EFFECT OF UNREGULATED SOCIAL MEDIA INFORMATION CIRCULATION ON GATE KEEPING IN PRINT MEDIA IN RWANDA.

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ABSTRACT

The growth of the Internet has changed the way newsrooms across the world operate. At the heart of the new developments is the growing presence of social media in competition with traditional media of newspaper, magazines, radio, television and online news. The major purpose of the study was to examine the effect of unregulated social media information circulation on the principle of gate keeping in the print media in Rwanda. The study was premised on the following four objectives: to investigate the effect of interactivity on gate keeping in print media in Rwanda; to determine the effect of multimedia usage on gate keeping in print media in Rwanda; to examine the effect of media policy on gate keeping in print media in Rwanda; and to examine the effect of bypass of print media by individuals on gate keeping in print media in Rwanda. The study adopted a descriptive research design and stratified random sampling was used to determine the sample size. The target population for the study was 115 respondents including 53 Managing Directors; 53 Chief Editors; and 9 key informants who are freelance journalists. Using Yamane's formula, 89 respondents were selected from the target population. Simple random sampling technique was used to choose 84 respondents from the print media houses whereas purposive sampling technique was used to select the 5-freelance journalists. The study collected both primary and secondary data, where structured questionnaires were used for data collection. Data collected was analyzed through SPSS version 21. Data analysis involved statistical computations for averages, percentages, correlation, and regression analysis. Ordinary least squares (OLS) regression method of analysis was adopted to determine the inferential statistics. The findings of the study are presented using frequency distribution tables. The findings showed that the study variables would explain 79.2% of the variations in gate keeping. Unregulated information circulated by social media has an impact on gate keeping contributing 98% to adoption. The study concludes that interactivity, multimedia usage, media Policy and Bypassing have influence on gate keeping in print media in Rwanda. The study recommends that though it is difficult, social media should be regulated to protect print media and ensure respect of established laws, social norms and media policy.

Key words: Interactivity, Multimedia Usage, Media Policy, Bypassing and Gate keeping.

1.0 Background.

The widespread adoption of social media and increased online activity by media organizations, has led to the adoption of new ways of collecting, processing and dissemination of news worldwide. In some cases, newsrooms rely on social media users for real time updates of events. In areas where journalists have no access or cannot adequately cover what is happening, social media have been used as sources of information. On the global scene, this was witnessed prominently in the Iranian Elections protests of 2009 and the Arab Spring uprising. In the face of traditional platforms inability of difficulty in covering these conflicts, social media and video sharing sites became a central platform of communication to the outside word. Dramatic footage from all over the country was uploaded to video-sharing and social media sites, as well as to mainstream media organizations like CNN and the BBC, which at one stage was receiving up to five videos a minute with *#Iranelection49* becoming a key aggregation point (Newman, 2009).

With the development of new technologies especially the internet penetration within the global communities, information circulation/flow has been made easier and faster (Dutton, 2009). More importantly, with the introduction of gadgets that facilitate easy transmission of information, each and every person is capable of transmitting messages on his/her own without necessarily passing through media houses/professionals. These individuals have no regulations or censorship patterns that govern the nature of the messages to be disseminated, the production of these messages and the dissemination/spread/circulation of the messages. To some extent, they even violate the laws in place that restrict certain kind of information like the laws on libel, defamation, infringement on individual privacy, public order and national security interests, among other laws (Mackay &Tong, 2011).

With the increase of circulation of unregulated information especially from the social media, media houses are overstretched in competition with social media. Media houses are governed by the principle of gate keeping whereby no media establishment can transmit all messages it receives in the course of a day's routine. In fact, gate keeping is the screening of information to be disseminated. Journalists have to decide which information to transmit, which to defer, which to modify, and which to delete/discard entirely (Shoemaker, 2009).

