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Fake News and Social Media Regulation in Zimbabwe: A Case Study of the 2019 National #Shutdown.

By

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A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Masters in Communication Studies in the Faculty of Humanities, University of Johannesburg.

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Declaration

I, **Grace Gambiza (Student #218097537)**, hereby declare that I am the sole author of this study entitled ***Fake News and Social Media Regulation in Zimbabwe: A Case Study Of The 2019 National #Shutdown.***I further declare that the work presented in this dissertation is authentic and original unless clearly indicated otherwise, and in such instances full reference to the source(s) is provided. I do not presume to receive any credit for such acknowledged quotations, and there is no copyright infringement in my work. I declare that no unethical research practices were used or material gained through dishonesty. I understand that plagiarism is a serious offence, and that should I contravene the Plagiarism Policy, notwithstanding signing this affidavit, I may be found guilty of a serious criminal offence (perjury). This would among other consequences compel the UJ to inform all other tertiary institutions of the offence and to issue a corresponding certificate of reprehensible academic conduct to whoever requests such a certificate from the institution.

Signed at Auckland Park Campus on this 31st day of October 2020

Signature:

Print name: **Grace Gambiza**

Dedication

To Njere-Vushe Gambiza, thank you for your continued love, support and theories. You have always been there to cheer me up. And to my "munchkins", Danai, Mufarowashe and Tamuda, we are all in this together. I love you team.

.

Acknowledgements

This was a culmination of two years of hard work that at one point made me to imagine the imaginable. At one point, I had to juggle at once all important things in my life while making sure that they all keep afloat. Covid-19 pandemic made me to doubt my capabilities. And yet, I still had to strike a balance between the most important things in my life. However, I did have the most amazing supervisor, Professor Nyasha Mboti, who, through our discussions, would always make me to see the lifelong journey of learning as endless. He would always encourage me not to give up. He made me realise that a goal can be scored from difficult angles. For that, Thank you Prof Mboti for this journey, thus far.

I would like to thank all my colleagues at the University of Johannesburg's CMS Department for their constant support especially during the country's lockdown period. This was a very emotional episode for me. And a big thank you again to my friends, who were there for me, I am very grateful for your love and support.

Lastly, to my family, thank you for your love. You made me realise that life is not a race, yesterday, today or tomorrow.

Acronyms

AIPPA	Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act
ANZ	Associated Newspapers of Zimbabwe
BSA	Broadcasting Services Act
CIO	Central Intelligence Organisation
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
ICA	Interception of Communications Act
MDC	Movement for Democratic Change
MISA	Media Institute of Southern Africa
POSA	Public Order and Security Act
POTRAZ	Postal Telecommunications Regulatory Authority of Zimbabwe
UJ	University of Johannesburg
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
VPN	Virtual Private Network
ZANU PF	Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front
ZBC	Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation
ZCTU	Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions
ZIMRA	Zimbabwe Revenue Authority
ZISPA	Zimbabwe Internet Service Providers' Association
ZUJ	Zimbabwe Union of Journalists

Abstract

This exploratory study investigated, and sought to establish, the link between "fake news" and social media regulation in Zimbabwe. The question of so-called "fake news" and social media regulation has become a central concern for governments worldwide, the private sector, media regulators and – gradually – media scholars. The ubiquitous presence of "fake news" on social media, on a national and global scale, has provoked a flurry of government-sponsored and private sector sponsored regulations. Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg recently proposed that governments should help Facebook to regulate social media and weed out fake news. This surprising plea suggests that social media companies may be losing the battle against "fake news". In these circumstances, most governments worldwide have not needed prompting. The internet blackout of January 2019 in Zimbabwe, which is central to this study, caps off a string of internet disruptions on the continent. Togo, Sierra Leone, Cameroon and Chad are among the African countries that faced substantive internet restrictions in 2018 alone. But in all this busy "regulatory" activity, three questions stand out for media scholars. The first one concerns matters of definition. What really is fake news? Despite the very public discourse about "fake news", there is still no accepted criterion of defining fake news or an industry standard for noticing and recognising fake news. There is as yet no standard or universally agreed definition, amongst media scholars of the concept. The second question is about power. Who decides what should be regulated, and how? The third and last question is about the regulation of digital platforms. Whereas scholarship on digital regulation (in the traditional sense of new media) is widely available, scholarship on social media regulation is only in its nascent stages, signalling a dearth of studies systematically engaging the issue of social media regulation. Owing to the fact that fake news (and social media itself) are recent innovations, and because the controversies are coming thick and fast, media scholars who deal with issues of media regulation, media freedom and freedom of expression have not yet fully woken up to the full implications of the clamour to regulate social media. Is social media regulation, to weed out fake news, a good thing or a bad thing? This leads to an ancillary question. What does the clamour to regulate social media reveal, if anything, about the would-be regulators and about the nature of fake news? This qualitative study grappled with these questions, with an emphasis on the *nexus* of "fake news" and social media regulation. It utilised an interpretive approach to analyse thematic issues raised from purposively selected key informants from government, civil society and media-policy making circles in Zimbabwe, with the January 2019 National #Shutdown serving as the basis for the exploration. The study found that the "fake news" during the January 2019 demonstrations was not really the ultimate provocation of the blackout of the internet as claimed by the government during that time and that the explanations appear to have been a cover up for a government caught in a panic by the latest cycle of crisis. The major conclusion is that social media appear to pose a constant threat to the government, which frames them as an "asymmetric threat" and regime changers who are being used for "command and control" type of attacks on the country's national security grid.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The question of "fake news"[1] and social media regulation has become a central concern for governments worldwide, the private sector, media regulators and – gradually – media scholars (cf. Rochefort, 2020). In recent years the ubiquitous presence of "fake news" on various social media platforms, from national to global scale, has provoked a flurry of government-sponsored and private-sector sponsored regulations to deal with it (Allcott et al.2017). For instance, Facebook CEO, Mark Zuckerberg, recently proposed that governments should help Facebook to regulate social media and weed out "fake news".[2] This may be because, as Parkinson (2016) writes, influence of verifiably false content on Facebook cannot be regarded as 'small' when it garners millions of shares and that social media companies have a responsibility when millions of users receive false information from their sites[3]. Still, this plea from Zuckerberg is surprising, not least because it suggests that social media companies may be losing the battle against "fake news". Indeed, Koebler and Cox (2018) point out that "Moderating billions of posts a week in more than a hundred languages has become Facebook's biggest challenge.[4]

The "fake news" phenomenon has motivated various governments to react. Responses are, in certain cases, "a genuine effort at seeking resolution while in some cases, an excuse for predators of press freedom to seize the opportunity to muzzle the media on the pretext of fighting false information" (*Reporters Without Borders*,

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[1] The use of scare quotes around "fake news" is an acknowledgement of the challenges and cynicism that accompany the notion.

[2] Schulze, E. (2019). "Google and Facebook should be regulated for news content, UK government report says", https://www.cnbc.com/2019/02/12/google-facebook-apple-news-should-be-regulated-uk-government-report.html

[3] Parkinson, H. (2016). "Click and elect: how fake news helped Donald Trump win a real election", https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/nov/14/fake-news-donald-trump-election-alt-right-social-media-tech-companies.

[4] **Koebler, J. and Cox, J. (2018). "The Impossible Job: Inside Facebook's Struggle to Moderate Two Billion People", https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/xwk9zd/how-facebook-content-moderation-works**

2019).Indeed, most governments worldwide have not needed further prompting. They have independently started to promulgate laws that penalise the spreading of "fake news". At the same time, "fact-checking" organisations – some sponsored by multi-billionaires such as George Soros – have sprouted in an attempt to deal with the real or perceived scourge.

The internet blackout of January 2019 in Zimbabwe was one in a chain of internet disruptions on the African continent[5] justified by claims to fight fake news. On 21 December 2018, the Sudanese government blocked internet access to popular social media sites in an attempt to quell nationwide protests triggered by economic instability and price hikes. Gabon experienced an internet shutdown on 7 January 2019 in the wake of an attempted military coup. A few days later, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) saw widespread disruption of internet connectivity following the 30 December 2018 elections. Togo, Sierra Leone, Cameroon and Chad are among other African countries that faced substantive internet restrictions in 2018 alone . Therefore, it is reasonable to make conclusion that these trends are not a passing phase. Rather, all indications are that they represent the solidification of a new norm. But in all this busy "regulatory" activity, three related questions stand out for media scholars.

The first question concerns matters of definition. *What really is fake news?* Despite the very public discourse about "fake news", there is still no accepted criterion of defining fake news or an industry standard for noticing and recognising fake news. There is as yet no standard or universally agreed definition, amongst media scholars of the concept (Tandoc, Lim and Ling, 2018). The second, related, question is about power. Who decides what is fake and what is true (or factual)? Michel Foucault's theorisation about "regimes of truth" can serve as a caution to us not to regard the label of fake news as innocent and value free (1978). The third and last question is about media regulation. Whereas scholarship on media regulation (in the traditional sense of the media) is widely available, scholarship on social media regulation is only in its nascent stages. Owing to the fact that fake news (and social media itself) are recent innovations, and because the controversies are coming thick and fast, media

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[5] APC (2019). Internet shutdowns in Africa: "It is like being cut off from the world", https://www.apc.org/en/news/internet-shutdowns-africa-it-being-cut-world

scholars who deal with media regulation issues, "media freedom and freedom of expression" have not yet fully woken up to the implications of the clamour to regulate social media (Iosifidis and Andrews, 2020). Is social media regulation, to weed out fake news, a good thing or a bad thing? This leads to an ancillary question. What does the clamour to regulate social media reveal, if anything, about the would-be regulators and about the nature of fake news? This study is an attempt to grapple with these questions, with an emphasis on the nexus of "fake news" and media regulation.

On January 15, 2019, Zimbabweans woke up to an unprecedented event: a total internet shutdown across the nation. This followed a call by "Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU)" for a three-day national stay away in protest to the 120 percent fuel hike announced by President Emmerson Mnangagwa on 12 January 2019 (*City Press*, 2019). On the first day of riots on 14 January 2019, "live video footage, news updates and breaking news made their way to the world through Facebook, WhatsApp and Twitter. News of real victims of the brutality had to compete with false or contrived information and exaggerations, and the desperate denials from the government, which sought to convince citizens that there was nothing unusual going on and everything was in fact normal (Mberi, 2019). "Videos and images of the military patrolling the streets, and pictures of the wounded, were said – by the police and the army – to be the work of a few rogues that had broken into armouries and stolen army uniforms and weapons" (Mberi, 2019). It was in the context of the Zimbabwean government's heavy-handed reaction to protests that so-called fake news spread and thrived.

The real and perceived spread of the "fake news" seemed to be the cue for the government's action to order all network providers in Zimbabwe – Econet, TelOne, Net One and ZOL – to switch off the internet (*The Zimbabwe Mail*, 2019). On 21 January 2019, Zimbabwe's High Court, acceding to a challenge from civil society, ordered the government to restore full internet connectivity to the country, citing that government's shutdown of the internet was illegal because the Minister of State for Security, Owen Ncube who ordered the internet closure, did not have powers to issue such a directive. Despite the order from the High Court, internet connectivity was not immediately restored. After eight days of intermittent connectivity, the internet finally came back on. Initially, the government denied shutting down the internet, with the then Deputy Minister Information, Publicity and Broadcasting Services, Energy Mutodi, claiming on

state television during the internet shutdown that there was no shutdown at all, but rather network congestion.
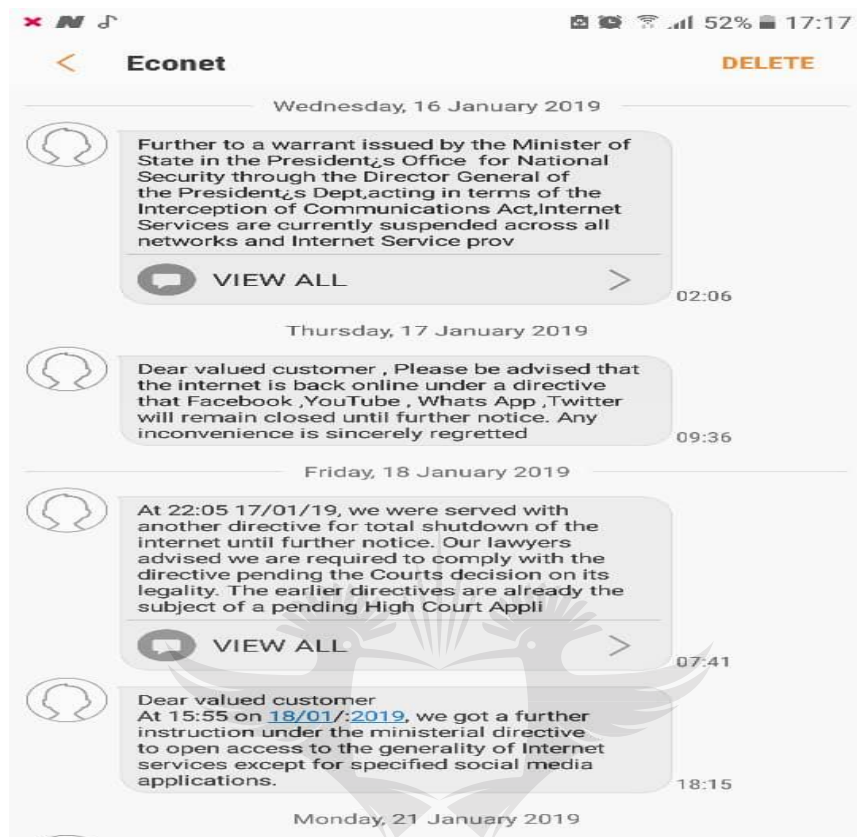
Figure 1: Message sent to Econet Subscribers

When government eventually owned up to being the perpetrator, it gave somewhat conflicting reasons for the shutdown (see Fig 1). Eventually, the Zimbabwean government admitted that it blocked access to the internet citing a threat to national security, and defended the move through the Interception of Communications Act (ICA) and Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act, (AIPPA). Interestingly, it has not yet been definitively established who ordered the shutdown. Was it the Minister of State Security, Owen Ncube acting unilaterally (see Fig 1), or was he acting under the orders of the Vice-President, Constantino Chiwenga, or the President, Mnangagwa, who was not in the country? What does power and its hierarchies, opacity and regimes of "command and control" have to do with it? How does the

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[6] Cheslow, D. and Schwartz, M. (2019). "Zimbabwe Orders Second Internet Shutdown In A Week Of Deadly Protest", https://www.npr.org/2019/01/18/686448187/zimbabwe-orders-second-internet-shutdown-in-a-week-of-deadly-protests

internet threaten the status quo? How does the status quo utilise the internet for its own purposes? In the interviews I did with government officials, the military concept of command and control (Vassiliou, Alberts, and Agre, 2015) kept cropping up in relation to the "threat" of social media. What role does the concept of "command and control" (the strategic use of a technology – in this case social media – to accomplish certain goals) play in all this? This research broadly tackles these issues in a bid to establish the flurry of "fake news" during this period and how this led to the internet shutdown by the government.

Zimbabwe has five international gateways for internet traffic: state-owned TelOne and Powertel; and privately owned Dandemutande, Econet, and Africom, (Chimhangwa, 2019)." State control over two of the country's gateways gives the government some ability to restrict access to internet and mobile networks, if desired, (Freedomhouse, 2019).One of the network providers, Econet Wireless subsequently sent out a message to subscribers saying it has been ordered to close down all internet activity (Fig 1).

There is a salient political dimension and background to the shutdown. The visible role of the military in the governance of Zimbabwe since the 2017 coup has signified that social media has increasingly been framed as both a "national culture" and a "national security" issue. Hence, as the coup was unfolding, the Commander of the Zimbabwe Defence Forces (ZDF), General Philip Sibanda, stated that:

> The contemporary trends in which social media has become a dominant phenomenon is posing a threat of loss of identity for people in the developing world. Cultures of powerful nations have been marketed through Western-owned media platforms while the people from Third World countries become inevitable consumers of these marketed products. Consequently, Africans have to some extent become carbon copies of our erstwhile former colonisers.

Not surprisingly, the army, soon after a coup, specifically singled out social media as constituting a "serious threat" (Matsilele 2019: 296). Even before the coup, army generals had been warning of an "asymmetric threat" to Zimbabwe from social media. In 2016 one of the Generals who was later to benefit from the coup, Gen. Chiwenga, stated:

It is the ZDF's hope…that the internal component of this asymmetric threat to the country will take heed and desist from these divisive activities for the betterment of the whole nation…. Recent events in Zimbabwe clearly demonstrate that State institutions, socio-political systems and even territories can now equally be threatened by manipulation of ideas through the use of social media (Matsilele 2019: 298).

In 2018 the Commander of the Zimbabwe Defence Forces (ZDF), General Philip Sibanda, asserted that the military was:

Training officers to be able to deal with this new threat we call cyber warfare where weapons – not necessarily guns but basically information and communication technology – are being used to mobilise people to do the wrong things.[7]

It is not specified what "wrong things" are, or how they are measured. Hence the first point to be made is that the ruling class in Zimbabwe has never hidden its dislike of social media, whether for cultural or national security reasons.

The second point draws from the first, but more in terms of what needs to be done about the "asymmetric threat" that social media poses. Ndavaningi Mangwana, the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Communication, has consistently threatened social media regulation in Zimbabwe. He has argued, for instance, that social media platforms are a modern-day information gateway that should be for sharing facts and not circulating false information (Mberi, 2019). He added that those, "[p]lanning to revolt against legitimately elected governments were easily commanding and controlling their operations using social media networks and applications" (Mberi, 2019). The Zimbabwean government had "last interfered with online content in July 2016, when WhatsApp was reportedly blocked during large scale anti-government protests dubbed Tajamuka/Sesijikile", (Matsilele 2019). While the government denied that it had blocked the service, sources in the telecoms sector revealed that they had

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[7] *The Telegraph* (7/8/2016). "New Zimbabwe law allows seizure of smartphones and laptops as Mugabe turns on social media" https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/08/07/new-zimbabwe-law-allows-seizure-of-smartphones-and-laptops-as-mu/ Retrieved 20 February 2018

received instructions from the government to shut down WhatsApp (Mberi, 2019). The WhatsApp outage followed months of threats by government officials to restrict social media use and foreshadowed the restrictions to come.

The January 2019 internet shutdown in Zimbabwe, and the partial one in 2016, must also be read in the context of the legal and policy landscape. Of great importance in this regard is the 'Cyber Bill'. The Cyber Bill, "which combines other legislation such as the Electronic Transactions and Electronic Commerce Bill, Data Protection Bill and the Computer Crime and Cybercrime Bill, has been in the works since 2015." It has since "been approved by Zimbabwe's Cabinet" and seeks to ensure that the "internet and related technologies are used for the good of society, not to violate national security". It purportedly aims to address "cybercrime and increase cybersecurity in order to build confidence and trust in the secure use of ICTs". "Zimbabweans who "abuse" social media platforms will face a maximum of ten years in prison, and those outside the country "who cause harm back home" using "social media or any other computer-based system" will be "extradited and prosecuted". Interestingly, the legislation's approval came just weeks after the internet shutdown of January 2019." However, critics are not convinced as they argue that one of the major aims of the Bill is to criminalise social media use and to give the state interference and surveillance powers. They do not see it as adding anything to protecting individual liberties, or accountability in the processes of combating cybercrime.

The spectre of regulation of social media thus looms large in Zimbabwe. The excuse for regulation is to control the "asymmetric threat" posed by, among other things, social media driven disinformation and fake news. But how does the Zimbabwean government define fake news? Does it even define it at all? Do we know who produces it, why, how? Are the motives of the government pure? What are the implications for media freedom? Certainly, the question of "fake news" and "social media regulation" is a local and a global one.[8] Governments (and experts and think tanks) the world over are seen rushing to figure out policies to deal with "fake news" on these social media platforms. However, because of the complexity surrounding the notion of "fake news" everything about "fake news" is still a developing story. This study proposes to explore

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[8] UNESCO (2018). *Handbook for Journalism Education and Training*

the nexus of fake news and social media regulation in Zimbabwe using the January 2019 National #Shutdown as a backdrop to understand exactly how "fake news" figures in the media regulation matrix.

Research Objectives

The study has two objectives, namely:

1. To explore the nexus of fake news and social media regulation in Zimbabwe using the January 2019 National # Shutdown
2. To understand how exactly 'fake news' figures in the media regulation matrix

Research questions.

The study thus turns on the following research questions:

1. What was the role of "fake news" in the January 2019 National #Shutdown in Zimbabwe?
2. What does the Zimbabwean government's response to "fake news" during the #Shutdown tell us about the relationship of "fake news" and (social) media regulation?

Structure of Thesis

Chapter one introduces the study. The background to the research, which explores the phenomenon of fake news and social media regulation in Zimbabwe, was presented. The chapter provided a statement of the problem, research questions and also objectives of the study. The scope, justifications of the study, together with assumptions, delimitations as well as limitations of this study were also included in the chapter. Chapter two establishes the context of the research problem. It clarifies the significance of this study by providing an understanding of what other academic researchers have so far covered and written on fake news and social media regulation. Chapter 3 presents the theoretical framework guiding the study. The chapter introduces Habermas' theory of public sphere and explains how it informs the study. Chapter four outlines and explains the qualitative research approach which was employed in the research study. Principal methods of data collection, data analysis

and the sampling technique are explained. These methods are very significant as they aid in obtaining the findings that are examined and presented in Chapter 5. In this study, Chapter 5 will present and analyse the findings from this study. It discusses what these findings mean in view of the objectives of the study. Research questions posed in Chapter 1 of this study will be answered through findings. Chapter 6 summarises and highlights recommendations for future scholarship.

CONCLUSION

Chapter 1 outlined background to this study and provided a detailed introduction to "fake news" and social media regulation using the January 2019 #Shutdown in Zimbabwe as a backdrop. The chapter also discussed the current state of fake news and how governments the world over are calling for social media regulation. Objectives, research rationale and justification of the study were also presented in this chapter. The next chapter will review existing literature on fake news and social media regulation relevant to this inquiry.
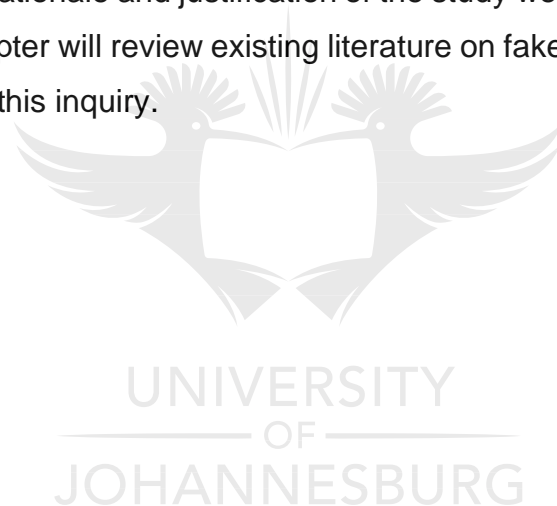
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The main purpose of this chapter is to evaluate relevant literature on the themes, conceptions and thoughts of "social media and fake news" regulations. The literature to be reviewed in this section explores the nexus "between fake news and social media" regulation and how "fake news" figures in the media regulation matrix. The section will therefore address matters of definition and power regarding fake news, as well as scholarships regarding social media regulation especially on implications of the clamour to regulate social media under the guise of weeding out fake news. The literature will be closely "guided by the following research questions:

1. What was the role of "fake news" in the January 2019 National #Shutdown in Zimbabwe?
2. What does the Zimbabwean government's response to "fake news" during the #Shutdown tell us about the relationship of "fake news" and (social) media regulation?

Literature on the history of fake news and media regulation in Zimbabwe will also be surveyed, focusing mainly on the January 2019 National #Shutdown in Zimbabwe which frames the context around which the study is premised.

Perspectives on Fake News and Online Media

Fake news was one of the main issues blamed for the internet blackout on 15 January 2019 in Zimbabwe. Since this study examines the nexus between fake news and social media regulation and explores how this notion figures in the social media regulation matrix, it is imperative to understand how "fake news" is defined and contested. This would also assist in locating the Zimbabwean government use of the term and understand the nature and role the notion played during the January 2019 National #Shutdown. An important element of this exercise is that it will also set the

scene for the discussion and analysis chapters where I evaluate data gathered from interviews with key informants who were close to the #shutdown events.

Perspectives on fake news

The concept "fake news", "has no single definition because it refers to a wide variety of things" (Gerlfert, 2018: 86). It can refer to intentionally fabricated information (Levi, 2018), and to information disorders such as misinformation and disinformation (Lazer et al., 2018). Still, the phrase is an umbrella term referring to "real threats to meaningful public debate on the Internet" (Klein and Wueller, 2017: 07). A number of loose taxonomies have been proposed to define "fake news," some focusing on the content of the material disseminated and some focusing on the intent behind the dissemination, and some on both. The breadth and complexity of the reference to "fake news" is used by some as a reason to reject the phrase itself, (for instance, Farkas and Schov, 2017). The looseness of the term has made it useful because anyone can effortlessly rebuff reproach by blaming "critics" of telling or spreading "fake news" (Mutsvairo, 2019). That is, "fake news" is a handy cover and camouflage, whereby even an individual spreading fake news can accuse those who accuse him to be spreading fake news themselves!. No one is immune to the accusation of purveying fake news, or to have their criticism (whether legitimate or not) dismissed as nothing but fake news. Zimbabwe is no exception to this, due in large part to a sharply polarised political environment. In the political battlefield different parties routinely use the strategy against their opponents (Dolezal, Ennser-Jedenastik and Müller, 2017).

