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Graduate School of Media and Communications

THE INFLUENCE OF CYBERSPACE REGULATIONS ON THE PRACTICE OF ONLINE JOURNALISM IN UGANDA

By

Patience Ndinawe
567786

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Master of Arts in Digital Journalism

Nairobi, Kenya

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APPROVAL PAGE

The Aga Khan University
Graduate School of Media and Communications

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment for the award of the degree of Master of Arts in Digital Journalism

Members of the Thesis Evaluation Committee appointed to examine the thesis of PATIENCE NDINAWE-567786, find it satisfactory and recommend that it be accepted.

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DECLARATION

THE INFLUENCE OF CYBERSPACE REGULATIONS ON THE PRACTICE OF ONLINE JOURNALISM IN UGANDA

I, **PATIENCE NDINAWE-567786,** declare that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university and that, to the best of my knowledge, it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference has been made in the text. The editorial assistance provided to me has in no way added to the substance of my thesis, which is the product of my research endeavors.

_____

Signature

_____

Date

DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my mother, Gladys Kanturegye Byembabazi for her encouragement that pushed me to persevere throughout this journey of my master's program.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Without the help and commitment of various people, I would not have been able to attain this degree. First, I thank the Almighty God for healing me when I felt ill and keeping me strong throughout the research period. Second, I owe a debt of gratitude to my supervisors, Dr. Nyakundi Nyamboga and Dr. Rose Kimani, for their advice and support. Their suggestions greatly streamlined the research. I am grateful for their dedication, swiftness, and availability to respond to emails and meetings and answer phone calls to clear my doubts and guide me. Additionally, I want to extend my gratitude to classmates, lecturers, the research studies instructor Hesbon Owilla, Henry Kibira, Alex Taremwa, and the librarian Augustine Gitonga for their immense support. I also want to thank Dr. John Baptist for proofreading my work. To the entire team at the Graduate School of Media and Communication, Aga Khan University, please accept my sincere gratitude for your untiring efforts and support that has made this project get to this level. To my friends and my son, Aron A. Ndinawe and my grandmother, Asenath K. Ndinawe, for being my pillar of strength. I appreciate you all looking after me and being compassionate.

ABSTRACT

The study assessed how cyberspace regulations have influenced the practice of online journalism in Uganda. The study's specific objectives were: to find out journalists' and regulators' understanding of cyberspace regulations in Uganda, to explore ways used to regulate online journalism in Uganda, and to examine how the implementation of cyberspace regulation in Uganda has affected online journalism practice. The study used a qualitative research method and an explorative research design that involved an in-depth and extensive investigation of a specific instance. The research was conducted using a qualitative approach, with interviews and document reviews. Findings reveal that most online journalists negatively perceived cyberspace regulations because they believe that major cyberspace regulations were signed into law to gag communication by limiting freedom of speech and expression. The study findings further reveal that cyberspace institutions regulated online journalism through monitoring, inspecting, supervising and controlling online content posted on digital spaces used for communication services. Findings further revealed that online journalists had learnt to practice self-censorship and adherence to cyber regulations to avoid arrests. The study recommended that cyberspace regulations be developed through a transparent process allowing public participation, including input from journalists and media organizations. The study also recommends that cyberspace regulations be clearly defined and consistently enforced without arbitrary or discriminatory application.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

APPROVAL PAGE i
DECLARATION ii
DEDICATION iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS iv
ABSTRACT v
LIST OF FIGURES viii
ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS ix
CHAPTER ONE 1
INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY 1
1.1 Introduction 1
1.2 Background to the Study 2
1.2.1 Media Regulation 3
1.2.2 The Ugandan Cyber Regulation Context 4
1.3 Statement of the Problem 6
1.4 Objectives of the Study 7
1.4.1 Specific Objectives 7
1.4.2 Research Questions 7
1.5 Justification of the Study 8
1.6 Significance of the Study 9
1.7 Scope of the Study 9
1.7.1 Geographical Scope 9
1.7.2 Content Scope 10
1.7.3 Time Scope 10
1.8 Limitations of the Study 10
1.9 Operational Definition of Terms 11
1.10 Summary 12
CHAPTER TWO 13
LITERATURE REVIEW 13
2.1 Introduction 13
2.2 Theoretical Framework 13
2.2.1 Mass Society Theory 13
2.2.2 Social Responsibility Theory 16
2.3 General and Empirical Literature Review 18
2.3.1 Cyber Regulation 18
2.3.2 Analysis of cyber regulation in Uganda 20
2.3.2.1 The Computer Misuse Act, 2011 21
2.3.2.2 The Uganda Communications Act, 2013 22
2.3.3 The sphere of online journalism and the reasons for its development 23
2.4 Conceptual Framework 27
2.5 Chapter Summary 29
CHAPTER THREE 30
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY 30
3.1 Introduction 30
3.2 Research Approach and Research Design 30
3.3 Population 31
3.4 Target Population 31

3.5 Study Site 31
3.6 Sample Size 31
3.7 Sampling Procedures 32
3.7.1 Purposive Sampling 32
3.8 Research Methods 33
3.9 Data Generation/Collection Tools 33
3.9.1. Interviews 33
3.9.2 Document Review 33
3.10 Data Collection Procedures 34
3.11 Pre-testing of Data Generation/Collection Tools 34
3.12 Validity and Reliability of Research Tools 34
3.12.1 Validity 34
3.12.2 Reliability 35
3.13 Data Analysis and Presentation Plan 35
3.14 Ethical Considerations 36
3.15 Summary 36
CHAPTER FOUR 37
DATA ANALYSIS, PRESENTATION, AND INTERPRETATION 37
4.1 Introduction 37
4.2 Presentation, Analysis, and Interpretation 37
4.2.1 Findings 38
4.2.1.1 To find out how the online journalists and regulators understood cyberspace regulations in Uganda 38
4.2.1.2 Ways used to regulate online journalism in Uganda 47
4.2.1.3 Effects of cyberspace regulation on journalism practice in Uganda 50
4.3 Summary 57
CHAPTER FIVE 58
DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS 58
5.1 Introduction 58
5.2 Discussions of Key Findings 58
5.2.1 Online journalists' Understanding of cyberspace regulations in Uganda 58
5.2.2 Exploring ways used to regulate online journalism in Uganda 60
5.2.3 Examining how the implementation of cyberspace regulation in Uganda has affected online journalism practice 61
5.3 Conclusion and Implications for Practice 62
5.4 Recommendations 64
5.5 Areas for Further Research 65
REFERENCES 67
APPENDICES 75
Appendix A: In-depth Interview Guide for Online Journalist 75
Appendix B: In-depth Interview Guide for UCC Officials 76
Appendix C: Documentary Review Guide 77
Appendix D: AKU Ethics Review Committee Approval Letter 78
Appendix E: AKU Introductory Letter 79
Appendix F: UCU Research Ethics Committee Approval Letter 80

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework.....*288*

ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

CMA:	Computer Misuse Act
ECMU:	Electronic Counter Measure Unit
RAM:	Random Access Memory
RICA:	Regulation of Interception of Communications Act
RSS:	Really Simple Syndication
UCC:	Uganda Communications Commission

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

Online journalism is a contemporary form where editorial content is distributed online instead of through print or broadcast media. It has become the new frontier for journalism practice worldwide (Steensen, 2011). Cyberspace in this study was conceptualised as internet-based communication platforms enabling online users to talk or share and exchange information, ideas, opinions, sentiments, photographs and videos through a specific network or web. Cyberspace includes text messaging, virtual worlds, podcasts, photo and video-sharing websites, widgets, and social networking platforms.

People's preferences for news and information sharing from traditional print media to online platforms have changed due to technological advancement. This is because of the ease, convenience and aptness. Therefore, to meet the new consumer preference, traditional media outlets (mainstream) utilise various online platforms (Dahlgren, 1996). States have taken action to control this emerging news sector, nevertheless. Regulations are used in this study to refer to the codified actions of administrative agencies that carry out laws and legislated rules that control how people behave and act in a nation.

In contrast, journalism is used to refer to the profession of gathering, evaluating, producing, and presenting news and information. Thus, the freedom to gather, evaluate, produce, and display news and information is a key component of journalism practice. Specifically in Uganda, in order to control online communication, the Computer Misuse

Act was introduced in 2011. According to Section 25 of the Computer Misuse Act, anyone who willfully and repeatedly uses electronic communication to disturb or attempts to disturb the peace, quiet, or right to privacy of any person without a purpose of legitimate communication, whether or not a conversation results, commits a violation and is subject to a fine of up to 24 currency points or a term of imprisonment up to a year, or both.

To combat cybercrime, the government established The Electronic Counter Measure Unit (ECMU) under the Ugandan police force in 2014. However, journalists increasingly perceive themselves as the primary targets of these restrictions, which impacts journalism practice. This study sought to determine the influence of cyberspace regulations on online journalism in Uganda.

The study sought: to find out the perception of journalists and regulators about cyberspace regulations in Uganda, to explore ways used to regulate online journalism in Uganda, and examine how the implementation of cyberspace regulations has affected the practice of online journalism in Uganda.

1.2 Background to the Study

The University of Florida's Journalism Department launched what is widely regarded as the first online journalism website in 1993, shortly after the release of the first web browser, Mosaic. A picture of a red-brick wall of the journalism department could be seen on a basic webpage. It had a 486-25 CPU with 4MB of random access memory (RAM) and was updated when no one else was using the RAM. A year later, The Daily Telegraph in the United Kingdom presented the Electronic Telegraph that featured a static website with content piled on top of one another (Siapera & Veglis, 2012). In a 2001 article, Derek

Bishton outlined the purpose of the Electronic Telegraph as one to assess the new medium, its financial and technological potential, and whether the Telegraph might establish an online brand (Bishton, 2001). Additionally, in this somewhat commonplace and gradual way, the history of internet journalism and the emergence of a brand-new sort of journalism that has forever changed the face of journalism got underway.

The world has seen gradual and dramatic advancements, as indicated by the trend towards participatory online on various platforms and the gradual adoption of internet characteristics like hyperlinking and interaction (Hermans, Vergeer, & d'Haenens, 2009). All parties participating in this interaction – theorists, practitioners, students, and readers/consumers/users of internet journalism – have something to gain from. All of them are curious about how journalism is evolving, its particular responsibilities, the many directions it might take, the implications for public and social life, and the various courses it might take (Siapera & Veglis, 2012).

According to Marta and Farias (2019), Cyber media's diversity and extensive coverage across many demographics and geographies exemplify its adaptability. Cyber media outclass traditional media in terms of convenience, modernity, and utility. The most beneficial aspect of cyber media is how rapidly it can recreate pictures and scenarios from where tragedies happened (Huda & Azad, 2015).

1.2.1 Media Regulation

World widely, media regulation is meant to benefit the public. The term "common good" or "public good," on the other hand, is ambiguous and has numerous meanings in many communities. International law and agreements offer a number of international

principles for attempting to define the common good. According to Lessig and Resnick (1999), although speech is restricted in various ways, every government limits access to particular communications. Kovach and Rosenstiel (2007) emphasize the responsibility of journalists for the accuracy, veracity, and objectivity of the subjects they report. On the other side, the reasons for media control stem from their regular broadcasting of inaccurate and sensitive information that could cause social upheaval and their reporting of insignificant happenings and amusement that occasionally lacks substance and social advancement. For instance, the Uganda Communications Commission (UCC), in 2021, ordered that adult-themed gossip programs be moved to between 8 p.m. and 10 p.m., ideally after primetime. The audience was concerned because the shows violated the Minimum Broadcasting Standards. According to Siebert et al. (1984), self-serving media interests have misled the public and even breached the privacy of countless people without justification. As a result, some level of control is necessary. Early experts called for a review of the current legal framework for web communication to address new issues, including Sussman and Sussman (1986) and Post (1997). Although many nations have national media laws, Sussman and Sussman (1986) highlight a crucial point by pointing out that no international regulations govern internet usage.