This is done in respect to professional ethics that govern journalism and serve the purpose to which this profession of journalism stands for. Indeed, gate keeping is not restricted to accepting and rejecting of information, but involves shaping, display, timing, repeating the message for emphasis, and so on. The basic idea of gate keeping has been cogently stated as simply the process by which the billions of messages that are available in the world get cut down and transformed into the hundreds of messages that reach a given person on a given day (Shoemaker& Vos, 2009).

Currently, traditional news organizations are seeing their gate keeping roles usurped increasingly more often by the public's use of social media. In other words, when editors do a lousy job of gate keeping and keep important stories locked behind the gate, the public now has the power to become the gate keepers and unlock an overlooked story. It's not that new media don't have the power to have an impact; it's that now an outraged public can use social-media tools to have an impact, sometimes bypassing the media and sometimes manipulating news organizations (Steve, 2005).

Newer communication technologies have increased the possibilities for how people can send and receive information. Social media are one such technology that has seen increased usage as an information source (Landau, 2010). However, a major question surrounding the use of social media as an information source is how people assess the source credibility of this information (Westerman *et al.*, 2014).

In today's world, the internet and social media in particular, facilitate citizen journalism on a grand scale. This has strong implications for today's crisis communicators as it only takes one person to spread the word about an incident. Once something has been leaked in a blog or shared on Twitter or WhatsApp or Facebook or Viber or Instagram, the news is out there and unlike a verbal conversation, which can be forgotten, content on the internet lasts forever and accessible all over the world and any time. Content on the internet especially on social network remains accessible for quite a long time and very difficult to delete. In comparison, it is very difficult to put the toothpaste back in the tube (Jacobson, 2008).

According to Sambrook (2009) information on Twitter or WhatsApp or Facebook or Viber or Instagram is not journalism in the sense that journalism, as a profession, requires discipline, analysis, explanation and context. The value that gets added with journalism is judgment, analysis and explanation and that makes the difference. However, journalists must understand one rule, if one believes to be in competition with the Internet, then they need to find their way out (Sambrook, 2009).

Nowadays journalists are always competing in spreading news thus rendering them to cease from being gate keepers of information. While citizen journalists may not meet the same standards of professional journalism nor produce the same caliber of content, the reality is that non-journalists are contributing to official and unofficial news outlets in greater numbers. Clearly, the definition of who is a journalist is changing (Jacobson, 2008). Journalists are recognizing this shift and many journalists monitor Twitter, blogs and other social media platforms for breaking news. Journalists are also using social media for researching their stories, with blogs being their favorite social media source (Cision & GWU, 2009). In fact, it has been observed that some journalists even end up posting social media stories without editing, analyzing and worst of all, verifying the reliability and source of the story. This is all done in the spirit of competition where Journalists want to publish stories they get before they are published by social media.

Journalists are forced to accelerate the traditional journalistic process because people now want real time information. People want the information as soon as the journalist or the media outlet receives it. So, to sit on a story until it is complete is to risk being out-scooped by competitors or even worse to be dubbed slow by the public. It is now a necessity to give the audience bits of information at a time, as soon as the information is available. This is because, traditionally, media outlets compete to out-scoop each other but today if they hold on to a story too long, they run the risk of being out-scooped by amateurs such as bloggers, citizen journalists and twitterers (Hilary & Trinity, 2010).

Rwandan print media are not exceptional to this challenge. They struggle to keep themselves relevant by competing with unregulated social media messages at the same time keeping the responsibility of gate keeping. In this project, the researcher assessed how Rwandan print media houses are maintaining their gate keeping roles in the face of increasing unregulated information circulation by social media.

This research focused on the print media houses in Rwanda and assessed how the print media operates in respect to gate keeping in the face of the competition with social media messages or unregulated information circulation.