Whether it is a leader from a totalitarian or democratic state pushing back against criticism from journalists and opponents or just ordinary citizens refusing to accept reality, the insidious use of "fake news" has become a go-to excuse for potentially weakening or silencing opposing and alternative voices[9]. Some scholars have gone further arguing that the term "fake news", presents a range of dangers to public discourse (Levi, 2008). Boczkowski (2016) discusses how challenges to journalism and its cultural authority are further legitimizing the misuse and mislabelling of the term, especially in the realm of politics. Thus, discourse around "fake news" has been further fragmented and obfuscated by the more recuse of the "fake news" term to discredit some news organizations' critical reporting (Tandoc et al., 2018:139). Be it

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[9] Cf. *The Republic at Risk: American Democracy One Year into the Trump Administration* (2018: 45)

politically or financially motivated, the question of "fake news" remains exacerbated by the ever-increasing popularity of social media.Tandoc et al., (2018:145) assert that Popularity on social media is thus a self-fulfilling cycle, one that lends well to the propagation of unverified information (2018:150). On the other hand, Maduro and de Cock Burning (2019) weigh in on the complexity of fake news, arguing that it "undermines trust in all forms of media and reinforces the view that it is impossible to discern fact from fiction. At any rate, there is little doubt that fake news – whatever it is – is an important category of political communication, that it is intricately intertwined with politics, and that it has a political dimension and agenda (Rodny-Gumede, 2018). This is the case, at least, in this current study.

The concept "fake news" is considered controversial, this is all because, in part, it is poorly defined and there is no standard, universal or broadly accepted definition for it in academic literature or media discourse (Wasserman and Madrid-Morales, 2018; Ribeiro and Ortellado, 2018). It is an open field, a minefield, and a moving target. This makes the study of fake news exciting, but also largely ungovernable. If there is no standard definition, it means that there are multiple definitions and no scholarly consensus. However, this is expected in a burgeoning field. Is fake news the same as disinformation or just an aspect of it? Is it disinformation or misinformation? Disinformation is taken to mean deliberately creating false news in order to sway public opinion while misinformation implies unknowingly spreading or sharing such information on social media. Worse, attempted definitions tend to consist of a wide and diverse range of connotations rather than a single meaning (Ellis, 2018), many depending on context, one's preferred reading, ideological camp and other factors. Part of the problem of defining "fake news" has precisely been a question of scope and scale. Where do we start and end? Lee (2016), for instance, argues that no one knows how much of the information that is currently available online is false. There is just so much to go through, and no one anywhere can get through all the existing information in order to classify it. Hence whatever is called fake news is bound to be an extremely small sample of all the information that exists. Researchers end up assigning "fact-checking" and moderation to algorithms, AI and bots to read on behalf of humans. Scholars such as Freeze, Baumgartner and Bruno (2020) recommend that "fake news" be rejected and replaced by a shared definition of the terms 'mis-

information' and 'disinformation'. While these terms are less politically loaded than the term 'fake news', one needs to pay heed to the fact that the term "fake news" is likely here to stay as" "[p]art of the vernacular that helps people express their frustration with the media environment",(Nielsen and Graves, 2017: 01). "It is therefore useful to explore its contours further and discuss whether "fake news" pose a threat that would justify their regulation.

Other scholars even insist that there is nothing new about "fake news" and, in fact, that it is a mere latter day iteration and manifestation of propaganda (McNair, 2017). One definition of "fake news", for instance, is that it is the "deliberate dissemination of false information expressly intended to misinform", (Ogola, 2017a). But what is so new about this? The "deliberate dissemination of false information, expressly intended to misinform" took place in the Garden of Eden 6000 years ago! The congressional testimony of a young Kuwaiti girl in 1990 about Saddam Hussein's atrocities – testimony which propelled the U.S. into the First Gulf War – but later proved to be false, was a clear form of fake news.[10] Klein and Wueller (2017) argue that, "[v]arious traditional media outlets, which have recently started to be subjected to the "fake news" label, should be excluded from the "fake" category because "they are not intentionally or knowingly false in nature" (2017: 6). Some occurrences such as accidental mistakes in reporting, rumours that originate outside news articles "conspiracy theories, satire that is unlikely to be misconstrued as factual, false statements by politicians and reports that are slanted or misleading but not outright false" may also fall outside of the "fake news" category, (Allcott and Gentzkow, 2017: 214). Others have argued that fake news is an aspect of psychology, because people tend to effortlessly trust false information as long as it backs their existing worldviews, (Weeks and Garrett, 2014). But, once again, neither gullibility nor psychology are new. So the question about what is really new about fake news is worth posing. It also needs to be noted that, moral panic aside, "fake news" are "not automatically illegal if they do not violate laws" on privacy, defamation, hate speech and misleading advertising, in

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[10] *The New York Times* revealed, in 1992, that "The girl's testimony was actually orchestrated by the big public relations firm Hill & Knowlton on behalf of a client, the Kuwaiti-sponsored Citizens for a Free Kuwait. The client's aim was to secure military support from the U.S. through raising awareness about the dangers posed to Kuwait by Iraqi dictator, Saddam Hussein. The girl who gave the testimony was also revealed to be not just an ordinary civilian but the daughter of the Kuwaiti Ambassador to the U.S."

countries such as Germany and the United Kingdom, (Katsirea, 2018: 163). Also, in some instances, people share "fake news" not because they want to destabilise a country or because they want to shore up their political credentials among likeminded friends but because they want to help, entertain or inform friends and family, (Tandoc, 2019). Thus, while "fake news" is often created to destabilise society, it may be shared to enhance and maintain friendships (Duffy, Tandoc and Ling, 2019). These latter points are meant as a caution against generalisation.

Still, there are some standard features. Apart from the observation that fake news causes distortions in the information market (Turker, 2018), broadly, dominant literature on fake news concerns itself with the distinction between "truthful" and "false" information (Farkas and Jannick, 2018). Allcott and Gentzkow (2017) have provided a general definition, which is that fake news is "news articles that are intentionally and verifiably false, and could mislead readers". For "fake news" story to be constituted as "fake news", it must meet "certain criteria". Bell and Owen suggest that, "[i]t needs to have an emotional appeal, appear authoritative, immersion to the digital world, and intensified social network presence," (2017: 03). On the other hand, Rubin, Chen, and Conroy (2015) equate fabrication to "fake news," while Rubin, Conroy, Chen, and Cornwell (2016) add hoaxes to that category. Thus, defining and determining what constitutes "fake news" belongs to a complex and contested terrain. One way identified to detect "fake news" has been to focus on the motivation. Some stories that are poorly verified "sit on the boarder" but are not exclusively fake. However, one way of identifying "fake news" is by looking at credibility and believability of the source (Westerman, Spence, and Van Der Heide, 2012). Furthermore, Klein and Wueller, 2017; and Tandoc et al., 2018) observe that all forms of "fake news," regardless of format, take the form of parody and satire, both of which are intended to attract the attention of its audience. In addition, they claim that "fake news" is typically characterised by fabrication since it consists of fictitious material, the manipulation and misrepresentation of visual images to create distorted public perceptions, as well as propaganda employed by political entities to sway public opinion, (Tandoc et al., 2018: 10).

It seems that, to do justice to the definition of fake news, one has to specify that it is a phenomenon that has a digital aspect. Fake news either starts on the internet and digital networks, or it is amplified there. After all, traditional forms of fake news did not enjoy the dimension of amplification that present day fake news enjoys, particularly due to social media. There is little doubt that the #Shutdown in Zimbabwe in January 2019 would have happened in the manner it did if it was not for social media, in particular social media amplification. Undoubtedly, the Internet changed the face of the world and, through "social media" has had a major role in popular protest movements." "There is no doubt that social media has become a conduit for all sorts of content, true and false, useful and harmful, by exploiting the low levels of digital literacy among many internet users and the lack of gatekeeping mechanisms typically found in traditional news media.

Thus, in identifying the nexus between "fake news" and "social media regulation", it is critical to focus on the new type of "fake news" that has surfaced in the modern political landscape- that is online fake news. This nature of "fake news" is defined as "the online publication of intentionally or knowingly false statements of fact". Morton (2018) acknowledges that the, "[a]dvent of the information and communication technologies opened up a myriad of opportunities for people to create and disseminate content through multiple services and platforms". There is little doubt, therefore, that the "fake news" that is central to this study has "evolved with the emergence of online media". Boczkowski (2016) asserts that the materialisation of "fake news", can be attributed to the ease with which people can now mass communicate and the inability to detect bias in the media environment. He argues, "One element that distinguishes the contemporary moment is the existence of a fairly novel information infrastructure with a scale, scope, and horizontality of information flows unlike anything we had seen before" (2016: 6).

At any rate, the subject of "fake news" is yet to be fully examined, especially in African contexts. Elsewhere the study of fake news has tended to be too sectoral. For instance, its impact on elections and democracy has been widely studied (Allcott and Gentzkow, 2017; Barthel, Mitchell and Holcomb, 2016). Particularly following its (disputed) impact on the electorate in 2016 in the United States of America, as well as

Brazil and the UK's Brexit. However, not much has been done to define fake news independently of particular, seminal case studies. If we are always thinking of Donald Trump's surprise election win over Hilary Clinton in 2016, or Jair Bolsonaro's in Brazil, or Brexit, it means we merely privilege the ideological struggle between left-wing and right-wing, liberal versus conservative. Such discussion adds little to, say, the African context where the link between fake news and the Alt-right or fascism is not at all obvious.

In this study I have deliberately sought to privilege a case study that does not fit these dominant frameworks. By using Zimbabwe, and the #Shutdown, as an example, I draw on an a typical example in order to find a link between social media regulation and fake news in a context not informed by contemporary western ideological struggle. Issues of media regulation are more pertinent in the Zimbabwean context than, say, the Alt-right or the right wing versus liberal dichotomy. At any rate, this study is relevant because social media regulation is currently in its nascent stages, and a lot more is bound to be witnessed in this space. While "fake news's" role in further polarising already divided societies has been examined (Cf. Vargo, Guo, and Amazeen, 2017) the focus has once again been "hijacked" by the liberal/conservative, right wing/left wing, Brexit/Remain dichotomy. Such a focus is largely irrelevant to African contexts. While scholars such as Mantzarlis et al. (2018) and Fregoso (2019) (see also UNESCO, 2018) agree that "fake news" content has potential destructive consequence on political life, but as far as rigorously identifying the exact nature and quality of this effect is concerned, and how to address it, literature is still lacking. The fact that the meaning of "fake news", thus despite its widespread usage in recent years, remains unsettled; presents a big challenge when trying to understand national responses to the phenomenon because the term itself is sometimes not directly employed when initiatives apparently directed at tackling "fake news" are taken. The above is very true in the Zimbabwean context. This is why the study seeks to understand, in part, how the Zimbabwean government defined and understood fake news, given as the reason for shutting down the internet during the January 2019 National #Shutdown.

 A core observation I have made is that people who engage in serious considerations of subjects in which "fake news" features tend not only to acknowledge the definitional

difficulties, but to offer caveats and disclaimers. A recent UNESCO handbook for media personnel, for instance, declares that it "avoids assuming that the term fake news has a straightforward or commonly understood meaning," (Ireton and Posetti, 2018: 7) . As already intimated, to some, fake news can only exist in a setting of disinformation – in other words, taking the view that publishers must have the intent of spreading untrue statements for these statements to be characterised as fake news (Frank, 2015; Klein and Wueller, 2017). As Morton (2018) acknowledged above, the advent of information and communication technologies opened up a myriad of opportunities for people to create and disseminate content through multiple services and platforms, even if not all actors equally take advantage of this bright side of the Internet or, more importantly, even if not everyone is online. Studies suggest that those who have access to online technologies are aware of their power to settle, confuse or amplify a contest, debate or controversy. Many participate, knowingly or not, in creating and spreading (purposefully or not), content of dubious veracity or unverified origin, (Pavleska, 2018).

While the slew of recent studies on fake news the world over (Cf. Wasserman, 2017; Fuchs, 2017; Niklewicz, 2018 and Tandoc et al., 2018) not only confirm that this is a nascent yet important area, but also that most of these studies mainly focus on alternative conceptions of fake news and its complex definitions, how to detect it, and how to apply fact-checking against it (Sharma, 2019). Discussions of the relationship between fake news and regulation have not marched in step. Where discussions on the regulation of the internet and social media have happened, they tended to focus on the themes of privacy and hate speech and how to stop the spread of hate speech and protect people's privacy. The qualitative, nuanced and context-sensitive understanding of "fake news" and its special relation to media regulation is only starting to emerge as a major concern. Thus, the existing scholarship rightly point to the problems of defining "fake news", but more attention needs to be paid to how, despite these problems, governments are pushing for media regulation in the name of fighting "fake news." Niklewic (2018) and Beauchamp (2019), for example, argued that the "content published on social media platforms – including fake news is a true reflection of people's emotions, and hence it is the essence of democracy. Instead of

trying to regulate the platforms, they claim, mainstream politicians should make better efforts to convince people."

Of course, "the moral panic around "fake news" has not been limited to the United States, but has formed the backdrop and discursive reference point for debates about the impact of the spread of similar fabrications on politics in African countries, where a sudden and steep proliferation of fake news websites as well as fake social media accounts have raised concerns," (Wasserman, 2017:312-316). However, it seems reasonable to assert that, news – whether 'fake' or 'real' – should not be understood outside of its particular contexts of production and consumption. As Willems and Mano (2017:1) argue, "the experiences of African audiences and the engagement of users with media are always grounded in particular contexts, worldviews and knowledge systems of life and wisdom". They further argue that "African media audiences and users carry their contexts and cultural repertoires in the same way a tortoise carries its shell' (2017: 4)."

Although fake news stories can be, and for a long time have been, transmitted through conventional media outlets, such as print and radio broadcasting, social media has emerged as the main and predominant mode of their dissemination and profitability[11] . Social media have become the, "[d]ominant source of information for significant parts of our societies," (Niklewicz, 2017:335). To date, "there has been an absence of a medium just as powerful as Facebook and other social media platforms in human history," (Lopes, 2014:6). Getachew (2019) argues that the power of the social media, especially when supported by video, is truly immense and can shape or decide the future or destiny of a country[12]. The ability of the media to mobilise for political cause has been pointed out as one of the numerous positive aspects brought about by these social media platforms. It is unquestionable that the strengthening of free speech is a result of social media (Enarsson, 2018). This is despite the negative impact on public debate that also comes with these media. Various governments are thus taking measures to curb this through regulation, with limited success.

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[11] *Countering fake news: A survey of recent global initiatives* (2018)

[12] Getachew, F. (01/4/2019). "Fake News and Social Media", *7D news.*

Some of the sites in the eye of the storm are Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, and WhatsApp, although every social media site hosts and spread fake news to varying degrees. Moinuddin, Menzies, Morrow and Vezer, suggested that some, "[f]ake news sites receive 50%-80% of their traffic via Facebook alone" (2017:2). They added that "fake news" creates confusion, which can have pernicious effects. In the same study undertaken by Moinuddin et al. (2017) results showed that almost two-thirds of Americans had reported that "fake news" had caused them a great deal of confusion, and just under one-quarter have shared a made-up news story. The unforgettable notorious "pizzagate" conspiracy story, which saw a "would-be vigilante" bringing a gun into a pizza restaurant in a Washington, DC and open fire, shows how far the lines between online and offline can be blurred. This is not the only "example of the danger fake news can pose to the public"[13]. In 2018, two Indian men were lynched based on fake news which was spread through social media (*AFP*.2018, July). Such social media driven mass hysteria leading to lynchings in India have since increased in incidence and prevalence.

The surge of "fake news", videos and claims also comes as many governments step up pressure on Facebook, WhatsApp and other platforms to act against fake news. Morgan argues that "Governments are becoming increasingly concerned about fake news, misinformation and the way the public sphere can be manipulated. Several governments have announced enquiries, are establishing units to debunk fake news and are proposing legislation and regulation" (2018:42). According to Morgan (2018), Gambia and Egypt have long had legislation aimed at combating fake news, arguing that German parliament recently passed a law to fine social media companies with more than two million users for failing to remove certain content (such as fake news and hate speech) within 24 hours. Thus, it seems that the "disruptive and democratising power of social media is not lost on African and European governments as restrictions on social media access and usage are becoming something of a trend"

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[13] *Washington Post* (6/12/2016). "Pizzagate: From rumor, to hashtag, to gunfire in D.C.", https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/pizzagate-from-rumor-to-hashtag-to-gunfire-in-dc/2016/12/06/4c7def50-bbd4-11e6-94ac-3d324840106c_story.html

(Gumede, 2016).[14] The Zimbabwean government is no exception to the above as social media regulation calls continue to gain momentum. In April 2020, President Mnangagwa threatened anyone found peddling false news with 20 years' imprisonment.[15]

Dominant social media sites, for their part, insist that they are platforms, not publishers (Flew, Martin and Suzor, 2019).They say that they are not responsible for what users post or do after posting or reading. Nevertheless, these sites were blamed, for instance, for inciting more than 20 lynchings in a mere two months in India[16]. According to Flew et al, "Fake news may also have deleterious political consequences, as fabricated stories can be designed with the intent to influence elections and undermine democratic processes, hence several governments are ostensibly taking steps to prevent fake news from distorting their political landscapes"(2019:33-50). The platforms themselves have tried to push back against fake news, despite saying that they are not publishers. Facebook recently updated its policies to allow for reporting and removal of posts flagged as inappropriate, the barring of certain content from being posted or shared and the suspension of accounts in order to curb the spread of fake news. Haciyakupoglu, Hui, Suguna, Leong and Rahman argue that, "[a]ny attempt to regulate the social media against fake news is Herculean given issues surrounding the definition of "fake news", the global dimension of cyberspace vis-à-vis the territorial boundaries of regulation, challenges in identifying the actual perpetrator of fake news and lastly, the sophistication of disinformation campaigns"(2018:3-12). They further argued that "content-related regulations in social media cyberspace would also face obstacles" (2018). Allcott and Gentzkow (2017: 211-326) attributed the rapid growth in the scale of "fake news" to the disappearance of access barriers to information consumption and the openness in access to information brought about by social media sites.

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[14] Gumede, W. (2016). *Censorship of the Internet, social media rising in Africa.* Democracy works Foundation, Policy Brief 8

[15] Aljazeera (14/4/2020). "Zimbabwe president threatens fake news author with 20 years' jail", https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/04/zimbabwe-president-threatens-fake-news-author-20-years-jail-200414150840843.html

[16] Srivastava, A. (22/8/2018). Fake News add to India's flood torment, *Mail & Guardian*

Studies have also linked "fake news" to post-truth. These include Calcutt (2018) who sees post-truth as a symbolic shift from an era where truth and rationality used to be sacrosanct, to an era where emotion rides roughshod over truth and rationality". The fact that various countries have stepped into the "knowledge era" or founded a "knowledge-based society" is as disputable as the one that people live in a "post-truth" age or society. The "knowledge – era" and the "post-era" are useful in locating the dynamics of fake news and the motivations surrounding the creation and circulation of fake news in Zimbabwe during the January 2019 National #Shutdown protests which prompted an internet shutdown. In Zimbabwe, information might be selected for its "feel good" effect in a context where democracy and economic prosperity are illusory for the common person. The different perspectives on "fake news," "post-truth politics" and "post-factuality" are all geared towards addressing the "question of what can be labelled as valid, proper or "true information" online and offline, and what should be counted as "fake news" or disinformation" (Farkas and Jannick, 2018). Generally, these debates have been amplified in the era of online publication and the rise of citizen journalism.

For Dutta (2019), the issue of internet has spawned mammoth opportunities and limitations for various governments the world over. However, the nature of internet and its regulation is currently posing challenges in various countries. This can be attributed to the dramatic change within the media fraternity. The proliferation of digital spaces for members of the public to express themselves offers great opportunities for strengthening democracies. Yet, there are significant concerns over the rapid circulation of digital disinformation. These include dissemination of violence, harmful health and wellbeing effects, and influence of foreign governments on domestic politics. This therefore raises serious questions about who gets to be the arbiter of truth and how the decision on what truth is made in the context of democratic societies (Dutta, 2019)

 Huges (2019) draws the link between social media regulation and fake news, noting that relying on social media to communicate with friends and family has become a threat to free speech around the world as fewer people actually talk on the phone (let

alone meet face to face). People are now being arrested for 'hate speech' for posting criticism about their government's policies on Facebook. This is not just happening in countries traditionally accused of authoritarianism and human rights violations. It is also happening in the so-called free world. In Germany a law "counteracting hate speech and fake news on the internet", called *Netzwerkdurchsetzungsgesetz* (Network Enforcement Act) has been in force since 1 January 2018 (Zlotowski, 2018). In Singapore, a parliamentary committee made 22 recommendations after a five-month inquiry, and called on the government to enact laws to check the spread of 'fake news' (Sim, 2018). In the Philippines, the idea of a 'fake news' law to penalise the malicious distribution of false news and other related violations was broached in June 2017 (Senate of the Philippines, 2017)". "In India 'guidelines' said to be aimed at curtailing "fake news" were hastily withdrawn without explanation, one day after the law was introduced.

In France, parliament introduced a law to prevent the spread of false information during election campaigns, by enabling parties or candidates to seek a court injunction to prevent the publication of 'false information' during the three months leading up to a national election and the main target, according to the Culture Minister, were stories spread by 'fake news' bots that are 'manifestly false and shared in a deliberate, mass and artificial way' (Agence France-Presse, 2018a). The law gives France's broadcast authority power to take any network 'controlled by, or under the influence of a foreign power' off the air if it 'deliberately spreads false information that could alter the integrity of the election' (ibid.). The move is seen as Western Europe's 'first attempt to officially ban false material' (Fiorentino, 2018).

In Australia, the problem of 'fake news', propaganda and public disinformation was one of the terms of reference in a federal Senate inquiry that examined the future of public interest journalism. The committee, however, 'only received a limited amount of information directly addressing the role fake news and misinformation has had on democratic processes' but it noted that the matter was viewed with seriousness overseas (Senate Select Committee on the Future of Public Interest Journalism, 2018, para 2.70). Australia has not introduced specific anti-fake news laws although recently-

introduced legislation was designed to address an unprecedented threat from espionage and foreign interference in Australia (Horne, 2018).

In the United Kingdom, "a government committee which considered the subject in detail published an interim report in 2018 and the final report in 2019 (Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee, 2018 and 2019b, respectively). The very first statement in the Interim Report's 'conclusions and recommendations' section states: 'The term "fake news" is bandied about with no clear indication of what it means, or agreed definition' (Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee, 2018: 64). In its final report, the committee observed:

> [w]e have always experienced propaganda and politically-aligned bias, which purports to be news' but that this activity had taken on new forms and that people are now able to give credence to information that reinforces their views, no matter how distorted or inaccurate, while dismissing content with which they do not agree as 'fake news', which creates a 'polarising effect and reduces the common ground on which reasoned debate, based on objective facts, can take place (Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee, 2019b: 5).

The above account shows a variety of world governmental responses to the perceived "fake news" dilemma, reflecting two extremes. At the one end lies a discernible effort to define the problem and formulate a considered course of action through formal inquiries and consultation with stakeholders, before recommending or embarking on a regulatory course of action. At the other end lies ill-considered responses, as happened in India . A key concern with the introduction of laws purporting to regulate 'fake news' is the potential for government overreach, and "scary" responses to the spread of misinformation and disinformation, (Funke and Mantzarlis, 2018). Baard (2019) observes that "fake news" in its strict sense may be cohesive in the required sense. Hence, regulating "fake news" can be lawful and legitimate up to a certain point. Surprisingly, Russia and Singapore introduced regulation to clamp down on "fake news" and misinformation in March 2019 – moves critics say are an excuse to extend government control and stamp out speech they do not like (Waters and Murphy, 2019). Sensing how quickly the winds have changed, internet companies have been shifting their ground. Interestingly, Mark Zuckerberg caused a stir in March 2019 when he called for government regulation

citing harmful content – specifically, he noted that "hate speech, terrorist propaganda and more" needed to be addressed.

"Fake News" and Social Media regulation in Africa

Closer to home, governments across the continent have also jumped to the bandwagon of calling for social media regulation. Various states contend that internet shutdowns are needed to quell public protests, violence and misinformation fuelled by social media or mobile phone messaging applications, citing the role of the Internet in the Arab Spring five years ago, when protests toppled regimes in Egypt and Tunisia (Mukeredzi, 2017). There is no doubt that "fake news" is intricately intertwined with politics (Freeden, 2019) thereby rendering very important attention on how this connection figures in the regulation of social media platforms. Some countries are in the early stages of tackling issues related to fake news and misinformation. For others, misinformation has already been a long struggle and the digital aspect merely brings a new dimension. Budoo (2020) noted that several African governments have recently announced enquiries and are establishing units to debunk fake news and are proposing legislation and regulation. The momentum for governments to tackle fake news and misinformation is now translating into practical actions, many of which could legitimise the actions of non-democratic nations and harm free speech (Morgan, 2018).

Thus, within various regions on the African continent, there has been something of a proliferation in the spate of social media regulations, with a number of governments putting in place measures to curb the influence and usage of the medium in recent times . This has however allowed many governments to extend control over any voices that are critical of the government rather than genuinely dealing with fake news (Mutsvairo and Bebawi, 2019). Governments argue that social media platforms encourage the spread of rumours which can trigger public unrest. This was the case in 2016 in Uganda during the country's presidential elections. The government restricted access to social media, describing the shutdown as a "security measure to avert lies intended to incite violence and illegal declaration of election results (Ogola, 2019) .This followed the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) government's order to cell phone companies, such as Vodacom, to shut down internet for three days as

voting ended in the highly disputed presidential election. Alongside the shutdown in the DRC, many complained that text messaging became more difficult and media was increasingly censured. Radio France Internationale was closed. The shutdown in the DRC made it easier for government to put out fake election results, (Dahir, 2019).

Some of the motives guiding the formulation of social media regulations may indeed be justified (or justifiable), especially when the need to regulate social media accounts that allegedly create, publish and distribute falsified information that can potentially cause to considerable damage is played up [17]. A similar narrative is obtainable from South Sudan, where it is reported that the ongoing conflict has been somewhat fuelled by online rumours and hate speech. Accusations have also been made about a particular 'false' Facebook post blamed for the death of over 150 persons. Such incidences give some credence to the notion that social media can actually be a dangerous tool in the wrong hands . The narratives on the social media platforms have given most African countries reasons to contemplate regulation. Some of these countries include South Africa (Isi, 2018)[18]. Zimbabwe and Zambia have proposed laws to restrict the use of social media. Egypt and the Gambia have long had legislation aimed at combatting fake news, which has been routinely criticised by free speech advocates. Several governments including Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania introduced "fake news" laws in 2018. In September 2019, WeeTracker reported that the Ugandan government had implemented a law mandating that a daily levy of USD 0.05 be paid by all social media users in the country, in a move that the government hopes will "curb online gossip" and raise funds for dealing with the consequences of online gossip.