1.2.2 The Ugandan Cyber Regulation Context

The Ugandan government passed the Computer Misuse Act in 2011 as a response to the problems with online journalism. Its goals are to increase safety and security in a world that is becoming increasingly digital, including by preventing unauthorized access to, abuse of, or misuse of information systems, including computers, and by ensuring the safety of online transactions. However, this law has been used in various ways to impede

online journalism and access to information. For instance, Dr. Stella Nyanzi, a researcher and social critic, was detained for denouncing the president in a post on social media. Various individuals believe the law was meant to restrict and control their online content and give people licenses to accuse internet journalists of cybercrimes, particularly when they engage in human rights activism (Mukasa, 2018).

The head of state in Uganda signed into law the Computer Misuse (Amendment) Bill, 2022. A major concern in Uganda has been spreading false, harmful, or misleading information, especially on social media platforms like Twitter. In addition, the Uganda Communications Commission (UCC) launched an initiative with a team of specialists in 2013 to address unauthorized use of internet communications and guarantee the security and safety of cyberspace. The squad was established to thoroughly check cyberspace and monitor and report high-tech crimes, including cyber-based terrorism, computer intrusions, online sexual exploitation, and large cyber frauds on the internet. In addition, the Electronic Counter Measure Unit (ECMU) was established by the Ugandan police in 2014 to identify and look into digital or computer-generated crimes using platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, Twitter, and others (Namasinga & Orgeret, 2020).

According to reports, journalists in Uganda perceive these rules as a barrier to their profession and work in dread due to them (Amanya, 2019). For example, security agents' regular violations of journalists' rights provide the basis for this anxiety by making wrongful arrests, seizing ICT equipment like computers, and surveilling people's online communications without a court order. These violations include the Computer Misuse Act and the Regulation of Interception of Communications Act (RICA) (Amanya, 2019). Although the rules provide that security agencies must first get a court order before

conducting surveillance or making arrests, security agencies frequently ignore this legal requirement (Namasinga & Orgeret, 2020).

Against this backdrop, the study was conducted to determine what impact cyberspace rules have on online journalism in Uganda by identifying the state laws that impact how journalists in Uganda use the internet. These included; the Computer Misuse Act, 2011; the Electronic Transactions Act, 2011; the Uganda Communications Act, 2013; the Anti-Pornography Act, 2014 and The National Information Technology Authority, Uganda Act, 2009.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

The introduction of high-speed and broad bandwidth digital technology-enabled media companies or individual journalists to publish anything from audio, text, images and videos that can be delivered directly to different platforms like Facebook and twitter through devices like computers and phones.

The Ugandan government has tried to regulate what is posted and shared that is deemed unlawful to protect the users through the legalization of the Computer Misuse (Amendment) Act passed in 2022. However, while courts can only ban newspapers, the decision to block a website appears to be made at whim by civil servants, ISPs or servers.

However, there is currently an ongoing debate about whether such laws regulating cyberspace usage are limiting the freedom of sharing information by online journalists the fear of being arrested, which would negatively affect their work or whether cyberspace users are being protected from spreading wrong and harmful information. Various studies have been conducted to clarify how regulations impact traditional media practices,

including the use of pre-internet channels, including newspapers, magazines, TV, radio, and billboards (Nyamboga, 2009; Namasinga & Orgeret, 2020; Rose, 2019). None, however, has looked at how Uganda's online journalism practices are affected by the regulations that now govern cyberspace. Therefore, this study was aimed at finding out how online journalists understood the regulations regarding their practice, finding out how the acts are being implemented, and how the implementation of regulations has affected journalists' practice both positively and negatively while proposing suggestions of what journalists think could be the most proper means to implement the cyberspace regulations.

1.4 Objectives of the Study

This study aimed to ascertain how cyberspace regulations have influenced the online journalism practice in Uganda.

1.4.1 Specific Objectives

1. To find out journalists' and regulators' understanding of cyberspace regulations in Uganda.
2. To explore ways used to regulate online journalism in Uganda.
3. To examine how the implementation of cyberspace regulation in Uganda has affected online journalism practice.

1.4.2 Research Questions

1. How do journalists and regulators understand cyberspace regulations in Uganda?
2. What are the ways used to regulate online journalism in Uganda?

3. How has the implementation of cyberspace regulation in Uganda affected online journalism practice?

1.5 Justification of the Study

Cyberspace has evolved as a very effective frontier for mass communication by leveraging online platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and websites to enlighten the public on numerous issues and disclose malpractices like corruption (Skjerdal, 2014). However, although journalists have a duty to the truth, the accuracy of the information, and independence in their job, national and international laws strongly emphasise press freedom. This implies they can communicate in a language of their choice through offline and online channels.

Despite this freedom, domestic restrictions that govern how Ugandans use the internet are alleged to hinder the practice of journalism and, as a result, restrict or censor online media in Uganda (Mukasa, 2018). For instance, the government of Uganda ordered telecommunications providers to shut down internet communication services like Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp during the 2021 general elections. These services have evolved in the modern era to become important venues for online journalism. This substantially impacted communications, which in turn constrained information dissemination. The World Press Freedom Index Report (World Press Freedom Index Report, 2021) has Uganda placed 125th out of 180 nations due to these rules, indicating a major incidence of media repression. In addition, online journalists now have to worry about the repercussions of their actions due to the creation of a police Electronic Counter Measure Unit (ECMU) to monitor the application of the Computer Misuse Act by

identifying and looking into crimes committed using online platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, Twitter, and blog sites (Kimumwe, 2014). There is a need to research how online journalism is affected by cyberspace legislation.

1.6 Significance of the Study

To online journalists, the findings reveal how state regulations have affected the utilization of cyberspace for online journalism practice in Uganda and increase awareness of the regulation to ensure that rules governing their profession are not violated.

To regulators like the Uganda Communications Commission, the study findings explain how cyberspace regulations have affected online journalism practice. This is key in shedding light on the range of improvements that could be done to maximize the potential of cyberspace usage for online journalism practice.

The study serves as a literature resource for academics researching cyberspace, cyber law, and the practice of journalism in Uganda and other nations. The study also results, which also spark discussion on journalism and cyberspace usage.

1.7 Scope of the Study

1.7.1 Geographical Scope

The study mainly focused on the study participants from the Kampala district because of its urban nature, which is linked to sharing information on cyberspace platforms and utilising that information. In addition, online journalists with a two-year experience operating from the capital city were used to support the study in answering research questions.

1.7.2 Content Scope

The study examined the influence of cyberspace regulations on the practice of online journalism in Uganda with a view to suggesting amendments to cyberspace regulations in order to reap the maximum benefits of cyberspace online journalism practice. Aiming at online journalists and regulators, the study particularly focused on finding out how online journalists understood cyberspace regulations in Uganda, examining how cyberspace regulations in Uganda affect online journalism practice and exploring ways used to regulate online journalism. Finally, the study recommends the apt for maximization of cyberspace benefits to online journalism practice in Uganda.

1.7.3 Time Scope

The study focused on 2021-2022, given the need to interview online journalists with a two-year experience. In addition, on 12th January 2021, Facebook was blocked from access, which required using applications like the virtual private network to access it. This particular time was, therefore, critical for the researcher to understand how online journalists have practised their profession - using cyberspace, although cyberspace platforms like Facebook were blocked. Furthermore, the Computer Misuse (Amendment) Act was signed into law in 2022, meaning the two years of 2021-2022 provided the best case for the research.

1.8 Limitations of the Study

Geographical challenges hindered the study since journalists are always in various locations. The study site was located in the four divisions of Kampala. However, upcountry

online journalists have different challenges compared to urban-based. If the scope had been widened, the study would have had more generalizable findings if other media houses outside Kampala had participated.

The research methodology was not applied to smaller media houses as it was used in general, and the online journalists from the hybrid media houses, which are more established.

1.9 Operational Definition of Terms

Regulation: Murray and Scott (2002) define regulation as "any control scheme, maintaining that control system must include some standard-setting feature." Such regulations allow for the acquisition and modification of certain data, which are then under the supervision of a regulatory body, in Uganda's case NITA, and subject to penalties for rule violations.

Cyber Harassment: Section 24 of the Computer Misuse Act (2011), states the cyber harassment offence as “the use of a computer in making obscene or indecent requests or threatening to inflict injury to any person or their property”.

Online Journalism: is the technical practice of news writing, information gathering, and image editing to produce, publish, transmit, and disseminate news-oriented or educational materials such as news, details, opinion, photos, or audio recordings using “internet-based technology”.

1.10 Summary

Chapter one presented the study's introduction and background, describing cyberspace regulations' influence on online journalism. It also stated the study problem, objectives and research questions, which helped the researcher conduct the study. The chapter also presented the study's scope, justification and significance and operational definitions. The next chapter reviews the related literature and theoretical framework and highlights the gaps in the literature that necessitated the study.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter critically reviews the literature on cyberspace and the practice of online journalism. It analyzes the development of journalism in relation to evolving technologies, citizen journalism, and online journalism. It also outlines the study's theoretical framework based on mass society and social responsibility theories.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

Two theories, the mass society theory and the social responsibility theory, served as the foundation of this study. The two opposing ideas (with regard to media freedom) provided the framework for this study's analysis of the reasons for the opposing protagonists' aggressive behaviour whenever their interests are at issue. For instance, although the ruling elite believes that media should be regulated, media owners and journalists prefer free media. Social responsibility theory explains why free media is necessary for societal advancement and democracy, while mass society theory explains why the government tries to regulate the press.

2.2.1 Mass Society Theory

It has long been a discussion among scholars on media freedom and regulation and how to hold independent media responsible for their output and make adjustments to meet the needs of the societies they serve. The mass society theory provides several justifications for the need for media regulation. The thesis contends that because influential individuals

usually exert pressure on the media in the environments in which they operate, there needs to be regulation of the industry. The idea that certain journalists, particularly in the early 20th century, were nearly immoral and that such illiterate people should not have control over the media is another significant one made by proponents of the Mass Society Theory. Newspapers with a "Yellow journalism" reputation were seen as enormous, monopolistic businesses employing unethical methods to appeal to large, illiterate readers (Baran & Dennis, 2012).

Mass society's thinking is founded on discontent, fear, and jealousy regarding who should maintain the social order with the advent of journalism to inform the public, notably giving people what they want instead of what they need. These emotions formed the basis for developing a philosophy that is at once profoundly conventional and potentially revolutionary (McQuail 2009). It argues that a conservative effort is necessary to reinstate the prior social order. Alternatively, proponents assert that to create a new and improved social structure, revolutionary action must be taken to install elite control over technology and the media (Bosire, 2012). The basic tenet of this theory is that the media are a potent social force that have the power to undermine fundamental norms and values and hence societal order. To counter this challenge, elite control of the media must be established. According to advocates of this perceptive, the media should be governed by the elite (Kornhauser, 2013).

Second, the theory contends that media can influence people's beliefs by directly reaching out to them and doing so. The direct-effects debate in media theory and research also considers this argument. The influence of the media on the beliefs and actions of regular men and women is astounding (Baran & Dennis, 2012). Although different groups

of mass society theory proponents have varied ideas about the direct impact of several media, all versions emphasize how hazardous this may be and how vulnerable normal people are to sudden media-induced changes. Ordinary people are believed to be helpless in the face of the media's ability to manipulate them (Bosire, 2012).

The third premise holds that after the media has altered people's perspectives, their personal lives are affected, and social issues are brought about on a significant scale. This point of view is based on perceived or actual drawbacks in media material. This idea has some valid criticisms of the media, but not all. This is so that people are informed and educated about advancements made possible by the media. According to this interpretation of the Mass Society Theory, the media harms society (Shils, 1962).