1.1 Statement of problem.

With the development of new technologies especially the Internet penetration, individuals with computers or smart phones connected to Internet, are capable of transmitting messages. In so doing, individuals do not respect professional ethics and laws, ending up posting everything they come across, sometimes contravening laws, social norms and values. This information is not regulated whatsoever yet it is out there for public consumption. Today, anyone can disseminate information because of the Internet. The Internet and social media facilitate citizen journalism on a grand scale. Once something has been leaked in a blog or shared on Twitter, the news is out there for everyone to consume unlike in the past when people waited for newspapers, radio and TV to get access to news/information (Steve, 2005).

The presence of twitter, Facebook and other social networking media has radically changed the concept of professional journalist as a gate keeper. With the new technology, news is now immediate that audience begins to expect eventually every minute. For instance, a research found out that it has become a habit that audience go to the Internet to post, know and read the latest and only those with less media literacy wait for traditional news (Olajide, 2011).

In his research paper, William P. Cassidy expounded that the advent of Internet offers the possibility that Journalists' gate keeping roles could significantly change. He carried out a survey of 203 daily newspapers and found out that nearly all, about 98%, agreed that journalism ethics and standards should be the same for both print and online editions. However, 47% said that the high speed at which the story can be posted online has cut down the time spent on verifying the facts of a story before it is published. It was further found out that 30% reported that the online sites of daily newspapers are not as likely to follow the general ethical standards as are the print versions of daily newspapers (Cassidy, 2006).

Craig Silverman (2015) further urges that today, rumors and unverified information make their way online and quickly find an audience. It happens faster and with a degree of abundance that has never existed in the history of journalism. He gives an example of the recent Ebola outbreak in West Africa, which unleashed a torrent of online rumors. For example, in October 2015, a woman in the UK circulated a message via WhatsApp warning people that the virus was in the UK and that people should be careful on public transport. He further noted that at the same time the message was picked and put in the US context that there was Ebola outbreak in Virginia. According to Craig, the challenge today for newsrooms is to find new and better ways to do their work amidst these unprecedented rumors which are spread faster by social media.

The issue at hand is how print media houses in Rwanda are competing with individual news producers who post bits of information as soon as they get them, yet media houses are constrained by the principle of gate keeping which delays the production process and limits the information to be produced. Specifically, print media houses, which are the main focus of this research, have to produce their printed newspapers at the end of the day after screening all the information received and decide which one to give to the public and which one to discard. The question is how the information already given to the public by social media still makes sense to audience when produced by print media.

1.3 Objectives of the study

1.3.1 General objective

The general objective of the study was to examine the effect of unregulated social media information circulation on gate keeping in print media in Rwanda.

1.3.2 Specific objectives

The following specific objectives guided the study:

1. To investigate the effect of interactivity on gate keeping in print media in Rwanda.
2. To determine the effect of multimedia usage on gate keeping in print media in Rwanda.
3. To examine the effect of media policy on gate keeping in print media in Rwanda.
4. To examine the effect of bypass of print media by individuals on gate keeping in print media in Rwanda.
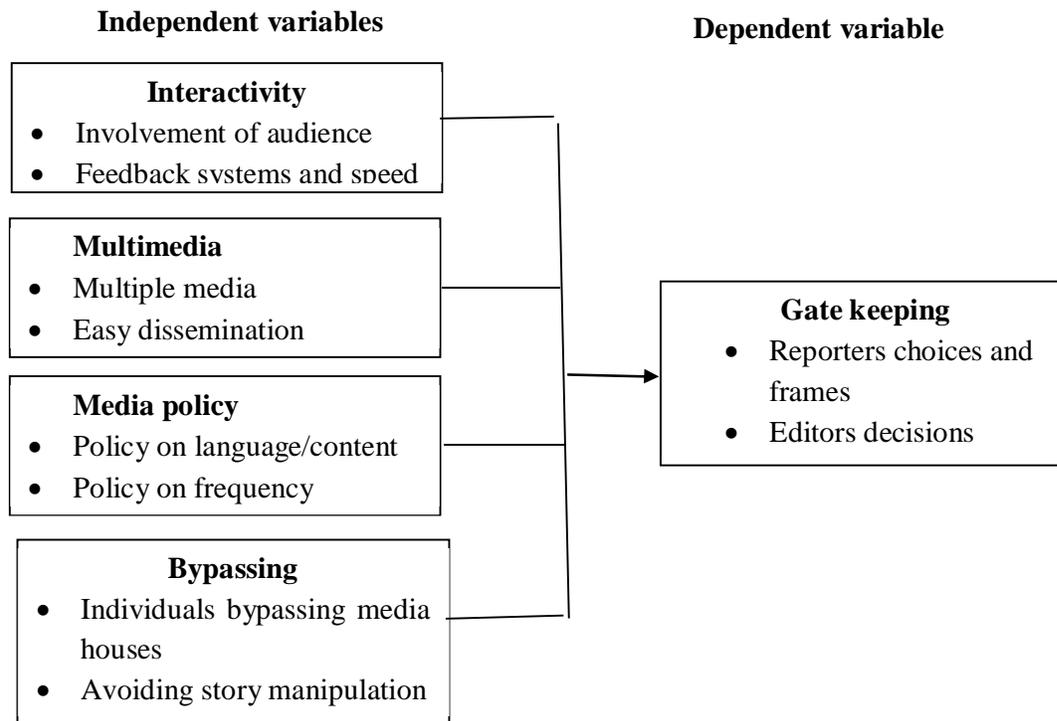
1.4 Research questions

The research questions for the study were:

1. What is the effect of interactivity on gate keeping in print media in Rwanda?
2. Does multimedia usage affect gate keeping in print media in Rwanda?
3. Does media policy favor social media to the detriment of gate keeping in print media in Rwanda?
4. What is the effect of bypass of media houses by individuals on gate keeping in print media in Rwanda?

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Conceptual Framework

Conceptual framework is a schematic presentation which identifies the variables that when put together explain the issue of concern (Peters et al, 2000). It is a set of broad ideas used to explain the relationship between the independent variables (factors) and the dependent variables (outcome) (Coulthard, 2004). The independent variables for this research are interactivity, multimedia usage, media policy and bypassing while the dependent variable is the gate keeping as illustrated in the Figure below:

Independent variables   **Dependent variable**

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Interactivity
 • Involvement of audience
 • Feedback systems and speed

Multimedia                                    Gate keeping
 • Multiple media                              • Reporters choices and
 • Easy dissemination                            frames
                                               • Editors decisions
Media policy
 • Policy on language/content
 • Policy on frequency

Bypassing
 • Individuals bypassing media
   houses
 • Avoiding story manipulation
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Figure 2.1: Conceptual framework

3.0 Research design

This research used descriptive research design. Descriptive design is normally used when collecting information about people's attitudes, habits, or opinions on the issues under study (Heppner et al 2008). This research design was preferred because it would bring deeper insights and better understanding of the unregulated information on gate keeping in Rwanda. It adopted a multi case study survey. A case study involves careful and complete observation and analysis of a unit in its relationship to any other unit in the group (Kothari, 2004). A survey design is associated with a guided and quick collection, analysis, and interpretation of observation (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2013).

3.1 Target population.

According to Cooper and Schindler (2008), a population is a well-defined set of people, services, elements, and events, group of things or households that are being investigated. In total, the target population was 115 respondents who included 53 Managing Directors and 53 Chief Editors and 9 freelance journalists.

3.2 Sample size sample frame

Sampling is defined as the process of selecting several individuals for a study in such a way that they represent the larger group from which they are selected (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003). A sample size of 89 respondents was determined from a total population of 115 individuals using the formula by Yamane (1967). Simple random sampling technique was used to select the respondents from the print media whereas purposive sampling technique was used to select the freelance journalist.

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N\,(e)^2}$$

Where n = the desired sample size of the population

e= probability of error (i.e. The desired precision, e.g.,0.05 for 95% confidence level).