Since the beginning of 2016, African governments have shut down the internet at least 21 times with some shutdowns going for months (Access Now, 2017). Indeed, this has particularly been a common tactic with authoritarian states such as Ethiopia, Togo, Cameroon, Gabon and the Democratic Republic of Congo. With regards to Cameroon, the internet was shut down twice in 2017 in some of its provinces for several months each time. Furthermore, Cameroon's leader, Paul Biya, who has ruled

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[17] https://theconversation.com/regulate-social-media-its-a-bit-more-complicated-than-that-103797

[18] Gift Isi, Afro Hustler, Governments' Social Media Regulation in Africa: How Possible? 24 April, 2018

the country for 37 years, famously denounced social media as 'a new form of terrorism' and 'a social pandemic', a clear indication of how much his regime is worried by the political influence of social media. Indeed, Africa accounted for 11 of the 56 global Internet shutdowns recorded in 2016, according to Deji Olukotun cited in Rowlands (2016). This represents a 50% increase from 2015. Shutdowns occurred four times in Ethiopia, twice each in Gambia and Uganda, and once each in Chad, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Gabon, Mali, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Open Internet promoters say the shutdowns highlight how internet attacks and abuses, including the proliferation of internet-regulating laws, surveillance and interceptions of communication are worsening on the continent, just as there is an increase in Internet diffusion.

This rise in internet shutdowns comes as an increasing number of Africans are communicating via the Internet. This, according to Mukeredzi (2017) has made various governments to see the connectivity as a threat rather than an opportunity. These fears and the attendant internet shutdowns have come at a financial cost. The Brookings Institution, a Washington, DC–based think tank, analysed the costs to an economy from a shutdown of the internet. In seven African countries surveyed in 2016, where the internet was shut down, an estimated $320 million in revenue was lost (Murekedzi, 2017). Ogola (2019) sums up the link between internet shutdowns and government: "[W]hile internet shutdowns do not stop demonstrations. Nor do they hinder the production and circulation of rumours: they encourage them instead". He also notes that many people are also circumventing the shutdowns through the use of virtual private networks (VPNs). These are networks that redirect internet activity to a computer in a different geographical location, thus enabling access to sites blocked in one's own country.

The list of African countries that have blocked access to social media during elections and other politically sensitive periods continues to grow, suggesting that this is becoming a new norm.[19] Cameroon, Chad, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Gabon, Gambia, the Republic of Congo, and Uganda, are amongst African countries

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[19] The Conversation, shutting down the internet doesn't work – but governments keep doing it, February, 2019

that have popped up on the radar , in recent times. In countries like Ethiopia, Madagascar, and Tanzania, there were introductions of cybercrime legislations which were thought to jeopardize freedom of expression in some quarters . It has been argued that governments recognise social media as a threat to their monopoly of power. Tellingly, the internet shutdowns in these countries have mostly specifically targeted social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter and messaging apps, such as WhatsApp. As such, a burgeoning field of studies has traced how social media has played a major role in facilitating actual political participation through protests against increasing government corruption, increasing levels of poverty and unemployment, among other government shortcomings (cf. Chatora, 2012). Despite studies having been done on fake news in protests especially after the Arab spring (Rampersad, 2019), not much has been done on the link between "fake news" and social media regulation, despite the fact that the phenomenon of media regulation has been an omnipresent topic in African media studies. Has the link not been made because this is not traditional media but social media that is in the line of fire? Despite the proliferation of laws against "fake news" in Africa, no major studies have been outlined in this area of the nexus between "fake news" and social media regulation. This study seeks to close this gap.

The issue of regulating social media platforms has always been a controversial one since it involves inter-boarder communication (Kayode-Adedeji, 2017:06). This is a major reason this platform is difficult to regulate. Facebook has gained notoriety for facilitating the spread of false information, while WhatsApp, which attracts many users in the Middle East and Africa because of encrypted communication, has also emerged as an expedient epicentre for far-reaching viral hoaxes, (Mutsvairo, 2019). Going by recent internet shutdowns by various African governments, one can take "fake news" to mean "information that the government does not agree with (Gukurume, 2017). Furthermore, some scholars such as (Gukurume, 2017; Morgan, 2018 and Ogola, 2019) have argued that social media has provided a discursive space for ordinary citizens' voices to articulate their problems and to challenge the excesses of the government, which is epitomised by endemic corruption and bad governance and has caused massive unemployment. The scholars further argued that social media has created a virtual community of dissent that actively fostered counter-hegemonic

discourses, hence affording the hitherto supressed voices an audible voice against these governments (Gukurume, 2017; Morgan, 2018). The future of unfettered internet access in Africa looks precarious should governments continue on this trajectory. The absence in many African countries of enforceable constitutional guarantees that protect the public's right to information means there are few opportunities for legal redress (Ogola, 2019)[20]. This makes the development of legislative regimes that recognise and protect access to the internet both urgent and necessary.

Scholars have argued that, in most cases, the desire to control the internet is rooted in governments' determination to control the political narrative, (Ogola, 2019). Many see the internet as an existential threat that must be contained, no matter what consequences it will have on other sectors (Ogola, 2019). The internet is seen as a threat because it disrupts older forms of government political control, particularly the control of information (Shahbaz, 2018). The stranglehold on the production and dissemination of information has always been an invaluable political tool for many African governments, (Voltmer, 2017). This loss of control, at a time when the media has brought politics closer to the people, presents governments with a distinctly unsettling reality, (Rainie, Andersson and Albright, 2017). Social media, for example, inherently encourages political indiscipline and engenders the production and circulation of alternative political narratives, (Ogola, 2019).

In addition, because it is a networked platform, users are simultaneously and instantaneously local and international, and are engaged in an information carnival that is difficult to police (Ogola, 2019). Quite often the narratives therein are at variance with the self-preserving and carefully constructed ideologies of the state. The irony, however, is that as these shutdowns continue, and even proliferate, there is scant evidence they actually work, (Voltmer, 2017). Instead, they seem to animate dissent and encourage precisely the kind of responses considered subversive by many governments . Below are three snapshots of some African countries' experiences of "fake news" and social media and how the issue was dealt with.

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[20] George Ogola, Pretoria News, Internet shutdowns don't contain African dissent, 21 February, 2019

Snapshot 1: Uganda

On the eve of 30 May 2018, the Ugandan parliament passed the Excise Duty (Amendment) Bill 2018, which imposes taxes on usage of social media. It clearly states: "A telecommunication service operator providing data used for accessing over the top services is liable to account and pay excise duty on the access to over the top services." Services such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter and the like will be charged a tax duty of UGX 200 (USD 0.05) per user per day of access. This tax has direct implications for creation and consumption of content through social media platforms. Similarly, in March 2018, the government of Uganda had also issued a public statement announcing that "all online data communication service providers, including online publishers, online news platforms, online radio and television operators are advised to apply and obtain authorization from the Commission with immediate effect" in order to offer communications services, (Ryakitimbo, 2019). This was however, widely criticized by the Ugandan population which blamed the government of using vague reasons and ideologies to infringe upon the online space.

Snapshot 2: Tanzania

In 2019, the Tanzanian government jumped on the bandwagon of online content regulation with the introduction of blogger licenses and sanctions under the Electronic and Postal Communications Act (EPOCA)[21] . These laws have prompted an online circus as different stakeholders discuss the extent to which it will limit creativity and local content creation online. The Act, which requires online content producers to be licensed, took effect on 16 March 2018 under Government Notice Number 133. This has had a direct impact on application services licensees, bloggers, internet cafés, online content hosts, online forums, online radio or television and social media as well as subscribers and users of any related online content, (Ryakitimbo, 2019). Ryakitimbo argues that the act makes use of unclear terminology, such as "indecent and obscene" or "use of disparaging or abusive words which is calculated to offend an individual or a group of persons" and describes false information as content which is "likely to mislead or deceive the public… except where it is preceded by a statement that the content is not factual" (2019:02). This vagueness and lack of clarity in the

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[21] Rebecca Ryakitimbo, AfriSig, Fake news and vague laws: Online content regulation in Africa, 28 November, 2018

wording of the policy leaves room for the violation of digital rights and, most commonly, misuse of the Act for personal/government gain.

Snapshot 3: Egypt

The Egyptian government seems to have hoped onto the bandwagon too as the country's parliament is reported to have recently approved and passed a bill that will see social media accounts with more than 5,000 followers being regulated and treated like media outlets. The new law is said to be motivated by the need to monitor and regulate social media accounts that allegedly create, publish and distribute fake news. While these developments may have been heralded as necessary in some quarters, they have been described as disturbing and greeted with cynicism and scepticism in others. Egyptian protesters had been forced to contend with some internet monitoring before the 2011 uprising, but not to the extent seen in Tunisia before its uprising. During the uprising, protesters were highly successful in circumventing internet controls, using tools like Hotspot Shield and Tor, which maintain the anonymity of the user while online (York, 2011a; Daily Mail, 2011), and other techniques they had learned before. After the regime blocked Twitter, people tweeted the websites of proxy servers to circumvent the control (Idle and Nunns, 2011, p. 41). However, once the protests began to threaten the Mubarak regime's existence, the state used a more aggressive — and cruder — method than Tunisia's government to impede internet and mobile phone access. On January 28, 2011, the Egyptian government shut off the Internet and mobile phone services for the entire country, resulting in a blackout that lasted almost one week (Ishani, 2011).

The blackout, which lasted nearly a week, forced activists to find more innovative workaround solutions, such as setting up FTP (file transfer protocol) accounts to send videos to international news organizations (Ishani, 2011). Another solution they found was using landlines to connect to internet services in neighbouring countries by calling international numbers with older dial-up modems, a connection that was slow but sufficient for posting tweets about events on the ground (Sigal, 2011; Seibt, 2011). In brief, the Egyptian regime's shutdown of the internet was not only costly, but it also backfired. It enraged Egyptians accustomed to internet and mobile phone access (Daily Mail, 2011). Young, educated Egyptians were affected by their years of access to the internet, which shaped their outlook and connections to each other and led to a

sense of entitlement to internet access, —so much so that when this access was revoked [when the regime turned off the internet during protests] they ended up flooding the streets (Vila, 2011).

The Social Media Context

Social media has received much of the criticism for disseminating "fake news." But what is it and what does it do? Social media is defined as an alternative media of mass communication that makes use of new information and communication technologies, such as the internet and mobile phones, to create, store and distribute multi-media messages (Mhiripiri and Mutsvairo, 2016: 415; Mboti, 2016). Since social media are internet-based platforms, they allow users to create profiles for sharing user-generated or curated digital content in the form of text, photos, graphics, or videos within a networked community of users who can respond to the content. The terms social media and social networks are often used interchangeably, but social media are the sites that allow users to share content and connect with other users, and social networks refer to the communities of users who are found on social media sites. For this study, social media will refer to online platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp which were mainly utilised during the January 2019 National #Shutdown.

 In recent years, social media has turned out to be a massive player in shaping public discourse in a democratic space (Marda and Milan, 2018). Gerbaudo (2019: 25) noted that "[t]he efficacy of social media platforms stems from their original role as services for interpersonal networking aimed at facilitating social interactions among friends, acquaintances, and communities of interest." He further argues that in Africa, "[s]ocial media has been harnessed to make political demands on human rights, accountability and good governance" (2017:49-70). Don Schultz describes social media as "participatory and self-expressive Web sites . . . where members/participants expose, discuss, reveal, and expound on their personal lives, activities, hopes, dreams, and even fantasies for others to see and marvel upon" (2007:10). The uptake and use of social media has increased tremendously with the emergence of networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube amongst other platforms (Mhiripiri and Mutsvairo, 2016). What cannot be disputed is the interconnectedness of people from various corners of the world, who discuss and share information on these platforms. Chatora (2012) further argues that social media has facilitated the sharing and expression of

diverse opinions within the online communities. The same social media has been used as counter discourse in Zimbabwe due to the hostility and rigidity of mainstream media. Fraser (1992) equates social media to spaces for incubating dissent towards the mainstream or conventional publics. Similarly, Square (2002) notes that counter publics are spaces that stimulate debate, planning and mobilisation.

The novelty in social media is the overabundance of information it presents relative to previous communication technologies (Gerbaudo, 2019). The issue of social media as alternative media has also been studied by various scholars. According to Moyo (2020), social media space has been the go-to alternative for a country hungry for information. She argues that the same space has also been a revolutionary space for government criticism, exposure of corruption and other excesses and demands for accountability. The constricted media landscape in Zimbabwe is pushing the population to seek alternative news space, and social media is providing this. Moyo (2020) further noted that social media has become the same space that the government has its eyes on although it faces dilemmas. The government itself needs the digital media space for its own propaganda. Indeed, some scholars are of the view that the alarm around the effect of fake news has been blown out of proportion (McNair, 2017).The unlimited freedom means that social media platforms are susceptible to misuse, misinformation, and thus, fake news. But how is this some sort of evil bogey? Any medium would be abused, whether new or old. Lack of policy implementation or laws which could either curb fake news or hold the perpetrator accountable for their action have only made the situation complex and challenging.

Critics question whether social media platforms are a threat to democracy (Naughton, 2018). Internet access is still highly an urban aspect, especially in Southern Africa. This is despite the urban citizens being a disproportionally influential and vocal group in African politics. Hence social media has played a galvanising role in street protests and popular uprisings across the continent from Cameroon and Burundi to Togo and Zimbabwe. In implicit recognition of the galvanising power of the social media, an increasing number of African governments have imposed temporary shutdowns or restrictions on internet access especially during elections and more recently during major protests in a bid to halt the protests and to silence the demonstrators and the opposition parties. In another study, there was evidence that suggested that social

media is more polarised in Africa than in any other regions (Kazeem, 2016). Social media platforms, compared to the traditional and conventional media outlets, enjoy an unchecked, somewhat ungovernable space. Since social media platforms provide a free platform for expression of speech and opinions by its users, no laws can be practically implemented to restrict the freedom of the users. This makes it almost impossible to eradicate fake news from social media as the flow of information, or the content, cannot be entirely restricted. This does not however rule out the possibility to regulate the platform. There have been various regulating methods implemented by different nations to combat the propagation of fake news. These regulatory mechanisms have been initiated involving multiple stakeholders, which include self-regulation by social media platforms and legal injunction to curb fake news (Bali and Desai, 2019). Political leaders often view social media as a threat because it can provide the public with greater access to information (Molony, 2019). It also has the potential to mobilise and challenge leadership.

Certainly, social media can be considered to be a double-sided sword, where, on one hand, it can be used as a weapon of disinformation and manipulation and, on the other hand, it can be a democratic tool to fight injustice, abuse and corruption. It is therefore difficult to measure the impact of fake news using a rigid measure or formula (Rodney-Gumede, 2018). Social media activism has played a crucial role in propping up as well as challenging and even toppling an authoritarian state. The so-called Varakashi in the Zimbabwean Twittersphere are a corps of pro-government social media users who "protect" the reputation of the president ED Mnangagwa, the ruling ZANU-PF party, and the government , while attacking the opposition MDC-Alliance or any other users who attack Mnangagwa and his government on Twitter. In Saudi Arabia, the government sponsors pro-government social media activists ("the flies") to neutralise anti-governments activists ("the bees"), a struggle that came to light with the infamous assassination of Jamal Khashoggi. Social media tools are thus open to both sides, and there is no single morality or ethics that animate online politics.

When an election was called in West African State of Gambia, where the dictator Yahya Jammeh had ruled for 22 years, opposition parties and candidates had little access to state controlled media, resulting in these parties creating dozens of WhatsApp groups to communicate with their supporters (Camara, 2016). However,

other forms of social media also proliferated. A leading independent group, the Gambia Youth and Women's forum discussed election issues on a public Facebook group with over 55 000 followers. The government blocked access to the internet, but Gambians used virtual private network (VPN) technology to bypass the shutdown. Similarly, Zimbabweans turned to VPN to bypass the internet shutdown during the January 2019 National shutdown in order to access information on what was taking place. In Burundi, protestors took a prolonged demonstration to the streets in 2015 in opposition to the extension of the rule of President Pierre Nkurunzira. The government retaliated by trying to thwart the protests by closing independent media outlets and by shutting down social media. The protestors used VPN technology as well to access social media (York, 2015) in communicating what was happening during the confrontations. But there is also a dark side. Social media has been accused of generating a cacophony of opinions and information that is degrading public discourse (Mueller, 2019). In Sudan, for instance, social media has been condemned for contributing towards hatred and conflict among ethnic groups (Camara, 2016). In the same vein, social media is likened to the 'Hate radio' that flourished in Rwanda during the 1994 genocide (Grzyb, 2019).

Trajectories of Fake News in Zimbabwe

Social media penetration in Zimbabwe is highly fragmented, with a larger population in the rural areas still without access to internet, the majority of the population in the urban areas has access to social media. Access to the internet in Zimbabwe stood at 52 percent as of mid-2018, according to official government data from the telecoms regulator POTRAZ, which incorporates mobile broadband access. Despite this figure, penetration in most rural areas remains low compared to urban areas. The Information Communication Technology (ICT) market in Zimbabwe is diverse, with 12 licensed internet access providers (IAPs) and 27 internet service providers (ISPs) registered with the Zimbabwe Internet Service Providers Association (ZISPA) as of 2017. ISPs and mobile phone companies are regulated by the Postal and Telecommunications Regulatory Authority of Zimbabwe (POTRAZ), whose leaders are appointed by the president in consultation with the minister of information communication technologies and courier services.

For "Zimbabwe's online landscape continues to grow in vibrancy, with Facebook, Google, Yahoo, and YouTube among the most popular websites among Zimbabwean internet users (Freedom House, 2018). Increasing access to ICTs has spawned numerous citizen initiatives, such as the @OpenParlyZw Twitter account, owned by the youth ICT network Magamba that actively monitors parliamentary activities. Magamba also runs a weekly Facebook comic analysis of key national issues titled "This Week," and carries interviews on key national issues. Other citizen journalism efforts on social media, such as @263 on Twitter, have morphed into full-fledged online news outlets that engage in debates on citizen issues . It is in this context that media researchers have examined the ways in which digital platforms have been creatively used to expand political participation (Margetts, 2018).Others have looked at the emergent phenomenon of social media dissidence" (cf. Matsilele, 2019), while others have focused on the political uses of memes (cf. Kasiyamhuru, 2019). A significant body of literature on social media in the Zimbabwean context, for instance, has previously focused on how youths make use of social media platforms for political activism (Mare, 2017). On the other hand, a growing body of scholarship has also focused on political parties in Zimbabwe make use of social media platforms during national elections (Gukurume, 2017). The nexus between "fake news" and social media regulation reflects a gap in the literature.

With street protests largely neutered by the police and army in Zimbabwe (the post-election violence of 2018 a case in point), it has been argued that the battleground between the government and the opposition has shifted to social media (Gukurume, 2017). In fact, social media polarisation has become pronounced in Zimbabwe in recent years. Zimbabwean politicians and independent activists often use Facebook and Twitter to reach large online audiences with little to no state interference. Social media wars have become regular occurrences (Wasserman, 2017) with opinions being disseminated instantly to wide and potentially global audience. Wasserman argues that social media statements between politicians tend to be provocative with the desired results being to attract likes or retweets. Movement for Democratic leader, Nelson Chamisa in 2018 claimed that he reached over 80 000 people with his regular Facebook live appearances (Thompson, 2019). Pastor Evan Mawarire rose to fame through videos that he released on Facebook and the #ThisFlag that he uses on

Twitter (York, 2016). Most of Mawarire's supporters would tweet taunting the police that they could not shoot a hashtag, highlighting the power of the social media.

In fact, the first online dissident in Zimbabwe was a shadowy Facebook figure calling himself Baba Jukwa who captured the nation's political imagination between 2012 and 2015 (cf. Matsilele 2019). Social media also became a key source of information for citizens as well as activists in Zimbabwe during the ouster of long-time leader, Robert Mugabe, by the army in November and December 2017, helping capture critical moments of the political transition. Civil society widely used Facebook, WhatsApp, and Twitter to mobilize calls for Mugabe's resignation amid tensions with the military with popular hashtags including #MugabeMustGo, #AriseZimbabwe, and #FreshStart. Indeed, fake news" in its various online guises in the Zimbabwean media landscape can be said to have crossed a threshold since November 2017 when Robert Mugabe was compelled to leave office by the military (Wasserman, 2019). This opinion is supported by the view that most things in Zimbabwe changed in November 2017. Certainly, the political scene changed, in ways that we are still coming to terms with.

The flood of fake news following the coup was somewhat unprecedented and helped to increase anxiety in amidst the country's first change in leadership since 1980. False reports revolved around the whereabouts of Mugabe and his family, including reports that Mugabe's wife Grace Mugabe had fled to Namibia, something which the Namibian government publicly denied. The spread of unverified reports intensified the public's anxiety and fears during the country's unprecedented political transition. Fake stories also spread about which of Mugabe's allies had been arrested or killed. In the shadow of conspiracy, and in the absence of trustworthy news sources, the rumour mill went into overdrive. False information also fuelled political attacks on the opposition in the lead up to the elections in July 2018. For example, state controlled media attacked the main opposition MDC Alliance leader Nelson Chamisa with falsified reports of his campaign strategies and actions, such as the story that Chamisa was mingling with former President Mugabe, who had since been removed and become an object of vilification by the media. More fake stories abounded on social media during this time. Another example was that of Kirsty Coventry – the Olympic swimmer who is Zimbabwe's Minister of Youth, Sport, Arts and Recreation – who was incorrectly said

to have quit the government out of disgust at the abuses. She issued a statement on social media disclaiming the false news.

Mberi (2019) argues that the, "[m]edia environment in Zimbabwe has long been polarised. State media are blindly in support of the government while the private media back the opposition, and also self-censor to avoid harassment". Regardless, when major events happen, the main news sources for many Zimbabweans currently is WhatsApp, Facebook and Twitter (Mberi, 2019). Thus, with a discredited government press, and slow and often unreliable mainstream media, there is no doubt that Zimbabwe is a goldmine for purveyors of fake news (Mberi, 2019). With its own communications structures in disarray, the government is arguably desperate to find a way to fight back against the rise of fake news posts and websites . Given the continuing political contestations, it is only fair to say that the political environment in Zimbabwe has augmented the problems of fake news. While the Zimbabwean government blamed social media for spreading fake news in January 2019, resulting into the shutting down of the internet, critics, opposition politicians, and media scholars tended to be sceptical of government motives. In general, scholars are wary of the tendencies by governments to scapegoat fake news while advancing their hegemonic tendencies (Yglesias, 2016).

There is a dearth in literature systematically engaging the history of 'fake news' in Zimbabwe. There are no existing studies of its genealogy, its local features, how it started or how it is defined. What is not in is the fact that "fake news" has existed in Zimbabwe prior to its contemporary online manifestation. It might not have been called fake news, as it is now, but certainly it existed in one form or another. During Mugabe's tenure, constant speculation of a political nature circulated every now and then. For instance, rumour persisted throughout Mugabe's reign that he was infertile, and therefore that his children were not his. News on the street about his wife, Grace Mugabe, proliferated in whispers about her alleged affairs. Deaths of politicians such as Moven Mahachi and Border Gezi, and socialites such as Peter "Pams" Pamire, and other citizens such as Rashiwe Guzha, were whispered to have been caused by a hidden hand. Purported "fake news" on his death and divorce circulated widely during his tenure. Mugabe himself noted these rumours, when he stated in 2012, "I have died many times. That's where I have beaten Christ. Christ died once and resurrected once.

I have died and resurrected, and I don't know how many times I will die and resurrect."[22] The iron-grip that Mugabe had on the free circulation of dissenting political opinions were the fertile ground for these whispering campaigns.

It seems that developments around "fake news" within the Zimbabwean context should be understood in relation to broader Zimbabwean political developments (Masuku, 2019). Although its meaning has evolved over the years, social media has amplified political discourse and positioned "fake news" as a focal point in current political debates . As social media continues to provide endless opportunities to have emotionally charged and one-sided or multi-sided discussions, it is important to note how these public discussions, including those about "fake news," have implications for society and are believed by some to be the truth . For this reason, the phenomenon of "fake news", the discourses that surround it and responses by audiences and the journalistic community have to be understood within particular social, cultural and political contexts . Thus, the issue of social media regulation should not be separated from the current, highly charged, political context prevailing in Zimbabwe. There is no doubt that 'fake news' (at least the fake news that we are interested in in this current study) have increasingly taken a strongly political and ideological form, and that this has become intricate and complex.

Merlo (2017:26) observes that "[h]ostile government actors have also been involved in generating and propagating fake news, particularly during election times". This harps back to the point already made that social media is a double edged sword. The uses of social media are not limited to anti-government formations. Thus, the Zimbabwean government also stands accused for aiding and abetting fake news, a strategy that has been linked to a statement made by the current President. Emerson Mnangagwa was quoted at a rally in 2018 instructing his (ZANU PF) party youth to engage ruthlessly with opposition supporters on social media: "*Tambai navo muSocial Media imomo. Musakundwe muSocial Media. Pindai, morakasha vanhu muSocial Media*" (Loosely translated as "Go and engage with them on social media. Make sure you defeat and destroy our opponents on social media" (Moyo, 2019). "This saw the christening of ZANUPF's new online army, known as the *Varakashi* (the destroyers),

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[22] https://mg.co.za/article/2019-09-06-robert-gabriel-mugabe-1924-2019-a-tragedy-in-three-acts/

whose purpose appears to be to cyberbully or harass government critics into silence . The continued confrontations between the Zanu-PF's "online warriors" against the MDC's "*Nerrorists*" (after Chamisa's nickname, "Nero") in the unprecedented online propaganda war has also contributed to the rise of 'fake news' on social media. One particular incident in January 2020, between presidential spokesperson George Charamba and a supposed *Murakashi* (singular for *varakashi*), Kudzai Mutisi, tweeting as @ KMutisi, inadvertently gave credence to the belief that the government pays online social media trolls . Charamba chastised Mutisi for failing to toe the official line and said he was holding to ridicule "the very system that pays [him]". This raised eyebrows: a senior member of the government seemed to be admitting that government paid trolls to defend the party and attack opponents .