The fourth aspect of the mass society theory is that the average person is vulnerable to media manipulation because they are removed from the traditional social institutions meant to protect them from manipulation (Kreiling, 1984). Earlier social institutions were meant to provide for and protect individuals within their societies. For example, people were regularly made to complete tasks their parents and grandparents had completed. In addition, being born in a certain place at a particular time led to people developing unique social roles (Giner, 2013). As a result, the media might develop into a trustworthy and worthwhile resource for news about politics, entertainment, religion, and education. Although it finally produces a mass society with a culture different from society's values, this offers the media a good contribution.

This fifth premise assumes that mass society is an inherently chaotic and unsteady social structure that will eventually fall and be replaced by dictatorship (Bosire, 2012).

Mass society, with its multitudes of lone individuals, must make way for a totalitarian state that is more highly structured and centrally administered. Thus, to the extent that the media promotes the growth of mass society, tyranny becomes more likely.

Online journalism is being discussed as a potential disruption to the established model of journalism as the debate over mass culture intensifies (Bosire, 2012). Therefore, this theory guided the study about how cyberspace regulation impacts how online journalism is practised in Uganda because it clarifies why the ruling elite favours controlled media and how, if left unchecked, journalists might undermine the foundations of society. In addition, the theory expanded on how influential media is in society. (Lang & Lang, 2009).

2.2.2 Social Responsibility Theory

The social responsibility theory was first presented in the United States of America in 1947 by the Robert Hutchins-led Hutchins Commission. The commission created a press code of social responsibility that required five fundamental services. The media's first duty is to present an accurate, in-depth, and thoughtful account of the day's events within a context that gives them meaning. To offer a forum for debate and criticism is the second condition.

Third, the media ought to portray all of the societal segments fairly. Fourth, the media should convey and explicate society's objectives and goals. The media's fifth duty is giving everyone access to the day's intelligence. The suggestions implied that journalists would risk losing some privileges if they did not assume greater public responsibility. The Hutchins Commission report's recommendations are known as the Press Social

Responsibility Theory (Siebert, Peterson, & Schramm, 1956). The approach strongly emphasises the necessity of independent media that looks into other social groups and generates unbiased, accurate news coverage. The theory holds that the media is in charge of making society productive and innovative. Media with social responsibility should give priority to cultural diversity. This may be accomplished when the media becomes the people's voice rather than elite groups or groups that previously dominated national, regional, or local culture. Journalists had to be considerate of those in their immediate surroundings because of the social responsibility concept. According to the Hutchins Commission report, the press is not free if the people who operate it act almost as their position grants them the right to be blind to opinions that freedom of speech procedures have brought to the public's attention (Baran, 2012).

According to McQuail (1987), the core ideas of social responsibility theory require the media to accept and uphold particular societal responsibilities. Setting high or professional standards for informativeness, truth, correctness, impartiality, and balance is essential for fulfilling the requirements. Additionally, anything that could cause violence, bloodshed, civil disturbance, or could offend minority groups should be avoided by the media. The media is, therefore, not required to spread information that could cause despondency among the members of the society they are supposed to represent. By assisting pluralistic organizations, the media erected a wall to safeguard democracy from foreign and internal threats (Baran & Davis, 2012). Even while media outlets worldwide have developed several professional procedures to follow the social responsibility theory, tremendous communities have yet to be accomplished. Significant obstacles have existed, and inequality is evident in every civilization. There is evidence that hate groups are

expanding in size and the number of people they may influence. Creating public fear of particular communities may still help politicians win elections (Baran et al., 2012). Questions posed by Baran et al. indicate that the theory is challenged by the way journalism is practised in various states (Baran & Davis, 2012).

According to the social responsibility theory, journalists who have media freedom are expected to take some accountability. It gives journalists the obligation to verify the truth before publishing their stories. As a result, it was used in the study to evaluate how regulations affect journalism practice, including information gathering, analysis, and presentation with accuracy, comprehensiveness, ensuring representativeness, presenting and clarifying the goals, values, and principles of society, as well as having full access to information about their knowledge to implore the ethics to the online journalists.

2.3 General and Empirical Literature Review

2.3.1 Cyber Regulation

Cyberspace is global, but it lacks a formal framework. It has no set metes and limits other than the hardware's capabilities for access. Cyberspace is not owned or controlled by a single person, entity, or government. Cyberspace, like outer space, may be considered res nullius in property law; it is incapable of private appropriation (Weber, 2015). Cyberspace regulation is a new challenge. According to Harvard Law School professor Lawrence Lessig, anonymity is the default in cyberspace. Anonymity promotes and enhances the exercise of one's freedom. Children too hesitant to speak up in front of others can use virtual identities to express themselves freely (Lessig, 1999).

The anonymity of cyberspace has forced countries worldwide to use various tools for cyber protection that combine legally binding regulation with one that promotes partnerships between the public and private sectors (Geers, 2010). The journalists who use cyberspace for sharing information, in contrast, still lack a comprehensive solution in this area and instead protect themselves based on their account's password protection and believing that all journalists will be cautious of what information to share on the platforms given the cultural, norms and political differences. The risk to national security posed by this circumstance is of the highest order (Siboni & Sivan-Sevilla, 2022). Furthermore, due to the lack of territorial boundaries, there is a high vulnerability of the users who feed on such information shared on cyberspace platforms by online journalists. Some governments, such as Uganda, have created laws to regulate online journalism, like the Computer Misuse Act, which the President signed into law in 2022. However, such laws could harm how online journalists practice sharing information or have even improved it since the information shared has been culturally, politically and socially acceptable.

Globally, media regulation is mostly made for the benefit of the public. However, "common good" or "public good" is subjective and has different meanings in different societies. On the other hand, international law and agreements offer a number of international norms for defining the common good. Although the speech differs by jurisdiction, every state limits access to some communications, which we refer to as mandated access limitations (Lessig & Resnick, 1999). The media's responsibilities include a duty to the truth, a duty to the people, and a discipline of verification, according to Kovach and Rosenstiel (2007). Practitioners must also protect the autonomy of those they are responsible for, function as impartial overseers of power, and offer a forum for

public debate and compromise. They also strive to keep the news accurate and balanced while making the important interesting and current. Objectivity, impartiality, and fairness are the media's duties.

According to Murray and Scott (2002), regulation is a control mechanism. In control theory, this term is founded. They claim that some form of uniformity is required for control. This might involve a technique for learning more about how the system works and a tool for altering behaviour. Information is typically obtained by observation by a department, agency, or self-regulatory body, with deviations dealt with through formal and informal sanctions. According to Post (1997), geographical barriers are no obstacle to internet-based communication.

2.3.2 Analysis of cyber regulation in Uganda

The provisions of Uganda's cyber laws were analyzed in light of international human rights legislation. International law emphasizes the requirement that all cyber legislation abides by it. Media professionals worldwide resist the State's attempts to restrict media freedom. Debatable topics among academics include state control and media freedom. Baird (2002) contends that because the media cannot self-regulate, the government must show them how to conduct themselves. His analysis of Internet regulation makes a case for the government to control online material. According to Baird's further argument, governments are the only institutions capable of ensuring stability and serving as a venue for discussion on what shared values should be protected. He acknowledges that not all governments adhere to the same ideas. His approach is based on the idea that regulatory issues are not only technical difficulties that can be left to experts

but rather significant policy challenges that require democratic resolution (Baird, 2002). In order to gather information regarding these domestic regulations' impact on the practice of online journalism in Uganda, document analysis and interviews with respondents were conducted. The following regulations are analysed:

2.3.2.1 The Computer Misuse Act, 2011

The Computer Misuse Act (CMA) establishes accountability for crimes using computers. Under the CMA, it is illegal to use child pornography, harass people online, send threatening communications, and stalk people online. The potential prison terms for these charges range from one to five years, with the exception of child pornography, which carries a 15-year maximum sentence.

The CMA also penalizes unauthorized alteration of computer content, unauthorized access to computer programs and data, and unauthorized use of computer service interception. The maximum penalties for these crimes range from 10 to 15 years in jail. Such harsh penalties may discourage people from using computers to get information and exercise their First Amendment rights. In addition, any computer system that is reasonably believed to be involved or that may provide proof in the commission or suspected commission of an offence, or that is intended to be used or is reasonably believed to be aimed to be used in the commission of an offence, may be started being seized by an authorized person, along with any samples or duplicates of applications or data. Reasonable reasons are sufficient proof to trigger these thorough search capabilities.

If they suspect an offence, police officers are also granted broad rights to search and confiscate property under the CMA. According to Section 28, if a Magistrate is

convinced by police information that there are reasonable grounds to believe that an offence under the CMA has been committed or is about to be committed in any premises and that there is evidence that such an offence has been or is about to be committed in those grounds, the Magistrate may issue an arrest warrant authorizing a police officer to enter and search the property, using appropriate force as necessary. In addition, any computer system that is reasonably believed to be involved or that may provide proof in the commission or suspected commission of an offence, or that is intended to be used or is reasonably believed to be aimed to be used in the commission of an offence, may be started being seized by an authorized person, along with any samples or duplicates of applications or data. Reasonable reasons are sufficient proof to trigger these thorough search capabilities.

These broad search and seizure capabilities and the low threshold of proof necessary threaten privacy and free speech. The police have vast authority to obtain access to people's computer data, which raises the possibility of privacy violations. Furthermore, being aware of these broad capabilities can have a chilling effect on using the free expression in the digital context, as individuals may fear being subjected to a police search on speculative grounds.

2.3.2.2 The Uganda Communications Act, 2013

The Uganda Communications Act is in charge of regulating Uganda's communications Act (UCA). It requests that the Ugandan Communications Commission (UCC) be established under Section 4. The UCC's mandate includes; monitoring, inspecting, licensing, supervising, controlling, and regulating communications services (b), receiving, investigating, and arbitrating complaints about communications services

and taking appropriate action (j), establishing an intelligent network monitoring system to monitor traffic, revenue, and operator quality of service (u), and setting standards, monitoring, and enforcing compliance with content (x) (Section 5). The UCC shall exercise its responsibilities independently (Section 8), whereas the Minister may, in advance, issue policy directions to the Commission regarding the execution of its functions, which the Commission shall follow (Section 7).

The responsibilities of the UCC give numerous offers to monitor and regulate communications under the UCA's scope. However, this permits it to act in unacceptable ways in terms of privacy and freedom of expression. In order to perform communications surveillance on people's communications, such as those sent through the Internet, Section 5(u) has been used, for instance, to create the Social Media Monitoring Centre and the Interception of Communication Monitoring Centre under RICA. Additionally, the government has vowed to restrict access to popular social media platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp. Such actions unquestionably have a detrimental effect on people's freedom of expression and privacy online.

2.3.3 The sphere of online journalism and the reasons for its development

"Online journalism" refers to publishing journalistic information and news articles in various forms online. According to Harcup's Oxford Dictionary of Journalism, "online journalism" covers many types of news delivered via web pages, social media, Really Simple Syndication (RSS) channels, e-mails, newsletters, and other forms of online communication. In contrast to more conventional methods of journalistic information transmission associated with the press, online journalism enables producers to provide

news nonlinearly; consumers may select how and when they wish to receive the news (Harcup, 2014). Russell prefers "networked journalism," noting that it encompasses more than just journalists using the general public's access to digital technology as a new data source form. It also involves a shift in the power dynamic between news sources and news consumers. Digital publishing capabilities and powerful mobile devices are complemented by societal changes, such as growing cynicism toward conventional sources of journalistic authority (Viovsk & Radoinská, 2017).

A key characteristic that divides "traditional" journalism from "modern" journalism is the electronic, or rather digital, way of publishing and transmitting journalistic output over the Internet. We could, however, choose to ignore the fact that the creative principles of journalism, which turn into specialized processes and techniques for transforming information to produce journalism products, are very similar to 'traditional' journalism, which is affiliated with the use of strictly defined processes (Viovsk, 2015).