N=the estimate of the population size.

n = 115/(1+115*0.05²)

n = 115/(1+115*0.0025)

n = 115/1.287

n = 89.35 which is approximately 89 respondents.

4.0 RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1. Interactivity and gate keeping in print media in Rwanda

The study sought to determine the effect of interactivity on gate keeping in print media in Rwanda. Table 4.6 indicates that majority (76%) of the respondents strongly agreed with the statement that interactivity nature of social media impact gate keeping in print media in Rwanda, 8% just agreed while 16% were not sure. Likewise 82% of the respondents strongly agreed with the statement that the level of interactivity of audience in social media affect respect of gate keeping in print media, 8% just agreed while 10% of the respondents disagreed with the statement. 52% of the respondents strongly agreed with the statement that involvement of audience in information generation and circulation has effect on gate keeping in print media in Rwanda while 48% just agreed. The table also shows that 40% of the respondents strongly agreed with the statement that print media in Rwanda has effective feedback systems to enhance interactivity, 48% just agreed while 12% of the respondents were not sure of the statement.

Table 1: Distribution of responses on Interactivity

Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	Not sure	Disagree
Interactivity nature of social media impact gate keeping in print media in Rwanda	63 (76%)	7 (8%)	13 (16%)	
The level of interactivity of audience in social media affect respect of gate keeping in print media	68 (82%)	7 (8%)		8 (10%)
Involvement of audience in information generation and circulation has effect on gate keeping in print media in Rwanda	43 (52%)	40 (48%)		
Print media in Rwanda has effective feedback systems to enhance interactivity like Social Media	33 (40%)	40 (48%)	10 (12%)	

4.2 Multimedia usage

The study sought the view of the respondents regarding influence of multimedia usage on gate keeping on print media in Rwanda. Respondents' opinion on multimedia usage on gate keeping on print media in Rwanda was captured using 5 **-**Strongly disagree; 4 – Disagree; 3 – Indifferent; 2 – Agree; 1 –Strongly agree. The statements, respondents' opinions and their percentages are as shown below:

Table 2: Respondents views on multimedia usage on gate keeping on print media in Rwanda

No.	Statements	Rating				
		5	4	3	2	1
a	Multimedia usage by individuals allow easy information circulation than print media in Rwanda			3 (3%)	52 (63%)	28 (34%)
b	With the help of multimedia, print media in Rwanda operate social media accounts to compete with individuals in information circulation			5 (6%)		78 (94%)
c	Print media houses are shifting to online media to compete with social media			11 (13%)	24 (29%)	48 (58%)
d	Multimedia has allowed individuals to be information disseminators without respecting gate keeping			25 (30%)	16 (19%)	42 (51%)

The above table shows the analysis of respondents regarding influence of multimedia usage on gate keeping in print media in Rwanda. The study used a five-point Likert scale in testing the level of agreeing from the respondents, whereby, 1- represented very strongly agree and 5- strongly disagree. The findings of the study revealed that 34% of the respondents strongly agreed that multimedia usage by individuals allow easy information circulation than print media in Rwanda whereas only 63% of the respondents agreed. Only 3% of the respondents disagreed with the statement.

The study findings revealed that majority of the respondents (94%) indicated that with the help of multimedia, print media in Rwanda operate social media accounts to compete with individuals in information circulation, however 6% of the respondents were indifferent with the statement. The study findings also revealed that 58% of the respondents indicated that Print media houses are shifting to online media to compete with social media, 29% of the respondents agreed with the statement while on 13% of the respondents were indifferent with the statement. As to whether multimedia has allowed individuals to be information disseminators without respecting gate keeping most of the respondent (51%) strongly agreed with the statement, 19% just agreed with the statement while 30% of the respondents were indifferent.

4.3 Effect of media policy on gate keeping

The study sought to determine the effect of media policy on gate keeping.