Despite it being something of a cliché, it is true that in contexts like Zimbabwe with restricted media spaces, social media plays a key role in democratising public discourse, expanding sources of information and enabling the enjoyment of inalienable rights as espoused in the 2013 Constitution (Mare, 2018). The Zimbabwean media environment is heavily politicised and the media are inevitably caught up in this very conundrum. The media, for instance, has been blamed for the lack a sense of balance and fairness in their coverage of issues (Mare, 2018). State-owned media parrot the ruling party's line and disparage the opposition, while independent media patronise an anti-government line that is also largely sympathetic to the opposition MDC-A. As such questions arise on the ability of the Zimbabwean media to play their role as the fourth estate in the interest of the public and of democracy. The need, and the ability, for media to abide by its principles such as to seek truth, act independently and to minimize harm is compromised (Oosthuizen, 2014).

Some scholars point the finger at the Zimbabwean government's repressive media policies, which they say drove Zimbabwean political discourse onto social networking platforms where people could experience relatively unfettered political exchange (Mare, 2017). This is the sense in which social media could be said to have emerged as an alternative public sphere in a context where the repressive system has "decapitated" the mainstream media (Moyo, 2011). Social media emerged as arenas enabling Zimbabweans to contest government's, ruling party's, and security forces narratives about the economy, human rights abuses, corruption, and real or perceived

electoral malpractices (Moyo, 2011).The rise in online activities in Zimbabwe has thus resulted in the exponential growth of new media sites such as Bus Stop TV, Magamba TV, CITE, Big Saturday Read, Gravitas Bulletin, Comic Pastor and @263 Chat. These media afford an alternative voice and help to contest dominant narratives. The arrest and jailing of whistleblower Hopewell Chin'ono showed that Twitter can be used throw authorities into panic and keep power (relatively) accountable by reporting on corruption in the public sector and on other issues of public interest. Magamba TV, Bus Stop TV and Comic Pastor use political satire to poke holes into the dominant narrative promoted by the ruling ZANU-PF and the state mouthpieces such as *The Herald* and ZBC. *Gravitas Bulletin* and *Big Saturday Read*, through op-eds, have stretched the limits of traditional media in discussing public affairs.

CITE, meanwhile, has managed to use online documentaries to give voice to the victims of the 1980s genocide in Matabeleland who previously had been unheard . However, there are some cases in Zimbabwe that reveal that social media is not always a glorious liberating space where democratic voices and aspirations always prevail. Social media also challenges hegemonic discourses in Zimbabwe. Mhiripiri and Moyo (2016) have shown how the LGBTI community are often hounded out of such public platforms like social media. These examples, and that of the Varakashi from the other end of the spectrum, shows how some Zimbabweans across the ideological spectrum are resorting to online platforms for political communication. This is the context in which I discuss the role of social media in Zimbabwe during the January 2019 National #Shutdown.

MEDIA REGULATION IN ZIMBABWE: A SNAPSHOT

That the media in Zimbabwe has witnessed varying degrees of control by government is now a cliché (Chuma, 2014;Mhiripiri and Mutsvairo, 2014;Chitagu,2018;Moyo,2018 and Mare,2018). Media laws in Zimbabwe, particularly the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA) and Broadcasting Services Act have been deemed excessive and repressive by media groups and journalists' associations such as the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA) and the Zimbabwe Union of Journalists (ZUJ) . While the state-owned media typically reports the preferred government line, the independent media is shackled by restrictive laws and regulations as well as unwritten rules about not piercing the veil of those in power. Whereas the

Zimbabwean constitution promotes freedom of the media and expression, this is hampered by the application of laws such as the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA), the Public Order and Security Act (POSA) and the Broadcasting Services Act (BSA) . These laws are in the process of being replaced as part of the Mnangagwa's government "reform" agenda, but there is not much expectation that the news regulations will be any better than those they replaced (Moyo, Oluyinka and Chabwinja, 2018).

Observers have not seen any encouraging signs from the rest of the behaviour by the Second Republic. Instead, the sense that people get is that the more things change the more they remain the same. There is scepticism because, nearly a decade after the adoption of the 2013 Constitution, which ushered a universally acceptable Bill of Rights, there has not been any meaningful shift in the country's legislation or policies to make these constitutional gains a reality, (cf. MISA, 2016). Furthermore, observers have argued that the provisions of the Cyber Bill seem to be targeted at restricting social media spaces. POTRAZ, the regulator, is expected to operate independently but, in practice, its independence has eroded over the years, becoming increasingly subsumed by security organs of the state. In October 2016, for example, a former director within the intelligence agency, Gift Machengete, was appointed as director-general of POTRAZ, which observers believe is part of the government's plans to monitor and restrict online activities.

There seems to be consensus that most of the restrictive media laws in Zimbabwe were promulgated in the early 2000s at the time when economic and political crises took root in the country. To stay in power, one of the things that had to happen was to control the narrative. The government of Robert Mugabe thus sought to "manage" bad publicity through media control (Moyo, 2009). The tenure of Jonathan Moyo as Minister of Information coincided with this shift to a polarised and openly restrictive media environment. It is in such a media environment that new communications technologies such as mobile phones, the internet, and satellite broadcasting emerged as powerful tools for political mobilisation, advocacy, and citizen participation in the national political discourse, (Moyo, 2009). The course set then still obtains today (Moyo, Oluyinka and Chabwinja, 2018). The mainstream public media continue to be

typically used by political elites for political manoeuvring, repositioning and consolidation of power in the more than two decades-long "crisis" (Chari, 2010) while ordinary Zimbabweans, on the other hand, increasingly rely on social media for venting their anger and coping with their everyday struggles (Mpofu, 2015; Moyo, 2009). In such a context, digital media technologies continue to offer citizens a means to create content and speak directly to their own audiences.

Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA)

The promulgation and coming into law of AIPPA in 2002 under the stewardship of the now exiled former Minister of Information, Jonathan Moyo, heralded one of the most difficult periods for the media in Zimbabwe. AIPPA governed the operations and general conduct of the media in a way that left the media with little breathing space (Mtetwa, 2016). AIPPA provided for access to information held by public bodies [Section 78], but it was up to the heads of these bodies to decide what they will and will not release "in the public interest". Ironically, it is not the public that decides what is in their interest but the government officials. The Act allowed public officials to hold information for thirty days after a request for information is made, which may be impractical for journalists (Feltoe, 2003). The stated objective of the Act was summarised in its preamble as follows :

> To provide members of the public with a right of access to records and information held by public bodies; to make public bodies accountable by giving the public a right to request correction of misrepresented personal information; to prevent the unauthorised collection, use or disclosure of personal information by public bodies; to protect personal privacy; to provide for the regulation of the mass media; to establish a Media and Information Commission and to provide for matters connected therewith or incidental to the foregoing (Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (5 of 2002:5).

Thus, according to AIPPA, "Any published statement, which is intentionally, unreasonably, recklessly, maliciously or fraudulently false and either (1) threatens the interest of defense, public safety, public order, the economic interests of the state, public morality or public health or, (2) is injurious to the reputation, rights and freedoms of other persons, will be punished."

AIPPA's trail of shackles for the media can be traced to its enactment in 2002 and the plethora of arrests, intimidation, harassment and measures of control which immediately followed (Moyo, 2018).These have been directed at media workers of all sorts - journalists, editors, photographers, even newspaper vendors and even drivers - as well as media outlets, in particular independent print Media (Mhiripiri and Ureke, 2018). The government's determination to maintain AIPPA as its shield against criticism and exposure of corruption in higher offices came in the wake of the closure of the African Tribune Newspapers in February 2005 (Thakurta: 2009). Since AIPPA's enactment, independent Zimbabwean journalists and media practitioners have continued to endure harassment, self-censorship and threats as the media landscape continued to wither under the pressure of state censorship .This left the media with little space to fulfil its public watchdog status as the fourth estate, which plays and speak-truth-to-power role against government. Citizens have thus been systematically deprived of their right to know, freedom of expression and the right to access information. Media space in Zimbabwe has continuously shrunk since the initial closure of Associated Newspapers of Zimbabwe (ANZ), publishers of the mass circulating *The Daily News* and *The Daily News on Sunday*, on 12 September 2003, and the bombing of their printing press.

Interception of Communications Act

In light of the discussion in chapter 1 where I observed that the military-led ZANU PF government frames social media as an "asymmetric threat" and as intent on "command and control", it became clear – in particular during interviews – that social media is firmly in the cross hairs of the military establishment as a national security matter. Whether or not this framing is justified, it allows government to treat digital networks as tools that are potentially in the hands of hostile forces. This therefore justifies, in their eyes, regulations such as the Cyber Bill. Such intent from the securocrats was always there. Prior to the Cyber Bill, the Interception of Communications Act (ICA), dubbed the 'spying act', was signed into law in August 2007. The purpose of the Act as stated in the overview is:

> To provide for the lawful interception and monitoring of certain communications in the course of their transmission through a telecommunication, postal or any other related service or system in Zimbabwe; to provide for the establishment of a monitoring centre; and

to provide for any other matters connected with or incidental to the foregoing (Interception of Communications Act (6 of 2007:2).

The Act empowers the government to open private postal mail, eavesdrop on telephone conversations and intercept faxes and e-mails. The chief of defence intelligence, the director-general of the Central Intelligence Office (CIO), the commissioner of police, the commissioner general of the Zimbabwe Revenue Authority (ZIMRA) , or any of their nominees are authorised to request interception warrants from the minister of transport and communications without any mention of court permission being granted for such requests .

According to Section 9 of the Act, internet service providers (ISPs) and telecommunications operators must install the necessary monitoring software themselves at their own cost to assist the government in its spying mission. The interception of communication has been justified as appropriate for national security purposes. The definition of 'national security' in Section 2 is vague and needs to be reconsidered. National security has been defined as "matters relating to the existence, independence and safety of the state" (Interception of Communications Act 6 of 2007:3). During the January 2019 National # Shutdown, analysts argued that The Interception of Communications Act 2007 could not be used to justify an internet shutdown because the Act does not provide for the suspension of any communications. The Act only provided for the lawful monitoring & interception of communication. The minister of state in the office of the president does not have the power to switch off the internet. The application challenging the internet shutdown was brought by civic society organisations.

The Cyber Crime, Cyber Security and Data Protection Bill of 2019
This bill was recently passed in Zimbabwe in October 2019 and was recently debated in Parliament. It now awaits assent from the president. While the Bill has not been made law yet, it aims to monitor Zimbabweans' use of social media platforms including WhatsApp, Twitter and Facebook, and penalise those who are disseminating "offensive" material. In its technical sense, the bill seeks to "….. combat cyber-crime and increase cyber security in order to build confidence and trust in the secure use of information communication technologies." More specifically the bill provides for the

"provision and approval of codes of conduct and ethics to be observed by all categories of data controllers, data protection with due regard to constitutional rights and public interest under the Postal, Telecommunication and Regulatory Authority of Zimbabwe". It also seeks to "provide penalties for the transmission of data messages inciting violence and damage to property, protection of citizens against cyber bullying and harassment, measures to address the dissemination of racist and xenophobic material". Moyo (2018) argues that the Bill is politically motivated and an attempt to censor what kind of information leaves the country. The bill is said to be an attempt to deal with fake news as the bill provides penalties for distribution of information one knows is false. Whilst this may be the norm the world over, it will be interesting to see how this part of the bill is implemented considering that any time there are protests the opposition is said to have incited violence. Scholars such as Ncube (2019) fear that this will become one of the multitudes of ways used to censor opposition parties.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has discussed literature on fake news and social media regulation by focusing on definitions, history and developments around the concepts. The literature also enabled the discussion of social media use and government responses in various countries. From the literature, it is evident that 'fake news' still poses some definitional challenges to both scholars and governments. In this study, fake news is used to denote deliberate disinformation that is a result of purely fabricated, misleading, and verifiably inaccurate information spread on social media. Our case study is the January 2019 National #Shutdown. It was also established that both citizens and governments are very active on social media, for different reasons and this has led to a proliferation of unverified information. Resultantly, most governments are calling for the regulation of social media platforms under the guise of stopping the spread of fake news in order to enhance their propagandist and hegemonic tendencies despite the difficulties of defining what fake news is.

"Breaking news," is cited by Zubiaga et al., 2016) as one of the main functions of social media in contemporary societies. The problem is that not all that is being shared on social media is credible. It is, however, the pervasive use of bots, a software program that systematically posts automated attention-grabbing tweets to promote a person, product, or ideology, which has courted controversy for purportedly acting as

grounds for potential manipulation among Twitter users . These concerns have been compounded by findings in a recent study that 15% of Twitter's current community of active users are bots (Varol et al., 2017). From a business perspective, it is understandable why social media platforms account for much of what the "fake news" empire produces and disseminates. These platforms generate advertising revenue (Picard and Pickard, 2017). Another problem arising from the absence of clear definitions is that national laws criminalising ''fake'' or ''false'' news are susceptible to misuse and abuse through arbitrary interpretation and enforcement. The next chapter will discuss the theoretical framework for this study .

CHAPTER 3

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Introduction

This study is informed and guided by Jürgen Habermas' theory of the public sphere which, I argue, not only manifests in the cyber sphere but is an aspect of political communication. This is important because I am not only looking at fake news as entertaining gossip or something with which to kill time but an element of political contestation. Social media thus transforms the public sphere into a public political arena. Fake news is therefore seen not just as any pointless distraction but, rather, political spectacle, or spectacular politics. If the military sees fake news as a platform for "command and control", and something with targeting with a Cyber Bill, then, the public sphere cannot just be a social real for forming public opinion. Instead, it becomes a civic and political realm for forming political opinions. There is an element of participation in it, which makes it transformative rather than just an elite bubble. This chapter therefore discusses key theoretical concepts on the public sphere and explains their importance and applicability to the study. The discussion will centre on how Habermas' notion of the public sphere can be applied to social media and to the Zimbabwe situation obtaining in January 2019.

Contextualising the public sphere

Habermas' public sphere, as a social realm in which public opinion is formed when (A portion of the public sphere comes into being in every conversation in which private individuals assemble to form a public body) (Habermas 1974: 28), is critical to this study because it spells out the process whereby people, on being presented with a dialogic platform, make up their own minds in a manner that benefits themselves and society. We cannot underestimate the value of people making up their minds about what is going on in their surroundings. Habermas defines the notion of the public thus: "We call events and occasions 'public' when they are open to all, in contrast to close or exclusive affairs" (Habermas 1989c: 1). For Habermas, the concept of a public sphere plays an important role in realising democracy. But before the public sphere can work, the public needs to have both right and opportunity to express and exchange their opinions on public affairs (Tang and Shi, 2001). This public sphere is also

considered as both a process and space given that in times of mobilisation, the balance of power between the general population and the ruling government is disturbed (Habermas,1996). Initially, cultural, communication and media studies rooted the idea of a public sphere in the mass media. However, with the emergence of the internet, and the flourishing of social media, the notion of a public sphere has morphed into cyber sphere, with Habermas himself returning to the concept, revising and updating it (Wright, 2012).

For Habermas, ([1989] 1991: 27) 'public sphere' resonates with a place where private people come together as a public for the purpose of using reason to further critical knowledge. In order for this 'space' to be called a 'public sphere' and for it to function, it requires unlimited access to information, equal and protected participation, and the absence of institutional influence, particularly regarding the economy. The public sphere concept is multi-faceted and can be approached from different angles. To complicate it further, Habermas makes a distinction between the political public sphere and the literal one. The literal one, he writes, refers to 'a realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed. 'The political public sphere on the other hand refers to when 'public discussion deals with objects connected to the activities of the state" (Abioye and Mnyongani, 2009: 182-198).The realisation or actualisation of these two public spheres depends on the existence of an environment that guarantees certain rights and freedoms. These guaranteed rights and freedoms are access to the public sphere, freedom of assembly and association, and freedom of expression.

 Various scholars have come up with theoretical arguments extending Habermas' "public sphere" to social media (Fuchs 2012; Jenkins 2006; Loader and Mercea 2011; Papacharissi 2010; Sørensen 2016)". "Social media's general structure appears to provide unlimited access to information and equal, protected, participation (Kruse, Norris and Flinchum, 2017). These are some of the prerequisites that Habermas identified as necessary for the 'public sphere' to function. In addition to this, scholars observe that the "internet is relatively accessible and, in theory, anyone can distribute information, making both participation and information acquisition free from outside influence (Fuchs 2012; Halpern and Gibbs 2013; Jenkins 2006; Loader and Mercea 2011; Van Dijk 2012). Fuchs (2012) further argues that social media sites, Facebook

in particular, offer favourable conditions for the public sphere. In support of this notion of social media sites being spaces for 'public sphere', Loader and Mercea argue that social media may revitalize the public sphere by allowing people "to challenge discourses, share alternative perspectives and publish their own opinions(2011:760). For Shirky (2008, 2011), social media has revitalized the public sphere. The scholar further argues that the networked population is gaining greater access to information, more opportunities to engage in public speech, and an enhanced ability to undertake collective action (2011: 29).

Thus, while access to the public sphere is said to be open to all, state authority it is excluded. The political public sphere sets the context within which state authority can be understood and defined. The exercise of political power must account to the democratic processes and the people, and only when this happens will the political public sphere be realised. The possibility that cell phones and the internet will empower citizens, relative to their regimes, has long been embraced by the cyber-utopians. As Fuchs (2012) observes, the freedom to connect is like the freedom of assembly, only in cyberspace. It allows individuals to get online, come together, and hopefully co-operate" (Fuchs, 2012). Conversely, it can be argued that with the exception of censorship and regime interference, the negative qualities of social media are most relevant to users in democracies.

 Jürgen Habermas' (1981) public sphere theory describes an environment in which individuals are able to critically discuss relevant issues and reach consensus regarding public matters. Much has been written regarding the evolution of the public sphere and its modern profile and function. When formulating his thesis, Habermas recognized that the public sphere was being expressed and manifested in coffee houses, table societies, salons, and other public places". WaThiong'o seems to be suggesting that a concept such as Habermas' public sphere was not exactly new to Africa (Cf. Tomaselli, Mboti and Ronning 2013). More importantly, he seems to be dramatising the concept of an alternative public sphere that spills out from the restricted and elite walls of the coffee house. However, this study explores how the public sphere has been manifested in the online community, utilizing social media which many individuals exchange information and opinions and discuss relevant matters. In this

particular study, there is need to explore the nature of "fake news" that was present on this cyber sphere that led to the government to shut down the internet.

The public sphere is a space where individuals exchange ideas, debate, and ideally reach some consensus on issues of political relevance. It is essentially a communication network where citizens can interact and share information and opinions that can have an influence over the state and its rulers (Habermas, 1996). Social media such as Facebook, Twitter are public sphere spaces used by Zimbabwean people as communication tools to highlight the height of what was happening during the demonstrations. This is despite having some of the population still cut form internet access. The interactive nature of the digital media platforms has given rise to talk of digital public sphere. In the available literature, it is generally agreed that the growth of the digital public sphere in Zimbabwe has largely been influenced by the repressive nature of Zimbabwean politics, especially post-2000 (Chibuwe and Ureke 2016; Moyo 2009, 2011).

The sharing of information and exchange of opinions in the bourgeois society that Habermas examined took place in the salons, coffee houses, and table societies, though in modern society this exchange occurs in a variety of locales. A variety of spheres, including mass media, the Internet, and a multitude of social networks intersect and overlap to form a global, multimodal communication space, what Castells terms —the new global public sphere (2012: 89-90). The public sphere, in contemporary society, has been shaped by the conditions in which modern society is situated. Much in the same way that citizens have changed how they communicate and obtain information, so has the environment in which they discuss and critique change. The public sphere by definition connotes the idea of citizenship in the open, accessible to all (Habermas, 1981; Papacharissi, 2002); however, various limits are often imposed on the communication process. In the context of a network society, the public sphere has undergone transformations that distinguish it from the ideal of the bourgeois public sphere that Habermas initially described; it has become what Castells refers to as the new public sphere. The public sphere is no exception and has taken on new characteristics as a result of the networking of virtually everything. Castells calls this the new public sphere or the new global public sphere (2008). Manuel

Castells identifies that modern society is a highly connected one whose social structure is made up of networks powered by microelectronic-based information and communication technologies (2004: 3); Castells calls this the network society.

A network society is an open, evolving structure comprised of a series of interconnected nodes, bearing no centre (2004; 2006). Society is by its very nature composed of overlapping social networks; however, the distinction here is that a network society is mediated by Information Communication Technologies (ICT) and Internet access, which facilitates a social structure based on these modern technologies. Firstly, the new public sphere has grown past national borders, mainly through the advent of global media-systems, which, for Castells, includes:

> Mass self-communication networks ...that is, networks of communication that relate many-to-many in the sending and receiving of messages in a multimodal form of communication that bypasses mass media and often escapes government control. (Castells, 2008: 90)

This is a key characteristic of modern society: the ability to communicate internationally in an unrestricted manner. This is what the social media has enabled before this current call from the various governments to have this platform regulated. This study explores the lexus between social media regulation and fake news during the January 2019 National #Shutdown in Zimbabwe where various authors believe that the citizens had come together to discuss national issues on the social media (Mberi, 2019).

Not only are individuals and groups able to communicate locally and globally, but they are able to share and access information as well as form interest groups. The nature of the Internet also allows this information to be stored for later access, creating a —repository of the ideas and projects that feed public debate (Castells, 2008: 79). Facebook and other social media tools are chronicling a history on the Internet that can be accessed and used from virtually anywhere in the world by anyone with a smartphone or Internet connection. These stores of information are useful at the local and global level and are representative of the informationalism of the network society. Facebook are often accused of being used for mostly trivial purposes; users are free to create their own content. The Internet allows individuals to not only communicate

with one another, but also collaborate and share information. Shirky (2011) identifies that all the above forms of communication have migrated to the Internet. This produced a —denser, more complex, and more participatory media population (Ibid: 2) creating the conditions for a better informed, more discursive, and more inclusive environment. The first major element of the public sphere is universality. Universality presupposes equality among participants (Habermas, 1989). When the status of participants elevates them over others, their arguments are elevated with them, removing the ability for consensus to be reached through discussion and argumentation and preventing any agreement reached from reflecting the group. The Internet has proven to be a space that is highly conducive to this type of universality, as individuals can much more easily hide their identities. The only indicators of an individual's social status on Facebook are their username – not necessarily their real name – and profile picture – should they choose to use one.

It can be argued that the Zimbabwean government panicked as the calls swelled and the posting of what was happening gained momentum. "In a frantic effort to counteract what they expected to be a condemnation" of civil rights abuse from all corners of the world, the government cut off Internet and mobile phone networks across the country. This can be considered as a move of desperation on the part of the government. They had run out of options at that point, (Mberi, 2019). Thus, the internet blackout was indicative of just how threatened the government was by Internet technologies.

Although social networks seem to be public spaces, where masses of people have similar and simultaneous experiences, in reality we have to deal with countless sets of private conversations that take place without our knowledge. The ghost of the public sphere is fragmented and submerged in billions of individual capillaries. (Mberi, 2019) The notion of censorship is commonly associated with totalitarian regimes. It should not be confused with a certain form of control that states can and must exercise on information for legitimate purposes, such as the protection of human rights or the safeguarding of public interest. An extreme right troll, for example, should not (and could not) be blocked on the Internet, but the algorithms that ensure its public attention can and should be controlled. Thus, it can be argued that if people choose to believe, "fake news", this becomes real news and hence regulation must not interfere with private decision making.

This theoretical framework is therefore ideal for this study because it has a link to both the ordinary events and political dimension which include issues that touch on public participation, democracy and the current economic challenges that the country is facing. This theory also resonates well with the research objectives that seek to explore the nexus of fake news and social media regulation in Zimbabwe using the January 2019 National # Shutdown as a backdrop to understand exactly how "fake news" figures in the media regulation matrix.

The exchanging of ideas and the interaction between the individuals has reached a high level, thanks to the use of social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp. Users can communicate freely with each-other and consequently can come together for a certain theme (Fuchs, 2011). Communicating online means to publish online, which on the other hand refers to being connected online with other people. The published content in the social media is reachable from anyone throughout the world. This eliminates the physical and infrastructure obstacles, which means that freedom of the speech is now the freedom of the press and as a consequence the freedom to gather together (Fuchs, 2014:185). It was never as easy as it is now for the people to come together and be organised to express their criticism or to contradict a certain matter that concerns a certain community. Habermas asserts that events and occasions are public when they, in contrast to closed or exclusive affairs, are open to all, in the same sense as we speak of public places or public houses (Habermas 1989:1).

The public sphere appears as a specific domain, the public domain versus the private, where communicative action can flourish and form public opinion (Ibid: 2). It is through communicative actions in the public sphere that lifeworld gains its potential for opposing the system, by fostering the public's role as a critical judge (Ibid). Cyberspace therefore holds potential for a stronger diversity of opinions and expressions, as they actually exist in society, thus strengthening the public discourse and sphere. The increased focus on Internet regulation, whether by applying existing laws, developing Internet-specific laws, applying content-based license terms to ISPs, or governments' encouragement of self-regulation by private parties, are all examples

of the political system gaining control over still more areas of the initially free public sphere of the cyberspace (Cela, 2017). Keller (2017) suggested that the public sphere theory provides important theoretical understanding of the spheres and its relationship to democracy. He noted that social media have created new spaces for political intervention that have potential to invigorate democracy while fostering greater manipulation and social control.

On the other hand, various scholars draw our attention to the limitations of the theory. Kovisto and Valiverronen (1996:18-36) see the public sphere not as domain, but as a process of counter-hegemonic struggles. Baumgartner and Morris (2010), Fuchs (2012) and Gladwell (2010) argued against the notion of social media having revitalised the public sphere, noting the absence of equal access and participation on these platforms. Jenkins (2006) pointed out that not everyone has access to internet, adding that the social media have not been free of institutional influence. On the other hand, Papacharissi (2002) argued that social media have brought a new dimension to the discussion of the public sphere. A public sphere emerges where people struggle for a better society and their struggle is a process of constituting the public that creates spatial domains of resistance in the public. Despite the criticism of this theoretical framework, it resonates very well with what was happening in Zimbabwe during the January 2019 National #Shutdown. The creation of public spheres does not just take place in the West, but also in many parts of the world in times of global capitalist and social crisis.