The most visible elements of this style of journalism include 'traditional' media websites (e.g., www.nytimes.com, www.sme.sk, www.rtvs.sk) and media that live only on the Internet (sometimes known as 'e-zines'). Online journalism uses a range of multimedia and interactive components, including text, photographs, videos, hyperlinks, and user comments, typically published on social networks concurrently to reach a more significant number of target audiences. Real-time access, involvement, straightforward comparison with competitors, information connecting via hypertext, and format blending are characteristics that Bednár, a Czech publicist and sociologist, attributes to Internet journalism (Bednář, 2011). Each new medium has, to some extent, embraced and changed previously established genres to increase its processing and dissemination capabilities.

Understandably, internet journalism categories are based on the genre typology used in print. The existence of audiovisual content and other graphic, multimedia, and interactive components on the Internet, on the other hand, serves as a foundation for forming and constructing unique genres typical of the online environment (e.g. online interviews, online discussion or online reportage).

Regarding the changes in journalistic genres in connection to the Internet and its rapid rise, nevertheless, preserving the core standards of 'journalistic writing' appears to be helpful, at least for the time being, for both authors and recipients (Osvaldová, 2009). Modern usage, however, shows that material disseminated online in text, aural, or audiovisual formats is likewise given via "traditional" media. Online journalism is not an exception to this rule; many online articles are also readily available in print.

The impact of online publishing on content on Internet journalists' work and, consequently, the operations of online news media is significant. In addition to accounting for its issues and formal requirements, online journalism also fits with commercial imperatives because it is feasible to identify target audiences precisely and offer advertisements successfully. The ability of online journalism to reduce printing and distribution expenses is another aspect of its financial success. Van der Wurff did, however, point out that the costs involved in producing any new product (a newspaper, a magazine, a television program, etc.) are still quite significant (Van der Wurff, 2008).

When it comes to the news media, their main goal is to choose social reality events and transform them into media content so that they can gain in some way. The journalistic practice has made it abundantly evident that the media has been hesitant to consider the

ongoing changes occurring in the online world. One of the factors contributing to this relatively low level of primordial confidence in the internet is the difficulty media organizations have had in identifying the best economic models that may generate additional cash from Internet content (such as advertising revenues and premium services). Ironically, generalized biases held by "conventional" media about the Internet have also contributed (Višňovský & Radošinská, 2017).

Thus, under the effect of "multimediatisation," established routines in journalistic practice are waning, which causes the lines between two formerly distinct platforms – the editorial offices of newspapers and online news portals – to become blurrier (Bosire, 2012). The journalistic profession has undergone significant change, and today it is not enough to be a highly skilled writer; one must also be able to use the Internet, "smart" devices, video cameras, editing software, etc., successfully. Furthermore, it is important to acknowledge that conceptualizing journalism in the new contexts associated with digital technology and its application is still very early in academic discourse. Heinrich presents a thoughtful analysis of the subject: The lines between conventional media mediums like print, radio, and television are becoming hazier as a multi-platform structure of journalism develops (McQuail, 2009).

As the traditionally distinct media platforms become blurrier, print, audio, and video are increasingly blending online. The management of cross-platform news flow procedures in daily news production has been impacted by convergence processes brought on by network technology. Similarly, Czech journalist Čuřík (2014) discusses this issue regarding the role of "a multimedia journalist" and other modifications to conventional journalistic practices. The inevitable development of new methods for disseminating

content to readers, new means of processing this content, and using hypertext is among the Internet's most significant benefits for the press. Furthermore, other gadgets outside computers can connect to the Internet. TVs, tablets, and cell phones can all be used to access the Internet. The Internet's real-time information updating capabilities, regular publication of audiovisual content, accessibility to digital archives, and interactivity (readers' reactions can be obtained via emails or in the form of discussion contributions placed below the published materials) are by far its most significant positive aspects in terms of its relationship with the press. Online journalism has grown due to various factors, including changing audience habits, globalization, the demise of traditional media, and a rise in the need for real-time news. These elements have paved the way for media professionals to develop fresh business strategies and employment opportunities.

2.4 Conceptual Framework

Figure 1 below illustrates the conceptual framework showing the relationship between the Independent and Dependent variables.

Independent Variable

Dependent Variable

Cyberspace Regulations

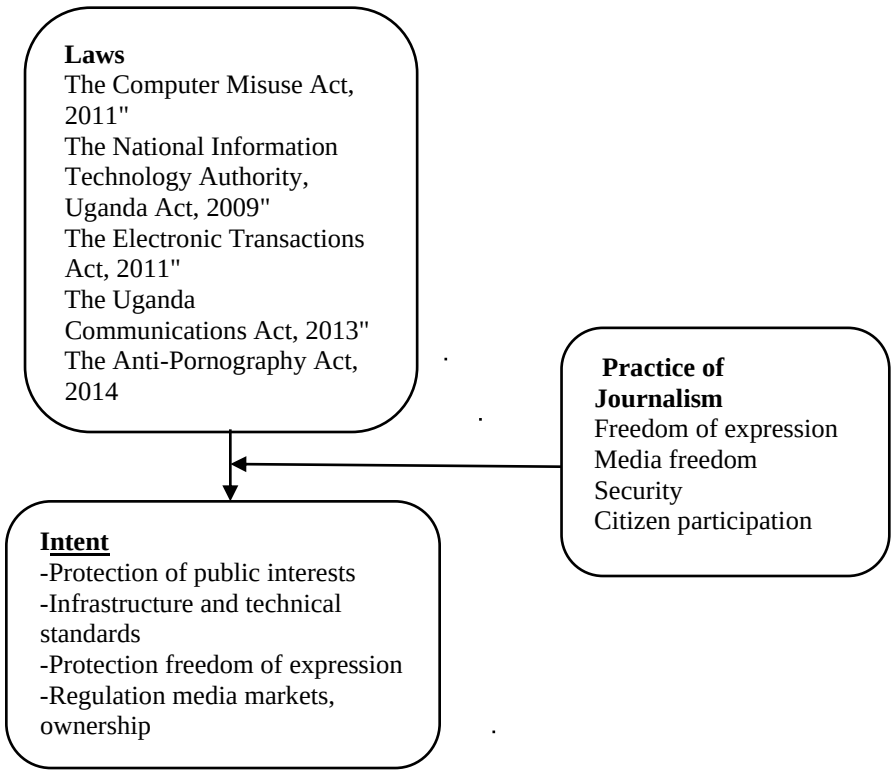

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Source: Adopted from Cherono (2017) and modified by the researcher

The relationship between journalism practice and cyberspace regulations is examined through the conceptual framework. Laws regarding cyberspace include; The Anti-Pornography Act, The National Information Technology Authority, Uganda Act, 2009; the Electronic Transactions Act, 2011, 2014; the Computer Misuse Act, 2011 and The Uganda Communications Act, 2013. These are meant to safeguard the public's interests, the infrastructure and technical standards, the right to free speech, and the ownership and operation of media outlets. Freedom of expression/speech, media freedom, security, and citizen involvement gauge journalism practice.

The study examined the influence of cyberspace regulations on online journalism in Uganda to suggest amendments to cyberspace regulations to reap the maximum benefits of cyberspace for online journalism practice.

2.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the two theories that guided the study about how cyber regulations have affected online journalism practice and reviewed related information about cyberspace regulation globally and contextually.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter explains the research methodology employed for this study. It looks at the research design and approach, the population and sample size, sampling methods, quality control, research methods and tools and ethical considerations applied to the study.

3.2 Research Approach and Research Design

The study used a qualitative research approach to understand cyber regulation concepts and understand online journalists' thoughts, perceptions and experiences about their practice and how the regulations affect and influence them. The qualitative approach was preferred because gathering in-depth and rich insights into the selected topic was important.

The study used an exploratory research design to find primary principles to explain data and observations. This was intended to examine a certain phenomenon with two specific orientations to examine it effectively: flexibility in their search for evidence and receptivity. Exploratory research design attempts to produce new ideas and combine them with the theory created directly from data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

A qualitative research approach, including interviews and a document review, was used to conduct this study. This was due to the fact that this research design enabled the researcher to do face-to-face interactions and collect firsthand information from online journalists whose practice had been impacted by the regulations. The documents reviewed

included; The Electronic Transactions Act, 2011; the Computer Misuse Act, 2011; the National Information Technology Authority, Uganda Act, 2009; the Anti-Pornography Act, 2014 and The Uganda Communications Act, 2013.

3.3 Population

This study considered all online and hybrid media houses in Uganda with an online media department. The current number by Uganda Communication Commission Report 2022 was 33 hybrid media houses.

3.4 Target Population

The target population is the portion or subset considered for study participation (Katamba & Nsubuga, 2014). The target population were journalists working in the online department from hybrid media houses. As per the Uganda Communications Commission (UCC), 33 hybrid media houses exist.

3.5 Study Site

The study was conducted in the four divisions of Kampala, Uganda, where most hybrid media houses are located.

3.6 Sample Size

From the four divisions of Kampala, 3 online journalists were selected from each, and one UCC official out of the targeted two was interviewed while conducting this study. The sampling of the 12 online journalists was done in the capital city of Uganda, Kampala, from the hybrid media houses because of their access to information, knowledge and

expertise using cyberspace. Online journalists who were urban-based made up the preferred population. The UCC officials from the legal department were interviewed

3.7 Sampling Procedures

3.7.1 Purposive Sampling

The study employed purposive sampling, which is non-probability sampling. According to Agyedu et al. (2010), in using purposive sampling, the researcher uses his or her discretion to select respondents who meet the study's objectives. This study used purposive sampling because not all journalists actively participated in online journalism. The goal was to collect as much useful information pertinent to the study.

Purposive sampling was chosen due to its affordability, and it helped the researcher generate worthwhile information from a selected population of interest to achieve the research purposes. The information was collected from specific participants that met the criteria, and the results were pertinent to the study's objectives.

The 12 online journalists to participate were selected from the hybrid media houses using the list of accredited journalists by the Media Council of Uganda. This was to eliminate researcher bias. The selection criteria was based on a 2-year experience in using cyberspace platforms journalists.

They were expected to have a wealth of expertise in receiving followers' comments and knowledge on sharing information and how it affects their audience. Unfortunately, there was no clear data to specify the exact number of online journalists. Therefore, the total of journalists in Kampala (120) is counted as the population. From the UCC, two (2)

officials from the media department were selected, specifically the legal officer due to his expertise in making the laws on cyberspace and the spokesperson who coordinates with the hybrid media houses and the online journalists.

3.8 Research Methods

The study used qualitative research methods, which included in-depth interviews and document reviews.

3.9 Data Generation/Collection Tools

3.9.1. Interviews

An interview is a face-to-face intentional interaction between an interviewer and interviewee (Palmer, 2000). Kothari (2014) shows that interviews are a conversation with a goal, making it easy to collect data, and the questions can be restricted. The researcher collected data by interviewing online journalists from the identified hybrid media houses. The interviews were conducted using an interview guide as a tool for the exercise. In order to obtain immediate input, digital interviews such as Zoom sessions were also used throughout data collecting.

3.9.2 Document Review

Document review is qualitative research in which the researcher reads documents to gather information about a subject (Bowen, 2012). Reviewing documents includes understanding and briefly noting the content into themes based on the study's objectives (Bowen, 2012). In order to gather information about the impact of cyber regulations on online journalism practice in Uganda, the researcher looked at the Electronic Transactions

Act of 2011, the Computer Misuse Act of 2011, the National Information Technology Authority of Uganda Act of 2009, the Anti-Pornography Act of 2014, and the Uganda Communications Act of 2013

3.10 Data Collection Procedures

A letter of introduction for data collection from Aga Khan University was collected to get access to the selected media houses to make appointments with the journalists working in the online department for interviews. It was also used to secure the interview with UCC, indicating that the study was for academic purposes.

