences to journalism practice. Mythen (2010) argues that citizen journalism can add to the plurality of discourses circulating in society and provide an alternative news agenda from mainstream. As an alternative subaltern space, citizen journalism gives voice to activist and marginalised groups, thereby diversifying opinion and enriching democracy. Radsch (2013) lauds citizen journalism for its facile production and instantaneous transmission of news. She notes that because citizen journalists often work outside institutional constraints of mainstream, they can potentially publish anything with immediacy. For example, a news story can be published immediately and developed through incremental live updates from first-hand contributions of the participating citizen journalists. Furthermore, citizen journalism is more dialogical than traditional media because participants act as both information senders and receivers. This participatory and collaborative approach to journalistic content creation removes elite gate keepers leading to better stories and better journalism, increased trust in media and shared responsibility of providing news and information in a democracy (Bowman & Wills, 2003).

In resource constrained newsrooms, citizen journalism is of benefit because it provides free labour. Bowman and Wills (2003) argue that an involved audience can play the role of a scalable virtual staff comprised of grassroots writers, commentators, photographers and videographers that can provide on-site updates. This fosters community belonging and greater participation as citizen journalists interact and share stores (Bowman &Wills 2003). Citizen journalism can act as a third space that is independent from corporate or government control, thereby counter balancing mainstream media.

Despite its usefulness as an alternative source of news and information rivalling mainstream media, citizen journalism has been criticised. Bruns (2010) criticises participants in citizen journalism as committing random acts of journalism by contributing news and commentary only occasionally and on selected topics rather than achieving a comprehensive coverage of the news. Holt and Karlsson (2015) established that citizen journalism in Sweden was episodic, focused on individual relevance and tended to tell soft news, rarely reporting on policy issues, local authorities, or people affected by

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decisions being made by them. Another challenge with citizen journalism is that it does not (yet) have a comparable code of ethics, hence suffers from lack of professional integrity and credibility. Singer (2003:143) bemoans that citizen journalism has "no entrance requirements, no discrete body of knowledge and no elite inner group with the ability to 'de-press' wayward members". Due to a lack of enforceable professional ethics, citizen journalism often violates professional ethics by, for example, doctoring pictures and the corruption of witness accounts. This lack of regulation of citizen journalism can give voice to extremist groups that can lead to racism, ethnic hatred and violence as was the case of the 2008 post-election violence in Kenya.

Citizen journalism is often seen as eroding quality in journalism when amateurs are treated as equally credible as professionals. Splichal and Dahlgren (2016:14) argue that citizen journalism is handicapped by precisely its "lack of professionalism" and "lack of organisational structures". This lack of professionalism is summed up by Foss (2008) who says citizen journalism "is like handing a man off the street a scalpel and authorising him to perform surgery". Maher (2010), writing online, argues that citizen journalism suffers from three deadly E's of ethics, economics and epistemology. With regards to ethics, Maher posits that unlike traditional journalism which had an institutionalised code of ethics, citizen journalism has no code of ethics because it is uncoordinated, superficial and subjective. Another weakness of citizen journalism is that it has not developed a self-financing economic model (Maher 2010). If citizen journalism were to rely on advertising revenue or corporate funding like traditional media it would risk being controlled by corporates. The last challenge of citizen journalism as advanced by Maher (2010) is that of epistemology. He asserts that where traditional journalism and old media are tools for "reflection and crystallisation of truths", citizen journalism is merely a tool for activism and contesting truth. He argues that unlike traditional journalism, citizen journalism is dependent on participatory peer contributions and makes no authoritative knowledge (Maher, 2010).

Kperogi (2011:314) dismisses corporate sponsored citizen journalism as failing to "counterfoil the suffocating dominance of the discursive space by the traditional mainstream media" lending itself to the aggressive co-optation by corporate media hegemons. His criticisms of citizen journalism are based on his study of iReport.com, a CNN experiment on citizen journalism that gives ordinary people from everywhere in the world the opportunity to contribute unedited, unfiltered, and uncensored user-generated video and text-based news reports. Kperogi (2011:320) argues that iRepoters "cherish the illusion of control over the construction and reportage of news" and yet in reality, CNN "rewards 'iReports' that conform to the conventional canons of professional news judgment". Kperogi (2011:321) further argues that citizen journalism is a form of free creative labour noting that iReport.com has a section called "Assignment Desk" where CNN producers list topics for

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"iReporters" to investigate and report, thus setting the agenda for citizen journalists. He notes that most of the reports from the "Assignment Desk" end up being used on CNN for free. This view is supported by Hajek *et al* (2014:179) who note that "from the news organization's point of view, it is much cheaper to monitor and process citizen material than to actually employ their own network of journalists to gather news independently". Another threat to citizen journalism is that it is not widely accepted. Kang (2016) argues that there is resistance to citizen journalism especially in countries with firmly established routines and conventions of journalism such as Japan. He notes that the failure of the citizen journalism news site *OhmyNews* in Japan as an antithesis of traditional journalism was due to the Japanese entrenched belief in traditional journalism and its values of factuality and neutrality.

## 2.6 Understanding alternative media

Alternative media are slippery to define. This is attested by Downing (2001: ix) who notes that "alternative media is almost oxymoronic" because "everything is, at some point, alternative to something else". The term alternative media insinuate meanings of "democratic media", "emancipatory media", "radical media", "independent media", "citizens' media", "tactical media", "activist media", "autonomous media", "community media", "rhizomatic media", "social movement media" and "participatory media" (Coyer, Dowmunt & Fountain, 2007; Bailey, Cammaerts & Carpentier, 2008; and Atton & Hamilton, 2008). Leading scholars in the study of alternative media, Chris Atton in the United Kingdom and James F. Hamilton in the United States of America, have established that a common characteristic of alternative media is its critique of the existing ways of doing journalism. Atton and Hamilton (2008:1) argue that alternative media "proceeds from dissatisfaction not only with mainstream coverage of certain issues and topics, but also with the epistemology of news".

Alternative media are defined by their explicit opposition or negative relationship with mainstream media (Kenix, 2011a). The oppositional stance of alternative media can be ideological or defined according to their scale in the marketplace of ideas. Waltz (2005:2) defines alternative media as "media that are alternative to, or in opposition to, something else" particularly "mass-media products that are widely available and widely consumed". He adds alternative media are "media that provide a different point of view from that usually expressed, that cater to communities not well served by the mass media, or that expressly advocate social change". Coyer, Dowmunt and Fountain (2007: i) define alternative media as produced by the socially, culturally and politically excluded, independently run and often community focused. Couldry and Curran (2003:7) define alternative media as "media production that challenges, at least implicitly, actual concentrations of media power, whatever form those concentrations may take in different locations". O'Sullivan, Hartley, Saunders,

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Montgomery and Fiske (1994:10) define alternative media as ‘‘forms of media communication that avowedly reject or challenge established and institutional politics, in the sense that they all advocate change in society, or at least a critical reassessment of traditional values”. Atkinson (2006:251) defines alternative media as ‘‘any media that are produced by non-commercial sources and attempt to transform existing social roles and routines by critiquing and challenging power structures’’.

Moyo (2010:87) defines alternative media in Zimbabwe “as those media that function in counter-position to state-controlled media systems by offering the means for democratic communication to groups and individuals who are otherwise excluded from the media production processes”. Mare (2013:32) established that alternative media in Zimbabwe tended to “provide information not readily available in the mainstream public media” and “alternatives to the dominant state narratives”. For the purposes of this study alternative media is defined as any media in Zimbabwe that is in explicit opposition to the government owned and controlled mainstream by offering counter news narratives, providing marginalised groups opportunities for self-expression and participation in decision making and production processes.

One of the questions that Coyer *et al* (2007) interrogate is: Where did the alternative media come from? Alternative media are linked to marginalised people. Walt (2005:8) established that “socially marginalised or dissenting groups, subcultures, ethnic minorities, and others who inhabit liminal spaces in mainstream cultures may be most likely to seek out alternative media, and to create their own if it is not found”. This view is confirmed by Moyo (2010:81) who notes that “historically, societies living under repressive regimes have always come up with alternative forms of communication as tools of subversion”. Historically, alternative media were opposed to or in tension with mainstream media, acting as a crucial resource for social movements and marginalised groups across the world in America, Europe and Africa (Pickard, 2007). Fountain (2007) advances that alternative media are a contestation of the public sphere which had long been captured by the mainstream media and they seek the transformation of people’s relationship to media through participation and democratisation.

Bailey *et al* (2008: xii) argue that “the identity of alternative media should be articulated as relational and contingent on the particularities of the contexts of production, distribution, and consumption”. Alternative media respond to specific political, economic, cultural and social contexts they are produced in (Atton, 2002). They are “alternative” only in the context of their response to, and participation in, the cultures within which they are produced and consumed. For example, Waltz (2005:2) argues that “even a mass-media product like CNN could constitute an ‘alternative’ in a repressive society where all outside media are banned”. Dowmunt and Coyer (2007:5) explain that the global Arabic news station Al Jazeera can be considered alternative “in the sense that its coverage

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provides a counter to the consistently Western bias in the portrayal of the Muslim world in the rest of the world's media".

In South Africa, Tomaselli and Louw (1991:8) witnessed the emergence of the alternative press in apartheid South Africa in the 1980s, which was an "expression of community struggles" and "challenged conventional journalism practices". Johnson (1991:24) identified four basic considerations that could define a publication as alternative in the apartheid South Africa: 1) that it was non-commercial in the sense that the profit-making motive was not the primary criterion for its establishment, 2) that its raison d'être was the fulfilment of a role within the resistance in South Africa, 3) that it saw the established commercial media as not fulfilling needs or reflecting the aspirations of the majority of South Africans and 4) that it was aimed at an audience of which a significant proportion was black. Due to the contingency of defining alternative media in different contexts, and as the analysis below will indicate, AMH Voices qualified as alternative media because of its small market share, independent ownership and control structure, openness to participation in news production processes, critical content that was anti-establishment, negative relationship with the mainstream media and radical stance in the quest for social and political change in Zimbabwe.

## 2.7 Theoretical approaches to the study of alternative media

Due to the difficulty of defining alternative media, Bailey *et al* (2008) proposed four approaches to the understanding of alternative media as "community media", "civil society media", "rhizomatic media" and "alternative media". They argue that these approaches are not mutually exclusive, as each has its own merits and, in the end, propose the formation of a panoptic view of alternative media. The first two set of approaches of "community media" and "civil society media" stress the importance of community while the last two focus on the relationship between alternative and mainstream media.

The first approach by Bailey *et al* (2008) see alternative media as serving the community. This approach is inspired by Atton's (2003:265) definition of alternative journalism as "a philosophy of journalism and a set of practices that are embedded within the everyday lives of citizens, and media content that is both driven and produced by those people". Bailey *et al* (2008) argue that alternative media are oriented towards a community by facilitating access and participation. A detailed discussion of citizen participation is made in section 2.9.

Alternative media can be conceived to be part of civil society independent of state and market in which "alternative conceptualizations of the political and economic system can develop and thrive" (Bailey *et al*, 2008:24). Defining alternative media as part of civil society means that alternative media can be considered the "third voice", independent and crucial for the viability of democracy by mobilising for social change and counterhegemony. Edwards (2004:55) posits that civil society and

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the public sphere are interrelated because both share a concern for the "public" – the common good. Berger (2002:35) argues that the public sphere and civil society are "complementary, though distinctapproaches" to theorise about the media and democracy in Africa. A common thread in both concepts is that they are part of radical democratic theory which foreground the active participation of citizens in deliberation of public affairs independent of the state and market forces. Chapters 5 and 6 discuss the relationship between AMH Voices and civil society in Zimbabwe by focusing on how civil society organisations utilised AMH Voices as a counterpublic sphere for activism and the articulation of counterhegemonic discourses that centred on good governance, democracy and human rights.

Bailey *et al* (2008) propose that alternative media can be understood as "rhizome". This builds on an approach inspired by Deleuze and Guattari's metaphor of the rhizome in their book *A Thousand plateaus: Capitalism and schizophrenia* published in 1987. The objective of the rhizomatic approach is to demonstrate the fluidity and contingency of alternative media. Bailey *et al* (2008) argue the metaphor of the rhizome is based on the juxtaposition of rhizomatic and arbolic thinking. Bailey *et al*, (2008:26) note:

> The arbolic is a structure, which is linear, hierarchic and sedentary, and could be represented as the tree-like structure of genealogy, branches that continue to subdivide into smaller and lesser categories. The rhizomatic, on the other hand, is non-linear, anarchic and nomadic. Unlike trees or their roots, the rhizome connects any point to any other point.

The identity of alternative media is elusive; hence it is comparable to a rhizome. At one-point alternative media are part of a fluid civil society and have an antagonistic relationship with the state and the market. At the same time, alternative media do not operate completely outside the market and/or the state, thus softening the antagonistic relationship towards the market and the state hence they are not merely counterhegemonic.

Kenix (2009) argues that alternative media simply can't be explained or understood without placing them in relation to the mainstream because they are a response to the distrust of mainstream media. Bailey *et al* (2008:15) develop the notion of alternative media as a "supplement to mainstream media, or as a counter-hegemonic critique of the mainstream". Alternative media are defined as small-scale, independent, and horizontally structured organisations carrying non-dominant discourses and representations that vary from those originating in the mainstream media. The study viewed AMH Voices as alternative to the mainstream which offered marginalised groups opportunities for self-representation in the articulation of counterhegemonic discourses.

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## 2.8 Towards a criterion of alternative media

Alternative media are characterised by citizen participation, critical content and form, deprofessionalisation, radical practices and counterhegemonic discourses. One of the key characteristics of alternative media is that it promotes citizen participation. Atton (2009:272) underlines that "alternative media have been characterized by their potential for participation". Alternative media enable wider social participation in the creation, production, and dissemination of news content. Campbell (2004:182) adds that in alternative media, "marginalised members of the society are foregrounded in the content and are active in the production of the content". Franklin *et al* (2005: 14) underscore participation in alternative media when they note that it represents groups that are "neglected, marginalised or suppressed by the institutionalised news agendas of professional journalists in the mainstream".

Sandoval and Fuchs (2010:142) argue that an understanding of alternative media as participatory media is insufficient as they "doubt that alternative media can effectively challenge corporate media power and dominant discourses by simply realizing participatory production processes". They argue that the first limitation of participatory media is the fragmentation of the public sphere into small counterpublics which should be ideally joined to form a big counterpublic sphere. The second limitation of participation in alternative media is that participation can be used as a means of profit accumulation or for advancing repressive political purposes. The third limitation of participatory media is exclusivity. Using participatory production processes as decisive criterion for defining alternative media excludes many oppositional media that provide critical content, but make use of professional organisation structures. Defining alternative media as participatory media excludes such oppositional publications, although they provide critical content and contribute to the establishment of a counterpublic sphere (Sandoval &Fuchs, 2010).

Sandoval and Fuchs (2010:147) argue that critical content should be considered as a minimum requirement for defining alternative media thereby departing from conventional approaches which suppose that alternative media differ from mainstream media in regard to their organisational principles such as participatory, collective organisation, horizontal structures and non-commercial financing. Fuchs (2010:179) defines alternative media as critical media. He notes:

> Critical media, in contrast, are characterized by critical form and content. There is oppositional content that provides alternatives to dominant repressive heteronomous perspectives that reflect the rule of capital, patriarchy, racism, sexism, nationalism, etc. Such content expresses oppositional standpoints that question all forms of heteronomy and domination. So, there is counter-information and counter-hegemony that includes the

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> voices of the excluded, the oppressed, the dominated, the enslaved, the estranged, the exploited, and the dominated. One aim is to give voices to the voiceless, media power to the powerless as well as to transcend the filtering and censorship of information by corporate information monopolies, state monopolies, or cultural monopolies in public information and communication. (Fuchs, 2010:179)

Alternative media are often deprofessionalised. Atton (2009:265) submits that alternative media is produced by amateurs who have little or no training or professional qualifications as journalists but write and report from their position as citizens, as members of communities, as activists and as fans. Alternative media is also radical. Atton (2003:267) argues that "alternative media may be understood as a radical challenge to the professionalized and institutionalized practices of the mainstream media". Alternative media are radical due to their oppositional practices, collective and anti-hierarchical forms of organisation. Atton (2002) observes that alternative media employ radical measures of production such as low-cost technologies and distribution, for example, pirate radio broadcasting and graffiti.. The radical form of alternative media also arises from its link with social movements and marginalised peoples' quest for progressive socio-political change or counterhegemonic transformation. Kozolanka, Mazepa and Skinner (2012:3) note that alternative media flourish to cover gaps left by mainstream media in addressing specific social, cultural, political and economic issues of marginalised people. Alternative media can be seen as the communicative dimension of the counterpublic sphere (Fuchs, 2010). The counterpublic sphere exists to give voice to opposing ideals healthy for a democracy. Tied with the notion of counterpublic sphere is that alternative media embody the Gramscian notion of counterhegemonic discourses, hence they are anti-establishment.

## 2.9 Defining citizen participation

Citizen journalism and alternative media have the potential to democratise news production and open decision making processes for participation by ordinary citizens. This is so because citizen journalism and alternative media are based on the active participation of audiences in the process of gathering, selecting, analysing and distribution of news. This discussion seeks to develop an operational definition of participation in the media mindful that "there is no generalized, universal notion of participation; [as] it always takes place under specific circumstances and is embodied in particular practices" (Dahlgren, 2018:2054). Carpentier (2011) emphasises that participation is interdisciplinary and can be applied in different fields of study such as democratic theory, spatial planning, museums and the arts, development, communication and the media.

A useful starting point to understand participation in journalism and in the media is to relook at traditional journalism and the practices of mainstream media. Carpentier, Dahlgren and Pasquali

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(2013:290) submit that production in mainstream media is restricted to professionals "who are characterized by the possession of specific forms of expertise and skills, institutional embeddedness and autonomy and the deployment of management and power strategies to achieve specific objectives". Since independence from British colonial rule in 1980, Zimbabwe has maintained a repressive and monolithic media environment. The country's mainstream serves the interests of the state and the political elite and remains closed for citizen participation in newsmaking processes and decision making by limiting citizen participation to letters to the editor and guest columns that correspond with the gatekeepers' ideological and editorial interests. Carpentier (2019:17) argues that participation results in efforts to even out "inequalities and exclusions" that may exist in mainstream media. Traditional journalism and mainstream media use the logic of professionalism to close out citizen participation in news production processes. Waisbord (2013:106) argues that professionalism is elitist, technocratic and disables participation of citizens in journalism. He adds "professions represent exclusivity and hierarchy rather than multiple voices, ample deliberation, and broad participation" (p.115). Citizen journalism and alternative media challenge the whole notion of professionalism in journalism by allowing citizen participation.

Fish (2013: 374) defines participation as referring "to amateurs having the competencies or access to engage with otherwise closed socio-technical systems". He adds that participation refers to amateurs acting together individually, collectively, or with organisations in fields otherwise dominated by gatekeepers or professionals. Hujanen (2016: 872) defines participation in news "as a shared and collaborative practice, and [that which refers] to journalists who listen to and reflect a variety of voices, avoid monology, and stimulate discussion and engagement". In this study, participation is defined as a process whereby lay or amateur audiences are invited to engage with news production processes that used to be the preserve of experts. By participating in journalism, ordinary citizens are able to take part in and access otherwise closed journalistic processes of newsmaking. A second view of participation adopted in this study is one advanced by Carpentier (2016:72) who notes that participation describes the activities of non-professionals, in particular, how they use and contribute to a platform. Thus, participation in this study referred to the processes by which ordinary citizens were invited to participate in news production at AMH Voices and how they used or contributed to the platform. Usher (2014:18) observes that "participation challenges the traditional norms of journalism by suggesting that anyone, at any time, could become a reporter". Participation is therefore, an open journalistic practice which deprofessionalises the practice of journalism.

Carpentier (2011:67) says participation in the media is of two types: "participation *in* the media and *through* the media" [italics original author's emphasis]. Carpentier (2011:68) notes "participation in the media deals with participation in the production of media output (content-related participation)

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and in media organizational decision making (structural participation)". Participation in the media entails power sharing between media professionals and audience members. Carpentier (2011:67) submits that "participation through the media deals with the opportunities for mediated participation in public debate and for self-representation in the variety of public spaces that characterize the social". Participation through the media enables audience members to voice their opinion in the public sphere and by doing so, potentially impact on political decision making.

Carpentier (2011:11) posits that there are four structuring elements that play (dis)enabling roles within participatory processes; these being identity, technology, organisation and quality. My focus in this study was on how technology and organisation enabled citizen participation in journalistic processes. The technology dimension looked at how digital technologies were utilised by professional journalists to engage with ordinary citizens in newsmaking and how citizen journalists used technology to produce and share news content on AMH Voices. The organisational dimension was applied to study how the AMH group institutionalised participation in its everyday work and which organisational factors were (dis)enabling citizen participation.

In researching how citizen participation was enacted at AMH Voices, I was also guided by Carpentier's (2015:18) categorisation of participatory process as minimalist or maximalist. In minimalist media participation, media professionals retain strong control over process and outcome of participation. Citizen participation "remains articulated as a contribution to the public sphere but often mainly serves the needs and interests of the mainstream media system itself" (Carpentier, 2015:19). Peters and Witschge (2015:26) observe that in minimalist media participation, audience members have limited interaction with professional journalists and contribute to the stories "post-hoc, after news is presented as finished product". Minimalist participation can be equated to partial participation, which Paterman quoted in Carpentier (2016:73) defines as "a process in which two or more parties influence each other in the making of decisions but the final power to decide rests with one party only". Maximalist media participation enables citizens to contribute news content via a particular platform, there is dialogue and consultation in news production at editorial level and there is co-design of the news agenda, news angles and stories (Peters & Witschge; 2015:26). It promotes audience diversity and heterogeneity (Carpentier, 2015). Maximalist participation can also be equated to full participation which Paterman in Carpentier (2016:73) defines as "a process where each individual member of a decision making body has equal power to determine the outcome of decisions".

In my analysis of citizen participation in content production at AMH Voices, I applied an analytical model propounded by Domingo, Quandt, Heinonen, Paulussen, Singer and Vujnovic (2008) who classify media organisations by their different levels of openness to citizen participation. Domingo *et*

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*al* (2008:336) defined very open to participation media organisations as enabling citizens to participate both as contributors and managers. Moderately open to participation media organisations allow citizens to only participate as contributors or managers as long as they fit some loose criteria. Slightly open to participation media organisations allow citizens to only participate as contributors with very strict rules and filters. In closed to participation media organisations, citizens cannot contribute to the production process. The model focuses on citizen participation at different stages of the news production process these being 1) access/ observation, which is concerned with explicit invitations by news media organisations to their audiences to participate by submitting story ideas; 2) selection/filtering, which entails citizen participation in choosing what stories will be published; 3)processing/editing, which is concerned with the extent to which citizens can submit news stories without professional gatekeeping processes; 4) distribution, which focuses on the extent to which users can email or share news stories; and 5) interpretation, which is the opportunity for readers to debate current events. In applying the model, I focused on how citizen participation increases or decreases at each level of news production. The model further analyses the professional, organisational, legal, market and social contexts that (dis)encourage citizen participation.

Domingo *et al* (2008:339) in their study of media industry trends in Europe and the United States established that there was a "general reluctance to open up most of the news production process to the active involvement of citizens […] as professionals kept the decision making power at each stage". However, their findings are from a western perspective and much has changed since their seminal study of 2008. This study offers a de-Westernised context for the study of citizen participation in journalism and provides further insight into the quality of citizen contribution in the public sphere through a critical discourse analysis of citizen journalism news content.

There are benefits of citizen participation in journalism. By participating, citizens can enrich the quality of journalism news stories through reporter-initiated crowdsourcing and online comments and feedback. As active participants, citizens can determine and structure the news agenda of the media thereby reversing traditional unidirectional journalism practices. Hujanen (2016: 875) observes that another benefit for participation in journalism is that "citizens' debates are portrayed as richness of democracy and multivoicing public discussion [that] bring people's voices and faces into the public sphere, and strengthen freedom of expression". Robinson and Wang (2018:92) argue that citizens' participation in news production serves a civic function as information is gathered and disseminated to advance certain agendas concerning the daily life of citizens. When citizens participate in journalism, they play an active role in problem solving and community building through solutions-based journalism. However, there are limitations to citizen participation in journalism. Quandt (2018:37) introduces the concept of dark participation as "the evil flip side of citizen engagement".

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He notes that participatory journalism has failed to leave up to its expectations as "comment sections of online news media are flooded with hateful messages, opinion mongering and incivility" forcing many news media to restrict participation.

## 2.10 Defining newsmaking practices

Although digital technologies have become central to journalists' work, they have changed traditional newsmaking practices by enabling citizen participation in previously closed news production processes. Postil (2010:1) notes that "practices are the embodied sets of activities that humans perform with varying degrees of regularity, competence and flair". Media practices are typically studied using ethnographic methods and usually focus on production work at media institutions and the consumption of media products by groups or individuals. The focus of this study was on the everyday news production practices at AMH Voices, exploring how citizen journalists gathered, edited and packaged news. Newsmaking is related to the process of entextualisation, which Peterson (2003:165) describes as "the practices by which a particular set of symbols and technologies is employed to make a socially recognisable, meaningful text". Due to citizen participation in news production processes, Robinson (2011:138) calls for "an end to thinking about news as a discrete product and the beginning of considering news production as a shared, distributed *action* with multiple authors, shifting institution-audience relationships and altered labour dynamics for everyone involved" [italics author's original emphasis]. Mabweazara (2018:2) submits that journalism "is an inherently *contextually-rooted* profession" [italics author's original emphasis] and newsmaking practices occur in "specific socio-cultural, political and economic settings". Against this, my study of newsmaking practices at AMH Voices focused on institutional and contextual factors that constrained citizen journalists' newsmaking practices, such organisational policies, editorial priorities, interests of ownership and control, legislation and technology.

Digital tools enable journalists to involve citizens in news production through crowdsourcing, web analytics and curation of user-generated content. Ryfe (2012:163) describes crowdsourcing as the act of outsourcing work once done by an individual to a group. It takes advantage of the fact that networks make it easy for groups of people to collaborate with one another. Fish (2013:377) defines crowdsourcing as an "explicit form of participation" by which media organisations outsource labour "to anyone anywhere with an Internet connection". Aitamurto (2017:185) describes crowdsourcing as an open journalistic practice that relies on voluntary contributions of the crowd towards a journalistic activity based on the participants' "intrinsically driven motivations, such as a sense of civic duty to contribute, ideological reasoning, or the fun derived from the activity". Journalists crowdsource information such as pictures about news events and story tips regularly on their websites.

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One of the disadvantages of crowdsourcing is catalysing user engagement. Ryfe (2012: 166) notes that "if the crowd does not want to write news about the city hall, then no news about city hall will be written. And if the crowd wants to talk about and write about the latest in swimsuit fashions, then that is what it will do". This points to the fact that getting audiences committed to contribute to certain news issues that are of interest to the journalists is sometimes difficult.

The use of web analytics is an equally changing newsmaking practice. Through web analytics, journalists can track and monitor audience behaviour online such as on their official webpage, Facebook page, Twitter handle and on Instagram. By tracking audiences' behaviours online, journalists can determine which stories are most read, shared and rated. Web analytics influences numerous stages of the news construction process, in particular, story placement and promotion and story planning and selection. Tandoc Jr (2017:294) notes "web analytics are also being used to guide decisions on earlier stages of news construction, such as deciding which story topics to pursue and how to deploy newsroom resources".

Content curation is another newsmaking practice resulting from the use of digital technologies by audiences to create user-generated content. Guerrini (2013:7) defines a content curator as "basically someone who takes an inordinate mass of material, and turns chaos into order". Curators take "the flood of atomized content coming from users […] verify and add context to what […] they think to be relevant, and feed it onto Web pages or mobile applications", (Guerrini, 2013:7). Guallar (2014:2) describes content curation as a system based on continuously searching, selecting, characterising and disseminating value added, relevant content from several web information sources about specific topic(s) and specific area(s), aimed at specific audience(s) usually web-based audiences, thereby establishing a link with its audience/users. In this study, content curation was defined as activities of professional journalists that entail searching, selecting, sense making and sharing of citizen's user-generated content as valuable news content. The newsmaking practices of crowdsourcing, web analytics, shovelware and content curation as observed at AMH Voices are discussed in detail in Chapter 5.

## 2.11 Summary

This chapter provided an explanation of the central concepts of citizen journalism and alternative media that underpin this study. The research themes of citizen participation and newsmaking practices were also discussed. There is a growing amount of research that focuses on citizen journalism since it gained universal currency in 2005. Most studies tend to focus on the interplay of citizen journalism with thematic issues of crises, ethics, collaboration with mainstream media, political activism and radical democracy and citizenship. Regrettably, most of these studies reflect a geographical bias to

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the North America, Western Europe, Asia Pacific and Arabic North Africa, reinforcing a need for more recent studies on everyday citizen journalism and alternative media in sub-Sahara Africa. With regards to research methodology, a great number of the studies deployed qualitative methods of data gathering and analysis, which resonated with the qualitative design used in this study, as discussed in Chapter 4.

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# Chapter Three
# Theoretical framework

## 3.1. Introduction

For any research to be meaningful, it must be aligned to and guided by theory (Imenda, 2014:186). This chapter introduces and describes the theoretical framework and departure points of this study. The purpose of the theoretical framework is to provide a perspective, or lens, through which to examine a topic and to explore, interpret or explain research phenomena under study (Imenda, 2014:188). Grant and Osanloo (2014:21), assert that theoretical frameworks function as abstract and logical guides that demarcate the start of the research problem and the methodological direction they take. Central to this chapter is an endeavour to show how the public sphere and critical political economy (CPE) theories provide insight into the research problem. Chapter 1 has engaged with both theories at introductory level to explain the research problem and context. The task of this chapter is to engage in a deeper understanding of the theories and to seek their empirical application to the study.

## 3.2. Towards a critical theory tradition

This study gravitates towards a critical theory tradition as will be explained below. Kellner and Durham (2001: xi) note that "a theory is a way of seeing, an optic, that focuses on a specific subject matter". Laughey (2007:4) defines theory as "a way of thinking that is more systematic and sophisticated". The purpose of theory is to describe, interpret, contextualise, predict, extrapolate, explain, challenge and advance intellect through evidence, comprehend the phenomenon under study and to make reasoned predictions about the future (Kellner & Durham, 2001; Boyd-Barret, 2002; Williams, 2003). The purpose of theory in this research was to explain the structural and contextual factors that constrained and enabled citizen journalism and alternative media in Zimbabwe. Boyd-Barret (2002) asserts that in the field of communications, theory is divided into traditional and critical theory, following a similar categorisation of research traditions. Administrative research is often empirical, quantitative and geared to improving the effectiveness and profitability of the media. In contrast, critical media research is policy oriented, addresses issues of public concern and studies media institutions within a socio-political and economic context (Boyd-Barret, 2002:26). By adopting the critical perspective of the public sphere theory and CPE, this study is inherently critical.

Fuchs (2015:1) defines critical theory as "an approach that studies society in a dialectical way by analysing political economy, domination, exploitation, and ideologies". McKinnon (2009:238) observes that "contemporary critical theory is not a unified theory but should be understood as a loose

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set of theoretical frameworks that all share the goal of critiquing domination with the end goal of social change". It is founded on the belief that domination by whosoever is a problem and that a domination-free society is needed. For studies to qualify as critical, they must adopt a neo-Marxist approach; critique domination; focus on the reproduction of ideology and hegemony; propose an agenda or blueprint for social transformation and emancipation; and, must be interdisciplinary (McKinnon, 2009). In view of the above, this study can be considered critical scholarship because it focused on citizen journalism and alternative media as ways of critiquing traditional journalism practice and challenging the dominion of the mainstream in Zimbabwe. McKinnon (2009:237) observes that "critical theory offers frameworks to analyse the complexities and contradictions of marginalization and resistance in societies" and "to open possibilities for the emancipation of people, meanings, and values". In keeping with this, the research investigated how citizens marginalised by the mainstream media in Zimbabwe found their voice through citizen journalism and resisted hegemonic messages by resorting to alternative media spaces such as AMH Voices. The use of interdisciplinary approaches, in particular, radical democratic theories from political science to enhance the public sphere theory; critical discourse analysis from linguistics to explain language use in news narratives; and, ethnography from social anthropology to examine the lived cultures of citizen journalists, qualified the study as critical. Therefore, at both theoretical and methodological levels, the study is inherently critical.

## 3.3. Radical democratic theories

Citizen journalism and alternative media are best studied in relation to radical democracy because they have discursive, technical, and institutional practices that are similar to radical democracy (Pickard, 2006). The production of alternative media and citizen journalism are examples of active citizenship, participation and deliberation that characterise radical democracy. Radical democracy is the theory and practice of democratic political contestation. Dahlberg and Siapera (2007:7) observe that a major concern of radical democracy is "with conceptualizing and realizing equality and liberty". Starr (2008:40) says radical democracy emphasises "active citizenship and equal power". Cohen and Fung (2004:24) note that radical democrats are committed to broader participation in public decision making and deliberation, through various platforms including the media. They note that "instead of a politics of power and interest, radical democrats favour a more deliberative democracy in which citizens address public problems by reasoning together about how best to solve them". Downey (2007:142) proposes that radical democracy must be "understood as being advanced through a heterogeneous public sphere of multiple and contesting deliberative publics, both dominant and counter". Dahlberg and Siapera (2007:6) see the internet as central to radical democracy practice because "marginalized groups are able to develop counter-discourses (including practices and

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cultures) that can challenge and resist domination". Deliberative democracy and radical pluralism are the two approaches of radical democracy. Deliberative democracy emanates from the critical theory approach, which emphasises rational discourse and consensus in the public sphere espoused by Habermas in 1964 in the German edition of *The structural transformation of the public sphere.* Radical pluralism emphasises agonistic pluralism and counterpublic spheres drawing insights from French post-structuralism exemplified by the work of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe in 1988 in the *Hegemony and socialist strategy* (Little & Lloyd 2009). Despite their differences, both consensus and conflict-oriented theories of radical democracy stress the need for citizens to participate in dialogue, debate, and deliberation (Bailey, Cammaerts & Carpentier, 2008:11).

## 3.4. Deliberative democracy and the Habermasian public sphere

Deliberative democracy has a close association with the public sphere theory. Starr (2008:37) defines deliberative democracy as a system of "government by discussion" that works through citizen participation "as free and equal, in discursive will formation". Deliberative democracy is born out of the idea that political problems can be resolved through the force of better argument and that deliberation, committed to the values of rationality and impartiality, is the best way to resolve disputes (Dahlberg & Siapera, 2007:8). Habermas is regarded as the philosophical father and a prominent advocate of deliberative democracy through his public sphere theory, (Cunningham, 2002). Habermas (1964:49) defines the public sphere as "a realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed". He adds that a public sphere comes into being in every conversation in which private individuals assemble to form a public body. Fraser (1990:57) a feminist critic of Habermas and proponent of the concept of counterpublic spheres, argues that a public sphere "designates a theatre in modern societies in which political participation is enacted through the medium of talk". Communication is central to the public sphere theory because it is a deliberative platform. To this end, some scholars have advanced communication and media centred conceptualisations of the public sphere. Dahlgren (2005:148) advances that "in schematic terms, a functioning public sphere is understood as a constellation of communicative spaces in society that permit the circulation of information, ideas, debates— ideally in an unfettered manner—and also the formation of political will". Journalism and the media are regarded as the main institutions of the contemporary public sphere that act as conduits for the free flow of information and discursive spaces for issues of public concern. Mass media forms such as newspapers, radio, television, journals, books, pamphlets and the internet represent the contemporary public sphere. The public sphere is radically democratic because decision making processes are subjected to the rational and critical deliberations, hence democratic power emanates from the communicative rationality of ordinary citizens rather than

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from the formal decision making processes of administrative, political, and economic elites (Dahlberg, 2007: 128).

Papacharissi (2002:10) asserts that the origin of the public sphere idea can be traced back to ancient Greek agoras which were characterised by "open exchanges of political thoughts and ideas". She adds that the term "public" calls for citizen participation in public affairs, "commonality, and things not private, but accessible and observable by all". Warner (2002:50) argues that the "public" in the public sphere is not "an actually existing set of potentially enumerable humans" but a "space of discourse organized by nothing other than discourse itself". Warner (2002:51) insists that a public is text based and "neither *crowd* nor *audience* nor *people* nor *group* will capture the same sense" [italics author's original emphasis]. Warner points out that publics exist if they are linked to particular discourses or texts. My conceptualisation of the "public" in the public sphere was that of interconnected citizens that were actively participating in journalistic processes at AMH Voices and contributing to the deliberation of public affairs.

The most important characteristics of the public sphere are consensus and the common good; rationality; universal access and equal participation; fundamental freedoms; active citizenship; and neutrality and autonomy. In the public sphere, reasoned deliberations lead to consensus and the common good (Cunningham, 2002). Fraser (1990:58) notes that the public sphere is a body of "private persons" assembled to discuss matters of "public concern" or "common interest". In the public sphere, citizens engage in bargaining of values, change their own preferences, agree to disagree and the preferred outcomes of common good carry the day (Cunningham, 2002). This research investigated how consensus and the common good were achieved at AMH Voices.

Calhoun (1992:13) asserts that in the Habermasian public sphere, a "rational argument was the sole arbiter of any issue". Habermas envisaged a public sphere where rationality of the argument carried the day rather than the identity of the speaker. Rationality is distinguished by impartiality and intellectual honesty among the participants (Stromback, 2005:337). In public sphere discussions, citizens must offer reasons justifying their positions without using emotions, domination and coercion of other participants. The ideal public sphere has universal access and equal participation. Habermas envisaged an ideal speech situation in which people could debate issues based solely on the merits of their arguments, uninfluenced by inequalities in participants' social, economic, or legal standing (Gastil, 2009:300). The public sphere must be a non-discriminatory open forum thriving on plurality and diversity of opinion, accessible freely to all citizens as equals. Starr (2008:37) observes that equal participation is preceded by "mutual respect between those on opposing sides and seeks to create a basis for cooperation that transcends particular moral and political disagreements". This research

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investigated the extent to which AMH Voices was universally accessible to competing ideas and societal groups.

The public sphere requires active citizenship. Stromback, (2005:337) describes the role of active citizenship as follows:

> Citizens should, to begin with, be politically interested and engaged. They should try to find the information necessary to understand a particular issue, and be able to link factual conditions, underlying moral values, and proposed solutions as to what consequences are likely. If discussions are to be deliberative, the participants should foster values such as trust, integrity and tolerance, as well as behaviours such as listening, reflecting and getting the facts right. Also, a willingness to change views and opinions must exist. Without these values and behaviours, deliberative discussions are unlikely to occur.

Active citizenship in the public sphere is played out when citizens engage in public dialogue in and through the media. In this study, active citizenship was investigated as the extent to which citizens initiated online discussions that were rational and served the common good.

The public sphere must be neutral and autonomous for the free delivery of critical and rational debate without fear and favour. Habermas (1964:49) argues that "although state authority is so to speak the executor of the political public sphere, it is not a part of it". The public sphere must be independent of the authority of the church, market and the state to allow for critical debate. Calhoun (1992:13) notes that "all sorts of topics over which church and state authorities had hitherto exercised a virtual monopoly of interpretation were open to discussion in as much as the public defined its discourse as focusing on all matters of common concern". This research investigated the extent to which AMH Voices was neutral and autonomous from the state and official economy. The public sphere means that fundamental freedoms of expression and associated are upheld, (Kellner, 2000:264). Habermas (1964:49) argues that "citizens behave as a public body when they confer in an unrestricted fashion-that is, with the guarantee of freedom of assembly and association and the freedom to express and publish their opinions-about matters of general interest". This research investigated the extent to which AMH Voices guaranteed citizens' freedom of speech and the right to freely participate in political debate and decision making.

### 3.4.1 Critique of the public sphere theory

Kellner and Durham (2001: xii) observe that "all given theories have their limitations as well as strengths, their blindspots as well as illuminating perspectives". Blindspots are the weaknesses or demerits that are evident in a theory on close scrutiny, field testing or empirical application.

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Habermas's public sphere theory has received mixed reviews that have resulted in Habermas (1996) modifying some of his initial thoughts in his book *Between facts and norms.* Goode (2005:1) observes:

> There is a paradox in the reception of the Habermasian idea of the public sphere. On the one hand, it seems like well-trodden territory. In fact, it is now increasingly dismissed as idealistic, Eurocentric and unwittingly patriarchal. On the other hand, it continues to be routinely invoked in debates around democracy, citizenship and communication.

Susen (2011:58) identified six blindspots of the public sphere theory these being i. bourgeois-centric; ii. Idealistic; iii. Gender blind; iv. Rationalistic; v. Universalistic; and vi. Dichotomous.

i. Bourgeois-centric

The Habermasian public sphere has been criticised for being a bourgeois space that was not as easily accessible hence being bourgeois centred. Susen (2011:58) criticises Habermas for focusing "almost exclusively on the hegemonic public sphere of the ruling class, thereby underestimating the social and political significance of alternative public spheres". Kellner (2000) accuse Habermas for idealising the bourgeois public sphere as a forum of rational discussion and debate when in fact certain groups were excluded from participation. Kellner (2000:270) observes that contrary to "populist celebration of diversity, tolerance, debate, and consensus, in actuality, the bourgeois public sphere was dominated by white, property-owning males". Fuchs (2014a:62) observes that it is possible proletarian public spheres formed by different and often competing constituencies such as women, gays and lesbians, and minority ethnicities could have existed parallel to the bourgeois public sphere in the 17$^{th,}$18$^{th}$ and 19$^{th}$ century. Habermas, in his theory, ignored these spheres as it was common to consider them as illegitimate. There is need to theorise of multiple subaltern counterpublics than one unified public sphere.

ii. Idealistic

Habermas's account of the 19$^{th}$ century public sphere has been dismissed as idealistic. Dagoula (2017:45) notes that "the basic principles of the Habermasian concept - openness, inclusiveness, equality, freedom - were beyond reproach, in reality they were simply illusions or ideologies". Dahlgren (1991:5) notes that the ideal of the bourgeois public sphere lacks concreteness and is distorted. He notes that it "is coloured both by a quality of romanticism verging on nostalgia as well as a pervasive pessimism". Susen (2011:53) says the public sphere is idealistic because it tends to overestimate the potential of rational-critical public discourse in creating the common good in society. It is doubtful that the ideal speech situation envisaged by Habermas could ever have been achieved. Some scholars have questioned Habermas's historical methods of analysis used in *The structural*

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*transformation of the public sphere*. They argue that his method of "historical excavation in search of a normative model of democracy relevant to the present" (Goode, 2005:29) is flawed because it focused on a specific period and location that is Europe during the Enlightenment period.

iii. Gender blind

Susen (2011:53) observes that the public sphere theory is gender blind because it does not account for the impact of sexist discrimination on the development of public life in modern society. Feminist scholars such as Fraser (1985:113) argue that the principal blindspot of Habermas' theory of the public sphere is a "failure to thematise the gender subtext of the relations and arrangements he describes". Fraser argues that the Habermasian public sphere was simply an unrealized utopian ideal which replicated prevalent ideological rationalisations of male dominance and female subordination. She notes that "masculinist gender constructs were built into the very conception of the republican public sphere […] to the formal exclusion from political life of women" (Fraser, 1985:98).

iv. Rationalistic

The public sphere theory has also been dismissed for being overly rationalistic, thus, assuming that communicative rationality drives human interaction. Susen (2011:540) argues that "the idea that the bourgeois public sphere is dominated by the continuous production of rational-critical discourses that endow society with an emancipatory potential rest on the short-sighted view that we can, and should, privilege rational over non-rational forms of engaging with the world". Habermas assumed that rational debate in a deliberative democracy leads to consensus and common good, precluding a radical conceptualisation of democracy as dissensus and conflict advanced by Chantel Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau (as the discussion below will indicate). Lunt and Stenner (2005) in their study of an emotional public sphere, *The Jerry Springer Show,* have demonstrated that rational and critical debates do not always occur as had been envisioned by Habermas. Their study perceives the show as an oppositional public sphere that focuses on issues of voice, the expression of marginal experiences and identities. Lunt and Stenner (2005) demonstrate that public spheres can also be characterised by emotions, conflict, scandal, sensationalism and private matters that contradict the Habermasian public theory of critical and rational debate.

v. Universalistic

Habermas proposes a one size fits all public sphere with universal characteristics. Susen (2011:540) notes that this weakness leads to a neglect of "the fact that advanced societies are composed of a multiplicity of competing, and often counter-hegemonic, public spheres". This view is echoed by Dahlgren (1991:6) who argues that Habermas "is silent on alternative, 'plebeian', popular, informal or oppositional public spheres" thereby leaving a big theoretic vacuum. Habermas failed to recognise counterpublic spheres that exist for the exchange of information, rumours, gossip and for cultural

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expression. By suggesting a universal model of the public sphere, Habermas failed to account for local dynamics such as those that exist in African countries. Berger (2002), while not conceding that the public sphere theory is Eurocentric, warns against the unthinkingly use of such western theories for analysing media systems in Africa. He proposes public sphere theory studies that are contextual because "many Africans are excluded from participation in the public sphere for reasons of government policy and practice, or due to factors of class, language, location, etc., while yet others are prevented by nationality and practical xenophobia" (Berger, 2002:35). If we are to use the public sphere theory in African countries such as Zimbabwe, we need to recognise contextual factors and "take into account not just who is excluded, but who is included, and with what effects" (Berger, 2002:35). Wimmer (2005) has rejected that the public sphere theory can be universally applied, arguing that it is largely Europeanised. Fuchs (2014a:65) draws upon the cultural imperialism critique to dismiss the public sphere as a "Western enlightenment concept that Western societies use for trying to impose their political, economic and social systems on other countries". Cultural imperialism critiques view multinational news media corporations such as the Cable News Network (CNN) and the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) as part of a plot to develop a global public sphere dominated by the capitalist West.

vi. Dichotomous

Another criticism of the Habermasian public sphere theory is its dichotomous view of society as a binary distinction between the public and the private. Fraser (1990:62) points that a blindspot is "the assumption that discourse in public spheres should be restricted to deliberation about the common good, and that the appearance of "private interests" and "private issues" is always undesirable". Fraser (1990) insists that issues such as gender-based violence and women's sexuality that occur in the private spheres of home equally merit discussion in a public sphere because ignoring them perpetuates gender inequalities.

Nonetheless, the merits of Habermasian public sphere theory are also still recognised. Dahlgren (1991:2) observes "the public sphere should be understood as an *analytic category,* a conceptual device which, while pointing to a specific social phenomenon can also aid us in analysing and researching the phenomenon" [italics author's original emphasis]. The theory illuminates the ideal roles of the media in facilitating public deliberations, calling upon the media to be an open market for the exchange of ideas and to be accessible to all parties. In this study, the public sphere theory was applied to understand citizen participation in citizen journalism and alternative media in Zimbabwe. Beyond journalism and media studies, the public sphere theory has been lauded for contributing to radical democratic theory. Fraser (2007:7) notes that "the public sphere was developed not simply to understand communication flows but to contribute a normative political theory of

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democracy". The public sphere theory therefore functions both as an analytical tool and as a normative theory for democracy (Willems, 2012:14).

Recent works conceive of a public sphere not as a single site but as the interlocking of multiple networks and spaces. Ndlela (2007:327) observes that changes in the conceptualisation of the public sphere theory are reflected in additional terms such as "mainstream public spheres", "alternative public spheres", "indigenous public spheres", "counter-public spheres", "transnational public spheres", "regional public spheres" and "global public spheres". This observation is affirmed by Fraser (2007:7) who notes that it is now commonplace to talk of "transnational public spheres", "diasporic public spheres", "Islamic public spheres" and even an emerging "global public sphere". Despite the ongoing structural transformations of the public sphere in a digital society and its blind spots, the theory remains valid in explicating the media-democracy nexus. Habermas has revised his theory and recognised the existence of alternative public spheres that have the capacity to challenge domination. This brings us to the discussion on radical pluralism and counterpublic spheres that challenge the original theorising of the Habermasian public sphere.