In Africa, the idea of public sphere has been found to be very useful especially for political communication (Suleiman, 2017). However, despite its usefulness, the notion poses certain conceptual difficulties given the historical underpinnings in Africa. Furthermore, the literature on the possibilities, or not, of the internet and online platforms enabling the emergence of virtual public spheres and inclusive citizens' political participation is abundant (Dahlgren, 2005; Downey and Fenton, 2003; Papacharissi, 2002). "Some researchers argue that such social transformations are brought by the social media and are already manifesting in the twenty-first century Africa, (Manganga, 2012; Mustapha, 2012; Ya'u, 2012). Manganga (2012:103) for instance, demonstrated that the internet has proved to be a useful alternative public

sphere for Zimbabweans both at home and in the diaspora for engaging the government and broadening political participation in the country. Thus, in Africa, "public sphere" is implied in discussions of the relationships between the media, civil society and the state in the continent thereby making critical, rational debate all nigh impossible.

There is little doubt that social media is being reinvented to increase political engagement in Africa as evidenced by the various African politicians who have taken advantage of this relatively new public sphere (Jacobs, 2015). Many countries where information used to be subject to absolute government control have seen unprecedented public debate and the arguable emergence of a fresh kind of public sphere (Deane, 2005, p. 181). On the other hand, Fraser (1990) suggests that the conception of the public sphere set out by Habermas effectively excluded the poor. A similar exclusion of the poor from the modern public sphere is arguably happening today, witnessed in the growing lack of interest by the media in public interest issues. Many authors have stressed the potential for, or limit of, the social media to advance political communication (Benkler 2006; Dahlberg 2001, 2004; Dahlgren 2005, 2009; and Papacharissi 2002, 2009), whereas a smaller number have also stressed that aspects of the political economy of the media and the social media relate directly to the concept of the public sphere (Garnham 1992; Sparks 2001). Social media would be "coordinating tools for nearly all of the world's political movements, just as most of the world's authoritarian governments (and, alarmingly, an increasing number of democratic ones) are trying to limit access to it (Shirky, 2011:30). Shirky further noted that there are attempts to control, censor and monitor social media, but argues at the same time that these attempts are unlikely to be successful in the long run and that social media are long-term tools that can strengthen civil society and the public sphere (2011:32).

Papacharissi (2010) argues that there is a limitation to the public sphere because unmediated public debates on social media are now being run by selfish people. Fuchs (2011) argues that the democratizing potential of social media platforms is now being mediated by trolls and bots, who have a leading role in spreading fake news. Trolls are people who are paid to provoke disagreements and doubts with offensive posts.

They can also be considered as people who are hired to create positive propaganda about a politician or even a whole country (Tornberg, 2019). Reda (2018) added that trolls manipulate the public opinion by using misleading campaigns, fake news and clickbait which are not supported by facts.

Habermas, Lennox and Lennox (1964: 49) postulate that by public sphere, we mean first of all a realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed. They further argued that policies and decisions by governments are influenced and shaped through this public sphere on social media. To Gerhards and Schäfer (2010) public sphere serves as a space to share information and debates. Papacharissi (2009) sounds a note of caution when she makes the observation that only a few individuals who are able to access the internet are the ones who enjoy its benefits as a public space; hence, the idea of the internet being an open public sphere remains an illusion. In addition, Papacharissi (2009) suggests that online political discussions are somewhat too specific to achieve Habermas' notion of an ideal public sphere, in the sense that online communication usually takes place between individuals who already know each other offline. On the other hand, it can thus be argued that with the growing popularity of mobile phones and social media especially amongst youths globally, information spreads rapidly in a viral nature within a short space of time.

Social Media as a Public Sphere

Previously, the media worked as a link between information providers and audiences. However, this has changed with the advent of social media where information is not only generated but also propagated. Thus, social media is often accused of shaping public debate and unfairly engineering people's behaviour and undermining the democratic process instead of nurturing a healthy public sphere (Marda and Milan, 2018). Social Media acts as a facilitator of democracy by providing the public with equal access to information and equal opportunities to participate. The public sphere is the nexus between public life and civil society. It is that space of the society where access is guaranteed to all the citizens to engage and discuss the matters of general interest to form a public opinion (Habermas, Lennox, and Lennox, 1964). Evolution of social media and its increasing role as a platform for its users to express their opinions has guaranteed freedom in an unrestricted way. Social media collects information and

opinions from all its audiences irrespective of whether they belong to the bourgeois or proletariat – and thus provides a neutral space for all those who are a part of the civil society to discuss any issue of common interest. Since it fulfils the basic pre-requisites of providing space, albeit digitally, for free speech of participants, it becomes a public sphere virtually.

At the same time, how civil society uses social media creates a dilemma. If social media is an effective public sphere or merely acts as a chaotic echo chamber for the public reason being, it has fewer central nodes, gatekeepers or agenda setters than the traditional media. This makes social media susceptible to unverified and misleading content viz. fake news. Fake news on social media has a massive impact on the opinions of people across the world. The proliferation of social network sites has led to what Castells (2007) calls horizontal forms of communication, which in turn have led to mass self-communication. That these networks are hosted on the mobile phones, among other platforms, enables the majority of people to access them thereby forming the public sphere. Implied in the foregoing is that social network sites enable citizens to participate more in the production, distribution, and consumption of communication. This has led scholars to argue that the Internet and these social network sites provide a digital public platform that enhances democracy. However, regimes, especially despotic ones, always try to impede the free flow of information on these platforms. This theoretical framework is therefore very relevant to this study as this will show how the public sphere on social media in Zimbabwe is also independent of government involvement in understanding the nexus between fake news and the regulation of this public sphere on social media.

While the public sphere does not perform a decision-making function, in our truth-tracking ideal, the public sphere should therefore be credited for acting as a function of articulating and raising the problems, claims, and interests (not to mention hopes and dreams) upon, and about, which decisions are taken. The public sphere produces public opinion. Therefore, social media may revitalize the public sphere by allowing people, to challenge discourses, share alternative perspectives and publish their own opinions (Loader and Mercea, 2011:760). Thus, social media in the Zimbabwean context emerged as arenas enabling Zimbabweans to share government's, ruling party's, and security forces' abuses, corruption, and electoral malpractices (Moyo,

2011). On 12 January 2019, President Mnangagwa made an announcement that fuel prices would go up by at least 150%. This was a trigger for citizens, already reeling from rising inflation, who then started to group and discuss the issue on Social media (Mberi, 2019).The fearlessness characteristic of debates on the digital public sphere could have been a result of the sense of security derived from the anonymity of citizens in online spaces—an anonymity that simultaneously provides netizens a platform to freely express themselves and to abuse others" (Chibuwe and Ureke, 2016).

Social media platforms have not only enabled civil society, interest groups, governments, political parties and candidates to deploy social media in electoral processes, but have also enabled citizens to actively take part in these processes (Chatora, 2012; Strandberg, 2013). Thus, the application of Habermas' public sphere theoretical framework makes it ideal to understand the Zimbabwean government's response to "fake news" during the #Shutdown and through this framework, the relationship of "fake news" and (social) media regulation would be brought to the fore. Social media are therefore a vital and permanent part of that public sphere, if for no other reason than that so many people get their basic information about what is going on in the world from social media (including whether it is raining or not). The problem of fake news points to new challenges brought about by the rise of social media as central actors in the public sphere. As such, any discussion of digital media democracy and political participation frequently falls back on Habermas' concept of the public sphere". "This is understandable as it is one of the few prominent theoretical frameworks that link the social media and its practices directly to the exercise of democracy.

CONCLUSION

This chapter discussed the theoretical framework applied to the study. The discussion revealed that the theory was initially rooted in the mass media. With the emergence of the internet, and the flourishing of "social media", comes the cyber sphere, the online version of the public sphere. Habermas returned to the concept, revising and updating it. The theory is used to explore how this cyber space was utilised to communicate what was happening during the January 2019 #National shutdown amid the internet shutdown.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This is an exploratory study grounded in qualitative research. Qualitative research is a type of research that focuses on developing and understanding naturalistic human phenomena, whether small or large (Savenye and Robinson, 2003). Mack et al (2005) argued that qualitative research seeks to understand a given research problem or topic from the perspectives of the local population it involves. The methodology is relevant for this study which seeks to understand the nature and role of "fake news" in the January 2019 National #Shutdown in Zimbabwe and to comprehend what the Zimbabwean government's response to "fake news" during the #Shutdown tells us about the relationship of "fake news" and social media regulation. The qualitative research methodology helps people to make sense of their social worlds and how they express these understandings through language, sound, imagery, personal style and social rituals (Mack et al, 2005).

Welman, Kruger and Mitchell (2005:8) describe qualitative research methods as methods aiming at determining the dynamic and changeable nature of reality by collecting subjective data, presented verbally by participants. For some scholars, qualitative research refers to any type of research that bring about findings that are not arrived at by statistical measures or by any other quantification methods" (Strauss and Corbin 1998: 10; Snape and Spencer 2003: 17). Although Strauss and Corbin (1998) contend that qualitative research results in qualitative findings, they however note that some qualitative research studies can be realised using quantification methods although the bulk of the analysis for qualitative research is interpretative. While qualitative research helps locate the researcher in the world (Denzin and Lincoln 2000: 3), it also promotes the creation of reality by human beings depending on their worldviews. In view of this study, I aim to explore how the Zimbabwean government responded to 'fake news' during the January 2019 #Shutdown and to understand how 'fake news' figures in the social media regulation matrix.

The study was located in Harare, the capital city of Zimbabwe (where the #shutdown was more prevalent), and conducted with purposively selected key informants within government, civil society, media policy making circles and the media. The findings presented in this chapter were drawn from twelve (12) semi-structured key informant interviews. Some of the interviews are not captured in these findings because, while participants agreed to be interviewed (and indeed were interviewed), they strictly insisted on being off the record and, even more significantly, asked not to have their interviews transcribed. The key-informant interviews contributed to an understanding of fake news and media regulation around the January 2019 National #Shutdown in Zimbabwe. With Harare being the epicentre of the demonstrations, it only made sense to limit interview with informants based in the city.

Semi-structured face-to-face key-informant interview data

As already noted, the study findings are drawn from twelve (12) interviewees with different media industry experts, politicians and civil society members on the issue of fake news and media regulation during the January 2019 #Shutdown protests in Zimbabwe. Out of more than twenty (20) prospective interviews, planned with the aim of getting as much interviews as possible to reach saturation, the study ended up obtaining twelve relevant interviews firstly because approximately a third of the participants who agreed to be interviewed opted not to be recorded and secondly because saturation was reached at about the halfway stage into the sample. The reluctance to be recorded by some of the interviews signified the very real, but also (to my mind) surprising, fear of reprisal that many Zimbabweans in positions of power feel. I say surprising because one would expect the key informants I interviewed, some of them from within government and ZANU-PF, to be more confident to be on record. For instance, those in opposition have access to lawyers compared to ordinary Zimbabweans who can be victimised without legal remedies. Another finding linked to this refusal to be on record is that it seemed those key informants in government actually wanted to contradict their (and the government's) public positions and standpoints.

As such, they felt safer off the record. They found my study and my interview to be an opportunity and platform to vent and speak their minds, but not for public consumption. In other words, they told me that they wanted to be frank with me, but only on condition

that none of what they said constituted the public record. Of course, this condition defeated the whole purpose of the research, but since I was very keen to hear what they had to say, I let them speak. It is a rare opportunity to hear intimately from insiders in Zimbabwean elite and governing circles. As a former journalist, I know a scoop when I see one. It was a pity, however, that I could not (for ethical reasons) use this scoop except in heavily redacted circumstances. Out of respect of the participants' wishes, I could not make use of what they told me in a manner that could out the identity of the speakers. It was striking that these informants felt that even a verbatim transcription of what they said would tracked and traced back to them. As such, it seems that the fear that the security establishment and the Central Intelligence Organisation (CIO) was able to listen in and shadow the recordings was real. Indeed, one of the officials I interviewed insisted that the interview be conducted not only off the record but off site. Another put on Jah Prayzah's music in the background, as if (or so I speculated) to create background noise to confound any listening devices.

Perhaps not surprisingly, most of the participants who refused to be recorded were some of the high-ranking officials within the government who were closely involved in the shutdown of the internet. I found it mildly amusing that these participants even resorted to appearing be refusing to be interviewed by me, when in fact they had agreed and even went ahead with the interviews. It was as if they were playing to the gallery and keeping up appearances, merely to stave off suspicion from whoever they suspected was watching them and listening. As I have already intimated, it was somewhat surprising to learn that people in power, and who publicly give of the aura of being in control of the narrative, also actually live in fear! Interestingly, these senior officials' answers were very informative and insightful. The insights will be weaved into this study in a way and manner that does not reveal the identities of the speakers or what they said directly. I have not only anonymised their submissions by not mentioning names, but also including their answers in the "latticework" and interstices of the information of other interviewees who agreed to be recorded. In other words, what I heard from these informants is buried in the data collected from other interviews. I could not find any other way to include this information in a safe way that respected the informants' wishes not to be recorded or quoted.

This way of including such information was an innovation I thought up in order to include the important insights without breaching ethical considerations. I also found this unfolding situation to be an important and interesting methodological challenge in terms of the meaning of consent in general and informed consent in particular. What are we to do as researchers out there in the field in cases where participants give their consent with such intricate conditions? It was clear that the participants wanted to be heard, but they did not feel that traditional anonymisation was adequate to protect identities. They wanted to be heard but not recorded. They wanted me to know what had happened but not in a form that could be transcribed. Basically, they were burdening me, the researcher, to find a way out of the conundrum. What was I to do? In future studies (perhaps in a journal article) I hope to further interrogate my methodological intervention to "bury" sensitive information by some reluctant-to-be-recorded participants inside the information of other willing-to-be-recorded participants. All participants, in any case, were anonymised, even the ones who agreed to be recorded and used in the study. Not a single key informant agreed to be referred to by their real identity. This, for me, spoke volumes about the fear and insecurity felt not only by some Zimbabweans but Zimbabweans in positions of power.

Of the twelve interviewees, four were females and eight were males. In order to meet the objectives of the research, questions were structured and categorised according to the five areas below:

1. January 2019 National #Shutdown
2. Government's role in the shutdown of the internet
3. Social Media participation
4. Fake news in Zimbabwe
5. Social Media regulation and laws

DATA COLLECTION

Interviews are an important strategy in data collection (Ryan et al., 2009). In this study, a total of 12 semi-structured, key informant, interviews were conducted with purposively selected participants within government, civil society, and media policy-making circles. Given (2008) states semi –structured interviews is a form of qualitative

data collection strategy in which the researcher asks the informant a series of predetermined but open ended questions. While there are no fixed responses to the questions (Oslen, 2012:33), this type of data collection requires collaboration between the researcher and informant (Given, 2008). The advantage is that semi-structured interviews have the ability to render rich and experiential accounts from the participating individuals (Al-Saggf and Williamson, 2004). Ryan et al., (2009) conclude that semi – structured interviews allow spontaneous and in-depth responses. They are flexible and the questions are not rigid, hence the researcher can probe accordingly. For instance, questions varied among informants depending on their background and expertise. The rationale behind key informant interviews, on the other hand, was their ability to draw useful insights from people who had an understanding of the subject. Participants already had an idea on the subject, and this made it easier for the researcher to get the required information. Key informants have exceptional knowledge about a particular (Lavrakas, 2008).

The purpose of these interviews was to elicit responses to questions about the relationship between fake news and media regulation in Zimbabwe, in light of the January 2019 #Shutdown.Semi-structured interviews with the key informants were therefore considered effective. The researcher was nevertheless aware of the limitations that comes with the use of key informants, which include the possibility of getting biased and misleading information considering that some informants belonged to partisan organisations and stood to benefit from pushing one-sided narratives. Drawing from various sectors was therefore important in allowing for varied and multiple perspectives on the January 2019 #Shutdown and media regulation. The researcher understood the need for reflection and action required on the nature of communication between the researcher and the participant, especially where semi – structured interviews are employed. The researcher therefore made sure that interviews were productive for both the study and the participants.

SAMPLING

Lavrakas (2008) defines sampling as, '[t]he selection of a given number of units of analysis from the population of interest.' He further emphasises the importance of sampling in research, singling out feasibility and time management as some of the major benefits of sampling. The study used non-probability sampling. The advantage

of using non-probability sampling is that of being able to apply a specific subjective method or criteria to choose the participants deemed satisfying by the researcher. Specifically, purposive sampling was used to select key informants for the semi-structured interviews. Purposive sampling focuses on particular characteristics of a population, deemed of interest to the researcher, which facilitate addressing the research questions (Marshall, 1996). It is one of the most common non-probability sampling methods where subjects are grouped depending on pre-selected criteria that are significant to a particular research (MacDougall and Fudge, 2001). The overall objective of this type of sampling is to come up with a sample that can be logically assumed to be a representative of the population with the researcher applying expert or subjective selection criteria of the participants. The research targeted individuals who had commented on the issue of fake news and social media regulation in the context of the January 2019 #Shutdown. Twelve participants were drawn from various informant groups including the Ministry of Information, MISA-Zimbabwe, the Movement for Democratic Change Alliance and ZANU PF. Participants also included media law experts and key influencers on social media who commented on 'fake news' during the January 2019 #Shutdown. The researcher visited these key informants *in situ*, in places that the interviewees were comfortable with.

While the sample may have been small, it was sufficient to generate the required output. The key informants had direct interests in the subject matter and therefore provided important insights. The researcher also made sure that informants were able and willing to take part in the semi-structured interviews. One way the researcher utilised was to investigate what they had posted and commented in relation to fake news during the #Shutdown. The researcher was well aware of the political instability in Zimbabwe that might have affected participant recruitment hence a sample was drawn from a wide selection of informants. The researcher grouped key informants according to their affiliations and the platforms that they used to comment on the issue of 'fake news'. The researcher then crosschecked if the selected interviewees were typical enough of the groups they represented. Social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter were used to get the key informants who were well versed in the subject of fake news and the January 2019 #Shutdown.

UNIT OF ANALYSIS

Vogt defined unit of analysis as, "[b]asically the main object which a researcher aims to examine in order to fulfil the objectives of the study" (2011) while Lewis-Beck et al (2004) refer to a unit of analysis as the most significant element of a research, which involves those subjects which the researcher interprets to produce results for the overall study. Furthermore, as some scholars noted such as (Gunter, 2000), once the most appropriate unit of analysis has been chosen for the study, it becomes much easier to select and employ the data analysis methods accordingly. The unit of analysis for this study refers to the 12 key informants selected by the researcher and the responses that the researcher received from these participants.

DATA ANALYSIS

In qualitative research, different methods of analysing data are available for selection by researchers (Williamson, 2004b). This study makes use of thematic analysis. A wide range of data sources may be used in a thematic analysis, including interview transcripts, field notes and information written by participants (Mills, Durepos and Wiebe, 2010). Thematic analysis involves discovering themes in the interview transcripts and documents reviewed and attempting to verify, confirm and qualify them by searching through the data and repeating the process to identify further themes and categories" (Chadwick et al., 2008: 429). The data will be transcribed and coded before it is interpreted according to different themes. Braun and Clarke's (2006) version of thematic analysis, which consists of familiarising with data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes and lastly, producing the report was used. Braun and Clarke (2006) state that thematic analysis is a qualitative process of identifying and analysing various themes within given data. Furthermore, they note that themes are capable of capturing significant aspects about data in relation to the research questions and they represent a certain level of patterned response or meaning within the data set. This version of thematic analysis was chosen because of its strength to "yield insightful interpretations that are contextually grounded" and because of its flexibility.

Taylor and Gibbs (2010), qualitative data analysis (QDA) is the range of processes and procedures whereby we move from the qualitative data that have been collected into some form of explanation, understanding or interpretation of the people and

situations we are investigating. In simple terms, data analysis entails interpreting what participants said and what the researcher read. The process of analysing data involves moving back and forth". In line with this, Goodwill and Goodwill (1996:142) maintains that qualitative data analysis is closely tied to data collection, and occurs throughout data collection as well as afterward. This view is upheld by Burnard et al., (2008:429) who note that in qualitative research, data analysis does not occur after all the data has been collected, but that after every session with a respondent the researcher will start transcribing. It also entails the writing of comments by the researcher as soon as a session with a participant is ended and these comments can be thoughts, feelings, and ideas for the next stage of data collection.

The basic analytic strategy used in thematic analysis is *coding*, a process of closely inspecting text to look for recurrent themes, topics, or relationships, and marking similar passages with a code or label to categorize them for later retrieval and theory-building. That is, coding refers to the process of indexing text with codes and in due course themes with notable variation between approaches and disciplines in exactly how these terms are used (King and Brooks 2018). Hence the importance of considering how a particular writer employed them. This is why the researcher chose to use Braun and Clarke's version. Following King and Horrocks (2010), King and Brooks (2018) define themes as 'recurrent and distinctive features of participants' accounts, characterising particular perceptions and/or experiences, which the researcher sees as relevant to the research question' (2018: 150).

The process starts when the analyst begins to notice, and look for, patterns of meaning and issues of potential interest in the data – this may be during data collection. The endpoint is the reporting of the content and meaning of patterns (themes) in the data, where themes are abstract (and often fuzzy) constructs the investigators identify [sic] before, during, and after analysis (Ryan and Bernard, 2000: 780). In analysing data, the researcher began by familiarising with concepts of fake news and social media regulation before reading on what transpired during the January 2019 #Shutdown to know what the key informants commented regarding the event. For a successful analysis, it is important for a researcher to be well versed in all aspects of the data since this phase provides the foundation for the rest of the analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Furthermore, some researchers even argue it should be seen as a key phase

of data analysis within interpretative qualitative methodology (Bird, 2005: 227), and recognised as an interpretative act, where meanings are created, rather than simply a mechanical one of putting spoken sounds on paper (Lapadat and Lindsay, 1999). It is at this stage that the researcher started taking "notes or ideas for coding during this phase". Since the researcher was working with verbal data from the key informant interviews, the data was then transcribed into written format for thematic analysis to take place.

The second phase involved generating initial codes with Braun and Clarke (2006) describing coding as involving the process of organising data into significant groups. The researcher identified important elements of the collected data before interpreting it. For Braun and Clarke, '[t]hematic analysis is a relatively straight-forward form of qualitative analysis, which does not require the some detailed theoretical and technical knowledge similar to critical content analysis, (2006: 68). The third phase involved searching for themes. At this stage the researcher categorised the different codes into potential themes, and collating all the relevant coded data extracts within the identified themes. Basically, it is at this stage that the analysis of the codes was initiated. Within the fourth stage, which involves the reviewing of themes, the researcher refined and validated the themes in relation to the set data.

By the end of this exercise, the researcher was able to know the different themes available before defining and naming the themes in the phase that follows. It is therefore within this fifth phase that concise names for the themes were developed. Final analysis and report writing were done in this final phase. The researcher summarised the complexity of the data collected to show the validity of the analysis. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis is not a complex method that is very flexible in qualitative research. However, the paradox regarding the place of generic thematic analysis in qualitative research continues and yet it on the other hand it continues to be widely used. By 2018, Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis article had received nearly 33,680, (King and Brooks, 2018), thus proving that the data analysis method still offers an accessible and theoretically-flexible approach to analysing qualitative data.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Due to the fact that the actions of civil society during the #Shutdown were regarded by government as illegal, it was important to clarify beforehand that the study was academic and was not in any way supportive of either government or opposition or civil society, and was not linked to illegal activities. During the data collection, the researcher remained neutral and unbiased. The researcher also undertook to conduct research that meets all the ethical standards, as prescribed in UJ's *Ethics Codes (Academic and Research Ethics)* policy document. Through an invitation letter, the nature and purpose of the study was clearly explained to all the participants so that they may make a decision to participate or not. Participants were not forced to participate in this study, and this was communicated verbally and in the letters of introduction and consent forms. Participation was strictly voluntary, and no payment, reward or incentives was offered for participation. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the interviews at any time, and for any reason, without having to explain why. The participants were also informed that they would not be subjected to any harm. Rather, they were informed that they were under no compulsion to answer questions that they wish not to answer. All interviews were recorded using a mobile phone, and participants who were reluctant to be recorded were not recorded. Although the researcher did not expect the research to pose any undue risks to participants due to the objective, academic and fairly uncontroversial nature of its research questions, the political situation is Zimbabwe is often volatile. As such, the researcher took steps to anonymise participants and respect confidentiality. This was the case in particular since the interviews included members of the opposition as well as key informants from government ministries.

CONCLUSION

This chapter presented the research methodology employed in this study. The researcher discussed, in detail, the qualitative research methodology, data collection methods, sampling strategy and methods of data analysis utilised in this study, whilst also giving the strengths and limitations of these methods. In addition, the chapter highlighted the ethical issues that the researcher observed while conducting the study. In the next chapter, the researcher will present, analyse and interpret the research findings.

CHAPTER 5

DATA PRESENTATION ANALYSIS, DISCUSSION FINDINGS

Introduction

This chapter presents data and findings obtained during the exploration of the nexus of fake news and social media regulation in Zimbabwe. The January 2019 National #Shutdown was used as the basis for this discussion on how 'fake news' figures in the media regulation matrix. The chapter also explains the relevance of the study's location by providing a background and significance of obtaining data exclusively from Harare. Findings on the nature and role of "fake news" in the January 2019 National #Shutdown in Zimbabwe, and what the Zimbabwean government's response to "fake news" during the #Shutdown reveals about the relationship between "fake news" and (social) media regulation are presented and analysed. During the shutdown, government officials raised alarm on the spread of "fake news" and used the pretext to shut down the internet. The data was analysed using Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis guidelines.

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

For the purpose of coding, presentation and analysis the twelve interviewees were named Participant 1 to 12 (i.e. P1 to P12). The table below indicates the demographic representation of the participants selected for this study. This includes information on the participant's gender, sector in which they are employed, whether they were present in Harare during the 2019 National #Shutdown and if they are active on Social media (Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp).