3.11 Pre-testing of Data Generation/Collection Tools

Data collection tools were pre-tested with three journalists from three hybrid media houses not considered in the data collection. The answers provided from the interviews informed the researcher whether the tool was appropriate for the study and whether to improve or delete some of the questions.

3.12 Validity and Reliability of Research Tools

3.12.1 Validity

Validity measures the ability of an instrument to yield consistent outcomes when applied under the same circumstances. To ascertain the validity of the instruments, important measures were taken. A number of articles, journals, and reports before building the devices were reviewed. This was useful in informing the development of the instruments based on the goals and research questions of the study.

3.12.2 Reliability

Reliability is measured by how consistently the instrument performs its tasks when collecting data (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003). The interview guide was pretested before being used to gather data to assure reliability. Pre-testing uses a set of individuals who are not study participants to administer the tools used in the study to a larger group to assess their reliability (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003). The research tools were adjusted based on the results of the pretesting in order to collect accurate data.

3.13 Data Analysis and Presentation Plan

Data analysis examines, purifies, and models data to find usable information, draw conclusions, and help decision-making (Rankin, 2013). For this study, qualitative data analysis was employed.

Coding was used to classify data. For example, an idea or theme can be represented by a "code," a single word or a short sentence (Elliott, 2018). Meaningful names were assigned to each code.

In contrast to quantitative procedures, no generally applicable techniques can be utilized to conclude the examination of qualitative data. In this qualitative study, data processing was greatly aided by the researcher's analytical and critical thinking abilities.

In the final phase, the researcher connected the outcomes and the study's goals. When drafting the data analysis chapter, the researcher used notable transcript quotes to draw attention to key themes in the findings and any inconsistencies.

3.14 Ethical Considerations

Participants were asked to give their informed consent before participating in the study. In addition, the privacy of the respondents was scrupulously respected, and the study's goal was stated to the intended respondents both orally and in a written introduction (Oso & Onen, 2011).

Each participant was given information about the study's goals before the study began and the option to leave the study at any time (Kendall, 2008). No coercion was used to get participants to participate in the study. Additionally, the study prevented revealing the individuals' identities (Rankin, 2013).

Any additional data used to demonstrate the applicability of this work that came from other authors or sources was duly acknowledged with references. By ensuring that other people's work is appropriately credited, considerations were made to prevent plagiarism (Guthrie, 2010).

3.15 Summary

The third chapter presented the research approach and design used for this study. Furthermore, the study population and sample size, the data collection methods, the procedure, and the data analysis were presented. Chapter three also presented data control methods, including validity, reliability, and ethical considerations.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA ANALYSIS, PRESENTATION, AND INTERPRETATION

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents findings and analysis from the data collected from 12 in-depth interviews with online journalists and one key informant interview from a cyberspace regulator (Uganda Communications Commission). Data was collected between January 6th and 18th January 2023. Virtual zoom interviews were conducted when the participant could not attend physical interviews. The study ensured that online journalists were aware of the purpose and details of the study by first reading, understanding and signing the consent forms before the interview was conducted. After the interviews, the researcher recorded and transcribed the interviews from where codes and themes were developed. For confidentiality and anonymity purposes, participants were given code OJ with numbers from one to twelve for their quotations, and key informants' responses were given K1 for identification purposes.

4.2 Presentation, Analysis, and Interpretation

The study was on the influence of cyberspace regulations on the practice of online journalism in Uganda. The interviews from the twelve online journalists and the officials revealed a number of concerns and findings, as presented below.

4.2.1 Findings

4.2.1.1 To find out how the online journalists and regulators understood cyberspace regulations in Uganda

The study's first objective was to discover journalists' and regulators' understanding of cyberspace regulations in Uganda. This objective was to reveal how online journalists regarded, understood and interpreted cyberspace regulations. Before addressing the first objective, which involved establishing how online journalists in Uganda understood cyberspace regulations, the researcher ascertained what role played and how Uganda's cyberspace regulations influenced their practice, as shown below.

Online journalists' understanding of cyber regulations

To answer the objective about online journalists' understanding of cyberspace regulations, participants were first asked to assess their knowledge using the question: "What do you understand by the term 'cyberspace regulations'?".

The study findings revealed how participants understood cyberspace regulations: firstly, as guidelines that govern cyberspace; as tools authorities use to avoid cyber-attacks of any form; and as frameworks used by authorities to monitor, sieve and promote quality content online.

Guidelines that govern cyberspace

The study findings revealed that most online journalists understood cyberspace regulations as guidelines. Guidelines are defined as general rules authored by a particular authority that should be adhered to by a particular group of people. In this context, cyberspace guidelines were to be followed by online journalists when sharing information

online to ensure online user privacy and safety. This explanation was evident in the participant's OJ, Seven understanding of cyberspace regulations who said that;

> Cyberspace regulations are laws to govern the online user. Institutions have authored these regulations in Uganda, for instance, Uganda Communications Commission and can cover a wide range of activities, including data privacy, cybercrimes, intellectual property, security, and online behaviour (OJ Seven, 2023).

To add to the aspect of governing cyberspace, participant OJ Five had a slightly different understanding of cyberspace regulations, which he defined as;

> A framework that governs the usage, access, distribution, and privacy on platforms like Twitter and Facebook on the digital platforms by Users and ensures their safety by using laws legalized by the Government (OJ Five, 2023).

Tools authorities use to prevent cyberspace-attacks of any form

The findings from online journalists further described cyberspace regulations as tools used by regulators like Uganda Communications Commission to protect online users from cyberspace attacks. One participant described cyberspace regulations to entail cautions or punishments to potential culprits to prevent possible violations that could lead to cyberspace attacks, for instance, criminalizing the recording of voice or video of an individual without authorisation - whose offence attracts a 10-year sentence or Uganda Shs15m fine. This role played by cyberspace regulations of preventing cyber-attacks was evident in what participant OJ Two said;

> Cyber regulations are tools authorities use to prevent and protect online users from cyber-attacks of any form. Cyberspace attacks include any malicious activity that aims to gather information or to collect, disrupt, deny, degrade, or destroy information system resources**.** Such cyberspace attacks target mainly naïve online content users (OJ Two, 2023).

Cyberspace regulators monitor, sieve and promote quality content online

Other respondents opined that cyberspace regulators are mandated to monitor, sieve and promote online activity by outlining what should be shared or not be shared by online journalists on digital platforms. For instance, using the Computer Misuse Act, the regulators caution online journalists on sharing information that could spark citizens' uprisings. Therefore, such information is sieved according to what the frameworks say about what information should be shared.

> Cyberspace regulations allow authorities to monitor, sieve and promote quality content online. For instance, some online journalists were monitored and arrested in Uganda for promoting political insecurity agendas. Regulators do all this to ensure harmony and quality content for online journalists and the people who consume information on digital platforms (OJ Twelve, 2023).

Based on the findings from interviews with journalists practising online journalism, they demonstrated a great understanding of cyberspace regulations in their descriptions. This was affirmed by a key informant from the Uganda Communications Commission, who described cyberspace regulations as frameworks for governing (monitoring and controlling) cyberspace activities and ensuring the safety and protection of digital platform users.

Role of cyberspace regulations in Uganda

The researcher found it necessary to find out the knowledge of online journalists about the role of cyberspace regulations as it would influence the first objective, which was to find out their understanding of cyberspace regulations and their influence on their online journalism practice. This is because their knowledge of cyberspace regulations would give an informed perception. Some themes emerged from the findings, including moderation of cyberspace activity, promoting user safety, and preventing defamation on digital platforms.

Moderation of cyberspace activity

Most participants pointed out that cyberspace regulations were implemented to moderate cyberspace activity. Moderation of cyberspace activities includes monitoring information being shared by online journalists and sieving out information deemed unethical or wrong to be shared on digital platforms. These assertions were affirmed by an interviewee, OJ, who pointed out that cyberspace regulations have enabled them to do their work lawfully, who said that;

> "Cyberspace regulations were introduced to moderate cyberspace activity, protect both users and systems, as well as provide for lawful activities" (OJ One, 2023).

Promotion of user safety while using digital platforms

The study findings from a section of participants from in-depth interviews further pointed out that online journalists majorly understood cyberspace regulations as tools for promoting and ensuring user safety while using digital platforms like Facebook and Twitter. For instance, one participant noted that cyberspace regulations were implemented to reduce cybercrimes;

> Without cyber regulations, cybercrimes like cyberbullying, which is a form of harassment using electronic means, would be rampant, but the introduction of regulations like the Computer Misuse Act reduces the likelihood of the risks of cyberbullying and attacks (OJ Nine, 2023).

In addition to the previous assertions about the role of cyberspace regulations, OJ Two pointed out that cyberspace regulations caution online journalists from media houses about what they should not share on digital platforms and the repercussions that come from the violation of such cautions;

> Since the Computer Misuse Act was signed into law, journalists and media houses have become cautious of what is posted, especially about

> personalities. For instance, some online content creators have been arrested for cyberbullying and disturbing political leaders' peace. For example, Stella Nyanzi was arrested for posting sensitive information on digital platforms about the person of the President of Uganda. Therefore, such cyberspace regulations have reduced cybercrimes on digital platforms, especially cyberbullying (OJ Two, 2023).

Additionally, interviewee OJ Six pointed out another perspective about cyberspace regulations' role, ensuring fairness in using digital platforms by all users. He said;

> The introduction of cyberspace regulations has ensured the security and fairness in the usage of digital platforms, for instance, the people who support the government in power have always been abused, harassed and threatened on Facebook and opposition party members have always abused Twitter, but this has reduced in fear of being brought to book by the law. For instance, Kakwenza Rukirabashaija was arrested for always abusing the First Family. However, after being arrested for violating cyberspace regulations, he fled the country to ensure security, safety and fairness for internet users (OJ Six, 2023).

Furthermore, findings from interviewee OJ Five showed how cyber regulations have enabled social harmony on digital platforms;

> Cyberspace regulations have ensured the protection of personal data and prevented cybercrime. It has also enabled social responsibility that has promoted social harmony (OJ Five, 2023).

Social harmony in the usage of digital platforms involves valuing, expressing, and promoting peace, respect and equity toward others in a given society regardless of their weight, marital status, national origin, ethnicity, colour, gender, race, age, or occupation;

The above findings about how cyberspace regulations ensure users' data protection supported was by the comments made by one interviewee OJ Eleven who said that cyberspace regulations have ensured user online user safety, which is echoed in the following statements:

> Cyberspace regulations ensure user safety and responsible internet usage through its continuous monitoring and sieving out information that can corrupt online users while protecting the rights and interests of individuals and organizations (OJ Eleven, 2023).

Cyber regulations prevent defamation

The study findings revealed that cyberspace regulations were preventing defamation and misinformation, as the two critical factors why cyberspace regulations were introduced because anyone would just share information without evidence, not researched, which ultimately ended up causing defamation of innocent personalities. In agreement to this statement, OJ Seven said that;

> Cyber regulations were mainly introduced to stop misinformation, disinformation, and fear of defamation from digital platforms that malicious persons and or novice internet users could share (OJ Seven, 2023).

Additionally, OJ Eight gave a detailed explanation of the role of cyberspace regulations in Uganda and how the regulation prevented defamation, saying that;

> Cyberspace regulations were formulated in Uganda to ensure standards of appropriate behaviour for information and communication technology (ICT) users are met, safeguard digital platform users about misinformation and defamations and mitigate harm to people, data, systems, services, and infrastructure in particular, upholds human rights, and enables the investigation and prosecution of crimes committed online (OJ, Eight 2023).

Uganda's cyberspace regulations influence on online journalism practice

The researcher found it critical to establish the cyberspace regulations that influence online journalism practice in Uganda. This finding was important because it revealed the Cyberspace Regulation Act as what the online journalists associated with most, followed by their perception of it. Therefore, the researcher outlined four cyberspace regulations which included the Computer Misuse Act, 2011, Uganda Communications Act,

2013, National Information Technology Authority, 2009 and Electronic Transaction Act, 2011.