## 3.5. Radical pluralism and counterpublic spheres

Bray and Slaughter (2015:108) argue that a key challenge with deliberative democracy is how to facilitate and institutionalise deliberation because "the sheer variety of voices and interests makes arriving at a consensus position on a given issue extremely difficult". For this reason, some scholars such as Fraser (1990) and Mouffe (2014) have proposed conflict-oriented approaches to radical democracy and oppositional public spheres. Radical pluralism, also known as agonistic pluralism, was initially outlined by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe in their book, *Hegemony and socialist strategy* (HSS) in 1988. Carpentier and Cammaerts (2006:965) observe that HSS is radical because it encompasses the extension of democracy into the social realm through an understanding of marginalised discourses and societal conflict. Mouffe (2014:154) notes that the agonistic model of democracy "is an analytical approach, formulated as an alternative to the aggregative and deliberative models". The agonistic model conceives pluralist democracy having an antagonistic dimension possibly manifesting itself as a friend/enemy confrontation or as a confrontation among adversaries (Mouffe, 2014:150). Mouffe sees the conflictual nature of radical pluralism stemming from the impossibility of reconciling all points of view. Similarly, Dahlberg and Siapera (2007:9) add that radical pluralism starts with a recognition that "communities are plural and relations between them are often antagonistic". This antagonism is fundamental to politics and its dynamism. Participation in politics is a struggle to reclaim and extend freedom and equality by the subordinated. Mouffe (2014:152) observes that "the permanent questioning of dominant identities and ideas is central to the

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agonistic struggle". Radical pluralism recognises that agonism and conflict are necessary forces that shape political and societal consensuses. Cunningham (2002:185) adds that conflict within democratic politics involves competition among the various groupings in a society to turn state power to their own ends while preventing any group from occupying it. Cunningham (2002: 184) notes that a key concern of radical pluralists is "to turn conflict, seen by some as a problem for democracy, into one of its virtues". Radical pluralists recognise that conflict is unavoidable hence they seek to institutionalise it into democratic culture and practices as a bulwark against autocracy. Radical pluralism calls upon citizens to participate in dialogue, debate, and deliberation albeit in oppositional public spheres. Mouffe (2014:151) "sees the public sphere as the battlefield on which hegemonic projects confront one another, with no possibility of a final reconciliation".

Radical pluralism is useful in understanding the contribution of citizen journalism and alternative media to the attainment of democracy and how struggles and discourses that resist domination and oppression occur in the media. Dahlberg (2007:129) argues that media research that adopts an agonistic position deploys the concept of counterpublics, which see the media as a contested terrain for marginalised groups and a site of political struggle and conflict. Media research from the agonistic position also focuses on two types of discourses, the dominant and marginalised. Dahlberg (2007:134) submits that "dominant discourses are those that have achieved, and attempt to maintain, authoritative or hegemonic status" using mainstream media and official channels of communication. Dominant discourses are in a negative relationship to subordinate discourses that are often weak and associated with excluded and marginalised voices. Agonists see the alternative media as supportive of marginalised discourses because: they are a deliberative space that draw upon and strengthen marginalised discourses; they link up with other excluded voices in developing representative, strategically effective counter discourses; and, they contest meanings and practices of the mainstream (Downey, 2007:134).

The concept of counterpublics which is central to radical pluralism was first espoused by Fraser (1990) in a direct response to Habermas and his theory of the public sphere. Since the post 1989 Habermasian era, counterpublics have gained societal relevance as spaces for marginalised citizens to collectively embark in discursive conflict and negotiation as part of the radical democratic project's pursuit for justice (Downey & Fenton, 2003). Fraser (1990), in her criticism of the Habermasian public sphere, said excluded, subordinated and marginalised social groups such as women, workers, peoples of colour, and gays and lesbians formed their own counter or alternative public spheres. Fraser (1990:67) called these "subaltern counterpublics" and defined them as "parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counter discourses, which in turn permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs".

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Counterpublics are therefore a response to social exclusion in the mainstream public spheres formed by a community of individuals who connect via a collective identity and counterhegemonic discourses. Downey and Fenton (2003:193) note that "counter-public sphere is suggestive of a politics that seeks to challenge the dominant public sphere rather than simply be independent from it". Kaiser (2017:1664) asserts that counterpublics are opposed to the dominant hegemony and are structured around specific issues that are morally or politically polarizing. Counterpublics are subsumed under alternative media. Alternative media such as blogsites, electronic mailing lists, wikis, forums, and citizen journalism platforms exemplified in this study by AMH Voices, are potential counterpublics for citizens in repressive countries. The most prominent strategy of counterpublics is to contest the hegemonic position, through measures such as establishing new frames, reframing news stories, or setting new topics. Online comments in news websites are also an influential way to communicate one's ideas and are a form of counterpublics used to argue the mainstream position. This research investigated how AMH Voices functioned as a counterpublic sphere that advanced the voices of the marginalised in society and contested discourses of the hegemonic order.

## 3.6. Empirical application of public sphere theory

Although the Habermasian public sphere theory has been overtaken by geopolitical and technological changes, Lunt and Livingstone (2013) observe that media studies have a long-standing fascination with it. Today there is a renewed interest in the public sphere theory because digital information and communication technologies have reconfigured it, thereby offering us new optics to understand its functionality in a digitised society. Dagoula (2017:5) observes that "technological advancements pose questions about the value, the sufficiency and the sustainability of Habermas' theory in a digital epoch". It is possible to view citizen journalism and alternative media as conduits of both the public sphere and counterpublic sphere. This is so because citizen journalism and alternative media have real life resemblances of both the public sphere and counterpublic spheres, where citizen participation and deliberation are acted out and a variety of views are articulated (Rodrigues & Braham, 2008).In this research, I firstly investigated how AMH Voices functioned as a public sphere that afforded deliberation leading to reasoned consensus. Secondly, I investigated how AMH Voices served as a counterpublic sphere, which fuelled agonism, conflict and dissensus.

Dagoula (2017:5) argues that the public sphere theory has a "normative and a pragmatic side". In empirically applying the theory, I followed Dahlgren's (2005) three constitutive dimensions of structures, representation, and interaction that are used in analysing any given public sphere. The structural dimension of the public sphere has to do with the formal institutional features of media organisations, including their political economy, financing ownership and control and legal

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frameworks that constrain the media. Dahlgren (2005:148) observes that "the structural dimension thus directs our attention to such classic democratic issues as freedom of speech, access, and the dynamic of inclusion/exclusion". Beyond the organisation of the media themselves, the structural dimension also points to society's political institutions, which impact on the media. In this research, the structural dimension of the public sphere was analysed through the CPE theory, which was deemed to be more relevant. The representational dimension refers to the output of the media. Dahlgren (2005:149) notes that "in this dimension, one can raise all of the familiar questions and criteria about media output including fairness, accuracy, completeness, pluralism of views, agenda setting, ideological tendencies, modes of address, and so forth". Critical discourse analysis was employed as the method for analysing the representational dimension of the public sphere. The focus was on the news content produced by citizen journalists at AMH Voices. Dahlgren (2005:149) submits that the interaction dimension of the public sphere refers to "the citizens' encounters with the media—the communicative processes of making sense, interpreting, and using the output" and the "interaction that is between citizens themselves, which can include anything from two-person conversations to large meetings". In this research, the interaction dimension of the public sphere was investigated through a virtual observation of citizen participation behaviours and discursive practices at AMH Voices.

## 3.7. Critical political economy

The field of political economy of media and communications has many traditions and debates dating back to the 1940s (Meehan & Wasko, 2013). It is frequently tagged simply as political economy without the prefix "critical", which signals the application of Marxist principles and methods of analysis. However, Meehan and Wasko (2013:40) state that "scholars who identify as political economists of the media are generally assumed to take a critical approach and to work within Marxist traditions". In this study, CPE theory was used to investigate the structural and contextual factors that constrained citizen journalism and alternative media in Zimbabwe. CPE was selected because it can explain the production of journalism within a specific political and economic system, which is linked to other central structures of society such as technology, legislation and culture. CPE is premised on a notion that journalistic output like a news story in a broadcast news bulletin or daily newspaper passes through a series of production processes upon which value is added at each level of production. The production of the final journalistic output is ultimately impacted on by structural and contextual factors such as ownership and control of media institutions, institutional policies and priorities and the broader operational environment of politics, economy, culture and technology. Herman and Chomsky (1988: xi) define political economy of the media as involving analysis of factors "such as ownership and control, dependence on other major funding sources, selection of right-thinking

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personnel and by the editors' and working journalists' internalization of priorities and definitions of newsworthiness that conform to the institution's policy". Kellner (2009:21) observes that "the term political economy calls attention to the fact that the production, distribution, and reception of culture take place within a specific economic and political system constituted by relations between the state, the economy, social institutions and practices, culture, and organizations like the media". Mosco (2009:2) argues that "political economy is the study of the social relations, particularly the power relations that mutually constitute the production, distribution, and consumption of resources, including communication resources".

Graham (2006: 494) defines political economy as "the study of how values of all kinds are produced, distributed, exchanged, and consumed (the economic); how power is produced, distributed, and exercised (the political); and how these aspects of the social world are related at any given place and time". Natalie (2007:26) defines critical political economy as an approach seeking to "reveal how forms of financing and organizing cultural production has consequences for public discourses and representations and the public's access to them within a broad context of social and economic structures". She adds that "critical political economy is concerned to explain the economic dynamics of production structure public discourse by promoting certain cultural forms over others" (p.13). Thus, CPE views journalism and the media as narrowing the range of discourses and privileging those that reflect the dominant ideology of the ruling political and economic elite that control the media industries. Boyd-Barret (2002:7) defines CPE as an approach to the study of media that "places things structural above things cultural" by insisting that "the production of media products whether news, journalism/film, advertising, drama, popular music or whatever - is *structurally constrainedly* by economic and political factors, especially those of ownership and control of the media industries" [italics author's original emphasis]. Because CPE places great emphasis on the structure and its effect on the production of media output, how media consumers interact with texts to realize meaning is therefore beyond the scope of CPE analysis and of this research. In this study, CPE was defined as an approach that focuses on the production and distribution of journalistic output within a given social system and how it is affected by the intentional actions of owners, editors and structural constraints of politics, economics, technology, culture and legislation.

CPE is a critique of capitalism founded on a Marxist/neo-Marxist framework hence it is a critical perspective (Graham, 2006). A primary concern with CPE practitioners is the allocation of resources within capitalist societies. CPE is opposed to capitalist monopoly of media systems and grand aggrandisement by media moguls. Fuchs (2014b:2719) observes that CPE "is oriented on a critique and not an affirmation of both capitalism and the role of media, communication, information, and culture in capitalism". Wasko (2014:40) adds that "rather than celebrate the status quo or ignore

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capitalism, political economists take on the task of ruthless criticism". CPE practitioners embark on studies of ownership and control to analyse how media systems perpetuate the capitalist interests leading to widening power inequalities. In their pursuit of moral philosophy and a just system, CPE practitioners often propose strategies to resist capitalism and media monopolies.

CPE is undertaken within a critical research framework, hence it is part of critical media studies scholarship. Babe (2009:17) notes that CPE is critical because of "its dialectical mode of analysis, its interdisciplinarity, its negative stance toward both concentrated power and instrumental reason, its attempt to integrate philosophy and social analysis and its focus on social totality". Mumby (2005:22) asserts that dialectical approaches are used in critical studies to understand the interplay and articulation of the opposites where there is a dichotomy of "control and resistance" or in circumstances where a "dominant pole […] marginalises its opposite", potentially leading to social change and transformation. Dialectical methods of analysis are a constituent feature of critical theory concerned with the interplay of opposites, domination and resistance, raising philosophical questions, producing Marxist consciousness and ultimately transforming society (Nixon, 2015). In this research, a dialectical method of reasoning was employed to explore the often contradictory relationship and practices of traditional and citizen journalism, and the oppositional discourses carried in mainstream and alternative media.

CPE is also critical because it can be distinguished from traditional or neo classical economy approaches of 18$^{th}$ century Europe, which viewed economies as self-regulating systems, governed by natural laws of production and exchange outside of human intervention (Atton & Hamilton, 2008:24). Murdock and Golding (2005:16) argue that CPE is different from mainstream economics in three main respects of it being holistically interrelated with political, social and cultural life rather than as a separate domain, historical by paying close attention to long-term changes in the role of the state, corporations and the media in culture, and in that it engages with basic moral questions of justice, equity and the public good.

Meehan and Wasko (2013:40) argue that scholars researching media economics do not belong to the CPE tradition because they use non-Marxist approaches. Wasko, Murdock and Sousa, (2011:3) argue that media economics is distinguished from CPE by its emphasis "on microeconomic issues rather than macro analysis" that focus primarily on producers and consumers in media markets. Wasko *et al* (2011:3) elaborate that media economics is typically concerned with how "media industries and companies can succeed, prosper, or move forward" and "little emphasis is placed on questions of ownership or the implications of concentrated ownership and control". The media economics approach avoids moral grounding adopted by political economists, as most studies emphasise description over critique. This research avoided a media economics approach because it is devoid of

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a holistic and contextual analysis of the media institutions, something which the CPE theory foregrounds. Another limitation of media economics is its contentment with the status quo, whereas the political economy represents a critical orientation to the study of the media, challenging unjust and inequitable systems of power (Wasko *et al*, 2011).

Very few studies have applied the CPE theory to study citizen journalism and alternative media. Atton and Hamilton (2008:25) assert that "when applied to the study of alternative journalism, critical political economy enables a greater understanding of the nature and implications of relationships between the role of journalism, how journalism is organised and its practises, and whose interests are served". Fuchs and Sandoval (2015) observe that the real challenge to alternative media is the power of media monopolies and oligopolies, as well as the problem of mobilising resources without state support and advertising. Atton (2002:49) established that the 1990s alternative press in Britain could not "compete with the mainstream press in terms of finance, circulation or distribution" because it used reprographic technologies, suffered economic stress, had viability challenges due to its reliance on donor subsides and had limited circulation confined to the alternative public sphere. Fuchs and Sandoval (2015:169) argue that alternative media are bound to face economic challenges because they are critical of the ruling class. In most cases, alternative media find themselves in a precarious situation where they cannot adopt advertising and state funding for fear of losing their autonomy. From an ethical point of view, many alternative media platforms in the Western world have rejected advertising as a prime source of income, resulting in them being financially insecure, limping from one financial crisis to another and their situation worsened when they are considered to be a threat to a repressive state (Bailey *et al*, 2008). Even in cases where alternative media are prepared to accept advertising as a predominant source of income, they often don't succeed because they create small counterpublics rife with conflict and antagonism, and are therefore, less likely to attract advertising. Herman and Chomsky (1988: xviii) note that "advertisers don't like the public sphere, where audiences are relatively small, upsetting controversy takes place, and the settings are not ideal for selling goods".

## 3.8. Characteristics of CPE

CPE has four defining characteristics being i) historical, ii) social totality, iii) moral philosophy, and iv) praxis (Murdock & Golding, 2005; Mosco, 2009).

i. Historical

Mosco (2009:3) notes that CPE foregrounds understanding of social change and historical transformation. Historical studies are a research theme in CPE scholarship that documents tendencies and trends, change as well as continuity (Wasko, 2014 263). Jansen (2013:88) observes that CPE "is

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steeped in history and in interrogating the past in order to understand the present and make predictions about the future, and in this sense, it is dialectical". A historical analysis was applied in this study to understand the present media situation in Zimbabwe. The study revealed that the current media system in Zimbabwe where the state owns and controls the mainstream was a result of the British colonial legacy. At independence in 1980, Zimbabwe inherited the colonial media system that was biased towards preserving the colonial system and to date, the mainstream has been used to preserve the interests of the ruling ZANU PF party. To its credit, the post-independence government has made efforts to reform the media sector by granting alternative owned media operational space.

ii. Social totality

Mosco (2009:3) observes that CPE "is also characterized by an interest in examining the social whole or the totality of social relations that make up the economic, political, social, and cultural areas of life". Central to this is a belief that media institutions should be studied in a holistic manner. A commitment to the social totality means understanding the connections of the media with the economic, political, technological and cultural dimensions of the social context in which they operate (Mosco, 2009). Social totality was achieved by investigating the impact of politics, economy, culture and legislature on citizen journalism and alternative media in Zimbabwe.

iii. Moral philosophy

According to Graham (2006:493), political economy first emerged as a branch of moral philosophy and for this reason it foregrounds specific ethical orientations. A commitment to moral philosophy, "means that it cares about the values that help to create social behaviour and about those moral principles that *ought* to guide efforts to change it" (Mosco, 2009:4) [italics author's original emphasis]. Atton and Hamilton (2008:24) observe that CPE "seeks to evaluate morally the modes of production and reproduction, and to recognise the immense inequalities produced by capitalism". CPE is concerned with the constitution of the good in society through practical actions of change that lead to social justice and democracy (Wasko *et al,* 2011:2). Due to its commitment to moral philosophy, Yao (2017:286) argues that CPE practitioners "have largely turned out to be social activists in different kinds of social movements". In adhering to the principles of moral philosophy, this research investigated mainstream media concentration and monopoly and the repressive environment in Zimbabwe, which can suffocate citizen journalism and alternative media.

iv. Social praxis

Social praxis refers to a process that links thinking and doing (Mosco, 2009). Unlike administrative research where researchers are expected to be neutral and disengaged in the social research process, CPE researchers assume an activist position in which they link research outcomes to action. Mosco (2009:4) observes that CPE practitioners view "intellectual life as a means of bringing about social

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change and social intervention as a means of advancing knowledge". CPE practitioners do not only theorise but also implement practical actions desired to bring change in society. The researcher was remotely involved in the processes of reforming media laws in Zimbabwe at the end of 2018 when the Ministry of Information, Broadcasting and Publicity invited public submissions towards the amendments of the laws. The researcher also supported ongoing processes to establish the Association of Citizen Journalists - Zimbabwe Chapter.

## 3.9. Application of CPE theory

This research focused on the dimension of ownership and control at AMH Voices. Natalie (2007: 11) points that ownership and control of the media "impact upon the capacity to determine or influence the contents of the media products and meaning carried by them". This assertion is founded on the Marxist perspective which states that the class which has the means of material production at its disposal has control, at the same time, over the means of mental production. The concept of allocative (organisational) and operational (implementation) control advanced by Murdock (1982:11) was used to investigate where control was concentrated, whose interests it served and how it shaped the range of content and day-to-day news production activities. Hardy (2017:12) observes that CPE "is interested in how different forms of financing influence what is produced, what kinds of content and viewpoints are favoured and disfavoured". Central to this study was an investigation of how citizen journalism at AMH Voices was financed and how the interests of ownership and control affected editorial direction and news output. CPE was also used to investigate structural and organisational factors that constrained citizen journalism and alternative media in Zimbabwe.

Boyd-Barret (2002:36) notes that "political economy's weakest links have been in the areas of content and audience reception". As already highlighted above, CPE only focuses on how structural and contextual factors impact on the production of journalistic output by media institutions and does not concern itself with the reception of news texts by audiences. This CPE weakness motivates cultural studies scholars who are mainly interested in the reception of media texts by active audiences as part of daily struggles and resistance. Fuchs (2014b:2719) notes that Karl Marx – the "founding and grounding figure of all modern critical thoughts", is the blind spot of the most CPE studies because they "lack a systematic critical theory of capitalism and a grounding in dialectical philosophy as its foundation". Nixon (2015:260) elaborates on this blindspot by observing that communications and media researchers consistently fail to apply the "critical method" prescribed by Marx as "historical materialist dialectical". Nixon notes that in most studies "critical is understood in relation to other, presumably uncritical, theories that also have different values, rather than the method of reasoning that Marx considers the critical foundation of his political economy" (p. 265). For CPE studies to be

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critical, they must refer to Marxian dialectical reasoning, raise questions of moral philosophy, produce consciousness of society and ultimately transform it. A dialectical method of analysis was employed in this research when the media landscape in Zimbabwe was viewed as polarised and as a site for dominance and resistance and by conceiving alternative media as oppositional to the mainstream. The study also adopted a moral position to protect alternative media against media monopolies, in the process, advocating for media diversity and pluralism.

## 3.10 Summary

This chapter focused on the empirical application of theory to the study of citizen journalism and alternative media in Zimbabwe. The objective of the discussion was to apply the selected theories of public sphere and CPE to explain the study problem and to indicate how the theories will aid data collection and contribute to the meaningful analysis of the research findings. The public sphere theory was applied primarily to investigate how AMH Voices functioned as a Habermasian public sphere that was open for the deliberation of various views by active citizens leading to reasoned consensus, and how it worked as a counterpublic sphere for discursive agonism and articulation of counterhegemonic discourses. CPE was applied to investigate the structural and organisational factors that impacted on journalistic processes at AMH Voices. The study was located within the ownership and control research theme in CPE that investigated how the interests of ownership and control had consequences for AMH Voices' editorial direction and news output.

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# Chapter Four
# Research methodology

## 4.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses interpretivism as the philosophy that underpins the research methodology for this study. It also focuses on the ethnographic research method; the data collection procedures; data analysis strategies; and the ethical issues that were considered during the different stages of the study. The study utilised participant observation and semi-structured in-depth interviews for data collection. Critical discourse analysis was used as the main method of data analysis.

## 4.2 Interpretive research paradigm

The research philosophy adopted in this study is that of interpretivism. This builds onto the critical theory tradition explained in the previous chapter. Whereas critical theory was applied to describe the choice of theories used to contextualise and explain the research problem, interpretivism describes the research philosophy and methodology used in this study. In the main, interpretivism provides the basis to describe, understand and interpret the research phenomenon from the research participants' perspectives. Interpretivism is sometimes viewed as a part of, or at least closely related to, critical theory (Wills, 2012) because like critical theory, it views social reality as socially constructed and contextual. Critical theory researchers often use interpretivism to gain understanding of the lived experiences of people "because the heart of critical theory is ideological rather than methodological" (Wills, 2012:86). Unlike interpretivism, critical theory research is concerned with a critique of society focusing on domination, alienation, social struggles and the attainment of social justice. In this study, critical theory research was concerned with the dominance of the mainstream media and the marginalisation of ordinary citizens from public sphere discourses as well as how citizen journalism and alternative media observed at AMH Voices challenged this dominance. There is an overlap of both paradigms because ethnography and critical discourse analysis, which are used as research method and data analysis method in this study are critical approaches used in critical studies. Furthermore, interpretivism and critical theory are both qualitative paradigms that use linguistic rather than numerical data and they both concede that there are important social and cultural variables that impact on the subject matter, and that these interconnections with the context cannot be ignored (Maroun, 2012).

Interpretivism stresses the importance of interpretation and observation so as to understand the social world. Bryman (1989:207) observes that interpretive approaches argue that the social world can only be understood from the perspectives and experiences of its participants. Interpretivism is largely

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associated with qualitative research designs that use methods such as case studies and ethnography to understand the world of human experience. The position of interpretivism in relation to ontology and epistemology is that interpretivists believe the reality is multiple and relative. Research knowledge acquired by interpretivists is socially constructed by human beings rather than objectively determined from a social world "out there" (Edirisingha, 2012). For the interpretative researcher, there cannot be a truly objective position since humans perceive and make sense of this world differently. Christians (2004:47) notes that media scholars turn to interpretivism because "the concepts of social science are not derived from a free-floating and abstruse mathematics, but resonate with the attitudes, definitions, and language of the people actually being studied". My motivation to use an interpretive paradigm was to understand citizen journalism and alternative media as social constructs as well as the human and institutional agents that participated in them. In addition, interpretivism was a suitable research paradigm because it emphasises the "*situatedness* of knowledge" (Wills,2012:99) [italics original author's emphasis] thereby enhancing my understanding of citizen journalism and alternative media in a particular context or situation, in this case at AMH Voices in Zimbabwe, rather than seeking to achieve universal and generalisable findings.

Interpretivists believe the researcher and his informants are interdependent and mutually interactive, hence interpretivists participate more fully in the lives of research participants or members of cultural groups (De Lain, 2000:108). This is confirmed by Wimmer and Dominick (2011:116) who observe that interpretive researchers are an integral part of the data and without the active participation of the researcher, no data exist. In light of this, I participated in newsroom activities at AMH Voices to understand the newsmaking practices of citizen journalism and alternative media in Zimbabwe. Interpretivists believe an understanding of the context in which any form of research is conducted is critical to the interpretation of data gathered (Thanh & Thanh, 2015:24). Consistent with this belief, I employed CPE theory to gain an understanding of the structural factors that constrained and enabled citizen journalism and alternative media in Zimbabwe. Wimmer and Dominick (2011:116) observe that the interpretive research design evolves during the research such that it can be adjusted or changed as the research progresses. Thanh and Thanh (2015:25) concur when they note that interpretivism includes "accepting and seeking multiple perspectives, being open to change, practicing iterative and emergent data collection techniques, promoting participatory and holistic research". As an interpretivist, I entered the research field mindful of the complex, multiple and unpredictable nature of the subject matter and remained open to new knowledge throughout the study that I developed with the help of informants. The interpretive researcher conducts studies in the field, in natural surroundings, trying to capture the normal flow of events without controlling extraneous variables (Wimmer & Dominick, 2011). The interpretive researcher often develops theories as part

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of the research process — theory is "data driven" and emerges as part of the research process, evolving from the data as they are collected (Wimmer and Dominick, 2011). In this study, though interpretive and qualitative, the data analysis included both inductive and deductive reasoning, because the structuring of findings was partly generated by and compared to an existing theoretical framework. My location within a broadly interpretive paradigm was due to the need to understand the perspectives of the research participants, that is, the motives, actions, interactions and other subjective experiences of citizen journalists, which were time and context bound and the structural factors that constrained alternative media in Zimbabwe.

Bryman (1989:21) observes that a research design is the "overall structure and orientation of an investigation" which "provides a framework within which data are collected and analysed". In this study, ethnography and critical discourse analysis were utilised as the qualitative methods of data collection and analysis. Hammersley and Atkinson (2007:16) describes qualitative research as "an active process, in which accounts of the world are produced through selective observation and theoretical interpretation of what is seen, through asking particular questions and interpreting what is said in reply, through writing field notes and transcribing audio- and video-recordings, as well as through writing research reports". Van den Bulck (2002:59) asserts that the tools for data collection in qualitative research are flexible and sensitive to the social context in which data are produced, aiming at compiling "rich" and often descriptive data. Ormston, Spencer, Barnard and Snape (2013:3) argue that a study can be identified as qualitative by its concern with "what", "why", and "how" questions rather than 'how many', a focus on processes and the flexible nature of the research design. Qualitative research therefore encompasses all methods that rely on linguistic rather than numerical data and employ meaning-based rather than statistical forms of data analysis. This view is supported by Iorio (2004:6) who observes that "qualitative researchers seek to explain the world rather than measure it". However, Bryman (1989:18) warns that "qualitative researchers are not averse to quantification as such, and often include some counting procedures in their investigations". In this qualitative study, there was reliance on interpretation and analysis of what the research participants did and said without making use of measurement or numerical analysis. The objective was not to look for mathematical equations but for conclusions in the form of consistent descriptions of citizen participation, newsmaking practices and citizen news discourses that were time and context bound at AMH Voices.

## 4.3 Ethnographic research method

The task of doing research in news media organisations is best achieved through the use of ethnographic methods (Tuchman, 1991). Singer (2009:192) observes that ethnographic research is

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inherently appealing to journalism scholars because it "involves on-site observations and interviews, making it the closest method to journalistic work that may have been done in the researcher's previous professional life". Ethnography is often used in production and consumption studies that research news production practices and media audiences. Wahl-Jorgensen (2010: 21) observes that "since the 1970s, ethnographic research has contributed tremendously to knowledge about news production processes and newsroom cultures, providing a rich description of journalists' way of life and work". Van den Bulck (2002:74) argues that ethnography is used to study the working of media institutions "when little is known about the phenomenon under study" and to "generate theoretical interpretations" as was the case with this study.

Hammersley and Atkinson (2007:1) observe that the term ethnography is used variedly and has fuzzy semantic boundaries with other labels such as "qualitative inquiry", "fieldwork", "interpretive method", and "case study". A central assumption of ethnography is that in order to understand what people are doing and why, one needs to understand the meanings involved, that is, how they interpret and evaluate the situations they face, and their own identities. Hammersley and Atkinson (2007:1) argue that the origins of ethnography lie in nineteenth-century Western anthropology, "where an ethnography was a descriptive account of a community or culture, usually one located outside the West". The term ethnography was used by early anthropologists to refer to an integration of both first-hand empirical investigation and the theoretical and comparative interpretation of social organisation and culture. In essence, ethnography entails studying people within their own cultural environment through intensive fieldwork and emphasising their frames of reference and understandings of the world. It produces written rich descriptions about people or a culture. Hine (2000:41) observes that in subsequent years, ethnography "has been taken up within a wide range of substantive fields [that promote qualitative approaches] including urban life, the media, medicine, the classroom, science and technology". I used ethnography to study the everyday life of citizen journalists at AMH Voices, that is, their participation in news production processes, their everyday news production practices and the news discourses they produced.

Cramer and McDevitt (2004:127) define ethnography as a method whereby the researcher immerses the self into the life, routines and rituals of the social setting under study to uncover meanings that are inherent to a group and its practices. Hammersley and Atkinson (2007:3) note that the task of ethnography is to "investigate some aspect of the lives of the people who are being studied, and this includes finding out how these people view the situations they face, how they regard one another, and also how they see themselves". Singer (2009:192) defines ethnographic research as interpretive, thick in description, contextual, aimed "to probe for meaning, to understand what is going on in the lives of the people being studied" with the ethnographer being "the research instrument par excellence",

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that is, an active participant in the research process. Hine (2000:4) observes that "in its basic form ethnography consists of a researcher spending an extended period of time immersed in a field setting, taking account of the relationships, activities and understandings of those in the setting and participating in those processes". Van den Bulck (2002:73) similarly describes ethnographic field research as a "form of qualitative research in which the researcher takes part in the situations to be studied" to know the everyday-life situations and settings of the research community from an insider's perspective. Murphy and Kraidy (2003:7) argue that ethnography's main preoccupation is the construction of "local knowledge" through a commitment to immersion, building of trust, long-term observation, or participation in the daily lives of research participants. O'Reilly (2012:12) notes that the term ethnography "can be applied to any small-scale research that is carried out in everyday settings; uses several methods; evolves in design through the study; and focuses on the meaning of individuals' actions and explanations rather than their quantification". The small-scale nature of ethnographic research enables in-depth study of social phenomenon be it a small group of people in a community or organisation.

There are distinct features that characterise ethnographic research. Hammersley and Atkinson (2007: 3) assert that a key feature is that "people's actions and accounts are studied in everyday contexts, rather than under conditions created by the researcher – such as in experimental setups or in highly structured interview situations". Thus, ethnographic research takes place in natural settings of the field, that is, situated in a local site, place or space. Fieldwork usually involves direct and sustained contact with human beings in the context of their daily lives, over a prolonged period of time often over the course of a year or more, in order to document and interpret their distinctive way of life, and the beliefs and values integral to it. The duration of fieldwork varies according to the nature of the research, availability of time and financial resources. In this research, the duration of fieldwork was six months spanning from the start of January to the end of June 2018. This was deemed sufficient time to enable me to gain institutional access at AMH, build rapport with the research participants, gather data and exit the field.

Ethnography is a holistic approach to the study of cultural membership and social reality with an emphasis on the socio-cultural contexts, processes, and meanings. Holism views societies as discrete and coherent entities that can also be interconnected in bits and pieces into wholes. Ethnography is also an open-ended, highly flexible and creative learning process, which collects data from a range of sources. Hammersley and Atkinson (2007: 3) argue that in ethnography data collection is, for the most part, relatively "unstructured" because it does not follow "a fixed and detailed research design specified at the start".and data analysis is built into the data collection process. As such, ethnographic research is cyclical in nature: data collection, analysis and interpretation are a continuously

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interrelated and inseparable process. The analysis of data involves interpretation of the meanings, functions, and consequences of human actions and institutional practices, as well as how these are implicated in local, and perhaps also wider, contexts. The products of ethnographic research are thick descriptions, explanations and theories.

Although there were seminal newsroom ethnographies in the early 1970s, ethnography in journalism and media studies was further inspired by cultural studies and the notion of an active television audience in the 1980s. Murphy and Kraidy (2003: 302) observe that Stuart Hall's seminal essay on *Encoding/decoding* (1997) and David Morley's *The nationwide audience* (1980) were significant in "moving toward qualitative and ultimately ethnographic forms of inquiry" in British cultural studies. The two texts launched a decade of interpretive audience research and to date, ethnography still has influence in media studies especially those that seek to understand how people interact everyday with different media technologies. Hansen, Cottle, Negrine and Newbold (1998:38) observe that it is possible to group ethnographic news production studies into three overlapping types: formative studies of news processes, substantive ethnographies and focused production-based studies. The formative studies of the news processes single out aspects of the news process for detailed attention such as the gatekeeping selection of news by editors. Substantive ethnographies were aimed at understanding news production at different news outlets in the 1970s and 1980s (Cottle, 2000). They have an interest in organisation, bureaucratic and professional nature of news production and news processing. Production-based studies "empirically explore the rapidly changing field of news production and today's differentiated ecology of news provision" (Cottle 2000:21). Production-based studies may focus on newsmaking routines in newsrooms and how these are affected by digital technologies; the role of sources in news production and how voices are positioned in relation to the discourse structures of news (Cottle, 2000). This research qualifies as a production-based ethnography because it focused on time and context bound organisational practices and everyday news production processes at AMH Voices. Bird (2010:15) bemoans the lack of non-elitist ethnographies as most studies focus on "newsroom[s] of often large and elite news corporations". This ethnography focused on citizen journalism and alternative media in Zimbabwe making it non-elitist and de-Westernised.

Robison and Metzler (2016:448) observe that in digital or converged newsrooms such as one by the AMH group, it is difficult to conduct ethnographic research due to temporal and spatial dynamics that enable "reporters [to] work at odd hours, […] tweet, post and blog on the fly" using digital technologies. Sjøvaag and Karlsson (2017:88) add that the newsroom "as a place where news production is taking place is disintegrating". The challenge of conducting research at AMH Voices was that it was an online centric environment characterised by temporal contacts with the research

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participants. Citizen journalists participated in news production processes using digital technologies and, in most cases, contributed content via email and internet driven social media of WhatsApp, Twitter and Facebook. For this reason, it was impossible to fully observe citizen participation behaviours and newsmaking practices at AMH Voices. This influenced my choice of virtual ethnography as a complimentary research method. Virtual or online ethnography is a relatively new development in qualitative research, often conducted around the use of sites and services such as blogs, chatrooms, forums and news platforms. Its pioneer, Hine (2000:8), developed it as "a methodology for investigating Internet use in everyday settings such the home, the workplace, the mass media and the university". The difference between traditional and virtual ethnography is that traditional ethnography is conducted in the natural, real-world environment while virtual ethnography is technical and limited to online data. Hine (2000:43) adds that while traditional ethnography entailed physical travel to a place and face-to-face interaction, virtual ethnography does not necessarily involve physical travel. Rather, the internet is taken as a site for interaction onto which ethnographic methods can be transferred to research specific identities, ways of communication and self-representation by participants (Flick, 2009:272). Virtual ethnography enabled me to observe citizen participation at AMH Voices, that is, the interaction and behaviours of citizens in the online public sphere deliberations. In doing so, I adopted the complete observer approach, which meant that I covertly pried into the users' activities on the platform without their informed consent. This of cause raised fundamental ethical issues about the covert observer status but the objective was to observe and understand how citizen participation was enacted on the platform by observing which individuals participated more in the public sphere deliberations and how they participated, by saying what and how often they participated.

Ethnography requires that the researcher adopts either an "outsider" or "insider" perspective. According to Hammersley and Atkinson (2007:86), outsider myths assert that only outsiders can conduct valid research on a given group because they have emotional distance and are hence objective. In contrast, insider myths assert that only insiders are capable of doing valid research in a particular group and that all outsiders are inherently incapable of appreciating the true character of the group's life. Wimmer and Dominick (2011:147) observe that outsider and insider perspectives can be understood using the etic and emic approaches. An "outside" perspective is the etic approach, which assigns meaning on the basis of general scientific concepts, principles, and theories. Fetterman (2008:288) describes the etic approach as the external social scientific perspective of reality based on logical scientific analysis. Etic descriptions or analyses conform to rules of science, including falsifiability, logical consistency, and replicability. The "insider" emic approach assigns meaning to cultural traits and patterns on the basis of the informants' perspective within the internal meaning

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system of their culture (Wimmer and Dominick, 2011:147). Fetterman (2008:289) argues that the emic perspective — the insider's or native's perspective of reality — is at the heart of most ethnographic research. An emic perspective is fundamental to understanding how people perceive the world around them. In this study, I adopted an emic or insider perspective to get close access to the research participants and an understanding of reality from their points of view. As an insider, I was able to understand the motives, meanings, reasons and other subjective experiences of citizen journalism and alternative media practices which were time and context bound.

Ethnography has been criticised on different fronts. Hammersley and Atkinson (2007:7) observe that positivists dismiss ethnography "as quite inappropriate to social science, on the grounds that the data and findings it produces are 'subjective', mere idiosyncratic impressions of one or two cases that cannot provide a solid foundation for rigorous scientific analysis". Murphy and Kraidy (2003: 11) note that "critics also accused traditional ethnography of embodying elitist and ethnocentric perspectives, implicitly associated with colonial discourses". They add that this "charge focused mainly on how the "write-up" of the field experience simultaneously objectified (participants become objects for study as if museum pieces) and subjectified (subjugated via power relations) the "other" (p. 12). In addition, critics questioned the way in which traditional ethnography acted to re-inscribe and maintain oppressive power relations through surveillance techniques of the overt observer. To counteract the above criticisms, I adopted the insider approach that enabled me to develop mutual relations with the research participants and allowed me to participate in the research as an observer. By conducting the research in my native environment side by side with familiar research participants, I was guarded against prejudice. I had a high regard of the host organisation and the research participants who provided me a rare opportunity to learn from them. At the end of it all, I had a positive attitude towards the whole research process and looked towards an ethnographic report that was to influence policy and reform of the Zimbabwean mediascape.

## 4.4 Data collection procedures and methods

Data collection procedures entailed obtaining organisational access at AMH Voices, managing field expectations and relationships. Organisational ethnography entails substantial negotiation to obtain access to media institutions and their staff members. Bryman (1989:2) observes that access remains a problem for many organisational researchers because there are suspicions about the aims of the researcher and management is often "concerned about the amount of their own and others' time that is likely to be consumed by the investigation". Hansen *et al* (1998:51) observes that without access the study is a non-starter. Crucial in the process of negotiating access is the role of gatekeepers. Gatekeepers are "generally, and understandably, concerned as to the picture of the organization" that

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the ethnographer will paint and they may attempt to exercise some degree of surveillance and control, either by blocking off certain lines of inquiry, or by shepherding the fieldworker in one direction or another (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007: 51). A practical way to get access is to use the friend of a friend approach and relying on contacts such as family, friends, colleagues and past researchers in the field (Hansen *et al*, 1998:52). In obtaining access to AMH Voices, I relied on two journalist friends who were also my juniors at university. The two had been recently elevated to editorship positions at the AMH flagship publications of *The Standard* and the *NewsDay*. By virtue of their senior work positions, they became my gatekeepers. The first step in securing access was a written formal letter to the AMH Group editor requesting access to the organisation and permission to conduct the research on AMH Voices (see Addendum 1). In my email request, I also attached my doctoral research proposal for their perusal. My request was granted through an email letter signed on behalf of the AMH Group editor by *The Standard* editor who I had pestered and lobbied via social media messaging (see Addendum 2). However, having obtained access to conduct my research at AMH Voices did not mean I operated carte blanche. My access to internal organisational processes and official documents was limited depending on the level of sensitivity. I never had access to top level editorial planning meetings and strategic documents that could have aided my research such as the AMH Digital First Strategy of 2013 that led to the creation of AMH Voices in January 2014.

Managing field expectations and relationships is another key step in ethnographic data collection. Hammersley and Atkinson (2007:60) assert that host organisations normally have "expectations about the ethnographer's identity and intentions". To this end, ethnographers are often seen as the "the expert" and or "the critic". The model of the "expert" suggests that the social researcher is, or should be, a person who is extremely well informed as to "problems" and their "solutions". The model of "the critic" suggests that the social researcher is expected to evaluate organisational systems and performance leading to improvements in efficiency and quality of work output. Upon my arrival at AMH Voices, junior staff members regarded me as the "expert" who they thought had read and seen it all regarding citizen journalism. This was punctuated by their mannerisms and language use such as addressing me as "big dara" in the local Shona language. This revered salutation, meaning the big boss, created a problematic image of me as an expert, wealthy and knowledgeable. To counteract this problem, I created an image of myself as a novice seeking to learn the ropes in citizen led news production processes. This unfortunately led to challenges with gatekeepers and some of the research participants who, because of their academic aspirations, begun to look for weaknesses in my research. Hammersley and Atkinson (2007:64) warn that "occasionally, participants may be, or consider themselves to be, very sophisticated in their knowledge of research methodology; and/or they may have a negative attitude towards research". One of the research participants suggested different

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theories and approaches to the study to which I was open to as it served to refine my approaches to the subject and enhanced my theoretical and practical understanding of the subject matter.

I also had the task of establishing and maintaining symbiotic relations with the research participants. As Hammersley and Atkinson (2007:44) observe, there is "the difference between being in a place and having access to the social relations that take place there". The task I had was to befriend and gain the trust of the AMH Voices production team and that of the citizen journalists who were previously unknown to me. The first few weeks were difficult, and I was alienated. This was fuelled by the citizen journalists' perceptions that I was a dreaded central intelligence officer (CIO) bent on spying on their operations on behalf of the ruling ZANU PF party and government. Hammersley and Atkinson (2007: 63) state that "field researchers are frequently suspected, initially at least, of being spies, tax inspectors, missionaries, or of belonging to some other group that may be perceived as undesirable". By the second month of fieldwork, the research participants at AMH Voices had begun to accept me as part of them and I sometimes made myself available for social events and activities after working hours such as watching sport on television over a couple of beers. Attending social events after working hours enabled me to ask follow up research questions and seek clarifications from the research participants in more relaxed situations. Soon I learnt the culture of the AMH Voice team and the initial suspicions about me being a government spy faded.

Impression management is another procedure in ethnographic data collection. I was consistently concerned with the impression that I created of myself and the university on the research participants. Van den Bulck (2002:75) defines impression management as concerned about how aspects of an individual's identity can be manipulated to facilitate access and good relationships with the members of the host community. De Laine (2000:96) states that fieldworkers are not "genderless, ageless, classless, raceless observation machines" and as such gender, age, race, and ethnic identification may shape relationships with gatekeepers and people under study in important ways. Hammersley and Atkinson (2007:74) established that male researchers may find it difficult to gain access to settings that are reserved for women and that belonging to a different ethnic or national group can have distinct advantages for field access and relations. Negotiating access to AMH Voices largely depended on my personal characteristics, in particular my ethnicity, age and sex. All the three editors of AMH publications of the *NewsDay*, *The Standard* and *The Zimbabwe Independent* were of the minority Ndebele ethnic group who were once based in Bulawayo before moving to the capital Harare to assume senior positions. Contacting them to negotiate access was easy as they were my "home boys". My sex and age also played a part as well. Being a middle-aged man, it was easy to relate to them as we were of the same sex, roughly the same age, attended the same university for undergraduate studies and had similar social interests. We all had a love for our home town, the city of Bulawayo and

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everything emanating from it, including its politicians, the artists and the football teams. During my stay in Harare for the field work, I once or twice sneaked into one of the editors' offices to talk about our love for Bulawayo and how we missed the city and its people.

Ethnographers usually utilise a combination of data collection methods. In this study, participant observation and semi-structured in-depth interviews were used as data collection methods.

### 4.4.1 Participant observation

Participant observation is a common research technique in organisational studies which involves the researcher spending a period of time making observations in a particular organisational context (Bryman, 198:23). It was selected as the main data collection method because it offered "a rare look into the inner sanctum of media production" and "insights into the complex of constraints, pressures and forces that surround, select and shape media output" (Hansen *et al*, 1998: 35). Earlier studies of news organisations in the 1960s in the USA and Britain used participant observation to study "the activities of news staff both inside and outside of the newsroom" and to follow news stories from their assignment through their editing and dissemination (Tuchman, 1991:84). Participant observation is a field strategy that uses multiple and triangulated methods of data collection that simultaneously combinedocument analysis, interviewing of respondents and informants, direct participation and observation, and introspection (Flick, 2009:227). Jankowski and Wester (1991:65) define participant observation as a method in which the observer participates in the daily life of the people under study, either openly in the role of researcher or covertly in some disguised role, observing things that happen, listening to what is said, and questioning people, over some length of time.

The primary purpose of participant observation is to describe various events, situations and actions that occur in a particular social setting. Participant observers are always open to in-situ developments and impromptu lines of inquiry. Unforeseen lines of inquiry can be pursued, new findings secured, and revised understanding may result. Hine (2000:47) argues that participant observation contributes to a fuller understanding of lived cultures because by participating, the ethnographer may share the concerns, emotions and commitments of the research subjects and cease to be a simple voyeur or a disengaged observer. Gans (1999:540) adds that another advantage of participant observation is that it "could supply empirical findings about little known or stereotyped populations, particularly those outside the mainstream". Participant observation "improves upon other methods through triangulation, qualifies or corrects speculative theoretical claims" (Hansen *et al*, 1998:43) while other empirical methods are limited to reporting what people say about what they do.

De Laine (2000) observes that participation during fieldwork can be understood using Gold's fourfold typology and / or Adler and Adler's typology. Gold in De Laine (2000:104) identified four modes

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through which observers might gather data. The "participant-as-observer" forms relationships and participates in activities but makes no secret of an intention to observe events. The "complete participant"; operates covertly, concealing any intention to observe the setting. The "observer-as-participant"; maintains only superficial contacts with the people being studied by asking them occasional questions. The "complete-observer" merely stands back and "eavesdrops" on the proceedings. Alternatively, participation during fieldwork can be understood using Adler and Adler's notion of membership roles. The "peripheral membership" role; is when the researcher feels an outsider perspective is vital for formal and accurate appraisal of human group life. The "active membership" role is when the researcher becomes more involved in the central activities of an organisation to learn the ropes and assume responsibility in helping advance the group's goals, but without fully committing themselves to group members' values and goals. The "complete membership" role is when the researcher is fully immersed and committed to group members' values and goals such that they cease to consider their own cultural or professional subgroup as the reference group, and the research agenda as the prime one. This results in the problem of over-involvement, "going native", or "developing an over-rapport with the research subjects that could harm the data-gathering process" (De Laine, 2000: 105). In this study, I assumed the role of the participant as observer or that of active membership. In the role of participant as observer I declared my research interests and strategies to the participants who comprised the AMH staff and citizen journalists. An observation checklist was used to elicit data on first-hand, day-to-day experiences and behaviours of citizen journalists, how they collect news and their interpretations of the world reality around them. (see Addendum 3). Daily field notes were taken in connection with these observations. Observation was useful in overcoming discrepancies between what respondents said in interviews and what they did in practice.

Due to the fact that the study was conducted in a newsroom whose physical space was "disintegrating" and transiting to the online world, I had limited opportunity to observe the actual interactions between citizen journalists and the professional AMH Voices staff. Citizen journalists were widely dispersed and connected with the newsroom via the internet and social media. The newsroom represented to me a physical work space from where I could ideally observe people at work but the key participants in my study were citizen journalists and these were not part of the formal organisational structure and thefore, operated remotely from their locales. Consequently, my newsroom observations were limited to the digital transactions that occurred when AMH Voices professional staff received news feeds from citizen journalists and processed them into news content published on the platform. Outside the newsroom, I had the opportunity to observe and participate in the everyday newsmaking practices of three citizen journalists. Unlike professional newsroom journalists, the citizen journalists had no story

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plans/diaries for the day (I discuss this issue at length in the following chapter under news practices). It was sometimes awkward to stick by a self-proclaimed citizen journalist for the whole day especially when they had no idea of what news story to pursue for the day since their activities were sometimes spontaneous. As fieldwork progressed, the citizen journalists felt as if they were under surveillance and as such proposed to contact me beforehand if they had diarised a news event or were on situ breaking a news story. This flexible arrangement enabled me to plan my field activities and be able to document the citizen journalists' process of newsmaking. I participated in different occasions during citizen journalists' search for news stories inside Harare, the research site and outside of it. I accompanied one of the citizen journalists to cover courts proceedings in Chimanimani and Mutare in Manicaland Province, some 200 km outside Harare. I also travelled to Plumtree town, some 100 km out of Bulawayo, to observe citizen journalists covering residents' protests over alleged corruption by the town council. This was all part of my quest for knowledge on how citizen journalists routinely gathered news, that is, how they selected their news agenda, interviewed news sources, processed their story materials and submitted it for publication on the AMH Voices platform.

### 4.4.2 Semi-structured interviews

The qualitative interview is a data collection method used in the social sciences "to explore people's understandings of their lives and aspects of their experiences" (Edwards & Holland, 2013:11). Kvale (2006:483) defines an interview "as a conversation with a purpose" that takes place in a specific socio-political context and with a specific purpose. Babbie (2008:336) asserts that a qualitative interview is based "on a set of topics to be discussed in depth rather than the use of standardized questions". Jensen (1991b:32) views the qualitative interview as a form of interpersonal communication were the interviewer and respondent(s) communicate through a language and negotiate an understanding of the subject matter, which becomes the object of linguistic analysis and textual interpretation. Kvale (2006:481) observes that in qualitative interviews, social scientists investigate varieties of human experience and attempt to understand the world from the subjects' points of view. The objective of qualitative interviews is to give voice to common people, allowing them to freely present their life situations in their own words and open for a close personal interaction between the researchers and their subjects. Qualitative interviews appear under different names such as in-depth, informal, non-directed, open-ended, conversational, naturalistic, narrative, biographical, oral or life history and ethnographic (Edwards & Holland, 2013:35). Mason (2002:62) argues that despite the large variations in style and tradition, all qualitative interviews have core features in common that include: the interactional exchange of dialogue between two or more participants; a thematic, topic-centred, biographical or narrative approach where the researcher has topics, themes or issues they wish to cover; and, a perspective regarding knowledge as situated and contextual. Flick

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(2009:156) adds that qualitative interviews operate from the "subjective theory", which refers to the fact that interviewees have a complex stock of subjective knowledge about the topic under study. In light of the above, I regarded all my research participants as knowledgeable participants who held beliefs and assumptions about citizen journalism and alternative media, which they could share through the interviews.