Participant's Code	Gender	Sector Represented	January 2019 National #Shutdown Presence in Harare	Social Media activeness (Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp)
P1	Male	Media and Policy	Yes	Yes
P2	Female	Civil Society	Yes	Yes
P3	Male	Media and Policy	Yes	Yes
P4	Female	Government	Yes	Yes
P5	Male	Government	Yes	Yes
P6	Male	Government	Yes	Yes
P7	Male	Media and Policy	Yes	Yes
P8	Male	Government	Yes	Yes
P9	Female	Civil Society	Yes	Yes
P10	Male	Civil Society	No	Yes
P11	Female	Civil Society	Yes	Yes
P12	Male	Government	Yes	Yes

Table 1: Demographic representation of the participants selected for this study

The participants' gender also gives an indication of the responses received. Moreover, the different sectors represented by the participants had an impact on the type of responses they gave. For instance, informants from the government sector were very formal, technical and impersonal in their responses – almost as if speaking to a script. Once again these "scripted" answers spoke to what I thought was the fear of reprisal or losing their jobs – a fear that is understandable in Zimbabwe's polarised, militarised and factionalised political space. The majority of participants stated that they were in Zimbabwe physically during the January 2019 National Shutdown, except for one participant (P10) who was not available at the time as he had travelled out of the country on business during the shutdown. By some coincidence (certainly this was not a criterion in my purposive selection of who to interview), all interviewees were very active on social media and some had the opportunity to also send in their comments on platforms such as Facebook and Twitter regarding what was happening during the January 2019 National #Shutdown.

An account, from each participant, of the events that took place in Zimbabwe on 15 January 2019 is presented in the table below:

Participants	What is your version and recollection of what happened during the January 2019 National #Shutdown?
P1	It was an order by the state security minister in response to what has been muted by various activists' especially non-government actors. It was essentially a protest against the government.
P2	Everything, communication was cut off because of the harsh economic conditions. People do not buy newspapers anymore because people have now moved on to social media. Government is paranoid, it fears free speech. There is free speech on social media.
P3	I was not part of the demonstrations, but we were covering the shutdown.
P4	There were some demonstrations about to happen in Zimbabwe. Fake news were just circulating around and that had the effect of actually threatening the economy of the country. In fact, there was going to be a strike, so people were circulating fake news around that issue.
P5	Well, there was an increase in fuel prices announced by the president I think, on 13 January 2019. There was a huge leap in prices and it resulted in protest in some parts of the country. People were protesting what they felt as unjustified price increases.
P6	The shutdown in January was not the first of its kind. Eh, it came against the background of other shutdowns stretching back to 1997.
P7	It was a demonstration that was plugged by the opposition to protest against eh… well the protest was what they were calling the living conditions which were deteriorating economic conditions, etc.
P9	Around that time, what happened was that, government believes they are the owners of the media. And be that as it may, they feel that they can control – one, the people and two, the media.
P10	I was arrested following the January disturbances, though I was not around as I was in Namibia that time. According to the government, they wanted to stop fake news that was being circulated by protestors and also pictures of the destruction that was going ahead which in their view was serving the purpose of motivating other communities.
P11	The government identified the internet as a threat to national security and they shutdown the internet. They thought by doing so they would be able to stop the protest, cut their means of communication and the likes.
P12	That was an opposition inspired, of course, it has quite a number of combination of other central groups' perhaps civic society who ought to express their political resonance of a number of issues around politics of the economic situation in the country.

Table 2: Participants' framing of the January 2019 National #Shutdown?

Participants' framing of what happened in Zimbabwe during the January 2019 National #Shutdown varied, tending to reflect whether one supported (or sympathised with) the government's response or criticised it and sympathised with the protestors. Some, like P10 were directly affected, by being arrested. Participants' views about their understanding of what led the government to shut down the internet in the country

during the week 15 to 23 January therefore tended to reflect this standard binary split not only in the Zimbabwean political sphere but also in its public sphere. P1, P2, P9, P10, and P11's responses speak directly to the concern that the government responded to the #shutdown with its own shutdown of the public sphere. In fact, I noted quite early in the interviews that the participants' who were critical of the government's responses not only seemed to sympathise with the "fake news" but did not seem to believe that it was "fake news" at all. Rather, they tended to believe that the government was merely using "fake news" as a convenient excuse to crack down on the opposition. Furthermore, the participants who were critical of the government response tended to see a form of public sphere where government saw "fake news". This polarisation was a persistent feature of the interviews. On the one hand, it reflected the typical polarisation that infects Zimbabwean political life, and on the other hand it showed an emerging perspective that one man's fake news is another man's public sphere. Interestingly, those who were critical of the government's response did not specifically engage with the definition of fake news. Rather, they took their position in opposition to the government.

Whatever the government hated was therefore a good thing, and whatever it liked was surely bad. In fact, whatever the government said, people were supposed to read the opposite. If the government cried "fake news", they saw "truth"! The fractures in the Zimbabwean political infrastructure run deep that I am compelled to invent a term to describe them: *infrafractures* (infrastructure + fracture, a reference to the persistence of deep fractures in the national political infrastructure or body politic). That is, the fractures are now so deeply imbedded in the national body politic that they inform and filter most interpretations. Fundamentally, an *infrafracture* is a hidden crisis that is either slowly (but inexorably) boiling to the surface or is the hidden driving force or motive force behind things that are happening. A government hampered by infrafractures therefore targets the wrong things, and therefore the crisis persists rather than ending. In the words of celebrated Afro-jazz Zimbabwean musician Oliver Mtukudzi in the song "Handiro Dambudziko" (That is not the problem):

Kunzwa musoro kutema mukoma
Handiro dambudziko mukoma
Wanzwa musoro kutema mukoma

Handiro dambudziko mukoma

Chapa musoro kutema mukoma

Ndiro dambudziko mukoma

Chapa musana kudzimba mukoma

Ndiroka dambudziko mukoma

Ongorora chikonzero chaita musoro uteme

Ugogazirisa chikonzero chaita musana ubande

Kusimbirira mhopo, mhopo pamusana

Mhopo iri pamusana iwe une ziso rine mbonje

Kusimbirira kurapa mhopo pamusana

Mhopo iri pausana iwe une ziso rine mbonje

(Translation):

Having a headache brother

That is not the problem brother

Feeling a headache brother

That is not the problem brother

What caused the headache brother

Is the problem brother

What caused the back pain brother

Is the problem brother

Investigate what caused the headache

And solve the problem that caused the back pain

Being persistent with a wart, a wart on your back

A wart on your back, when you have a black eye

Persisting to cure the wart on your back

The wart on your back when you have a black eye

In this study I use Tuku's words as a reference to Zimbabwe's infrafracture: deeply imbedded and deeply seated perennial problems that the government has done nothing to address. In fact, the reason there is a crisis to begin with is because the

government persists (and insists on) in solving symptoms. In this study, a core finding is that the "public sphere" arises to draw attention to this crisis (the infrastructure) and the government solves it by shutting down the symptoms (social media). The shutdown causes the problem to disappear, not because it has been solved but because it has been suppressed. Thus, we can trust the problem to come back again, in unending cycles. This, in short, is the story of Zimbabwe. It tells us, for instance, that the coup was not a solution, but a cosmetic measure. Replacing Mugabe with Mnangagwa is not an authentic solution. The cycle of problems is bound to return.

Based on the responses, there were a lot of *infrafractures* in the various accounts of what led to the events that took place in Zimbabwe during the course of the January 2019 National #shutdown. However, the main infrafractures, in the participants' perspectives, tended to coalesce and to be located around the issues of the deteriorating standards of living, government's hold on power and the announcement of the increase in the fuel price, which acted as the trigger for the protests. Not surprisingly, a common answer was that it was therefore this increase in fuel prices that triggered the protests, and prompted the government to shut down the internet. Basically, the #Shutdown, although it was a hashtag, proved to have an origin in a real socioeconomic problem. The cost of fuel is a baseline cost which affects all the other costs, particularly of basic commodities like sugar, bread and cooking oil. By dramatically increasing the price of fuel, Mnangagwa was impacting struggling Zimbabwe personally and where it hurt most: livelihoods.

These livelihoods have been precarious for more than two decades, and have been heavily contested in elections voting patterns as well as in previous strikes, shutdowns, boycotts and union-led mass stayaways. This was exactly the point made by P6 who said, "The shutdown in January was not the first of its kind. Eh, it came against the background of other shutdowns stretching back to 1997". This answer to me reflects what, above, I have called infrafractures. The #shutdown is not only deeply imbedded in the political behaviour of Zimbabweans, but dates back to 1997 when Black Friday occurred. Black Friday occurred on 14 November 1997. Matsilele (2019: 316) states that "14 November 1997 (is) when Zimbabwe's current economic, social and political problems began". He argues that 1997 marked the end of Lancaster House Agreement, as well as exactly 100 years since the end of the 1st Chimurenga.

(Interestingly, the "Operation Restore Legacy" coup also began on 14 November 2017! This is exactly 20 years since Black Friday!). Hence:

> Essentially, it was on that date that Zimbabwe unofficially "closed for business". That is, one remembers how the collapse of November 1997 was precipitated by IMF and the World Bank closing lines of credit and recalling loans, among other things. These events were precipitately followed by the food riots of 19-23 January 1998, marking the end of one socio-economic and socio-political order in Zimbabwe and its replacement by a new order (Matsilele 2019: 316).

If Matsilele is correct about the genealogy of Zimbabwe's problems, it would confirm my assertion that Zimbabwe suffers under deep infrafractures. Interestingly, Matsilele (2019) traces these infrafractures to 1897 when the first Chimurenga was crushed. Unfortunately, due to reasons of space, the study of this lengthy genealogy of "infrafractures" falls outside the scope of this study. However, I have made a note to follow this promising line of questioning in future studies.

In the view of some participants, there is no question that the government fears the unfolding public sphere spurred on by social media. Basically, the power of social media is to expose long existing infrafractures, something which the government supposedly lives in trepidation of. Hence P2 says that the government was paranoid as it fears free speech on social media, which in this case was being mobilised as a tool used to mobilise people. To this participant, there is no other explanation for the government electing to cut off all communication. The Zimbabwean government, perhaps in obedience to underlying infrafractures, has been known for exerting control on the media fraternity in the country. This has resulted in people losing trust in the government-controlled media or mouthpieces (such as the *Herald Newspaper* and the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Television – ZBC). Some of those in Zimbabwe who used to depend on state media have therefore resorted to get news from social media, as the new public sphere. Thus, ironically, government's traditionally repressive control of the media is also another factor that led to the shutdown.

The cycle of crisis cannot be solved by creating another crisis. The Shona word is *kuvirikidzana* (layered-ness). When the crises are layered (*akavirikidzana*), the only "solution" is to suppress and postpone them, leading to other, greater crisis in the

future. Thus when people speak of the "Zimbabwean crisis", or the so-called "decade of crisis" (1998-2008), I see Zimbabwean *crises* (in the plural). Another factor that was highlighted was the deteriorating living and economic conditions in the country. The increase in fuel prices fed into this perspective. Finally, the Zimbabwean government has always blamed the opposition for any misdeeds that happens in the country, especially if this is targeted towards the government. This is another way it plays into exacerbating infrafractures. P12 believed that the protests were inspired by opposition groups and civic society through mobilising for large scale demonstrations across the country over a number of issues including that of the economic situation in the country.P1 indicated that the protests were *against* the government.

The table below illustrates participant views on the internet shutdown in Zimbabwe. Regarding the internet shutdown, interviewees were asked two questions, one on who should shut down the internet as well as why they think the Zimbabwean government shutdown the internet?

Who, if anybody, has the right to shut the internet down?	
P1	No one has that power including the executive. No one, if you look at our laws, there is no provision whatsoever in the law that compels any person to actually shutdown the internet. The High Court categorically stated that it was illegal in its ruling.
P2	The minister of national security is the one who gave the directive to all internet providers, which is an infringement to our rights, freedom of speech, and access to information. Internet access is a right, according to UN treaty. So the government has no right to switch off its citizens, it is a violation of the basic human rights.
P8	It depends on what we shutdown the internet for. If it's a technical need to expand capacity, the service provider should request for permission. The whole idea of shutting down the internet is not premised on fake news. There is a difference between fake news where you just lie on the internet and we live with that every day and you cannot close the internet for that reason. But if a movement like Zanu Ndonga says we want to launch an attack on the authority or we want to do a march to state house. People already start to say if there a probability that this can be a threat to national security because it will be used not to propagate fake news. So that shutdown was then instituted as a command and control tool for people who want to do things that are unlawful. Remember fake news has always been there…makuhwa agara ariko. You think the country can be stopped nemakuhwa nhai…
P9	The government does not have a role to play in switching off the internet because I feel Econet and other platforms had the right or could have opted to shut down but it was the government who were on the forefront to say let's shutdown.

P10	There should never be a reason why the internet should be shutdown. You look at how the internet was developed. It is owned by no one…If you look at history of shutdowns of internet, only rogue regimes have ever done that.
P11	For me as a citizen I don't think it is necessary to shutdown the internet.
P12	The only institution with capacity to shutdown it is the state. There has to be a reason to shutdown, very exceptional grounds.
Why do you think the government shutdown the internet?	
P3	The reason is so obvious. They felt that people were gathering and upstaging an unrest mainly because of the tools being provided by the social media and also the virality of information and messages that were now going around, encouraging people to go onto the streets and some encouraging others to be violent. They felt threatened that the more they leave the people to communicate like that and felt that they can control the people by switching off the internet.
P5	At the time there was a growing concern within government that there was deliberate misinterpretation of the fuel price increase. And obviously those opposed to the government took an advantage of that and went on to peddle that sort of narrative. As a result, the government felt that there were a number of groupings for instance #Tajamuka who were rallying their members using social media and they were coordinating their demonstrations using social media. So that was the justification of shutting down that space to thwart the protests.
P6	The internet is quite pervasive. It reaches many people very quickly just by clicking your phone, your iPhone or your laptop. So, the government did not want people to have access to information about what was happening in real time.
P9	Up to this point they know and they felt that should they leave it to filter whatever information it would cause the scenario to be worse than it is or it was at the particular time. In that they had their little skeletons in their skeletons in their closet that they didn't want opened and the public was not happy as well with whatever was happening.

Table 3: Who should shut down the internet? And why do you think government shut down the internet?

From Table 3 above two set of questions were posed to participants. Who, if anyone, should have the right to shut down the internet? Why do you think the government shut down the internet? The common response was that no one, including the government, for whatever reason, should shut down the internet. This answer indicates the deep distrust of the government from the participants. Although the government should ideally work for its citizens, most of the participants did not believe that the Zimbabwean government was capable of executing this mandate faithfully, fairly, objectively or with integrity. The common feeling seemed to be that the government is anti-people and corrupt. At any rate, shutting down the internet, as noted in Chapter 3, is a violation of human rights. Other participants focused on the legal process. For instance, P8 argues that a shutdown can only take place for technical purposes, especially when expanding the internet, but a service provider

should request permission. Some participants, like P8, were unsympathetic to the protestors. In fact, P8 took the position that, in Chapter 1, I highlighted from the words of General Chiwenga as "asymmetric threat" as well as from the literature on "command and control". Thus P8 indicated that if some political movements announce attacks on government or marches towards the state house, this can be deemed as a threat to national security and hence shutting down the internet can be effected.

P12 suggested that the state is the only institution that can shut down the internet, but must have exceptional grounds to do so. What is interesting from these findings is how much the internet, and even social media, are seen as fundamental human rights. This is interesting because social media are not only recent technologies, but are technically not human rights. There is no human right to WhatsApp, Twitter or Facebook. Rather, these are privately owned platforms which are run for profit. The view that a platform like Twitter or WhatsApp is a right is an illusion. At the same time, it reflects how people can repurpose these private technologies into weapons with which to fight for their rights. So, in that perspective, social media is a tool which can be repurposed to safeguard essential rights. It is only a "right" indirectly and by extension. People would still have rights if there was no social media. However, social media can enhance the discourse of human rights.

Table 4 below illustrates participant views on who actually defines what is true and what is false in Zimbabwe. This question was aimed at generating understanding on the concept of "fake news" from the different perspectives of the working environments of the participants and information disseminated to the public.

	In Zimbabwe, who defines what's true and what's false?
P1	The challenge we have in a polarised society like ours is that the fake news that is disseminated is usually the affirmation of one's opinion, belief, and inclination towards an idea or ideal.
P2	The state defines for the citizens what is true or false. When you go out and say that MDC wants to bomb all the tall buildings in Zimbabwe, when you know that MDC does not have military and has no capacity to recruit terrorists. That is basically where this thing of fake news by government starts.
P3	Well you can't then have a uniform system coming from parallel systems. The MDC and Zanu Pf example are like parallel. The most important thing now it is on content creators to cross-check or confirm facts. Half the time people have the agenda to smear people's images.
P8	There is no one who decides. Remember social media is something that has just come out. It's a new dimension, but generally there has always been some

	regulatory bodies that regulate operations of the media. For instance, we have Zimbabwe Media Commission, it has provision that look at issues to do with fake news in traditional mainstream media. But obviously if something now becomes fake on the internet there must be a complainant, but those issues are not generally provided for in the acts that were meant for mainstream media. So, people end up taking each other to courts.
P9	That is a very big challenge that we've got because honestly speaking, for somebody to get real news or what they would call real news it's difficult. Honestly speaking, there is no way we can continue to be like the Deputy Minister and continue to paddle lies and think it's okay because I have just said my bit and nobody should verify and they should be grateful with. I really honestly would like to find a situation whereby we go back to giving out news that is authentic, news that is, I don't know when that will be.
P10	You know in a polarised society like Zimbabwe, that's almost impossible because there is always a version from the other people
P11	Reality on the ground will prove fake news from real news. If you do research on any issue that is published by the government and the opposition say it's fake. If you do a thorough research on that you can tell as you are doing today, you can tell what fake news from what is not fake news is. The reality on the ground defines what fake news is. You saw that our minister of finance gave us fake news when he was presenting the 2020 Budget; then the Chinese embassy had come out and said the Zimbabwean government is like they gave us a parable that we gave Zimbabwe five chickens and they accounted for two in their budget
P12	If a fake news item is favourable to your political party's agenda, you hold it dear even if you know it is false because it speaks to your primary political interest which is to delegitimise your opponent.

Table 4: Who defines what is true and what is false in Zimbabwe?

The table above sought to solicit answers on who decides what is true and false in Zimbabwe. The participants had widely divergent views on this. A notable response was that Zimbabwe is a deeply polarised country thereby making it difficult to ascertain who really decides what is true or false. As P10 says, "You know in a polarised society like Zimbabwe, that's almost impossible because there is always a version from the other people". Every position is contested, and filtered through political binaries and, even, political party factions. Thus, P1 and P10 all singled out the polarity of Zimbabwean society as a challenge to the concept of truth. On the other hand, P12, P2 and P3 all noted that each political party decides what truth is. Thus, truth is ideological, an element of what Foucault calls "regimes of truth". Overall, the ruling class is said to hold the apparatus of power which it uses to coerce people into regarding as constituting the truth. Pro-government participants, and those within government itself, mainly indicated the need for the Zimbabwe Media Commission to look into the new dimensions brought about by new media. What I found problematic in the emphasis on political polarisation as a reflection of "polarised truth" is the fact that it tended to then relativise truth. But is truth relative?

Participants were asked about their understanding of "fake news" and how they defined it. This question was key in understanding how fake news was understood in Zimbabwe and how it manifested during the January 2019 National #Shutdown. How "fake news" was defined also contributed to the understanding of how government respondent to the protests. Table 5 below shows the responses from participants.

	What is your understanding of "fake news" and how would you define it?
P1	It is an oxymoron, in that if it is news, it then can't be fake……….
P2	When it is fake, it is not news. I will prefer to call it false news and it has grown to be defined as Information that is false, malicious, unfactual, not true, unverified, sensationalised and exaggerated, one that can be used as opinion passed as fact.
P3	Fake news is fake news, is news that is fake and not authentic and not credible, and that is created mainly for the purposes of misleading the reader for whatever purposes.
P4	From my own understanding, fake news is that news which is not true or which cannot probably be true, which has the effect of actually causing perhaps alarm and despondence.
P5	My understanding of fake news, I think there is continuum of fake news. You have mild fake news and extreme fake news so to speak. There is deliberate misinterpretation of what happened, which can be fake. Then there is fake-fake news. Blatantly, fake news where someone says so-and-so has died when they have not died.
P6	I want to use two words. Fake news is doctored news. Fake news is distorted news. Fake news is inaccurate news which is not balanced.
P7	Fake news, basically can be defined from two terms, whereby somebody knowingly creates news that they know it is fake or its untrue or its unverified, then they just put it social media either deliberately to cause despondence, alarm amongst citizens or somebody unknowingly pushes certain news that have not been verified and then they just trust it into the national discourse through social media and then like it vilified and spread and it's unverified.
P8	I never really sought to come up with a definition of fake news. If I define fake news it would be from my experience as a citizen. Fake news I would take it to be any news which is premised on anything other than fact. It is untrue, this are false–faults, fabricated or created to create a certain impression or throw a certain idea but with derogation. So, fake news to me anything is not factual that is not true.
P9	Fake news from my own understanding is news that is not telling the situation as it is, news that causes alarm and despondency unnecessarily, and news that does not hold water.
P10	Fake news, I think obviously is just news that is circulated by the people with the intention of deceiving members of the public. Something that has no truth in it which is intended to mostly push a certain narrative that benefit the people that pursue that fake news.
P11	There are many variants of fake news. Propaganda is fake news because it gives half-truth mixed with political motives with false information. We have individually created news about things that did not happen that is fake news. My definition will be fake news is spreading of false information particularly on media

| P12 | Fake news is the deliberate dissemination of false news item for public consumption. |

Table 5: What is your understanding of "fake news" and how would you define it?

It is evident that the concept of "fake news", even to the participants, does not have an agreed definition. This was interesting because this is borne out in the literature. As alluded to in Chapter 2, the concept "fake news" is considered controversial, this is all because, in part, it is "poorly defined and there is no standard, universal or broadly accepted definition for it in academic literature or media discourse," (Wasserman and Madrid-Morales, 2018; Ribeiro and Ortellado, 2018). Also, some scholars have argued that "fake news" is an aspect of psychology, because people tend to effortlessly trust false information as long as it backs their existing worldviews, (Weeks and Garrett, 2014). The above hence confirms the literature on "fake news" that defining and determining what constitutes "fake news" belongs to a complex and contested terrain as argued in Chapter 2.

From the participant responses, varied words and phrases are used to explain and define "fake news". These include propaganda, half-truths, deliberate misinterpretation of facts, deliberate dissemination of false news, inaccurate news, untrue facts and spreading of false information. As we saw in Chapter 2, some scholars insisted on "fake news" being propaganda and the deliberate dissemination of false news. McNair (2017), insisted that there is nothing new about "fake news" noting that is a mere latter day interaction and manifestation. Arguing in the same breath, Ogola (2017a) equated "fake news" to the deliberate dissemination of false information expressly intended to misinform. Participant 11, interestingly, mentioned that there are types of "fake news", citing political motives and individually created news about things that did not happen. This is one of the few answers that indicate an interest in what I would call a "taxonomy" of fake news. Because fake news is complex and ever-evolving, such a taxonomy is needed, and yet currently does not yet exist.

Participants were also asked who produces fake news in Zimbabwe and whether there were instances of "fake news" cited or reported in Zimbabwe before January 2019. The main aim of asking these questions was to understand the reasons why the

government of Zimbabwe resorted to shutting down the internet under the pretext of dealing with "fake news". Table 6 below shows the responses from participants.

	Who produces fakes news in Zimbabwe, and before January 2019 did fake news exist?
P1	Anyone can produce fake news and it has always been there.
P2	Fake news in Zimbabwe has always existed. In fact it was worrisome that fake news actually began to exist in the mainstream media among professionals in the form of propaganda, sensationalism, exaggerations and so forth, so as for citizens we are there to blame because they feel that is how news and communication should be packaged. As for who, I think it's at two levels 1. Are deliberate actors, people that actually sit down not necessarily for click baiting. For example, Baba Jukwa who mixed truths, false news, half-truths, and truths, it actually works to confuse people. You know how counter intelligent works. I tell you something to be true today, after three days, I have your trust So there is a real industry of manipulation and is unfortunate that it is across the political divide. Secondly, the normal citizens, in their sharing .Obviously it is packaged in an interesting way
P3	People produce fake news.
P4	It can be anyone, it can be political actors or some NGO activists. Some political actors masquerade as NGO activists and also spread fake news. Even some individuals can also spread fake news about certain individuals
P5	You can't point one individual that this one produces fake news but it's the open nature of social media that breeds mischief. It's open to everyone. Everyone now is able to generate content, unlike before when we didn't have social media. It does, it does in huge quantities.
P6	Uhm, media trolls produce fake news. Apart from those social media trolls, eh, the polarisation of the political climate in Zimbabwe is also contributing to the production of fake news. The polarisation in itself is a compost that is nourishing fake news because we have two antagonistic forces, the MDC and they ZANUPF. They are competing for political space. So, what they do is they disseminate false messages in order to outdo each other. Fake news has always existed, but it's now so prevalent on social media
P7	Basically, those two fronts. I can refer to those two fronts -We have proponents who mischievously push fake news and others who are just naïve and then they also fit into that agenda
P8	Obvious. But the only difference is fake news was not so prevalent. Why? Because it was traceable. When somebody lied like for instance the story of soldier was buried without a head that was fake news. That was not true, I was actually in the military by that time…. So people in general produce the fake news.
P9	Well, they have mushroomed and they are in their numbers and they are amongst all of us; they are amongst the bigwigs; they are amongst you know. It's like all over, it's mushrooming and there are a whole lot of people doing it.
P11	Ah, ZBC would be 60%. If we are to scale out of 100%, ZBC would score about 60% in terms of dispersing fake news in Zimbabwe. The prevalence is more. Yes, state-owned media lead by ZBC online that handle always gives us false information. I had said ZBC would score 60% of fake news circulating online. Diplomacy peddled by government ministers is fake news in most cases. Then we have opposition politicians claiming or giving us some assumptions as if it's true for political purposes which is fake news as well.

P12	Individuals who are aligned with certain political groups and civic groups are responsible for the spreading of fake news. If you are an official spokesperson of the government, yes you can put up some propaganda but then to write a fake news item deliberately which is fake then it is very, very difficult. It has to come out as propaganda than fake news.
	As a deputy minister of information, his duty is to protect the interest of the state and also means just like any other official of government in another country is also to spread some propaganda. I think he later on realised that, no, the propaganda item that he had unleashed was not credible. They tried to justify what the government had done. I think it was the wrong way of doing the right thing. It was prevalent.

Table 6: Who produces fakes news in Zimbabwe, and would you say that before January 2019 there was such a thing as fake news?

The responses gathered from this question reveal that any individual can produce fake news. These could be individuals in civil society, media or politics trying to push their agendas. They could also be bots, although no one mentioned this feature of fake news. P4 indicated that some political actors masquerading as NGO activists were also spreading fake news. Another point that stood out was the state-run media's propensity to produce "fake news". P11 singled out *The Herald* and the ZBC as the biggest producers of "fake news" in the country. This reason could be grounded in the fact that government only allows news favourable to it to be covered by state media, while opposition elements are demonised. Worth noting also is the fact that the view that ZBC and *The Herald* are major producers of fake news accords with the point not only that fake news is nothing new but also that it is interlinked with propaganda.

On the question of whether fake news existed before January 2019, participants were unanimous that "fake news" has always existed in Zimbabwe. P2, for instance, cited its existence in mainstream media. In addition, P8 alluded to a story that appeared in the independent media, in 1998, which reported that a decapitated Zimbabwean soldier had been buried in Nyanga district after dying in the war in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. This story was later debunked as false. From the responses, it was clear that, "fake news" was not viewed as having come into existence during the January 2019 National #Shutdown. If "fake news" has always existed, why then did the government then blame "fake news" for the internet shutdown? During the first day of the internet shutdown, the then Deputy Minister of information, Energy Mutodi blamed "fake news" as the cause (cf. Mberi, 2019) In order have a clearer

understanding of this, participants were further probed on the instances of "fake news" circulated during the shutdown.

Table 7 below shows what participants considered instances of "fake news" during the period when the government shut down the internet.

	Any instances of "fake news" circulated during the January 2019 National #Shutdown.
P1	Certainly, images from violence that occurred in Kenya circulated purportedly to have happened in Harare during the shutdown.
P2	There was nothing that was false. Everything was genuine. The false news that I know was largely from the state media.
P3	Yes true. We were not following people were sending. Rather we were privileged enough to go around. We did eight places, Mufakose being the noisiest, Highfields, Mabvuku and Tafara. People would send that the other neighbourhood is on fire and yet we were there. And we would see that was fake news.
P4	There were some mobilisations were being done on the internet, pertaining to something which was false. People now discuss everything on social media. So basically, you can get anything from there.
P6	There was a lot of pictorial footage on social media showing incidents around the country but some of the pictures were photo shopped. They were not real pictures of what was happening during that time. But these were pictures or footage from other incidents elsewhere.
P7	I would actually need to do a kind of research to give you two instances. But definitely I can say authoritatively we had fake news which was propounded during that time.
P11	What I can say is most of the pictures that have been circulating online because we were now using some other ways after they shutdown the internet

Table 7: Any instances of "fake news" circulated during the January 2019 National #Shutdown

Participants are convinced that "fake news" was posted during the January 2019 National #Shutdown. But what was notable was the fact that the participants did not seem to agree on the definition itself. This related mainly to images of incidents that happened in other countries such as Kenya that were purportedly said to have happened in the Harare suburbs. Participant 3 concurred with P1 on the fake images that were being circulated on social media. He added a personal experience of receiving images of houses supposedly burning in Mufakose while he was there and could tell that nothing of the sort was happening. P2 denied the presence of "fake news" during the shutdown, indicating that everything that was being posted during that week was accurate.

In order to understand the link between fake news and social media regulation in Zimbabwe, participants were asked about their views regarding social media regulation. Table 8 shows the responses to this question.

	Is social media a threat that should be contained or regulated?
P1	I wouldn't say it is a threat although it does have challenges. The best way forward will be self-regulatory and let the space be. I would say Social media is actually on the contrary a welcome platform, a conduit for citizen to enjoy rights to free expression, to access information and actually a vehicle towards enhanced communication among people.
P2	Never, it should not be regulated.
P3	You can't regulate social media, you don't regulate it, you must not regulate. You can regulate communication. Social media is a social platform, it is like trying to regulate how people think and laugh. I am strongly opposed to AIPPA same as social media regulation.
P4	It must be regulated I think. Because we cannot have people just spreading fake news on social media. There is need to regulate that in my view.
P5	I feel it must be regulated, personally. Number two, even if you want to regulate it - it is difficult to regulate. It has to be an incumbent upon an individual to say okay don't worry about Facebook because there is a lot of abuse that happens there. No one dies from not being on social media.
P6	Uhm, if it's possible to regulate it, yes, I would go for that because social media and citizen journalism have done harm to society.
P7	Why are we now talking about regulating the media in 2019, why didn't we talk about it in 2010? It means that over the course of 9 to 10 or so years, there have been certain developments that prompted people to begin to think about it, maybe we need regulation.
P8	The problem is when you say social media, it is pregnant term. To say social media is threat I am not sure but what I know for certain is that the internet is. There are instances on social media or the internet which is the carrier are a threat and there are instances when there are a serious advantage.
P9	I feel social media must be regulated. It is getting out of hand in that it is spreading falsehood and by spreading falsehoods, eh, it is not doing justice to the public.
P10	The whole world is moving towards an unregulated social media. My view is that it must remain largely unregulated so that it gives ordinary people the opportunity to express themselves without the excess of different governments that stumble upon people's rights.
P11	Yes it must be regulated within but the regulation must be in line with dictates of the constitution. It must not be absolute – it must be minimal.
P12	Obviously, it should be regulated because you are not operating in a vacuum. It can be used to cause harm, to cause violence just like the radio broadcast in Rwanda.

Table 8: Is social media a threat that should be contained or regulated?

The issue of social media regulation remains a highly contested issue. This was evident from the responses gathered from participants. Participants were evenly divided on whether social media was a threat that should be regulated or not. Those who were against regulating social media pointed to the difficulties that would come with trying to contain social spaces. P3 indicated that he was strongly opposed to social media regulation and equated this to trying to regulate how people think and laugh. P1 did not see social media as a threat, but as a conduit for citizens to enjoy free expression. Some of the participants mentioned that social media is supposed to be regulated given that it has been used to cause harm. For example, P9 indicated that social media is being used to spread falsehoods. P4, P5, P12 and P6 all concurred with the need for social media regulation. I sensed that part of the reason government is not trusted to regulate social media is because of its past track record in misusing power. Interestingly, distrust of government is not an exclusively Zimbabwean thing. Rather, it is a universal phenomenon, one framed differently in different contexts. As we showed in Chapter 2, many African governments are jumping onto the bandwagon of internet shutdowns. In the last three years, internet shutdowns have been experienced in Chad, Gabon, Ethiopia and Sudan. Legislation to limit social media has been proposed or promulgated in Zambia and Tanzania.

Participants were asked which law would be used to regulate social media in Zimbabwe. Table 9 below presents the responses.

	What law must be used to regulate fake news?
P1	I am aware of the various versions on the Cyber Crime, Cyber Security and Data Protection Bill of 2019 that have to the point where we are now. And this is what can be used.
P2	There are laws that they are trying to craft, several laws, cybercrime, MOPA, also is AIPPA that has been remodelled, can be used to persecute and prosecute people on what they say on social media.
P3	The Cyber bill, which is a useless piece of legislation.
P4	We have the, I am not quite of the laws … It should be protection of privacy we have protection of privacy rules which are been actually being enacted. There are undergoing law making process I am sure.

P5	We have different laws or bills that are before parliament or at different stages of promulgation that will regulate the media industry, the mainstream media industry so to speak.
P6	Any law that has to do with media regulation, such as the proposed cybercrime, cyber security bill.
P7	Currently we are at stage whereby government is exploring the cyber bill.
P8	Cyber bill being proposed and is a better step in the right direction.
P9	Cyber bill which is going to replace the AIPPA.
P11	The government doesn't have the law or policy to regulate the internet.
P12	We do have the cyber bill that is coming out

Table 9: What law must be used to regulate fake news?

The responses indicate that most of the participants knew about the impending Cyber Bill. This suggested that the Bill was a much-awaited (by pro-government participants) as well as much-derided (by pro-social media participants) piece of legislation. There is a realisation by some participants that such legislation is inevitable, while others are adamant that social media should remain unregulated. A middle way between the two extremes seems, however, to be the most prudent position. Of interest as well was whether social media fuels demonstration or promotes uprisings (Table 10), and whether social movements – which mobilise through social media – impact on politics in Zimbabwe (Table 11). Table 10 and 11 below summarises the responses.

The responses in Table and 10 and 11 indicate a universal belief in the power or potential of social media, although there was no agreement on exactly the nature of such power or potential. What was interesting about these responses was that even when participants said yes to the question, they still tended to disagree about the reasons for saying yes. The pro-government participants saw the concurrence that social media fuels demonstrations as proof that it must be regulated or even shutdown during protests. The pro-opposition participants, however, thought that social media

was an important tool of democratisation and that fuelling demonstrations was an element of this.

	Does social media fuel demonstrations or promotes uprisings?
P1	I think social media is just but another vehicle. If people are going to demonstrate, they won't demonstrate because they have access social media, they will demonstrate because they believe they have a reason to demonstrate/protest. If people are generally violent, what is violent is not the media.
P2	It doesn't help to spread, Social media is an idea whose time has come and you cannot reach it away in that it is a cheaper avenue or platforms that allows citizens to interact, communicate, integrate, and collaborate.
P3	Guns do not kill people, people kill people, we can blame guns all we want.-Social media is a tool, people will use it whichever way they want. Do not blame the social media for what is happening, you blame the people who are behind it.
P5	Social media is double-agent. It has its good side and it has its bad side. It can be used to incite insurgency, mobilise people because it allows you to rally people in one place at a kick of a button.
P8	Sometimes, yes
P9	In a way like I indicated earlier, it causes alarm and despondence…
P10	You see demonstrations are a constitutional construct of any democratic society and social media must play a role of facilitating the enjoyment of that right by citizens. I don't understand why it can be said to be a reason to cause the spreading of violence or whatever
P11	It creates the necessary mood. The necessary atmosphere because you know that the most people affected by situation in the country are the people who work; are the people who are in urban areas; are the people who have the smartphones. It creates the necessary mood for a revolution. We saw it during the Arab spring revolutions.
P12	It really depends on the scenario

Table 10: Does social media fuel demonstrations or help in the spreading of uprisings?

To further understand how government responded during the January 2019 National Shutdown, participants were asked about the impact of social media movements such as BabaJukwa and ThisFlag on Zimbabwean politics. Table 11 below shows some of the salient participant responses.

	Social movements impact on politics in Zimbabwe?
P1	Yes they did.
P2	Yes they have actually revolutionised the way politics is done in Zimbabwe. That's is why we have Zanu Pf paying trolls Varakashi. Charamba exposed them.
P3	They have greatly impacted on the politics in the country
P4	Definitely,…..
P5	These movements are playing a very important role…
P6	Yes…
P7	These movements have had great impact….
P8	Obvious, they are playing one particular agenda in support of one faction of our political set-up.
P9	Yes. They created a big impact. The bulk of the people relied on okay I will call someone or I will text someone for the news or I will do it later but there are people who are already on the ground.
P10	Definitely.
P11	They are the ones who even starting crying about #MugabeMustFall. They are the one who started that thing. The system saw an opportunity and then they arrested the opportunity. But they are the ones who started the pressure. They are the ones who got the fire burning.
P12	They do promote political discourse about the political affairs of the country and yes, it is debatable whether some of the information was true or false.

Table 11: Understanding the impact of social media movements on the politics of Zimbabwe

Participants were asked if there is a link between "fake news" and social media regulation. This was done to understand what government's response to "fake news" during the #Shutdown tells us about the relationship of "fake news" and (social) media regulation. Table 12 below shows the responses from participants.

	Is there a link between fake news and social media regulation?
P1	There would be, to be honest. What else would you want to regulate in such a manner to shut down the internet for example, if it is not political.
P2	It is political, they are paranoid.
P3	There is a thin line between the two. The Herald and Daily News lie with their ink. We can't say social media is the source for fake news.
P4	With social media it is difficult to detect because some people can generate fake news and just post it on social media and that news actually do spread like fire, you know.
P5	Personally, I don't have a clear answer on this.
P6	Media regulations has always been there without social media, because if you look at social media, social media is a recent thing from 2000 going upwards but media regulations has always been there, even in this country prior to independence, the colonial government, you know it, there was law mark, the official secret act. So, to say that there is a link, yes, there could be a link because social media unlike your mainstream media, social media is so pervasive and it has the capacity to make a lot of influence on a large scale unlike the mainstream media.
P7	Definitely there is a link because what we see there is…
P8	The problem with the internet to the state is not about fake news. Every day people are lying on the internet about the state and things like that.
P9	There could be a link or even none
P10	Look, if there is going to be cause for some regulation particularly to deal with fake news then that is a noble thing to do.
P11	Yes, I think so. But in Zimbabwe the main agenda is not to regulate fake news because government lives through fake news. Like what Professor Jonathan Moyo said ZANUPF will not reform itself out of power.
P12	I haven't seen any research in that direction. You are one of the very few now beginning to explore that particular area.

Table 12: Understanding the link between fake news and social media regulation?

From the responses gathered from the participants, there is really a thin line between "fake news" and social media regulation. P3, P4, P5 and P9 believe that it is very difficult to identify link. On the other hand, P1 and P2 indicated that the only link between "fake news" and social media regulation is political. For P7and P11, there is definitely a link between the two. However, P12 indicated that he hasn't read much on the subject and therefore did not have enough information.

Discussion

Several salient themes emerged from the interviews. These include the complex (hard-to-define) nature of fake news, contestations about social media regulation, media polarisation, social media participation and government control and propaganda. These broad themes covered a wide range of issues that came out of the collected data. To answer the research objective of this research that of the exploration of the link between "fake news" and social media regulation in Zimbabwe, I will therefore present a detailed analysis of the themes. But firstly, I will present a word cloud of the most common words that I picked from the data analysis. These words better situate the responses from the participants within the broad themes identified.

Figure 2: Common words found in the data

Theme 1: Complex nature of fake news and misconceptions about it

This theme emerged from questions that sought to understand how participants understood the concept of "fake news", how they defined it, what they considered instances of "fake news" during the January 2019 National #Shutdown in Zimbabwe, who produced it and whether it was a new phenomenon in Zimbabwe. The issue of "fake news" was very important to this study. Understanding this concept would assist in understanding how 'fake news' figures in the media regulation matrix. When the Zimbabwean government ordered the shutting down of the internet on 15 January 2019, the issue of the spread of dangerous "fake news" (dangerous to national peace and security) was reported to be the reason behind the shutting down before the government made an about turn. Then network congestion was fingered as the reason behind the intermittent and limited internet coverage. So, it is important to understand how the participants understood the concept. From the data collected, it was evident that the participants were familiar with "fake news" in general, although the definition varied across participants.

The concept of "fake news" remains a highly contested area given the different explanations attached to it. It was evident that the concept of "fake news" does not have a single definition. What cannot be denied from the data collected was that of "fake news" having altered politics in the country. Rodny-Gumede (2018) emphasises the impact "fake news" has had on politics. Participants used varied terms and phrases to explain and define "fake news." These included propaganda, half-truths, deliberate misinterpretation of facts, deliberate dissemination of false news, inaccurate news, untrue facts, spreading of false information. For P8, defining "fake news" was very cumbersome since the concept could be defined from different standings. P8 pointed out that:

> I never really sought to come up with a definition of fake news. If I define fake news, it would be from my experience as a citizen. Fake news I would take it to be any news which is premised on anything other than fact. It is untrue, this are false–faults, fabricated or created to create a certain impression or throw a certain idea but with derogation. So, fake news to me anything is not factual that is not true... (Table 5: P8)

Participants had different perceptions of fake news and this complicated the question of determining whether "fake news" contributed to the January 2019 National

#Shutdown or not. Ogola (2017a) states that "fake news" is the deliberate dissemination of false information expressly intended to misinform. Since I also sought the nature and role of "fake news" in the January 2019 National #Shutdown in Zimbabwe, the responses from participants made it impossible to determine the role "fake news" played in the January 2019 National #Shutdown.

Tandoc et al, (2018) indicated that "fake news" could appear in the form of manipulated images and videos intended to create false narratives. It was evident that during the January National Shutdown, a lot of images were circulated on social media purporting to be from the suburbs. Instances of "fake news" that circulated during January 2019 National #Shutdown included images from other countries. P6 alluded to these manipulated images that were being posted on social media, saying:

> There was a lot of pictorial footage on social media showing incidents around the country but some of the pictures were photo shopped. They were not real pictures of what was happening during that time. But these were pictures or footage from other incidents elsewhere…. (Table 5: P6)

But if the images were true despite not being from the shutdown, should these still be referred to as "fake news"? What then constitute "fake news"? The theme of "fake news" misconception in Zimbabwe points to new challenges brought about by the rise of social media as central actors in the public sphere.

Most of the participants conceded that "fake news" was an omnipresent reality on social media, although – due to political polarisation – they tended to differ on what exactly constituted fake news. What was not in question was the fact that social media has become a meeting place for people to share news and information. This echoes the literature review (Chapter 2) and also the theoretical framework (Chapter 3) for this study which suggests that the social media has become a "public sphere" where people meet to discuss issues of national interests. P4 stated that "fake news" is everywhere on social media and that "People now discuss everything on social media. So basically, you can get anything from there" (Table 7: P4).

There was consensus that fake news in Zimbabwe did not just come with the January 2019 National #Shutdown, but pre-existed it by. Hence, for instance, the former president, Robert Mugabe, and the current vice President, Constantino Chiwenga, "died" several times on social media. False messages about their deaths circulated on social media. During the coup in 2017, "fake news" became so rampant on social media, especially regarding the whereabouts of the former 'First Family', hence the issue of "fake news" did not just sprout with the shutting down of the internet in January 2019. This insistence draws a sharp distinction with the observation made in Chapter 2 that fake news in a standard sense is a recent phenomenon which cannot be divorced from the internet and, indeed, the proliferation of social media. However, it is broadly true that fake news is as old as the Garden of Eden! Thus, for P2, "fake news" had always existed and began in mainstream media:

> Fake news in Zimbabwe has always existed. In fact it was worry some that fake news actually began to exist in the mainstream media among professionals in the form of propaganda, sensationalism, exaggerations and so forth, so as for citizens we are there to blame because they feel that is how news and communication should be packaged…(P2)

Nevertheless, the interminable rise of social media platforms has seen large upward swings in the numbers of the population making use of the platforms (Ogola, 2019). For instance, the statistics for social media use in Zimbabwe are 980.0 thousand as of January 2020 (Kemp,2020). Most of the communication is now happening on social media, and people go on these platforms to share jokes, to laugh and vent their anger against the current government. This has been exacerbated by the crippling economic conditions that the people of Zimbabwe have been subjected to.

Theme 2: Political and media polarisation

Against the backdrop of a much-discussed and continuously deteriorating socio-economic environment, polarisation is one of the themes that emerged from collected data. Participants repeatedly mentioned the issue of polarisation both politically and in the mainstream media. What then stood out was mainstream media in Zimbabwe being seen as exacerbating political polarization by creating "echo chambers" which prevent people from being exposed to information that contradicts their pre-existing

beliefs. Similarly, political polarisation, continues to insulate people from opposing views about current events. In Zimbabwe, the mainstream media, especially the state sponsored media such as the Zimpapers stable and the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC) have since been labelled "Government Mouthpieces" for consistently and uncritically advancing the ruling government's ideologies (Ncube, 2019).This has been referred to as "patriotic journalism" (Chambwera,2020), an inflection of Terence Ranger's concept of "patriotic history". Resultantly, Zimbabweans have turned to social media to get information and read about current events.

The prevailing conditions in Zimbabwe have thus been blamed for creating the breeding ground for "fake news". P6 blamed the political climate for the production of "fake news":

> the polarisation of the political climate in Zimbabwe is also contributing to the production of fake news. The polarisation in itself is a compost that is nourishing fake news because we have two antagonistic forces, the MDC and they ZANUPF. They are competing for political space. So, what they do is they disseminate false messages in order to outdo each other. Fake news has always existed, but it's now so prevalent on social media... (Table 6: P6)

So it was evident that on the political front, both ZANU PF and MDC have been blamed for the production of the "fake news" in the country. The two political parties actually have online supporters that stand for the party's ideologies: #Varakashi (the destroyers – for the current government) and the #Nerrorists and #TeamPachedu (For the MDC Alliance). One of the participants mentioned how government was paying #Varakashi to pounce on the #Nerrorists/#TeamPachedu. As pointed out in Chapter 1, President Emmerson Mnangagwa is on record urging the #Varakashi to go in their numbers on social media and trounce the opposition supporters.

As for the media polarisation, Chatora (2012) argues that Zimbabwean people have resorted to social media to counter official discourse given the hostility and rigidity of mainstream media. Moyo (2011) concurs that social media, in the Zimbabwean context, emerged as arenas enabling Zimbabweans to share government and security forces' abuses, corruption, and electoral malpractices. Participants from civil society highlighted the need for diverse reporting from the media in order to address the issue

of "fake news". P11 blamed state mouthpieces for the spread of "fake news" and the subsequent migration of the masses to social media:

> …Ah, ZBC would be 60%. If we are to scale out of 100%, ZBC would score about 60% in terms of dispersing fake news in Zimbabwe. The prevalence is more. Yes, state-owned media lead by ZBC online that handle always gives us false information…. (Table 6: P11)

Zimbabweans are said to be hungry for information as they are angry and bored from receiving the same propaganda information from state media. Moyo (2020) alluded to social media being the go-to alternative for a country hungry for information. One important example given by the participant was the announcement in December 2019 of a decrease in school fees for the school term starting January 2020. What happened in January 2020 was the opposite; the fees for all schools trebled.

Theme 3: Regimes of truth

Foucault (1978) asserts that the production of truth at any given moment is intricately intertwined with power relations hence every *regime of truth* has to be understood in the context of existing power relations. This speaks to the complexity and highly contested nature of "fake news" as a concept. The polarity of the Zimbabwean society posed a challenge in really determining who defines what's true or false in the country. P1 stated:

> The challenge we have in a polarised society like ours is that the fake news that is disseminated is usually the affirmation of one's opinion, belief, and inclination towards an idea or ideal. (Table 4: P1)

Most participants, with the exception of those from the government sector, indicated that the "state of the nations" was responsible for defining for citizens what should be considered as true or false. P2 explained: "When you go out and say that MDC wants to and bomb all the tall buildings in Zimbabwe, when you know that MDC does not have military and has no capacity to recruit terrorists. That is basically where this thing of fake news by government starts.

On the other hand, participants from within the government sector indicated that there was no one to decide what is true or false for anyone. P8 noted:

> There is no one who decides. Remember social media is something that has just come out. It's a new dimension, but generally there has always been some regulatory bodies that regulate operations of the media. For instance, we have Zimbabwe Media Commission, it has provision that look at issues to do with fake news in traditional mainstream media. But obviously if something now becomes fake on the internet there must be a complainant, but those issues are not generally provided for in the acts that were meant for mainstream media. So, people end up taking each other to courts. (Table 4: P8)

Thus, in as truth or falsity are concerned, the ruling government decides. In any country, what is true to one party is "fake news" to the other party. As P11 observes:

> If you do research on any issue that is published by the government, the opposition says it's fake news. If you do a thorough research on that you can tell as you are doing today, you can tell what fake news from what is not fake news is. (Table 4:11).

Some participants highlighted that reality in the real world defines what is true or false for the citizens. Participants pointed out how government ministers lied to people, thereby betraying who defined what was true or false in Zimbabwe. The more the power individuals had, the more likely they were to generate "fake news'. P11 pointed to an incident that happened in December 2019:

> You saw that our minister of finance gave us fake news when he was presenting the 2020 Budget; then the Chinese Embassy had come out and said the Zimbabwean government is like they gave us a parable that we gave Zimbabwe five chickens and they accounted for two in their budget (Table 4: P11).

Thus, what is undeniable is the complexity of what is happening on the online public sphere. Morgan (2019) blames this on the declining levels of trust in institutions and experts. P3 also noted that in the case of Zimbabwe, it has become very impossible to have a uniform system coming from parallel systems. Habermas notes that the

public sphere is both process and space: "In periods of mobilization, the structures that actually support the authority of a critically engaged public begin to vibrate. The balance of power between civil society and the political system then shifts" (1996:379). A significant number of people in Zimbabwe have now resorted to using social media for their communication while shunning ZBC and the rest of the state print media. This current online public sphere is definitely a threat to the government. To counter this, the government unleashed their online "Varakashi" to destabilise the online public sphere against its enemies.

Theme 4: Tyranny, control and propaganda

It was important to establish what the Zimbabwean government's response to "fake news" during the #Shutdown reveals about the relationship of "fake news" and (social) media regulation and why the government blocked the internet. The issue of tyranny, control and propaganda is not new, especially to African governments (Ogola, 2017). In most cases, the desire to control the internet is rooted in government's determination to control the political narrative. From the analysis, it was observed that there is a deliberate tendency by the government to conveniently dismiss most news disseminated by social media as "fake news". In fact, if it upsets the authorities, it is fake news. *The Herald*, the leading state-controlled daily newspaper, blatantly "lies" in favour of the government, and government sees it as authentic. This makes the "fake" tag problematic and complex.

When the internet shutdown took place, the then Deputy Minister of Information, Energy Mutodi denied government interference citing congestion caused by people posting videos on social media[23]. The Zimbabwean government used control and propaganda in dealing with January 2019 protests. It went further to block the internet. P6 indicated that the shutting down of the internet was done to protect the government from international shame regarding its violent crackdown of the demonstration. There was a suggestion that the government did not shutdown the internet because of "fake news". P8, who is from the government, called shutting the internet a 'command and control tool'. He indicated that, "fake news" had always existed and had nothing to do

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[23] https://www.techzim.co.zw/2019/01/there-was-just-a-congestion-problem-zimbabwes-information-deputy-ministers-silly-lie-about-the-internet-blackout/

with the January 2019 internet blackout. Further to this, it was revealed that social media is not a problem to the government since people lie everyday about government dealings every day:

> So that shutdown was then instituted …as a command and control tool for people who want to do things that are unlawful. Remember fake news has always been there…*makuhwa agara ariko*. (Fake news has always been there) You think the country can be stopped nemakuhwa…. (Table 3: P8)

Any government will use propaganda to ensure that its ideologies are protected. P11 affirmed this:

> But in Zimbabwe the main agenda is not to regulate fake news because government lives through fake news. Like what Professor Jonathan Moyo said ZANUPF will not reform itself out of power (Table12: P11).

Most African governments will do anything to thwart any threat that might arise (Ogola, 2017). Zimbabwe is not the only African country that has shut down the internet in an attempt to control the narrative against the efforts of its citizens to flip the discourse. Several other countries such as Chad, DRC, Congo Republic, have all joined this bandwagon of governments that have shutdown internet. P5 pointed out that:

> No government is in power to relinquish it. Government is in power to stay. If anything threatens their stay in power, I am sure they will justify to-do that. It's a trend all over. (P5)

The above shows how authoritative governments are responding to the growing online presence of their populations. While the response is not uniform, it is nevertheless made in the direction of more regulation and control.

Theme 5: Social media regulation

The interest of regulating social media is rooted in the need for the government to enhance control and extend its hold on power. Social media has necessitated the dissemination of much information within countries and has played a very important

function in communities (Rodny-Gumede and Hyde-Clarke, 2014). Rodny-Gumede and Hyde-Clarke add that news media play a vital role in the public sphere and the link between social media and democracy in the public sphere remains uncontested. Social media has become an indispensable meeting place for most people where they discuss issues affecting their lives and also to laugh and pass on jokes. Celliers and Hatting warned that the increased use of social media exposes the public sphere to misleading information and satire (2020). A public sphere emerges where people struggle for a better society, and their struggle is a process of constituting the public that creates spatial domains of resistance in the public. Moreover, there is no doubt that Zimbabweans have increasingly come to rely on social media for news and information about politics. Increasingly, social media has emerged as a fertile soil for deliberately produced misinformation campaigns, conspiracy, and extremist alternative media (Neudert, Howard and Kollanyi 2019, 1).

The issue of social media regulation in Zimbabwe has not spared the government from being blamed for violating the basic human rights in its bid to protect itself. Participants believe that social media is not a threat but it has challenges. These include that of "fake news" being peddled by people. However, this should not warrant regulation if the information does not threaten national security. P1 indicated that regulating the social media platforms would rob the citizens of their freedom of expression:

> I wouldn't say it is a threat although it does have challenges, the best way forward will be self-regulatory and let the space be. I would say Social media is actually on the contrary a welcome platform, a conduit for citizen to enjoy rights to free expression, to access information and actually a vehicle towards enhanced communication among people (Table 8: P1).

The social media are now a permanent part of the lives of the people in Zimbabwe. People now get their basic information from Social media. The public sphere produces public opinion which in turn articulates the problems for which a truth-tracking democratic system seeks solutions. And most important in Habermas' conceptualisation was that anyone could participate in this public sphere. This notion has flagged that the internet is where the online public sphere might merge.

In a democracy people have freedom of choice including the choice to be on social media. However, autocratic governments find themselves struggling to accommodate these platforms. Thus, the Zimbabwean government ended up blocking the internet fearing mobilisation against its authority. Gukurume (2017) and Morgan (2018) argue that social media provides a discursive space for ordinary citizens to articulate their problems and to challenge the excesses of the government, which are epitomised by endemic corruption, bad governance and massive unemployment.

There were concerns that the issue of regulating the internet poses a number of challenges. While there was need for social media regulation, proper institutions had to be put in place to make it possible:

> You can't regulate social media, you don't regulate it, you must not regulate. You can regulate communication. Social media is a social platform, it is like trying to regulate how people think and laugh. I am strongly opposed to AIPPA same as social media regulation…. (P3)

> The whole world is moving towards an unregulated social media. My view is that it must remain largely unregulated so that it gives ordinary people the opportunity to express themselves without the excess of different governments that stumble upon people's rights… (P10)

> I feel it must be regulated, personally. Number two, even if you want to regulate it - it is difficult to regulate. It has to be an incumbent upon an individual to say okay don't worry about Facebook because there is a lot of abuse that happens there. No one dies from not being on social media…. (P5)

> Yes it must be regulated within but the regulation must be in line with dictates of the constitution. It must not be absolute – it must be minimal…. (P11).

Various African governments are rushing to regulate social media platforms under the guise of protecting the nation form "fake news". In Zimbabwe, the Minister of Information, Monica Mutsvangwa publicly announced that social media was being used to peddle falsehoods about government thereby having a negative effect on what

she referred to as 'national security'[24] This has however, allowed many governments to extend control over any voices that are critical of the government rather than control fake news (Mutsvairo and Bebawi, 2019). A lot of questions have thus been raised on the link between "fake news" and these social media regulations that have seen most governments instituting especially in Africa. It was revealed that there is a very thin line between "fake news" and social media regulation. The main idea to regulate the internet was blamed on the need to advance political ideologies of the ruling party and government:

> What else would you want to regulate in such a manner to shut down the internet for example, if it is not political… (P1)
>
> It is political, they are paranoid… (P2)
>
> There is a thin line between the two. *The Herald* and *Daily News* lie with their ink. We can't say social media is the source for fake news… (P3)
>
> I haven't seen any research in that direction. You are one of the very few now beginning to explore that particular area… (P12)

Participants also revealed that the various laws that are being drafted in Zimbabwe would not assist in the flow of communication. By 2019, Zimbabwe did not have the appropriate law to regulate "fake news" on social media, hence there was a rush to promulgate the Cyber Bill. Participants from the government sector contend that the Cyber Bill was a positive step towards the right direction. The Bill has since been published in the Zimbabwe Government Gazette, on 15 May 2020[25] .

Conclusion

In this chapter, data was presented, analysed and interpreted in order to understand the link between "fake news" and social media regulation, using the January 2019 National Shutdown as the context for the study. The concept of *infrafractures* was introduced, to express the phenomenon of Zimbabwe's cyclic crises. Five broad themes were analysed, using thematic analysis, to address the research questions of this study. From the analysis, it was established that a thin line exists between "fake

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[24]https://www.chronicle.co.zw/minister-calls-for-laws-regulating-social-media/

[25] https://altadvisory.africa/2020/05/20/zimbabwe-gazettes-cyber-security-and-data-protection-bill/

news" and social media regulation. The link between the two is blurred by the political and media polarisation currently existing in Zimbabwe. It was also established that the concept of "fake news" remains a poorly defined area and this poses a challenge to narratives that use this concept. While the issue of "fake news" on social media cannot be ruled out, regulation requires appropriate laws for dealing with the new forms of media. Most people have now resorted to online public sphere to discuss issues concerning their lives and economies. As such, most autocratic governments are in fear hence the rush to impose social media regulation in order to safeguard their ideologies. The next chapter will conclude the study.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

Summary

The purpose of this study was to explore the nexus of fake and social media regulation in Zimbabwe, using the January 2019 National #Shutdown, and to understand how 'fake news' figures in the media regulation matrix. This chapter gives a conclusion to the findings of this study. The research was informed by the research questions below, which formed the basis for the semi-structured interviews that were undertaken with key informants in Harare. The study turned on the following research questions:

1. What was the nature and role of "fake news" in the January 2019 National #Shutdown in Zimbabwe?
2. What does the Zimbabwean government's response to "fake news" during the #Shutdown tell us about the relationship of "fake news" and (social) media regulation?

It is evident that "fake news" still poses some definitional challenges not only to scholars, but to government and general citizens as well. The lack of a standard definition for "fake news", that is yet to be established is therefore a cause for concern when trying to understand issues that involve this concept. Another notable problem arising from not having a clear cut definition for "fake news" is that of national laws criminalising "fake" or "false" news being susceptible to misuse and abuse through arbitrary interpretation and enforcement.

The world over, both citizens and government have become very active on social media platforms. This, for different reasons has seen a proliferation of unverified information on the different social media platforms. However, despite the difficulties surrounding the definitional aspect of "fake news" various governments are calling for the regulation of social media platforms under the guise of curbing the spread of "fake news". This has been interpreted as a calculated move to enhance the different government's hold on power. Understandably, some have argued on potential positives of such government's stance towards the need to regulate social media. But in all this hullabaloo, most governments that have been caught in this storm have been found to be very authoritarian, which affirms the need to maintain their grip on power.

Interestingly, social media have become a vital and permanent part of the "public sphere" as many people have now resorted to getting basic information from social media. In Zimbabwe, the media, which is supposed to give unbiased information to people, has been blamed for polarisation. The prevailing situation in the country has pushed majority of the citizens to source for alternative news and their only hope is from social media. As alluded to in the theoretical framework of this study in Chapter 3, Habermas's "Public Sphere" comes into being in which private individuals assemble to form a public body. In this, people make up their minds in a manner that benefits their worldviews and society. And this move could not be underestimated. Although the "public sphere" does not perform decision making functions, the truth is that social media has been used to raise awareness on problems, claims and interests. Zimbabwe has not been immune to this. Social media has transformed the "Public Sphere" into the public political arena. Social media in Zimbabwe has become a civic and political realm for forming political opinions and this played a key role in what happed during the January 2019 National #Shutdown.

Twelve key informants in Harare were interviewed for this study and these were from different sectors such as, government, civil society, media policy organisations as well as the mainstream media. In fact, twenty participants were interviewed, but about a third of them requested to be off-the-record, although they expressed willingness to talk to me about what they knew about the #shutdown. The refusal to be recorded made me reflect that there was a deep rooted fear of reprisal by many Zimbabweans especially those in positions of power. The January 2019 National #Shutdown was used to illustrate how "fake news" figures in the social media regulation matrix. Furthermore, thematic analysis was used to analyse the data collected during the semi-structured interviews with the selected key-informants.

From the analysis, it was established that most of the "fake news" that was circulated on social media before the lockdown was instituted were mainly pictorial images of events that had happened in other countries such as Kenya. As such, it can be argued that to some extend social media users, including government, were well aware of these images. However, this boiled down to what really constitutes "fake news." If these images were a true representation of what had happened in Kenya two years

ago, what was really "fake' about them? If government knew that the images were of events that happened in Kenya, why then did it shut down the internet under the guise of stopping the spread of "fake news" as if the January 2019 demonstrations had given birth to "fake news" in the country? It was also established that the idea of "fake news" ought not to be seen in a monolithic way. The definition depends on how one is positioned. Hence the definition that "fake news" depend on context, one's preferred reading and ideological camp (Ellis, 2018) suggests that people would tend to effortlessly trust false information as long as it backs their existing worldviews (Weeks and Garrett, 2014).

Moreover, the idea of social media regulation also depends on where one stands within the economic circle. This was also confirmed by the High Court ruling that later found the government guilty of instituting an unlawful shutdown of the internet. From the analysis, it also emerged that government was well aware that "fake news" has always existed and that those incidences from the demonstrations, exacerbated by the increase in fuel price, were far away from affecting 'national security'. Thus, the "fake news" during the January 2019 demonstrations was not really the ultimate provocation of the blackout of the internet as claimed by the government during that time. The explanations appear to have been a cover up for a government caught in a panic by the latest cycle of crisis. I have referred to these cycles of crisis as infrafractures because they reflect a deep seated fractured polity and body politic.

Furthermore, it was established that Zimbabwe is in a very volatile space politically. As P1 stated "The challenge we have in a polarised society like ours is that the fake news that is disseminated is usually the affirmation of one's opinion, belief, and inclination towards an idea or ideal". P10 also stated that "You know in a polarised society like Zimbabwe, that's almost impossible because there is always a version from the other people". This alone has led to polarisation in the country, with the mainstream media being accused of lying with their ink. The state-owned media, mainly *The Herald* newspaper and the ZBC have been accused of being the ruling government's mouth-pieces which leave the population information- and news-hungry. This has resulted in the migration to social media platforms which, theoretically, Habermas conceptualised as 'online public spheres' (Kruse, Norris and Flinchum,

2017). P11 asserted that "Ah, ZBC would be 60%. If we are to scale out of 100%, ZBC would score about 60% in terms of dispersing fake news in Zimbabwe. The prevalence is more. Yes, state-owned media lead by ZBC online that handle always gives us false information…." Many Zimbabweans are now connected to these social media platforms where they meet to discuss everyday struggles that they are experiencing economically. However, despite this leap, social media participation in Zimbabwe remains at an evolving stage. Urban dwellers have better access to information technologies than their rural counterparts.

Thus, most citizens in Zimbabwe seem to have formed their own "Public Sphere" in which they discuss issues affecting them. As mentioned earlier, the "Public Sphere" in the country have become transformative participation given the element of participation within the political realm. The existence of polarisation, as affirmed by the interviews revealed the type of "public sphere that exists in Zimbabwe. One man's "fake news" has become another man's "public sphere". The platforms appear to pose a constant threat to the government, which frames them as an "asymmetric threat" and regime changers who are being used for "command and control" type of attacks on the country's national security grid. This "asymmetric threat" has been referred to significantly in military literature but is difficult to prove. Also, where there is citizen anger, these issues can blend, and dismissing citizen anger merely because there is the possibility of cyber-attacks by a hostile foreign entity is dishonest. At the same time, foreign and national security threats can take many forms, and citizen anger can be weaponised by hostile foreign entities. Still, the cries of Zimbabweans for social and economic justice remain relevant, and cannot be delegitimised by a government that has shown repeatedly that it is had no abiding interest in fundamental change.

The Zimbabwean government had felt the impact of other social media movements, such as #ThisFlag, which had compromised the politics of the country, hence would not tolerate the online mobilisations that were taking place during the January #shutdown. The study also found that there was a thin line between "fake news" and social media regulation in Zimbabwe. Whilst the presence of "fake news" on social media platforms is undeniable, the move to regulate the platforms was politically motivated. It was also established that many authoritarian African governments were also implementing similar steps of shutting down the internet in order to hide atrocities

being committed to the citizens during times of demonstrations and Zimbabwe was not exempted from this. To add on to this, it was established that given that social media platforms are new types of media, laws to regulate them were not readily available hence the rush to establish them. In Zimbabwe, the Cyber Bill was gazetted on 15 May 2020, hence the internet shutdown in January was done outside the law given the absence of a law that specifically addressed the issue of "fake news" on social media. While the regulation of social media was met with mixed reactions, the study found that it was important for the government to roll out campaigns on "fake news" and how to detect it so that the population would be aware of these. While social media has brought alternative avenues for communicating, the issue of "fake news" is of growing concern and has resulted in the rush to regulate social media. The study also concluded that "fake news" had nothing to do with the internet shutdown during the January 2019 National #Shutdown. It was however, the fear by the government of a repeat of the Arab Spring wave. The government's response to the demonstrations reveals the authoritarian nature of the government of Zimbabwe which is eager to protect its political narratives.

Against the backdrop of the regulatory furore over "fake news", I would recommend that further studies be conducted, especially on the link between social media and "fake news" because alternative explanations to the findings of this study cannot be ruled out. The study could also be expanded to include the link between "fake news" and state security, which has not been researched in Zimbabwe. I would also recommend that technology companies in Zimbabwe be autonomous of government institutions in trying to counter the manipulation of the online public sphere. Moreover, long-term social media policies should be enacted to inform the publics about how the online public sphere is shaped in order to build resilience into the democratic system.

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Appendix 1: FHDC Letter approving study

Ms Laurinda Van Den Berg
lvandenberg@uj.ac.za

From: Prof P Rugunanan

To: Ms Grace Gambiza

Cc: Prof N Mboti

Date: 27 September 2019

Re: Higher Degrees Committee Proposal Approval

Student Name	Ms Grace Gambiza
Student Number	218097537
Title of Study	FAKE NEWS AND SOCIAL MEDIA REGULATION IN ZIMBABWE: A CASE STUDY OF THE 2019 NATIONAL #SHUTDOWN
Department	Communication Studies
Degree	Masters
Supervisor(s)	Prof N Mboti
Ethics Approval #	
Approval Date	19 September 2019

The Faculty of Humanities Higher Degrees Committee (Humanities) ratifies your proposal if it is a Masters dissertation and recommends your proposal to the Senate Higher Degrees Committee if it is a Doctoral thesis. All proposals using human subjects need ethics clearance. Your proposal will be sent to the Ethics Committee if ethics clearance is required.

Warm regards

(PROF P RUGUNANAN)
CHAIR: FACULTY OF HUMANITIES HIGHER DEGREES COMMITTEE (HUMANITIES)

Appendix 2: Ethics Cover Letter

FACULTY OF HUMANITIES

RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

09 October 2019

ETHICAL CLEARANCE NUMBER	REC-01-139-2019
REVIEW OUTCOME	Approved
APPLICANT(S)	Mrs. G. Gambiza (218097537)
TITLE OF RESEARCH PROJECT	Fake News and Social Media Regulation in Zimbabwe: A Case Study of the 2019 National #Shutdown
DEPARTMENT	Communication Studies
SUPERVISOR(S)	Prof. N. Mboti

Dear Mrs. G. Gambiza

The Faculty of Humanities Research Ethics Committee has gone through your research proposal and is satisfied that it is compliant with the approved ethical standards of the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Johannesburg.

The REC would like to extend its best wishes to you in your research project.

Sincerely,

PROJECT TITLE: Fake News and Social Media Regulation in Zimbabwe: A case study of the 2019 National #Shutdown.

RESEARCHER NAME: GRACE GAMBIZA

This invitation letter and informed consent form may contain some words that are unfamiliar to you. Please ask questions about anything you do not understand or anything you want to learn more about.

You may take home an unsigned copy of this consent form to think about or discuss with family or friends before deciding.

Once you understand, and if you agree to take part, you will be asked to sign your name or make your mark on this form. You will be offered a copy to keep.

INTRODUCTION
Hello, my name is Grace Gambiza. I am a student at the University of Johannesburg. I would like to invite you to take part in this study. I am conducting this research for my Masters' degree. I have selected you to participate in this study because i believe that you are well knowledgeable on the issues surrounding fake news and social media regulation and the 2019 National # shutdown in Zimbabwe.

YOUR PARTICIPATION IS VOLUNTARY
Before you decide whether to be in this study, I would like to explain the purpose, the risks and benefits, what is expected of you and what you can expect from me.

It is up to you whether you join the study. You may choose to leave this study at any time.

AIM OF THE STUDY
The study aims to investigate the nexus of fake news and social media regulation in Zimbabwe using the January 2019 National # Shutdown as a backdrop to understand exactly how "fake news" figures in the emerging media regulation matrix.

RESEARCH
The study will conduct semi-structured interviews. During the individual interviews, I will ask direct questions and write down your answers, in order to have in-depth understanding of the topic. The interaction will be recorded using a phone, and the audio will be downloaded onto a secure and encrypted hard drive where it is protected from any third party. The notes and the recording will not contain your name or other identifying information and will be stored on a computer that is password protected. All the audio recordings will be destroyed after 5 years

What are my rights as a participant?

Your participation is voluntary. You are free to decide if you want to take part in the research. You can refuse to participate or stop at any time without giving any reason. The study will be carried out at a place that you are comfortable with, and where you will be free to communicate. Participation is strictly voluntary, and you will be fully informed of the purpose of the study, and the uses to which your data will be put, prior to the commencement of collecting data.

Are there any risks or discomforts involved in interviews?
The study is purely academic, and thus has minimal risk; it is not expected that participation will in any way put you in any harm whatsoever. But should you wish to be permitted to leave the interview and/or focus group at any point, without having to give reasons for this. You are under no compulsion to answer questions that you wish not to answer

Are there any benefits?
There are no material benefits to participating in the study. However the study will contribute to the broader work of research in the area.

Is there any cost to me taking part in the interview?
There is no cost in taking part in this study. The study is also not expecting to make any money from your participation.

Will I be paid?
No payments or reimbursements are attached to this study.

Will what I tell you remain confidential?
Participants' identities will be protected. As a participant, you will fully be treated as autonomous individual able to exercise their autonomy possible, including the right to privacy and the right to have private information remain confidential.

ETHICAL APPROVAL
This study proposal has been submitted to the University of Johannesburg Research Ethics Committee.

PROBLEMS OR QUESTIONS
If you ever have any questions about this study, you can contact:

Researcher contact details: ggambiza@gmail.com; Mobile: 0761344183

Supervisor contact details: nmboti@uj.ac.za 011 559 2929

Ethics Committee contact details: tchagonda@uj.ac.za 011 559 3827

Appendix 4: Informed Consent Form

Informed Consent Form

INFORMED CONSENT FORM (SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW)

This form is called a Consent Form. It will give you information about the study so you can make an informed decision about participation in this research. We encourage you to take some time to think this over and ask questions now and at any other time. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to sign this form and you will be given a copy for your records.

I agree to participate in this study titled **Fake News and Social Media Regulation in Zimbabwe: A case study of the 2019 National #Shutdown** being carried out by Grace Gambiza from the University of Johannesburg.

The purpose of this document is to specify the terms of my participation in the project through being interviewed. I can confirm that:

1. I have been given sufficient information about this research project. The purpose of my participation as an interviewee in this project has been explained to me and is clear.

2. My participation as an interviewee in this project is voluntary. There is no explicit or implicit coercion whatsoever to participate.

3. Participation involves being interviewed by (a) researcher(s) from the University of Johannesburg. The interview will last approximately [20] minutes. I allow the researcher(s) to take written notes during the interview. I also may allow the recording (by audio/video tape) of the interview. It is clear to me that in case I do not want the interview to be taped I am at any point of time fully entitled to withdraw from participation.

4. I have the right not to answer any of the questions. If I feel uncomfortable in any way during the interview session, I have the right to withdraw from the interview.

5. I have been given the explicit guarantees that, if I so wish, the researcher will not identify me by name or function in any reports using information obtained from this interview, and that my confidentiality as a participant in this study will remain secure. In all cases subsequent uses of records and data will be subject to standard data use policies at the University of Johannesburg (Data Protection Policy).

6. I have been given the guarantee that this research project has been reviewed and approved by Prof. Nyasha Mboti by the Department of Communication Studies, and by the Faculty of Humanities Ethics Committee at the University of Johannesburg. For research problems or any other question regarding the research project, the Faculty of Humanities Ethics Committee at the UJ may be contacted through Prof. T Chagonda, 011 559 3827.

7. I have read and understood the points and statements of this form. I have had all my questions answered to my satisfaction, and I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

8. I have been given a copy of this consent form co-signed by the interviewer.

_____   _____
Participant's Signature   Date

I have explained the study and the implications of being interviewed to the interviewee and I believe that the consent is informed and that he/she understands the implications of participation.

_____   _____
 Researcher's Signature   Date

Appendix 5: Interview Schedule

Place:

Date:

Time:

Gender:

SECTOR:

RESEARCH QUESTIONS
● **What was the nature and role of "fake news" in the January 2019 National #Shutdown in Zimbabwe?**
● **What does the Zimbabwean government's response to "fake news" during the #Shutdown tell us about the relationship of "fake news" and (social) media regulation?**

QUESTION 1: What was the nature and role of "fake news" in the January 2019 National #Shutdown in Zimbabwe?

Were you in Zimbabwe during the January 2019 National #Shutdown?

Can you tell me more about the January 2019? National #Shutdown?

What really happened in January? Was the government under threat?

Who should shut down the internet? Is it the companies (Econet, Facebook, Google etc.) or government?

Are you on social media?

Why do you think government shut down the internet during January 2019 National #Shutdown?

How would you define 'fake news" and how do you understand it?

Does 'fake news' exist?

How do you define it?

Before social media, was there fake news that affected national security?

Can you identify two instances of 'fake news' that was posted on social media during January **2019 National #Shutdown**?

Why do you say it was 'fake news' and were they really 'fake news'?

Did 'fake news' contribute anything to the **January 2019 National #Shutdown**?

Would you say Zimbabweans are aware of 'fake news'?

Has 'fake news' ever affected you in some way?

Who do you think produces 'fake news'?

What type of 'fake news' should be punishable and what sort of punishment should be enforced?

QUESTION 2: **What does the Zimbabwean government's response to "fake news" during the #Shutdown tell us about the relationship of "fake news" and (social) media regulation?**

How did government respond to the claims of fake news?

Do you think social media must be regulated?

Is social media a threat that should be contained?

What law must be used to regulate 'fake news?'

Are you aware of the Cyber Crime, Cyber Security and Data Protection Bill of 2019?

Does the bill infringe on civil liberties?

How would this affect the production of 'fake news'?

Do you think politicians must be on social media?

Do you think social media fuels uprisings?

Is there any link between 'fake news' and social media regulation?

What type of information would you deem to be offensive if posted on social media?

Some say government is complaining about 'fake news' spread to protect personal interests, do you agree with this?

Do you think social media must be regulated? Why and how?

Additional questions

What really happened in January? Was the internet really shutdown or (as Mutodi suggested), it was network issue and it was just data bundles that were depleted?

There have been several shutdowns in Africa (give examples). Is shutting down the internet a good thing?

Does shutting down the internet help? What does it help? Or hinder?

Does fake news threaten national security? In what ways? What is the link between national security and fake news?

What is your view of VPNsand other ways or circumventing controls of internet connectivity?

There are reports that the government has procured social media monitoring tech. Is this true? Does the government have the technology to monitor Whatsapp and other social media? (Who is the supplier? China? Israel?)

Edward Snowden and Chelsea Manning were charged with treason for digital offences. In other countries they propose the death penalty or flogging etc. (Give examples).

What should be the appropriate punishment for spreading "fake news" in Zimbabwe? Why?

How much research, if any, has been done to make the link between "fake news" and state security?

What is the government's view of deep fake videos? What is being done to counter the growing sophistication of "fake news"?