Findings revealed that the Computer Misuse Act 2011 were influencing all the participants. The findings confirm that the Computer Misuse Act of 2011 influenced every participant, indicating that every online journalist was relating to it specifically. This was followed by a section of participants (9) who pointed out that they were both mainly influenced by the Uganda Communications Act, of 2013 and the Electronic Transaction Act, of 2011. Findings also revealed that the National Information Technology Authority Act 2009 influenced the least number of participants. This may have been because it had nothing to do with how most online journalists worked. The Computer Misuse Act of 2011's Section 24 on Cyber Harassment, which states that "a person who commits cyber harassment is liable on conviction to a fine not exceeding seventy-two currency points or imprisonment not exceeding three years or both," can be used to justify the fact that the majority of online journalists are subject to its provisions. Article 25: "Offensive communication."

Perceptions of online journalists about cyberspace regulations affected by the government of Uganda

After discovering the participants' understanding of cyberspace regulations, their role and the cyberspace regulation that online journalists mainly associated themselves with, the study addressed how online journalists perceived cyberspace regulations. The findings revealed key themes, which included curtailing freedom of speech, cyber regulations are politicised, cyberspace regulations are ambiguous, and cyberspace regulations ensuring online user safety;

Cyberspace regulations curtail freedom of speech

Findings from the in-depth interviews carried out with the online journalists revealed that the majority of the participants pointed out that most cyberspace regulations are for restricting information or comments from being made public or passed onto any unauthorized third party on digital platforms, for example, one respondent said;

> Some cyberspace regulations are in good faith, yet others are not, as they gag the media and deter the media from reporting on the areas perceived to be sensitive by the government. Some are politically motivated to avoid responsibility and accountability (OJ Three, 2023).

Similarly, interview findings also revealed that some regulations have suppressed online speech and communication, affecting journalism practice. One of the participants had this particular perception;

> The Computer Misuse Act and other cyberspace laws in Uganda might be seen as attempts by the government to censor information and restrict freedom of speech in the country. The law makes it illegal to publish false, misleading, or fabricated information or offensive communications, which might be seen as an effort to stifle dissenting opinions and stop the spread of information that might be seen as detrimental to the government's interests. The requirement for internet service providers and social media platforms to register users and keep records of their activities for up to two years can be seen as a form of surveillance and a way for the government to monitor and track online activities. The vagueness of the regulation can also be interpreted as a way to allow for arbitrary and discretionary enforcement, which can be used to target specific individuals or groups. Additionally, the government's use of the regulations to block access to certain websites and social media platforms, and to arrest and detain individuals for their online activities, can be interpreted as a form of censorship and repression of free speech. Overall, the cyberspace regulations in Uganda can be interpreted as an attempt by the government to exert control over the flow of information and limit freedom of expression in the country (OJ Eleven, 2023).

Cyber regulations are politicized

According to online journalists, the study findings revealed that some cyberspace regulations are politically motivated to control opposition views. If the information shared on digital platforms discredits the ruling government's views, ideas and programs, the author will lose their online platform and occasionally be arrested. This was pointed out by one of the participants, who said;

> Some cyberspace regulations, for instance, the Computer Misuse Act (2022) was implemented to curtail the freedom of expression for those with parallel views against the ruling government or personnel, in summary, they are politicized (OJ Six, 2023).

In agreement with the previous participant, respondent OJ Five also thought that cyberspace regulations were so political, especially during elections time;

> The way cyberspace regulations are implemented is harsh during politically charged times. For example, at election times, the opposition party faces censorship in what they post online, otherwise usually relax after elections (OJ Five, 2023).

Cyberspace regulations are ambiguous

The study findings about online journalists' perception of cyberspace regulations revealed that some of the regulations were ambitious. This means that some cyberspace regulations have one or more meanings and interpretations depending on whether you are from an opposition party or for the government, which risks the practice of online journalism depending on what information they share on digital platforms. Participant OJ Two, in the affirmation of this assertion, had this to say;

> Some of the cyberspace regulations are ambiguous and misinformed. For instance, before the Computer Misuse Act was signed into law on 8th September 2022, without enough consultations with the people, it would affect most - online journalists. Moreover, the regulations are sometimes difficult to understand and interpret (OJ Two, 2023).

Cyberspace regulations were ensuring online user safety

The study findings about the online journalists' perceptions of cyberspace regulations revealed that they were ensuring the safety of the online user. The online journalists described regulations as providers of online users with information about knowing the types of risks they might face when using the Internet for activity, including security risks, managing and protecting your data, managing your online reputation, and avoiding inappropriate or illegal content, for instance from the National Information Technology Act. These findings were supported by participants (OJ, Eight), who thought that cyberspace regulations were ensuring online user safety;

> Implementing cyberspace regulations is necessary to ensure safe and fair user online interactions free from cyberbullying, cyber-attacks, and account hacking (OJ, Eight).

In conclusion, most online journalists had a negative perception of cyberspace regulations because they unanimously said that they are implemented to gag communication by limiting freedom of speech and expression. However, a small section of participants revealed that cyberspace regulations were creating user awareness about preventing cyber-attacks and cyberbullying to ensure user safety.

4.2.1.2 Ways used to regulate online journalism in Uganda

The study's second objective was to explore how cyberspace is regulated by the regulatory authorities in Uganda. To achieve this objective, one key informant from Uganda Communications Commission, the body that regulates cyberspace activities, was interviewed about the ways they use to regulate cyberspace and how they enforce these regulations. The key findings from this objective revealed three themes which are

monitoring and inspecting communication services, collaboration with enforcement authorities and cautioning media houses with online journalists

UCC monitors, supervise and controls all communications services

The study findings revealed that cyberspace authorities regulated online journalism by monitoring, inspecting, supervising and controlling all communication services. The Uganda Communications Commission monitors online content posted by online journalists about its credibility, authenticity and sensitivity so that users online are safe being on digital platforms. The key informant from Uganda Communications Commission had this to say about it;

> It is the work of UCC to monitor, inspect, license, supervise, control, and regulate all communications services by establishing and enforcing digital content standards. These digital content standards include disseminating or exchanging audio, visual, or data content via postal radio or telecommunications media, data communication, and broadcasting. Therefore, all online data communication service providers, including online publishers, online news platforms, and online radio and television operators, apply to the commission for authorization to monitor all digital platforms for content from bloggers with immediate effect (Key informant, UCC, 2023).

Collaborations with other government institutions

The study also revealed that regulators collaborate with other law enforcement government institutions like Police and courts to deal with violators of cyberspace regulations. Such law enforcement institutions arrest and charge violators of cyberspace regulations. This was evident in the example given by the key informant about collaborations with other government institutions;

> Regulators have to work with police and courts of law to enforce the law, for instance, after Stella Nyanzi wrote sensitive information about the

> person of President on her Twitter platform, she was arrested and charged with disturbing the peace of person of the President. Therefore, the regulators formulate laws and rules that should be followed for online user safety while other institutions enforce those who violate the laws (Key informant, UCC, 2023).

Cautioning online journalists

The study findings also revealed that regulatory authorities enforce regulations by cautioning online journalists about the information they should or should not share on their digital platforms to ensure regulations are not violated;

> It is critical to caution online journalists from different media houses about the dangers of posting particular information on their digital platforms. The cautions and warnings to make the online journalists aware of the laws they are violating, and if it is not adhered to, they are arrested and charged (Key informant, UCC, 2023).

UCC reports cyberspace law violations on the Internet

Following the mandate to regulate information shared on cyberspace platforms, In June 2013, the Uganda Communications Commission established the Uganda Communications Commission Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT) at UCC as a central hub to serve as a "trusted and central coordination point of contact for cyber security". This was evident in the narration by the key informant;

> The UCC mandated the Computer Emergency Response Team to monitor and report violations on the Internet, such as cyber terrorism, computer intrusion, online sexual exploitation, and cyber fraud. The team also coordinates all other multi-sectoral agencies involved in the fight against cybercrime, collaborates with other law enforcement agencies in prosecuting cyber-related crimes, and works with other regional and international organizations with similar mandates. The Computer Emergency Response Team also aims to identify, defend, respond to, and manage cyber threats in the communication sector (Key informant, UCC, 2023).

Publish information for all public interests

Through the key informant interview, the study revealed that online content shared on digital platforms was supposed to be inclusive for all public consumption. This was evident in the informant's narration;

> The Uganda Communication Commission outlines the public interest requirements that all authorized platforms must adhere to. These include providing information of "specific interest to all ethnic groups, gender, and persons with disabilities" and ensuring a wide variety of sources and viewpoints. In addition, information should not be misrepresented or "contrary to the public morality (Key informant, UCC, 2023).

4.2.1.3 Effects of cyberspace regulation on journalism practice in Uganda

The third objective of this study was to examine how the implementation of cyberspace regulation in Uganda has affected online journalism practice. To achieve this objective, data was collected using in-depth interviews and analyzed under the question, 'how has the implementation of cyberspace regulation in Uganda affected online journalism practice?' This research question sought to establish how cyberspace regulation in Uganda has affected online journalism practice. The results are presented below.

Journalists' understanding of cyber laws

The study findings reveal different ways in which cyberspace regulations affect online journalists. For instance, most online journalists pointed out that they have learnt to read and understand the risks involved with violations of the cyber regulations, which prompts them to verify the information before sharing it to ensure that they are not caught by the law so that they can practice online journalism effectively;

> In our online journalistic approach, I ensure to understand the cyberspace regulations that govern the use of the internet and other related technologies. This includes laws related to data privacy, intellectual

> property, security, and online behaviour - being aware of the risks. As an online journalist, I know the risks associated with the work, such as the potential for legal action or censorship. I am always prepared to take steps to protect myself and my sources. As an online journalist, I am always diligent in verifying the accuracy of the information I report, and I try to be transparent about the sources of that information (OJ Eleven, 2023).

Like the previous participant, another participant said;

> I read, update and inform myself of the cyberspace regulations and intend to abide therein (OJ One, 2023).

Self-censorship and adherence to cyberspace regulations

The study also revealed from the findings that participants practising online journalism have learnt to practice self-censorship and adherence to the cyber regulations to avoid arrests through consultations before sharing information online. One participant noted;

> We only practice online journalism without being interfered with by cyberspace regulations by adhering to them. This way I avoid going onto the collision path with the powers that be. I consult widely on how to go about the story (OJ Three, 2023).

In the same vein, findings revealed that some journalists practised self-censorship to avoid violating cyberspace regulations. This was evident when one of the participants said;

> Given the implementation of cyberspace regulations, self-censorship is key, or you risk legal procedures being levied against you, therefore, you have to work within the confines of the law (OJ Four, 2023).

Findings from the in-depth interviews highlighted that some journalists' adherence to company regulations influences what they post online - that is in line with cyberspace regulations. For instance, one participant said that;

> As a journalist who shares information on digital platforms, I respect my employer's rules whenever I post online. Credibility matters to me. XX(Keeping company name anonymous)media house is governed by its own rules and regulations (OJ Twelve, 2023).

Verification of stories/content before publication on digital platforms

The study findings revealed that some journalists were verifying information before sharing it on digital platforms, especially stories that are considered sensitive and political. This was evident as respondents said;

> Our online journalistic practice checks cyberspace laws and guidelines, especially with legal department intervention on sensitive stories that implicate people or organizations before sharing (OJ Six, 2023).

> Regarding cyberspace regulations, we discuss topics backed with facts in hand and double-check work to ensure it does not contravene cyber regulations before sharing it on digital platforms (OJ Eight, 2023).

The study also revealed how participants must be cautious when sharing information using digital platforms. For instance, one participant had this to say;

> As online journalists, we have to be cautious when using different digital platforms. For instance, I avoid controversial topics that could lead to arrest (OJ Seven, 2023).