Table 3: Effect of media policy on gate keeping

Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	Not sure	Disagree
Media policy influence gate keeping in print media in Rwanda	51(61%)	20(24%)	12(15%)	
Social media is not bound by gate keeping policy in Rwanda	68(82%)	8(10%)		7(8%)
Media policy constrains print media to compete with social media	23(28%)	60(72%)		
Print media houses are shifting to online media to compete with social media	31(37%)	43(52%)	9(11%)	

Table 3 indicates that majority (61%) of the respondents strongly agreed that Media policy influence gate keeping in print media in Rwanda, 24% just agreed while 15% were not sure. Majority 82% of the respondents strongly agreed with the statement that Social media is not bound by gate keeping policy in Rwanda, 10% just agreed while 8% of the respondents disagreed with the statement. 72% of the respondents agreed with the statement that print media are constrained by media policy to compete with social media while 28% just agreed. The table also shows that 37% of the respondents strongly agreed with the statement print media houses are shifting to online media to compete with social media, 52% just agreed while 11% of the respondents were not sure of the statement.

4.4 Bypassing and gate keeping in print media in Rwanda

The study sought to establish the effect of bypassing on gate keeping. Analysis of data collected on bypassing is indicated in Table 4.

Table 4: Distribution of responses on Bypassing

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Not sure	Disagree
Bypassing of print media houses by individuals is done to avoid distortion of information	16(19%)	45(54)	22(27%)	
Individuals bypass print media houses to avoid gate keeping of some bits of information	38(46%)	13(16)	32(38%)	
Individuals use social media to post their information to avoid delay by Print Media	51(61%)	32(39)		
Individuals prefer to post their information on social media than giving it to print media	29(35%)	18(22)	19(23%)	17(20%)

Table 4. indicates that 19% of the respondents strongly agreed with the statement that bypassing of print media houses by individuals is done to avoid distortion of information, 54% just agreed while 27% were not sure of the statement. Majority (46) of the respondents strongly agreed with the statement that individuals bypass print media houses to avoid gate keeping of some bits of information, 16% just agreed while 38% were not sure. Also the findings indicates that 61% strongly agree with the statement that individuals use social media to post their information to avoid delay by Print Media while 39% just agreed with the statement. Thirty five percent of the respondents strongly agreed that individuals prefer to post their information on social media than giving it to print media, 22% just agreed, 23% were not sure while 20% disagreed with the statement.

4.7 Regression Analysis showing the effect of unregulated social media information circulation on gate keeping in print media in Rwanda

Table 5: Regression model summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.990[a]	.980	.980	.235

a. Predictors: (Constant), Interactivity, Multimedia usage, Media policy, Bypassing

According to results in above table, unregulated social media information circulation has positive impact on gate keeping where (R=0.990) with all variables (Interactivity, Multimedia usage, Media policy, Bypassing) contributing (98%) to the adoption.

Table 6: Regression Analysis showing the effect of unregulated social media information circulation on gate keeping in print media in Rwanda

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1 (Constant)	.094	.050		1.887	.061
Interactivity	.069	.036	.062	1.923	.056
Multimedia Usage	.824	.040	.850	20.790	.000
Media Policy	.084	.034	.079	2.449	.005
Bypassing	.010	.026	.010	.363	.007

a. Dependent Variable: Gate keeping

Using linear regression analysis from SPSS data bases the effect of unregulated social media information circulation on gate keeping in print media in Rwanda the following equation was obtained.

$Y = 0.094 + 0.069x1 + 0.824x2 + 0.084x3 + 0.010x4 + \varepsilon$.

From the above regression equation, it was revealed that holding interactivity, Multimedia usage, Media policy and Bypassing to a constant zero, gate keeping would be at 0.094. A unit increase on interactivity would lead to increase in gate keeping by a factor of 0.069, a unit increase in multimedia usage would lead to increase in gate keeping by a factor of 0.824, a unit increase in media policy would lead to increase in gate keeping by a factor of 0.084 and unit increase in Bypassing would lead to increase in gate keeping by a factor of 0.204.

5.0. Conclusions

From the findings of the study, it is concluded that interactivity has a high influence on gate keeping in print media in Rwanda. From this study, it is concluded that interactivity affects gate keeping in print media in Rwanda. This is because; information circulated by social media favors easy interactivity where the audience is able to post comments/feedback on the information. This becomes very difficult for newspapers reproducing the same piece of information withholding some kind of information in the practice of gate keeping.

From this study, it is concluded that multimedia usage affects gate keeping in print media in Rwanda to a great extent. This is because, multimedia usage favor individuals to be news producers and disseminators and are able to post information faster than print media. Unlike print media houses, individuals are not constrained by gate keeping obligations; hence it becomes very difficult for the print media houses to compete with free individuals as they have to wait to compile the whole newspapers, take it to the printery and then distribute it.

It is also concluded that media policy is a constraint to print media because they have to practice gate keeping in respect to the country's media policy. As for individuals, they are not constrained by media policy and therefore, post whatever they come across. From this study, it is concluded that there is a general direct/positive relationship between media policy and gate keeping in the Rwandan print media industry.

With regard to bypass of print media, the study also found out that with the introduction of Internet and new technological gadgets, individuals are capable of generating and disseminating information bypassing media houses. This is because individuals want to give their own stories by themselves to avoid any distortion, withholding of their information and delay by print media.

5.1. Recommendations

Going by the conclusions above, this study draws various recommendations for media owners, managers, journalists and regulators. The study recommends that social media should be regularly analyzed to measure their influence on gate keeping of information in print media and other media houses like radio and TVs. This can be achieved through:

1. On interactivity, the print media need to invest more in enhancing editorial checks for their social media accounts managers by constantly training them on changes in the field. With technological innovations pushing social media forward fast and often changing how it works or binging in new social media, there is a need to train staff who handle social media. The print media houses to publish their printed copies with part of the feedback from their social media pages on each story to attract leaders/audience

2. On multimedia usage, there is need for journalists to understand what the social media or digital divisions are doing in order to be able to work together, especially in an era where media convergence in the buzzword in newsrooms. The study showed that journalists in other divisions have little understanding of the processes in place in their online/digital departments. This can be achieved by holding regular social media training for journalists across the board and making sure they are conversant with social media policies that guide the handling of official and personal social media accounts. Print media need to embrace this new phenomenon and use it in the interest of timely dissemination of their printed copies.

3. On Media policy, managers need to innovate ways of making money out of social media platforms. There is need; therefore, to develop social media capabilities to enable such digital departments, especially social media, to a place where they can hold their own and if need be competing with traditional platforms both in terms of quality and finance. Already, social media forces print and broadcast journalists to work extra hard to give their audiences fresh content in the face of social media that is faster with breaking news and updates. However, though it is difficult, it is important for media regulatory agencies to regulate information disseminated by social media to protect societal values, norms and established laws.

4. On by pass of print media the study recommends that in terms of vetting news tips received by newsrooms via social media networks, the newsroom editor does assume more of a gatekeeping role. In those instances, all of the respondents suggested the tip may come in to a specific reporter and that reporter may look at the validity of the story as well as the source, but when both are confirmed, it is the editor who makes the final decision as to whether the incoming news tip is followed up and proceeded as a story. Print media houses need to be protected by especially the regulators and government by providing them with information and officials to avoid bypassing them in some instances.

5.2. Areas for further research

Academically, there are many directions in which to conduct further research on unregulated social media information. As this study generally examined the impact of unregulated information on gate keeping process, further research could be done on producers of content in specific mediums.

Additionally, a comparative study can be done to examine impact of unregulated information on private radio and TV stations in Rwanda.

It is also important to carryout research on the possibility of regulating information circulated by social media, and means to protect conventional journalism.

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