Qualitative interviews can be semi-structured and unstructured hence they are characterised by levels of flexibility and in some cases lack of structure. In this study I made use of the semi- structured in-depth interviews that have open-ended approach characteristic of ethnographic research. Whitehead (2005:18) describes semi-structured interview as having "much of the freewheeling quality of unstructured interviewing but is based on the use of an interview guide — a written list of questions and topics that need to be covered in a particular order". In conducting the semi-structured interviews, I had a list of prepared questions for the research participants although I exercised flexibility by allowing the discussions to wander off to more topical issues of the day carried in the news media. Using the semi-structured interviews enabled me to elicit answers from the perspective of the study participants and to gain a greater understanding of the context and meaning of those responses through various forms of probing. Semi-structured interviews were also used to elicit respondents' episodic and semantic knowledge of citizen journalism and alternative media. Flick (1997:4) underlines that "episodic knowledge comprises knowledge which is linked to concrete circumstances (time, space, persons, events, situations), whereas semantic knowledge is more abstract, generalised and decontextualised from specific situations and events". This approach to in-depth interviews helped me to draw knowledge on the respondents' theoretical and practical understanding of citizen journalism and alternative media.

Before conducting the interviews, I approached each of the research participants with a request to hold the interview at a time and place convenient to them. This was done in advance recognising that participants from the AMH group had work responsibilities and that some citizen journalists required time to consult and make a decision on whether they will or not participate in the research. This strategy proved to be best practice. Hammersley and Atkinson (2007:116) confirm that "with many people, interviewing them on their own territory, and allowing them to organize the context the way they wish, is the best strategy" as "it allows them to relax much more than they would in less familiar surroundings, and it may also provide insight into their sense of themselves and their world". I explained the research objectives and the informed consent process as I contacted the research participants to schedule for the interviews. In conducting the actual interviews, I made use of an *aide-mémoire,* or interview guide. This was a list of interview questions and discussion issues to be covered in each interview. The interview guide reminded me interviewer of the topics I wanted to cover, while

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giving respondents considerable latitude over what they want to say and how they say it. Following Van den Bulck's (2002:70) recommendation, all interviews were started with general questions on the background demographics of the research participants followed by descriptive and structural questions that asked for specific descriptions of events, people and their opinions towards the subject (see Addendum 4 & 5). All interviews were audio recorded and the files were saved in MP3 format in an external USB drive and on a password–protected computer cloud service. The interviews were also recorded in the form of field notes.

In ethnography, who is interviewed, when, and how is usually determined as the research progresses. However, Hammersley and Atkinson (2007:104) warn that "gatekeepers or other powerful figures in the field sometimes attempt to select interviewees for the ethnographer". This may be done in good faith to facilitate the research, or it may be designed to control the findings. My gatekeepers at AMH Voices attempted in vain to prevent my access to senior management for interviews on the presumption that they had no time to participate in the research process. In selecting the research participants for interviews, I used a mixture of purposive and snowball sampling. Purposive sampling is a naturalistic and non-probability sampling technique used in qualitative research (Marshal, 1996). Singer (2009:195) supports the use of purposive sampling in qualitative fieldwork because "the case or cases chosen should provide the greatest opportunity to learn about the topic of interest". Jensen (2002:239) notes that "snowball sampling is when initial contact with an informant generates further contacts". Edwards and Holland (2013:6) argue that snowball sampling, as an integral part of ethnography, is useful in contacting hard to reach groups and individuals, in this case citizen journalists. Identifying and selecting citizen journalists for interviews was a challenge because of their "fragmentation and elusiveness" (Sjøvaag & Karlsson, 2017:89). Citizen journalists were uncoordinated and their work practices unstructured due to digital technologies that enabled them to participate in news production processes online without physical presence in the newsroom. Robinson and Meltzer (2016:452) attest to this challenge of identifying online participants for research arguing that it is difficult to "recruit participants when only one persona of the real person exists on screen, and little verification of their 'real' self exists". Sjøvaag and Karlsson (2017:88) add that "conducting ethnography and interviews becomes more difficult as the 'actors' who create news become harder to pin down and the 'space' where news is produced has ceased to exist as an object of study". Because citizen journalists operated almost virtually, I used email and direct messaging on social media to request for interviews with active citizen journalists. Active citizen journalists were defined as those who had recently contributed more than 5 news articles to AMH Voices. The other criteria used to shortlist active citizen journalists for interviews was that they must have been resident within

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the research site of Harare, be willing to be interviewed and must have been active at the AMH Voices for some time, preferably since its inception in 2014.

Despite an initial low response rate that arose from fear of participating in this research, I interviewed three citizen journalists at times and places convenient to them. The decision to interview only three citizen journalists was to a large extent determined by the circumstances I encountered during field work. It was extremely difficult to track citizen journalists and have them to agree to participate in the research interviews for two reasons. The first was that citizen journalists maintained at least two types of identities: the online identity performed and enacted on the platform and the real-life identity outside the platform. Most citizen journalists had an online identity which enabled them to use pseudonyms for the purposes of dark participation such as trolling others and propagating counterhegemonic discourses. It was therefore difficult to track such citizen journalists as they feared being unmasked and exposed by the researcher as the real people behind the counterhegemonic news discourses. Whilst it was easy to track citizen journalists who used real names for the news content they submitted on the platform, it was difficult to convince them to participate in the research interviews because they had safety and security fears given the state repression that was prevalent in the country. This was exacerbated by the fact that at the time of conducting this research Zimbabwe was in an election season and citizen journalists were perceived to be anti-establishment, hence they feared forced disappearances, intimidation and violence on themselves. Consequently, substantial time was taken in gaining informed consent and building the trust that enabled the three citizen journalists to participate freely in this research without safety fears. The three interviewed citizen journalists cut across all the categories of citizen journalists identified in Zimbabwe; these being one trained citizen journalist, one activist journalist and one spontaneous citizen journalist (see 5.6 for detailed discussion). Given the circumstances, interviewing the three citizen journalists was considered adequate as the objective of the semi-structured in-depth interviews was to obtain rich qualitative data that aided the researcher's understanding of the subject matter rather generating a sample survey. I also interviewed three professional staff directly responsible for the production of AMH Voices content, namely the Online Editor, the Multimedia Editor and the Online Content Producer. Four research participants were also drawn from newsroom staff and these comprised the *NewsDay* Assistant Editor and three professional journalists. The Assistant Editor of the *NewsDay* was selected to participate in the study because they somewhat exercised editorial oversight on AMH Voices content since the platform sat on the *NewsDay* website. The AMH professional journalists were interviewed about their interactions with citizen journalists and their perceptions of the participation of ordinary citizens in newsmaking processes. Three members of the AMH managerial team, comprising the AMH Group Chairperson, a member of the Public Editorial Board and the

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Operations Manager, were also interviewed. These were interviewed on everyday operational issues of the group and how structural factors constrained group operations. The board member was quizzed on how the Public Editorial Board functioned as a vehicle for citizen participation in journalistic processes. Two alternative media practitioners outside the AMH group were interviewed to obtain comparable data and develop a nuanced understanding of the political economy of alternative media in Zimbabwe. These two alternative media practitioners were purposively sampled to represent views about the operations and practice of alternative media located within civil society and alternative media serving the community. The views from these external practitioners complimented interview data obtained from interviews with AMH managerial team members that represented views of alternative media in relation to the mainstream. In total, 15 people were interviewed (see Addendum 7).

As with any other data collection method, interviews have their blind spots. Edwards and Holland (2013:92) point out that findings from qualitative interviews are not generaliseable and impossible to replicate because "they are a social interaction with many elements coming into play". These elements include location and context, the physical and social space within which the interview takes place, power relations at the social and individual levels and a wide range of characteristics, predispositions understandings and emotions of interviewer and interviewee. Kvale (2006:484) argues that research interviews represent asymmetrical power relations of interviewer and interviewee where the interviewer upholds a monopoly of interpretation. Kvale (2006:485) concludes that research interviews are "not an open and dominance free dialogue between egalitarian partners, but a specific hierarchical and instrumental form of conversation, where the interviewer sets the stage and scripts in accord with his or her research interests". Based on my field experience interviewing the AMH managerial team, the above criticism by Kvale (2006) that interviewers wield more power than interviewees is contestable. Interviewees have the potential to turn around the power relations by withholding certain information and choosing not to respond to sensitive interview questions. When they do so, researchers become less powerful as they are not able to force responses from the interviewees. For example, in field interviews, the AMH managerial team were noncommittal on confidential business intelligence issues such as competitive strategy, donor funding and annual profit and loss accounts. I tried to mitigate the short comings of interviews mentioned above by not asking leading and intrusive questions and resorting to publicly available secondary sources of data regarding the AMH group.

All data from interviews and participant observation were recorded in the form of field notes. In the field notes I also recorded significant events, personal impressions, feelings, interpretations and new lines of theorising and analysis that emerged from the data collection process. The field notes were

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typed and stored in my laptop for back up. Interviews were audio-recorded on my phone and then transferred onto the laptop. All research data were saved in Dropbox, a computer cloud service, for backup purposes in the event of a computer crash or virus attack. In writing the final ethnography after fieldwork, I used the field notes only as a guide and trigger, the significant data came from my collective recall of the fieldwork experience which I had deeply internalised and from data "recorded in memory, body and all the senses" (Okely,1994:21) of my inner self.

## 4.5 Data analysis

Data analysis is the process of bringing order, structure and meaning to the mass of collected data with the aim of discovering patterns, theories, concepts, themes and meanings. Data analysis is not necessarily a distinct stage of the research process. Bryman (1989:138) notes that one of the challenges with ethnography is that of data analysis since researchers become overwhelmed with data due to "a *tabula rasa* approach, whereby they delimit the area they are investigating as little as possible and wait for interesting themes to emerge" [italics author's original emphasis]. He cites an example of Ditton whose research accumulated over 4560 hours of participant observation and thirty-four taped and typed interviews. To overcome this challenge of not having a clear focus, I delimited the areas of foci into citizen participation, newsmaking practices and discourses. The theoretical framework of public sphere and critical political economy also guided data analysis. Bryman and Burgess (1994:7) suggest two approaches to qualitative data analysis: analysis in the field whereby the researcher constantly engages in "preliminary analytic strategies during data collection" and analysis after data collection that entails developing a coding system. I analysed the research data during and after data collection. During fieldwork, preliminary discoveries and data analysis enabled me to widen the scope of my research participants so as to get rich data and to refine the interview questions to suit the prevailing research context. After fieldwork, preliminary data analysis enabled me to identify emerging themes from transcribed interviews and field notes.

The methodological approach to data analysis was critical discourse analysis (CDA). According to Van den Bulck (2002:85), "discourse is a language or system of representation that has developed socially in order to make and circulate a coherent set of meanings about an important topic area". He adds that "discourse is, in fact, the story of reality as it is presented to us through media or other cultural texts". Discourse analysis is a part of the linguistic turn in the social sciences and the humanities that emphasize the role of language in the construction of social reality (Talja, 1999:460). Van Dijk (2015:466) defines CDA as "analytical research that primarily studies the way social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context". A discourse can be defined as a set of meanings through which a group of

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people communicate about a particular topic. Jorgensen and Phillips (2002:1) define discourse analysis as the analysis of "a particular way of talking about and understanding the world". CDA seeks to produce succinct findings through a process of transcription, sorting and categorisation of the data (Taylor, 2001:5). In this study, the unit of data analysis was the text, that is, sampled news content published in English language on the AMH Voices platform as from January 2014 to June 2018, my field notes and interview transcripts.

Purposeful sampling and data saturation strategies were used to identify and select citizen news content for analysis that yielded rich information, provided answers to research questions and above all enriched my in-depth understanding of the discourses of citizen journalism and alternative media in Zimbabwe. 120 out of 570 news stories, feature articles and opinion pieces were selected for data analysis. These were put into six emerging discourse categories of society/community news; national news; Mugabeism; economy news; civil society news and 2018 national elections. Saunders, Sim, Kingstone, Baker, Waterfield, Bartlam, Burroughs and Jinks (2018:1894) define saturation as criterion used in qualitative research for "discontinuing data collection and/or analysis". Saunders (2018) *et al* advance that saturation has hybrid forms and two types of saturation that applied to this study were priori thematic saturation and inductive thematic saturation. Priori thematic saturation occurred at the sampling level where no new discourse categories could be established and inductive thematic saturation occurred at data analysis level where analysis of additional news content outside the selected 120 articles could not yield new findings. In order to avoid influencing the result through personal biases, I tried to balance my analysis of the news content using CDA with findings from the interviews and participant observation.

The selected citizen news content was analysed using CDA steps advanced by discourse analysis scholar Teun Van Dijk that focused on textual, thematic and contextual dimensions. The first step was textual analysis. As advanced by Van Dijk (2015:474), news stories were analysed at sentence level to establish the use of grammatical devices such as metaphors, implications and presuppositions and passive sentence structures and nominalizations that may be used to hide or downplay situations. The second stage in data analysis was analysis of thematic structures. Van Dijk (1988a:30) argues that "systematic analysis of the textual structures of news begins with an explication of notions like theme or topic". News articles were categorised into themes to determine which themes were prominent and the consequences thereof. The third level of analysis was that of sources and quotations. Van Dijk (1988a:87) argues that "there is a hierarchy of sources and associated degrees of their reliability". This study analysed the sources and quotations used in citizen news articles to determine if citizen journalists had access to a wide range of news sources and authenticity of their news reports. The fourth level of analysis was that of newsmaking as discourse processing (Van Dijk,

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1988a: 95). I analysed the respective steps or phases involved in the making of news texts and the journalistic activities and interactions with possible news sources and news actors. The fifth level of analysis was the news schema. Van Dijk (1988b:14) defines the news schema as referring to how the overall meaning or macrostructure of a text is organised. News articles produced by citizen journalists were analysed to establish if they were coherent and followed conventional journalistic codes of headline, lead, body and conclusion. The last level of analysis was ideological analysis because news media discourses are not value free but express ideologies. Van Dijk (1995:17) perceives discourse analysis as ideology analysis because "ideologies are typically, though not exclusively, expressed and reproduced in discourse and communication, including non-verbal semiotic messages, such as pictures, photographs and movies". News stories produced were analysed to determine the ideological values they represented and the presence of bipolar bias that represented the 'us' and 'them' attitudes.

Validity of this research was strengthened through the use of methodological triangulation. Christians (2004:48) argues that the goal of methodological triangulation is "to build up a fully rounded analysis of some phenomenon by combining all lines of attack, each probe revealing certain dimensions of the human world being investigated". Hammersley and Atkinson (2007:183) define triangulation as "the checking of inferences drawn from one set of data sources by collecting data from others". Methodological triangulation involved comparing data produced by different data collection techniques, in this case participant observation, semi-structured in-depth interviews and CDA. It was done to cover the apparent weaknesses of one data collection method over the other. Triangulation helped me to cross check and confirm findings and enhanced my understanding of the studied phenomena.

There were a number of ethical considerations taken into account when conducting this research such as gaining institutional access and consent of the research participants. Ethical clearance for the research project was obtained through the formal process of Stellenbosch University that involved the Departmental Ethics Screening Committee (DESC) review and a formal research clearance certificate from the Research Ethics Committee (REC): Humanities (see Addendum 6). The DESC examined the research for ethical soundness and the data collection tools' adherence to ethical standards. All research participants signed the informed consent forms to ensure that they consented to being researched and made decisions on the basis of comprehensive and accurate information about the research and that they should be free to withdraw at any time.

## 4.6 Summary

This chapter focused on the interpretive research philosophy that underpins this study. Adopting an interpretive research philosophy meant that I treated the subject matter and the research participants

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as socially constructed and relative. The research prioritised the perspectives of the research participants, in this case the motivations and ambitions of citizen journalists and the interests of AMH Voices gatekeepers and owners. As an ethnography study, the methods of data collection were inherently triangulated through participant observation, semi-structured interviews and critical discourse analysis. Observations of newsmaking practices were mainly conducted at the AMH newsroom in Harare, Zimbabwe and in some instances, outside the newsroom involving citizen journalists at different locations. A total of 15 people participated in the semi-structured interviews and 120 news articles were selected for analysis using purposive sampling and data saturation techniques.

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# Chapter Five
# Results and discussion: Structures, citizen participation and newsmaking practices at AMH Voices

## 5.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the research results and findings in line with the themes of citizen participation and newsmaking practices. It starts with a CPE analysis to describe the context and explain how citizen journalism and alternative media in Zimbabwe were structurally constrained by politics, economy, technology, legislation, and socio-cultural factors. The public sphere theory provides the departure point to investigate the dynamics of citizen participation at AMH Voices.

## 5.2 A contextual update of Zimbabwe 2014-18

The present study was conducted during the years 2014-2018, a period in which Zimbabwe's multifaceted crisis that started at the turn of the millennium prolongated (Chiumbu & Musemwa, 2012; Ruhanya, 2018). The crisis contributed to citizen journalism becoming more prominent at AMH Voices because the role of citizen journalism is often enunciated during crises (see Chapter 2). This inherently placed the study within a crisis context. Walby (2015:14) observes that crises are both real and socially constructed. They are real in the sense that there may be actual changes within a political economic system that can be detrimental to human well-being and socially constructed because there are different narrations and interpretations of any crisis. The view of a crisis as a social construct was adapted in this study to demonstrate how citizen journalists used AMH Voices as a platform to contest and construct alternative and counterhegemonic narratives about Zimbabwe's multidimensional crisis during the years 2014-18. The prevailing crisis together with contextual factors of politics, economy, legislation and technology had consequences for citizen journalism and alternative media in Zimbabwe.

The crisis, which continued beyond 2018 had political, economic and human rights dimensions that impacted on citizen journalism and alternative media as well. The economic crisis manifested itself through a crippling external debt-trap, low domestic productivity and high levels of unemployment due to company closures (Magaisa, 2019). A liquidity crisis allegedly caused by money laundering activities of business investors led the government to introduce a much-loathed surrogate currency called bond notes in 2016. The failed 2015/2016 agricultural season led to hunger of a vulnerable population and increasing mass discontent. On the political front, there was an unresolved political succession dispute to replace an aged Robert Mugabe as leader of the ruling ZANU PF party and head of state. This succession dispute culminated in a November 2017 coup d'état that replaced

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Mugabe with his deputy Emmerson Mnangagwa, thereby creating a crisis of democracy and legitimacy for the incumbent. Magaisa (2019) states that human rights concerns included suspension of fundamental freedoms, forced disappearances, unlawful killings by the State, systematic torture and mass rape of women as extra-judicial instruments of punishment.

### 5.2.1 Political uncertainty, Mugabe's legacy of fear

The change of political leadership in November 2017 had consequences for citizen journalism and alternative media. For a long time, under Mugabe's reign, alternative media were seen as sworn political opponents of the state because they advanced the democratisation agenda. As a result, the state repressed them through biased enforcement of obnoxious laws that muzzled media freedoms, physical harassment of journalists and the violation of their premises and equipment. The fate of alternative media remained uncertain post-Mugabe era because the new government seemed to be reform-oriented at the same time keeping some authoritarian tentacles of Mugabeism. Consequently, alternative media such as the AMH group treaded the political terrain with more caution as it was afraid to alienate the new political leadership through overcritical editorials and news content. AMH proprietor Trevor Ncube actively sought political protection and established a personal relationship with President Mnangagwa. Ncube often visited the office of the president and used his Twitter account to exalt President Mnangagwa as a "better devil" than former president Robert Mugabe. Ncube openly endorsed Mnangagwa's actions and policies by visiting the office of the president and on his Twitter account where he often argued that Mnangagwa was politically stable and mature. According to alternative media practitioner Nigel Mugamu (2018), business people and alternative media proprietors generally liked President Mnangagwa's reformist attitude and his "Zimbabwe is open for business" mantra because they hoped it will bring more business opportunities.

Although Mugabe had been removed from office, his legacy of fear still permeated Zimbabwean society. The fear of arbitrary arrests and surveillance by state security agents prevented maximum participation in citizen journalism. I observed that some citizen journalists and users at AMH Voices posted news content and comments anonymously or used pseudonyms, perhaps to avoid being identified and to overcome fear of surveillance. Multimedia Editor Tapiwa Zivira (2018) said AMH Voices policy was never to "compromise citizens' security" by publishing personal information. Despite the security assurances, participation in citizen journalism at AMH Voices was still hindered by fears of forced disappearances, like that of pro-democracy activist Itai Dzamara, who was allegedly abducted by state security agents at his Harare home in March 2015 and have not been seen since then (AFP, 2018).

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The security risks that citizen journalists faced in Zimbabwe were shared by some professional journalists. Muneri (2016:178) observed that "in an environment where even journalists who have protection of their news organisations are fearful to exercise their profession freely, it becomes even more challenging for members of the public to fully participate, […] in citizen journalism". Some professional journalists were still afraid of violence and intimidation from holders of power such as politicians, business people, and personnel from the military. AMH professional journalist Nqobani Ndlovu (2018) said he still had security fears in executing his duties and noted that journalism had changed for the worse in the post-Mugabe era. Ndlovu said the military junta that orchestrated the November 2017 coup d'état was more ruthless and dreaded than the members of the Central Intelligence Organisation (CIO) and the Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP) that kept Mugabe in power. Ndlovu (2018) remarked:

> We are free but we are not entirely free. There is still a high level of self-censorship amongst journalists. Suppose if you get picked [arbitrarily arrested] by this military junta what will you do, who will help you and where will you get legal recourse? It's tricky because these guys are above everyone!

Although the coup in 2017 was another extreme example of military influence in state politics, the Zimbabwe Democracy Institute (2017:6) reports that "militarisation" in Zimbabwe started in the period after independence in 1980 when securocrats such as Mugabe and Mnangagwa got into government with "their bush mentalities, values, structures and fears" to serve selfish interests at the expense of democracy. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2015:4) argues that colonialism was partly to blame for the police state during Mugabe's reign and the military rule under Mnangagwa because "it was never a school of democracy and human rights" rather it "was a terrain of conquest, violence, dispossession, displacement, coercion, police rule, militarism, racism, authoritarianism, and antiblack racism".

### 5.2.2 The new dispensation and its efforts at reform

The post-Mugabe government advanced the view that President Mnangagwa's ascendancy to power symbolized the advent of a new socio-economic, cultural and political dispensation and that Mugabe was responsible for all ZANU PF's failures and shortcomings between 1980 and 2017. Under the new dispensation, President Mnangagwa made efforts to open Zimbabwe for business, launched a fight to end corruption and started re-engagement with the international community. Public demonstrations by opposition politicians and activists were authorised in the spirit of true democracy. Unlike before, reduced public policing enabled citizen to enjoy freedom of speech, association and movement. In doing so, the new dispensation succeeded to create some hope and tried to break the

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legacy of fear and repression by opening the democratic space for citizen journalists and alternative media. Citizen journalist Divine Dube (2018) remarked:

> Journalists are now free! They can report on issues they would not have done so during President Mugabe's reign. People are free to engage in political debate and criticise members of the executive without fear of getting arrested.

Having been away when Mugabe was toppled in November 2017 and returning home after a year to conduct fieldwork for this research, I was engulfed in the euphoria of the new dispensation. I felt the new winds of change that were blowing in the country and the opening up of democratic space under the new dispensation. Everywhere I went, I could almost see and feel a semblance of democratic change, be it at leisure spots, in internet cafes and in public transport vehicles. Citizens engaged in debates about the political situation in the country much more freely than I had previously known. I saw citizen journalists take photographs of road traffic accidents and recording videos of other public events without interference from law enforcement agents. Previously, acts of citizen journalism in public places often resulted in confrontations with police as citizen journalism was outlawed. At the AMH newsroom, I observed that journalists were free to engage in political debate and question the executive more than before. I participated in lunch break informal debates with AMH journalists over the political situation in the country. Some openly stated their preferred candidates in the upcoming 2018 national elections and justified their choices without any fear. Under Mugabe's reign, all these freedoms were not guaranteed. AMH majority shareholder and Chairperson, Trevor Ncube (2018a), remarked:

> People are now free to speak their minds. There is more freedom of expression, newspapers write freely and people are Tweeting. There is a discernible difference between what we are experiencing now and what we had during Mugabe.

Mugamu (2018) concurred that the new dispensation had encouraged freedom of expression. He noted:

> As journalists, we are not afraid as we were when Mugabe was president. There is a sigh in the democratic space. For example, the conversation on Gukurahundi[3] is now taking

[3] Gukurahundi was a state orchestrated ethnic cleansing genocide that occurred between 1983 and 1987 targeting people of the Ndebele ethnic group in Matabeleland and Midlands provinces of the country. An estimated 20 000 people were killed in the genocide. The state has previously prevented public discussions on the issue until 2017 when a National Peace and Reconciliation Commission was constituted to conduct public hearings on the matter with a view to bring about national reconciliation by encouraging people to tell the truth about the past and facilitating the making of amends and the provision of justice.

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> place in public spaces and social media. But during Mugabe's reign that never happened. It was always hushed and discouraged.

With the opening up of the democratic space under the new dispensation, citizen participation at AMH Voices escalated. Zivira (2018) explained the changed participation behaviours at AMH Voices during the new dispensation:

> The fall of Mugabe, whereby people marched into the streets, was symbolic. It showed the people that they can speak out as citizens. Even those people who were in hibernation came out fearlessly during that time to participate in anti-Mugabe marches. As a result of Mugabe's fall, AMH Voices has more people contributing than before. People contribute more openly and give alternative views. They are not afraid to do so. This is unlike in the past were people participated on the platform anonymously or after having been assured of their confidentiality.

While some citizen journalists and alternative media practitioners hailed the new dispensation for opening the democratic space for the practice of journalism, others did not. Alternative media practitioner Zenzele Ndebele (2018) reasoned that the new dispensation had not brought any change. He noted:

> Yes, Mugabe is gone but nothing has changed. The Gukurahundi issue is still there. The marginalisation of Matabeleland is still there. Corruption has not been addressed and media laws have not been aligned to the constitution. There is still every reason to hold the government of the day to account.

Ndebele warned citizen journalists and alternative media not to celebrate the new dispensation for "tokenistic reforms" because media laws were yet to be aligned to the new constitution approved in 2013. The Zimbabwe Constitution of 2013 was widely regarded as the most democratic when compared to previous constitutions. Controversial laws such as the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA, 2002) and the Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act of 2004 still contained provisions that undermined the constitutional bill of rights, hence the need for their alignment with the Zimbabwe Constitution of 2013.

Mugamu (2018) saw the new dispensation as seeking to sanitise itself by providing tokenistic reforms. "Itai Dzamara is still missing but we know with some certainty that this government cannot afford another Itai Dzamara," said Magamu. To him, it was apparent that the new dispensation provided tokenistic reforms to endear itself with pro-democracy activists, opposition politicians, civil society and the international community. In reality, so the argument goes, there was nothing new about the

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new dispensation because President Mnangagwa was Mugabe's right-hand man for 37 years. He represented the same ZANU PF that presided over state failure.

Events that occurred after 30 June 2018 which are, however, beyond the scope of this study, supported the view that Mnangagwa and his new dispensation had perhaps not reformed significantly. These include allegations that national elections held on 31 2018 July were rigged in favour of ZANU PF and street protests on 1 August 2018 that saw six people killed in Harare central business district by state soldiers (European Union Election Observation Mission, 2018:2). By October 2018, exactly a month into President Mnangagwa's term as elected president of the second republic of Zimbabwe, the economy tumbled back into hyperinflation when many hoped for stabilisation (AP, 2018). There was widespread shortage of foreign currency in the country to import fuel and basic commodities such as cooking oil, sugar and wheat flour for bread (News24, 2018a). Under Mnangagwa, it seems, the country relapsed into an arguably worse crisis than that experienced under the presidency of Mugabe.

### 5.2.3 The impact of the faltering Zimbabwean economy

During the Mugabe years and due to the depressed economy, business entities did not have adequate budgets to place advertisements in the media, hence the traditional funding mechanism of the media through advertising suffered. In the crippled economy, it was difficult for alternative media to secure advertising for two reasons. The first was that government was the biggest advertiser and it was reluctant to advertise in alternative media because alternative media was hostile to the state. The Minister of Media, Information and Broadcasting Services, Christopher Mushowe, was quoted in the *NewsDay* (2017; June 17) in a news article titled "Mushowe threatens 'critical' private media", threatening to starve the alternative media of advertising revenue. Mushowe was quoted as saying:

> I have tried all the means to accommodate all the media houses. I have been on record saying that media houses should play a role in building our nation. Let's not play these political games. Don't push me against the walls. You know private newspapers are surviving under the consideration of President Robert Mugabe. Do you know we can simply say that no ZANU PF supporters should buy your newspaper and that no state institution or parastatal will place an advert. You will simply collapse.

Government departments channelled all advertising to state owned media. The second reason was that advertisers believed that alternative media were small scale and had limited audience reach. This belief was confirmed by results of the Zimbabwe All Media Products Survey (ZAMPS) which put the mainstream media on top of the readership charts. Despite this, alternative media attracted significant advertisers determined to reach population segments beyond the mainstream. In practice,

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advertisers using alternative media potentially reached a broad audience because of the declining readership and trust in mainstream media which were seen as government propaganda instruments. Lack of advertising revenue was disastrous for alternative media in Zimbabwe because they did not have other viable sources of income as newspaper copy sales were diminishing due to a depressed economic environment and reader migration to online news platforms.

Faced with poor advertising income, low revenue inflows and a stagnant economy, alternative media organisations were forced to cut salaries and operate with bare budgets. I established that some organisations were in salary arrears and had staggered payment plans to clear unpaid employee wages. Disputes over unpaid and low salaries at the AMH group led to employee strikes in 2013 (*The Herald*, 2013) and 2018 (*ZimLive.com*, 2018). The vulnerable economic situation made the AMH group to cut newsroom staff and be dependent on free content produced by citizen journalists and in some cases by civil society organisations (CSOs). Against this background, AMH Voices was launched in 2014 as an institutional citizen journalism experiment. Online Editor, John Mokwetsi (2018) said the economic objective underlying the formation of AMH Voices was "to have ordinary citizens provide news from dark areas of the country, which professional journalists could no longer cover due to bottom line issues affecting media organisations such as staff retrenchments and the shutting down of bureau offices". The institutionalisation of citizen journalism through AMH Voices was consistent with AMH's cost-cutting strategy to maintain what shareholders perceived to be "learner and efficient" newsrooms that utilised citizen content and digital technologies to deliver news to audiences (Mokwetsi, 2018).

AMH journalists said Zimbabwe's economic crisis was worse for alternative media because it was not adequately funded like the mainstream. Alternative media could not maintain bureau offices and their operations were crippled by lack of transport to cover events in outlying areas of the city hence their dependency on citizen journalism. Due to the poor state of the economy and low-end salaries, alternative media journalists hustled for additional incomes. Flexible work times due to digitisation, enabled the journalists to leave the office for a few hours to clinch personal business deals. The most common type of part-time work that alternative media journalists engaged in was moonlighting for foreign publications. During the 2018 election season, another source of extra income was clandestine public relations (PR) activities for politicians including freebies for covering politicians. Sadly, due to cash shortages that prevailed in the country, some journalists left offices to queue for cash at banking halls so that they could access their inconsistently paid earnings.

Another challenge for alternative media in Zimbabwe was that of the poor distribution networks. AMH Operations Manager, Nicholas Ncube (2018b), submitted that they often failed to deliver copy

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or to deliver on time in outlying areas of the country because production was centralised in the capital city of Harare. This was confirmed by Cage (2015:617) who observed that "in many sub-Saharan African countries the press is very urban because distribution outside the capital and the big cities is too costly for newspapers and there is a flagrant lack of transport facilities". Comedia, cited in Atton (2008:219), argued that alternative media can only reach wider audiences by adopting mainstream strategies of organisation, economics, and distribution. Alternative media in Zimbabwe devised localised strategies to suit the operational context. For example, in an attempt to push hard copy sales, the online version of the *NewsDay* was often uploaded mid-morning, presumably after significant hard copy sales had been made through street vendors and merchandisers (Ncube, 2018b). While the *NewsDay* online was being delayed, the main news headlines and story briefs were marketed on social media. The mainstream did not have in-country distribution challenges because they had regional newspaper titles that catered for particular geographic communities and bureau offices in major towns for easy production and distribution. Paywalls and electronic newspapers (e-paper) were introduced by the AMH group to deal with distribution challenges and to generate income through the sale of content. *The Zimbabwe Independent* was the first AMH publication to use the paywall system – an arrangement whereby access to news content was restricted to subscribers or paid-up users. The rationale behind paywalls is that audiences/readers pay for the news content available to them via online platforms so that news organisations can at least recoup on lost advertising revenues and move towards financial stability through the online subscription revenues. Benson (2019:146) argues that paywalls are "a strong incentive for news organisations to produce the highest quality journalism" because audiences will only pay for the news content they want to read. However, the downside of paywalls is that they tend to cater for the news needs of relatively high income and high education elites making journalism for the elite and an agent of exclusion in society (Benson, 2019).

The *NewsDay* e-paper was a subscription-based service that distributed via email the PDF replica of the *NewsDay* to local and diasporic audiences via the internet. The e-paper had all the content that was in the hard copy including the column advertisements, cartoons and word puzzles that were not found in the *NewsDay* online (*NewsDay*, 2018a).

### 5.2.4 Implications of donor financing

Due to poor capitalisation and a faltering economy, citizen journalism and alternative media in Zimbabwe were often financed through grants from non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and Western donors. The United States (US) based charities of Media Development Investment Fund (MDIF) and the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) were the largest financiers of citizen journalism and alternative media in Zimbabwe. Mottaz (2010:10) observed that since 2008, all

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funding grants by the above centred on digital media initiatives. MDIF funded the start-up of *NewsDay* in 2010 and the institutionalisation of digital media practices that resulted in the establishment of AMH Voices in 2014. Support for citizen journalism and alternative media in Zimbabwe has consistently been from traditional Western donors such as the Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa (OSISA), Open Society Foundation; International Media Support; Free Press International and the Netherlands based Humanist Institute for Cooperation with Developing Countries (HIVOS). However, there has been a recent increase in media funding from China in Africa. Co-operation between China and some African media companies geared at challenging Western media influence in Africa has been progressing since the year 2000 under the Forum on China-Africa Co-operation (Chidzonga, 2016). The co-operation is aimed at counterbalancing the negative reporting of both China and Africa in Western media and has seen China provide technical support for the setting up of media infrastructure and training exchange programmes for African journalists (Chidzonga, 2016). Higgins (2014:10) argues that China's increasing role in Africa's media is a source of discomfort for the US because the country's influence is declining as a world power and China is rising into prominence using soft power approaches as opposed to military power.

In Zimbabwe, funding for citizen journalism channelled through NGOs came in already packaged programmes with themes in democracy, human rights, freedom of expression, media freedom, communication for social change, active citizenship and digital activism. When AMH Voices launched in 2014, it entered into a funding partnership with a local NGO, Mobile Community Zimbabwe (MCZ), which was promoting community mobile reporting using a grant from Free Press Unlimited. Natasha Msonza (2015), who coordinated MCZ, said the objective of community mobile reporting was to contribute to "media plurality and diversity" and to "advance democratic participation and active citizenship of marginalized communities". The partnership was built on the understanding that AMH Voices was a secure proprietary platform where participants could upload their news content and get professional feedback. MCZ identified and trained citizen journalists in digital security, law and ethics, and equipped them with skills to gather, edit and share news content in multimedia formats using smartphones on the StoryMaker application (Zivira, 2018), thereby affirming the technological foundation of citizen journalism. In addition, MCZ paid citizen journalists' monthly allowances for content produced and provided them with free start-up smartphones. At the end of 2014, more than 150 community stories had been published on AMH Voices (Msonza, 2015). The success of AMH Voices and MCZ partnership was short-lived as MCZ funding dried at the beginning of 2015. MDIF, which had 39% investment shares in the *NewsDay*, indirectly funded AMH Voices. From the very onset, citizen journalism at AMH Voices benefitted from donor funding. Later, this presented sustainability challenges as shall be demonstrated. Besides

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funding from Western donors and NGO grants, alternative media in Zimbabwe tapped into funding from local businesses and professional associations such as the Voluntary Media Council of Zimbabwe which provided occasional grants for investigative journalism (Mugamu, 2018).

Donors have different reasons for funding media organisations (Myers, 2009:9). Tietaah, Yeboah-Banin, Akrofi-Quarcoo and Sesenu (2018:94) argue that "strategic foreign policy agendas, geopolitical spheres of influence, cultural diplomacy and economic opportunism" are some of the reasons why rich countries extend aid to some African countries. The reasons for foreign funding in media vary from commercial interests to philanthropy and propaganda. MDIF funding can at least be viewed from two perspectives: firstly, as a philanthropic gesture aimed at promoting freedom of the media and its development; and secondly from the perspective of media imperialism where MDIF was trying to extend US cultural, political and economic influence. Higgins (2014:2) suggests media donor funding leads to "better journalists, better media organisations, better media systems and ultimately contribute to the development of democracy". MDIF funding was viewed by some as an applaudable philanthropic gesture that supported the healthy growth of *NewsDay* and AMH Voices amidst a faltering economy and repressive media environment. At the same time, it was perceived by others as the US government trying to extend its influence and control in Zimbabwean media. Paterson, Gadzekpo and Wasserman (2018:4) point out that major donors of the media in Africa, such as MDIF, "are substantially funded by their home governments and [are] influenced by foreign policy objectives". It can be argued that MDIF funded *NewsDay* and AMH Voices to advance US foreign policy objectives in Zimbabwe related to active democratic participation of citizens in and through the media.

Tietaah *et al* (2018:94) argue that donor countries and agencies often see the media as allies for securing accountability outcomes. MDIF (2017) states that it funds independent or alternative media because it exposes corruption; holds authorities accountable; and provides a platform for debate. The MDIF impact dashboard for 2017 required fund recipients, in this case, *NewsDay* and AMH Voices, to report on the impact of their work on society in areas of corruption and accountability, elections and social issues. The corruption and accountability impact factor required funded media organisations to curb corruption and foster accountability by exposing corruption scandals. The elections impact factor encouraged funded media to promote democratic participation, audience engagement as well as contribute to election debates. The social issues impact factor encouraged fund recipients to "concentrate on stories focusing on the environment, gender, LGBT and minority rights" (MDIF, 2017:5). It is apparent that *NewsDay* and AMH Voices were committed to the MDIF accountability outcomes and impact indicators by virtue of being fund recipients. In a real sense, the

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news agendas for *NewsDay* and AMH Voices were at least partly set from outside by US interests secured in MDIF funding.

Despite the appeal of foreign donor funding for the media in repressive environments, it has its drawbacks. Myers (2018:37) argues that one of the drawbacks is "who is setting the agenda and deciding what stories to cover". Another challenge with donor funding is that it creates a dependency syndrome. The dependency on donor grants poses a sustainability risk for citizen journalism and alternative media because "donors come and go, and their priorities can often change with little warning" (Myers, 2018:37), depending on the political and economic situation in the recipient country. The lack of sustainability after the exit of the donor was evidenced at AMH Voices when MCZ funding dried up at the end of 2014. This meant that citizen journalists could no longer be paid monthly allowances for content produced. Irked by lack of incentives, the MCZ trained citizen journalists stopped submitting content for free. Realising that much of citizen journalism and alternative media in Zimbabwe and presumably elsewhere in Africa was still dependent on donor grants for everyday operations and survival, Paterson, Gadzekpo and Wasserman (2018:7) urge critical researchers "to explore how foreign money shapes the African conversation". The unsustainable use of both advertising and donor grants to finance citizen journalism and alternative media begs for the use of hybrid business models that diversify revenue streams to meet overheads and survival in constricted economies. Crowdfunding by users or interested citizens can be used to gather money to finance citizen journalism and alternative media. Crowdfunding can be for a single story that is about to be produced or has been produced, for the continuous coverage of stories and for sustaining the platform (Aitamurto, 2017:188).

### 5.2.5 The legal pitfalls of citizen journalism

Alternative media in Zimbabwe were often suffocated by the state through legal and extra-legal means. Repressive laws such as the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA, 2002), Public Order and Security Act (POSA, 2002), Broadcasting Services Act (BSA, 2002) and Official Secrets Act (OSA, 1970) were sometimes selectively applied to muzzle the freedom of alternative media. To circumvent the government legal arsenal that impinged on freedom of expression and freedom of the media, citizen journalists and alternative media utilised the internet and digital technologies to gather and disseminate news. Although citizen journalism had experienced a phenomenal rise in Zimbabwe during the years 2014-2018 as a result of various factors referred to above, it had legal challenges. A strong legal foundation for it was the constitutional provisions on freedom of expression and freedom of the media. Whereas the constitution provided for freedom of expression and the media, various pieces of legislation that were not aligned to the Zimbabwe

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Constitution of 2013 such as the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA, 2002) and the Criminal Codification Law Act of 2004 constrained citizen journalism and alternative media.

AIPPA was the main statute that regulated journalism and media practice in Zimbabwe from 2002. It required all journalists and the media to be registered by the Media and Information Commission (MIC) established under the act in 2002 and recognised under Chapter 12:5 of the 2013 Constitution as one of the commissions supporting democracy. AIPPA had become archaic because it maintained traditional definitions of the "journalist" and "mass media" in a context of digital media practices. The act defines "mass media service" or "mass media" as consisting "the transmission of voice, visual, data or textual messages to an unlimited number of persons". The limited definition of mass media in the act does not include new media organisations and alternative media platforms such as AMH Voices that "are entirely born and grown online" called "digital native" (Wu, 2016:131).

Section 2:1b of AIPPA defines a journalist as "a person who gathers, collects, edits or prepares news, stories, materials and information for a mass media service, whether as an employee of the service or as a freelancer". This traditional view of the journalist excluded citizen journalists who equally gathered news for dissemination in the media. Section 82 of AIPPA stipulates that journalists must be accredited by the MIC which is mandated to establish and maintain the roll of journalists. Journalistic practice without accreditation is criminal. Section 83:1 of AIPPA states that "no person other than an accredited journalist shall practice as a journalist nor be employed as such or in any manner hold himself out as a journalist". A person caught practicing as a journalist without accreditation was liable to a fine or to imprisonment for a period not exceeding two years or to both the fine and imprisonment. Journalists accredited by the MIC are accorded rights referred to as "journalistic privileges" which includes the right "to enquire, gather, receive and disseminate information", (section 78a) and "to make recordings with the use of audio-video equipment, photography and cine-photography" (section 78d).

Citizen journalists did not have similar rights and privileges as accredited journalists because they were not recognised at law and accredited by the MIC hence, they faced arrest if they were to be caught performing journalistic duties. A majority of citizen journalists I interacted with during fieldwork operated without accreditation oblivious of the law. Due to the fact that a majority of citizen journalists were not accredited by the MIC and therefore operated outside the law, it was difficult for them to access support services from professional bodies in the country such as Media Institute of Southern Africa, Zimbabwe Union of Journalists and Voluntary Media Council of Zimbabwe (Dube, 2018). This led to the conceptualisation and formation of the Association of Citizen Journalists-Zimbabwe Chapter.

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Draconian provisions in the Criminal Codification Law Act (2004) equally constrained journalism practice. Section 96:1 of the law deals with criminal defamation defined as publishing statements which harm or have the risk of harming the reputation of another person. While criminal defamation is seen as archaic, the law under Section 96:3 puts strict liabilities on journalists to prove their innocence before the courts of law that indeed they had no intention to defame an individual instead of the complainant proving that they had been defamed. Section 31 of the Criminal Codification Law Act (2004) prohibits publishing or communicating false statements prejudicial to the State and Section 33 criminalises undermining authority of the President or insulting the President. Both Section 31 and Section 33 were unconstitutional since they undermined the rights to freedom of expression and the media. Section 187 of the Criminal Law Act (2004) dealt with incitement. Citizen journalists at AMH Voices risked arrest for incitement because they contributed activist news content that directly confronted the state and incited civil disobedience by urging citizens to take action against the authorities.

There were other laws that had the potential to constrain citizen journalism and alternative media operations. These included the Interception of Communications Act (2007) which empowered the Ministry of Information, Communication, Technology, Postal and Courier Services to lawfully intercept and monitor certain communications in the course of their transmission through a telecommunication, postal or any other related service or system in Zimbabwe. The act gave powers to the Minister or those designated by him/her to intrude into the privacy of citizens by intercepting their communications. This contradicted constitutional provisions on the rights to privacy, freedom of expression that includes the right to seek, receive and impart information and ideas. The Cyber Crimes and Cyber Security Bill (2017), if enacted into law, will constrain citizen journalism. The bill proposes a litany of crimes punishable with imprisonment of up to 10 years arising from transmitting messages by means of computers or information systems that incite racism, xenophobia, violence or cause harm. Such a bill, although perhaps well-meaning, may be used to limit internet freedom and possibly deter citizen journalism. In 2019, the government began a process of reforming the country's media laws to align them to the constitution and to repeal draconian and archaic statues of AIPPA and POSA (Mhike, 2019).

### 5.2.6 The impact of ownership and control at AMH Voices

Ownership and control are key factors that determine journalistic norms, behaviours, routines and news output (Kenix, 2011b:14). One of my research concerns under CPE was to establish how ownership and control at AMH Voices impacted on journalistic practices and news output. The AMH pledge (2018) states that the group is "free from political ties and outside influence". Despite these claims, Trevor Ncube, the owner of AMH Voices, exhibited politically partisan behaviour as he

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openly endorsed President Mnangagwa and his new dispensation, fuelling public speculation that he and the AMH group had been "captured" by the presidency. Figure 5:1 below is a picture of Ncube with AMH senior journalists and management staff presenting President Mnangagwa a framed *NewsDay* front page news story titled "*Mugabe out in week - Mnangagwa*". The news story headline celebrates the heroics of Mnangagwa in executing a coup that removed Mugabe from office. That the *NewsDay* supported Mnangagwa and his faction in ZANU PF is also confirmed by Chitagu (2018:5) who is of the view that the newspaper's "bitter-sweet" relationship with ZANU PF politicians was motivated by the need "to stay afloat in the face of withdrawn donor funding, reduced advertising revenue due to a comatose economy and shifting audiences". Embracing the new political order in the post-Mugabe era was a necessary survival strategy for alternative media because it offered business protection. By aligning himself with the new dispensation of President Mnangagwa, Ncube's media business interests were secured. His online radio and television station, Heart & Soul Broadcasting Services, were awarded broadcasting licences ahead of 28 community radio initiatives (Amnesty International, 2015) that applied for operating licences to the Broadcasting Authority of Zimbabwe in 2015. Ncube was quoted in the *NewsDay* (2018b) saying "these licences are a game changer for our business. Print has [not] been good to us. Our future is where the audience is and that is on digital platforms". In January 2019, Ncube was appointed into the Presidential Advisory Council in charge of media and communications (*NewsDay*, 2019). These developments can be seen as rewards for Ncube's support of the president and evidence of his alliance with the presidency. His appointment into the Presidential Advisory Council in charge of media and communications led to a changed editorial approach of the AMH group as it sought to support the new dispensation's efforts to implement reforms, national unity and (re)building. Consequently, Ncube's decision to align himself with the new dispensation of President Mnangagwa, made AMH Voices lose its potency that had come to define it as an alternative media space for the expression of counterhegemonic discourses. However, the platform remained alternative during the height of the new dispensation often providing alternative political narratives and counterhegemonic news discourses, as will be discussed below and in Chapter 6.

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***Figure 5:1 Trevor Ncube and AMH group employees after an office visit to President Mnangagwa.***

Responding to the allegations of "media capture" Ncube (2018a) said it was vital to separate his private person from the AMH business. "I am not my newspapers. My newspapers are not me," he stated. He argued that what he posted on Twitter was an exercise of his freedom of expression and his meetings with President Mnangagwa were his freedom of association. Ncube (2018a) noted:

> There is a perception that because I met with the president of Zimbabwe, I am captured. When I met with the leader of the opposition back then I was also accused of being captured by the MDC[4]. I am now used to allegations of capture. When the opposition accuses you of being captured and the ruling party does the same, then that's a good space to be. It means that both are not happy with you. Our space as AMH group is the middle ground. We exist to tell the Zimbabwean story as the Zimbabweans would want their story to be told. We are independent from advertisers and shareholders. We are also independent from politicians in the ruling ZANU PF party or opposition MDC. The voice we want to hear is

[4] MDC stands for the Movement for Democratic Change. The MDC was formed in 1999 and is Zimbabwe's strongest opposition party. It was an offshoot of civil society and the labour movement. The MDC party manifesto and ideology rivals ZANU PF's nationalist ideology as it appeals to the urban working class and enunciate a vision for a better Zimbabwe founded on democratic principles. Despite facing internal squabbles that resulted in its split into three separate groupings of MDC-Tsvangirai, MDC-Ncube and MDC- Mutambara in 2005, the MDC reunited in 2018 to contest the national elections as a coalition under the MDC Alliance banner led by presidential aspirant Nelson Chamisa.

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> the voice of people guided by the constitution of Zimbabwe and the bill of rights. We speak for the voiceless.

Ncube (2018a) claimed that the AMH group was free from outside political influence and control despite his association with the political elites. Another line of inquiry was to establish how ownership and control affected editorial direction and news content at AMH Voices. AMH news editors said they enjoyed editorial autonomy as the owner and stakeholders did not interference much in editorial matters. *NewsDay* assistant editor, Nqaba Matshazi (2018), said Ncube did not interfere with the everyday newsroom work. He noted:

> Although he [Trevor Ncube] has vested interests, he is not someone who will come knocking on your door to say can you write this story or do not write that story. He has no idea of what is in tomorrow's paper. He will read it, perhaps with surprise, the moment everyone else is reading it. As a former journalist, he has an idea of how the media should ideally operate. He stays out of editorial issues and his interests are purely on the business side of things. He gets worried when the sales are down.

During fieldwork, I observed that Ncube maintained an open-door policy, which in principle allowed newsroom journalists to interact with him. I realised that he was open and talkative both on Twitter and in real life. He never attended the editors' planning meetings – a sign that he did not want to create the impression that he was influencing newsmaking processes. He would, once in a while, walk into the newsroom to congratulate a journalist on a good story. When I pestered Matshazi (2018) on what he thought of Ncube's association with President Mnangagwa, he said: "everyone was socially placed and entitled to political views". Matshazi added that Ncube's political opinions and associations did not affect the editorial output.

Ncube said despite being the majority shareholder, he did not influence the manner in which journalists covered certain politicians or news because he esteemed editorial independence. Ncube (2018a) noted:

> I read this paper [pointing to a copy of the *NewsDay*] like everybody else. I got the paper this morning at home. I have no idea what goes in here before its printed and don't want to know. I get shocked to read certain headlines and sometimes I get upset. Like today I am upset because they led on a story based on Jonathan Moyo's Tweet. But the editorial team has already made the decision and that's how it should be. If I am upset or disappointed, I always tell them.

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It was apparent that professional AMH journalists were using Twitter and other social media platforms to generate story ideas to the disdain of the owner. In this particular case, the *NewsDay* (2018c: June 14) had led with a front-page article titled "Zec in fresh plot to rig elections", in which exiled former ZANU PF Cabinet minister and politburo member, Jonathan Moyo, sensationally claimed that he had unearthed an elaborate plot, where the ruling ZANU PF party had colluded with the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (Zec) to rig the July 30 general elections using hired Chinese cyber experts. Ncube was a self-confessed opponent of Mugabe and his hatred of Mugabeism extended to erstwhile cabinet ministers that were always in Mugabe's inner circle such as Moyo who often helped Mugabe maintain his stronghold on power. Moyo was Mnangagwa's political foe who survived military attacks (News24, 2018b) in the November 2017 coup that ousted Mugabe out of power. Evidently, the political interests of Ncube affected news output as he preferred news that cast Mnangagwa and the new dispensation in a positive light. His admission that he told the editorial team whenever he was "upset or disappointed" indicates that he sometimes confronted editors whenever they failed to toe the line. If news editors knew what upset Ncube, it is possible that they would anticipate and self-censor in fear of reprisals. Despite that, Ncube influenced news content to some extent.. The presence of the AMH pledge and public editorial board reaffirmed editorial autonomy in principle and in practice. The AMH pledge guaranteed the journalists autonomy in principle and the public editorial board served as the practical mechanism to prevent shareholders from influencing journalists and interfering with the newsmaking process. Current editorial board member, Liberty Bhebhe (2018), said the board "intervened on behalf of the public to protect the AMH group publications and its online platforms from being captured" by political elites through the majority shareholder, Trevor Ncube.

Advertisers did not influence AMH Voices news content in any observable way because advertising and editorial departments operated distinctly. Matshazi (2018) said editorial teams "didn't care about advertising" and he "didn't even know the adverts that came in the newspapers". He explained that his concern as a news editor was with delivering news to the audiences and not audiences to advertisers. Unlike before, in the new dispensation government and ZANU PF advertised in alternative media. The *NewsDay* and AMH Voices carried President Mnangagwa's 2018 election advertisements, something which was interpreted as a sign that indeed the AMH owner had been "captured" by the political elite and as a demonstration of the thawed relations between the state and alternative media that were part of the new dispensation's reformist agenda. Figure 5:2 is a picture of the *NewsDay* homepage taken on 24 July 2018, which gave prominence to the personality of President Mnangagwa and his election adverts without necessarily endorsing his candidature for the 30 July elections.

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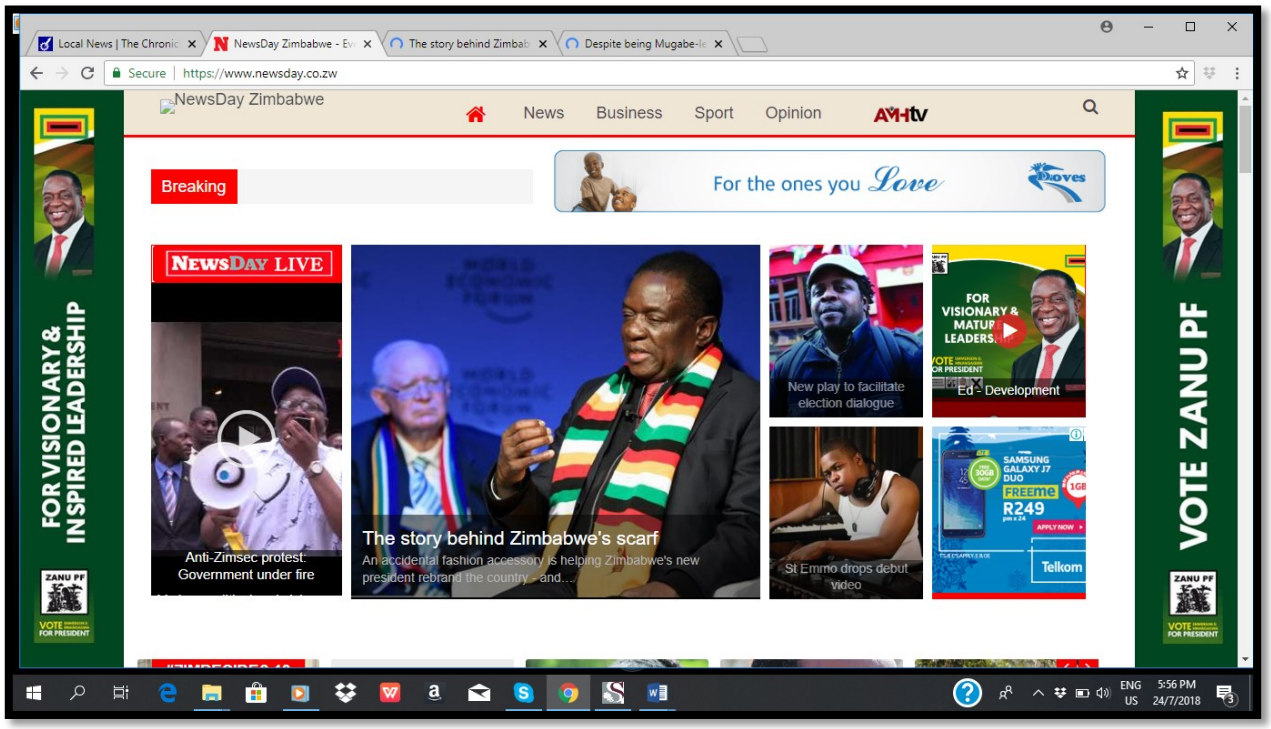
***Figure 5:2 President Mnangagwa's election adverts on the NewsDay website giving credence that the newspaper owner, Trevor Ncube, had been "captured" by the presidency.***




## 5.3 Citizen participation

Citizen participation emerged as one of the key research themes in this study. The concern was to establish how citizen journalism and alternative media enabled participation. Citizen participation at AMH Voices was in constant flux and to a large extent determined by digital technology and organisational policies and priorities. There were three types of citizen participation at AMH Voices: participation in content production; decision making; and, in public sphere deliberations.

Participation in content production was a form of participation in the media. At AMH Voices, it occurred when ordinary citizens were invited to contribute to news production processes in various ways and at different levels. At the very basic, citizens participated in content production by providing raw materials used in journalistic story construction such as audios, videos and pictures. At the intermediate level, citizens participated in content production by taking part in crowdsourcing activities initiated by professional AMH journalists such as carrying out specific tasks that led to finished news products. Participation in crowdsourcing activities required citizens to volunteer their time and labour to carry out specific tasks such as verifying information, gathering pictures from their locale and providing feedback on the crowdsourced news articles. At its most democratic and maximalist form, citizens participated in content production at AMH Voices by submitting complete news articles, eyewitness accounts and regular analysis and commentary on current affairs. Citizen participation in news production processes at AMH Voices was enabled by digital technologies of

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smartphones and the StoryMaker application. The AMH Digital First Strategy of 2013 promoted the smartphone as the technology of choice in news production processes because of its multimedia functions, that is, the ability to combine text, video and audio and its availability for use by citizen journalists. The strategy affirmed a belief that the future of journalism at the AMH group was in a smaller converged newsroom with less staff and maximum citizen participation in news production processes. Chiyadzwa and Maunganidze (2014:116) contend that digitalisation of practices at the AMH group that led to creation of the citizen journalism and alternative media platform of AMH Voices was a blessing in disguise because the organisation was able to downsize its professional staff at the same time obtaining more news and cheap labour from citizen journalists. MCZ, which provided funding support for the launch of AMH Voices in 2014 at a time when the AMH group was under pressure to reduce costs, promoted the StoryMaker application in newsgathering because it enabled "a user to record and assemble audio, picture and video content into finished formats using an android device" (Msonza, 2015). The safety of the citizen journalists was enhanced when they used smartphones to gather news because the smartphones made the journalists less noticeable and allowed them to blend in with the crowd. Msonza (2015) observed that smartphones and the StoryMaker application enabled "citizen journalists to produce high-quality content without having to lug around heavy camera equipment or use illustrious editing software". Using the StoryMaker application, citizen journalists used their smartphones to record videos, audios and pictures of news worthy events they witnessed for publication on AMH Voices. They were able to break news of crisis or high-risk situations in Zimbabwe such as road traffic accidents, capture acts of corruption by public officials and record violence and mass riots that occurred over the years. Citizen journalist Pardon Maguta (2018) attested that smartphones enabled him to safely gather news in difficult situations and environments. He added that he used subterfuge methods to gather news, thereby overcoming repressive legislative barriers that required only allowed accredited journalists to gather news.

Participation in decision making was another form of citizen participation at AMH Voices. Citizen participation in decision-making is a form of participation in the media which equalises the power relations between "privileged and non-privileged actors in decision-making processes" (Carpentier, Dahlgren & Pasquali (2013:289). This type of citizen participation was enabled by organisational policies and priorities. In 2018, the AMH group set up a public editorial board that incorporated the position of reader representative as an avenue for the participation of citizens in decision-making. Participation as an organisation ideal was valued by the proprietor, Ncube (2018a), who said the AMH group "belonged to the people" underlining that "the bosses of the group employees were out on the streets". This view by Ncube was, however, taken cautiously as further analysis revealed that participation did not always serve the needs of citizens but was used to achieve organisational goals.

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The AMH pledge of 2018 was the policy document that expressed the organisation's commitment to participation. The Alpha Media Holdings (2018) pledge outlined:

> We will strive to dig where others don't, give voice to the voiceless, shine a light in dark places, scrutinise the executive and hold the powerful to account. This we do on behalf of our audiences, whom we aim to serve with integrity by offering journalism that is professional, credible, reliable, trustworthy, dependable and totally transparent… It is our desire to create a conversation with Zimbabweans about the issues that matter in the country and enable maximum participation so that our newspapers and online offerings reflect as diverse a range of perspectives as possible.

The notion of maximum participation outlined in the pledge contrasted with that of minimum participation. Carpentier (2015) conceptualised maximalist participation as full participation and minimalist participation as partial participation. Whereas AMH projected itself as an organisation that facilitated maximalist participation, my study of citizen participation in news production processes, decision-making and public sphere deliberation revealed a mixture of both maximalist and minimalist participation tendencies. Citizen participation oscillated between maximalist and minimalist variations. At both ends, it was contingent upon the circumstances and fulfilled specific purposes. On the maximalist end, AMH Voices opened production, interpretation and distribution of news to citizen participation. This kind of maximalist participation fulfilled the democratic ideal of the media as an open and universally accessible public sphere. Maximalist participation was only applied at certain levels of the news production process that benefited the organisation such as in utilising free citizen-produced content and citizen labour in journalistic crowdsourcing. Despite the fact that maximalist participation was applied with selectivity at AMH Voices, it was commendable to do considering that maximalist participation is a "utopia, important to strive for, hard to reach and even harder to maintain" (Carpentier, 2019a:3). Minimalist participation at AMH Voices was seen in closed story selection, editing and content uploading procedures that did not enable citizens to participate. Minimalising citizen participation in important areas of the news production process was justified by the gatekeepers who argued that there was a need to do so in order to preserve the integrity of the platform. The right to select, processe and upload news content was restricted to professionals to ensure that only content that passed ethical and legal tests was uploaded on the platform.

Although the public editorial board did not have regular interface with AMH Voices, it was a practical mechanism to ensure citizen participation in decision making processes of a previously closed media institution. The board had the position of reader representative occupied by an ordinary citizen mandated with representing the needs and interests of readers at decision making level and in editorial matters. The reader representative conveyed other citizens' concerns and aspirations regarding the

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news content of AMH print publications. He read the AMH newspaper titles to "check the appropriateness of story angles, identify factual and editorial errors, misinformation and issues that might be harmful to the public" (Bhebhe, 2018). The position of reader representative in the public editorial board created the illusion of maximalist participation that levelled power relations between professionals and ordinary citizens in decision-making. It is doubtful that the reader representative as an ordinary citizen made meaningful impact to decision-making considering that the editorial board was a powerful entity endowed with people of diverse professional backgrounds and expertise. Furthermore, the effectiveness of the editorial board was in doubt, considering that most of the board members were headhunted by Ncube himself and seconded to the shareholders for appointment. Considering this, it is possible that the editorial board sometimes rubberstamped decisions in favour of the owner and shareholders. Whilst the participation of the public editorial board in decision-making and newsmaking processes opened news production to non-professionals, it can be perceived as a threat to journalistic boundaries and editorial autonomy. The editorial board may, in the long run, interfere with newsmaking processes and take away the news agenda-setting power from professional journalists and surrender it to non-professionals and citizens. The AMH public editorial board can also be criticised as an extension of US media management practices in Zimbabwe's media that came as part of MDIF's funding conditionalities.

At AMH Voices, participation through the media was a popular form of citizen participation that enabled citizens to engage in peer to peer debates on issues of public interest. Participation through the media enabled citizens to voice their opinions, experiences and interact with other voices. AMH Voices was specifically created as a platform for citizens to participate in public sphere deliberations by "giving them feedback and publishing their news stories and views" (Mokwetsi, 2018). Participation in public sphere debates at AMH Voices was enabled by the interactive nature of the platform, specifically the user comments section. The user comments section manifested citizen participation in the public sphere by fostering deliberation on public interest issues. At one level, AMH Voices functioned as a Habermasian public sphere that enabled citizens to participate by multi-voicing their opinions and concerns, thereby enriching the public debate and potentially impacting on political decision-making. At another level, it resembled a counter-public sphere that fuelled antagonism through uncivil and hostile discussions. The discussion of citizen participation in public sphere deliberations is explored in detail in 5.4.5, which looks at citizen participation in news interpretation.

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## 5.4 Analysing citizen participation in news production processes

Citizen participation in news production processes at AMH Voices was evaluated using an analytical framework developed by Domingo *et al* (2008) – which was introduced in Chapter 2. In the model, the process of news production is broken into five stages of access/observation, selection/filtering, processing/editing, distribution and interpretation. Citizens can participate at each stage of the production process depending on how open or participatory is the stage at a particular news media organisation. The openness of the production processes at each stage is ranked into four categories of 1) very open; 2) moderately open; 3) slightly open; 4) closed organisations.

### 5.4.1 Access/Observation – Moderately Open

Access/ observation is concerned with explicit invitations by news media organisations to their audiences to participate by submitting story ideas. At AMH Voices, access was moderately open because not all citizen news content was published on the platform since it was required to fit some criteria. As from January 2014, AMH Voices made express calls on its website and on social media platforms for citizens to submit news content that made impact on their communities. Ordinary citizens were cajoled to be part of citizen journalism through promises of rewards for the best stories, pictures, audios and videos. Initially, AMH Voices targeted to publish news content produced by citizen journalists trained by MCZ in 2014. However, when the MCZ funding dried up at the end of 2014 and due to increasing popularity, AMH Voices was opened to all interested citizens. In inviting citizens to submit news content, Mokwetsi (2014) wrote:

> Do you have a picture, story, audio or video that you think will make an impact in your community? We want to give you a voice on our websites. The WhatsApp number is +263773 245 709. We would like to publish your photo, your audio, and video. We already have overwhelming citizen journalism coming our way and we are loving it. Every month a team of selectors will award prizes for the best story, picture, audio, and video. And we would like to give you an opportunity to be part of our team. Your stories and images will be published on our websites under the section AMH Voices.

There are a number of issues that emerge from the above call for citizen participation. Firstly, the Online Editor defined the nature of the news discourses as those that "make an impact in your community", hence citizen news contributions were limited to community developmental issues and hyperlocal news. Secondly, by stating that "we want to give you a voice on our websites", the call for participation was projected as seeking to benefit the audience yet in reality, the AMH group benefitted from the citizen participation and content contributions, considering that it was resource constrained. Thirdly, citizens were persuaded to take part in citizen journalism through promises of rewards for

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the best content submissions. This incentivisation of citizen journalism was not sustainable especially after the end of MCZ funding. Fourthly, the call opened news production to citizen participation and co-opted citizen journalists as team members when it stated "we would like to give you an opportunity to be part of our team". Lastly, the call set out clearly the boundaries of the journalistic output by segregating the citizen news content into a separate section/platform called AMH Voices. In view of the above, it can be argued, as Wahl-Jorgensen (2015) did in another context, that AMH Voices was also a result of co-optation and segregation strategies that were used by legacy media organisations to deal with the unprecedented rise of citizen journalism. Wahl-Jorgensen (2015:174) observes that co-optation entails integrating citizen news stories into the new agenda of an organisation and actively inviting citizen contributions and segregation as "the deliberate separation of audience/amateur content from professional/journalistic content". Both co-optation and segregation strategies are evident as citizen journalism was co-opted into everyday news work processes and institutional structures of the AMH group. Segregation was achieved by the physical separation of citizen news content into the AMH Voices platform, which was distinct from professionally produced content of the *NewsDay*. The invitations for citizens to submit news content on AMH Voices announced every week with a focus on particular themes under the hatch tag #Pitchin, signalled a change in tone and objective from the initial call. In the #Pitchin call for citizens to submit stories for publication on AMH Voices, Zivira (2014) wrote:

> Do you feel there is something that is being wrongly done in your community? Are you affected by poor service delivery or neglect of public infrastructure? Do you feel your council is not doing something, somewhere and that you have been forced to stand aside and do nothing because there is no platform for you to express yourself? Well, it's time to grab your phone, tablet or camera so that you can #PitchIn and nudge the authorities to prioritise collection of revenue, not the purchase of luxury vehicles and other self-embellishment activities over service delivery. #PitchIn is an AMH Voices initiative to provide a platform for wonderful citizens of this country to remind their respective public office bearers of their duty.

This call for citizen participation was discursively framed and encouraged radicalised content. It assumed that citizens were already wronged or affected by corruption and needed a platform to express themselves. Citizens were encouraged to participate on the platform as long as they discussed issues related to corruption and poor service delivery. Effectively, this enabled the AMH Voices gatekeepers to determine the discourses they wanted participating citizens to engage with, thereby granting participation based on discursive frames. The call for participation was radical in the sense that it not only promoted active citizenship but it also encouraged the agonistic participation of

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citizens to challenge local authorities by expressing dissident views on the state of service delivery and corruption. The call also expressed the technological foundation of citizen journalism when it noted that "it's time to grab your phone, tablet or camera so that you can #PitchIn". The radical emancipatory tone outlined in this call urging citizens to rise, grab their digital gadgets and nudge the authorities led to politicised and counterhegemonic news discourses that sought to undermine government authority. Zivira (2018) attested that most of the unedited citizen journalism news content that came through AMH Voices had "a political stance, be it a simple story about hunger, the floods, and uncollected refuse".

### 5.4.2 Selection/Filtering – Closed

Selection or filtering entails citizen participating in choosing what stories will be published. This process usually happens when citizens gather together with the editorial team to read, review and select on merit the stories that will be published from a list of completed stories. The process of story selection can also be done through blind peer reviews on online platforms to determine which of the citizen stories merit publication. Story selection at AMH Voices was closed for citizen participation. It was the prerogative of the Online Editor to select citizen news articles for publication on the platform. As a standard, news stories were selected based on their relevance to the AMH Voices weekly content plan. Zivira (2018) highlighted that as part of story selection "we check if the story is verifiable, relevant, news worthy and has the necessary attributions". The closed process meant that the criteria for story selection was determined by the professional journalists and was unknown to the citizen journalists. Zivira (2018) noted:

> Not many of the citizen contributors know our editorial policy and the gatekeeping process. They submit content knowing that they will receive feedback on it and with the trust that it will get published.

Although the selection criteria for news articles was unknown to citizen journalists, seasoned contributors had knowledge and experience to pitch stories in the appropriate style and tone (Zivira, 2018). AMH Voices generally avoided sensational news content that was sent in by overzealous citizen journalists in order to protect the integrity of the platform. The closed selection process meant that AMH Voices news content represented the interests of ownership and control. The news agenda served the vested political and economic interests of the proprietor, Trevor Ncube, who was against Mugabeism and supportive of the new dispensation of President Mnangagwa. The news agenda also served the interests of the professional gatekeepers who controlled the platform. In the selection of news content for publication on the platform, the AMH Voices professional staff played the dual role of legitimating organisational structures and as citizen gatekeepers. Lindner (2017:1182) observes

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that legimating organisational structures entails professional staff ensuring that the legitimate work of citizen journalists passes as some form of "real" or serious journalism. As citizen gatekeepers, professional staff are part of organisational hierarchy that enforce a set of routine journalistic practices (Lindner, 2017: 1182). The fact that AMH Voices had professional gatekeepers reinforced public trust of citizen journalism as legitimate journalistic work since all the citizen content was subjected to routine fact checking processes to curb concerns about fake news. A closer look at the AMH Voices news content revealed that it sometimes followed the narrative logic and the editorial thrust of the *NewsDay*. Citizen news articles that were counterhegemonic and highlighted everyday life struggles against Mugabeism and the ZANU PF led government were often selected by the editors for publication on the platform. Citizen journalist Pardon Makunike (2018) said that "agenda setting and filtering of the news content" by the professional AMH Voices staff was tantamount to suppression of citizen voices because some of the citizen news was never published on the platform. This pointed to the clash of the editorial agenda with the citizen agenda and how the former always prevailed over the latter. Despite the closed story selection process, citizens could comment on AMH Voices news content post hoc. This opportunity to comment on the news content post hoc meant that citizens could potentially influence the news agenda since gatekeepers used the feedback to improve reportage of certain issues and to generate ideas for new content.

### 5.4.3 Processing/Editing – Closed

Citizen journalism can depart from routine traditional journalistic practices by allowing for the publication of unedited news content. Processing or editing is concerned with the extent to which citizens can submit news articles without professional gatekeeping processes. At AMH Voices, processing of news content was closed. Citizen journalists could not directly upload content on the platform because there was a high level of gatekeeping, which allowed the professionals to maintain control over the news agenda by deciding which stories got published. Gatekeeping was necessitated by ubiquitous and unsolicited citizen content which demanded greater fact checking, triangulation and copy editing. Strick gatekeeping procedures were also enforced to protect the organisation from legal complications that may have arisen from using citizen news content. The fact that citizen journalism practice had no legal basis and that citizen contributors used pseudonyms, made the AMH group to be legally responsible for all news content published on the platform. The ease of access and openness of the platform meant that citizen journalists entered and left the platform as they wished. This openness demanded higher levels of gatekeeping because if content processing were to be left open it would have been easily abused by citizen journalists posting illegal content using pseudonyms. The Online Editor often worked with the *NewsDay* editor to ensure that news content was written in acceptable language and to enforce quality control. News material from the citizen journalists flowed

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hierarchically to the Content Producer and to the Multimedia Editor depending on its format. The Content Producer was the first level gatekeeper who checked and verified facts of the news article before forwarding the article to the next level chain of command. The Multimedia Editor had the responsibility to repackage citizen pictures, audio files and video footage into usable news content. The Online Editor had the final call on each submitted news article. Due to the factor that the Online Editor occupied a more technical role, he often forwarded story materials to the *NewsDay* editor for finer editorial tasks such as editing for clarity, compliance with in-house style, appropriateness of the language, ethical soundness and to make sure the copy complied with law. Mokwetsi (2018) said, "The citizen stories were kept in their original form and only edited for readability, libel and slander." He added that the gatekeeping process was to keep the ethical issues in check and not to censure citizen voices. In essence, the editorial work done by the gatekeepers was aimed at cleaning citizen news content and to give it a professional feel. Citizen journalist Dube (2018) confirmed that the editing processes by the gatekeepers did not entail "changing the story treatment or effecting a spin", but entailed checking the story for ethical, legal and grammatical issues.

### 5.4.4 Distribution – Very Open

Distribution focuses on the extent to which users can share news articles. Noguera-Vivo (2018:150) observes that participation in journalism has recently shifted from an emphasis on usergenerated content to user distributed content. AMH Voices content could be distributed via email, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and WhatsApp. The decision to open the distribution of news content was of strategic value to AMH because it enabled the promotion of content across platforms by producers, users and content aggregators. Journalists play a major role in the promotion and dissemination of their own news content. Journalists share their news content to be heard and as self-expression (Noguera-Vivo, 2018). Citizen journalist Maguta often shared his news articles with me using Facebook, ostensibly for me to hear his political views and to commiserate with his personal experiences in a Zimbabwe full of crises. Both professional and citizen journalists received immediate and direct feedback from their readers when they shared the content themselves. Professional AMH journalists particularly used Twitter to share news stories they had written with their networks. This helped build them build a personal brand, a fan base and a direct relationship with the readers, resulting in what Olausson (2018) has called "the celebrified journalist". He observed that due to digitisation in most newsrooms, journalists were using Twitter for self-promotion and branding at the expense of their employers. Olausson (2018:2380) reasoned that self-promotion and branding were not only a result of "technological and cultural changes in journalism" but were fuelled by the "international crisis of journalism, where budget cuts have resulted in precarious job situations for journalists, which paved the way for journalists' self-commodification". Self-commodification meant

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that journalists increased their personal market value by becoming pivots around which news and opinions revolve. I observed that professional AMH journalists positioned themselves as experts on the Zimbabwean situation such that they were regarded as political critics and opinion leaders. They regularly tweeted their news articles that challenged Mugabeism directly to senior management staff of international NGOs and to staff of Western diplomatic missions. This presented them as favourites for job opportunities, training workshops and overseas staff development programmes supported by international NGOs and diplomatic missions.

### 5.4.5 Interpretation – Moderately Open

Interpretation is a form of participation through the media concerned with the opportunity for self-representation as users debate current events and participate in public sphere deliberations. At AMH Voices, interpretation was moderately open because users commented and debated the citizen news content within the confines of rationality and civility as determined by the gatekeepers. Commenting on news content was the most popular form of citizen participation at AMH Voices that enabled citizens to engage in peer to peer review of thoughts and ideas. Matshazi (2018) remarked that AMH Voices had a snowballing effect as conversations started when one user posted a story or a comment. Online deliberations between citizen journalists and users had a cyclic characteristic because they were unresolved. The gatekeepers never made effort to steer the deliberations to conclusions because at one point there would be consensus and in the next dissensus. The online deliberations crystallised both deliberative democracy and radical pluralism but were characterised more by agonistic dissensus consistent with the concept of counterpublic sphere, which viewed AMH Voices as a site of political struggle and conflict. The opportunity for citizens to participate in public sphere deliberations through user comments was in constant flux as it changed over the four-year period. As from 2014-2016, user comments were unmoderated. In 2017, the gatekeepers begun to moderate them using language filter dictionaries and in 2018 user comments were partially moved from the proprietorial platform to Facebook due to a shift of organisation priorities and editorial direction. This gave AMH Voices a rhizomatic character that views alternative media as elusive, fluid and contingent.

Moderation is a cautious and time-consuming process whereby user comments to news articles are moderated before they get published online. It is a full-time job in well-resourced online newsrooms. Unmoderated user comments from 2014-2016 encouraged more participation as users kept coming back for the lively discussions and in the process, provided feedback that could be used as raw materials for new content (Zivira, 2018). This research finding corresponds to findings by Domingo and Heikkila (2012:276), who noted that comment sections of news websites are part of media accountability practices that enable responsiveness to audience feedback and concerns such as notification of errors in the news and tip-offs for potential topics to be covered. However, the open

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and unmoderated user comment section of AMH Voices became a source of "dark participation" (Frischlich, Boberg, & Quandt 2019:1) characterised by incivility and hostility. Quandt (2018:37) defines dark participation as "the evil flip side of citizen engagement", which includes negative, selfish or even deeply sinister contributions such as trolling, cyberbullying and large-scale disinformation in uncontrolled news environments. Ksiazek and Peer (2017: 244) define civility as the avoidance of personal attacks and harsh language used against other users or on the content being discussed. Hostility is defined as the opposite of civility and is associated with attacks on someone or something thereby inciting anger, profanity, name-calling, character assassination and insulting or offensive language (Ksiazek & Peer, 2017: 245). The user comments at AMH Voices were generally civil on human interest issues as the users commiserated with human suffering induced by the crisis situation in the country. They often degenerated into conflict and hostility when the discourses concerned contentious issues of economy and politics. Sometimes the users were polarised on tribal and political party lines. A simple issue under discussion often degenerated into a tribal tirade between Ndebele and Shona users or simply polarised users into MDC and ZANU PF sympathisers. Uncivil and hostile comments posed a dilemma for the gatekeepers as they potentially downgraded the integrity of the platform at the same positively driving citizen participation and increasing audience reach for advertisers. Trolling and cyberbullying were other forms of dark participation at AMH Voices. Cheng, Bernstein, Mizil and Leskovec (2017) define trolling as a form of antisocial behaviour that disrupts constructive discussions in online communities. Wikipedia[5] defines an internet troll as "a person who starts quarrels or upsets people on the internet to distract and sow discord by posting inflammatory and digressive, extraneous, or off-topic messages in an online community such as a newsgroup or forum, with the intent of provoking readers into displaying emotional responses and normalizing tangential discussion". Trolling was a common form of dark participation on comment sections of AMH Voices. For example, an online user Wilson Matsika (2017), oddly responded to an article by citizen journalist Dick (2017: January16) titled "Kombi operators hard done by corrupt cops". In an off-topic rant Matsika (2017) lashed at the University of Zimbabwe (UZ) Vice Chancellor Levi Nyagura who was accused of corruptly awarding Grace Mugabe a PhD degree. He thus wrote:

> Vice-Chancellor Levi Nyagura must have unrestrained access to bumper harvests of poppies [a crude flower drug] and mbanje [cannabis] to assist with his now frequent hallucinations. It is common knowledge that ALL [sic] degrees from Zimbabwe are worthless garbage. The so-called lecturers are under qualified. Their pay is paltry. It is also widely known that with the right connections, an unearned Doctorate degree can be

[5] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Internet_troll

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> demanded or "purchased". This trash is not recognized in any civilized democratic country in the world. The UZ is actually a dump with little or no water, facilities or amenities and crappy residence halls. Many female students pay the exorbitant fees from being on their backs. UZ recently ranked 98th out of 100 sub-Saharan universities. No other purported Zimbabwean university featured in the 500 list. Levi Nyagura is hereby nominated for the label of the biggest IDIOT [sic] of the year.

Trolling as seen above was common as users vented their frustration with the prevailing crisis on the platform. Citizen journalist Maguta (2018) attested that indeed cyberbullying and stalking were other forms of dark participation at AMH Voices. Maguta attributed the cyber bullying and stalking to ZANU PF propaganda armies and covert state security agents who entered the platform in disguise to distract and influence the citizen discourses to favour the status quo. Spam advertising was another form of dark participation were unscrupulous users posted advertisements to reach audiences delivered by the platform.

To counteract the challenge of incivility and hostility that characterised dark participation, AMH Voices gatekeepers initially appealed to its community of users to exercise self-restraint and be civil all the time threatening to punish by blocking uncivil users before beginning to moderate user comments using filter dictionaries in 2017. The filter dictionaries ran on the WordPress software programme to detect and remove undesirable user comments such as profane and uncouth language. Moderation filters functioned at two levels of the moderation queue and the comment blacklist. At the level of moderation queue, user comments that contained profane words or colloquial phrases expressed in local languages were placed on hold to balance "the danger of either censoring genuine speech or letting noxious forms of user engagement slip through" (Frischlish, Boberg & Quandt, 2019:2). Zivira (2018) explained that the use of the moderation queue was not to stifle discussion but "to understand the context of any given comment". Comments that included the users' contact details such as a telephone number, email and web address were placed in the moderation queue to determine if they were genuine comments and not spam advertising. Word puns such as "bull sheet", "sun of a beach" and ambiguous idiomatic phrases that needed further interpretation so as to be understood within a given context were also also placed in the moderation queue. For example, the words "Ndebele", "Mthwakazi", and "Gukurahundi", were placed in the moderation queue because they were linked to the secessionist agenda to create a separate Ndebele state called Mthwakazi Republic, whose activists argued that a unitary Zimbabwe state was not possible given the Gukurahundi ethnic cleansing genocide that targeted Ndebele speaking people in Matabeleland and Midlands provinces between 1983 and 1987. This can be seen as a huge political decision that discouraged public debate on pertinent issues that affected marginalised tribal groups whose voices were annihilated by the

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mainstream. The second level of moderation was the blacklist level whereby user comments that contained profane and explicit sexual references were automatically trashed. For example, explicit Shona words such as “anehombe” meaning he has a big penis, “ngochani” a derogatory insult meaning homosexual, “imbwa” an insult meaning dog were blacklisted on the platform.

Using the filter dictionaries to prevent dark participation arguably also preserved the integrity of the platform. However, it put additional strain on time and human resources of an already resource constrained newsroom. Moderation slowed citizen participation and dampened the online deliberations as user comments were approved late and some trashed. Zivira (2018) noted that moderation of user comments “killed [web] traffic and discussions around the stories”. Moderation of user comments also had consequences for the exercise of freedom of association and expression as envisaged by Habermas in the deliberative public sphere. Freedom of association and expression were no longer guaranteed at AMH Voices as these could only be exercised within the confines of a certain view of civility and in discourses framed by the gatekeepers.

Westlund and Ekstrom (2018:4) observe that many news media organisations have ceased to offer comment functions on their proprietorial platforms due to difficulties in maintaining a good tone that arise from dark participation. A number of news organisations have begun to shift commenting from their proprietorial websites to non-proprietorial platforms such as Facebook (Kim, Lewis & Watson, 2018). To keep citizen participation in public sphere deliberations alive and to protect the AMH brand from legal and reputational damage, the gatekeepers at AMH Voices diverted user comments to Facebook in 2018. AMH Voices news content was shared on the *NewsDay* Facebook page where users commented using their Facebook accounts. When users comment using their Facebook accounts, they reveal their identity and may have greater accountability of their comments (Kim, Lewis & Watson, 2018). However, using Facebook as a space for citizen participation did not minimise dark participation as some users created parody or troll accounts (Zivira, 2018) to incite agonism. User comments on *NewsDay* Facebook resembled a counterpublic sphere because they were significantly higher in quantity and more uncivil and hostile in quality than those on the *NewsDay* official webpage. Using Facebook for user comments preserved the integrity of the proprietorial platform, lowered the burden of comments management and the accompanying ethical concerns that result from dark participation. Whilst dark participation brings out the true character of alternative media as a counterpublic sphere, it remains a challenge for proprietorial news platforms that are keen to preserve their integrity. Alternative media as affordances of dark participation and Facebook as dark social spaces are increasingly being used by “subcultural groups, activists, marginalised cultures and communities, trolls and socially divisive actors who seek to evade, refuse or disrupt institutional power” (Cinque, 2019). Despite the fact that media organisations such as the AMH group have

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diverted user comments to non-proprietal platforms of Facebook to avoid dark participation, it is possible to hold them legally responsible for comments posted by users on the outlet's news content.

### 5.4.6 Summarising citizen participation in news production processes

In view of the five stages of news production outlined above, it was noted that openness and participation in news production at AMH Voices differed at each stage. Some stages of the news production processes were very open to citizen participation and yet others moderately open, slightly open and others closed. The table below summarises the researcher's assessment of citizen participation.

***Figure 5:3 Participation in news production processes at AMH Voices. Adapted from Domingo et al (2008).***

| Stage of news production | Score at *AMH Voices* | Comments |
|---|---|---|
| **Access/ observation** | Moderately open | Citizen journalists were free to submit news content as long as it met the gatekeepers' requirements. |
| **Selection/filtering** | Closed | Citizen journalists were not able to select news content for publication on the platform. |
| **Processing/editing** | Closed | Citizen journalists were not able to submit and publish news content without professional gatekeeping. |
| **Distribution** | Very open | Citizen journalists could share news content using digital technologies. |
| **Interpretation** | Moderately open | Users could comment on citizen-produced news content and engage in peer to peer exchange of thoughts and ideas with citizens journalists on the platform. |
| **Overall AMH Voices score** | Moderately open | AMH Voices allowed citizens to participate to some extent in content production, decision making, and public sphere deliberations. |

Despite important areas of closure, AMH Voices was deemed to be moderately open because it allowed participation of citizens in content production, decision-making, and public sphere deliberations. The process of news production at AMH Voices did not have fixed timelines because

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of citizen participation and the use of digital technologies, which meant that news articles were never a finished product as citizens could comment on them bringing in fresh perspectives that necessitated updates. This was elaborated by Mokwetsi (2018) who said AMH Voices worked on a "virtuous 24/7-365 news cycle", which enabled them to publish news, get feedback and possibly do follow up stories based on the readers' feedback.

## 5.5 The dynamics of participation at AMH Voices

The public sphere theory as set out in the discussion above describes the connection between journalism and citizen participation at AMH Voices well. This is so because AMH Voices provided a space where citizen participation and deliberation were acted out and a variety of views articulated. In applying this interpretation of public sphere theory, I focused on Dahlgren's (2005) three-dimensional analysis of structures, representation, and interaction (see Chapter 3).

One of the structural factors that disenabled participation at AMH Voices was access to digital technologies. Despite remarkable inroads to improve internet connectivity, Zimbabwe had a digital divide that created the haves and have-nots of internet technology. The haves were mainly the urban middle-class dwellers who connected to the internet at home, work or on their smartphones. Zivira (2018) submitted that "the middle class in urban and peri-urban areas were the most visible users on the platform". This finding is confirmed by Mutsvairo and Ragnedda (2019:17) who argue that exclusion from digital participation is due to social class whereby low socio-economic communities fail to participate in digital platforms due to the fact that they do not have access to enabling digital technologies, high cost of digital technologies, poor infrastructure and lack of requisite digital literacy and skills. Consequently, this gives credence to Susen's (2011) critique of the public sphere as bourgeois-centric because participation at AMH Voices was limited to the urban middle class, which can be likened to the 19$^{th}$ century European bourgeois class that dominated the Habermasian public sphere by virtue of owning the means of production. Web analytics revealed that the users (participants) of the platform were mainly in urban areas of Harare, Bulawayo, Mutare, and Gweru in Zimbabwe. Diasporic Zimbabweans in South Africa, Botswana, Zambia, Namibia, Nigeria, Malawi, United Kingdom and the United States of America also used the platform. The Facebook web analytics in Figure 5:4 shows aggregated demographic data of people who liked the *NewsDay* page by age, gender and location. Due to the fact that AMH Voices sat on the *NewsDay* website, it was impossible to obtain separate data about it and the data on *NewDay* was taken to be representative of participation behaviours on the platform. This is obviously problematic in some respects because there is no necessity that readers of *NewsDay* will always or automatically also click on the AMH

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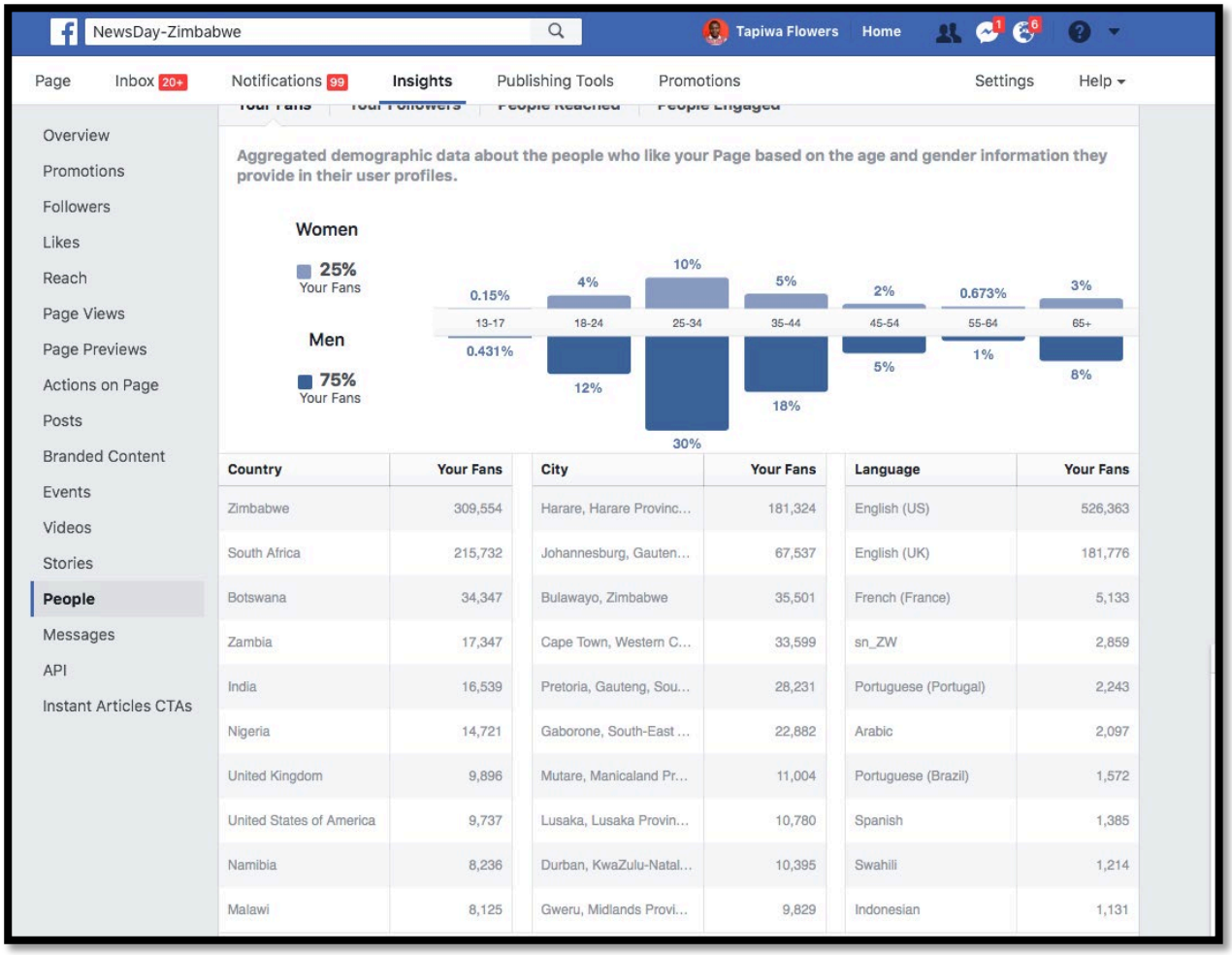
Voices link, but the argument is that at least a general trend applicable to AMH Voices may also be visible from this data.

***Figure 5:4 Web analytics data depicting participation dynamics of gender, age, and location***




Although most of the users at AMH Voices and citizen journalists were urban based, citizen journalist Dube (2018) remarked that there were a few rural based citizen journalists who were supported by MCZ with access to digital technologies that enabled them to participate in journalism. Dube added that such citizen journalists "acted as opinion leaders and conveyors of news and information on behalf of technologically bereft rural folks".

The above data showed that age was possibly another participation factor as people in the 18-44 age group participated more on the platform. Samukange (2018) said this trend was due to the factor that this particular age group "owned mobile smartphones" and were "actively involved in the goings-on of the country". It can be argued that the youthful population group actively participated on the platform because it was badly affected by the crisis of 2014-18 such that individuals resorted to the platform for self-expression against state authorities.

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Participation at AMH Voices was also gendered. Web analytics data revealed that 75% of the participants were men and women constituted 25%. This finding confirmed Susen's (2011) criticism of the Habermasian public sphere as gender blind, thus describing it as a forum or space dominated by propertied men. In this instance, AMH Voices was considered gender blind because the participation of women in newsmaking processes and public sphere deliberations was limited as indicated by web analytics data. Although 25% is still a level of involvement, it points in the direction of non-participation. Wake and Willis (2018:2) define non-participation as the occasions when "audiences have conscientious objections – to structures, to sponsors, to subject matter – in which case they might boycott". Zivira (2018) said the low level of participation by women was due to "the nature of the political content on the platform" that kept women participants away. Women's low levels of participation on the platform could be explained by the patriarchal nature of the Zimbabwean society that discouraged active women participation in public spaces and confined them to the domestic sphere. Just like the Habermasian public sphere, AMH Voices can be criticised for being a gender-blind public sphere that was dominated by male voices. This was compounded by the choice of certain news discourses by male gatekeepers that may have unintentionally excluded some women from active participation. News discourses centred on contentious politics and argumentationat the expense of "soft news" discourses of love and sex, childcare, beauty and fashion, home care, cooking and gardening, which are thought to appeal to women. This is not to argue that all women only prefer "soft news", but it indicates how traditional stereotypes may still be operational.

The data on age and gender participation dynamics at AMH Voices compares with a global survey on citizen journalism conducted by Ali (2012), which established that 58% of the global citizen journalists were men and that 67% of them were aged between 18 and 30 years of age. Ali argues that such a trend in which youthful men tend to participate more in citizen journalism than women is because citizen journalism is driven by digital technologies. His conclusion is that more men have access to digital technologies than women, which facilitates their participation in citizen journalism.

Socio-cultural factors of racism and homophobia constrained citizen participation at AMH Voices. The reluctance of white people to participate on an alternative and oppositional platform such as AMH Voices can perhaps be explained by the politics of racial exclusion in Zimbabwe that saw a significant number of the white population, who were commercial farmers, leave the country at the height of the land reform programme in 2000. Mugamu (2018) stated that whites affected by government's fast track land reform programme consistently "resisted media interviews regarding their lives, years after the land reform". From this analysis, it is observed that AMH Voices was not a universally accessible public sphere as idealised by Habermas.

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Another important dimension that affected citizen participation at AMH Voices was the digital divide and technological inequality whereby men arguably had more access to digital technologies than women. Mabweazara (2010:27) describes the digital divide as the "asymmetrical distribution and use of [digital] technologies in Africa" that alerts us to the disproportionate distribution of electricity, poor and unreliable telecommunications infrastructure, connectivity challenges and content issues. Mutsvairo and Ragnedda (2019:14) observe that the digital divide is a multidimensional phenomenon which describes "the unavoidable void between those with access to information and communication technologies (ICTs) and those without" that can be employed to explain the exclusion from digital participation such as online news platforms based "on one's race, gender, socio-economic status, or geographical location". They observe that English or other colonial languages is one of the reasons why several Africans are left out of the digital participation, given that online activity is limited to those who can read and understand those languages. Similarly, citizen participation at AMH Voices was limited to those not only with access to digital technologies but also those conversant with English language since all news content was published in English as well as the online public sphere deliberations. Schelenz and Schopp (2018:1413) observe that women and girls in Africa lack basic skills in using digital technologies, have less ownership of devices, and therefore less access. They observe that power relations and politics affect the access and use of digital technologies such that there is a "gender digital divide" whereby "women and girls are disproportionately excluded from digitalization processes" (p. 1414). In cases where women and girls have access to digital technologies they often do not have money to purchase airtime for mobile data. Another reason for non-participation of women in online platforms is gendered violence that occurs in the form of stalking, bullying, and revenge pornography (Schelenz & Schopp, 2018:1414). I observed that women who participated in online public sphere deliberations at AMH Voices were harassed more often than men through sexist comments. Some of the blacklisted words on the AMH Voices filter dictionaries were indicative of deep-seated sexism on the platform. Words such as "makumbo" used in reference to women's shapely legs, "kumborohwa" loosely translated to having sex with a woman usually of loose morals, and "mahure" meaning prostitutes were examples of sexist comments that women received. The comments were blacklisted on the platform.

It can be argued that non-participation or low levels of participation at AMH Voices were due to the gendered digital divide. Ndlovu, (2018:279) argues that the effect of the gendered digital divide is that women "are not able to set agendas for discussions and become conditioned to follow the thoughts of the dominant groups in society". This is contestable as Casemajor, Couture, Delfin, Goerzen and Delfantin (2015) argue that non-participation in public sphere deliberations must be viewed "as a form of political action rather than as mere passivity", which offers "resistance to

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dominant political structures" and the possibilities of emancipation. The women's limited interest to participate in AMH Voices can be viewed as resistance to patriarchy and a male-dominated public sphere. Women in Zimbabwe created and resorted to feminist counter-public spheres such as Her Zimbabwe, which empowered women citizen journalists by giving them the platform to speak against patriarchy and on other issues of concern often ignored by mainstream media or frowned upon by society (Mpofu, 2016:271). The lack of active participation by women at AMH Voices can be seen as participation by "listening". Barnes (2016:187) in his ecology of participation argues that online platforms have a "silent majority" that participate through background listening and engaged listening. Background listening entails viewing, checking, snacking, scanning or monitoring. Engaged listeners may have emotional or personal reactions to the content, but will not publicly declare this, instead, they remain silent and internalise their response. Barnes views distributing news content from the platform to external users as a form of participation. Based on this rationale, it is possible that women and other men users participated on the platform through listening and distributing news content. Lack of active citizenship due to a repressive political culture also constrained citizen participation at AMH Voices. Active citizenship means that citizens must be interested, engaged and participate in citizen journalism to express alternative voices, perspectives and identities that challenge the hegemonic position of the mainstream. The legacy of state repression against hapless citizens and the fear of surveillance by state security details arguably discouraged active citizen participation at AMH Voices.

Whereas a patriarchal approach to and choice of certain political discourses may have excluded some women from participation, other approaches reinforced ownership and participation on the platform. Human-interest stories were popular amongst users and encouraged more participation by focusing on family reunions, love affairs and the citizens' experiences in face of adversity. Users of the platform participated by sharing their different experiences of the crisis with the hope for economic and political change. The fact that AMH Voices represented marginalised people and groups encouraged citizen participation. The platform focused on non-elitist (but in some cases patriarchal) news discourses that affected ordinary people. Matshazi (2018) said AMH Voices dwelt on "the small things that affected ordinary people" and its popularity rested on its ability to "empower the grassroots to challenge the system or the authorities". Mokwetsi (2018) added that the platform was popular with some ordinary citizens because it had departed "from mainstream journalism practices that focused on the big man in a black suit as the newsmaker to focus on the ordinary lives of people". AMH Voices was the counterpublic sphere that expressed subaltern and marginalised voices.

Citizen participation in discourse making at AMH Voices waned as from July 2018 onwards when President Mnangagwa was elected into office. This was possibly due to the fact that Mugabe was no

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longer in power and citizens did not have significant political issues to contest on the platform given that Mnangagwa's new dispensation was still young in political office. The second reason for this was located in issues of ownership and control. The owner of the AMH group that ran the platform was obviously disinterested in contentious politics especially that which put the new dispensation in negative light. Ncube was an ardent supporter and advisor of President Mnangagwa and his media business benefited from this political connection. Ncube (2018) indicated that counterhegemonic citizen discourses that had become characteristic of AMH Voices over the years had no place in the new dispensation because there was "need to speak hope" about Zimbabwe as the country "has been to hell and back". This view was foisted onto the Online Editor, Mokwetsi (2018), who said marginal citizen views had lesser value in the new dispensation because "the country needed mature, critical and well-refined conversations". The political interests of the ownership and control to a large extent affected citizen participation and the nature of discourses at AMH Voices. From 2018 onwards, AMH Voices remained alternative but effectively lacked the vibrancy it had at the time of its inception in 2014 (see Chapter 6). It was possible that Ncube envisaged a different role of AMH Voices in the new dispensation as that of consolidating the political transition that had occurred in the country and sustaining the status quo. After a brief four years, the platform failed to adequately motivate citizen participation as was the case with CNN's iReport. Li and Hellmueller (2017:341) observed that after six years, iReport's "idea of participatory journalism was not as innovative or exciting to CNN journalists or audiences anymore".

In the final analysis, AMH shareholders enabled citizen participation at AMH Voices for the benefit of the organisation. It was unlikely that AMH institutionalised participation for the benefit of the public because it was a privately-owned organisation, which prioritised the profit motives of the shareholders. The shareholders allowed for tokenistic participation to project a public image of the AMH group as a progressive organisation that valued the plurality of citizen perspectives and as an open and democratised media organisation in the eyes of its Western financiers. Participation through citizen journalism was convenient for AMH because it tapped into the free labour of citizen journalists in reporting hyperlocal news and in crowdsourcing for news materials, thereby cutting on financial costs of hiring stringers and maintaining bureau offices. From a technological determinist viewpoint, it can be argued that citizen participation in journalism was inevitable because digital technologies broke the newsmaking monopoly of legacy media institutions. Even without legacy media institutions, it is possible that citizens would have been able to share news and information on their own using digital technologies. Mokwetsi (2018) said it was imperative for the AMH group to embed citizen journalism "so as to prevent the citizen witnesses from running away with the story through peer to peer sharing on social media".

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As already discussed above, it can be concluded that citizen journalism as observed at AMH Voices did not necessarily represent an "ideal" public sphere in all respects as Habermas had described. To some extent the Habermasian ideal of rational argument was achieved as an analysis of the news discourses (see Chapter 6) revealed that many news articles published on the platform were rationale and had a legitimate public interest appeal. The attainment of rational deliberation and discourses was to a large extent due to the gatekeeping function, which enabled the AMH Voices professional staff to structure the news agenda, select and filter only the "rational" citizen news articles for publication on the platform. Without the gatekeeping function, it is possible that maximalist citizen participation at AMH Voices would have led to anarchy and irrational discourses characterised by hate speech and incivility. The Habermasian public sphere ideal of universal access was also not achieved because certain groups such as the white racial minority and homosexuals chose not to participate in newsmaking processes due to social cultural pressures hence, they lost the opportunity to construct and contest their interests and identities on the platform. Furthermore, it was established that AMH Voices was not neutral and autonomous as idealised in the Habermasian public sphere. The platform was to some extent affected by the interests of ownership and control as the owner sometimes dictated the editorial direction to favour his political views and business interests. Consequently, the news discourses at AMH Voices were shaped by the gatekeepers and to some extent controlled by the owner. The Habermasian ideal of freedom of speech and association was only achieved to a limited extent at AMH Voices. This was because participating citizens could not fully express their views and opinions. AMH Voices was to a large extent a counterpublic sphere which was opposed to the dominant mainstream. It also enabled marginalised citizens to participate in contesting alternative political narratives and counterhegemonic news discourses. Even so, AMH Voices did not function as an ideal counterpublic sphere because the citizen deliberations were sometimes moderated to remove hostililty and incivility that characterise agonism and conflictual deliberations in counterpublic spheres. This also meant that the exercise of the freedom of expression and association on the platform was limited and moderated by the gatekeepers.

## 5.6 Citizen journalists' newsmaking practices

Newsmaking practices was the second research theme to emerge. I observed how citizen journalists routinely gathered AMH Voices news content and how engagement with audiences affected the newsgathering practices of professional AMH journalists. Newsmaking practices were defined as the practical activities and routines that professional and citizen journalists followed to gather, edit and publish AMH Voices news content. I conceptualised newsmaking practices as the repeated behaviours of journalists inside and outside the newsrooms that were part of the everyday work routines. I viewed newsmaking as an interlinked process that involved; 1) the generation of story

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ideas and determining what was newsworthy; 2) the actual act of newsgathering which involved interviewing of news sources and fact checking; 3) the writing and editing process; and, 4) the finalisation process of packaging and distribution. Newsmaking practices at AMH Voices were in constant flux as new practices were adopted in response to changing operational context and organisation priorities. Deuze (2008) proposes that journalism must be viewed as "liquid" especially in the light of constantly changing practices caused by disruptive digital technologies. Deuze (2008:851) argues that liquid journalism "cannot keep its shape or stay on course for long" because volatility, uncertainty, flux, change, conflict, and revolution are the permanent conditions of everyday life. The study revealed that citizen journalists gathered AMH Voices news content using structured, unstructured and hybrid practices.

During the first year of its launch, AMH Voices utilised content from trained citizen journalists gathered using structured content plans. In this research, trained citizen journalists refer to ordinary citizens who were specifically trained by MCZ to gather and produce news content for AMH Voices. Trained citizen journalists were tasked to produce, on a weekly basis, hyperlocal news from their communities on topics predetermined by the Online Editor as part of continuous skills development. The Online Editor announced the weekly content plans on Twitter under the hatch tag #Pitchin, on WhatsApp groups and direct messaging calling upon the trained citizen journalists to submit content about community news events and local authority service delivery issues such as burst sewer pipes, dilapidated school facilities, power outages, water cuts, road accidents and veld fires. Trained citizen journalists produced content using Motorola G2 smartphones given to them by MCZ and on the StoryMaker application. The structured content plans guided the citizen journalists on what issues to report on and the focus on community issues was meant to fill the void for hyperlocal news content. The use of the structured content plans evidenced minimalist citizen participation in content production because the agenda-setting power and range of news discourses were determined by the professional gatekeepers in line with editorial interests. The trained citizen journalists operated in similar ways to their professional counterparts. They worked with a predetermined weekly news agenda and scheduled their work activities roughly in the same manner as the professionals did in the editorial planning meetings. This led some trained citizen journalists to regard themselves as "pro-ams" (Bruns, 2010) and to demand remuneration equal to that given to stringers working for the mainstream (interview with Dube, 2018). Trained citizen journalist, Dube thus remarked:

> It is not important to train citizen journalists anymore because once trained they begin to act like professionals, they start imitating the professional way of reporting using the inverted pyramid and look for stories that are covered by professional journalists, thereby neglecting their constituency of citizen news.

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From 2015 onwards, AMH Voices news content was produced using unstructured practices that opened news gathering to spontaneous and activist citizen journalists. This was after trained citizen journalists discontinued to produce content for the platform due to lack of incentives as funding from MCZ dried up. The failure by trained citizen journalists to continue producing news content even after funding had dried up reaffirms Wall's (2017) view that citizen journalism can only be fostered through establishing on-going, face-to-face training and perhaps through sustainable funding. Spontaneous citizen journalists were ordinary citizens that gathered and produced news content for AMH Voices mainly using smartphones and without any journalism training. This new crop of content contributors fundamentally changed the nature of news discourses on the platform from community centred developmental news to contentious politics. News content from the spontaneous citizen journalists was unsolicited unlike that from the trained citizen journalists, which followed the structured content plan. Spontaneous citizen journalists submitted news content that was remarkably unstructured and often failed to meet the standard of newsworthiness as seen by the gatekeepers. Spontaneous citizen journalists contributed to the newsmaking process at AMH Voices as eyewitnesses to particular news events or as individuals telling personal experiences of the crisis in the country. The spontaneous citizen journalist can be equated to the "citizen witness" introduced by Allan (2013:9) to describe "first-person reportage in which individuals temporarily adopt the role of journalists to participate in newsmaking, often spontaneously during a time of crisis, accident, tragedy or disaster when they happen to be present on the scene". As eyewitnesses, spontaneous citizen journalists gathered news accidentally by being at the right place at the right time. Unlike trained citizen journalists, spontaneous citizen journalists constructed news accounts on the basis of their proximity to news events rather than using the journalistic skill of news selection and planning. Activist citizen journalism was another form of unstructured practice at AMH Voices. It was performed by individuals affiliated to political parties or social movement groups seeking to tell alternative news about the crisis situation in Zimbabwe. Activist citizen journalism is similar to what Nguyen and Scifo (2018:379) describe as oppositional citizen journalism whose practice is "sustained, non-accidental activity [that] serve some ideological agendas and socio-political causes". Activist citizen journalists at AMH Voices provided regular commentary and analysis on a variety of issues "often with attitudes hostile to widely held beliefs" (Nguyen & Scifo, 2018:379) and representing the voices of the subaltern. One can argue that as from 2015 onwards, there was little citizen journalism at AMH Voices because the first cohort of trained citizen journalists stopped producing content at the end of 2014, when MCZ funding dried up. The content from activist citizen journalists, which partly replaced news content from the trained citizen journalists as from 2015 to 2018 can be equated to reader comments that are not far removed from the letters to the editor of the older legacy media. However, for the purposes of this study, such content was treated as part of citizen

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journalism because it enabled the participation of ordinary citizens in discourse making, informing the public and enriching news commentary about the political and economic situation in the country. Furthermore, such content was viewed as a form of journalism written using interpretive writing styles that foregrounds the author's views and opinions and makes no use of interview sources (see Chapter 6). The use of such content on the AMH Voices platform signals the changing nature of journalism, its epistemes, news values and need for boundary work to delimit what is objective journalism as seen by traditionalists from new forms of journalistic output that are affective and interpretative.

Hybrid newsmaking practices were also observed at AMH Voices. Hamilton (2016:165) describes hybrid newsmaking practices as those that "straddle mainstream and alternative journalism". He adds that hybrid practices also manifest in the "contradictory pairing of guerrilla and professional" (p.171). Ruotsalainen and Villi (2018:80) observe that hybrid journalism appeals to both rational and affective sentiments in the audience by blending public with private, entertainment with politics, work with leisure and the personal with the political. Waisbord (2013:229) notes that "the integration of professional and amateurs in news production illustrates hybridisation of news cultures whereby the professionals seek professional reporting and citizen journalists add advocacy and partisanism". In some instances, AMH Voices represented a hybrid form of journalistic practice where the input from professionals and the citizen journalists mixed. Citizen journalist Makunike (2018) recounted how he approached the AMH Voices gatekeepers seeking assistance to cover a developing story in his community. "They assisted me with more ideas on who to interview and what questions to ask in the interview. They even advised me on what photographs to get for the story," said Makunike. An example of the collaboration was a story done by AMH Voices content producer, Tinotenda Samukange and a citizen journalist Jackie Mbayiwa–Makuvatsine (Samukange & Mbayiwa-Makuvatsine, 2015: June 5) titled "The anguish, anxiety of an expecting mother". Mbayiwa – Makuvatsine, an expecting mother, had a negative experience in one of the country's public hospitals. She decided to use her citizen journalism skills and intuition to highlight the challenges of maternal health in the country. In order to amplify citizen concerns over poor maternal health delivery, the news article was written by the professional journalist using the eyewitness narration of the citizen journalist. During fieldwork, I witnessed an incident where citizen and professional journalists collaborated in gathering news. In this particular incident, a *NewsDay* reporter was on assignment alone to cover a high-profile court session in which judgment was about to be delivered on a case involving the battle of control of the MDC T party by Thokozani Khupe and Nelson Chamisa. Whilst the journalist was inside the court following the proceedings, outside the court room another news event occurred when Chamisa's supporters broke into song denigrating Khupe. The lone journalist

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decided not to skip the court proceedings to bear witness of the unfolding drama outside the court room. A spontaneous citizen journalist recorded the event on his smartphone and shared the footage with the professional journalist. The video footage was uploaded on AMH Voices and credited to the citizen journalist. The motivation of collaboration in hybrid practices was in most cases to amplify citizen voices and to produce content of better quality that potentially had greater impact with the audiences, according to professional journalistic standards. Collaboration in hybrid practices equalised the power relations between professional and citizen journalists and assumed this was mutually beneficial. The weaknesses of citizen journalists in writing compelling news narratives were covered when they collaborated with the professionals. Similarly, the news output of professional journalism was enhanced because citizen voices provided new perspectives and improved the breadth and depth coverage of an issue. This is corroborated by Nyathi and Garman (2016:104) who in their study of Iindaba Ziyafika – a citizen journalism project in Grahamstown, South Africa - established that citizen journalists worked best when partnered with professional journalists, and vice versa because citizen journalist brought their local knowledge of the town and contacts while the professional journalists brought to bear the expertise and techniques of professional practice.

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***Table 1 Timeline of events at AMH Voices***

| Key Events | Citizen participation | Newsmaking Practices | News Discourses |
|---|---|---|---|
| **2014.** AMH Voices is established as a citizen journalism and alternative media platform by the AMH group. The establishment of the platform is a result of the Digital First Strategy aimed at engaging audiences, enabling citizen participation in news production processes, reducing company costs and downsizing staff.<br>MCZ extends funding support to AMH Voices by training citizen journalists, pays for content produced and incentives for participation. Citizen journalists are given mobile smartphones and allowances for the purchase of internet data. | Ordinary citizens are engaged through the interactive platform and take part in public sphere deliberations at AMH Voices through the unmoderated user comments which allow them to engage in peer to peer exchange of thoughts and ideas. Citizen participation in news production processes is limited to trained citizen journalists. | Newsmaking practices are structured. Content from the trained citizen journalists is gathered using mobile smartphones and packaged in multimedia formats using the StoryMaker application. Only trained citizen journalists contribute news content on the platform. All content from citizen journalists is subjected to professional gatekeeping processes of fact checking and verification to ensure copy meets professional journalism standards. | News discourses are controlled and determined by the professional gatekeepers through the structured content plans. News discourses are hyperlocal focusing on local authorities and community development challenges with a view of promoting improved service delivery. |
| **2015-2016.** MCZ funding for citizen journalism at AMH Voices dries up. Aggrieved cohort of trained citizen journalists stops producing content due to lack of incentives. For continuity purposes, spontaneous and activist citizen journalists are encouraged to submit news content. | Citizen participation peaks and approximates the maximalist ideal as open calls are made for more citizen participation on the platform by professional gatekeepers. Citizen participation in news production processes is through crowdsourcing, unsolicited eyewitness accounts and video footage, opinion, analysis and commentary on public interest issues. Participation in public sphere deliberations is high due to increasing disdain of Mugabeism and the crisis in the country. The counterhegemonic discourses and the contentious politics that takes centre stage on the platform drive citizen participation. The comment sections become a source of | Newsmaking practices are unstructured as most of the news content comes from untrained citizen journalists unsolicited. Content is not packaged in any standardised form.<br>News events are not objectively reported but use an interpretive style of writing that foregrounds personal opinion, emotion and makes no use of sources. Activist citizen journalists and civil society organisations use the platform to give alternative political commentary and to advocate for democracy and human rights. There is also use of hybrid newsmaking practices where professional AMH journalists partner with citizen journalists to produce news content | Although news content still focuses on hyperlocal content, the discourses become politicised and radical as they boldly question status quo Mugabeism and the hegemonic order. The news discourses become explicitly counterhegemonic discourses as they directly confront government over the exploding crisis and push for the radical ouster of Mugabe and the ruling ZANU PF party out of government. |

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| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | dark participation where users vent their frustrations over the situation in the country prompting gatekeepers to moderate them. This in turn slows down participation and the public sphere deliberations. | that is of great quality and appeal at least according to professional journalism standards. | |
| **2017-18**. Mugabe is removed from power through a military coup in November 2017. A new political administration takes over and promises to open Zimbabwe for business and implement prodemocracy reforms. The AMH Voices proprietor immediately supports the new political administration to protect his business interests at the expense of the public interest journalism. | Due to dark participation, professional gatekeepers move user comments from the online proprietorial platform to Facebook. This is done to protect the integrity of the platform and protect it from legal law suits that may arise from uncivil user comments. After the fall of Mugabe, citizen participation in public sphere deliberations at AMH Voices wanes ostensibly because Mugabe, the contentious political figure in Zimbabwe's politics that generated most of the news content, was gone and there was optimism with the new dispensation. | Citizen participation and support of the platform dwindles when the owner publicly declares his support for the new political administration amidst allegations that he and the AMH group are "captured" by the political elites. News content contributions from untrained citizen journalists are still welcome. However, there is enforcement of stricter gatekeeping practices and this drives away participation as content must resonate with the changed interests of ownership and control. Nonetheless, the platform remains alternative due to its open production practices that allow ordinary citizens to contribute news content. | The anti Mugabeism discourses that previously took centre stage on the platform stop with the ouster of Mugabe from power. The tone is lowered on overly critical counterhegemonic discourses in fear of alienating the new political administration. The owner of the platform discourages citizen discourses that cast the government of the day and his political allies in a bad light. Instead, citizens are encouraged to participate by contributing news content and discourses that promote national interests and support the new dispensation's effort to rebuild the country, allegedly from the ruins of Mugabeism. |

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## 5.7 Citizen journalists' sourcing practices and quotations

Part of the research on newsmaking practices focused on citizen journalists' use of sources and quotations as part of presenting news reports. Atton (2008: 220) observes that mainstream media make extensive use of members of elite groups as sources and alternative media offer access to a much wider range of voices including members of local communities, protesters, and activists. Trained citizen journalists were aware that they must use local leaders and ordinary citizens as news sources (Dube, 2018). However, all analysed citizen news content did not reveal the use of sources and quotations. All citizen journalists wrote AMH Voices news content using their own or community perspective. Such content qualified as news because it was based on the narration of real events that conveyed new information and, in most cases, it provided alternative analysis and commentary of the situation in the country. Citizen journalist did not follow strict professional journalistic rules on the use of triangulated sources in order to achieve balance and a fair distribution of voices. This is similar to what Li and Hellmueller (2017:336) established about CNN's iReporters who were "more likely to report their own observations, personal experiences, and interview civilian sources rather than official sources of information". The citizen journalists' personal perspectives and experiences were central to newsmaking at AMH Voices, as elaborated by Mokwetsi (2018):

> AMH Voices news stories are derived from lived personal experiences. It doesn't matter where the person sends their story from. You can be in Zimbabwe for less than two hours and still be able to send us a story about your lived experience in the country from your base in South Africa. Our stories come from all corners as long as they are based on a lived reality.

The personal perspective meant that news articles were narrated in the first person, thereby challenging the notion of journalistic objectivity. Stories written from the personal perspective were sometimes emotive and value laden as the citizen journalists attempted to bring to the fore their personal beliefs and world view. This is in line with findings by Wahl-Jorgensen (2016:128), who observed that citizen journalism had "opened up new spaces for more emotional and personalised forms of expression in public discourse". Wahl-Jorgensen adds that emotional expression does not undermine the rationality of the public sphere but is a vital force that enables engagement with audiences. The use of the personal perspective contrasted with traditional journalism practice where a reporter pretends to stay completely out of the picture, in order to present an objective point of view of the news event. Citizen journalists used either their personal perspective or the community perspective to write news stories.Dube (2018) remarked that he wrote news stories using the "public

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powered journalism" perspective, which called on him "to always fit into the story, voices and perspectives of grassroots communities".

Although analysis of news content did not reveal the use of sources, it was established that citizen journalists had news contacts or sources. Citizen journalist Makunike (2018) said he had "direct access to the people of Ruwa" that included local politicians, local authority staff, representatives of NGOs and opinion leaders who served as local level sources of news. Interactions with local contacts made it easy for Makunike to confirm local news talk and to tap into gossip even in commuter omnibuses. An insistence on the use of local level contacts as news sources meant that citizen journalists were confined to hyperlocal news reporting. Despite Atton's (2008: 221) assertion that "the representation of ordinary people in alternative journalism does not set them apart as heroes or victims, but as voices that have as equal a right to be heard as do the voices of elite groups", at AMH Voices the voices of ordinary citizens were often presented as those of hapless citizens suffering at the hands of a ruthless ZANU PF regime, crying out for help and seeking relief from the multifaceted crisis situation.

Overall access to news sources was a challenge for citizen journalism and alternative media in Zimbabwe. This was because mainstream media had strong links to and perhaps even a monopoly over access to government sources of information. Government authorities responded swiftly to information requests by mainstream media journalists. Magamu (2018) stated that mainstream media were always first with the story because they received media briefings from government sources ahead of alternative media. Despite this unequal access to government sources, alternative media sometimes reported similar events using alternative sources and frames that were counterhegemonic. Another challenge was the bureaucratic processes of public relations (PR) and of obtaining information from government departments as obstacles to newsmaking. AMH professional journalist Silas Nkala (2018) said government procedures of submitting written requests for public information and obtaining a written response as stipulated by law (AIPPA, 2002) frustrated and delayed newsmaking, resulting in some news stories not materialising. Closely related to this was the challenge of closed institutions that were inaccessible to journalists such as the army and tough-skinned politicians who simply did not bother to respond to journalistic inquiries or requests for interviews. PR was a threat to newsmaking for all journalists. Nkala (2018) noted that efforts to obtain comments from ailing public institutions were always frustrated by PR professionals who "put cosmetic responses to journalist inquiries in line with their mandate to protect the image of an organisation even when it was clear that such organisations were facing challenges".

During fieldwork, I encountered two examples that illustrated the challenge of accessing news sources faced by citizen journalists and professional journalists working for alternative media. In

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January 2018, a citizen journalist decided to collaborate with a professional AMH journalist in developing two stories that were unfolding within the military. In the first story, the citizen journalist had witnessed the deployment of armed soldiers in his rural home of Nkayi, some 150 km out of the city of Bulawayo, allegedly to intimidate the rural folk into voting for the ruling ZANU PF party in the national elections that were scheduled for July 2018. Repeated efforts by the collaborating journalists to get official comment on the story from the Zimbabwe National Army (ZNA) failed as the inquiries were simply ignored. The journalists were forced to abandon the story due to lack of official comment and fear of reprisal given the context that the army had recently in November 2017 staged a coup d'état that dislodged long time president Mugabe. Even though the citizen journalist might have taken a picture of the army as valid proof of military presence in the area, doing so had legal consequences. The Official Secrets Act [Chapter 11:09] of 1970 inherited from the colonial administration, criminalised "communicating or receiving anything, [that] shall be construed as including a reference to a prohibited place". A "prohibited place" is defined by the Act as "any defence work belonging to, occupied by or used by or on behalf of the State" including any arsenal, military or air force establishment, police camp, depot, station or building. As such, the citizen journalist was prevented by law and institutional pressures from pursing the story. The story was eventually picked up by alternative media outlet Bulawayo24.com which published it under the by-line of Stephen Jakes (2018: January 23) headlined "Soldiers causing 'terror, havoc' in Nkayi". In the story Jakes (2018) referred to unnamed sources that witnessed the "terror and havoc" of the soldiers and made no use of ZNA official comment. After the publication of the news article, ZNA used the state owned mainstream media to refute the allegations of terror and havoc by its members as publicised by Bulawayo24.com. In a media release published by the *Chronicle* (2018: January 31) titled "Army dismisses deployment claims in Nkayi", the ZNA director of public relations urged media organisations to verify facts with the ZNA before publishing news. This demonstrated how the ZNA was available for comment when the mainstream media was involved and non-committal to alternative media inquiries. This non-committal approach was also due to the fact that alternative media were assumed to be in an adversarial relationship with the state and the ruling elites.

In the second story, the citizen journalist narrated how his brother employed by the army, had been arrested and detained by military police for taking part in an industrial action at Brady Barracks on the outskirts of Bulawayo. The alleged industrial action occurred in April 2018, amid claims that the soldiers were demanding a pay hike as a reward for participating in Operation Restore Order, the coup d'état that removed Mugabe from office. The collaborative effort of the citizen and professional journalist to do the story failed because the ZNA refused to comment, stating that issues of indiscipline by members of their force were an internal matter and beyond the public glare of

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journalism. Faced with such dicey situations where closed institutions refused to comment, alternative media had the option of letting the story die or run the story without the necessary attributions. Doing the latter often led to dire consequences for alternative media journalists such as threats on personal security and trumped-up treasonous charges using draconian and archaic laws. Nonetheless, state repression sometimes reinforced alternative media's bold anti-establishment character as they published what the mainstream media would not ordinarily publish.

## 5.8 Digital newsmaking practices at AMH Voices

Deuze and Prenger (2018:14) observe that digital technology is "the most powerful sectoral force shaping how media content gets produced, distributed, and experienced" as most media organisations "continue to computerize and digitalise all elements of the production cycle". The centrality of digital technology to journalistic processes at AMH was emphasised by Ncube (2018a) who stated that "technology was the enabler, not the enemy" of journalism. The digital practices that I observed at AMH Voices included journalists' use of social media for newsmaking; web analytics and clickbaiting (to be discussed below); crowdsourcing; content curation and shovelware (the use of news content from print publications on online platforms and vice versa).

### 5.8.1 Social media in newsmaking

During fieldwork in the AMH newsroom, I observed that the internet had become engrained in the daily routines of professional journalists. As I walked in the newsroom, I noticed that almost every journalist was using the internet either for research purposes or for social networking on Facebook and Twitter. It was customary for AMH journalists to begin the day in the office by checking their email and then check for updates on Facebook and Twitter. I noticed that the news editors and senior journalists always opened the news websites of the rival state owned mainstream publications of *The Herald* and *Chronicle*. By reading mainstream news media stories and headlines, AMH journalists got ideas on how to develop different stories using alternative angles and sources. I also discovered that AMH editors used Twitter to habitually scoff at their mainstream media counterparts for poor quality news articles and lack of sophistication. This often degenerated into a cyber-war of scorn and mudslinging between mainstream and alternative media editors. Sometimes the rivalry got unprofessional and splashed into the newspaper pages. For example, *The Herald* (2019a: May 17) in "Plot to unleash violent protests unearthed", alleged that a multimedia journalist from *NewsDay* and eight other activists had received group training in the Maldives and the Czech Republic "to effect illegal regime change" in Zimbabwe through "massive demonstrations, sit-ins, student protests, civil disobedience and online activism". Irked by this, *NewsDay* (2019b: May 18) in "*The Herald* falsehoods exposed", retorted by dismissing *The Herald* news article as "malicious, unethical,

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vexatious, false and an attempt to soil the rapidly growing paper's image". *NewsDay* (2019b) said the article was recklessly bent on painting the paper as a "terrorist or political outpost" describing *The Herald* journalists as "outright liars and fiction mongers". *The Herald* (2019b: May 20) in "*NewsDay*: Lack of wisdom, hypocri*sy* and confusion" was unrelenting in its attack of the alternative publication. In its editorial*,* *The Herald* (2019b) described the *NewsDay* as engaged in "acts of treachery [with] civil society acolytes [to] get their hands dirty through donor money intended to effect regime change in Zimbabwe". *The Herald* (2019b) added that *NewsDay* "lived off the filthy lucre" of donor funding which had seen it "having newsprint donated to them, to getting money via offshore accounts so that they play the role of the voice of the opposition within the illegal regime change matrix against Zimbabwe". The above example demonstrated the oppositional relationship that existed between the mainstream and alternative media in which the mainstream positioned itself as defending the national interest while portraying the alternative as anti-establishment, aligned to civil society and representing the interest of Western donors.

As a result of internet use in the AMH newsroom, professional journalists routinely engaged with citizens on social media. Saltzis (2012:471) observes that citizen engagement with professional journalists has been increasing in "quantity and quality" such that it "cannot be ignored [in] the daily routines of journalists". At AMH Voices, the purpose of citizen engagement was to find story ideas and keep in touch with audiences. Mokwetsi (2018) said he generated story ideas for AMH Voices content from the engaged audience by "provoking conversations". To do this, Mokwetsi would ask audience members questions about their lived experiences such as asking which bank in Harare was issuing hard currency cash or where one could source fuel and cement, which were some of the scarce commodities in the country in 2018. Citizen responses to these seemingly simple questions were material for news stories as some provided eyewitness accounts of the crisis and yet other citizen responses were potential material for journalistic scoops.

Apart from the deliberate audience engagement on social media to provoke conversations, I learnt that professional AMH journalists used social media, particularly Twitter, to search for story ideas. The professional journalists tuned into the topical conversations of unsuspecting audience members to get story ideas. Professional journalist Ndlovu (2018) highlighted that the days of "unidirectional journalism where journalists fooled themselves into believing that they knew everything were over because audiences knew better". Ndlovu said he followed the noisemakers of social media particularly prominent activists, politicians and academics who were always "buzzed" on topical issues of news value. He added that it was better to mine story ideas from ordinary citizens on social media than to rely on biased and puffery news releases from corporates and politicians. News releases are part of newsmaking practices in traditional journalism where the authority to "release" news rests

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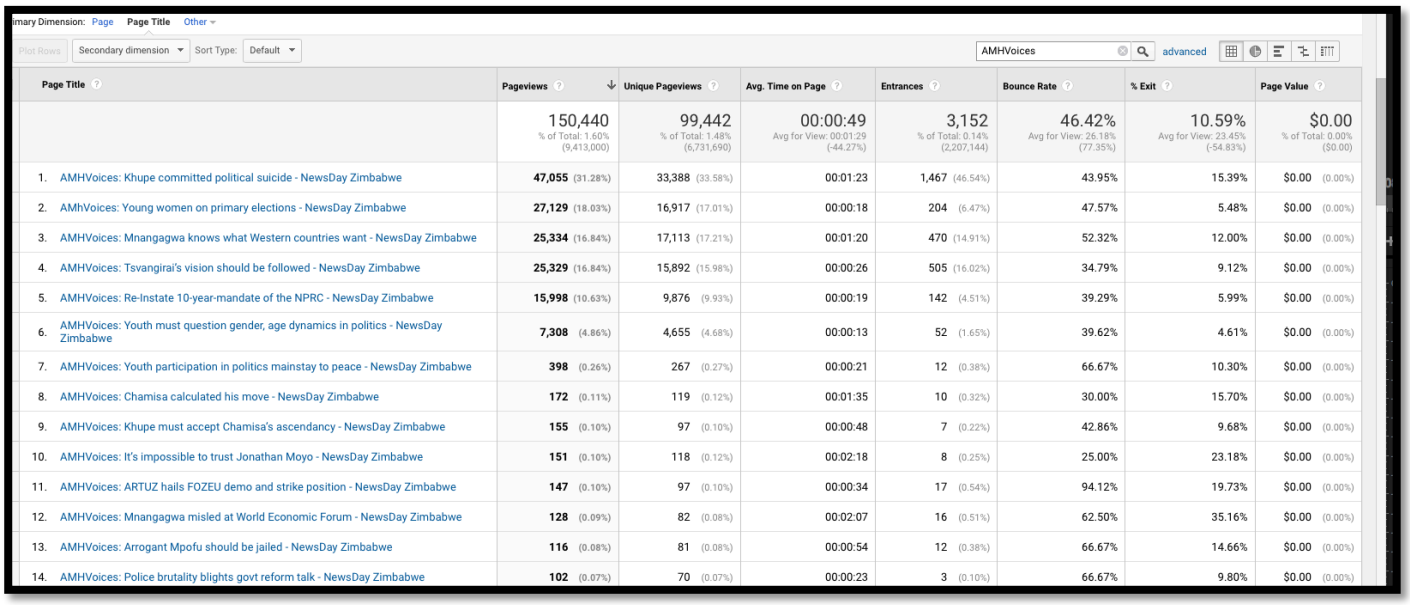
with a designated authority, usually a public relations (PR) professional. Although news releases are still in use, citizen journalists have challenged the monopoly of PR practitioners and mainstream media to announce news as they are able to capture and disseminate news and information instantaneously using digital technologies.

### 5.8.2 Web analytics and clickbaits

An enduring outcome of the AMH Digital First Strategy was a shift of newsmaking practices from traditional approaches to audience-centric ones. Audience-centric newsmaking approaches rely on audience metrics and web analytics data to study the behaviour of audiences and their content preferences (Nelson & Tandoc Jr, 2018:1). Web analytics are tools used by digital media producers to determine audience behaviour online such as the duration of stay on a web page and the number of clicks on a story. Web analytics were used as newsmaking practice at the *NewsDay* and AMH Voices to get an idea of which citizen news content was read most by the audiences and to decide on the nature of future content. Zivira (2018) stated that "web analytics helped a lot to identify how AMH Voices stories were doing and informed choices about the editorial content". He added, "Based on web analytics, we are able to determine what stories sell and, in some instances, we do follow up stories." Figure 5:5 below is web analytics data, depicting audience behaviour in relation to AMH Voices news content by midday of 23 March 2018. It shows the citizen news stories by headline, the number of page views and the unique page views, average time on the story page, entrances and the bounce rate (the percentage of visitors who enter the site and then leave without continuing to view other pages within the same site).

***Figure 5:5 Web analytics data depicting audience behaviour in relation to AMH Voices content***



imary Dimension: Page Page Title Other

Plot Rows | Secondary dimension | Sort Type: Default | AMHVoices | advanced

| | Page Title | Pageviews | Unique Pageviews | Avg. Time on Page | Entrances | Bounce Rate | % Exit | Page Value |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | 150,440 % of Total: 1.60% (9,413,000) | 99,442 % of Total: 1.48% (6,731,690) | 00:00:49 Avg for View: 00:01:29 (-44.27%) | 3,152 % of Total: 0.14% (2,207,144) | 46.42% Avg for View: 26.18% (77.35%) | 10.59% Avg for View: 23.45% (-54.83%) | $0.00 % of Total: 0.00% ($0.00) |
| 1. | AMHVoices: Khupe committed political suicide - NewsDay Zimbabwe | 47,055 (31.28%) | 33,388 (33.58%) | 00:01:23 | 1,467 (46.54%) | 43.95% | 15.39% | $0.00 (0.00%) |
| 2. | AMhVoices: Young women on primary elections - NewsDay Zimbabwe | 27,129 (18.03%) | 16,917 (17.01%) | 00:00:18 | 204 (6.47%) | 47.57% | 5.48% | $0.00 (0.00%) |
| 3. | AMHVoices: Mnangagwa knows what Western countries want - NewsDay Zimbabwe | 25,334 (16.84%) | 17,113 (17.21%) | 00:01:20 | 470 (14.91%) | 52.32% | 12.00% | $0.00 (0.00%) |
| 4. | AMHVoices: Tsvangirai's vision should be followed - NewsDay Zimbabwe | 25,329 (16.84%) | 15,892 (15.98%) | 00:00:26 | 505 (16.02%) | 34.79% | 9.12% | $0.00 (0.00%) |
| 5. | AMHVoices: Re-Instate 10-year-mandate of the NPRC - NewsDay Zimbabwe | 15,998 (10.63%) | 9,876 (9.93%) | 00:00:19 | 142 (4.51%) | 39.29% | 5.99% | $0.00 (0.00%) |
| 6. | AMHVoices: Youth must question gender, age dynamics in politics - NewsDay Zimbabwe | 7,308 (4.86%) | 4,655 (4.68%) | 00:00:13 | 52 (1.65%) | 39.62% | 4.61% | $0.00 (0.00%) |
| 7. | AMHVoices: Youth participation in politics mainstay to peace - NewsDay Zimbabwe | 398 (0.26%) | 267 (0.27%) | 00:00:21 | 12 (0.38%) | 66.67% | 10.30% | $0.00 (0.00%) |
| 8. | AMHVoices: Chamisa calculated his move - NewsDay Zimbabwe | 172 (0.11%) | 119 (0.12%) | 00:01:35 | 10 (0.32%) | 30.00% | 15.70% | $0.00 (0.00%) |
| 9. | AMHVoices: Khupe must accept Chamisa's ascendancy - NewsDay Zimbabwe | 155 (0.10%) | 97 (0.10%) | 00:00:48 | 7 (0.22%) | 42.86% | 9.68% | $0.00 (0.00%) |
| 10. | AMHVoices: It's impossible to trust Jonathan Moyo - NewsDay Zimbabwe | 151 (0.10%) | 118 (0.12%) | 00:02:18 | 8 (0.25%) | 25.00% | 23.18% | $0.00 (0.00%) |
| 11. | AMHVoices: ARTUZ hails FOZEU demo and strike position - NewsDay Zimbabwe | 147 (0.10%) | 97 (0.10%) | 00:00:34 | 17 (0.54%) | 94.12% | 19.73% | $0.00 (0.00%) |
| 12. | AMHVoices: Mnangagwa misled at World Economic Forum - NewsDay Zimbabwe | 128 (0.09%) | 82 (0.08%) | 00:02:07 | 16 (0.51%) | 62.50% | 35.16% | $0.00 (0.00%) |
| 13. | AMHVoices: Arrogant Mpofu should be jailed - NewsDay Zimbabwe | 116 (0.08%) | 81 (0.08%) | 00:00:54 | 12 (0.38%) | 66.67% | 14.66% | $0.00 (0.00%) |
| 14. | AMHVoices: Police brutality blights govt reform talk - NewsDay Zimbabwe | 102 (0.07%) | 70 (0.07%) | 00:00:23 | 3 (0.10%) | 66.67% | 9.80% | $0.00 (0.00%) |

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From the above data, it was apparent that news stories that centred on the main political protagonists in the 2018 presidential elections received more audience attention. The political protagonists were MDC Alliance candidate Nelson Chamisa, MDC-T candidate Thokozani Khupe and ZANU PF candidate Emmerson Mnangagwa. The data showed that audiences stayed more on stories related to politics. For instance, the top five stories based on the duration of stay were: "It's impossible to trust Jonathan Moyo" (2:18 mins); "Mnangagwa misled at the World Economic Forum" (2:07mins); "Chamisa calculated his move" (1:35 mins); "Khupe committed political suicide" (1:23 mins); and, "Mnangagwa knows what the Western countries want" (1:20 mins). News discourses that focused on politics incentivised audience participation and engagement. This finding resonates with the assertion by Stroud (2017:165) that "inflammatory articles, news featuring polarising political figures, and comment sections that generate fights among those with competing partisan viewpoints can dramatically increase page views, return visits, and time on site".

Due to audiences' interest in political content as revealed by web analytics data, AMH Voices gatekeepers were pressured to publish citizen content that focused on the political matters of the day. As a newsmaking practice, web analytics guided decisions on which news topics to pursue. News articles that got strong online traffic were followed up and updated. This finding was confirmed by Moyo, Mare and Matsilele (2019:3) who observed that audience metrics in selected newsrooms in Kenya, South Africa and Zimbabwe were forcing journalists to "gather news that is tailor-made to meet certain consumption patterns and expectations". They argue that this has led to "analytics-driven journalism" – a phenomenon where editorial decisions are informed and influenced by a strict reading of metrics, web traffic measurements and other big data indices.

The *NewsDay* editor also used web analytics data because it enabled him to know what audiences wanted to read about and how the newspaper's stories were performing online. Nelson and Tandoc Jr (2018:15) observe that web analytics are a constant reminder that editors working for-profit, daily news organisations such as the *NewsDay* must reach large audiences in order for their outlets to survive. The editors were obliged to draw audience traffic to the *NewDay* website for the advertisers' sake and to generate revenues through copy sales using clickbaits. Clickbait journalism is the use of eye-catching headlines that are often exaggerated and sensationalised in order to push offline copy circulation numbers up and the volume of traffic into the website (Frampton, 2015). Clickbait headlines deceive users into clicking on a story or buying a newspaper's hard copy.

The *NewsDay* often used clickbaits that capitalised on the public's disdain of Mugabe. Two stories written by *NewsDay* journalist Charles Laiton are examples of newsmaking based on audience news preferences and clickbaiting to drive web traffic and push hard copy sales. Laiton (2017a: November 28) in a news article titled: "Mnangagwa sues Mugabe over debt" played on audience's craze with

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news that centred on the conflict between Mnangagwa and Mugabe. President Mnangagwa had just disposed his former boss in a military assisted coup d'état on 15 November 2017 and the news headline was expected given the animosity that existed between the two. However, the news article was not about the two prominent politicians but about Harare businessman Bernard Mnangagwa who was suing businesswoman Sharon Mugabe over the non-payment of a debt (Laiton, 2017a). Laiton (2017b: November 30) in another article titled "Mugabe files for divorce" played a similar trick on the audiences. The audiences could have anticipated that the article would be about Mugabe divorcing his wife Grace because she had contributed to his dethronement. However, the article turned out to be about a Harare couple, Kudzai Florence Mugabe and Geoffrey Takudzwa Mugabe who were seeking divorce over lost love (Laiton, 2017b). The use of clickbaits although unorthodox, was considered a necessary survival strategy for alternative media to push copy sales and attract advertisers.

### 5.8.3 Crowdsourcing

Crowdsourcing using digital technologies enabled the voluntary collaboration of professional journalists with citizens in newsmaking. As part of crowdsourcing, citizens performed various journalism related tasks such as providing on the spot news feeds; verification of information; sharing of views and experiences and taking photographs and video footage. Crowdsourcing was a cheaper way of gathering news from remote areas that were not accessible to professional AMH journalists due to financial and logistical constraints. Zivira (2018) explained the motivation of journalistic crowdsourcing:

> With 730 000 likes on Facebook and more than 200 000 followers on Twitter, we realised that it was easy to crowdsource. Our readers can give us more information without us going out of the office. Just yesterday we received a video from one of our followers from the airport showing the return to Harare of self-exiled ZANU-PF politician Saviour Kasukuwere that we uploaded on the platform. But our team never left the office. By crowdsourcing, audiences can verify information for us on the ground. For example, we can ask people in remote areas such as Mvuri to say this has happened, did you witness it? Through crowdsourcing, it is easy to get information from dispersed citizens in order to construct a story.

At the AMH newsroom, crowdsourcing was also used by business reporters as a form of *vox populi* to determine how citizens were affected by particular market phenomenon, services and products. *NewsDay* business reporter Tarira Zwinoira (2018a) remarked:

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> The traditional *vox pop* is a dying thing. The simpler thing to do is to use social media to crowdsource citizen views. It's a lot faster than the field interviews. The disadvantage of the traditional *vox pop* is that people are usually afraid to speak even if the matter is not political. However, social media gets people speaking freely and it is faster.

The news article by Zwinoira (2018b: April 25) titled: "Econet and the mystery of disappearing data" published by *NewsDay* was written through crowdsourcing of citizen views on data that "disappeared" from mobile phones of Econet Wireless subscribers. Figure 5:6 below demonstrates how Zwinoira used crowdsourcing to elicit citizen views for the article.

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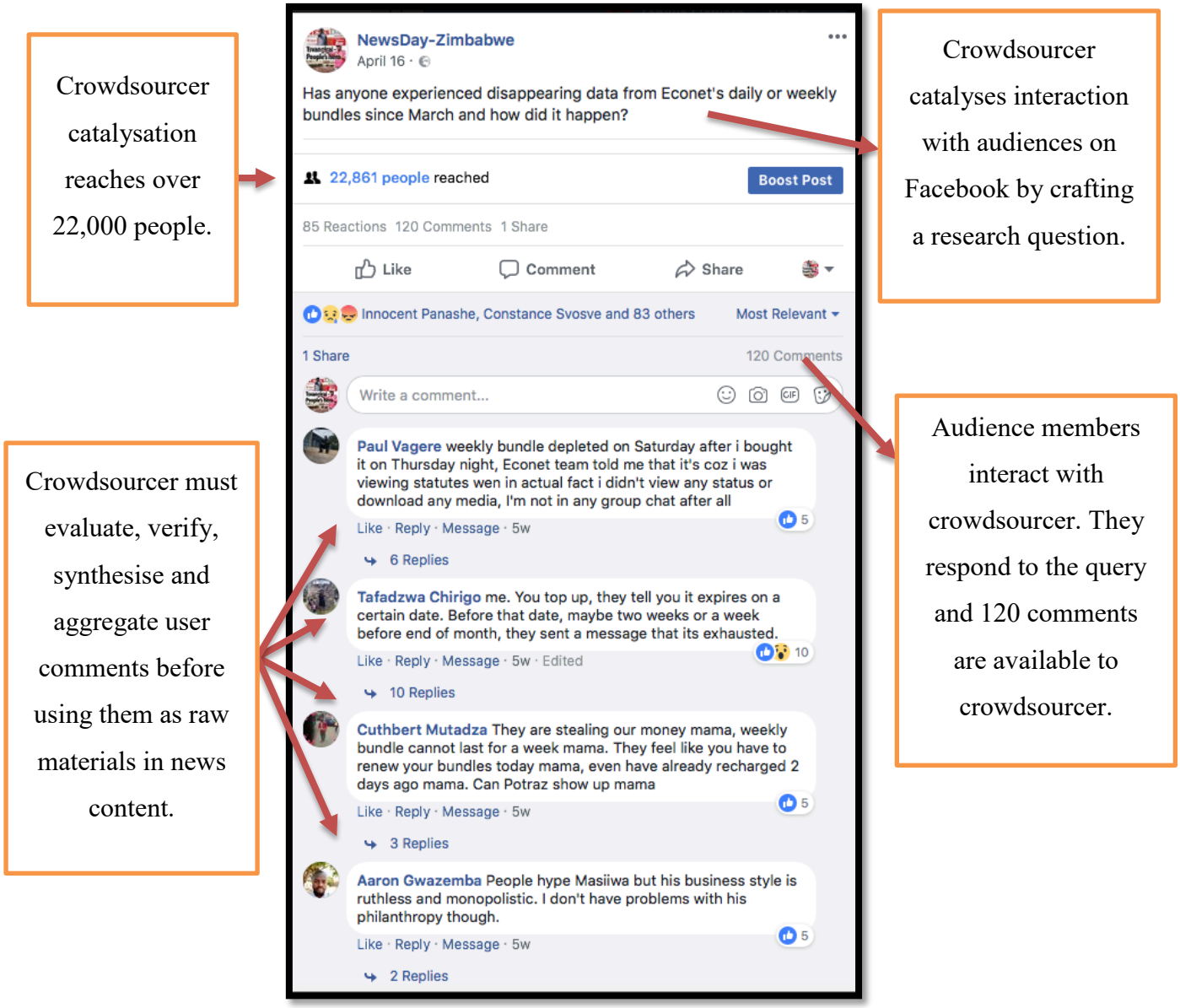
***Figure 5:6 Journalistic crowdsourcing of citizen views***




Crowdsourcing is a virtuous cycle which begins with the catalysing user of interaction; analysis and evaluation of user contributions; verification; synthesis and aggregation (Aitamurto, 2017: 190). AMH journalists used crowdsourcing without following a specific order. To catalyse interaction, Zwinoira crafted questions around his investigation and posted them on Facebook for audiences to respond. His next step was analysis and evaluation of the user comments. Zwinoira (2018a) said this entailed "removing vulgar content and selecting the useful comments for soundbites [source quotes]". To verify the accuracy of the information obtained through crowdsourcing, Zwinoira used traditional cross-checking procedures such as a media interview with the authorities. After verification and fact checking, writing was the final activity in Zwinoira's crowdsourcing process. At the AMH newsroom, crowdsourced news articles were written as solo projects by the professional journalists who often acknowledged the citizen input.

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Crowdsourcing as a newsmaking practice used by professional AMH journalists can be viewed as unfair exploitation of audience's time and input because the professional journalist gets credit for the finished product. Crowdsourcing privileged the professional journalists because they had the power to decide when, where, and how to use crowdsourcing. The professional journalists decided how the crowd's input was used thereby giving him/her power over the process. Nonetheless, crowdsourcing as a newsmaking practice at the AMH newsroom challenged traditional journalistic practices by opening news production to citizen participation. Like any other forms of citizen participation, crowdsourcing was limited by internet access as only the haves of digital technology could participate in it. Also, the newsroom skill barriers meant that not all professional journalists could use crowdsourcing for newsmaking, hence limiting the potential participation of audiences. The advantage of crowdsourcing lies in its ability to obtain vast information quickly from the crowd of audiences that can be used in journalistic newsmaking.

### 5.8.4 Content curation and shovelware

The Online Content Producer was responsible for knitting together reader comments into useable news content. Content curation was achieved through contextualisation, which involved filtering, selecting, and editorialising readers' comments to popular stories into new AMH Voices content. Figure 5:7 below demonstrates user comments that were curated into new AMH Voices (2017: August 17) content headlined: "Feedback from our readers".

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***Figure 5:7 Curation of audience views into news content through optimisation and contextualisation***

Original news story from which user comments are derived.

Selected and editorialised user comments incorporated into curated news content.

Graphics used to illustrate curated news content.

Curated user comments were also published as *vox populi* news articles that carried citizen views on issues of public interest. In such articles, user feedback was published verbatim without contextualisation. Figure 5:8 below is an example of content curation using verbatim user comments published as new AMH Voices (2018: September 12) content titled: "Zim netizens respond to Finance minister's cash plan".

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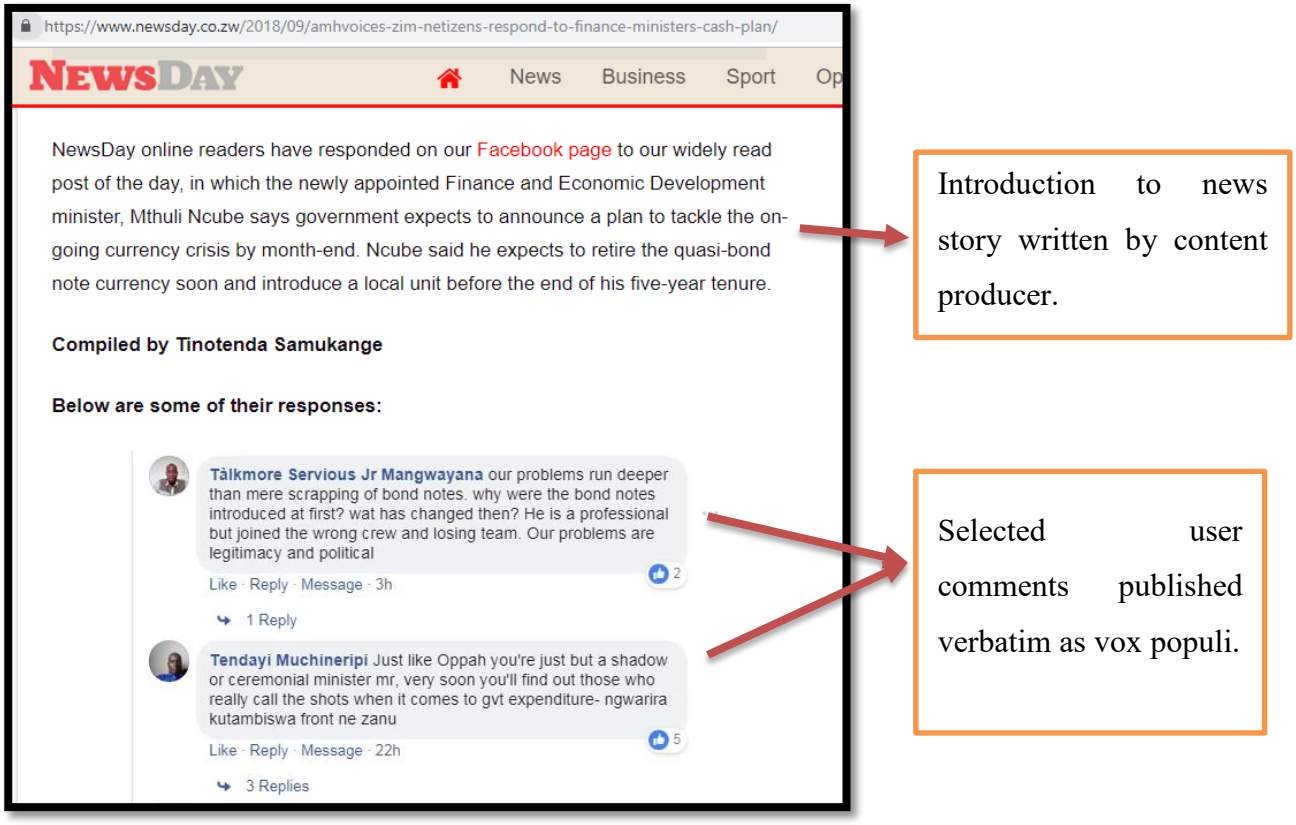
***Figure 5:8 Curated content from reader comments***




Content curation was similar to shovelware which is a trend in digital newsrooms where previously existing content meant for print is repurposed and repackaged for online audiences. The Online Content Producer repurposed citizen news content published as letters to the editor or guest columns from the AMH sister print publications of the *NewsDay, The Standard* and *The Zimbabwe Independent* for publication on AMH Voices. Shovelware content was optimised for the web. Optimisation involved adding aesthetic value to the citizen content through trendy headlines, graphics, and multimedia design elements. The advantage of shovelware was that it promoted the sharing of news content across platforms, that is, from print to online and vice versa. At the same time, shovelware was indicative of the resource constraints at the AMH newsroom, which resulted in almost the same content being shared across platforms without newer platform-specific content being developed.

## 5.9 Perspectives on citizen journalism

Recognising that citizen journalism was a relatively new phenomenon in Zimbabwe, it was useful to investigate perspectives around it by asking citizen journalists what society thought about their role and how the professional AMH journalists regarded citizen journalists. There were internal contradictions at the AMH group regarding the status of citizen journalism. Whereas management saw citizen journalism as a vital cost-cutting measure that enabled citizen participation in news

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production, some professional journalists were opposed to it because they wanted to preserve the "purity" of the profession. They detested citizen journalism because they thought it had lowered the entry requirements of the profession as anyone with access to digital technology was potentially a journalist, thereby blurring the line between professional and amateur. Alternative media practitioner Mugamu, an accountant that landed in journalism, said journalism was now open to everyone, thanks to digital technologies. "I don't think you need qualifications to be a journalist! Anyone can be a journalist as long as they can tell good stories," said Mugamu (2018). Professional AMH journalists were divided in their views of citizen journalism with some arguing that citizen journalism did not deserve to be taken too seriously as a journalism discipline because of its focus on trivial community issues and its unstructured nature, while some pointed out that the value of citizen journalism was in producing hyperlocal news content and in assisting the newsmaking processes through crowdsourcing. Despite this division, it was apparent that citizen journalism was vital as it often raised issues of national significance that potentially challenged state hegemony.

Considering the many challenges faced in Zimbabwe, the value of journalism and the media in the country can be measured by its contribution to rational and critical discussions of public interest issues. This disposition to journalism and media as part of the mainstream public sphere that serves the public interest could mean citizen journalism and alternative media occupy a secondary and less influential role in society. Mainstream journalism produced by professionals was seen as of better quality and more trustworthy than citizen journalism. Citizen journalism's truth claims were seen as devoid of expert knowledge and sophistication because they were authored by ordinary citizens from their own perspectives. Some citizen journalists felt illegitimate because they did not enjoy the same privileges as professional journalists nor did they have the same socio-economic status.

Citizen journalist Makunike said society predominantly had negative perceptions about journalists in general and were usually seen as representing partisan interests. State media journalists were widely regarded as ZANU PF apologists, paid to propagate state propaganda while alternative media journalists were considered to be MDC activists. Regardless of which news organisation one worked for, the common perception of the Zimbabwean journalist was that he/she was a propagandist, rumour monger, untrustworthy, a paid informer or hatchet man and never to be trusted. Maguta (2018) was reluctant to be identified as a citizen journalist preferring to call himself "firstly an activist in defense of human rights, secondly an opposition politician and thirdly a citizen journalist". This absence of a sense of being a citizen journalist was worrying to me considering that Maguta was the most active contributor on the platform and had contributed well over 20 news articles and opinion pieces. He later explained to me that each time when he introduced himself as a citizen journalist people were always quick to judge him negatively as a peddler of lies and rumours. Makunike (2018) said citizen

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journalists like him that contributed AMH Voices news content were thought to be in the the MDC payroll and were regarded as opposition elements seeking to incite and mobilise the citizenry to revolt against the government. The perception that citizen journalism was part of opposition politics and civil society activism arose from its associations with both and was attributable to the counterhegemonic content it produced. Alternative media were equally viewed negatively by some in society because they positioned themselves as anti-establishment. Consequently, alternative media were always under pressure to peddle counterhegemonic content even when not necessary. Despite the softened editorial content of AMH Voices in the news dispensation as dictated by the interests of the ownership and control, the platform remained alternative because of its open production practices that allowed citizens to participate in content production, decision-making and public sphere deliberations. By and large, AMH Voices content remained critical as it questioned the status quo in less radicalised ways than before.

## 5.10 The advantages and challenges of citizen journalism

To consolidate my understanding of citizen journalism and alternative media in the case of AMH Voices in Zimbabwe, I weighed their advantages and disadvantages. Overall, both were advantageous because they opened previously closed journalistic processes to citizen participation in content production, decision-making, and public sphere deliberations. Citizen participation enabled by technology and organisation factors at AMH Voices was the key advantage of citizen journalism and alternative media. Participation empowered citizens to contribute to news discourses by producing content and giving feedback to published news content. Participation also allowed citizens to input into decision making processes through the office reader representative in the public editorial board.

Citizen journalism aids newsmaking processes. Citizen journalists contributed to different stages of news production at AMH Voices by providing labour and raw materials. In crowdsourcing, citizen journalists contributed raw materials necessary for the construction of the news articles in the form of photos, videos, and views, and labour in the form of fact checking and verification. To this end, citizen journalism was a cost-cutting measure for the AMH group that enabled the newspaper titles to receive and process news reports from remote areas of the country. Zivira (2018) stated that through citizen journalism, the AMH group was “able to get news content without expending too much resources” and that had “lessened the burden of having to be everywhere all the time when it was impossible” due to budgetary and logistical limitations.

Citizen journalism improves the news ecosystem and the coverage of hyperlocal news. At AMH Voices, citizen journalists acted as stringers that reported on community news events and issues in the absence of professional journalists. Citizen journalism and alternative media enable citizen and

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community voices to be heard. Zivira (2018) observed that citizen journalism "enriched news content by using citizen voices and not of the authorities". AMH Voices enabled citizens to express themselves and, in the process, encouraging multi-voicing in the public sphere.

Citizen participation increases public trust in journalism. AMH Voices created a virtual community of contributors and users bound together by a common quest for change. The participation and engagement on the platform arguably increased public trust and loyalty to the AMH group (Ncube, 2018a). Citizen journalism builds civic skills and effective citizenship. The citizen journalists I interacted with had a conscious resolve to make a positive contribution and act in the public interest. They used AMH Voices to assert their democratic rights, expose corruption and to speak against human rights abuses. This bold character of citizen journalists combined with writing skills contributed to the selection of some citizen journalists into community leadership positions and the absorption of some by CSOs as activists. A final advantage of citizen journalism is that it can be used for mass mobilisations against the state, hence becoming part of the radical democracy project. I observed that CSOs, political activists and social movements such as #ThisFlag, Tajamuka and #ShutdownZim utilised social media and citizen journalism to mobilise for citizen participation. They used AMH Voices as a platform for activism and to disseminate news and information about their events and activities.

Despite its advantages, citizen journalism had its own set of challenges. One of them was the demand for remuneration and incentives by participating citizen journalists. In well-functioning economies, citizen journalism can be a source of income where citizens are paid to produce content. However, in depressed economies such as Zimbabwe, it was difficult to pay citizen journalists for content especially in the absence of donor funding. In some instances, citizen journalists on donor-funded programmes demanded access to enabling digital technologies in the form of smartphones and allowances for the purchase of internet mobile data. Due to the failure to pay citizens for content and a changed editorial direction, AMH Voices had diminished and irregular content submissions that ultimately stagnated the platform.

Another challenge for citizen journalism was that it opened the space for the spread of fake news and third-party information. The rise of fake news has prompted critics such as Carter, Cushion and Garcia-Blanco (2018:935) to suggest we are living in a time of "post-truth" journalism where none of us knows what or whom to believe anymore. Harsin (2018:16) observed that citizen journalism "brings not just packs of watchdogs but also armies of rumour bombers and fake news purveyors". During fieldwork, I observed that some citizen journalists often tried to distribute falsehoods and fake news. The spread of fake news was particularly alarming in Zimbabwe during crisis times when the public grew anxious for news to the extent that they consumed everything that came their way. Zivira

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(2018) said fake news from citizen journalism was high during November 2017 when the country witnessed a coup d'état engineered by the army. He noted:

> One of the most difficult times we had at AMH Voices was during the November 2017 coup. Our inbox was always on fire with almost everything from citizen journalists. It was difficult to sift through a lot of information and still meet deadlines for publishing content. In the midst of this, you didn't know who the credible source of news was. We got images of military tanks on the road, which I later discovered were not from Zimbabwe.

The above also demonstrates how professional AMH Voices staff were sometimes engaged in boundary work to differentiate genuine citizen news content from fake news. To guard against fake news content from citizen journalists, AMH Voices used fact checking processes. Cheruiyot and Ferrer-Conill (2018:1) submit that the practice of fact checking has recently gained prominence as an attempt to mitigate the presumed effects of fake news, especially outside legacy media organisations. A related challenge was third party information that circulated on social media without end making it difficult to trace the source. Zivira (2018) acknowledged that AMH Voices received third-party content but did not publish it due to lack of authenticity after routine fact checking.

Citizen journalism in Zimbabwe was disadvantaged because it was not recognised at law under AIPPA (2002), which maintained traditional notions of journalism and mass media in a context of digital practices. This was compounded by the fact that citizen journalists did not have a formally recognised association or body that safeguarded their interests. At the time of conducting this research, there were efforts to formulate and operationalise the Association of Citizen Journalists – Zimbabwe Chapter. Furthermore, in repressive environments such as Zimbabwe, citizen journalism was perceived to be a threat to national security because of its ability to propagate counterhegemonic discourses and organise dissent. Minister of Information, Publicity and Broadcasting Services, Monica Mutsvangwa (2019), in her presentation at the Zimbabwe National Defence University, titled "Information as a threat to national security" argued that citizen journalism was responsible for fanning terrorism in the country because it was used by opposition forces and civic organisations "to attack sovereignty, national security, promote commotion and violence by whipping emotions mostly through the dissemination of fake information". Due to the perception that social media and internet based citizen journalism "encourages political indiscipline and engenders the production and circulation of alternative political narratives" (Ogola, 2019), the government of Zimbabwe ordered an internet total shutdown over a five-day period as from 14 to18 January 2019. The internet shutdown was meant to prevent the use of social media applications of WhatsApp, Twitter and Facebook in organising mass protests in response to a government decision to increase fuel prices by 150 percent. Internet shutdowns, censorship and continued surveillance of online platforms as

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experienced in Zimbabwe paralyses potential interest in citizen journalism (Mutsvairo & Ragnedda, 2019).

## 5.11 Summary

This chapter presented the results of the critical political economy analysis and ethnography, including interviews. It was indicated that citizen journalism and alternative media at AMH Voices in Zimbabwe were structurally constrained by politics, economy, law, and technology. The prevailing crisis situation in the country contributed to robust citizen journalism at AMH Voices as ordinary citizens, activists and CSOs sought to provide alternative interpretations and narratives of the country. The research themes of citizen participation in journalism and newsmaking practices at AMH Voices were discussed. It was established that participation at AMH Voices occurred at the level of content production, decision-making, and public sphere deliberations. Technology and organisation were the factors that enabled citizen participation. The newsmaking practices of citizen journalists at AMH were structured, unstructured and sometimes hybrid. Structured newsmaking practices were followed by trained citizen journalists who produced content under guidelines of professional staff. Unstructured practices were the random acts of newsmaking by spontaneous citizen journalists through eyewitnessing and opinion making. Hybrid newsmaking practices were manifest in content produced through the collaboration of professional and citizen journalists. Citizen journalists' use of sources and quotes as part of newsmaking was also discussed. The citizen news articles at AMH Voices were written using personal narratives and community perspectives. Digital newsmaking practices at AMH Voices included the use of social media for audience engagement, web analytics and clickbaits, crowdsourcing, content curation, and shovelware. The chapter discussed perspectives on citizen journalism. The advantages and challenges of citizen journalism and alternative media concluded the chapter.

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# Chapter Six
# Critical discourse analysis of AMH Voices news content

## 6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of an analysis of citizen journalism news discourses at AMH Voices. An inductive approach to data analysis was used, which means that the news content was not analysed using priori discourse categories, but that the categories and themes were generated by and during the analysis. Six discourse categories of 1) civil society news; 2) society/community news; 3) national news; 4) Mugabeism; 5) economy news; and 6) the 2018 national elections emerged from the news content. The six-step analytical model of CDA used in this study had a contextual rather than a linguistic approach with specific focus on textual analysis, thematic analysis, sources and quotations, discourse processing, news schema and ideological analysis (see Chapter 4). The analysis of the news articles was done per discourse category focusing on news schema, textual, thematic and ideological analysis. Citizen journalists' use of sources and quotations and discourse processing was discussed in Chapter 5 as part of newsmaking practices.

## 6.2 Interpretive news genres and styles at AMH Voices

There are different journalistic genres, styles and norms that have arisen due to the continuously evolving nature of journalism driven by political, economic, cultural, and technological factors. Citizen journalism is a recent type of journalism birthed by digital technologies which enable citizen participation in previously closed journalistic processes of content production, decision-making and public sphere debates. The prevalence of varied journalistic cultures has given rise to boundary work in journalism studies whereby scholars and practitioners are "demarcating, defending, expanding and contesting the limits of legitimate journalism" (Fakazis, 2006:6). Carlson (2015:2) notes that boundary work consists of contests over "what is journalism", "who is a journalist" and how can journalism be demarcated from non-journalism. Viewed within the context of boundary work, this study dealt with the expansion of journalistic boundaries through citizen participation and how the use of digital technologies for newsmaking resulted in new journalistic genres, styles and discourses at AMH Voices.

Objectivists and interpretationists are the two epistemological stances in journalism (Ornebring, 2017:79). Ekstrom (2002:260) defines epistemology as "rules, routines and institutionalized procedures that operate within a social setting and decide the form of the knowledge produced and the knowledge claims expressed". The epistemological stances of objectivists and interpretationists

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determine how journalistic news articles are produced, that is, how they are gathered, written, edited and published. The objectivity norm in journalism dates back to the late 19th century and is often flaunted as the American model of professional journalism. Schudson (2001:149) describes objectivity in journalism as "a moral ideal, a set of reporting and editing practices, and an observable pattern of news writing", which "guides journalists to separate facts from values and to report only the facts". Maras (2013:194) sees objectivity in journalism as stemming from the positivist philosophy in which reality "is simply described and presented in its value free form". Archetti (2010:20) adds that objective news reporters gather facts without evaluating or commenting on them. Objectivity in journalism aims to produce news content that is factual, non-judgemental, non-partisan and impersonal, that is, devoid of authorial intrusion in the form of the journalist's values and emotions. Richardson (2007:87) says journalistic news content qualifies as objective if it uses sources in the "verbalisation of truth claims"; includes supporting evidence in the form of background or contextualised information; makes use of "scare quotes" to indicate contentious truth claims; uses the inverted pyramid structure of news reporting and a narrative style that removes the authorial voice of the journalist.

Critics of the objectivity norm in journalism such as Maras (2013:190) argue that it is associated with "unitary, monolithic alignment of news values with a single news source". Citizen journalism challenges the objectivity norm because it uses transformed ways of producing news. Maras (2013:191) celebrates citizen journalism for dramatically shifting news production and dissemination by rejecting notions of truth, objectivity, credibility and distance from the audience by using platforms that foster dialogue than monologue. Atton and Hamilton (2008:86) observe that "alternative media are characterised by their explicitly partisan character" that challenge objectivity and impartiality. At AMH Voices, it was observed that citizen journalism was different from traditional journalism because it used alternative norms, actors, values and styles that placed ordinary citizens at the centre of news production. Unlike traditional journalism which emphasised objectivity as a professional standard, citizen journalism at AMH Voices used interpretative journalism news styles and genres. This resonates with Wahl-Jorgensen's (2015:171) observation that "citizen journalism implies a more personal and subjective stance, free of the constraints of objective journalism".

Interpretive news is the antithesis of objective journalism that presents opinions rather than facts to the audience. Salgado and Stromback (2011:154) provide their definition of interpretive:

> Interpretive journalism is opposed to or going beyond descriptive, fact-focused and source-driven journalism. On the story-level of analysis, interpretive journalism is characterized by a prominent journalistic voice; and by journalistic explanations, evaluations, contextualizations [sic], or speculations going beyond verifiable facts or statements by

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> sources. It may, but does not have to, also be characterized by a theme chosen by the journalist, use of value-laden terms, or overt commentary.

From the above definition, it is possible to develop some criteria for interpretive news. Interpretive news gives prominence to journalistic voice (Salgado & Stromback, 2011), hence it is driven by journalists themselves and not the sources. All citizen-produced news content at AMH Voices did not make use of sources as it was written from the personal or community perspective, thereby privileging the voice of citizen journalists. Interpretive news like citizen journalism relied on the agency of individuals to participate in journalism by expressing themselves in and through the media. Interpretive news has negative tones or connotations (Salgado & Stromback, 2011). The citizen news content at AMH Voices strongly focused on the negative crisis issues that characterised Zimbabwe between 2014 and 2018, particularly the political crisis of Mugabeism, economic decline, corruption and human rights abuse. Related to above is that interpretive news manifests itself in often negative speculations about the future without referring either explicitly or implicitly to verifiable facts or statements from news sources (Soontjens, 2018:1). The analysis of the news content revealed that citizen journalists speculated more about future negative consequences of government policy actions and events. This negative reportage that portrayed Zimbabwe as a country in gloom and whose future was doomed partly succeeded in fermenting citizen discontent about government.

Interpretive news is theme based as opposed to event centred reportage associated with traditional journalism. Salgado and Stromback (2011:146) assert that "interpretive journalism is journalism driven by themes, where facts are used mainly to illustrate the theme chosen by the journalist". The interpretive style requires the journalist to act as an analyst on his/her chosen theme. Theme based reporting at AMH Voices was implied in the structured content plans, which outlined specific topics and themes for the trained citizen news reporters. Theme based news reportage was also associated with activist citizen journalists and civil society organisations (CSOs) that reported on themes such as human rights, elections and corruption that were part of their activism. Interpretive news also emphasises the WHY of journalism, neglecting the what, who, where and when. Schudson (2001:164) observes that interpretive journalists see their task as that of helping readers "not only know but understand", certain phenomenon and events of the social reality. This motivation to explain and create understanding explains why interpretive news places emphasis on the WHY of journalistic inquiry. From the analysis of AMH Voices news content, it was possible to extrapolate the WHY questions that motivated the citizen news contributions and deliberations on the platform. By focusing on the WHY questions, citizen journalists attempted to unravel and understand the Zimbabwean crisis and provided alternative narratives that were in most cases subjective and emotional. Lastly, interpretive news uses value-laden language and overt commentary especially in the evaluation of

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political actors or events (Soontjens, 2018:1). The use of value-laden language was prominent in the citizen's deliberations about Mugabeism because Mugabe, the then president of the country, was loathed for allegedly running down the country.

The use of interpretive writing style changes the news schema, particularly how the overall meaning or macrostructure of the news texts are organised. Traditional news reports follow schematic ordering that begin with a headline, lead, main event and background (Van Dijk, 1991). The headline signals what is the most relevant or important information of the news report, the lead functions as a summary expressing the 5Ws and H (Who, What, Why, When, Where and How) of participants, actions or events. The main event organises all information about the events that gave rise to a news report. The background provides addition historical and contextual information about the event, personalities or actors carried in the news article (Van Dijk 1991). News schema presupposes that news articles are written using story formulas, in particular, the inverted pyramid commonly used in traditional journalism. The citizen news content at AMH Voices did not follow the formulaic inverted pyramid writing style of headline, lead, body and conclusion because the open newsmaking practices did not bind citizen journalists to prescribed writing formula. Unlike traditional journalism, AMH Voices news articles were theme based, written in personal narrative and sometimes superficial, that is, without contextualisation. The use of digital technologies in news production and dissemination also affected the news schema. Because AMH Voices new articles were disseminated online, they were relatively shorter, without background information when compared to traditional journalism articles so as to save users the cost of internet data. According to AMH Voices staff interviewed, video and audio materials were also shortened to 2-3 minutes without necessarily compromising on quality and content.

The use of interpretive news at AMH Voices distinguished citizen-produced content from professionally-produced content of the *NewsDay* since both sat on the same website. The *NewsDay* represented the professional and institutional operations of objective journalism whereas AMH Voices stood for the deprofessionalised work of citizen journalists. AMH Voices represented the interpretive agency of the citizen journalists, activists and CSOs responding to the unfolding crisis in the country. As an interpretive discourse community (Zelizer, 2017:180), AMH Voices carried alternative interpretations of the crisis that were shared by its members and negotiated for a better preferred situation.

Soontjens (20018:6) argues that interpretive news is "faster and cheaper" to produce and suits alternative media's quest for audience maximization "as news consumers tend to be attracted to evaluative (mostly negative) news, the explanation and more in-depth interpretation of events and predictive news about the future". In resource constrained newsrooms such as AMH Voices,

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interpretive journalism was useful because it utilised citizen-produced content that required less sources or information gathering. An interpretive writing style was used at AMH Voices due to the level of attachment to the news events and the social reality by citizen journalists who were affected by the Zimbabwean crisis in different ways. It was difficult for citizen journalists to report on the situation as detached individuals. The interpretive style of reporting allowed them to evaluate and comment on the crisis situation as affected participants.

It is possible that news values have been changing due to digital technology and the organisation of alternative media which enables the participation of citizens in news production. News values are a set criterion that journalists use to measure and judge if events are news worthy. My study established that the news value of affective news constructed out of subjective experience, opinion, and emotion had been introduced at AMH Voices. The traditional news value of prominence, that is, reference to elite people, was substituted with a contradictory value of the subaltern that focused on ordinary citizens and marginalised people. From the analysis of the news content, it was apparent that an overriding news value at AMH Voices was the public interest. The citizen news content had to have a legitimate public appeal for it to be published by the professional gatekeepers running the platform. The emphasis on the public interest prevented citizen journalists from sensationalist content that focused on the private lives of people. Another news value that influenced news selection at AMH Voices was argumentation. Richardson (2007:155) defines argumentation as a social activity of reason aimed at increasing or decreasing the acceptability of a controversial standpoint by putting forward a constellation of propositions intended to justify or refute the standpoint before a rational judge. Argumentative news enabled citizen journalists to be heard and to provide their own interpretations. Argumentation led AMH Voices to become a site for contestation and ideological struggle where alternative and counterhegemonic narrations of the Zimbabwean crisis were articulated.

The standard journalistic output is the "news story". Zelizer (2017:18) describes the news story as "a narrative form that carries news information". In the contemporary news media environment, there are different kinds of news stories that vie for public attention, including materials on WhatsApp, YouTube, Instagram, Twitter and Facebook. News is traditionally divided into two news categories of hard and soft news. In hard news overt opinion is repressed whereas in soft news opinion is more or less foregrounded (Conboy 2007:8). Soft news includes news topics seen as not "politically" important or not major news events – like entertainment. Sjøvaag (2015:101) argues that the hard and soft news dichotomy "reflects the hierarchy that separates the higher and lower forms of journalistic genres, professional practices, ethical issues, and journalism's potential socio-democratic impact". Citizen content at AMH Voices was not published as hard news because it included opinions and

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affective narration. The soft and hard news dichotomy has some limitations especially when applied to distinguish traditional journalism as the bearer of hard news and citizen journalism as the forerunner of soft news. For example, the citizen journalism content at AMH Voices focused on important topics that may have fit into the category of hard news such as national events, elections, economy and party politics. However, such serious content was not qualified as hard news by the gatekeepers because it was written using the interpretive style that foregrounded affection and personal opinion. This research finding contradicted what Holt and Karlsson (2015) established about citizen journalism in Sweden where they observed that citizen journalism tended to report soft news. The gathering of hard news was therefore regarded as the duty of professional AMH journalists and soft news topics were outsourced to citizen journalists. This outsourcing of soft news genres to citizen journalists was reflective of the vulnerable economic conditions, which forced alternative media in Zimbabwe to reduce staff and maintain shoestring budgets for the production of "the most worthy forms of journalism" (Sjøvaag, 2015:104) in the form of hard news. Whenever, citizen journalists contributed to the production of hard news, it was through feedback comments on professional journalists' news articles and tips towards story scoops and investigative journalism pieces. In this study, analysed citizen content mainly consisted of both soft and hard news articles published in AMH Voices between January 2014 and June 2018, in the form of feature articles, news analyses and commentary, opinion pieces, human interest stories, media releases from CSOs and letters to the editor that were taken as shovelware from the AMH print publications.

## 6.3 Civil society news discourses

Alternative media and civil society are a third space independent of the market and state that can function as counterpublic spheres for the expression of marginalised voices. AMH Voices was a strategic partner for CSOs who used it as a platform for activism and information dissemination. As part of their activism, CSOs submitted for publication on AMH Voices content that confronted the state regarding the unfolding crisis in the country in line with their mandate of promoting and defending the public interest against real or potential abuse by the state. They also used AMH Voices as a platform to disseminate information concerning their programmes; support human rights activism; defend human rights violations by the state; create awareness on democracy and good governance; share resources and tool kits; and to mobilise citizens for action. Content contributions from CSOs were in the form of feature articles, press releases and position papers couched in Western liberal concepts of good governance, democracy and human rights that emphasised citizens' rights and the state's responsibility to protect them. The civil society liberal agenda found expression in alternative media such as AMH Voices because the mainstream was supporting status quo Mugabeism, which was opposed to Western notions of liberalism by being nationalistic, Pan

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Africanistic and anti-imperialist/decolonial. The CSO news articles were written in the first-person narrative by in-house information teams to express liberal ideologies that synced with Western donors. The CSO news discourses were counterhegemonic because they opposed status quo Mugabeism and were framed from non-dominant ideological perspectives of human rights and good governance.

CSO news discourses exemplified interpretive news writing because they were theme based rather than event led, focused on human rights and good governance. CSOs positioned themselves as watchdogs and advocates of human rights in the country by raising an alarm each time the state violated human rights, reminding the state of its human rights obligations and advocating for the human rights of marginalised groups. In raising alarms on human rights violations, CSOs were always on the watch for incidents where the state violated human rights. Heal Zimbabwe Trust (HZT, 2017: July 3) in an article titled: "Teargassing by police uncalled for" condemned the state for using tear-smoke to disperse crowds as "recklessness and dangerous" and showing "lack of respect for human life and security". This came against a backdrop of violent protests on 15 September 2017 by street vendors and ordinary citizens in Harare against an escalating economic crisis in which police used tear-smoke to disperse the protestors. HZT (2017) compelled government to "create a conducive environment for its citizens, where fundamental freedoms and human rights, such as the rights to demonstrate and petition, are enjoyed". The Matabeleland Institute for Human Rights (MIHR) equally condemned state violations of human rights. MIHR (2017: May 3) in an article titled: "Govt, local authorities must respect informal workers' rights", condemned government for treating vendors worse than "murderers, rapists, bank robbers and car hijackers". Government had ordered the "brazen, arbitrary and unwarranted harassment, arrest and confiscation of wares of informal workers" in a bid to prevent disease outbreak and decongest Harare's central business district.

CSOs reminded the state of its human rights obligations by publishing theme based content on days to commemorate regional and international events on the human rights calendar. Such content outlined the state's responsibilities in light of regional and human rights instruments that it ratified such as African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, Southern Africa Development Committee (SADC) Gender Protocol on Gender and Development of 1997, Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) 1979 and the Beijing Platform for Action of 1995. A media release by HZT (2018: June 15) titled "Heal Zimbabwe statement on the Day of the African Child" illustrated this. The media release published on the Day of the African Child commemorations held on 16 June condemned state sanctioned political violence because it "deprived children of their right to social services such as health and education that are explicitly provided for in the African Charter for Rights and Welfare of Children".

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Different CSOs used AMH Voices as a platform to advocate for marginalised groups in society, mainly women and children. Rural Teachers' Union of Zimbabwe (RTUZ, 2016) advocated for the rights of children to education in a conducive environment free from political violence and interference. RTUZ (2016: February 23) in an article titled: "Grace, spare pupils your toxic politics", alleged that ZANU PF political rallies by Grace Mugabe amounted to an "abuse of teachers, schoolchildren and school premises" because pupils were usually forced to attend them to perform plays and poetry that eulogised the first family and the ruling party. "Given the hate speech, vulgarity, bellicosity, tribalism and naked violence which characterises ZANU PF rallies in general and Grace's rallies in particular, the young vulnerable minds are being traumatised in ways beyond imagination", lamented RTUZ (2016). Consistent with interpretive news, the article by RTUZ used overt commentary and evaluation to describe ZANU PF and Grace as vulgar, tribalistic and violent, in the process politicising the CSO discourses on human rights. The Institute for Young Women Development (IYWD) disseminated on AMH Voices content that advocated for gender equality in all spaces and promoted young women's participation and leadership in political processes. Advocacy on women's issues was often expressed in emotive language that was uncharacteristic of traditional journalism which often sought objectivity and balance. IYWD (2018a: June 12) in an article titled: "Making a case for 25 % young women's quota in Zimbabwe" said they had "a heavy heart" and were "devastated" that women representation and leadership was less than 10% in elective politics in Zimbabwe. The phrases "heavy heart" and "devastated" showed how deeply emotive and engaged the authors of the subject matter were and their location within the gender activist movement in Zimbabwe.

Good governance was a second theme that emerged from civil society news discourses. Good governance is an assurance that corruption is minimized, the views of minorities are considered and that the voices of the most vulnerable in society are heard in decision making (Keping, 2018). Corruption is the abuse of public power for private benefit such one's political party, class, tribe, friends and family (Tanzi, 1998:8). In Zimbabwe there were two types of corruption: grand corruption by people in positions of power to defraud either the state or companies and administrative/petty corruption that involved demand for bribes by public officials in their line of duty (Mwatwara & Mujere, 2015: 183). CSOs and citizen journalists used AMH Voices to expose and speak against corruption in line with MDIF's accountability outcomes of exposing and curbing corruption. Corruptionforce, ZimRights and the Residents' Forum were actively involved in anticorruption activism and took the lead to expose grand corruption by ZANU PF political elites.

Corruptionforce (2017a: October 5) in an article titled: "Hypocritical for Mugabe to buy Rolls-Royces from British" accused the former first family of corruption when Grace Mugabe's son from her first

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marriage, Russell Goreraza, purchased an expensive Rolls-Royce vehicle from Britain. Corruptionforce (2017a) rhetorically asked, "How can the Mugabes have all this wealth on government salaries if they are honest and respect the rule of law?" As with interpretive news writing, Corruptionforce insinuated that Goreraza had purchased the expensive vehicle using money from corrupt activities of his mother even without providing readers with the evidence. Similarly, ZimRights (2017: April 10) in an article titled: "Arbitrary evictions of families at Arnold Farm deplorable", alleged corruption and personal aggrandisement after Grace Mugabe evicted black families at Arnold Farm in Mazoe, Mashonaland Central for the purported establishment of her wildlife orphanage. ZimRights (2017) described the eviction as "a serious abrogation of the rule of law, accountability, constitutionalism and democracy in the country". Residents Forum (2016: August 8) in an article titled: "Politicisation of residential stands provision in Zim", spoke against corruption in the allocation and distribution of residential stands. Corruption in the provision of housing occurred in a context of massive urban population growth which was unmatched with adequate housing especially in the major cities of Harare and Bulawayo. Residents Forum alleged that ZANU PF youths and women were receiving preferential treatment in the allocation of the residential stands as part of the party's broad empowerment programme.

Corruptionforce (2017b: May 10) in an article titled: "Your vote counts, just like Chiwenga's" alleged that ZANU PF had been corrupt for the last 37 years since it assumed power at independence in 1980. The commentary argued that ZANU PF was not only corrupt but was also a massive failure, except for their success in providing access to education – an achievement also undone by high unemployment. The article illustrated how CSOs not only positioned themselves as champions of human rights and good governance but as rebellious entities that challenged Mugabeism and state authority through accusations of corruption that delegitimised its rule over the citizens. The CSO news discourses used activist language that supported opposition politics and derided the state. Corruptionforce (2017b) not only spoke against ZANU PF corruption, but also covertly campaigned for the opposition vote in the national elections that were held on 30 July 2018. "When the time comes and you go to vote, think about the mess that Zanu PF has got us into. When you have thought about all these things, then when you cast your vote at the next election you would have voted wisely," wrote Corruptionforce (2017b). CSOs news discourses were also characterised by a radical incitement and mobilisation of the citizenry towards some form of action against the state. "Just like the Jews hunted down the Nazis, Zimbabweans can hunt down corrupt and murderous Zanu PF cronies", urged Corruptionforce (2017b). By urging citizens to hunt down ZANU PF politicians in the same way Jews did with Nazis in German, Corruptionforce (2017b) incited citizens to hate "corrupt and murderous" ZANU PF politicians.

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Citizen journalists reported on alleged crime and petty corruption activities in the community. This was a lesser role compared to that assumed by CSOs in exposing grand corruption. Mwana Wevhu (2016: October, 24) in an article titled: "ZRP must deal with corrupt Magunje cop", accused a police officer stationed in rural Magunje of corruption. Mwana Wevhu (2016) said the police officer and his spouse were running a "bogus pharmacy" while they were "not even qualified to have opened this facility". The citizen journalist stated the information despite not availing evidence to prove that indeed the couple were operating an illegal pharmacy and were not qualified to do so. Instead of presenting evidence that is normally used to support objective journalism, Mwana Wehvu (2016) decried the lack of rule of law in the country when he observed that government officials seemed to be immune from prosecution. "It is common knowledge that members of the public are arrested whenever they are seen selling drugs and other illicit medicinal items, but the same does not apply to this police officer," wrote Mwana Wehvu (2016). Tadiwa (2015: October, 3) in an article titled: "Kombi operators hard done by corrupt cops", claimed that there was a "corrupt and brutal syndicate involving ZRP officers, municipal police officers and some runners who harass and victimise law-abiding transport operators for not giving them bribes". As it is with the interpretive writing style, the above claim was not validated by the citizen journalist who quickly appealed for sympathy of the readers when he asked, "Is it a crime to be a law-abiding citizen?" (Tadiwa, 2015). All the analysed news articles framed ZANU PF politicians and party members as the beneficiaries of corruption. This one-sided reportage was unjustifiable considering that corruption in Zimbabwe was entrenched in all spheres of live. It is possible that opposition politicians, private businesses, traditional leaders and state-run entities were also corrupt. As with the interpretive writing style, all the corruption related news articles did not provide evidence that linked individuals to the alleged corruption cases. This can be perceived as a weakness of the interpretive news writing as the news articles were written without sources making them to be speculative and lacking verifiable facts. Critics may say this introduces subjectivity and bias in the news reports, which can discredit journalists and journalism itself. However, one can also see the interpretive writing style as liberating and operating outside the formulaic writing style of traditional journalism commonly known as the inverted pyramid which prioritises the 5Ws and H. Interpretive journalism then empowers journalistsby giving them more control over content through the selection of themes and the possibility of adding new meaning to news stories (Salgado, 2019). Interpretive journalism can also contribute to in-depth news analysis and powerful commentary articles that break conventional thought often carried by the mainstream media.

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## 6.4 Society and community news discourses

Society and community news discourses at AMH Voices evidenced the role of citizen journalism in covering hyperlocal news and its ability to offer solutions to societal problems and community development challenges. Citizen journalism, as hyperlocal news, filled the void for local news left by the mainstream media as it was forced to shut down bureau offices, retrench stringers and keep a smaller staff component at its headquarters. Society and community news emanated from broader society and from local community events. It was written from the perspective of the community, hence it put people at the centre of news. The main themes carried in the society and community news discourses were a concern with societal problems, community development challenges, poor service delivery, crime and corruption, human interest and solutions to society and community challenges.

Society and community news discourses were more prominent at the start of AMH Voices in 2014, when citizen journalists trained by MCZ were responsible for producing news content for the platform. As part of their contractual obligations with MCZ, trained citizen journalists were required to submit weekly news content in the form of videos and pictures focusing on community issues. Such content, which was archived on the platform included citizen-produced short videos and pictures that depicted community development challenges such as the living conditions of the poor in slums, road accidents due to the poor state of the roads, challenges in accessing clean and potable water and broken community infrastructure such as bust drainage systems and felled down power lines. Some of the pictures captured public officials, particularly members of the police force and soldiers, engaged in misdemeanours and other acts of corruption that potentially brought the image of the government into disrepute. There were also human-interest pictures and video stories that celebrated community heroes and their resilience in the face of adversity. Most of the pictures and video stories submitted by the trained citizen journalists had political undertones because they were not only a reflection of the lived reality in Zimbabwe but exposed government's ineptitude in service delivery, dealing with unemployment, poverty and deprivation.

As from 2015 onwards, much of the community and society news discourses were produced by untrained citizen journalists who wrote their narratives in interpretive style. These news narratives from the untrained citizen journalists focused on societal problems such as child indiscipline, the increase in commercial sexual work, domestic violence and child marriages. Such content tended to be conservative and nostalgic by upholding old values of life and glorifying the past where everything was in balance before being upset by a dysfunctional economy, technological advancements and poor government policies. The societal news discourses emphasised the WHY of journalistic inquiry as it sought to explain the underlying causes of societal problems. A common thread in all the analysed articles was an inclination to blame the ZANU PF led government for ineptitude and for contributing

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to the surge in social vices. Misi (2015: November 9) in an article titled: "Spare the rod, lose the child", raised concern with child indiscipline. Misi (2015) exhibited conservative values toward child indiscipline because he advocated for the use of corporal punishment on children at home and at school because "a good spank won't kill them". This came against heated debates on the relevancy of corporal punishment in the face of child indiscipline and concerns by human rights activists that it was inhumane torture that degraded the dignity of children. Misi (2015) claimed that he "held discussions with men from various walks of life" on the topic and the "outcome showed that men unanimously agreed on the need to continue including corporal punishment as a way of disciplining children, provided it is done in a loving manner". Consistent with interpretive writing, Misi speculates about the future if parents fail to discipline children saying "a lost generation" will be created without elaborating how and what a lost generation is. The article was written in a biased and one-sided manner which championed the world view of men and advocated for patriarchy in a society where men dominated the family unit and were the source of discipline for children.

Citizen journalists also wrote about the upsurge of commercial sex work in Zimbabwe's towns and cities. The social/moral order frame was used to present commercial sex work as a societal problem with destabilizing effects. Guvamombe (2017: September 6) in an article titled: "Increase in sex worker numbers alarming", argued that an increase in numbers of sex workers around the city of Harare was "attributed to the prevailing economic turmoil". The use of the interpretive writing style is evident when Guvamombe attributes the upsurge of commercial sex work to the economic turmoil without providing verifiable facts or statements from official sources. It was characteristic for citizen journalists to attribute societal problems to the political economy as they sought to explain and understand why social reality was the way it was. This focus on the WHY of journalist led citizen journalists to produce news accounts that were devoid of context, hence superficial and sensationalised. In the Guvamombe case, the citizen journalist is alarmed by the increase in commercial sex work but does not give context as to how the "economic turmoil" led to its increase neither does he provide official statistics to support this truth claim. Guvamombe (2017) writes that commercial sex work had always been there in society but was confined to what Ronco (2014:147) calls "spaces of consumption and pleasures", such as the Avenues area in Harare. "Little did we know sex work would soon find its way into the community and have some regard it as a profession," wrote Guvamombe (2017). The terms "sex work" and "profession" were used in the article to reduce stigmatisation and to empower women and men involved in prostitution to earn a living. Guvamombe's traditional conceptions about sex as a taboo were revealed when he condemned sex workers for engaging in sex "openly" and "in broad daylight". In using these binary opposites, Guvamombe (2017) moralised that sex must be done in closed spaces and at night.

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Mugwiji (2016: November 10) in an article titled: "Taking a stand: No to violence" wrote against the "simmering problem" of domestic violence in society. Mugwiji (2016) noted that violence had become rampant in "every aspect of our society" to the extent that "it [was] used to settle social disputes, to whip political opponents into line by the political elites and by the State to suppress dissent". In line with the interpretive writing style of making readers understand, Mugwiji (2016) explained the socio-political and economic factors that caused violence in society. At the societal level, Mugwiji (2016) blamed the patriarchal culture for contributing to violence because it had "falsely taught young men that they must enforce their natural rule over their wives and children, as they are the head of their houses". At the political level, Mugwiji (2016) blamed Mugabeism for inculcating a culture of violence in society through acts of orchestrated violence on opposition politicians. At the economic level, Mugwiji (2016) noted that abject poverty was the cause of violence. Without surmounting any evidence, Mugwiji (2016) speculated that stress induced by economic hardships and poverty was causing violence in society. The government was blamed for the upsurge of violence in society because it had "pauperised the majority of citizens". Mugwiji (2016) urged citizens to "channel and direct their anger and aggression towards the government which has failed in all its responsibilities", thereby mobilising for dissent against the state. Makunike (2015a: November 25) in an article titled: "Spare children from marriages" spoke against the social delinquency of child marriages. The piece was written in a context of increasing child marriages due to poverty, religious beliefs and traditional practices such as that of using young girls to settle family debt and disputes. To make readers understand, Makunike provided social and medical reasons why children should not enter into marriage. He argued that child marriages deprived children of the right to education and led to medical complications such as miscarriage, anaemia, premature birth and high infant mortality rate.

Citizen journalists used AMH Voices as a platform to speak on behalf of rural communities on development challenges of rampant poaching, unsustainable exploitation of natural resources and perceived poor development planning by the government. The news articles on community development challenges were written in a negative tone that blamed the government for the 2000 land reform programme, which resulted in deprivation and poor natural resources management. The news content on community development challenges emanated more from the new resettlement areas where landless blacks were settled on former white owned commercial farms. In those areas, an influx of people had affected the natural habitat, thereby creating human-animal conflicts. There was also unsustainable exploitation of natural resources in those areas as the resettled farmers sought to eke out a living. In resettlement areas, poaching was rampant due to food insecurity since the newly resettled farmers did not have adequate farming knowledge, farm inputs and were affected by

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consecutive droughts induced by climate change. In January 2018, government through the Minister of Environment, Water and Climate, Oppah Muchinguri, proclaimed a "shoot to kill" policy on poachers (*The Herald*, 2018). In response to this policy directive, an unnamed citizen journalist wrote a commentary titled "Muchinguri must value human life more than animals*"* (AMH Voices, 2018: January 23). The citizen journalist argued that human life lost in anti-poaching operations had more value than animals. The citizen journalist argued that poaching was a recent problem created by the post-independence government of Zimbabwe as noted below:

> Firstly, was poaching itself so rife as it is now as compared to the early 1980s and 90s? I strongly believe some of these activities are mostly fuelled by the current economic hardships where people engage in indiscriminate activities out of poverty and desperation.

The interpretive style of writing was evidenced by the citizen journalist's speculation that poaching was probably less rampant in years immediately after independence and had only worsened recently due to economic hardships attributable to Mugabeism. There is a sense of nostalgia when the author reflects about life in the 1980s and 1990s when community developmental challenges were less common. The citizen journalist blamed government for poor development planning and encouraged it to "go back to the drawing board and see where it all went wrong".

Makunike (2017: September 14) in an article titled: "Nothing to show for Chiadzwa diamonds", raised community concerns against the exploitation of local natural resources for the benefit of political elites and foreign investors. The Chiadzwa diamond fields located in Mutare were arguably the biggest mining fields found in Zimbabwe which were exploited by companies affiliated to some ZANU PF leaders, the military and Chinese at the expense of locals (*The Zimbabwe Independent*, 2018). Makunike (2017) argued that natural resources "must be shared equally among the sons and daughters of the soil" instead of being used for "the selfish enrichment of mining firms" and political elites. Worried Villager (2017: January 5) in an article titled: "Hyenas causing sleepless nights" raised concern over menacing hyenas in the government resettlement area of Chivi South. Worried Village (2017) blamed government for poor development planning that upset normal community life. "In the past, before the relocation of several other villagers to Chingwizi camp, we never used to have problems with wild animals in our areas," wrote Worried Villager using a community perspective synonymous with hyperlocal reporting. By relocating a majority of villagers to Chingwizi, government was accused of exposing the remaining "defenceless" community members who live a life of despair and fear to attacks by hyenas.

Citizen journalists used AMH Voices to admonish local authorities and state-run entities for corruption and poor service delivery in line with the gatekeepers' call for such content. The Chitungwiza Town Council was exposed for poor service delivery, misuse of revenues and poor staff

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performance. Activist citizen journalist Marvellous Kumalo (2016: January 13) in an article titled: "Chitungwiza municipality has gone to the dogs", raised concern over the deteriorating service delivery by the local authority whose focus he alleged was on "widening revenue collection base at the expense of the suffering residents". Kumalo (2016) said the council neglected "key service delivery components such as water supply, provision of healthcare and educational amenities, refuse collection and sewer reticulation", putting the lives of residents at the risk of water related diseases. Guni (2016: August 25), while raising similar concerns in an article titled: "Chitown water situation scandalous", shamed non-performing officials nominated to serve the council. "My second issue is directed to town clerk George Makunde who seems to be there, but in actual fact has done nothing to show his presence," wrote Guni (2016). In so doing, Guni radicalised the process of demanding accountability from local authorities by naming and shaming incompetent officials. By confronting the local authorities, citizen journalists committed political disobedience that undermined the holders of power. Mupfumira (2016: April 11) in an article titled: "Zesa service atrocious" expressed "utter disappointment" with the Zimbabwe Electricity Supply Authority (Zesa)'s lengthy power cuts. Mupfumira who described himself as a paying customer and not a recipient of "donor aid" recounted how he had lost "perishables such as meat" and risked being mugged in darkness due to the power cuts. By expressing his disappointment over the power cuts, Mupfumira (2016) asserted his citizenship and consumer rights. By giving citizens a platform to express themselves, citizen journalism helped citizens to assert and affirm their citizenship rights using AMH Voices as a platform for self-expression.

Society and community news discourses also appeared in the genre of human-interest stories. Human-interest stories focused on people who needed help or on those that helped the needy; people reunions; survivors of adversity and unsung heroes. They were written in emotive language to appeal for empathy, compassion, sympathy, motivation, laughter, fear and love. A letter written by Raymond Chishamba (2017: June 26) titled "A letter to my slain daddy" had a human-interest theme that appealed to readers' sympathy. The letter, written by the son exactly nine years after his father died, - is highly emotional. It told of the son's resilience in the face of adversity, including the death of the father in political violence during the 2008 presidential election re-run. Chishamba (2017) assumed his father was in a "beautiful place", presumably heaven because he had allegedly been murdered by ZANU PF thugs who he said belonged in hell. The letter illustrated how citizen journalism blurred the public interest with private matters. The author's loss and remembrance of a father, a decade later is certainly a private matter and yet it becomes public interest when he mentions that the father died in politically motivated violence. Thus, citizen journalism presented the challenge of demarcating the boundaries of discourse, that is, how to separate private experiences from public interest. The

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publication of the letter on the platform affirmed Lunt and Stenner's (2005) assertions that counterpublic spheres do not always carry rational and critical debates. Instead, counterpublic spheres can serve as an emotional public sphere for the expression of marginal experiences as was the case. Furthermore, Wahl-Jorgensen (2019:2) established that "personal and emotional stories appear to be widely valued by both journalists and audience members" because "they have the capacity to cultivate compassion and enlarge our world views". In this instance, the news article by the citizen journalist cultivated compassion and rended visible the lived experience of a survivor of political violence.

While citizen journalism at AMH Voices played a crucial role in highlighting everyday life challenges, it can also be credited for proffering solutions to the same. In attempting to provide solutions, citizen journalism arguably became part of solutions-based journalism. Solutions-based journalism is an approach to news reporting that focuses on responses to social issues as well as the problems themselves. Local people are seen as empowered and capable of action because they are able to identify problems and provide solutions. For example, the commentary by Tawasika (2016: April 6) titled: "It's everybody's duty to keep Harare clean", encouraged "citizens and corporates to help in waste management" instead of leaving it to the local authority. Instead of exposing the inadequacies of local authorities in service delivery, the commentary offered a solution to waste management through the collaboration of citizens and corporates. It called upon citizens to avoid littering and corporates to donate refuse bins. Another example of a solutions-based citizen journalism was a commentary by Makunike (2016a: January 26) entitled: "Baby dumping: Holistic approach needed". Makunike (2016a) called for a holistic approach to baby dumping through an analysis of push factors and the removal of "archaic laws" that punished women offenders without regard of the reasons that pushed them to dump babies. Malinganiza (2015: November 5) in an article titled: "What has caused nude parties among youths?" questioned the cause of youth parties privately held by high school students to allegedly engage in sex and drug abuse. To remedy this social ill, Malinganiza (2015) proposed that "parents and guardians should play a major role by monitoring their children's daily activities". He added that the community should also play a pivotal role by reporting any suspicious parties involving students and for the prosecution of the young offenders "to send a clear message to other students about the consequences likely to be faced if they are to be caught on the wrong side of the law".

## 6.5 National news discourses

For the purposes of this study, national news discourses were defined as citizen-produced news content that had a macro focus, appealed to the majority of citizens and had wide ranging consequences for the nation. The analysis of national news discourses focused on citizen journalists'

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reportage of national events, nation building and nationhood. State-controlled mainstream media had customarily reported on national events with patriotic exuberance that exalted former President Mugabe and ZANU PF as hallmarks for nationalism, sovereignty and territorial integrity. Such reportage gave rise to what Ranger (2005:13) termed "patriotic journalism" – a kind of journalism that served the national interest in a prejudiced and propagandistic manner by employing narrow and divisive strategies that cast Zimbabweans into "sellouts and patriots" and the rest of the world into its "supporters and imperialists". The objective of my analysis was to establish if citizen journalism and alternative media in Zimbabwe were loyal to the country in their reportage of national events, and in what form was the loyalty expressed. This was an important point of departure because alternative media are seen as carriers of alternative political narratives and counterhegemonic discourses. The prevailing crisis led to negative citizen discourses about the nation that were devoid of patriotism. The citizen journalists were dissatisfied with Mugabeism and yearned for regime change. They framed national news discourses in terms of failure, which positioned them as activists directly affected by the crisis characterised by unemployment, corruption and poorly executed populist government policies.

In analysing citizen journalists' reportage of national events, I focused on content they produced during events of national significance such as Independence Day celebrated every 18$^{th}$ of April and Defence Forces Day commemorated every August to honour the nation's defence and uniformed forces comprising the police, army and the prison services. Born-free (2017: April 19) in an article titled: "Nothing to celebrate on Independence Day" argued there was nothing to celebrate on Independence Day because of entrenched poverty, corruption, looting of state resources and failed government policies, particularly the land reform program that had "failed to revolutionise [the] agricultural industry". Born-free (2017) said far from achieving social justice and unity, independence in Zimbabwe had brought class divisions essentially "a poor learned black middle class and a rich elite class" and a "subjugation of the majority by a rich minority". He added that gains of independence were "hijacked by the political elite" at the expense of the majority who were "wallowing in poverty". Maguta (2016a: April 10) in an article titled: "Independence meaningless with repressive govt", rallied citizens to fight the "bad system" of the ZANU PF in the same manner as the black nationalist armies had fought against the bad system of colonialism. By implication, Maguta said fighting and defeating ZANU PF would bring real independence to Zimbabweans suffering from economic hardships. Maguta (2016a) departed from the mainstream media narratives that glorified ZANU PF and Mugabe as architects of Zimbabwe's independence arguing that their contribution to the cause were coincidental. Maguta (2016a) thus noted:

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> With or without Zanu PF, independence was going to come anyway. It was only that in 1980 Zanu PF and President Robert Mugabe were at the right place at the right time. We owe Zanu PF nothing when it comes to our national independence as they did not initiate the struggle, but simply joined it.

The above view by Maguta (2016a) was uncharacteristic because ZANU PF and Mugabe were widely seen as forerunners of Zimbabwe's nationalist struggle for independence. Maguta noted that Zimbabwe was "in trouble because of Zanu PF" hence he mobilised for an opposition vote in the 30 July 2018 national elections asserting that "there is a lot to gain by making sure Zanu PF lost the next poll". Maguta (2016b: August 7) in an article titled: "Defence Forces must not dabble in partisan politics", decried indulgence in ZANU PF politics by "a few rotten apples" of the defence forces in clear violation of the constitution. Maguta (2016b) alleged that some "top military, police and other state security personnel" had declared their allegiance to Zanu PF and this was "a recipe for disaster" that made the "likelihood of a free and fair elections impossible". This later became evident in November 2017 when the army launched Operation Restore Legacy that intervened in the ZANU PF succession dispute forcing Mugabe out of power and replacing him with his former deputy, now President Mnangagwa. The citizen journalist's lack of affection and reason to celebrate national holidays was largely due to diminished nationalism as a result of the crisis and the fact that national holidays were conflated with ZANU PF party politics. The national holidays were officiated by ZANU PF politicians who used the occasions to further party activities and ideologies. Mpofu (2016:30) called this the "toxification" or Zanufication of national holidays for selfish party interests.

Citizen journalists produced for AMH Voices regular commentary and analysis articles that evaluated government's development priorities and performance. They were largely doubtful of the government's commitment to nation building and saw lack of meaningful development in the country as a consequence of poor policies and misplaced priorities. South Africa based citizen journalist, Hamu Juju Patina (2015: September 29) in an article titled: "Zimbabweans queue for SA permits" depicted Zimbabweans in winding queues at Department of Home Affairs in Johannesburg. The thrust of the article was on government's "misplaced priorities" in addressing the country's economic challenges by instead focusing on anti-Western and homophobic rhetoric. Patina (2015) argued that there was no logic for Mugabe to have "delivered a speech at the United Nations General Assembly in New York condemning gays and lesbians [when] several hundreds of Zimbabweans queued in Midrand, South Africa, waiting for results of their application to stay away from home as economic refugees". Patina (2015) said government lacked focus and prioritisation of issues because it had "not put economic reintegration among its priorities with Mugabe's public speeches continually punctuated by issues like government's anti-gay stance and the sour relations between Zimbabwe and

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Western countries". For Patina (2015) Mugabe's grandstanding had no value when more than three million Zimbabweans were living as economic refugees in South Africa.

Maguta (2016c: March 10) in an article titled: "Mugabe, stop fiddling while hunger stalks", blamed government for misplaced priorities in addressing the countrywide food security crisis by concentrating on ZANU PF factional wars that were concerned with who would succeed Mugabe as leader of the party and president of Zimbabwe. An annoyed Maguta (2016c) wrote, "It is the spectacular fashion in which Mugabe is concentrating in solving his party problems at the expense of national issues which is galling." He added, "Very little time is being spent focusing on the stagnant economy, unemployment, ravaging famine, quality service delivery and other important issues which affect us daily." Maguta (2016c) urged Mugabe to "deal with pressing national issues first" such as food shortages and the economy.

Citizen journalists blamed government policies for the country's development challenges in particular the populist land reform programme. Whereas the land reform programme was a source of pride for patriotic journalists from the state owned mainstream, citizen journalists were critical of it. Maguta (2016d: November 14) in an article titled: "Farmers, vote Zanu PF and remain poor", argued that poor agricultural productivity in the country was due to government talk and lack of action in providing farmers with inputs. Maguta said famine in the country was also attributable to lack of policy oversight that saw the government implement a land reform programme in haste "without making sure the farms are made good use of". Maguta (2016d) noted:

> To this end, I totally blame our leadership for decimating our agriculture. No! Zimbabweans must not continue starving 16 years after the land reform programme. With these actions or lack of, it seems the Zanu PF government does not care about farmers it created. Their only interest is in using these farming communities as voters' wells in elections and nothing else.

Because citizen journalists thought government had misplaced development priorities they pushed for the ouster of Mugabe. Maguta (2016e: July 2) in an article titled: "Regime has lit the last, dangerous match", urged "the Zanu PF-led government [to] resign immediately or face the poor people's wrath". Maguta reasoned that ZANU PF was an "obscene failure" and Mugabe was supposed to "step down and allow new brains into [the] national political cockpit". When Mugabe was eventually removed in November 2017, the focus of citizen journalists shifted to President Mnangagwa's performance in office. Ruth (2018: February 27) in an article titled: "Mnangagwa's 100-day fake promises" argued that Mnangagwa's first 100 days in office had "totally failed" because nothing had changed in the country as the problems that the new dispensation took over from the

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Mugabe were still present. Mnangagwa had upon his inauguration as president set himself a 100-day plan to transform key sectors of the economy and rid corruption associated with Mugabe's regime. By evaluating government development priorities and performance, citizen journalists kept government in check and promoted public deliberations on issues of nation importance.

As stated above, my analysis also focused on the extent to which national news discourses by citizen journalists reflected nationalism and how they framed the national interest, because citizen journalism and alternative media may have "contested narratives, visions, and versions of the nation" (Mpofu & Nenjerama, 2018:1). I established that citizen journalists' sense of national pride had reached a low point due to the prevailing crisis in the country. Concerned (2016: August 17) in an article titled: "Barren patriotism won't take Zim anywhere", argued that patriotism espoused by ZANU PF was "barren" because it had not yielded tangible national development results. Concerned (2016) blamed ZANU PF for corruption and pillage of national resources using patriotism as a smokescreen. He thus noted:

> In Zimbabwe today, people are busy shouting patriotic slogans during the day, while at night they are busy doing everything to advance their personal and very selfish interests. Let us wait and see where barren patriotism and excuses will take Zimbabwe.

Mugabe was known for patriotic slogans, yet his family members were enriching themselves as evidenced by the lavish lifestyle of his wife Grace and two sons who were living in expensive hotels and mansions abroad.

Citizen journalists argued that entrenched racism and tribalism were barriers to a unitary and nationalist Zimbabwean state. This was due to the political history that divided the country along racial and tribal lines as well as Mugabeism that was considered racist and tribalistic (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015). Zimbabwe's tribal tensions date back to the post-independence ethnic cleansing genocide called Gukurahundi that occurred as from 1983 and ceased in 1987 with the signing of a Unity Accord by the rival parties of PF ZAPU, whose majority supporters were of the Ndebele tribe and ZANU, whose supporters were mainly of the Shona tribe. Because of Gukurahundi, the relations between the majority Shona and minority Ndebele have been strained. Allegations and counter allegations of regional and tribal marginalisation took centre stage in alternative media spaces such as AMH Voices, with some Ndebeles accusing Shonas of "besieging" them. Some Ndebeles accused Shonas of seeking to extend their hegemony over them by controlling all spheres of life such as culture, politics and public office. Secessionist groups and political groups such as the Mthwakazi Liberation Front and the Mthwakazi Republic party called for the formation of a break away Mthwakazi State consisting mainly of the Ndebele ethnic group. In order to discourage tribal tensions,

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the terms Mthwakazi, Gukurahundi, Ndebele, Shona were blacklisted on the user comments section of AMH Voices, but citizen journalists still referred to tribal issues. The decision to blacklist user comments and sometimes news content that referred to tribalism can be seen as editorial censorship that prevented deliberations in an open counterpublic sphere, and also as paternalistic since it determined the topics that readers engaged with from a top-down authoritarian perspective. Chipangura (2016: August 1) in an article titled: "Stop playing tribalism card", argued that tribalism was affecting national cohesion to the extent that it was used in almost all quarters of life such as politics, workplace and recently sport. Chipangura (2016) noted that "when the Zimbabwe football national team secured their 2017 Afcon [Africa Cup of Nations] berth, their celebrations suffered, as they were also accused of being comprised of only Shona players, hence, tribalism again". Chipangura (2016) was concerned that national achievements such as qualifying for the continental soccer competition, Afcon were shrouded by allegations of tribalism. This was so because the national soccer team had comprised mainly of players of the Shona tribe, much to the chagrin of some Ndebele people who felt that there were a lot of deserving Ndebele players deliberately left out by the selectors because of their tribe. Citizen journalists viewed the unresolved national questions of racism and tribalism as exposing the lack of political will by government to pacify race and tribal tensions and build a unitary state based on equality of all people.

## 6.6 Mugabeism news discourses

Mugabeism was a prominent discourse category on AMH Voices because Mugabe was not only president of the country but an important African political figure who gained both admiration and criticism. The focus of the analysis was on citizen journalists' contestations of Mugabeism because it is a "highly contested political phenomenon albeit one that has no coherent ideological content" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015:16). Mugabeism news discourses centred on the personality of Mugabe in particular his masculinity; family life; politics and ideology; and his shortcomings as the president of Zimbabwe and as the ZANU PF party leader. In analysing news content in this discourse category, I drew upon the works of leading discourse scholar Van Dijk (1995, 2000) that view discourse analysis as ideological analysis (see Chapter 4.7). This route of analysis meant that I viewed the news discourses on Mugabeism as carriers of ideologies. It also meant that I treated each news story as laden with bias that potentially represented a duality of "us" and "them". The use of the "us" and "them" analysis presupposes the existence of prejudice by the ingroup towards an outgroup. Citizen journalists as the ingroup were prejudiced in their view of Mugabe and ZANU PF, the outgroup. They held non-dominant, negative and oppositional beliefs about Mugabe and ZANU PF that were different from those propagated by state-owned and controlled mainstream media in Zimbabwe. Although almost all the analysed news content on Mugabeism was negative and opposed to Mugabe's

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politics, some citizen journalists were at least sympathetic to him and appreciated his political decisions regarding homosexuality, black empowerment and Pan Africanism.

The personality of Mugabe and his control of his family were contested by citizen journalists because of the controversies that surrounded them. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2015:21) notes that manhood, masculinity, and patriarchy were constitutive aspects of Mugabeism. Mainstream media constructs of Mugabe accentuated his masculinity traits by presenting him as eloquent, godly, cultic and ultramodern while his political opponents were portrayed as softer, malleable, seemingly empathetic (Muponde, 2015: 139). Because of these mainstream media constructs, Mugabe was seen as part of hegemonic masculinities that are "dominant, empowered, and socially and economically significant […], that can legitimize and reproduce their power" (Gaidzanwa, 2015:158). However, citizen journalists at AMH Voices dispelled this notion of Mugabe as a hegemonic masculine by advancing the view that his wife, Grace, and rowdy sons had emasculated him. They portrayed Mugabe as a failed disciplinarian who could not keep his family under check. Despite the widely held beliefs fed by mainstream media that Mugabe was a no-nonsense person, citizen journalists thought Mugabe was actually at the mercy of a "wicked" wife Grace who could do anything to fulfil her uncurbed political ambitions.

As from 2014 onwards, Grace became involved in ZANU PF politics and openly vied to succeed Mugabe as president of the country. This, among other reasons, led to Mugabe's political misfortunes and his subsequent removal from office through a November 2017 coup. Before the coup, citizen journalists had already begun to allege that Grace was the source of trouble for Mugabe, ZANU PF and Zimbabwe. Anderson (2016: February 19) in an article titled: "To Grace from a Zanu PF member", delegitimised Grace's bid for political office because she was "unheralded, [a] non-fighter and non-collaborator". This lack of liberation war credentials derailed Grace's political ambitions as liberation war credentials were requisite for political leadership in ZANU PF. In debasing remarks, Anderson noted that Grace's "only claim to fame" was "marrying the President". Grace was further delegitimised for political office using moralisation. Anderson said Grace was of questionable morals as she had divorced her husband Stanely Gorerasa to marry Mugabe. Anderson (2016) thus questioned:

> Do you really love Robert Mugabe? Please take cognisant of his age and hitherto in relation to his strenuous schedule. Have you been a good mother? This is, of course, guided by the delinquency shown by your sons.

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Anderson (2016) questioned if Grace loved Mugabe and if she had been able to provide him with sex considering that Mugabe was aged and had a strenuous schedule. Anderson suggested that Grace had no love for Mugabe but was driven into the marriage by political ambition and greed.

The discourse of Grace as the trouble causer in ZANU PF was elaborated using Biblical references that expressed moral judgements about her. Pazvagozha (2017: July 24) in an article titled: "Grace behind turmoil in Zanu PF", drew on Biblical parallels to warn Mugabe to stop Grace. "I see Mugabe's (and Zanu PF's) fate being congruent to that of the biblical Adam – who blamed his demise on his wife", warned Pazvagozha. Grace was equated to the Biblical Eve who deceived Adam to sin at the Garden of Eden. The use of Biblical imagery and parallelisms to describe Grace as a wicked woman was also used by Shumba (2017: April 7) in an article titled: "Grace should be stopped from taking us for a ride". Shumba stated that Grace was equivalent to the "wicked wife" of King Ahab, "the evil Jezebel" who was drunk in power. Mugabe was likened to Ahab who "sold himself to do evil in the presence of the Lord, urged by his wife Jezebel". Shumba (2017) suggested that Grace wrongly influenced Mugabe to stay in power. He thus wrote:

> Some suggest that if Sally [Mugabe's former wife] was still alive, Mugabe would have handed over power decades ago, but with Grace urging him on, and wanting to be president too, he continues to rule despite being very old.

In the above statement, Shumba compared Grace to Mugabe's deceased first wife, Sally, who was thought to be well mannered and would have guided Mugabe to make the right decisions.

Bikaz (2016: November 23) in an article titled: "Grace won't last a day after Mugabe", extended the commonly held view that Grace was not qualified for political office because she lacked "sophistry". Bikaz (2016) maintained that Grace was disliked by party supporters but her marriage to Mugabe worked to her advantage. As "the wife of one of the most feared dictators in history", Grace made "everyone quake in their boots at the mere mention of her name" wrote Bikaz (2016). He reminded Grace not to ride on Mugabe's fame as she aspired for political office because "presidents are not chosen by husbands". The representation of Grace as a weak politician fed on societal stereotypes which regarded women politicians as weak and as people who attained political office through sexual favours. In Zimbabwe there were rampant misogynistic perceptions around Grace's ascendance to power that discouraged her from nurturing political ambitions. For example, there was a crude joke that was attributed to former liberation war veterans leader, Jabulani Sibanda, that denounced Grace Mugabe's "bedroom coup" and stated that "power was not sexually transmitted" (Gaidzanwa, 2015:176).

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Grace was portrayed as a selfish woman bent on amassing personal wealth from state resources and spending it on overseas shopping. Kaitano (2017: August 22) in an article titled: "We cannot afford another term under Grace govt", urged people to register to vote in the 2018 elections so that they remove the Mugabes from power. Kaitano (2017) surmised that Grace was already in power and Mugabe was only a "proxy" for her in government. Kaitano reasoned that Grace wanted Mugabe to remain in power so as "to continue ruling as she is already doing" and to "splash on herself the country's wealth buying more houses in South Africa or Asia". The view that Grace was de facto prime minister of Zimbabwe, making decisions on behalf of a "proxy" Mugabe gave credence to the argument that Mugabe as seen by citizen journalists and alternative media, had been effectively emasculated by Grace. This argument was also framed using the concept of "state capture" that was coined against former South African president Jacob Zuma for having allowed the business family of the Guptas significant influence in the running of the state. Gheorghe (2017: September 14) in an article titled: "Grace has captured Mugabe to capture the State", advanced the theory that Grace had captured the state by "making unruly statements that went against protocol" while Mugabe was "a willing player and participant".

Citizen journalists viewed Mugabe and family as greedy. Gandanga (2016: June 21) in an article titled: "Mugabe, Zanu PF not your property", accused Mugabe and family for being selfish in "trying to privatise a revolutionary party and share ownership with his wife, children and clan in front of blind party followers". Gandanga (2016) bemoaned how a greedy Mugabe wanted "to take Zanu PF as his property" yet he "never fired a single shot at the enemy during the entire Chimurenga war". This alternative presentation of Mugabe as meek to the extent of failing to fire a single shot against the enemy during the liberation war was largely absent from mainstream media narratives. By and large, the portrayal of Mugabe and family on AMH Voices played into gendered stereotypes about men as hegemonic masculinities and women as domesticated homemakers. News articles that focused on Grace used the moralisation frame to delegitimise her as a woman of loose morals who divorced her first husband to marry the hegemonic Mugabe and as a wicked power-hungry woman who nurtured political ambitions. The moralisation of Grace was also in the form of Biblical references that portrayed her as the modern-day Jezebel if not Eve, that wrongly influenced her husband. For this reason, citizen journalism news discourses can be seen as conservative for resisting some forms of social change, such as women emancipation and empowerment.

Citizen journalists used AMH Voices as a platform to contest Mugabeism. In so doing they had the opportunity of self-expression in reviewing and evaluating Mugabe's practice of politics and ideology. In my analysis, I focused on the citizen contributions and the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with Mugabe on political and ideological issues. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2015:16) observes

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that at the practical level of operation, Mugabeism thrived on the "politics of survival and opportunism". This contradicted the commonly held notion by citizen journalists that Mugabe was a strategist par excellence. When Mugabe failed to tackle what was considered a national problem of corruption effectively, citizen journalists did not see incapacitation but shrewd political scheming. They reasoned that Mugabe used corruption as a political strategy because he let free high-profile politicians accused of corruption in order to benefit from their political allegiances. In 2016, Mugabe let free former Minister of Higher and Tertiary Education, Professor Jonathan Moyo, who publicly admitted to corruptly using public funds for selfish political gains. Moyo took over US$500 000 from the Zimbabwe Development Fund, administered by his ministry to purchase motor cycles and bicycles for traditional leaders in his constituency, (*The Zimbabwe Independent*, 2016). Maguta (2016f: October 10) in an article titled: "Mugabe must deal with corrupt ministers", accused Mugabe for failing to drop from cabinet corrupt ministers who were his "political props helping him to stay in power as long as he wanted". Mugabe's failure to dismiss Moyo illustrated his political scheming and his strategy to keep the best brains in Moyo for his own political benefit.

Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2015:19) observes that Mugabeism was Pan-Africanist as evidenced by "his populist redistributive policies on land, empowerment, and indigenization; and his anti-Western antics". The assertion that Mugabeism was Pan Africanistic resonated with the opinions of some AMH Voices citizen journalists who idolised Mugabe as perhaps the only African leader who stood up against Western influence. Since the start of government black empowerment programmes in 2000, Mugabe was conspicuous for his anti-West and decoloniality rhetoric especially at international fora. In 2016, Mugabe characteristically urged African countries to pull out of the UN if it failed to reform its Security Council so as to accommodate smaller powers, especially those from the so-called Third World. Baba Kiki (2016: September 29) in an article titled: "UN pullout won't harm you, Mugabe, but ordinary people", disagreed with the stance taken by Mugabe arguing that it was "selfish" and akin to "holding the whole [African] continent to ransom". Mugabe had issued the statement in his capacity as chairperson of the African Union. Baba Kiki (2016) reasoned that it was reckless for Mugabe to suggest that Africa must pull out of UN because doing so "will bring a lot of suffering to the majority of the people". Baba Kiki (2016) added that a UN pull out was not even acceptable to Mugabe's wife saying Mugabe was likely to get a "torrid time" at home from the "flamboyant wife" who "organised" all Mugabe's foreign trips. On this occasion, citizen journalists disagreed with Mugabeism. Takabvakure (2015: December 4) in an article titled: "Mugabe is right on homosexuality", concurred with Mugabe regarding homosexuality because it was "unnatural and it has no room in a civilised society". In Mugabe style anti-Western rhetoric, Takabvakure (2015) insisted that homosexuality was part of the "liberalistic approach to everything" which created a "do-

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as-you-will" attitude in society. He added that rights which emanated from "the madness in the West" had "resulted in so much immorality and senselessness". Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2015:2) asserted that Mugabeism embraced violence as a pillar of governance. This view was concurred by some citizen journalists who believed that Mugabe used threats and violence on opposition politicians and supporters. Maunganidze (2016: September 18) in an article titled: "One cannot run a nation on threats", cautioned Mugabe against using threats of violence on the suffering citizenry because "it has never worked and it will not work" to solve the "social, political and economic problems" of the country. Some citizen journalists at AMH Voices concurred with Ndlovu-Gatsheni's (2015) assertion that Mugabeism was corrupt. Maguta (2016g: September 14) in an article titled: "Mugabe must stop criminal starvation of people", said Mugabe was corruptly using food aid as a political weapon to win the rural vote. From the above examples, we see how citizen journalists contested Mugabeism, sometimes agreeing and disagreeing to it.

When the Zimbabwe crisis escalated as from 2016 onwards, citizen journalists made calls on AMH Voices for Mugabe to step down as a matter of urgency and in the national interest because he had failed as a statesman and as a party leader. The calls for Mugabe to resign were premised on his failure to stop rampant corruption, improve the economy, raise standards of living, deal with the factional fights in ZANU PF and to control his raging wife Grace, who was in the habit of publicly insulting Mugabe's political enemies. Chinowaita (2016: August 18) in an article titled: "It's time for Mugabe to resign", urged Mugabe to swallow his pride and resign over "incapability, laziness and sleeping while in office". Chinowaita claimed that everyone in the country wanted Mugabe out of office including his once loyal supporters. Moyo (2016: July 17) in an article titled: "Mugabe should be held accountable", said Mugabe and his "ruthless junta" must resign over "corruption, unemployment, kleptocracy, gross human rights violations and failure to eradicate poverty". Garikai (2016: June 20) in an article titled: "Succession discourse must be encouraged", said it was time Mugabe resigned before "God says [its] enough" adding that the succession discourse in ZANU PF was healthy because it prevented Mugabe from dying in office. K.R.K. (2015: December 7) in an article titled: "Mugabe its time to step down", said Mugabe must step down because he had lost respect and was about to reverse his own legacy.

As from 2016 onwards, most citizen journalists preoccupied themselves with negative discourses about Mugabeism that fomented national resentment of Mugabe and in part contributed to his removal from office. The negative discourses disregarded the positives that Mugabe might have made to the country and were extended to include the ZANU PF party, which was portrayed as a vile terrorist organisation incapable of delivering anything good. Mupinyuri (2016: July 30) in an article titled: "Zanu PF clearly showing terroristic face", noted that "all Zanu PF functionaries are no more, nor

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less than terrorists" who used "violence against innocent people to impose their will". Mupinyuri (2016) said ZANU PF used violence "mafia style more like terrorists Boko Haram" […] "at every stage of a political challenge". IM (2016: July 4) in an article titled: "The world must shun Zanu PF govt", urged the international community to isolate ZANU PF because of "its officialised corruption, political abductions and persecutions, [and] partisan distribution of drought relief food". Musewe (2016: July 28) in an article titled: "Naive for anyone to think Zanu PF can reform", stated that it was a "joke" for the British government to "think that Zanu PF can reform". The article came at a time when Britain and other Western powers had committed to work with ZANU PF in restoring the battered economy for the benefit of the nation. Mafume (2016: June 22) in an article titled: "Nothing good comes from ZANU PF" said the party was a vile terrorist organisation that "[was] incompetent, cruel, heartless and dangerous" and "driven only by power retention and aggrandizement". Mafume (2016) added that when "placed under any pressure", ZANU PF resorted to "cannibalism" by unleashing violence and repression on opposition politicians and supporters.

## 6.7 Economic news discourses

Economic news discourses at AMH Voices resembled economics journalism because they analysed and interpreted news events on the economic front as they unfolded. Economics journalism is concerned with the reportage of economic issues, business and financial markets (Hayes, 2014). Economic journalists are required to be neutral, objective, and balanced providers of news and information. Economics journalism is a specialist genre that was underdeveloped in Zimbabwe due to lack of adequate skills and training. It was limited to few specialist finance publications that targeted business executives such as *The Zimbabwe Independent*, *The Financial Gazette* and the *Business Weekly*. The lack of specialised training on economic reporting and an understanding of economic fundamentals meant that citizen journalists at AMH Voices wrote less on economic issues. My analysis focused on citizen journalists' perceptions towards economic issues and how they were affected by them because this influenced the discourses they constructed and circulated. The analysis revealed that citizen journalists had predominantly negative views of Zimbabwe's economic performance and future outlook. This was because a majority of them had witnessed first-hand economic hardships induced by the first wave of the Zimbabwean crisis between 2000 and 2008. As a result of these experiences, and maybe also because of the general anti-government positioning, many citizen journalists were sceptical of government economic policies towards economic revival. The economic news discourses were written by ordinary citizens without expert knowledge in economics, using accessible language devoid of statistics, technical explanations or jargon. Everyday life examples modelled around the imagery of a peasant farmer and his two cows were often used to illustrate otherwise difficult economic concepts, the magnitude of the economic deterioration and

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ineffectiveness of government policies to arrest further economic decline. The objective of this was to keep news articles interesting and simple so that readers could understand. This simplified presentation of economic news discourses fundamentally differed with that of specialist finance publications that used expert analysis. In keeping with the interpretive writing style, economic news discourses at AMH Voices downplayed positive government actions to restore economic normalcy and overemphasised negative developments. Citizen journalists tended to be alarmists who flagged risks associated with government actions to remedy the economic decline through speculations about the future without using verifiable facts or sources. The citizen news articled tended to unfold through what can be called diagnosis and prognosis. In diagnosis, citizen journalists explored the underlying causes of the economic crisis and in prognosis, they attempted to offer solutions to rectify the crisis. Through diagnosis and prognosis, some citizen journalists raised critical questions about the economy and proffered non-expert economic and financial solutions to the crisis.

Pani (2017:13) observes that economic issues are "always best reported through people" and not necessarily in "numbers and statistics". To this end, citizen journalists reported on the impact of the economic crisis on ordinary citizens, thereby becoming the voice for the voiceless. Their focus in the reportage was the human element, that is, the marginalised people affected by the economic decline and the decision-making of the political elite. Although the economic crisis heightened in 2016, by the end of November 2015 there were already signs of tough times ahead. Government had in December 2014 introduced bond coins to remedy the lack of small change on US dollar purchases before launching the bond notes in November 2016. Makunike (2015b: November 9) in an article titled: "Poor bear brunt of coin shortage", observed that bond coins were not adequately circulating, as a result, the "common man [was] being given biscuits, sweets and chewing gum as change". Makunike (2015b) said "most people affected by coin shortage [were] from lower strata of society and [had] the least voice in government'. From this, it was observed that citizen journalists represented the voices of excluded citizens and empowered marginalised groups to express their views in economic matters. Makunike (2015b) provided a diagnosis of the coin shortage problem and how it was to affect the poor through increased prices of basic commodities. He argued that as a result of coin shortages, businesses were bound to increase the prices to reach the one-dollar mark in order to avoid sourcing coins for use as change. His prognosis to coin shortage was the use of bank cards for all transactions. Makunike (2015b) noted however, that the challenge with bank cards was that "a huge chunk of the nation [was] in the informal sector and unbanked", hence only bond notes could help remedy the lack of change in business transactions. Concerned Citizen (2016: December 24) in an article titled: "No Christmas for the poor after Chinamasa budget", raised concern over lack of pro-poor budgeting by finance minister Patrick Chinamasa in his 2017 national budget statement.

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Concerned Citizen (2016) dismissed the budget as "another damp squib" that did not "inspire confidence to a hopeless nation". He observed that 80% of the budget went towards the salaries of government workers and the poor had "nothing to celebrate" because they were unemployed and hundreds of companies were closing down. In so doing, Concerned Citizen (2016) voiced citizen's concerns about the rate of unemployment and economic decline.

In view of the unabated economic crisis, citizen journalists begun to critique government economic policies. In so doing, they occupied themselves with negative sentiments and at times raised unnecessary alarm on the situation. Mafume (2017: March 16) in an article titled: "Command economy will not work", scoffed at government efforts to introduce the "command" element in economy, education and health. This came after government successfully introduced command agriculture in 2016 that provided communal farmers with inputs and implements so as to boost productivity. Between 2000 and 2008 government implemented various policy interventions that were construed as command economics. These policy actions saw central government regulate economic behaviour by way of price controls and salary freezes in place of a free market system. Mafume (2017) argued that command economics was "ill-informed, ignorant and bound to fail". Instead, he urged government to "fix the basics" and apply the command strategy to "the reduction of roadblocks, an end to corruption and the insatiable appetite to fly in and out by the executive".

When the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe introduced bond notes in November 2016 purportedly to solve the ongoing cash crisis, some citizen journalists potentially caused public alarm through oppositional news commentary and analysis. Rukara (2016: August 11) in an article titled: "Spare us from bond note voodoo economics" described the bond notes as an "act of economic genocide" and "voodoo economics". Rukara said with the introduction of bond notes, "lemons [will] drive oranges out of the market", in apparent reference to Gresham's Law, whereby, abundant and worthless money drives out scarce and highly valued currency from the market. The simile on lemons and oranges exemplified how citizen journalists used non-expert language to describe economic phenomenon. Mambanje (2016: June 17) in an article titled: "Open letter to President Mugabe", beseeched Mugabe to listen to public pleas and not impose bond notes. Mambanje (2016) said he had respect for Mugabe because he occupied the highest office in the land but on that occasion, he requested an infallible Mugabe to climb down on his decision to introduce bond notes because "even God had to listen to a human being". Mambanje (2016) humbly begged Mugabe not to introduce bond notes:

> My plea, Mr. President, is for you to drop this weird idea of bond notes. It will only make Zimbabweans worse off. It's not too late and it will not be perceived as a sign of weakness to drop the idea but good leadership. I hope the good Lord will impress upon your mind to take the right decision going forward.

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From above, it was apparent that some Zimbabweans viewed Mugabe as a sacrosanct leader who they pleaded with to reverse economic decisions that negatively affected them. Mugari (2016: November 16) in an article titled: "Bond notes will worsen poverty, shortages", warned that bond notes were ill-fated. Using an interpretive writing style that speculates about the future, Mugari predicted that bond notes would result in "panic withdrawal of cash from the banks", that a "monetary parallel market [was] going to emerge" and that "the bond notes value will plummet" resulting in expensive imports and fuel shortages. Although Mugari's speculations at the time of writing were without base, by 30 June 2018 they had materialised. The bond note was continuously losing value against the US dollar and there was a parallel money market as banks ran dry of cash. In September 2018, the country faced fuel shortages as business battled to raise enough foreign currency for imports. The prediction by Mugari, who is not an economist, demonstrated how citizen journalists as non-experts provided tenable economic solutions and predicted economic outcomes.

Some citizen journalists thought government was incapable of solving Zimbabwe's economic challenges. Anon (2017: April 26) in an article titled: "ZANU PF clueless on fixing Zim mess", argued that ZANU PF could not solve the economic "mess" they created because its politicians were "braindead" and only cared for their "tummies". He argued that government chose "executive largesse" over investment on industrial production hence behaved like the farmer with a "cow [that] should keep providing milk even if they didn't feed it". The above metaphor was used to simplify the economic concept of government's over expenditure from the treasury without offsetting it though local production. Makunike (2016b: October 5) in an article titled: "People have no confidence in govt leaders", observed that Zimbabweans had "no faith" in government leaders because they had failed to prescribe the correct remedies in the last two decades of economic ruin. Despite the overly negative economic news discourses on the platform, some citizen journalists contributed content that predicted positive economic outlook for the country. Such content, although well-meaning was usually dismissed with contempt by other citizens who argued that it was produced by ZANU PF propaganda armies that pried on the platform to troll users.

## 6.8 Election news discourses

Fieldwork in this study was conducted when Zimbabwe was preparing for elections to elect new members of the parliament and president of the country on a five-year term in line with republican democracy. Waldahl (2004) observes that during elections, the media plays different functions that include the public watchdog function, information role, acting as commenters and agenda setting. Mujere and Mwatwara (2016:216) established that citizen journalism in Zimbabwe played "an important role in shaping political attitudes, altering the boundaries of political interaction, and

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bringing into existence new methods and channels for resistance since the build-up to the 2008 elections, and the 2013 elections". They add that during the 2008 and 2013 elections, citizen journalists made substantial commentary on the struggles that were affecting Zimbabweans thereby giving voice and greater decision making powers to disadvantaged and vulnerable groups for them to participate in governance and the economy. Besides regular commentary, citizen journalism can provide on the spot election monitoring to expose malpractices and report on the election outcomes, thereby enhancing transparency and accountability of the elections (Mare, Keith, Marimbe & Mukundu, 2018). In recognition of the potential role of citizen journalism in election reporting, the International Media Support, a non-profit organisation working to support local media in countries affected by armed conflict, authoritarian rule and political transition[6] commissioned in March 2018 a manual entitled *Citizen journalism guidelines on electoral reporting in Zimbabwe* authored by Mare *et al* (2018). The launch of the manual heightened the status of citizen journalism in Zimbabwe as a source of news and information, particularly during elections.

My analysis of citizen journalists' 2018 election discourses at AMH Voices was limited to the pre-election period because the study focused on the period from January 2014 to June 2018 whereas the elections were held on 30 July 2018. This means that the textual analysis does not include citizen journalists' reportage of the actual elections and the post-election events.

Citizen journalists at AMH Voices provided information on the alternative political ideology of generational consensus. Machimbira (2018) defined it as a Pan-African "youth-driven form of renaissance, renewal and rejuvenation" that calls for the inclusion of youths in governance. Generational consensus is when youths lead the agenda for structural transformation to redress social, political and economic ills. Mare (2018) argued that generational consensus was an attractive trajectory in Zimbabwe's 2018 elections because most political parties were "dominated by the old generation, especially at the top while the young generation occupied peripheral roles". Mare added that youth participation in politics and in generational consensus was enabled by the internet and digital technologies through cyber-movements and hashtag politics. Generational consensus gained ground in Zimbabwe because the youth were tired of ZANU PF's old guard that had been in power since independence in 1980.

News articles on generational consensus called for the participation of young people in the 2018 national elections as candidates for political office and to support the opposition MDC Alliance presidential candidate Nelson Chamisa, who had turned 40 years, enabling him to qualify for presidential office as stipulated by the Zimbabwean Constitution. Organizing for Zimbabwe (O4Z),

[6] https://www.mediasupport.org/about/

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a youth led civic organisation led the campaign to promote youth participation in Zimbabwe's electoral cycle so as to redress high levels of youth apathy towards governance. O4Z (2018a: April 7) in an article titled: "Youth participation in politics mainstay to peace" encouraged youth participation in national elections because the tactics of "old and tired politicians" had contributed to the current economic crisis. O4Z supported generational consensus because it saw the youth as catalysts for change in Zimbabwe. O4Z (2018b: April 10) in an article titled: "Youth must question gender, age dynamics in politics", urged youths to participate in the electoral process to challenge discriminatory political party structures. O4Z noted that Zimbabwean political parties were structured according to youth, women and main wings which elbowed out the influence of young people and gave them little chance to participate in the elective processes because decision-making rested with the main wing, often dominated by aged men acting as founding members. As part of generational consensus, youths used social and alternative media spaces to support the youthful opposition presidential candidate Chamisa. A significant number of youths also contested for political office as ward councillors and members of the parliament. Regrettably for supporters of the youth movement, most of the generational consensus political aspirants including Chamisa lost the elections to older and experienced candidates from both ZANU PF and the MDC-T because they limited their political campaigns to social media without reaching out to the grassroots electorate, and due to the fact that ZANU PF had unparalleled access to mainstream media for partisan news coverage and propaganda, (European Union Election Observation Mission, 2018).

During elections the media plays the role of public watchdog. As a public watchdog, they expose election malpractices and other reprehensive actions by the authorities (Waldahl, 2004:12). In line with the watchdog role, citizen journalists used AMH Voices to highlight the need for electoral reforms as a requisite for free and fair elections. They argued that electoral reforms would create a level playing field for participating political parties and enable the diaspora to vote. Kaitano (2018: January 30) in an article titled: "Mnangagwa misled at World Economic Forum" said President Mnangagwa misled the world on the diaspora vote during a World Economic Forum held at Davos, Switzerland. In an interview aired to an international audience, Mnangagwa assured the world that appropriate measures were taken to accommodate the diaspora vote. The president never kept his promises as the Constitutional Court ruled that it could not amend section 23(3) of the Electoral Act, which prohibited Zimbabwean citizens who lived outside the country for over 12 months, to participate in the country's electoral processes. Mnangagwa later declared that government had no resources to enable the diaspora to vote. Mhlanga (2018: March 28) in an article titled: "No diaspora vote: President" quoted the president saying diasporians who wanted to vote must "come home and in less than 10 minutes [they] will have finished voting and [they] go back to [their] work". By

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disenabling the diaspora vote, Kaitano (2018) said President Mnangagwa was "deliberately excluding certain voters who he suspects will not vote for him". ZANU PF was wary of a diaspora vote because most diasporic Zimbabweans were unlikely to vote for it as they were living as economic refugees having fled a deteriorating economy rundown by the ZANU PF led government. Some citizen journalists warned the opposition not to expect free and fair polls speculating that ZANU PF would use every trick in the book to win them including vote buying, violence, intimidation and systematic rigging. Maguta (2017a: January 5) in an article titled: "No free, fair polls for opposition", urged the opposition to brace itself for "war" with ZANU PF in the elections because the playing field was tilted in favour of ZANU PF which already votes from "youth militia, traditional leaders, overzealous civil servants and members of security services". Maguta added that ZANU PF was not willing to accede to free and fair elections. "Expecting Zanu PF to agree to hold free, fair, transparent and credible polls is like expecting the devil to follow the biblical 10 Commandments," wrote Maguta (2017a).

During elections, the media ideally functions as a public sphere for the exchange of ideas by politicians both from the ruling party and the opposition. Waldahl (2004:13) asserts that as part of the public sphere, the media must comment on election processes. This role entails that media must evaluate election manifestos by the politicians, albeit objectively so that the electorate is empowered to make informed choices about which political party or candidate to vote for. This involves comparing and contrasting candidates, parties as well as their programmes. A close reading of comment and analysis stories by citizen journalists revealed their sympathy and support for the opposition MDC Alliance and a deep-seated disdain of ZANU PF. Citizen journalists at AMH Voices supported MDC Alliance presidential candidate Nelson Chamisa in line with generational consensus and loathed ZANU PF candidate Emmerson Mnangagwa who they saw as representing the old guard. Although, overly sympathetic and supportive of the opposition, citizen journalists were alive to the reality that the country's opposition was weak, divided and needed to strengthen by forming a grand coalition. Maguta (2017b: April 10) in an article titled: "Mwenezi East by-election outcome frightening" said the opposition was not adequately prepared for the elections following its defeat to ZANU PF by a wide margin in a by-election. Considering ZANU PF's electoral victory, Maguta (2017) urged the opposition to work extra hard "to dismantle Zanu PF hegemony in rural areas".

Maguta (2017c: January 3) in an article titled: "Breaking fear in rural voters needed", encouraged the opposition to break the culture of fear that their supporters had by alleging that ZANU PF was popular in the rural areas because it used fear as "the trump card" to win the elections in an "ugly" way. He thus noted:

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> Fear of being beaten. Fear of being murdered. Fear of being tortured. Fear of the unknown. Fear of being targeted. Fear of being displaced. Fear of being harmed. This is what any serious opposition organisation must deal with in order to win the elections. Without that, certainly Zanu PF will retain power.

The use of violence and intimidation were an integral part of Mugabeism as has already been argued. Maguta (2017c) elaborates this when he notes that ZANU PF used fear as a strategy to win elections especially by targeting beneficiaries of the land reform programme who could not "vote freely as they were always threatened with eviction and internal displacement if their polling stations recorded an opposition victory". Jambawo (2017a: March 23) in an article titled: "Political celebrity status not enough to win elections", warned the opposition against celebrity politics which had endeared it to urbanites urging it to focus on winning the rural vote. Jambawo implored the opposition "to counter fear, bribery, resignation and […] rural conservatism" in order to win rural. He also warned the opposition to avoid complacency that accompanied the fame of youthful presidential candidate Chamisa. Jambawo (2017a) said the political celebrity status of Chamisa evidenced by his well-attended campaign rallies was not enough to change people's minds ahead of the national elections as voters were impressed by what the opposition politician could do for them. Because the opposition was perceived to be weak, citizen journalists advocated for a grand coalition of opposition forces. Jambawo (2017b: March 29) in an article titled: "Coalition mustn't accommodate opportunists", said "coalitions have been known to win elections against some of the most brutal dictatorships in the world". Jambawo (2017b) argued that the purpose of the grand coalition was "to increase the opposition parties' electoral competitiveness by pooling together their limited resources so that they are more effective".

Citizen journalists overtly campaigned for the MDC Alliance in the elections because of its perceived potential to improve the lives of Zimbabweans and de-campaigned ZANU PF portraying it as a bartered, corrupt and tyrannical party. Mazenge (2017: September 6) in an article titled: "MDC Alliance can awaken the Zimbabwean dream" campaigned for the MDC Alliance saying the party was capable of delivering every Zimbabwean's dream of "three meals a day" including "equal access to quality education, quality healthcare, potable water supply, reliable electricity supply and security, among others". Mukori (2016: April 4) in an article titled: "Mnangagwa cannot win free and fair elections", de-campaigned Mnanangwa arguing that he had "a blood-stained reputation" and Gukurahundi was "tattooed on his forehead". This was against the dominant discourses carried by mainstream media which favoured ZANU PF and its presidential candidate Mnangagwa. The 2018 election news discourses were alternative because the political analysis came from ordinary citizens and not political experts often used by mainstream media in election reporting. However, the

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downside of the election discourses, as with any other discourses on AMH Voices, was that they were male dominated. The citizen journalists were comprised mainly of men who saw the world from a male perspective, thereby disadvantaging women perspectives.

Despite the changed editorial approach that AMH Voices adopted at the start of 2018 in support of the new dispensation of President Mnangagwa in line with the owner's interests, it arguably remained alternative as it challenged everyday narratives of the mainstream and carried counterhegemonic political narratives. Whereas the mainstream media portrayed President Mnangagwa as a saviour who liberated Zimbabwe from Robert Mugabe's oppression, some citizen journalists writing for AMH Voices presented a different narrative. Instead, they saw President Mnangagwa's new dispensation as a new dictatorship backed by Western powers in particular Britain. Mbofana (2018: April 20) in an article titled: "Mnangagwa knows what Western countries want", alleged that Mnangagwa was a tyrant installed by a British engineered coup to protect Western business interests. Mbofana (2018) reasoned that Mnangagwa's Zimbabwe is open for business mantra was "not directed at ordinary Zimbabweans, but to Western countries and their investors". This alternative narrative of Mnangagwa as a British propped up tyrant was largely absent from the mainstream media. Its effect was to undermine the credibility of President Mnangagwa and his commitment to the national interest. Even so, some citizen journalists continued to undermine President Mnangagwa in their news commentary in contradiction to the owner's attempts to sway opinion in favour of the new dispensation. Maguta (2018: August 20) in an article titled: "Chamisa too hot to handle", painted a glamorous picture of the opposition politician despite his electoral defeat to President Mnangagwa in the July 30 polls. Using binary opposites Maguta (2018) said Chamisa was "young and eloquent", "firebrand and charismatic" and had "an electrifying presidential campaign" that "mesmerised everyone by his public speaking abilities". This reinforced citizen journalists' perception of Mnangagwa as old, uninspiring and dull, hence being the complete opposite of Chamisa. In addition, some citizen journalists continued to use AMH Voices as a platform to push for the removal of ZANU PF from power even during the new dispensation. For example, Wilbert (2019: May 8) in an article titled: "Zanu PF has no intentions of solving Zim challenges", argued that Zimbabwe remained "a pariah state ruled by corrupt and vote-rigging people". Wilbert (2019) insisted that "Zanu PF must be forced to step down" because it rejoiced in corruption and could "never deal with the country's teething problems". This instalment by the citizen journalist contradicted the owner's wish to use the platform to inspire hope and revival of the country post Mugabe. Despite the owner's support of the new dispensation of President Mnangagwa, some citizen journalists contributed news articles that were openly anti-establishment and challenged the leadership credentials of the president. Kaitano, (2019: May 8) in an article titled: "Zimbabwe needs a new, better, focused leadership", questioned the leadership of

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President Emmerson Mnangagwa whose ruling ZANU PF party continued to be accused of corruption. Kaitano (2019) reasoned that Mnangagwa himself was also corrupt "with [a] soiled past" and was "not the right person to take Zimbabwe out of [its] mess".

CSOs such as Corruptionforce (2019) continued to use AMH Voices as a platform to demand government accountability and an end to grand corruption. Corruptionforce (2019: March 11) in an article titled: "Zanu PF's behaviour invites sanctions", alleged that the ZANU PF led government continued to breach the constitution through "corruption, lies, abuse of office, intimidation, harassment, looting and murder". To evidence these allegations, Corruptionforce (2019) cited the "August 1 post-election killings" where the state "behaved like a mafia" by sanctioning the army's killing of opposition supporters in Harare's central business district as they were protesting the late release of the 30 July 2018 presidential election results. The Amalgamated Rural Teachers' Union of Zimbabwe (ARTUZ, 2019: May 8), in a media release published on AMH Voices, and titled "Long winter looming in education sector", argued that "the so-called new dispensation" had nothing to show expect a legacy of "abductions, torture, detentions and harassment of the workers who speak out against exploitation". This came against a background were representatives of labour unions were allegedly being targeted by state security agents for organising strikes in protest of a government salary freeze yet employee earnings were being eroded by hyperinflation. By and large CSOs continued to use AMH Voices as a platform for activism and to lobby for prodemocracy reforms. This can be construed of as being counterhegemonic since the CSOs boldly challenged the state to reform and respect human rights and good governance. Conclusively, AMH Voices remained an alternative media platform during the new dispensation and was characterised by counterhegemonic discourses that contradicted the owner's political interests and support for the new government of President Mnangagwa.

## 6.9 Summary

This chapter presented the findings of a critical discourse analysis of citizen-produced news discourses produced at AMH Voices between 2014 and 2018. At its launch in 2014, the news discourses were localised and developmental as trained citizen journalists reported on community stories and local authority service delivery issues. From 2015 onwards, the news discourses changed to national contentious politics because the contributors were spontaneous and activist citizen journalists who were advocating their views on democracy, human rights, good governance and political change. The citizen content was in most cases opposed to status quo Mugabeism, although a few citizen journalists agreed with Mugabe's political views on homosexuality and black empowerment. News discourses on AMH Voices were progressive in some respects, but also showed

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signs of entrenched conservatism, especially with regards to the rights and place of women and gays in society. AMH Voices was used as a platform to mobilise and incite citizens into some form of action against the authorities. This incitement to radical action to overturn the status quo was not always overt but was implied in terms such as "voting wisely" in the 2018 national elections. The news discourses were mostly counterhegemonic because they challenged the dominant representations of the situation in Zimbabwe by the state-controlled mainstream. The news discourses also often advocated for radical political change and often mobilised support for opposition politics. When Mugabe was eventually removed from power in November 2017, the editorial direction of AMH Voices seemed to change as the owner publicly declared his support for the new dispensation. The impact of the owner's changed political interests was not immediately observed in the editorial content. Therefore, AMH Voices remained an alternative media platform in many respects due to its alternative political narratives and counterhegemonic news discourses.

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# Chapter Seven
# Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations

## 7.1 Introduction

This study focused on citizen journalism and alternative media in Zimbabwe, specifically how ordinary citizens participated in previously closed journalistic processes, the newsmaking practices of citizen journalists and the citizen news discourses at AMH Voices. This chapter is a summary of the research project. It draws conclusions and provides recommendations for future research. In achieving this, it firstly summarises each of the chapters then provides answers to the research questions and discusses the scholarly contributions of the study at empirical, theoretical and methodological levels. By highlighting limitations of this study, the chapter provides indications for future research.

## 7.2 Summary

Chapter 1 introduced the research by outlining the background and motivations for this study. The study was motivated by the relatively recent rise of citizen journalism and alternative media in Zimbabwe due to the internet and digital technologies as well as the presence of a monolithic and repressive media environment at the beginning of the 21st century under the regime of Robert Mugabe, who ruled since independence. Chapter 2, being a literature review, discussed the central concepts of citizen journalism and alternative media that underpin the study. The related thematic concerns of citizen participation and newsmaking practices were also discussed. Chapter 3 outlined the theoretical framework. It discussed the public sphere and critical political economy (CPE) theories. The purpose of applying theory in this research was to provide a lens through which the research problem could be investigated. Chapter 4 was the research methodology chapter. The chapter focused on the ethnographic research method; the data collection procedures; data analysis strategies; and the ethical issues that were considered during the different stages of the study. Chapter 5 presented the research results obtained from fieldwork through observations and interviews in line with the research themes of citizen participation and newsmaking practices. In presenting the findings, the chapter was guided by the research questions, themes and the theoretical framework outlined above. Chapter 6 presented the results from the analysis of citizen news discourses at AMH Voices. The analysed news content comprised of news articles, opinion pieces, feature articles produced by citizen journalists and media statements issued by civil society organisations as from January 2014 to June 2018.

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## 7.3 Research questions

The goal of the research was to contribute to theoretical and practical understanding of citizen journalism and alternative media in a repressive environment in Zimbabwe.

### 7.3.1 General research question:

The general research question was how did citizen journalism and alternative media of AMH Voices operate in a repressive and monolithic media environment in Zimbabwe? The study established that the operations of citizen journalism and practices of alternative media in Zimbabwe as seen in the case of AMH Voices were always in constant flux due to shifting organisational pressures and priorities, in line with the interests of ownership and control and were to a large extent determined by structural factors of politics and economy. The owners and professional gatekeepers determined how the citizen journalism platform of AMH Voices functioned including the nature of citizen participation and the range of news discourses that circulated on the platform. The nature of citizen participation oscillated between minimalist and maximalist participation depending on how well it served the interests of ownership and control. Furthermore, the professional gatekeepers controlled the range of news discourses on the platform through the structured content plans and had the ultimate control over the news content that was published on the platform, thereby limiting citizen participation in the selection, editing and publication of the news content. It was also established that alternative media in Zimbabwe were constrained to a large extent by economic and political factors. The dire economic situation in the country forced alternative media organisations such as the AMH group to look for additional funding from local NGOs and western donors so as to sustain their operations in the absence of advertising revenue and declining copy sales. The repressive and uncertain political environment in the country made alternative media proprietors to actively seek business protection from the political elites, in the process, softening their previously critical editorial stances to support the status quo. This reduced temerity of alternative media, especially in the post Mugabe era of 2017, cast them in doubt as serious alternatives to the state-owned and controlled mainstream amidst speculations that they had been "captured" by the political elites.

## 7.4 Specific research questions

#### 7.4.1. How did ordinary citizens participate in journalistic processes at AMH Voices?

Citizens participated in journalistic processes at AMH Voices as content producers, in decision-making and in public sphere deliberations. Content related participation occurred when AMH Voices opened the news production processes to citizen participation through express invitations to citizens

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to submit news content. Citizens participated at different levels of news production and in different roles. At the start of the platform in 2014 and with funding from Mobile Community Zimbabwe (MCZ), trained citizen journalists were co-optated into the organisational structure and were mandated to participate by producing weekly news content that fit into editorial content plans. However, when MCZ funding dried in 2015, spontaneous citizen journalists were responsible for producing most of AMH Voices news content. The spontaneous citizen journalists were detached from organisational processes at AMH Voices but participated by submitting unsolicited news content in the form of raw materials such as videos, pictures and audios. In some instances, the spontaneous citizen journalists provided processed news products in the form of eyewitness accounts of news events and personalised news narratives. The AMH public editorial board set up in 2018 was the practical mechanism for citizen participation in decision-making of previously closed journalistic institutions. The ordinary citizen who occupied the position of reader representative in the board potentially influenced decision-making and conveyed citizen interests at management level. Participation in public sphere deliberations was the most popular form of citizen participation at AMH Voices that occurred in the form of user comments. The user comments allowed citizens to participate by expressing themselves and providing feedback on citizen-produced news content, thereby engaging in peer to peer deliberations of issues. Due to the fact that user comments were often unmoderated, the interactions were often closer to the agonistic model of Mouffe than the rational deliberation model of Habermas.

### 7.4.2. What were the newsmaking practices of citizen journalists at AMH Voices?

The newsmaking practices of citizen journalists at AMH Voices were in constant flux and variably changed since the platform was incepted in 2014. This was partly attributed to the constantly changing nature of digital technologies and organisational factors. Four discernible newsmaking practices were identified: structured, unstructured, hybrid and digitalised. At the start of the platform in 2014, the newsmaking practices were structured and citizen participation in news production was limited to the trained citizen journalists. Structured newsmaking practices entailed citizen journalists gathering community news for AMH Voices using mobile smartphones and packaging using the StoryMaker application. The trained citizen journalists worked on weekly deadlines and gathered hyperlocal news on themes predetermined by the gatekeepers. As from 2015 onwards, the newsmaking practices at AMH Voices were unstructured because the donor funding that was availed for citizen journalism by MCZ had dried up. Unstructured practices meant that the journalistic process of newsmaking was open to everyone with access to internet and a mobile smartphone. Unstructured newsmaking practices involved unsolicited news content from spontaneous citizen journalists and activist citizen

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journalists. Eyewitnessing was an integral part of unstructured newsmaking practices where spontaneous citizen journalists gathered news by their proximity to news events using mobile smartphones and digital technologies. Another form of unstructured newsmaking was for spontaneous and activist citizen journalists to report their personal experiences in face of adversity and to give commentary and analysis of crisis situations in the country. Hybrid newsmaking practices manifested in the form of collaborations between citizen journalists and professional AMH journalists. Hybrid practices essentially meant the pairing of the professional and amateur and sharing the responsibilities of newsmaking between the two, thereby equalising the power relations. The objective of collaborating in hybrid practices was to amplify citizen voices and produce news stories of better quality that have a large appeal. The digital newsmaking practices that were utilised by AMH Voices gatekeepers were identified as crowdsourcing, content curation, web analytics and shovelware. Crowdsourcing enabled ordinary citizens to participate in the journalistic processes at AMH Voices as providers of raw materials to be used in story construction. Acts of voluntary crowdsourcing by citizens involved providing on the spot news feeds; verification of information; sharing of views and experiences and taking photographs and video footage. Web analytics as a newsmaking practice informed the gatekeepers about which stories were most read and generated the most audience debate. In that way, the gatekeepers were informed on what story lines or issues to pursue in future stories. Content curation involved using audience feedback on the user comments to generate new content. Shovelware as a newsmaking practice at AMH Voices meant that the gatekeepers used pre-existing citizen-produced news content meant for print, specifically letters to the editor from the *NewsDay* and optimised it for AMH Voices online. Newsmaking practices were in flux and determined by contextual factors such as access to money, training and technology as well as institutional factors such as news values and editorial priorities.

### 7.4.3. What discourses were contested by citizen journalists at AMH Voices and to what extent were they counterhegemonic?

Alternative media are by definition anti-establishment and embody the Gramscian notion of counterhegemonic positioning in power relations and struggles. Being counterhegemonic means that alternative media often carry news discourses that are in opposition to the dominant discourses of the mainstream. Counterhegemonic discourses refer to news media texts that are opposed to the status quo and those that represent and articulate the interests of marginalised citizens and subaltern groups. The citizen news discourses at AMH Voices were in the main counterhegemonic because they challenged the dominant and everyday representations of the mainstream. However, it was established that the citizen news discourses were male dominated, sometimes becoming patriarchal and homophobic hence they were conservative and might be seen as close to mainstream views.

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Civil society news discourses at AMH Voices were counterhegemonic because they openly confronted the state regarding the unfolding political, economic and human rights crisis in the country. They were also counterhegemonic because they were opposed to status quo Mugabeism and framed from non-dominant ideological perspectives of human rights and good governance that exposed state human rights excesses and corruption of the political elites. Civil society news discourses tended to be a form of activism that discredited the ruling government and mobilised support for the political opposition.

Society and community news discourses were intended to fill the void for hyperlocal news by focusing on societal and community news events. However, the news discourses tended to be counterhegemonic because they presented government ineptitude as the cause of societal problems, community development challenges, poor service delivery, crime and corruption. The news discourses were in most cases framed from a personal or a grassroots perspective that emphasised the views of the marginalised people and cast them in a conflictual relationship with the state. This framing of society and community news discourses using people centred perspectives was different from mainstream media frames which were regarded as elitist and often structured around official sources of news.

The national news discourses at AMH Voices portrayed Zimbabwe as a failed state battling with high levels of unemployment, corruption and suffering self-destruction due to poorly executed populist policies. The news discourses doubted the nationalist project by arguing that it had been bastardised by the political elite and Mugabeism which was racist, tribalistic and corrupt. Because of this, the news discourses advanced the regime change agenda by proposing a new government led by the opposition. The negative tone in national news discourses devoid of nationalism contrasted with the patriotic news discourses of the mainstream that exalted Mugabeism and esteemed Zimbabwe for its sovereignty, black empowerment programmes and for championing decolonisation in Africa.

Mugabeism news discourses focused on the personality of Mugabe, particularly his masculinity, family life, politics, ideology; and his role as a public leader. The Mugabeism discourses at AMH Voices contested mainstream media representations of Mugabe as the hegemonic masculine, eloquent, godly, cultic and ultramodern. In contrast, Mugabe was portrayed as a weak man emasculated by his wife Grace and as a failed disciplinarian who could not keep his rowdy sons under check. Contrary to mainstream media portrayals of Grace Mugabe as a hardworking mother of the nation, the news discourses at AMH Voices presented her as a wicked woman who was causing trouble for ZANU PF and the nation through her uncurbed political ambitions. Love, sex and failed parenthood were used in citizen news discourses to moralise Grace's actions, presenting her as an adulterer and a weak politician who was using sex as a tool to advance her political ambitions.

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Economic news discourses at AMH Voices represented the views of ordinary citizens regarding the economic crisis in the country and government's efforts in addressing it. Unlike mainstream media which makes use of expert voices in the reportage of economic news, the economic news discourses at AMH Voices were citizen led. They represented nonexpert views of the economic situation using simplified language and examples. Economic news discourses were counterhegemonic because they downplayed positive government actions to restore economic normalcy by over emphasising negative developments and presenting the government as incapable of solving the economic crisis. The citizen journalists reported on the impact of the economic crisis on ordinary citizens, thereby becoming the voice for the voiceless. Their focus in the reportage was the human element, that is, the marginalised people affected by economic decline and the decision-making of the political elite.

News discourses on the 2018 elections were all considered to be counterhegemonic because they provided alternative political narratives and advocated citizens to vote for the political opposition. This was despite the fact that the owner of AMH Voices now openly supported the ruling party ZANU PF. As such, the strategic management choices of the owner did not immediately influence editorial positioning of the platform. The alternative political ideology of generational consensus and election reforms were the main themes of the election news discourses. Generational consensus encouraged youths to participate in the national elections by voting for the youthful opposition leader, Nelson Chamisa, and to vote out the tired ZANU PF old guard, represented by Emmerson Mnangagwa, that had been in power since independence in 1980. The election news discourses also pushed for election reforms that would have enabled reprehensive Zimbabweans in diaspora sympathetic to the opposition to vote.

### 7.4.4. How did AMH Voices function as a counterpublic sphere that prioritised and strengthened the voice of marginalised groups?

AMH Voices was a counterpublic sphere that had oppositional relationship with the mainstream media. It was perhaps not an ideal counterpublic sphere because of certain conservative views that were carried on the platform by citizen journalists. As a counterpublic sphere, AMH Voices allowed citizens to participate in contesting and constructing alternative and counterhegemonic narratives about Zimbabwe's multidimensional crisis. The platform enabled participation of marginalised citizens in newsmaking and online public sphere deliberations. By participating in newsmaking processes and commenting on news content, marginalised citizens had the opportunity to express themselves and be heard. Due to the platform's openness, a diverse range of views enriched conflictual debate in line with the characterisation of counterpublics. As a counterpublic, AMH Voices used transformed news values that focused on some marginalised and subaltern groups. The news discourses focused on the ordinary lives of citizens living in rural resettlement areas amidst

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abject poverty due to the government land reform programme, and as distressed citizens affected by a multidimensional crisis that was unfolding in the country.

### 7.4.5. What were structural factors that constrained citizen journalism and alternative media in Zimbabwe?

There were a number of structural factors that constrained citizen journalism and alternative media in Zimbabwe. Social-cultural factors such as racism and homophobia prevented the participation of whites and homosexuals in citizen journalism and alternative media. Mugabe's policies on black empowerment stripped whites of their dignity and made them vulnerable. Because of this, whites were marginalised in national discourses and were treated as the insignificant other, even by alternative media which was ideally supposed to give them a voice. Economic factors constrained citizen journalism and alternative media in Zimbabwe. The depressed economy forced them to look for additional funding outside the traditional financing models of copy sales and advertising. Government, the biggest advertiser in the media, was reluctant to place its advertisements on alternative media because of their oppositional stance. Faced with poor advertising income, low revenue inflows and a stagnant economy, alternative media organisations were forced to cut salaries and operate with bare budgets. The vulnerable economic situation made alternative media such as the AMH group to cut newsroom staff and be dependent on free content produced by citizen journalists. The launch of AMH Voices in 2014 was part of a cost cutting strategy to utilise free citizen labour in news production and to produce hyperlocal news in the absence of bureau offices. Due to poor capitalisation and a faltering economy, citizen journalism and alternative media in Zimbabwe was often financed through grants from local NGOs and Western donors. AMH Voices received funding from MCZ and indirectly from a United States based charity, Media Development Investment Fund (MDIF) which had a 39% investment shares in the *NewsDay*. MDIF funding to the *NewsDay* and AMH Voices was seen as a way of extending US foreign policy interests and influence in Zimbabwe. AMH Voices was used to secure US accountability outcomes in Zimbabwe by reporting on corruption, promoting accountability, promoting democratic participation in elections, encouraging election debates and contributing to social issues that directly or indirectly affected the Zimbabwean community.

The political environment in Zimbabwe presented complications and contradictions for citizen journalism. Despite the fact that Mugabe had been removed from office in November 2017, there was a legacy of fear that prevented full participation in citizen journalism. Citizen journalists feared state surveillance, forced disappearances and personal threats on their security. The new dispensation of President Mnangagwa attempted to allay these fears by providing tokenistic reforms that opened democratic space for the practice of fundamental freedoms of speech, association and assembly,

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thereby incentivising citizen participation in journalism. However, in a move that contradicted its prodemocracy reforms, the new dispensation unleashed the military to crackdown post-election violence in August 2018. The crackdown discouraged citizen participation in various aspects of civic life including citizen journalism. The military junta of President Mnangagwa became to be feared worse than Mugabe's police state. In addition, the political environment in the country affected the choices and decisions of alternative media owners and practitioners. Some alternative media owners made decisions on the basis of political expediency that were motivated by the need to protect business interests at the expense of journalism and the public interest. Before the new dispensation of November 2017, AMH Voices functioned as a robust platform that strongly opposed status quo Mugabeism by advancing counterhegemonic narratives and advocating for political change. However, in the post Mugabe era, the platform was forced to soften its editorial stance in line with the interests of the owner, Trevor Ncube, who was a supporter and advisor of President Mnangagwa. Because of his political association with the new dispensation, Ncube indicated that he was disinterested in using AMH Voices for contesting counterhegemonic discourses but keen to use it only for critical and rational discourses that supported national (re)building. Whilst AMH Voices still remained as an alternative media platform due to its open production practices that allowed for citizen participation in contestation of counterhegemonic discourses, its potency had been evidently tamed in the new dispensation.

Archaic and obnoxious laws constrained citizen journalism and alternative media in Zimbabwe. The main statute that regulated journalism practice was the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA, 2002). The act had not been updated to suit the current digital media environment. AIPPA outlawed citizen journalism and other digitally powered alternative media because it relied on obsolete definitions of who a journalist was and what media services were. The only strong legal foundation for citizen journalism and alternative media were the constitutional provisions on freedom of expression and freedom of the media. Because citizen journalists were not recognised at law, they faced possible arrest. Apart from AIPPA, the state had a legal arsenal and had proposed news bills that if amended into law, would impinge on the practice of citizen journalism and alternative media. Laws such as the Public Order and Security Act (2002), Criminal Codification Law Act (2004), Interception of Communications Act (2007), Cyber Crimes and Cyber Security Bill (2017) constrained media freedoms. On a positive note, in 2019, government begun a process to reform the country's media laws with the intention of aligning them to the Zimbabwe Constitution of 2013.

Digital technologies enabled and disenabled citizen participation in journalism. Internet driven social media such as Twitter, Facebook and WhatsApp enabled professional journalists to interact and

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engage audiences to participate in journalistic processes. Digital technologies were also increasingly used for newsmaking at AMH Voices. Audience measurement metrics and web analytics tools were used to determine audience behaviours online and in editorial decision-making by providing data on which stories were most read and therefore providing clues on reader preferences. Crowdsourcing tools enabled citizens to participate in news gathering as providers of raw materials for news content. However, on the flip side, technology was also seen as a disenabler to citizen journalism due to the digital divide. In Zimbabwe, there was asymmetrical distribution of digital technologies such that citizen journalism was reduced to an urban phenomenon of the technology haves whilst the technology have-nots in the rural areas did not fully participate in it. The digital divide in the country was also gendered as men had more ownership and access to digital technologies than women. This gendered access to digital technologies meant that men participated more in citizen journalism than women. Frequent power cuts, prohibitive costs of internet data, lack of digital literacy skills and widespread poverty were some of factors that prevented full citizen participation in citizen journalism.

### 7.4.6. How did ownership and control affect content production and editorial direction at AMH Voices?

Although there was an illusion of editorial independence from the owners, advertisers and politicians, the study established that indeed ownership and control affected news output at AMH Voices. The owner of the platform, Mr Trevor Ncube, did not take part in everyday editorial decision making processes but often censured his staff if they failed to toe the line. Because the staff knew this, they sometimes self-censored in fear of reprimands and to avoid alienating the owner's political allies. It was established that to some extent, the news agenda at AMH Voices served the vested political and economic interests of the proprietor who in his admission hated Mugabeism and supported Mnangagwa's new dispensation. This was evidenced by the toned-down editorial content that took shape on the platform as from July 2018 when the new dispensation of Mnangagwa was sworn in. The toned-down news content was a clear departure from the overcritical and counterhegemonic news discourses that were carried by the platform as from January 2014 to June 2018. Apart from the political interests of the owner, the study established that professional gatekeepers determined the citizen news agenda at AMH Voices. The gatekeepers announced the weekly news agendas for the citizen journalists and selected the news articles that were published on the platform. Because the power to set the news agenda and to frame discursive participation rested with the professional gatekeepers, the citizen news agenda and the public interest was often sacrificed.

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## 7.4 Empirical contributions

This research was a timely contribution to the understanding of citizen journalism and alternative media in repressive regimes such as Zimbabwe. It fed into ongoing debates in journalism and media studies about citizen participation in journalistic processes, newsmaking practices in digital news environs and citizen discourses in counterpublic spheres. The research covered a gap in ethnographic based production studies of citizen journalism and alternative media by empirically analysing citizen participation and newsmaking practices at AMH Voices. Citizen participation in news production processes was analysed using a framework developed by Domingo *et al (*2008). The analytical framework had been to a large extent applied in Western contexts with advanced forms of democracy to produce results that were often taken as universal truths of citizen participation in journalism. This study was arguably one of the first to apply the analytical model in non-Western contexts to understand the dynamics of citizen participation in journalism that are context specific and within an African resource constrained newsroom. The study also investigated the newsmaking practices of citizen journalists and how they were aided by digital technologies. Analysing the newsmaking practices of citizen journalists using digital technologies had significance since digital technologies are appropriated within specific conditions that vary depending on digital literacy, access and level of technological advancement. Apart from understanding citizen participation in journalism, the study provided insight into the quality of citizen contributions in the public sphere through a critical discourse analysis of citizen news content at AMH Voices. The study was also the first empirical analysis of an institutionalised citizen journalism experiment by a legacy news media organisation in Zimbabwe. The study also elaborated that digital technologies are appropriated differently in the African continent and that citizen journalism powered by such technologies can have varying outcomes depending on the context. This means that utopian assumptions that digital technologies and citizen journalism can easily usher in democratisation across the whole African continent based on the success of the Arab Spring[7] revolutions of the early 2010s in North Africa does not hold true. This conclusion is drawn from this study, which empirically demonstrated that citizen journalism as in the case of AMH Voices in Zimbabwe, did not deliver democratic change to the people as it did in some parts of North Africa. It was, however, a crucial part of the radical democratic project that organised dissent against status quo Mugabeism and questioned the hegemonic order. The incessant anti Mugabeism counterhegemonic content on AMH Voices did not always translate to real life action

[7] The Arab Spring revolutions were a series of anti –government protests that started in Tunisia in 2010 and spread into Morocco, Libya and Egypt in 2011, disposing authoritarian regimes in those countries. The revolutions were largely galvanized by digital technologies whereby social media and citizen journalism were used as tools for citizen mobilisation against state authorities. Since then, utopians of digital technologies have attributed power to digital technologies in mobilising citizens for dissent, collective action and for enabling them to distribute alternative news and information, thereby circumventing state controlled news and information channels.

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or any seismic political changes as Mugabe remained in power until he was disposed by the military in November 2017. This points to the fact that online mobilisation of citizens for radical democracy through citizen journalism and civic disobedience through online counterhegemonic citizen discourses is only effective when it is backed with real life activities offline and through executable action plans.

## 7.5 Theoretical contributions

The study advanced new insights into Habermasian public sphere theory in an Africa context and most importantly, how other theoretical models are needed to describe and analyse counterpublic spheres which emerge on alternative media. Despite its apparent weakness such as assuming that there are equal opportunities for participation and that rational debate leads to consensus, the Habermasian public sphere theory remains a useful starting point to study the role of media in democracy. The concept of counterpublic sphere was linked to citizen journalism and alternative media to understand how these provide opportunities for self-expression to the subaltern groups marginalised from the mainstream public spheres. The study revealed that counterpublics cannot be assumed to be free from political and economic influences of ownership and control. Like mainstream public spheres, counterpublics can be usurped by political and economic elites such that they fail to serve and advance the interests of marginalised groups. While counterpublics bring together people bound together by a common identity and with the need to express themselves, it was established that they can be monopolised by domineering individuals who contribute more often than others leading to the formation of splinter public spheres. At AMH Voices, men participated more than women by contesting and asserting their views regarding the situation in the country. Consequently, the choice of contentious and argumentative news discourses at AMH Voices led to low women participation. This may force women users to exit the platform to form their own counterpublic spheres leading to numerous small counterpublic spheres that may not be effective in delivering social and political justice of the radical democratic project. It is possible that counterpublics can transform and mutate into mainstream publics especially if they propagate dominant views, for example about gender, race and sexuality. AMH Voices perpetuated the dominantly held views about race, gender and sexuality that made it seem conservative like mainstream public spheres.

Very few studies have applied the CPE theory to study citizen journalism. This is so because most studies tend to view citizen journalism as spontaneous – a spur of the moment activity that happens when citizens act as witnesses to news events and therefore ignore the structural factors that constrain its practices. To cover this gap, the study applied CPE theory to explain the structural and contextual factors that constrained citizen journalism and alternative media in Zimbabwe. The CPE theory

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enabled the research to explain the production of journalism within a specific political and economic system, which were linked to other central structures of society such as technology, legislation and culture. The four main characteristics of the CPE theory of historical analysis, social totality, moral philosophy and praxis were at least applied in the study. A historical analysis of the media during the colonial era in Zimbabwe was used to explain the development of a monolithic and repressive media situation in the country. Social totality was included by analysing the holistic impact of politics, economy, culture and legislature on citizen journalism and alternative media in Zimbabwe. In reference to moral philosophy, this research focused on mainstream media concentration and monopoly and the repressive operational environment in Zimbabwe, which suffocated citizen journalism and alternative media. With regards to praxis, the researcher worked with media lobby groups in Zimbabwe to push for the formal recognition of citizen journalists at law under the ongoing media reforms and supported the formation of the Association of Citizen Journalists - Zimbabwe Chapter.

## 7.6 Methodological contributions

This study was a ground-breaking production-based ethnography of citizen journalism and alternative media in Zimbabwe. As revealed in Chapter 2, most studies on citizen journalism are not sustained as they tend to focus on its role during ephemeral crisis events. By using ethnographic methods, the researcher gained a sustained understanding of the whole circuit of news production by looking at how citizen journalists participated in journalism, their newsmaking practices and the news discourses they produced. Using the interpretive research paradigm immersed me into the lives of the research participants so as to understand motives, meanings, reasons and other subjective experiences that were time and context bound. Another methodological contribution was in the use of CDA to analyse citizen news. CDA enabled me to analyse the citizen news discourses at the textual and contextual levels. Most studies have tended to analyse citizen journalism news content at textual level neglecting the contextual. The contextual dimension of discourse analysis enabled me to understand structural factors that shape news production and the context under which the news discourses were produced.

## 7.7 Future research/ Recommendations/Limitations

Sometimes the purpose of conducting research is to make reasoned predictions about the future. Since this study focused on citizen journalism, production future studies are encouraged to focus on the consumption/ reception and effects of citizen journalism and alternative media on audiences. There are prospects to investigate how audiences consume citizen news and what values they attach to citizen journalism as a source of everyday news, its reliability and credibility. This study was located within a specific context from 2014 to 2018, which was characterised by a multidimensional crisis.

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There is arguably, always a need for responsible citizen journalism that is reasonably critical and promotes the public interest. It was observed that AMH Voices news content was over critical of the state by emphasising the negative, thereby becoming alarmist and polarising. Against this, there are opportunities for investigating the role and contribution of citizen journalism and alternative media to the news ecology outside crisis situations. A worthy pursuit is to investigate citizen journalism as a source of hyperlocal news within specific communities.

Realising that citizen journalism and alternative media in Africa still depends on donor funding because of lack of sustainable business models, there is potential to research on the impact of donor funding on citizen journalism and alternative media in Africa. Such studies will focus on how donor funding influences news content and editorial decision-making. Furthermore, there is need for future research on citizen journalism and alternative media using business centred approaches such as media economics to determine their profitability and sustainability. Such research will lead to the development of sustainable business models for citizen journalism and alternative media in Africa that are not centred on advertising and copy sales. Related to this, is the potential to utilise CPE theory to investigate the value of non-remunerated digital labour provided by citizens during online content creation in citizen journalism and alternative media. This will contribute to knowledge on labour, which remains an under researched theme in the CPE of journalism and the media.

One limitation of the study was that all the research participants were male. It was impossible to identify female participants at the AMH newsroom and practicing female citizen journalists. The research report therefore presented male perspectives on citizen journalism and alternative media. This study limitation presents opportunities for the study of gendered citizen journalism and alternative media. Such studies are encouraged to focus on women as producers of news content and the news discourses they produce. Due to the evolutionary nature of journalism, it is also possible that citizen journalism will one day become an outdated concept as there is evidence of new forms of journalism such as data journalism and algorithmic journalism. Another limitation of this study was that participation and newsmaking practices were in constant flux. By the time the study was completed, changes in citizen participation behaviours and newsmaking practices had occurred at AMH Voices due to the fast-changing nature of digital technologies and changing organisational policies and priorities. As such, the case study of AMH Voices alone cannot offer a comprehensive understanding of citizen journalism and alternative media in Zimbabwe as practices may vary from one outlet to the other and change with time. Future researchers are encouraged to investigate the practice of citizen journalism at different outlets to draw results that compare with this study and to consolidate knowledge about the subject in Zimbabwe and beyond.

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# Addendum

## Addendum 1: Letter of request for AMH organisational access

UNIVERSITEIT·STELLENBOSCH·UNIVERSITY
jou kennisvennoot • your knowledge partner

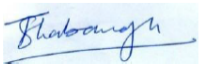
*Alpha Media Holdings*
*No. 1 Union Ave, Harare*
*Zimbabwe*

The Editor

**RE: Request for access to your organisation for academic research purposes.**

I am writing to you requesting access to your organisation to conduct an ethnographic study on citizen journalism practices as part of my PhD research in journalism at Stellenbosch University. The focus of my study is to develop a practical understanding of how citizen journalism is conducted and how *AHM Voices* function as an alternative news media platform in Zimbabwe. The study will focus on the everyday practices of citizen journalists and how citizens participate in news making processes and the shaping of public discourses. I intend to spend a minimum of 6 months in your organisation as from January to June 2018 during which I will be learning, participating, observing, and interviewing your staff on news production processes. Participation of individuals in research interviews would be entirely voluntary and confidential. The study will therefore not refer to the actual names of individuals. Further, the data collected will strictly be used for academic purposes only. I will be happy to produce a summary report of my findings following my fieldwork should this be required. Throughout the study, I will endeavour to have as little impact on daily working practices as possible. Should you require further details please do not hesitate to contact me on the following email address: tshabangu2012@gmail.com or my academic supervisor Dr. Gabriel Botma on email address: gbotma@sun.ac.za. I want to thank you in advance for your support.

Yours Sincerely,
Thulani Tshabangu



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## Addendum 2: Letter granting access to AMH Voices

ALPHA MEDIA HOLDINGS (PVT) LTD
INDEPENDENT INNOVATIVE DEPENDABLE

HARARE: 1 Kwame Nkrumah Ave,3rd Block, 1st Floor, One Union Avenue Building • Marketing & Advertising: 3rd Block, 1st Floor, One Union Avenue Building • P.O. Box BE1165, Belvedere, Harare, Zimbabwe • Tel: +263 4 773930-8, 755123/4. Fax: +263 4 798897
BULAWAYO: 3rd Floor, West Wing, Forestry Commission Bldg, 71a Fife St./L Takawira Ave • P.O. Box AC558, Ascot, Bulawayo
Tel: (263-09) 883184-8, 887057/58/69/70/71 • Fax: (263-09) 76839

Dear Mr. Thulani Tshabangu

**RE: Access to Alpha Media Holdings newsrooms and staff for academic research purposes.**

The above refers. I have received and reviewed your request to gain access to Alpha Media Holdings newsrooms and staff for academic research purposes as from January to June 2018. I hereby grant you permit to proceed with your research on citizen journalism and alternative media practices focusing on *AMH Voices*. The organisation will provide you a temporary workspace should you require one.

Since this is not an internship, Alpha Media Holdings is not bound to provide you with any allowances and it is your responsibility to take care of your day to day expenses. At the end of the data collection, you will be required to provide a verbal or written summary report of the key research findings. This will be used for learning purposes by my organisation. During the period of your research you will work with and report to the Acting Online Editor Mr. Tapiwa Zivira.

I look forward to meeting you soon.

Yours Sincerely

Kholwani Nyathi
(The Standard Editor)

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## Addendum 3: Observation Checklist

| Category | Dimension | Field Notes |
|---|---|---|
| Structure and Organisation | How the organisation is structured i.e. number of staff and disaggregation by gender and age. | |
| Technology | Use of mobile smartphones, internet, video cameras, social media platforms for news gathering | |
| Newsroom cultures | What is the frequency of the "diary meetings"?<br>What is the atmosphere at the "diary meeting" i.e. relaxed or formal?<br>How is the delegation to assignments conducted? | |
| News production | Do the citizen journalists have a contacts list?<br>How and where are the interviews with sources conducted?<br>How do the citizen journalists conduct background research and verification of news stories?<br>How and with whom are interactions made in and outside the newsroom?<br>What is the relationship with the sources?<br>Is there adherence to legal and ethical issues when sourcing for news stories? | |
| News production roles | What are the different roles of the news production team?<br>What is the gender of the production team and do women participate in the production process? | |
| Social practices | How do citizen journalists interact with the professional journalists and what are the issues of common interest?<br>What are commonly discussed issues, jokes and gossip? | |
| News Discourses | What news beats are generally favoured by citizen journalists? | |

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## Addendum 4: Semi-structured interview guidelines for citizen journalists

1. What is the name of the respondent?
2. What is the sex of the respondent?
3. What is the age of the respondent?
4. What is the educational background or professional training of the respondent?
5. Please give me a brief description of your career and where you currently work?
6. Please tell me about your experience with writing and journalism.
7. What do you know about citizen journalism?
8. Do you consider yourself a journalist and if so, on what basis?
9. What is your role as a citizen journalist and that of journalism in society?
10. How would you describe your day-to-day practices and routines?
11. Do you participate in the decision making processes of news content production?
12. Can you refer to any recent incident in which you wrote or contributed to a news story to AMH Voices? Narrate what had happened and how you contributed.
13. Who are your usual contacts for a news story, how did you develop the contacts list and how do you relate to them?
14. Are you able to access government authorities for news sources?
15. What is your relationship with the audiences/ readers of AMH Voices news content?
16. How do you collaborate with other citizens and professional journalists in gathering news stories?
17. How do other citizens participate at AMH Voices?
18. Do you think there is adequate representation of all constituents by AMH Voices? Probe which group(s) are left out and why?
19. Do you think AMH Voices adequately represents the citizens' voices?
20. What are the advantages of allowing citizen participation in news production?
21. What are the disadvantages of allowing citizen participation in news production?
22. What news beats do you normally report on and why?
23. Do you think the beats you listed above are relevant to AMH Voices readers?
24. Are there any other news beats that you would want AMH Voices to focus on?
25. Do you think AMH Voices is or has contributed to shaping the world view around you? Probe how AMH Voices has influenced citizens' perceptions of social reality in Zimbabwe.
26. What relevant training did you receive for your role as a citizen journalist?

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27. Do you have knowledge of ethics that apply to journalists? If so, please elaborate on any ethical issue you are aware of?
28. Do you have knowledge of laws that apply to journalists? If so, please elaborate on any legal issue you are aware of?
29. What do consider as the most important tools for your trade? Probe what technology do citizen journalist use or have at their disposal i.e. smartphones, internet, satellite radio receivers etc.
30. What are the community perceptions around your role as a citizen journalist? Probe for social, cultural and political perceptions.
31. Do you derive any benefits from your role as a citizen journalist? Probe for economic and or political benefits.
32. As a citizen journalist do you feel safe? Probe if there are any security risks associated with practicing as a citizen journalist.
33. In what way do think your role as a citizen journalist is more or less important in society?

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## Addendum 5: Semi-structured interview guidelines for AMH staff

1. What is the name of the respondent?
2. What is the sex of the respondent?
3. What is the age of the respondent?
4. What is the educational background or professional training of the respondent?
5. For how long have you worked for AMH and what is your experience?
6. What is your current position? Can you describe your day to day activities and routines?
7. What is the mandate of AMH Voices?
8. Does AMH Voices have an editorial policy that informs newsmaking practices?
9. Is there a content strategy for AMH Voices?
10. What do you know about citizen journalism?
11. What do you know about alternative media?
12. How many citizen journalists does AMH Voices work with?
13. What is their geographic spread, i.e. where are they located? Probe if the citizen journalists' working sites are rural or urban and the rationale behind the positioning?
14. What equipment do citizen journalists have to assist them in news gathering?
15. Did citizen journalists receive any training in journalistic principles and ethics?
16. Are the citizen journalists oriented to AMH Voices editorial policies and procedures such as inhouse writing style and editorial focus?
17. How do you routinely select and gather news stories?
18. How do you treat news material received from the citizen journalists? Probe the editing and gatekeeping process?
19. Is there any collaboration between citizen journalists and AMH professional journalists?
20. How do ordinary citizens contribute to the newsmaking processes at AMH Voices?
21. Do the citizens have a say in what is eventually published as news at AMH Voices?
22. What are the advantages of allowing citizen participation in news production?
23. What are the disadvantages of allowing citizen participation in news production?
24. Who owns and controls AMH Voices i.e. what is the ownership structure like and what is the organisation hierarchy and chain of command?
25. How does ownership and control affect editorial decision-making and news content?
26. What is the public perception of AMH Voices? Probe if the platform is seen in a positive or negative light?
27. What is the relationship between government stakeholders and AMH Voices? Probe if the relationship is symbiotic or adversarial?

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28. Do you generate any revenue from advertising or subscription fees? If so, probe major sources of advertising revenue.
29. Do you have access to sources of funding? If so, state sources of funds.
30. Which digital technologies are used by AMH Voices for news production processes?
31. What legislation constrains citizen journalism and alternative media operations in Zimbabwe?
32. What are the "rational and critical" issues of common good that are discussed at AMH Voices?
33. Are these discussions rational and critical as reflected in discourses that are free from emotive values and ideological bias?
34. Is AMH Voices a universally accessible public sphere that grants citizens and interested parties opportunities for equal and free participation in sharing ideas?
35. Which groups are included and excluded from participation at AMH Voices and why?
36. Does AMH Voices prioritise and strengthen the voice of alternative and marginalised groups by supporting the contestation of dominant discourses and power structures?
37. To what extend is freedom of expression exercised by participants at AMH Voices?
38. To what extend does AMH Voices promote active citizenship such that participating citizens actively initiate discussions and set their own agendas for deliberation?
39. Is AMH Voices free from state control and vested economic interests such that there is the exercise freedom of speech in political debates?
40. Do you think citizen journalism and alternative media are a serious challenge to mainstream media?

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# Addendum 6: Ethical clearance letter

UNIVERSITEIT
STELLENBOSCH
UNIVERSITY

**NOTICE OF APPROVAL**

REC Humanities New Application Form

3 October 2017

Project number: REC-2017-0226

Project Title: Citizen journalism and alternative media in Zimbabwe: An ethnographic study of AMH voices

Dear Mr Thulani Tshabangu

Your REC Humanities New Application Form submitted on 29 September 2017 was reviewed and approved by the REC: Humanities.

Please note the following about your approved submission:

**Ethics approval period:19 September 2017 - 18 September 2018**

Please take note of the General Investigator Responsibilities attached to this letter. You may commence with your research after complying fully with these guidelines.

**If the researcher deviates in any way from the proposal approved by the REC: Humanities, the researcher must notify the REC of these changes.**

Please use your SU project number (REC-2017-0226) on any documents or correspondence with the REC concerning your project.

Please note that the REC has the prerogative and authority to ask further questions, seek additional information, require further modifications, or monitor the conduct of your research and the consent process.

**FOR CONTINUATION OF PROJECTS AFTER REC APPROVAL PERIOD**

Please note that a progress report should be submitted to the Research Ethics Committee: Humanities before the approval period has expired if a continuation of ethics approval is required. The Committee will then consider the continuation of the project for a further year (if necessary)

**Included Documents:**

| Document Type | File Name | Date | Version |
|---|---|---|---|
| Informed Consent Form | SU_Consent_to_Participate_in_Research_ Staff | 12/06/2017 | |
| Data collection tool | SSIs Guidelines for citizen journalists | 12/06/2017 | |
| Data collection tool | SSIs Guidelines for AMH staff | 12/06/2017 | |
| Data collection tool | Observation Checklist | 12/06/2017 | |
| Proof of permission | AMH Voices Acceptance Letter | 14/06/2017 | |
| Default | Letter of Request AHM | 14/06/2017 | |
| Research Protocol/Proposal | thulani_tshabangu_21485119_final_proposal | 11/09/2017 | modified |
| Default | Response to REC | 11/09/2017 | Final |
| Default | Undertaking to abide by REC stipulations | 28/09/2017 | Final |

If you have any questions or need further help, please contact the REC office at cgraham@sun.ac.za.

Sincerely,

Clarissa Graham

REC Coordinator: Research Ethics Committee: Human Research (Humanities)

*National Health Research Ethics Committee (NHREC) registration number: REC-050411-032.*
*The Research Ethics Committee: Humanities complies with the SA National Health Act No.61 2003 as it pertains to health research. In addition, this committee abides by the ethical norms and principles for research established by the Declaration of Helsinki (2013) and the Department of Health Guidelines for Ethical Research: Principles Structures and Processes (2nd Ed.) 2015. Annually a number of projects may be selected randomly for an external audit.*

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## Addendum 7: List of Interviews

Bhebhe, L. 2018. Semi-structured in-depth interview. 25 July, Bulawayo.

Dube, D. 2018. Semi-structured in-depth interview. 5 June, Bulawayo.

Maguta, P. 2018. Semi-structured in-depth interview. 25 May, Harare.

Makunike, P. 2018. Semi-structured in-depth interview. 20 June, Harare.

Matshazi, N. 2018. Semi-structured in-depth interview. 28 March. Harare.

Mokwetsi, J. 2018. Semi-structured in-depth interview. 22 May. Harare.

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Ncube, T. 2018a. Semi-structured in-depth interview. 15 June. Harare.

Ncube, N. 2018b. Semi-structured in-depth interview. 24 April. Bulawayo.

Ndebele, Z. 2018. Semi-structured in-depth interview. 24 April. Bulawayo.

Ndlovu, N. 2018. Semi-structured in-depth interview. 25 April. Bulawayo.

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Samukange, T. 2018. Semi-structured in-depth interview. 28 March. Harare.

Zivira, T. 2018. Semi-structured in-depth interview. 24 May. Harare.

Zwinoira, T. 2018. Semi-structured in-depth interview. 15 June. Harare.

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## Addendum 8: Analysed AMH Voices news content

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Concerned Citizen. 2016. No Christmas for the poor after Chinamasa budget, [Online]. Available: https://www.*NewsDay*.co.zw/2016/12/amhvoices-no-christmas-poor-chinamasa-budget/ [2018, September 28].

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