In support of the previous findings, another participant pointed out that they always do in-house consultations using company lawyers when necessary:

> When we are not sure about the effects of the information we have to share, we always use in-house legal counsel to ensure that what we post does not violate cyberspace regulations (OJ Five, 2023).

The researcher found it critical to establish online journalists' opinions about the effectiveness of cyberspace regulations in the country. The Table below shows their opinions about cyberspace regulations regarding their effectiveness.

Findings revealed that a significant number of participants thought that the cyberspace regulations were effective, accounting to 50%. These were followed by participants who disagreed that cyberspace regulations were effective and those who were not sure whether regulations were effective. The significant number of participants who pointed out that cyberspace regulations were effective had this to say;

> Cyberspace regulations have been more effective, as few journalists have been dragged to court on the grounds of breaking these laws. However, chances are high, this could be due to fear keeping most of us away (OJ Three, 2023).

Another respondent stated that;

> Cyberspace regulations have been effective because many Ugandans can own personal accounts and even new online websites to discuss various issues (OJ Four, 2023).

In the same vein, findings from the in-depth interview revealed that cyberspace regulations have reduced the sharing of fake news on digital platforms;

> Ever since cyber regulations were implemented, they have helped curb fake news because of fear of violation of regulations (OJ Two, 2023).

The findings also revealed that 25% of respondents disagreed with the fact that cyberspace regulations have been effective. One of the respondents said;

> There is no way cyberspace regulations have been effective because they impede freedom of expression, which negatively affects our practice (OJ Five, 2023).

In the same vein, another participant said most of the regulations are aimed at silencing online journalist voices;

> They censor or silence online journalism, for instance, those who have expressed themselves freely have been targeted. As a result, some have fled the country. Moreover, many sections of the laws don't serve the intended purpose (OJ Six, 2023).

The study findings about whether cyberspace regulations were effective revealed that some journalists were unsure. One of these said;

> I am not competent enough to make a conclusive judgment on this. But, most of the regulations are not enforced (OJ Ten, 2023).

In the same vein, another participant gave detailed justification for why he was not sure about the effectiveness of the cyberspace regulations in Uganda;

> My stand on this is that I am not yet sure whether the cyberspace regulations have been effective, given that different people may have different views on the subject. Determining how well Uganda's cyberspace laws promote online journalism is impossible. There have been worries, nevertheless, that certain laws in Uganda have been utilized to stifle free speech and the flow of information. The Computer Misuse Act was passed in Uganda. Among other things, it makes it illegal to publish "false, misleading, or fictitious data" or "offensive communication," It mandates that social media platforms and internet service providers register users and keep records of their activities for up to two years. This has drawn criticism for being too ambiguous and having the ability to stifle free speech and information flow. There have also been instances of the government arresting and detaining people for their online actions and utilizing rules to ban access to particular websites and social media platforms. These moves have raised worries that the laws are being applied to stifle dissenting opinions and limit access to information. It's critical to remember that Uganda's situation is complicated and dynamic and that cyberspace rules may not always be effective in fostering online journalism. In order to support a free and open internet in the nation, it is crucial to keep an eye on the situation and to keep having conversations with the government and other stakeholders (OJ Eleven, 2023).

Challenges facing online journalists resulting from cyberspace regulations

The researcher was interested in discovering the main challenges facing online journalists' practice in Uganda. Participants mentioned three key challenges, including self-censorship, which had limited freedom of expression, the ambiguous nature of regulations, and the politicization of cyber regulations, which has restricted access to information.

Self-censorship, which has limited freedom of expression

Respondents highlighted self-censorship, which entails classifying one's discourse. This is done out of fear of, or deference to, the sensibilities or preferences (actual or perceived) of others and without overt pressure from any specific party or institution of authority. The study findings revealed that the majority of the participants faced the challenge of self-censorship, which has affected their freedom of expression due to cyberspace regulations. One participant had this to say about that;

> Cyberspace regulations have limited freedom of expression. For example, because freedom of speech is regulated, it is difficult to talk or share about certain topics, most notably politics (OJ Eleven, 2023).

The previous assertions were supported by the comments made during the study from another participant, who had this to say;

> Cyberspace regulations have prompted us to practice self-censorship, which has limited our freedom of expression and speech because of the risk of legal action in case what you have written offends any particular individual. Furthermore, we have been gagged by those in power to kill off discussions around sensitive topics (OJ Four, 2023).

In the same vein, another participant stated plainly how cyberspace regulations have negatively impacted their practice that;

> One can no longer say what they want to say the way they want it. It is hard beating around the bush when you say something simple (OJ Ten, 2023).

Many online journalists practice self-censorship to avoid running afoul of cyber regulations, which could lead to a lack of diverse voices and perspectives in the media. The study findings further revealed another perspective on how cyberspace regulations have prompted self-censorship amongst online journalists, which has affected the quality of information shared;

> Cyberspace regulations have forced us to practice self-censorship, which is on the rise, compromising the quality of journalistic investigation because some critical parts of some stories are left out for fear of being arrested and charged for violation of the regulations (OJ Ten, 2023).

Findings from in-depth interviews with online journalists also revealed that cyberspace regulations were politically applied specifically, not neutral. For instance, one participant had this to say;

> The cyberspace regulations have been politicised to work against those who disagree with the state's ideas, which frustrated online journalism practice (OJ Six, 2023).

Cyberspace regulations are ambiguous

The majority of the respondents also highlighted that cyberspace regulations are ambiguous and, therefore, need comprehensive research to understand them before sharing information online. For instance, one respondent had this to say about them;

> Some of the cyberspace regulations are not clear, they lack clarity depending on who is applying them, and for instance, the opposition government and the government in authority have different perspectives about them, making our work hard (OJ One, 2023).

In the same vein, another participant pointed out that in order to understand and practice the cyberspace regulations, there is a need for consultations from legal counsels, which is expensive and time-consuming;

> Navigating the legal landscape of cyber regulations can be challenging and time-consuming, and online journalists may need to seek legal counsel to ensure they comply with the law (OJ Two, 2023).

Another participant pointed out that because the cyberspace regulations are not clear to them, they end up delaying the processing and sharing their content on digital spaces;

> Cyberspace regulations have caused unnecessary delays in the delivery of my projects due to wide consultation and perusal by the legal team at

> my workstation, in fear of violating the rules and getting arrested (OJ Three, 2023).

Limited access to information

One of the respondents thought that cyberspace regulations were implemented to restrict them from accessing particular information that is sensitive and said;

> Cyber regulations may restrict access to certain information, making it more difficult for online journalists to gather information for their stories (OJ Eleven, 2023).

4.3 Summary

This chapter provided findings on the influence of cyberspace regulations on the practice of online journalism in Uganda. A range of themes arose from the analysis as presented above. As a result, it can be concluded that cyberspace laws are continuously being used to restrict the publication of information on the internet, negatively affecting many online journalists.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the findings, conclusions, recommendations, and areas for further study. The study sought to find out the perception of journalists and regulators about cyberspace regulations in Uganda, explore ways used to regulate online journalism in Uganda and examine how the implementation of cyberspace regulation in Uganda has affected online journalism practice.

5.2 Discussions of Key Findings

5.2.1 Online journalists' Understanding of cyberspace regulations in Uganda

The first objective was to establish how online journalists understood cyberspace regulations in Uganda. Findings revealed that most participants pointed out that most cyberspace regulations restrict information or comments from being made public or passed onto any unauthorized third party on digital platforms. These results disagree with the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states that "everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression" (UDHR Article 19).

Similarly, the Human Rights Network for Journalists-Uganda (HRNJ-U) publication on 14th October 2022 pointed out that cyberspace regulations, specifically the Computer Misuse Act, were signed into law to severely restrict freedom of expression online be weaponised against critics and political opponents. However, there is support from the 1948 UDHR Act about cyber regulations restriction of information sharing, which

specifies that this right includes the freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of the border (UDHR, Article 19).

The study findings revealed that some cyberspace regulations are politically motivated to control opposition views. The findings align with Selnes (2021), who noted that some cyberspace regulations are intended to target government critics specifically, and they will be used to silence dissent and prevent people from speaking out.

A significant number of participants thought that cyberspace regulations were ambiguous and misinformed. This is because they are difficult to understand and interpret sometimes. The findings aligned with Wanyama (2022), who pointed out that the Computer Misuse Act law was very broad and ambiguous. He noted that there are still questions about how the committee introduced provisions on social media misuse that were not in the Bill, were not subjected to stakeholder consultation and were not discussed by committee members, according to the Minority report. The government and its agencies could use this to target critics, limiting freedom of expression and access to information significantly.

However, one participant had positive thoughts about cyberspace regulations, stating that they were ensuring online user safety and ensuring fair online interactions. These findings align with the Computer Misuse Act 2022 which ensures online user security and safety by prohibiting anyone who uses social media to publish, distribute, or share information prohibited by Ugandan law, or who uses a disguised or false identity, commits an offence. In addition, the law also punishes unauthorized recording of a person's voice or video, as well as unauthorized access to their personal information. The finding

relates to the mass society theory that journalists if left free, could ruin society since the people are vulnerable to the media.

5.2.2 Exploring ways used to regulate online journalism in Uganda

The second objective was to explore how institutions regulated online journalism in Uganda. The study findings revealed that UCC regulates online journalism by monitoring, inspecting, supervising and controlling online content posted on digital spaces used for communication services.

These findings affirm that cyberspace regulators are performing well in monitoring, inspecting, supervising and controlling online content because Uganda was ranked as Africa's most secure cyberspace in September 2018, according to the Global National Cyber Security Index. In addition, according to the Index, Uganda has made significant progress in cyber threat analysis and information management, digital service protection, education and professional development, and the fight against cybercrime.

The study findings about ways institutions regulate online journalism from key informant interviews revealed that the UCC mandated the Computer Emergency Response Team to monitor and report violations on the Internet, such as cyber terrorism, computer intrusion, online sexual exploitation, and cyber fraud. These findings are in line with Charity (2017), who pointed out that cyberspace regulations are in charge of ensuring the safety and security of electronic transactions and information systems, the prevention of unauthorized access, abuse, or misuse of information systems, including computers, and the security of electronic transactions in a trustworthy environment. The act establishes

offences for unauthorized use, access, or abuse of computers or data and also covers electronic fraud, child pornography, cyber harassment, and cyberstalking.

Through the key informant interview, the study revealed that online content shared on digital platforms was supposed to be inclusive for all public consumption. However, according to the mass society theory, mass media and technology development may cause old social institutions to disintegrate and a more dispersed and atomized society to emerge (Bosire, 2012). This could imply that as internet usage increases, it becomes harder to monitor and control it, resulting in a loss of social order and a fall in conventional values in Uganda's cyberspace regulation. These findings agree with Vergeer (2018) in his study about journalists' perceived online source credibility and verification behaviour, who pointed out that cyberspace regulation ethics emphasize that online journalism should publish accurate and credible information while in respect of differences in national and international cultural values.

5.2.3 Examining how the implementation of cyberspace regulation in Uganda has affected online journalism practice

The study findings revealed that most online journalists pointed out that they have learnt to read and understand the risks involved with violations of the cyber regulations, which prompts them to verify the information before sharing it to ensure that they are not caught by the law so that they can practice online journalism effectively. These findings resonate with the National Information Technology Authority – Uganda (NITA-U) objective of having professionally trained online journalists to curb violation of cyberspace laws and creating awareness of the existing cyber laws that some did not know.

The study also revealed from the findings that participants practising online journalism have learnt to practice self-censorship and adherence to the cyber regulations to avoid arrests. These results agree with Namasinga (2020), who pointed out that through cyberspace regulations, the media has been constructed, managed and threatened in the regime's interest. As a result, individual journalists and media organizations have been harassed, tortured, imprisoned, denied advertisements closed, or intimidated to the point where they must practice self-censorship. This is the political, legal, and institutional framework within which the media must operate in Uganda.

The study findings revealed that some journalists have learnt to do prior information verification before sharing information on digital platforms, especially stories that are thought to be sensitive and political. The study by Namasinga and Orgeret (2020) relates to the findings about the need to verify the information before sharing it on digital platforms. They noted that online journalists should undergo a verification process and adhere to the following cyberspace regulations; - collecting information, evaluating, weighing and establishing its evidence before sharing on digital platforms. This compels journalists to be sensitive to others around them and aligns with McQuail (1987) argument on social responsibility theory that the media should regulate itself within the law's framework and specified model to fulfil societal obligations.

5.3 Conclusion and Implications for Practice

From the first objective, which sought to establish the understanding of online journalists about cyberspace regulations effected by the government of Uganda, most of the online journalists had a negative perception of cyberspace regulations because they

majorly believe cyberspace regulations were signed into law to gag communication by limiting freedom of speech and expression. However, some had a more positive view of online regulations, that the regulations have reduced the spread of fake news and instead have to authenticate the news before publishing. This is to curtail the citizen journalists who do not uphold journalistic ethics, thus pushing for journalism to be respected and trusted.

The second objective was to explore ways in which online journalism is regulated. The study concluded that cyberspace institutions regulated online journalism through monitoring, inspecting, supervising and controlling online content posted on digital spaces used for communication services. The study also concluded that cyberspace regulators monitor and report violations on the Internet, such as cyber terrorism, computer intrusion, online sexual exploitation, and cyber fraud and ensure that online content shared on digital platforms was supposed to be inclusive for all public consumption. However, there are elements of cyberspace regulations, such as the Computer Misuse Act (2011) and the Uganda Communications Act, 2013, that regulators use to crack down on online media space in the guise of protecting public safety and terrorism in the country that limits the space in which online journalists have to express themselves and do their journalistic work. For example, journalists cannot cover any military-related operations because it is argued that it is for national security.

The third objective of the study was to examine how the implementation of cyberspace regulation in Uganda has affected online journalism practice. The study concluded that participants practising online journalism had learnt to practice self-censorship and adherence to the cyber regulations to avoid arrests. The study also

concluded that some online journalists have learnt to verify the information before sharing it on digital platforms, especially stories that are thought to be sensitive and political. The verification of information prior to publishing is crucial and in line with journalism ethics to certify that information is "accurate, fair and thorough" as per the Society of Professional journalists' Code of Ethics. This would help curb the spread of fake and unverified news from spreading and causing harm to society.

5.4 Recommendations

Based on the findings from the in-depth interviews carried out with the online journalists and regulators, the study recommends the following;

Findings revealed that some cyberspace regulations were ambiguous and broad; therefore, the study recommends that regulations be developed through a transparent process allowing public participation, including input from journalists and media organizations. This will aid in having clear regulations to be adhered to by online journalists and avoid colliding with the policy enforcers.

The study also recommends that cyberspace regulations be clearly defined and consistently enforced without arbitrary or discriminatory application. Clear cyberspace legislation will aid in fostering innovation and growth in the practice of online journalism to carry out their work in a responsible and accountable manner. This includes the right to free speech, the ability to obtain and publish information, and the obligation to disclose correct and accurate information.

The study findings revealed that cyberspace regulations favoured particular interests in the government. Based on that finding, the study recommends that regulations

balance different stakeholders' interests, including the need to protect national security, public safety, and individual rights, such as freedom of expression and privacy.

In the same vein, the study recommends that there should be an independent oversight body to monitor the implementation and enforcement of regulations and to ensure that they are not being used to restrict freedom of expression or the free flow of information.

The findings revealed that almost half of the respondents did not understand or had no idea about the impact of cyberspace regulations. Based on this finding, the study recommends that there should be massive sensitisation and deeper consultation of the policymakers before enacting such laws. By encouraging journalists to do their work ethically and professionally, a broad-based awareness campaign on cyberspace regulations can aid in the promotion of a culture of responsible journalism online. This can assist in upholding the credibility and integrity of the online media community.

The findings revealed that most online journalists were not happy with the provisions in the cyberspace regulations regarding their implementation, which restricted their freedom of speech. Therefore, based on the findings, regulators should engage journalists and have amendments done or review the high-handed regulations to be fair to all parties.

5.5 Areas for Further Research

The study's findings open possibilities for further studies on the impact of cyberspace regulations knowledge performance of online journalists. Much as this study

met the targeted objectives, the impact of cyberspace regulations knowledge performance of online journalists remains another unexplored area that would bring more insights.

For further studies, research on the impact of cyberspace regulations on online media freedoms would give a comprehensive overview while comparing the media rights, the ever-changing technological advancements impact on journalism and the cyberspace regulations.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: In-depth Interview Guide for Online Journalist

Interview Guide for Online Journalists

1. What do you understand by the term ‘cyberspace regulations’?
2. What do you think is the primary reason for cyber regulations?
3. What Uganda cyberspace regulations influence your work as a journalist ?
4. How do you interpret cyberspace regulations effected by the government of Uganda?
5. How do you navigate the cyber regulations in your daily online work?
6. What challenges do you face as a result of the introduction of cyber regulation?
7. What strategies can be used to improve cyberspace regulations on online journalism?
8. How effective are Uganda cyberspace regulations in promoting online journalism in the country?

Appendix B: In-depth Interview Guide for UCC Officials

1. What is meant by the term ‘cyberspace regulations’?
2. What is the primary reason for cyberspace regulations in Uganda?
3. How do you enforce these regulations?
4. How effective are Uganda cyberspace Regulations in promoting Online Journalism in the country?
5. What challenges do you face in the implementation of the cyber
6. How can the cyberspace regulations be improved to increase the maximization of online journalism in Uganda?

Appendix C: Documentary Review Guide

The Computer Misuse Act, 2022,

The Electronic Transactions Act, 2011,

The Uganda Communications Act, 2013,

The Anti-Pornography Act, 2014

The National Information Technology Authority, Uganda Act, 2009

Appendix D: AKU Ethics Review Committee Approval Letter

THE AGA KHAN UNIVERSITY

Graduate School of Media and Communications

REF: AKU-GSMC/ERC/2022/020

Date: December 13, 2022.

Dear Patience Ndinawe (Student No. 567786)

RE: THE INFLUENCE OF CYBER SPACE REGULATIONS ON THE PRACTICE OF ONLINE JOURNALISM IN UGANDA

This is to inform you that Aga Khan University – Graduate School of Media and Communications Ethics Review Committee has reviewed and approved your above research proposal. Your approval period is December 13, 2022, to December 12, 2023, and your application's approval number is AKU-GSMC/ERC/2022/020.
This approval is subject to compliance with the following, under the supervision of your two supervisors:

1. Only the approved documents including the informed consent form and the data collection instruments will be used.
2. Any changes, made on the approved documents that may increase the risks or affect the welfare or safety of the participants or compromise the integrity of the study must be reported to GSMC within the shortest time possible. The amended documents will be taken through a fresh review and the due process of approval.
3. In the event that the research cannot be completed within the one-year approved period, the researcher will request for renewal of approval 30 days prior to the end of the approved period.
4. The researcher will be required to submit a comprehensive progress report when applying for renewal of approval.
5. Submission of an executive summary report to the GSMC's Ethics Review Committee within 90 days of completion of the study.
6. Produce all the data collected using the approved tools as and when required by the Ethics Review Committee within the 90 days of completion of your study.

Prior to commencing your study, you will be required to obtain a research permit from National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI). You can access the application portal from the website on https://www.nacosti.go.ke/.

Please feel free to contact me should you require any further information.

Yours sincerely

Prof Nancy Booker
Interim Dean

University Centre, 4th Floor, 3rd Parklands Avenue
P.O. Box 30270 – 00100 G.P.O. Nairobi, Kenya
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Appendix E: AKU Introductory Letter

THE AGA KHAN UNIVERSITY

Graduate School of Media and Communications

The Uganda National Council for Science and Technology

P. O. Box 6884
Kampala

December 13, 2022

Dear Sir/Madam,

PATIENCE NDINAWE (STUDENT NO. 567786)

Patience Ndinawe is a registered student at the Aga Khan University, Graduate School of Media and Communications. She is enrolled in the Master of Arts in Digital Journalism Programme and has completed her course work. She is now working on her Master's thesis. Ms. Ndinawe's topic is "**The Influence of Cyber Space Regulations on the Practice of Online Journalism in Uganda.**"

The purpose of my writing is to request you to assist Ms. Ndinawe complete this important academic exercise. Any information collected will be used solely for academic purposes. Upon completion of the research, Ms. Ndinawe's thesis will be available at our library. She will also submit two hard copies and one soft copy in pdf of her completed work to your department.

We appreciate your support to our student towards her successful completion of her thesis research.

Please feel free to contact me should you require any further information.

Yours sincerely,

Prof Nancy Booker
Interim Dean

Appendix F: UCU Research Ethics Committee Approval Letter

UGANDA CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY
A Centre of Excellence in the Heart of Africa

18th January, 2023

18th January, 2023

Patience Ndinawe
Aga Khan University
C/o, Nairobi, Kenya
P.O. Box 30270
0785990973
Email: ndinawepatience@gmail.com

UG-REC-026 APPROVAL NOTICE

To: Patience Ndinawe, Principal Investigator

Re: UCU-REC Application titled; The Influence of Cyberspace Regulations on the Practice of Online Journalism in Uganda.

Application Number: UCUREC-2023-445

Version: 4.0

UGANDA CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY APPROVED UNTIL 18 JAN 2024 RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

Type: [ ] Initial Review
[ ] Protocol Amendment
[ ] Letter of Amendment (LOA)
[ ] Continuing Review
[ ] Material Transfer Agreement
[ ] Other, Specify:

I am please to inform you that the UG-REC-026; UCUREC approved the above referenced application.

Approval of the research is for the period from 18th January 2023, to 18th January, 2024.

This research is considered minimal risk category.
As Principal Investigator of the research, you are responsible for fulfilling the following requirements of approval:

1. All co-investigators must be kept informed of the status of the research.
2. Changes, amendments, and additions to the protocol or the consent form must be submitted to the REC for re-review and approval prior to the activation of the changes.

1 of 2

The REC application number assigned to the research should be cited in any correspondence.

3. Reports of unanticipated problems involving risks to participants or other must be submitted to the REC. New information that becomes available which could change the risk: benefit ratio must be submitted promptly for REC review.

4. Only approved consent forms are to be used in the enrollment of participants. All consent forms signed by subjects and/or witnesses should be retained on file. The REC may conduct audits of all study records, and consent documentation may be part of such audits.
5. Regulations require review of an approved study not less than once per 12-month period. Therefore, a continuing review application must be submitted to the REC eight weeks prior to the above expiration date of 19th November, 2024 in order to continue the study beyond the approved period. Failure to submit a continuing review application in a timely fashion may result in suspension or termination of the study, at which point new participants may not be enrolled and currently enrolled participants must be taken off the study.
6. The REC application number assigned to the research should be cited in any correspondence with the REC of record.
7. Your research details have been shared with the Executive secretary of Uganda National Council for Science and Technology (UNCST) and you are not required to get clearance since you are a Masters degree research. Refer to UNCST Research registration and clearance Policy and guidelines (July 2016) in Uganda section 6(e).

The following is the list of all documents approved in this application by UG-REC _026:

	Document Title	Language	Version	Version Date
1.	Research Proposal	English	1.0	2023-01-12
2.	Informed Consent Form	English	2.0	2023-01-12
3.	Data Collection Tools	English	1.0	2023-01-12

Signed and Stamped

Prof. Peter Waiswa.
UCUREC Chairperson,
pwaiswa@musph.ac.ug

UGANDA CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY
APPROVED
UNTIL
18 JAN 2024
RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE